

Shapurji Saklatvala

A SHORT BIOGRAPHY

BY
PANCHANAN SAHA

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By

PANCHANAN SAHA

Foreword by

R. PALME DUTT



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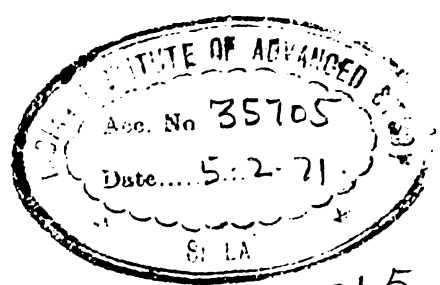
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PREFACE

It is a pity that our new generation is not quite aware of the glorious role of the pioneers of the international working class movement. By their arduous efforts they paved the way towards the release of mankind from the yoke of capitalism. Today one-third of mankind has already thrown off its chains. Shapurji Saklatvala was one of these pioneers. V. I. Lenin said, "Capital is an international force. Its defeat requires an international alliance of the workers, their international brotherhood". Saklatvala was a symbol of such international brotherhood of workers. East and west met in him. Jawaharlal Nehru correctly said that Saklatvala throughout his life "was a brave and intrepid soldier of freedom". Mine is a humble but honest attempt to present the life of a tireless fighter for socialism.

I had an opportunity of meeting Mrs Saklatvala and Miss Saklatvala in London. They helped me in my project of gathering relevant materials.

I also ventured to meet R. Palme Dutt without whose encouragement and active help I could not have finished this brief biography. When I again met him with the manuscript he not only took pains to go through it but also wrote the foreword.

I must express my sincere thanks to Reginald Bridgeman (since deceased) of League Against Imperialism fame, Kay

Beauchamp, Tony Gilbert and Maurice Conforth for their valuable suggestions and active help in finalising the draft.

I am afraid that this is not the complete biography of an active statesman whose brilliant career passed through many phases. I would be glad to receive suggestions from readers in improving it further.

PANCHANAN SAHA

FOREWORD

IT IS FITTING THAT HONOUR should be paid to the memory of Shapurji Saklatvala, a heroic figure of international communism, of the fight for Indian national liberation and of the British working class movement.

Twice elected by the British workers in the working class district of North Battersea in London to be their representative in Parliament, he was a foundation member of the Communist Party, won the support of the electors openly as a communist, the first time with the official support of the local labour movement, and the second time as a communist candidate opposed by a official labour candidate. He had already been long active in the British socialist movement, as a member of Independent Labour Party since 1910, participated in the foundation of the Communist Party and remained fully active in the cause of communism to the day of his death in 1936. He was unflinching in his fight against imperialism, and his visit to India in 1927 and public interchange with Gandhi constituted a historic confrontation. Thereafter the Foreign Office banned his further entry into India and the Labour Foreign Secretary, Arthur Henderson, upheld that ban in 1929. A fiery and inspiring orator proclaiming the cause of the working class and communism, he was known and honoured by the working people in every corner of Britain.

It is especially welcome that a young Indian marxist has undertaken the task of writing the first biography of Saklatvala. Here the extracts from Saklatvala's speeches and writings, as well as the tributes paid to him by his contemporaries in the labour and socialist movement help to give the picture of the living man.

The elements of biographical detail are here briefly set out, showing the road which he travelled from the foundation of the Tata iron and steel industry to communism. It may be worth adding something to this picture if I recall the vivid account which he gave me personally on one of the many occasions we spent together, to describe the spiritual odyssey of his life from his wealthy family background to become a hard pressed communist, having to live and bring up his family on very meagre resources (he consistently refused to hold any shares in the great Tata monopoly whose productive enterprises he had in fact helped to build).

From the outset his whole passionate nature was concerned to find the means to end the poverty and misery of masses of the Indian people.

He sought first, as he told me, to find in religion the key which would unlock the door to a new awakening and advance of the nation. He soaked himself in the subject of religion, and indeed, after he had become a communist Member of Parliament, surprised the comrades by bringing up his children according to the parsee ritual. When the Political Bureau of our party expressed criticism, he declared himself in full agreement with the criticism, but explained that the reasons were domestic.

Soon, however, he came to realise that religion brought no solution, but led only to passivity and sanctifying of the existing order of society.

Then he turned to science as the magic key for a happier future for the Indian people. He plunged into the study of science and anyone who had the opportunity of conversing with him outside political subjects came to realise the encyclopaedic breadth of his knowledge and his special expertness in geology and mineralogy.

But after years of scientific studies he reached the conclusion that science alone could bring no solution unless it was applied in practice in the economy of the country. He had already been active in welfare work in the plague hospitals and slums of Bombay. But he was well aware that such service was not enough.

So came the third stage, when his active mind reached the conclusion that the national advance of India and overcoming of Indian poverty would require industrial development to end the existing backwardness and lack of the means of life. Accordingly, he spent three years travelling over India, even through the most impenetrable jungle on his prospecting explorations, until he found the region where the presence of coal, iron ore and limestone deposits provided the possibility for the development of a steel industry. It was this exploration of his which led to the establishment of the Tata iron and steel industry in India.

When his open advocacy of national liberation proved unwelcome to the authorities, the Tata firm sent him as departmental manager to London. So came the fourth chapter and climax of his spiritual pilgrimage. Introduced at first to the liberal world, as a member of the National Liberal Club, he speedily saw through the very limited outlook and snobbish hypocrisy, crossed swords with Morley, then Secretary of State for India, and turned from the liberal politicians to the working class.

Travelling all over England, he saw the slums and unemployment, the ruthless exploitation of the industrial and agricultural workers, and the horrors of the existence of the submerged tenth; he came to realise that poverty was not just an Indian problem, but an international problem of the workers all over the world, and that its solution required the international fight of the working class against class society and for socialism. So he came to join the Independent Labour Party in 1910 as a fighter for international socialism.

It was in the ILP that I first came to know him, in the days before there was a communist party, when we fought on the left in the ILP against the rightwing domination of

MacDonald and Snowden. After we had secured the disaffiliation of the ILP from the attempts to rebuild the Second International, there followed the fight for affiliation to the Communist International.

A committee was formed, consisting of Saklatvala, Walton Newbold, Emile Burns and myself to organise the fight for the annual conference of the ILP in the autumn of 1920, and we produced a Bulletin of the Committee for the Third International under the title "The International". To defeat this campaign MacDonald at the conference of the ILP adopted the crafty device of advocating that the ILP should not be affiliated either to the Second or Third International, but to a centrist body formed at Vienna which became known as the 2½ International (and which two years later, after it had served its purpose, duly disappeared into the Second International). Accordingly, the leftwing of the ILP, after being defeated at the conference in the autumn, joined in the Unity Congress of the Communist Party in JANUARY 1921.

This picture which he gave me personally of the stages through which he came to communism has already left a deep impression on me as the epic of a great spirit, battling its way to true understanding in the maelstrom of the modern world.

When he stood for Parliament in Battersea North, he was on the first occasion, in 1922, supported by local Labour. Then in the 1923 election he lost his seat for one year. In 1924 all the opposing parties, Conservative, Liberal and Labour, combined to present a single "Constitutionalist" candidate against Saklatvala; but he won the seat, running as a communist against this unholy alliance.

During one of these elections, either in 1922 or 1923, I was temporarily staying, at a period when I had to change my address often, in my parents' home, who then lived in North Battersea. The Tory candidate came round, and speaking to my mother, who was Swedish with the characteristically very fair Nordic complexion, said: "Of course you will not want to vote for the black man." Tory habits do not change.

Some of the examples of Saklatvala's brilliant speeches in Parliament can be found in this biography. His vivid directness of expression made every issue alive for that dull and somnolent assembly. On one occasion I recall, when Gandhi was conducting his agitation against the salt tax, and it was the height of summer with MPs enjoying their favourite refreshment on the terrace, Saklatvala took the occasion to explain to them: "Salt is not like strawberries and cream; no-one wants to gorge on it", and this brought home to them how bitter must be the poverty in which a tax on salt becomes a deadly burden on living conditions.

But it was above all in his tireless propaganda in every town and locality of England, Scotland and Wales that Saklatvala was known, loved and honoured by the workers.

During subsequent years, long after his death, when I travelled over the country on a propaganda, and stayed in workers' homes in all parts of the country, I came to know how dearly his memory was cherished. In the conventional histories which now abound of Britain and the British labour movement during this period, the academic chroniclers may not be aware of his role. But in the heart of working class families all over Britain his memory lives and is honoured.

May Day, 1969

R. PALME DUTT

PUBLISHER'S NOTE

This is the first in the series of biographies of communists and others who died in the cause of socialism and for a better life for our people.

You will not find their names in the *Who's Who of Indian Martyrs* brought out by the ministry of education and launched with great fanfare by the home minister Y. B. Chavan.

In an effort to bask in the sunshine of the cherished memory of our martyrs (even those who did not agree with them in their lifetime) and for the petty reason of appropriating their glory to hide their present plight, the congress leaders have, nevertheless, scrupulously avoided the mention of a single communist or ordinary worker or peasant who died for the cause of his country and for his class.

We are grateful to Dr Panchanan Saha for inaugurating this series. Born 37 years ago and educated at Midnapur, Calcutta and London, he has been actively connected with democratic and progressive movements in the country and has written booklets and articles on various subjects. His major work *Emigration of Indian Labour, 1834-1900* is presently under print as a PPH publication.

We hope that many more writers will come forward and make a success of this series.

CONTENTS

PREFACE	<i>iii</i>
FOREWORD	v
PUBLISHER'S NOTE	x
A SHORT BIOGRAPHY	1
APPENDICES	
1. Saklatvala-Gandhi Correspondence	67
2. Welcome Addresses to Saklatvala	89
3. Saklatvala's Message to Madras Congress	93
4. The Indian Round-Table Conference	96
5. Some Tributes to Saklatvala	101

SHAPURJI SAKLATVALA

A Short Biography

SHAPURJI SAKLATVALA SYMBOLISED a link between the working-class movement of the west with the national-liberation movement of the enslaved east. His unswerving loyalty to the working class, devotion to the cause of colonial and dependent countries earned him the wrath of the capitalists and imperialists. His brilliant exposition of the oppressive rule of British imperialism in the colonial countries and his unequivocal demand for independence for India and other dependent countries earned him the title of the most consistent 'enemy of the Union Jack'.

I

Born in Bombay on 28 March 1874, he belonged to the Parsee community and was related to the Tata family on his mother's side. His childhood was wellcared for. The Saklatvala family was a wellknown Parsee family in Bombay since the 1830s.¹ His father Dorabjee was a famous merchant

¹ *Bombay Chronicle*, 17 February 1927.

and his mother Jerbai was a sister of J. N. Tata. The Saklatvalas were noted for their orthodoxy and Shapurji's father and grandfather were staunch Zoroastrians. His mental makeup was greatly influenced by this religious atmosphere and this was visible even in the later period of his life. From his boyhood he was extraordinarily intelligent. He was educated at St Xavier's School and College, Bombay. He was a brilliant debater in his college days. His connection with the Tata family gave him in his early days splendid opportunities to study the commercial and industrial situation in the country.

Though he was born with a silver spoon in his mouth, he did not fail to respond to the call of suffering humanity. During the plague epidemic in Bombay in 1890s he assisted Haffkine, the great Russian doctor, in his relief work.

II

After leaving college, he threw himself heart and soul into the field of industry. He was mainly instrumental in the inauguration of the Tata Iron and Steel Works Ltd. under the able guidance of his maternal uncle—J. N. Tata. He went on a survey of iron ore throughout the length and breadth of India, in the remotest jungles. The mass of information he thus collected contributed to a great extent to the success of the Tata concerns. While prospecting iron ore in the jungles of Bihar and Orissa, he came across various complicated problems which he tactfully managed. It was customary with such expeditions that labour should be recruited from villages on the outskirts of the jungles. On one occasion when Saklatvala reached a certain village, he found that it was deserted. But he had heard of a racket worked by the Indian police on such occasions. He had a shrewd suspicion that the police might have told the villagers (mostly tribal) that a punitive British expedition was coming and they had taken to their heels. The idea of the police was that they would then round up the villagers and collect

the booty from the prospectors. So he went to the police station and entered into conversation with the village constables. While talking, he saw the key of the station on the wall. He grabbed it, ran out and locked the door. Negotiations were then conducted through the small window. One constable would be released to bring back the villagers, and to apologise to them for the false story. The other one would remain locked-up without food or drink until this was done. The police could do nothing but submit.² In this way, by overcoming many obstacles, he proceeded with his prospecting.

This was the period of rising national consciousness in India. The Indian National Congress had already been established in 1885. The Congress was still in its infancy and counting on British good will for Indian redress. He was attracted to politics and now and then came into conflict with the British authorities, which was embarrassing to a rising concern like the Tatas. Therefore he was sent to England as their representative in 1905. The year was significant in Indian history. Bengal was partitioned in that year, resulting in swadeshi movement there. Being afraid of growing militant nationalism in Bengal and some other parts of India, British authorities in India adopted more and more repressive measures to check it.

III

In that period of transition of Indian politics, Saklatvala came to England. In England his political life actually began. The transformation of Saklatvala from a liberal—a believer in British good will—to an arch enemy of British imperialism is very educative. It shows that only the communists were genuine anti-imperialists and dared to fight imperialism in the heart of its stronghold.

For a few months he worked in the Manchester office of

² Reg. Bishop's Lecture, *Daily Worker*, 20 January 1936.

the Tatas, then he came to London, where his family made him a life member of the National Liberal Club. Here, it was thought, Saklatvala would meet all the really respectable friends of Indian freedom. He did, and having met them, he did not think much of them. Among those he met was Lord Morley who as coauthor of the Morley-Minto Reforms of 1909 which had the declared aim "to rally the moderates", in view of the rising tide of militant Indian nationalism. It was the Morley-Minto Reforms that sowed the seeds of communal division of Indian nationalism by the introduction of separate electorates for Hindus and Muslims.

The liberals, who were considered to be friends of India, did not pass the acid test of Saklatvala's arguments. Having come into close contact with the liberals, he understood their bankruptcy, their hypocrisy vis-a-vis the interests of Indian people. The outcome of a furious argument with "Honest Jack", as Morley liked to be known, was Saklatvala's resignation from the liberal "mausoleum" and his entry into working-class politics via the Independent Labour Party in 1910.³ Here in London he married an English lady — Miss Marsh of Tansley, Derbyshire, who remained at his side throughout his life.

IV

His experience in the Independent Labour Party was not at all satisfactory. The ILP was founded in 1893 and it took active part in the foundation of the Labour Party. The celebrated English political leader Tom Mann was its first secretary. Gradually this party turned from a Marxist into anti-Marxist party. Saklatvala was seeking for a party — a group of friends who were truly internationalists, who could bury all sorts of narrow nationalism and were ready to support the national-liberation movement of India. He was not satisfied with the activities of the Independent Labour

³ *Daily Worker*, 20 January 1936.

Party — a party which was championing the cause of the working people of England no doubt, but without going to the root cause of capitalist exploitation and unconnected with working-class movement elsewhere. When he was looking for a way to salvage his countrymen from the bondage to British imperialism and the oppressed humanity from the exploitation by capitalists, the great Russian revolution of 1917 stirred his imagination. He at once welcomed it as the precursor of a new civilisation — a new social order which would ultimately liberate the oppressed millions from the exploitation of capitalism and imperialism. The imperialists clearly foresaw the real implication of the revolution on working-class movement and on the national-liberation movement of the dependent countries.

They therefore spared no effort to throttle the new-born Soviet state on the one hand and on the other to vilify it in every possible way. Due to the preoccupation of the imperialists with the war, the infant Soviet state got a breathing space to consolidate itself and be able to face the enemy in the future. During those days of rabid anti-Sovietism, when all sorts of slander and distorted news about the Soviet Union were being spread by the bourgeois press and government machinery, Saklatvala and his friends came forward to consolidate public opinion in England in favour of the first workers' and peasants' state, to propagate the truth about the events in the Soviet Union. He joined the newly-formed People's Russian Information Bureau in 1918. The bureau did splendid work in disseminating the message of the Russian revolution among the masses and counter-acting the anti-Soviet slanders in the bourgeois press.

The war ended with the surrender of Germany unconditionally and with the emergence of first workers' and peasants' state in the world. The revolutionary movement everywhere received a fillip with the first successful proletarian revolution. The working-class solidarity, which was disrupted during the first world war due to the betrayal

of the reformist leadership of the social-democratic parties, required restoration. With the emergence of a new wave of revolutionary and working-class movement, a new International was urgently required to consolidate and coordinate the working-class revolutionary movement against the common enemy, capitalism and imperialism. The Third International was thus formed in March 1919 under the direct leadership of Lenin, the architect of the first successful proletarian revolution in the world.

Saklatvala at once demanded that the Independent Labour Party should be affiliated with the Third International to forge unity with the world proletarian movement. He was foremost in the move along with some other comrades. But the proposal was not accepted. He found himself for the time being frustrated. But ultimately he found in the Communist Party the ideals and the band of workers which he was seeking. Saklatvala came into the Communist Party in 1921 and remained, while many of his former associates fell by the wayside, right until the end as one of its most loyal and devoted members.¹

The Communist Party of Great Britain was founded in 1920 amidst the rising tide of militant activities of the trade-union movement. The socialist revolution in Russia opened in Britain a new era of militant working-class struggles. Support for the young Soviet Republic became the central political issue. In the early spring of 1919 the national "Hands Off Russia" Committee was established in Britain. This started a great movement against British intervention. In April 1919 a joint conference of the Trades Union Congress and the Labour Party demanded the withdrawal of all British troops from Russia. In August 1920, when the British government sent an ultimatum to the Soviet Union, the

¹ Saklatvala and his comrades, though they did not participate in the unity conference of the CPGB, sent a joint letter welcoming the decision of founding the party.

entire British working class replied with the threat of a general strike.

British atrocities in Amritsar (Jallianwalabagh massacre) and the suppression of the Egyptian national-liberation movement aroused a powerful protest movement led by the newly-founded Communist Party and left-wing labourites. Saklatvala found that it was the Communist Party which stood firmly for international solidarity, for national liberation and for ending exploitation. In one of his famous speeches in the British Parliament in 1926 he explained the reasons for his joining the Communist Party. "I am", he declared, "the product of the teachings of the British trade unions. I am a member of the Communist Party because, rightly or wrongly, it honestly appears to me to be pointing the way through which the objects laid down by the Labour Party are to be achieved."⁵ He knew of course that the communists are not infallible. They are also human beings. He said: "I at once admit that communists are not infallible, and they make mistakes. Sometimes they may do things in a clumsy and hasty way, but these are only human and individual elements."

It is not an exaggeration to declare that he was a product of the British working-class movement. The British workers with their deep class consciousness produced a number of sons and daughters who fought valiantly to end the exploitation of man by man. Here in England working-class leaders of the continent found a convenient place to propagate the ideal of working-class unity. During the fight for the reform of Parliament, "The London Workingmen's Association was formed to secure political rights for the workers after the failure to win working-class representation in 1832. It was this organisation which produced in 1838 the People's Charter."⁶ The charter became the rallying point for a great

⁵ *Hansard*, Vol. 194 : 21 April 1926, p. 1337.

⁶ *London Labour and Colonial Freedom — Two Centuries of Struggle*, London District CPGB publication.

revolutionary movement which from the beginning recognised that the struggle of the working class was an international one. In 1846, Julian Harney declared in a meeting of emigre German workers: "The cause of the people of all countries is the same — the cause of labour, enslaved and plundered labour. . . workingmen of all nations, are not your grievances, your wrongs, the same? Is not your good cause, then, one and the same also? We may differ as to the means necessary, but the great end — the veritable emancipation of the human race — must be the one aim and end of all."⁷

Here in England hailing the Chartist demands, Karl Marx declared in November 1847: "Effect this grand object, then, you workingmen of England, and you will be hailed as the saviours of whole human race."⁸ The great Chartist leader, Ernest Jones, through the columns of the *People's Paper* lashed out at British colonial exploitation and oppression. "On its colonies the sun never sets, but the blood never dries", he wrote. Even in 1857 he urged upon the British people to support the Indian cause: "We bespeak the sympathy of the English people for their Hindu brethren. Their cause is yours — their success is, indirectly, yours as well. The fearful atrocities committed have nothing to do with the great cause at issue — the cause is just, it is holy, it is glorious."⁹ In every colonial or world issue the progressive working class of Britain, whether in the case of Irish struggle or in the support of Paris Communards, was in the forefront and thus established a glorious tradition of international solidarity. Therefore, it is no wonder that Saklatvala proudly declared on the floor of British Parliament that he was the product of British working-class movement.

⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹ *Ibid.*

V

From the days of the Independent Labour Party he took a keen interest in the trade-union movement. After joining the Communist Party, he became an active trade-union member. The *Daily Worker* wrote: "Night after night, year after year, in all parts of Britain he carried out his task of working-class agitation, education and organisation. No comrade ever did more of his work so uncomplainingly as Comrade Saklatvala. No call was ever made upon to which he did not respond."¹⁰ A columnist of the *Daily Worker* wrote in 1927 just before his departure for India that he was prepared to offer a bet that "Saklatvala's list of meetings addressed would beat that of any other propagandist in Britain". His amazing vitality was inexhaustible. Bad health, including a very "dicky" heart, did not deter Saklatvala for a moment.

In 1927, on two successive days he spoke at four meetings in Northumberland and Durham, and at two in his own constituency of Battersea. That meant that during the intervening night he travelled south by train, sleeping, as he always did, wrapped in his overcoat, even on the floor of the corridor in a crowded train — certainly never in a first-class sleeper. Within a very short time he became very popular among British workers. Wherever he went he attracted large crowds. An ordinary worker, D. C. Jackson, wrote in a letter to the *Daily Worker*: "No greater testimony could be paid to Comrade Saklatvala than to recall one summer's afternoon on southern Common — hardly an ideal place for communist propaganda when the military and patriotic tendencies of the locality are considered. Yet Saklatvala drew a crowd of 1,500 people, who listened earnestly and attentively. Ten yards away, Mr. Beckett, the renegade socialist who has become one of the Blackshirt 'Stars', was speaking to a small audience. When Saklatvala

¹⁰ *Daily Worker*, 18 January 1936.

began, however, they deserted the fascist gentleman and came over to the communist speaker's platform."¹¹ William Gallacher, the noted labour and communist leader and a former M.P., said: "Wherever I have gone on propaganda in England, Scotland and Wales, I have found Saklatvala respected, loved and honoured by the workers, who appreciated his sterling worth, his utter selflessness, his devotion to duty."¹²

He was one of the active members of the General Workers' Union. He also joined the Clerks' Union and the Cooperative Union. He was elected as a delegate by the Trade Union Congress of India to represent them at various trade-union congresses in England. During the celebrated British general strike of 1926 he was arrested because of a "seditious" speech in Hyde Park when he said, "Tell the Army boys they must refuse to fight us." He was tried for this speech and was sentenced to two months in the second division for refusing to find sureties for good behaviour although he was then a member of Parliament.

His popularity found expression in his election to the British Parliament in 1922 from a London constituency — Battersea.¹³ Although a communist, he was elected a labour member for North Battersea as the candidate of the Battersea Trades Council. Saklatvala was the third Indian to sit in the British Parliament. The first was a liberal, the second a tory. Saklatvala was the only one of whom it could truly be said that he represented the masses of India.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 21 January 1936.

¹² *Ibid.*, 18 January 1936.

¹³ *Results of the General Elections: Battersea North Constituency:*

1922	Shapurji Saklatvala (<i>Labour</i>)	— 11,311
	Hogbin (<i>National Liberal</i>)	— 9,290
	Albu (<i>Liberal</i>)	— 1,756
1923 (Dec.)	E. Hogbin (<i>Liberal</i>)	— 12,527
	S. Saklatvala (<i>Labour</i>)	— 12,341
1924 (Oct.)	Saklatvala (<i>Com.</i>)	— 15,096
	H. Hogbin (<i>Const. Liberal</i>)	— 14,552

In 1923 he was defeated due to the opposition of rightwing labour leaders, but raised his vote 9.1 per cent over the previous figure. In 1924 he again raised his vote by another 3,000, and regained the seat.¹¹ The answer of the Labour Party rightwing leadership was to disaffiliate the Battersea Trades Council—the sponsors of Saklatvala's candidature. Saklatvala lost his seat in 1929 as he had to face labour opposition. During his parliamentary career, between 1922-23 and 1924-29, he became the most hated man in Britain to the bosses and one of the most popular leaders with the workers.

VI

In the Parliament, he was a consistent fighter for the workers' cause and for the national-liberation movements of the dependent countries against imperialism and colonialism. He was never hesitant in criticising British colonial oppression inside and outside Parliament. His was the true voice of the oppressed millions living under the jackboot of British imperialism.

During his parliamentary career, India was passing through an ordeal. The Jallianwalabagh massacre in Amritsar followed by the great noncooperation movement initiated by Gandhi created an unprecedented upheaval in India and unheard of atrocities by British imperialism in order to suppress the movement. Thousands of unarmed Indians were severely tortured, killed or put into prison by the British rulers. Saklatvala was consistently voicing the demands of the Indian freedom fighters in the British Parliament. On 2 February 1926 he lashed out at British imperialism, saying:

"Your doings in India, which are of a hideous character

¹¹ In 1924 election he was contesting as a communist candidate. In spite of opposition from the official Labour Party leaders he regained his seat with a considerable majority.

in many respects, and a very hideous character too, are going to be continued. . . getting hold of citizens and keeping them in prison without trial and without charge, holding them in bondage, ruling people under the name of civilisation, and exploiting them, industrially on miserable wages, which produces an infantile death rate of 600 and 800 for every 1,000 infants born if these conditions are to be perpetrated, and you are ashamed of announcing it publicly, but want the world to forget that India exists today.”¹⁵

Time and again he raised the question of the plight of millions of downtrodden Indians suffering under British imperialism. He severely criticised British hypocritical statesmanship.

In one of his memorable speeches on the floor of Parliament he categorically declared:

“I pay homage to the British spirit of hypocritical statesmanship. 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 are discussing some matters relating to the renewal of furniture in the library or the cooking utensils in the kitchen of the House of Commons. . . We are debating here as if the Bengal ordinances were never promulgated, as if the shooting of Bombay operatives during the cotton strike had never taken place, 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 hardfaced 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. Is there a single British man or woman today, is there a person in any country in Europe, in any of the backward

¹⁵ *Hansard*, Vol. 191 (1926), p. 84.

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?"¹⁶

The viceroy of India announced the appointment of a Statutory Commission on Reforms on 8 November 1927 under the presidency of Sir John Simon assisted by six other members of Parliament.

The viceroy in his announcement said:

"Eight years ago the British Parliament enacted a statute which regulated the conditions under which India might learn, by actual experience, whether or not the western system of representative government was the most appropriate means through which she might attain responsible selfgovernment within the empire. The statute never professed to incorporate irrevocable decisions and recognised that the work must of necessity be revived in the light of fuller knowledge with the lapse of years. Parliament accordingly enacted that at the end of ten years, at the latest, a Statutory Commission should be appointed to examine and report upon the progress made."

On 25 November in the House of Commons Earl Winterton moved the resolution regarding the appointment of the Indian Statutory Commission.

Taking part in the discussion Saklatvala declared that the government was insulting and hurting the people of India. The joint conspiracy between labour and the government did not detract from the insult. He said the talk of protecting the minorities was bunkum. The whole commission was a farce.

Alluding scornfully to Earl Winterton's observation regarding trusteeship for minorities, Saklatvala recalled that twentyfive years ago he was prevented from entering a

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, Vol. 186, 9 July 1925. pp. 705-19.

white man's club in India for the purpose of conferring with a white doctor regarding the antiplague measures though afterwards he was allowed to enter by the back entrance and a corner on the basement. Was that not untouchability? Could the commission alter that? Every Indian politician felt that the commission going out would deny India the right of selfrule. What right had Britain to send a commission to India to see whether Indians were fit to govern any more than Britain had to send someone to France to enquire whether Frenchmen should rule themselves and whether the British should take care of the minorities in Alsace-Lorraine?

VII

Saklatvala moved to amend the resolution so as to make it read:

"That the House resolves to invite Pandit Motilal Nehru to the Bar of the House to explain Indian sentiments and guide the House as provided in the preamble of the Government of India Act of 1919, before concurring in submission to His Majesty, of the names of persons."

The amendment was negatived without discussion. The motion of Earl Winterton was carried.

Saklatvala also moved a rejection motion which was also disallowed.

On the floor of Parliament he not only voiced the demand for India's independence, but also raised the questions of independence of other enslaved nations suffering under imperialism. In 1926 the British imperialists violated China's sovereignty by sending an army. He severely criticised the policy of the British government and demanded the withdrawal of British forces from China. He said:

"We are told that for the first time a ship equipped with aeroplanes was now going out to Chinese waters. That is an indication. There were no ships bringing food from China

to this country which were in danger. There were no ships that had sent an sos to the Admiralty saying that the Chinamen were attacking them, yet we are told that this ship is going there in order to secure the safety of the British citizens in the country of Chinese. If a Chinese ship came to Liverpool to safeguard the interests and safety of the Chinese citizens in Liverpool. . . what the Englishmen would feel?"¹⁷

Perhaps he was the first parliamentarian in the modern period who had dared to indict openly and forcefully the British monarchy on the floor of Parliament. He ridiculed it saying: "A few families supply monarchs just as a few biscuit factories supply biscuits all over Europe."¹⁸ This remark on the floor of Parliament naturally aroused deep protest from the treasury benches but he was a man who was not easily deterred. In the same session he raised the question of the Indian Trade Union Congress session at Dhanbad (1923), the Kanpur Bolshevik trials, etc. and concluded by saying: "British imperialism must go if humanity is to progress." It is no wonder, therefore, that he earned the wrath of British imperialist rulers and he glorified in being "a determined and implacable enemy of the Union Jack and British imperialism."

Outside Parliament he utilised every opportunity to gather public support for India's independence. Jawaharlal Nehru in his condolence message said: "Shapurji Saklatvala throughout his life was a brave and intrepid soldier of freedom." It is no exaggeration at all. Throughout his life he missed no opportunity to raise the question of India's independence. His deep knowledge about the condition of the Indian working class led him to agitate for introducing trade-union rights in India. The Indian working class was not enjoying the even minimum facilities earned by the workers of Britain. It was Saklatvala who initiated a move in England

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, Vol. 192, March 1926, p. 742.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, Vol. 186, pp. 705-19.

for a Trade Union Act in India. In 1920, he went on a deputation to Mr Montagu, then Secretary of State for India, and urged upon him the need for trade-union legislation in India.¹⁹

Saklatvala clearly understood that British rule was a stumbling block in the path of rapid industrialisation of India. Industrial backwardness in India was affecting all classes. During the period of the first world war, Saklatvala who still had faith in British liberalism was shocked to find that the War Trades Department had prohibited the import of Indian yarns of the lowest count into England by an order since 25 March 1916. Saklatvala sent a strong protest letter to the editor of the celebrated English newspaper the *Manchester Guardian*. Its editor did not think it fit to publish it in his paper but it was subsequently published in the Indian paper *New India*. The contents of the letter reveal his deep patriotism. He wrote :

"On 25 March 1916, the War Trades Department prohibited imports of Indian yarns of lower count into this country just when Indian yarn of lower count, 6 to 20, was beginning to make headway in place of the continental yarn shut out by the war. The professed object was saving of freight space. It was pointed out to the Board of Trade that all raw cotton required to replace this yarn occupied greater freight space, and also demanded additional labour in this country at a time when shortage of labour was the predominant cry. The above representation was made by the Indian community of London as well as by some Manchester merchants, who could take an impartial view of the situation, as a distinct effort under disguise of a war measure to shut out Indian yarn for the protection of some Lancashire spinners. These British petitioners in Manchester would be able to tell you that opposition to them came from a powerful party in Lancashire, who welcomed such protection, and

¹⁹ Ahmed Mukhtar, *Trade Unionism and Labour Disputes in India*, 1935, p. 87.

who are still scheming to perpetuate it. The Manchester Chamber, the Blackburn Chamber and the Operatives Union did not then recoil at this retrograde measure. The apostles of free trade and the upholders of even balance between India and England in the cotton trade adopted discreet silence, or a secret agitation in favour of maintaining a severe restriction on imports of Indian yarn, whereas Lancashire yarn has had a wide open door in India.”²⁰

New India commented on this letter: “Manchester quietly welcomed that protective legislation against India, and how significant is therefore its cry for free trade! Where were the free traders hiding in 1916?”

This type of British imperial hypocrisy and discriminating policy towards India opened his eyes. He came to the conclusion that until British rule was liquidated in India there was little chance to get justice from an alien ruler. He became determined to end British rule in India. His house in London became an unofficial centre of the Indian freedom movement. Whenever any Indian leader visited London, Saklatvala was a regular caller. Soon after becoming a communist he tried his best to influence Indian students to the new ideals. A number of brilliant young Indians came into close contact with him and were tremendously influenced by him. The illustrious Indian historian, K. M. Ashraf, was one of them.²¹ Ashraf testifies to it by saying:

“I had earlier taken part with Srinivas Ayangar, Maulana Mohammad Ali and Saklatvala in the formation of the London Congress Committee. Now after my return to London I met (in 1929) those friends who were living in poverty like myself and who had long before me gone through these heartbreaking and enlightening experiences. The next Sunday we all met first at the house of Shapurji

²⁰ Quoted by Major B. D. Basu, *Ruin of Indian Trade and Industries*, Calcutta, 1925, pp. 25-26.

²¹ Rahul Sankrityayan, in *Kunwar Mohammad Ashraf*, New Delhi, 1969, p. 353.

Saklatvala, and on our return from there we went to Highgate cemetery. Here we took an oath at the grave of a new *murshid* who is still alive. I entered a new period of my life which was in every respect different from the past.”²²

Saklatvala's unswerving loyalty to the cause of the oppressed people was put to a severe test during his second period in Parliament in 1924-29. His private secretary Reg. Bishop said in 1936 :

“During his second period in Parliament, 1924-29, I was working with him all the time and saw the pressure that was brought to bear on him, pressure of a personal as well as of a political character.

“For the first year or two after election as M.P. for North Battersea there were many who tried to get him to break from the Communist Party. The Under-Secretaryship was held out if only he would be more ‘orthodox’ in politics.”²³

He was punished for his loyalty to working class. In 1925 he was to go to the United States as a member of the British delegation to the Inter-Parliamentary Conference, but Mr Kellogg, the Secretary of State of the USA, revoked his visa on the grounds that the United States did not admit revolutionaries.²⁴

In 1925, he resigned his position with the Tata firm, feeling it inconsistent to denounce capitalism at public meetings and at same time to hold a departmental managership in a firm with an authorised capital of £ 4 million, one of whose directors was his younger brother. Since that time, he devoted all his energy and time to the liberation of the working class from capitalist exploitation.

In the years following the first world war, the problem presented by intensified colonial exploitation demanded action from the British labour movement. A growing inter-

²² K. M. Ashraf on Himself, *ibid.*, p. 398.

²³ *Daily Worker*, 21 January 1936.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 18 January 1936.

national outlook among a section of working class in the United Kingdom was a significant development in the postwar period. The newly-formed Communist Party and the leftwing elements of the Labour Party (George Lansbury and others) were trying hard to arouse a protest movement against the Jallianwalabagh massacre at Amritsar (13 April 1919) and the suppression of the Egyptian national-liberation movement. This growing anti-colonial radical outlook of the British working class was reflected in the resolution adopted by 3,083,000 to 79,000 in the Trades Union Congress at Scarborough in 1925:

“This Trades Union Congress believes that the domination of non-British peoples of the British government is a form of capitalist exploitation, having for its object securing for British capitalists (1) of cheap sources of raw materials; (2) the right to exploit cheap and unorganised labour and to use the competition of that labour to degrade the workers’ standards in Great Britain.

“It declares its complete opposition to imperialism and resolves (1) to support the workers in all parts of the British empire in organising trade unions and political parties in order to further their interests, and (2) to support the right of all peoples in the British empire to self-determination including the right to choose complete separation from the empire.”²⁵

The resolution itself was a revolutionary one. Only a handful of rightwingers opposed it openly. But the rightwing leadership soon sabotaged its implementation through the General Council.

The Communist Party of Great Britain of course tried its best to implement the resolution in practice through helping the colonial peoples to organise trade unions and the labour movement. The communists were convinced that the liberation of British labour was closely linked with

²⁵ Scarborough Congress of the British Trades Union, 1925.

the liberation of the colonial and dependent peoples of the empire.²⁶ The Communist Party had two difficult tasks before it—building the party and fighting the rightwing labour leaders ideologically. At the same time their duty was to extend a helping hand to the subject peoples of the empire. Saklatvala was impatient at the slow progress made in the historic tasks that fell to the communists of Great Britain. In a letter addressed to the Political Bureau of the party on 7 October 1925 he suggested:

“I feel that the extraordinary circumstances prevailing at the moment call for extraordinary measures to be taken by our party. There is not much doubt in my mind that without drastic measures to build up our party we shall be submerged into insignificance in Great Britain. Parliamentary customs and traditions have still a very great attraction for the masses. In order to overcome this we must adopt merciless measures to fight the Labour Party.”²⁷

By suggesting the adoption of merciless measures to fight the Labour Party, he meant to fight it ideologically. He not only advocated measures to build the party, but threw himself heart and soul into performing that noble but hard task. The role of Saklatvala in the historic British general strike of 1926 is wellknown. *The Times* reported:

“At Bow Street Mr Saklatvala M.P. who was required as a result of his Hyde Park speech on Saturday (1 May) to give sureties to abstain from making violent and inflammatory speeches was remanded for two days on bail.”²⁸

Forty years after that great strike the *Sunday Times* published an article in which the writer described Saklatvala as one of the instigators of the general strike. In

²⁶ F. Engels in a letter to August Bebel in Leipzig asserted on 30 August 1883: “...a really general workers’ movement will come into existence here only when the workers feel that England’s world monopoly is broken.” Marx-Engels, *Selected Correspondence*, Moscow, 1965, p. 365.

²⁷ British Government Blue Book, 1926, p. 72.

²⁸ *The Times*, 5 May 1926.

that special issue two old opponents of the strike, Lord Citrine, the acting General Secretary of the TUC, and Lord Davidson, then Stanley Baldwin's chief aide, while recalling the general strike days, admitted the vanguard role of the communists. Lord Davidson wrote: "the communists were trying to organise the unemployed and to take the lead in all industrial disputes. . ."

The general strike which had been described by the British government as "revolution" could not achieve any revolutionary change, due to the betrayal of the rightwing labour leaders. The government imprisoned Saklatvala for his role in the strike but the class-conscious workers hailed him. After his release from the prison, the constituency of Saklatvala organised a grand social reception at the Battersea Town Hall and reendorsed his British, Indian and international policies.²⁹

VIII

This period not only witnessed the gathering of a new momentum in the national-liberation movement but also naked and brutal oppression by the imperialists to contain it. The national-liberation movements in India, Egypt, Ireland and in some other countries were crushed by imperialists using all sorts of weapons. The international working-class movement considered the freedom struggle in the colonial and dependent countries as its ally. Hence active collaboration between the organised labour movement of the west and the newly-emerged national-liberation movement against the common enemy, imperialism and capitalism, was urgently needed. Hence the move to organise an international organisation against imperialism was afoot. Saklatvala went to India to forge links between the organised labour movement in Europe and the Indian national-liberation movement.

In a letter to the *Daily Herald* Saklatvala wrote about his proposed visit to 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".³⁰

He then strongly appealed to the labour and TU movement for active help for his mission: "Every ounce of good will 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 worker from every trade union and socialist branch to my address, c/o. AITUC, Sandhurst Road, Bombay." But it was not easy for him to get a passport to visit India. The British imperialists felt uneasy about his proposed visit. When his passport was delayed on the plea that the British government was "consulting the Government of India", Saklatvala wrote a strongly-worded letter to the then British Prime Minister, Mr Baldwin:

Dear Mr Prime Minister,

In the first place, I must protest against the official attitude in some quarters that my political activities aim at fostering crime, when throughout my long career I have never committed or endeavoured to commit any. This has only been a subterfuge used to deny to me my political opportunities when logical and constitutional methods have no chance of destroying my political contributions.

I can understand that the wishes of an independent colonial government should be consulted regarding the political business of another British citizen! But in the case of India, it becomes quite grotesque when we are told that the duly-elected representatives of the British public, who have a duty of supervising the acts and imperial policy of Britain abroad and of appealing to the

³⁰ *Daily Herald*, 30 December 1926.

Indian public, require any permission from the executive government of India.

The matter is being made into one of whether such visits of investigation suit the taste and convenience of the Indian government, or not. It is not right and proper for His Majesty's government to lay down any general rule here or in any part of the empire that a member of the communist or any other political party should be made an exception in his duties and rights as a member of Parliament.

I have not taken up a new and sudden role after my election, but for three successive elections I have offered myself to a free and typical British electorate as a known member of the Communist Party, having a certain policy and pledges with regard to imperial relations and questions of Indian labour, all of which has been fully explained in my election manifestos.

After the consent and approval of a British electorate have been obtained, His Majesty's ministers or representatives are not at liberty to deny such views the legitimate right of expression.

The political side of my visit to India—besides urgent private affairs—is primarily and entirely in connection with my parliamentary duty, and my representing the CP's politics should not make any difference from another member representing the liberal, conservative, or labour party.

I, therefore, trust that your government will give up interfering with the legitimate function and duties of members of Parliament on account of their belonging to a party which your party may even hate or dread, and to let my trip take a normal course.³¹

He got the passport at last and started for India.

³¹ *Daily Worker*, 21 February 1926.

IX

Saklatvala's Indian tour evoked tremendous enthusiasm among political-minded Indians. He was given a reception such as is accorded to few men. He was acclaimed as a supreme fighter for national liberation. When the news of his impending visit was published the following items were circulated by Associated Press of India on 1 January 1927 from Lahore:

"The Second session of the All India Communist Conference will be held at Lahore from 17th to 20th March next. Mr Saklatvala is expected to preside."

The committee which was formed in Bombay to make arrangements for his reception was truly national in character. Among the members of the committee were Sarojini Naidu and B. G. Horniman. The reception committee arranged his programme in such way that he could spend most of his time in labour circles and addressing meetings in mill areas.³²

Saklatvala's visit created enthusiasm among the general public at large and advanced section in particular. But at the same time some class-conscious bourgeois leaders of Bombay visualised clearly the possible impact of his visit. Jaminadas Dwarkadas, a leading industrialist in Bombay, had declined to be a member of the reception committee on the ground that he disagreed with the policies of Saklatvala.³³

On 14 January, Saklatvala arrived in Bombay by English Mail ss *Razmak* and was given a rousing reception on landing by the reception committee. He was profusely garlanded. In the evening he attended a labour meeting after attending two social functions arranged for him by the Trade Union Congress. At night he also

³² *Free Press of India*, 11 January 1927; *Amrita Bazar Patrika*, 12 January 1927.

³³ *Amrita Bazar Patrika*, 14 January 1927.

addressed another labour meeting. Such was his crowded four-day programme in Bombay. Everywhere he emphasised the need for working-class unity and international brotherhood and independence for India. Everywhere he evoked tremendous enthusiasm among the people by his thrilling and illuminating speeches. In his lucid style and simple language, he tried to invoke the latent force of the Indian working class for Indian independence and for a better future. In a speech in Bombay on 15 January he stressed the need for working-class unity and international brotherhood. "Wage-workers of India, like all wage-workers of the world are the light and wealth of world", he said, "You have not fully weighed up and appreciated the greater strength of your economic power than all the powers of armed forces." He then urged them to become conscious, to realise that they were the rightful owners of the material world. "Let us forget our international differences and organise ourselves into an international brotherhood of workers of the world. The West is awaiting for the East, the East is waiting for the hand of fellowship from the West", he continued.

On 18 January, scenes of tremendous enthusiasm marked the public reception given to Saklatvala in Bombay. The Cowasji Jehangir Hall, where the reception was held, was "packed from floor to ceiling with an almost unprecedented large gathering which greeted his arrival with thundering cheers".

Sarojini Naidu, president of the public reception committee, appealed to the audience, saying: "Do bid him welcome, thrice welcome, back to his motherland." The audience responded with round upon round of wild cheering. Mrs Naidu welcoming him said:

"Mr Saklatvala is one of those to whom political life and political ideals are not mere matters of rhetoric, but of life and death; not of academic definition, but of dynamic concrete work. He means to India the symbol of reawakened spirit of India that held liberty dear and death as the

only alternative and he comes back to his homeland after thirteen years (*a voice from the audience like the 'Pandavas'*). He comes to study the poor with the mind of the poor."

Saklatvala then rose amidst more wild cheering and spoke for over two hours. Calling himself a "Tilakite extremist", he explained that he was not an enemy of English people but English capitalism which was "producing unemployment, underemployment and misery in the homes of millions of British workers". His demand was human happiness, human right, human freedom. In that demand he was extreme and would be satisfied with nothing short of it. Strongly criticising exaggerated emphasis on nonviolence put by Gandhi, he explained at length the creed of communism. When he was asked to suggest welfare schemes for labour, he said: "Destroy the system that divides mankind into poor and rich!"

The reception meeting in Bombay was a grand success. Prominent national leaders of Bombay including Horniman, Shaukat Ali, Brelvi and others took part in the deliberation.

The political situation following noncooperation in India was demoralising. Since the Chauri Chaura incident and the decision of Gandhiji to call off the noncooperation movement, there was deep frustration among Indians. His much-advertised promise of attainment of independence within one year proved to be an utter failure. The decision of calling off the noncooperation movement was taken at a hasty meeting of the Congress Working Committee at Bardoli on 12 February 1922 in view of the "inhuman conduct of the mob at Chauri Chaura". R. P. Dutt comments on this:

"To say that Bardoli decision created consternation in the congress camp would be to fall short of any powers of language to describe the feelings that were aroused. The nearest approach for English readers would be the effect

of the calling off of the general strike in 1926 as some parallel to India's Bardoli in 1922."³⁴

Subhas Chandra Bose wrote:

"To sound the order of retreat just when public enthusiasm was reaching the boiling point was nothing short of a national calamity. The principal lieutenants of the Mahatma, Deshbandhu Das, Pandit Motilal Nehru and Lala Lajpat Rai, who were all in prison, shared the popular resentment. I was with the Deshbandhu at the time, and I could see that he was beside himself with anger and sorrow."³⁵

Even Jawaharlal Nehru admitted that the decision to call off the movement

"brought about a certain demoralisation. It is possible, however, that this sudden bottling up of a great movement contributed to a tragic development in the country. The drift to sporadic and futile violence in the political struggle was stopped, but the suppressed violence had to find a way out, and in the following years this perhaps aggravated the communal trouble."³⁶

At the same time the postwar years also witnessed rise of labour movement and socialism in India. Thousands of workers took part in the strikes in these years for better wages and working facilities. Many trade unions were formed throughout the country. The Russian revolution had its impact on Indian masses despite attempts of British imperialists to vilify the message of the revolution. In the 32nd session of the Indian National Congress held in December 1917, Mrs Annie Beasant, president of the session, could not but notice the possible impact of Russian revolution in India. She emphatically said:

"...the Russian revolution in Europe and Asia have all entirely changed the conditions existing before in India.

³⁴ R. P. Dutt, *India Today*, Bombay, 1947, p. 287.

³⁵ S. C. Bose, *The Indian Struggle, 1920-42*, Bombay, 1967, p. 73.

³⁶ J. Nehru, *An Autobiography*, London, 1958, p. 86.

Across Asia, beyond the Himalayas, stretch free and self-ruling nations. India no longer sees as her Asian neighbours the huge domains of a Czar...and compares her condition under British rule with those of their subject population. British rule profited by the comparison at least, until 1905, when the great period of repression set in. But in future, unless India wins selfgovernment, she will look enviously at her selfgoverning neighbours and the contrast will intensify her unrest."

The British government clearly visualised the possible impact of Russian revolution on Indian people in spite of its virtual imposition of ban of true news of revolutionary Russia and its malicious propaganda against bolshevism. In a note to all senior government officers to counteract the bolshevik propaganda the British government could not but testify to the pitiable condition of the Indian masses as early as 1920.

"Now there is no doubt that at present the lower classes in India, both in the towns and in the rural areas, are going through a very hard time. The high prices resulting from the war have induced a feeling of restlessness, making them discontented with conditions which previously they bore patiently. Accordingly in the districts the peasants are grumbling that there is no reason why they should be forced to pay rent to the zamindar or land revenue to the sarkar; in the towns the labourers are complaining that while richmen live lives of comfort and ease, they are condemned to toil, early and late, to live in miserable hovels, to go clad in rags."³⁷

The downtrodden were acquiring class consciousness through their own experiences. The growth of working class in the interwar years and their strike movements in the postwar years are very significant. Only in 1919 about 125 thousand workers struck work in Bombay alone.

³⁷ Political Dept., File 14, p/1, Progs: B 526-27, June 1927, Government of Bengal.

In this situation the All India Trade Union Congress was founded in 1920. The calling off the noncooperation movement created disillusionment among the people—it raised questions about Gandhiji and his policy, at least among a section of young people.

They found in the Russian revolution a new hope, a new path which was attracting them more and more. Criticism of Gandhiji and other national leaders appeared in some newspapers. Socialist and communist ideas were slowly reaching India since the revolution. As early as 1919 the celebrated English monthly of Calcutta, *Modern Review*, published an article where the gist of the bolshevik ideals was given. Comparing bolsheviks with the mensheviks it wrote:

“The bolsheviks were more dogmatic, more radical. They demanded full and immediate realisation of their socialistic programme, such as handing over the factories to workmen and turning over all the lands to the peasants. The bolsheviks were in favour of complete socialism and absolute political democracy.”³⁸

Reproducing John Reed’s article from the *Liberator*, *Modern Review* commented:

“It is refreshing to turn from the chorus of abuse and misrepresentation directed against the Russian soviets by the capitalist press to the illuminating sketch of the framework of the Soviet state penned by John Reed in the pages of the *Liberator*. We are at least given an insight into the mighty efforts of revolutionary Russia to organise herself and work out her communistic ideals.”³⁹

A Bengali weekly, *Sramik* (Worker), published an article entitled “Capitalists and Labourers” as early as 19 August 1924. The writer declared emphatically: “In almost all the countries of the world a severe struggle is going on

³⁸ *Modern Review*, February 1919.

³⁹ *Ibid.*

between the capitalists and the labourers, the final termination of which depends on removing the cause, the root of the conflict." It wrote again on the need of labour agitation and of urging the national leaders to declare their views on the future administration of the country:

"The present agitation for swaraj is mainly in the hands of the rich and the middle class and it is they who have taken the lead in the country. Hence it is necessary for them to express a clear opinion regarding the future administration of the country... If the leaders believe that without the support of the aristocratic class the swaraj agitation will become weakened, we must say that without the help of the masses the country will never become free... If instead of a foreign bureaucracy, the rule of the aristocracy of the country is introduced here, the condition of labourers will not improve a bit. Democracy is the only alternative to the present administration, and the only way of establishing democracy is to spread political education amongst the masses. But we do not believe that this is possible without labour agitation."¹⁰

The *Sramik* also gives a picture how the oppressed workers and peasants were being organised: "There is discontent everywhere. The agriculturists are lamenting their sad lot on account of the oppression of the zamindars and 'mahajans'. The workers in the factories cry that they have to work for 18 hours... The capitalists in various spheres of their activities have established their supremacy."¹¹

In Bombay S. A. Dange published and edited a journal, the *Socialist*, in 1924. Dange became the Assistant Secretary of the Trade Union Congress. The British government was alarmed with this rapid growth of socialist and communist ideas and lost no time to strike. The "socialist" labour government was in power in England. Under that govern-

¹⁰ *Sramik*, 24 August 1924.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 21 September 1924.

ment the famous Kanpur Bolshevik Conspiracy Case was launched against four communist leaders, Dange, Shaukat Usmani, Muzaffar Ahmed and Nalini Dasgupta. They were sentenced to four years imprisonment. Repression could not check the advance of radical outlook, wrote *Sramik* in November 1924 advocating the cause of communist leaders in the Kanpur Conspiracy Case, "Communism is the very object of the labour movement."

R. P. Dutt writes:

"By 1926-27 socialist ideas were spreading widely. A new initial form of political working-class and socialist organisation began to appear in the Workers' and Peasants' Parties, which sprang up and united militant elements in the trade-union movement with left elements in the National Congress. The Workers' and Peasants' Party was formed in Bengal in February 1926; others followed in Bombay, the United Provinces and the Punjab."⁴²

In India Communist Party was also formed in Kanpur on 25-26 December 1925. Saklatvala sent a personal letter of greetings to this conference. The president of the first communist conference in India, Singaravelu Chettiar, explained the attitude of the Indian communists to swaraj: "In the great struggle for swaraj which is now in progress throughout the country we communists have to take the greatest share in the struggle."⁴³ *Forward*, a radical English daily of Calcutta founded by Deshbandhu Chittaranjan Das, editorially welcomed the speech of Singaravelu on 28 December 1925. Even *Ananda Bazar Patrika*, the top-most Bengali daily, commented on 31 December 1925:

"The Communist Party has made its appearance as the mouthpiece of the ryots and labourers. There is no denying the fact that the need of such a party had been felt very keenly, especially for the reason that the Congress had more or less remained indifferent to the interests of the

⁴² R. P. Dutt, *op. cit.*, p. 338.

⁴³ *Amrita Bazar Patrika*, 28 December 1925.

ryots and the labourers. The strength of the nation will increase to a considerable extent if the Communist Party succeeds in organising a political party composed of the ryots and the labourers and forms into a section of the Congress."

Meanwhile the Congress itself was divided into two sections — prochangers and nochangers. Prochangers were the followers of Swaraj Party of Deshbandhu Das. He evinced keen interest on labour organisation. He even spoke of "swaraj for the 98 per cent". But Deshbandhu expired in 1925 creating a political vacuum which was very difficult to fill.

Saklatvala reached India in this political background. The great ovation which he received in Bombay to which we have already referred was unparalleled in recent history. His itinerary in Bombay bears testimony to his popularity. On 16 January, S. Sreenivas Iyenger and Saklatvala were entertained at a garden party by the Bombay Provincial Congress Committee. In a meeting at the Congress House, Saklatvala said that he looked forward to the day when Congress House would not only be the National Government House but the Soviet House, from where the common people would direct their destiny.

He delivered speeches in the workers' rallies in Bombay urging them to organise against imperialism and capitalism. From Madras Singaravelu Chettiar, prominent labour leader and president of the recently-formed Indian Communist Party, sent a telegram to Saklatvala fully praising his role: "Pray go forth and preach glorious doctrine of Indian workers' emancipation. Proclaim to them international unity. Kindly preside over Lahore communist conference."¹¹

In a letter addressed to the president, Tramway Workers' Union in Madras, Saklatvala politely described his mission in India:

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 19 January 1927.

“At last I have managed to enable myself to visit our homeland and old friends. My time and resources are very limited, and I have a lot to see, study and learn and at the same time I am anxious to render as devoted and useful service to our poor country as possible.”⁴⁵

From Bombay he went to Gujarat. On 21 January 1927 he was received at Ahmedabad railway station by Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel, president of the Gujarat Provincial Congress Committee, who personally garlanded Saklatvala. While in Ahmedabad he had a busy programme of visiting Gandhi's ashram and attending a meeting organised by the Congress. On 22 January in a huge mass rally in Ahmedabad organised by the congress committee he boldly criticised the programme of the Congress. In that huge meeting presided over by Patel himself, he advised ordinary congressmen thus: “Awake your peasantry from slumber.” Tracing the congress history from its inception he said that they had committed a mistake in not setting a definite goal. Everybody was defining swaraj in different ways, but nobody had a definite idea about India's freedom. It was now time that they should fix and declare their goal and how to attain it. After the advent of Tilak the Congress became more forceful and Gandhi infused a new spirit into it. But it was not enough. The Congress must now take workers, peasants and villagers into its fold and make them conscious of their political rights and thus make a peasants' party in the Congress.

“You will never get freedom”, said Saklatvala, “if you do not work with your village folk. . . If Gandhiji had taken the help of labourers and peasants the boycott of foreign cloth and titles would have been successful. . . Awake your peasantry, your labourers and you will get a new strength, new vigour and you will find out a way which will bring your freedom and thus you will attain your goal for which you are pining for years.” (*Loud and prolonged cheers.*)⁴⁶

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 22 January 1927.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 23 January 1927.

Saklatvala stressed on one thing everywhere in India — building a strong organisation of workers and peasants. Without awakening of Indian peasantry from ageold bondage to landlords, moneylenders and superstitions, India's progress was impossible. His idea of awakening the Indian workers and peasantry has been clearly reflected in his letter published in the English daily *Forward*. He desired also that his countrymen should seriously ponder over the Indian situation, particularly in its relation to the world situation. He raised this point in his innumerable speeches — what kind of swaraj that the Indian people want and how they could realise it? Politicians had evaded an answer to these questions. He had demanded that the toiling masses must know what they were asked to fight for. "They must not be used as footstools of ambitions and pawns in a game which is intended as far as possible to supplant the white bureaucracy by a brown bureaucracy."

In that letter Saklatvala analysing the weakness of the noncooperation movement put forward his suggestions to achieve independence. He wrote:

"Thousands of students responded to the call of the Congress in 1922 and emptied the schools and colleges, with determination and devotion to become life-long servants of our dear motherland. This call of Comrade Gandhi was endorsed and accepted by the 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, so I had to satisfy myself by discussing the scheme in my mind with Dr Ansari, then with Mr Deep Narain Singh, and then with Mr Tulsi Goswami and some other friends who happened to visit Great Britain. I felt that the call 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 the misbelief of religious or civic virtues.

"This talk cannot be performed by book education, or by the thumping oratory of a travelling agitator, both on account of unsuitability of such methods, and also on account of the peculiar difficulties of our illiterate peasants and industrial workers.

"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 humanity. I want them even now in a methodical and in an organised manner to enter agricultural villages, factories, mines, dockyards, railway-yards and in places of human activities as bona fide workers within these 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 places 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 degradations 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 on to a path of self-assertion or defence against the might of the privileged class, and then of demands for the ultimate rights of their own class.

"India has about six lakhs of villages, and about twenty thousand places or centres or institutions of modern industrial organisations. A band of 70,000 young educated men and 30,000 young educated women, whom Comrade Gandhi's inspiring call made available, could launch a gigantic programme of Indian revival and produce results within 12 months. This is yet my reply to my student friends, and if my country would only permit me, and would facilitate my greeting the full personnel of the All India Congress Committee, I am still hopeful of putting the scheme into workable shape provided always with good will and help from my more esteemed friends and leaders

like Comrades Iyenger, Nehru, Gandhi, Sarojini Naidu, Joshi, Anusuyabai, Mohammad Ali, Shaukat Ali and several others."⁴⁷

Everywhere the main theme of his speeches was unity, organisation and solidarity — unity of the people against British imperialism, organisation of peasants and workers and solidarity with the fighting millions throughout the whole world. No speaker espoused communism so brilliantly from the platform of the Indian National Congress before Saklatvala.

X

In a speech in the Cowasji Jehangir Hall organised by Parsi Rajkiya Sabha, Saklatvala dealt with the need of organisation of labour and peasantry. Reviewing the failure of the boycott movement he remarked: "Boycott would have proved effective if the workers had been organised to refuse to handle foreign trade." He also emphasised the organisation of workers as a primary issue of our freedom and not secondary object of charity. He also wanted the incorporation of the newly-formed Peasants' and Workers' Party in the Congress.⁴⁸

But by organising workers only on economic issues will not liberate the workers from the clutches of capitalist exploitation. In his appeal to trade-union workers of India he urged that the "TU workers should be made politically conscious and there should be a mutual support uniting together, meeting together the economic and the political power of the nation of all India."⁴⁹

Criticising the attitude of the so-called leaders who think that the labourers are not capable of taking care of them-

⁴⁷ *Forward*, 25 January 1927.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 26 January, 1927.

⁴⁹ *Amrita Bazar Patrika*, 24 February 1927.

selves Saklatvala told a workers' rally in Madras:

"British and Indian politicians who say that the labour should educate itself and show its fitness to take care of itself are wrong, and we communists do not believe it. We say to working classes that the so-called educated classes are treacherous in saying that labour cannot take care of itself. There is a great warfare, more cruel than that waged with firearms and bullets, between the rich and the poor all over the world. Almost all of our leading politicians including Mr Gandhi do not care for Indian labourers."⁵⁰

It needed courage and political firmness to criticise Mahatma Gandhi in the twenties. But wherever required Saklatvala did not hesitate to criticise severely the policy pursued by any great man but without showing any disrespect to him. In one of his speeches in Bombay he openly criticised the plan of Mahatma as impracticable: "Mahatma's plan was impracticable." "Khaddar", in his opinion, "would be only a supplementary economic weapon and not a political weapon."⁵¹

But at the same time he did not suggest that the Peasants' and Workers' Party should dissociate itself from the Congress which was dominated by Gandhi and his followers. In the conference of the Peasants' and Workers' Party held in February 1927 he did not suggest for a moment that the National Congress, as it existed, was useless. But he suggested that the Congress would become truly national and really powerful when it was associated with a great party of the workers and peasants of India.⁵²

In his speech on the eve of his departure to England, Saklatvala categorically appealed to his countrymen generally and the peasants and workers particularly to rally round the Congress. His experiences in India had convinced him that, in spite of confusion and differences, there would

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 27 February 1927.

⁵¹ *Forward*, 26 January 1927.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 20 February 1927.

emerge some elements in the Congress which would build up the strength and unity of the workers and peasants:

"All must get into the Congress whatever might be their differences and exchange their views with one another. It was stupid to remain aloof and sulk and grumble. We should have a strong united National Congress, representative of all the classes and interests. Nothing can be national in India if the peasants and workers are not in it for they form the largest majority."⁵³

But his open appeal to the newly-emerged radicals to work inside the Congress was not accepted by many leftists. Unfortunately the leftist circle was then suffering from sectarianism. There were, of course, some leaders like S. A. Dange and Singaravelu who advocated that communists should be the pioneers in the national-liberation movement. Saklatvala's close relation with the leaders of the National Congress during his Indian tour was interpreted by veteran leader Hasrat Mohani as that he had become a "congress victim." He further contended that Saklatvala could do genuine work in India had he not fallen a victim to Congress and other nationalists. Saklatvala, according to him, was not allowed to breathe in a fresh atmosphere. "The very fact that he had begun to address as comrades the Ali brothers, who had recently exposed themselves antiproletariat at Gauhati, and Mahatma Gandhi, who thanked God, because of whom the independence resolution in the Congress was defeated, was sure proof that he was being all through deceived by cleverly hatched-up conspiracy of so-called leaders of the Congress which today had gone into the hands of those who did not care a bit to better the condition of those whose sole cause Saklatvala stood to espouse. Saklatvala says that the swarajist programme was the best programme for the country. Saklatvala must know only if he took care to meet those who worked with the masses that

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 9 April 1927.

the swarajists were far removed from any activity really beneficial to the masses." Hasrat Mohani further warned Saklatvala that since his arrival in India he was constantly and consistently being duped by Indian supporters of British imperialism though today they were in forcible possession of Congress.⁵⁴

This sectarian attitude caused heavy damage to the left movement in India. It seems that Saklatvala had a clear understanding of the Indian situation. He knew very well that in an anti-imperialist struggle unity of all forces was essential. But it does not mean giving up building workers' and peasants' organisations or party or ideological struggle. Therefore while he was advocating fervently to the Indian left to join hands with the National Congress in order to achieve freedom, he never forgot to strongly criticise the policy of the Congress and even Gandhiji. He also utilised the congress platform to explain the message of communism, internationalism and the pioneering role of the Soviet Union. It seems that his suggestions to the Indian left towards the Congress were unity and struggle—unity against British imperialism and ideological struggle inside the Congress.

The famous Saklatvala-Gandhi controversy reveals his manner in waging ideological controversy with the greatest political figure of modern India. Meeting Gandhiji at Nagpur, Saklatvala declared himself against charkha and khaddar but Mahatma advised him to go to England with a charkha to educate public opinion on India. Saklatvala, naturally, could not agree with this but the Mahatma insisted. Saklatvala wanted Gandhiji to help in organising the workers and peasants in the country. But Gandhiji replied that the first need for swaraj was a more liberal use of khaddar and charkha.⁵⁵

He differed with Gandhiji on principle but was very conscious about the role of Gandhiji. Therefore he appealed

⁵⁴ *Amrita Bazar Patrika*, 11 February 1927.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 12 February 1927.

again and again to Gandhiji to take up the leadership in organising workers and peasants.

Saklatvala never hesitated in explaining the bonds of brotherhood of the workers and the exploited masses throughout the whole world. He took the liberty in his various speeches to explain the basic tenets of communism. In a New Delhi speech he explained the existence of two separate wests.

"There are two distinctly separate, contrary wests — one dominating, commanding, exploiting, monopolising West, and the other suffering, dictated, exploited and dispossessed West. Of this latter class he is as much a brother and a servant of the same class in East."⁵⁶

He asked Indian leaders to forge unity with the anti-imperialist movements of the whole world. "The feeling of opposition to imperialism is no longer a sentimental and emotional expression of a few individuals", he declared, "but it is now an organised movement against it in all countries of the world".⁵⁷ He then referred to the ensuing world conference against imperialism to be held in Brussels and appealed to Indian organisations to extend their support.⁵⁸

Explaining the class division in every class society, Saklatvala said in his lucid style:

"Every nation today is divided into two nations, one seeking to hold power over the humanity and the other seeking power on equal terms for all members of the nation and for all nations within the human race. The first group is successful at the present moment on account of two factors, firstly, its capacity to remain well-organised and closely disciplined in selfinterest and, secondly, its control over the armed forces and armaments by which it enforces its will upon the masses in the ultimate analysis in all

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 2 February 1927.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

⁵⁸ In the World Congress of the League Against Imperialism, the National Congress sent Jawaharlal Nehru as its representative and Gandhiji sent a message.

disputes. . . Against this dominant class, workers and peasants are being organised who could wield their economic power and who, by well-directed and properly legitimate resistance can dry up the very sources of wealth, power and militarism of the dominant class. Where nations have so organised themselves and have worked to organise the workers and peasants as the first step and the foundation stone for acquiring natural freedom, they have succeeded. In India certain political theories as boycott of foreign cloth, surrender of titles or round-table conference for rights of the Indians in Africa may appear very glamorous, but most will end in complete failure where behind such national aspiration organised workers and peasants are not arrayed as a delivering force.”⁵⁹

Time and again he boldly asserted that Soviet Russia was the vanguard of a new civilisation and communism was the ultimate aim of all struggles waged by the exploited masses throughout the world. Praising the Soviet Union and communism in India in those days was dangerous, and might lead to persecution by British government. Only a few years earlier the British government convicted some communist leaders on the so-called Kanpur Bolshevik Conspiracy Case. In 1924 the Kanpur trial was staged against four of the communist leaders — Shripad Amrit Dange, Shaukat Usmani, Nalini Dasgupta and Muzaffar Ahmad. The trial was staged under a labour government in England. All the four leaders were sentenced to four years' imprisonment. The British government was not satisfied with repressive measures against communists, it tried to check spread of communist ideals by banning importation of communist and socialist literature, by spreading the vilest slanders against the Soviet Union. But repression could not check the advance of socialist ideas in India.

Saklatvala in those days tried his best to put forward before the masses of India the true picture of the Soviet

⁵⁹ *Amrita Bazar Patrika*, 2 February 1927.

Union and the ideals of communism. He perfectly utilised his position as a member of the British Parliament. In an interview with the Associated Press of India in New Delhi on 1 February 1927 he declared :

“I wish to bring home to my countrymen and women not to misunderstand genuine communism by its false and grotesque description given by interested imperialists who are preventing them from travelling to Russia to see the real blessings and true civilising influence as it is being actually experimented in Russia.”

Repudiating the slanders against communism he declared emphatically :

“Communism does not seek to create or perpetuate bloodshed. Communism does not seek to confiscate and deprive individuals of all personal properties but communism wants to introduce a civilised and honest system of society where any man, woman or child is adequately taken care of from birth to death.”

In his various public speeches he boldly repudiated the lie that the communists were after bloodshed and destruction. Explaining the latent capacity of the workers and peasants in building society under socialism, he referred in one of his Bombay speeches to the example of the Soviet Union: “Russia is being ruled by men who are mere workers and peasants. Czar has gone—and in his place workers and peasants are ruling.” He then reported to the audience about the rapid advance of literacy in Russia since the revolution.⁶⁰

In Calcutta Saklatvala was accorded a tumultuous welcome by the Bengal Trade Union Federation at Wellington Square. Mrinal Kanti Bose, the veteran trade-union leader of Bengal, in his address of welcome requested him to explain the basic tenets of communism: “We are told that communism is a subversive doctrine. We know nothing

⁶⁰ *Forward*, 21 January 1927.

about it." Saklatvala rose amidst cheers in a dignified manner and replied that he stood before them that evening as a communist because in his opinion communism was the coming civilisation for the whole world. Communist propaganda had been described as subversive. But he might tell them quite clearly, that it was so.

"Because the fact remained that every propaganda that was honest and sincere tried to subvert existing order. Everything in life that was new was subversive of the old... In the present capitalist system of life, hypocrisy, criminal bent of mind, clinging habits and slavish bent of mind had been products of human civilisation. Now communism says to the few privileged, the external controller of the world, that if they had so ordained the economic life of the nation that a man dared not call his soul his own, that a child must be put to the grinding necessity of earning its four annas, then freedom of nations, liberty of consciousness were all moonshine, a cant, a hypocrisy unless human beings are economically free. Then there is the question how can they be free? It can be possible by abolition of all class privileges. In that egalitarian society distribution of wealth will be according to the necessity and requirement of individual. It is said that if that society evolves, no one will work. It is a foolish argument."

Explaining true meaning of freedom Saklatvala argued:

"We say to the world if you talk of national freedom, national rights, national freedom without individual freedom is a sham. A political formula may be very good for hypocritical parliamentarians and we say that real freedom in the realities of life in the actual dealings of life must belong to men and women of society in every home and every hearth. We say of that freedom which is based on economic independence."

Referring to Indian independence he categorically asserted:

"You will never get it unless you first mean freedom for the workers and the poor agriculturists. Freedom for India means freedom in the cottage, freedom in the mud huts..."

I would ask you to unite, to combine as workers, each one demanding his freedom and that will constitute national freedom."

Lashing out at the idea of white supremacy Saklatvala said: "I declare that no nation on earth has a right to call itself superior and govern another nation even for a single minute. No group of individuals has a right to oppress the masses of their nationality."

Saklatvala declared in that august meeting unequivocally:

"I say communism is the coming civilisation which must be subversive, must subvert the present abominable, criminal and murderous form of society. The moment you learn to look at communism in the right line, never listening to the bogies described by the enemies of communism and adopt the principle in your life, the better for you all. In conclusion I beg of you to organise yourselves to demand your political rights. You have greater rights than the capitalists. I ask you to give up all your little jealousies and build up All India Trade Union Federation, inspired by the spirit of communism so that your new political order may be communist order, nothing else."⁶¹

In this way Saklatvala never hesitated to explain his position and appealed to his listeners not to pay any attention to the crude propaganda let loose by the bourgeoisie to malign communism.

There was such crude propaganda current in India as that the Soviet government had "nationalised women". Saklatvala explaining the marriage law of Russia and socio-economic factors in the marriage contract strongly repudiated that charge. He said: "But if communism gives the freedom to separate it does not mean that communism has relaxed the marriage tie or led to an increased number of divorce cases. As a matter of fact, Russia records a lesser number of divorce cases than any other European country.

⁶¹ *Amrita Bazar Patrika*, 20 February 1927.

The marriage laws under communism are not 'misunderstood' but they are deliberately 'misrepresented'.⁶² While in Bengal, he did not hesitate a moment to rush to the side of the striking workers of the British-owned Bengal Nagpur Railway at Kharagpur, seventytwo miles away from Calcutta.

Saklatvala was accompanied by V. V. Giri, the then leader of workers, at present President of India. He found at Kharagpur the strong determination of the workers to fight. He also witnessed the helping hand of Indian capitalist concerns. The Tata Company was not in favour of the fighting Indian workers but in favour of their oppressor, the British-owned Bengal Nagpur Railway Company. He sent the following telegram to the Tata Company on 18 February from Calcutta.⁶³

"Tata Iron and Steel Co., Bruce Street, Bombay.

I propose visiting Jamshedpur about the 25th instant. I shall appreciate reasonable assistance from the management in studying labour conditions. Astonished, your firm supported from public funds by several crores of rupees as steel producing concern, should now be used as a strike-breaking institute against halfstarved railway workers. If as employers you join another employer's quarrel will not your workers be justified striking in sympathy with railway workers?

Shapurji Saklatvala
28, Doctor Lane, Calcutta."

At Kharagpur he was not allowed to deliver a public speech by the authorities. Coming back to Calcutta he sent a letter to the governor of Bengal protesting against the repressive measures adopted by the government against the striking workers:

"I have just come back from Kharagpur where there is stoppage of work among the railway workers, arising out of a dispute with the Bengal Nagpur Railway Company.

⁶² *Ibid.*

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 19 February 1927.

Besides unnecessarily big military display, which in itself is bound to have tendency to terrorise men back to work on iniquitous terms, there is one very obnoxious practice to which I beg to draw your attention—with the request for its immediate reversal. Under the order issued prohibiting meetings, meetings of strictly trade-union members to be addressed by trade-union officials are banned. This is indeed paralysing constitutional work of organisation at a time when it is most needed especially when the bulk of our labour is illiterate. Even during the last prolonged lockout of coal miners in Great Britain when every rigorous emergency regulations were put into force as soon as Home Secretary's attention was drawn to certain impediments in the way of miners' trade-union meeting, Sir William Johnson Hicks issued special orders to make it immediately clear that such meetings could not and would not be stopped. If your government prevent trade unionists from meeting together and discussing their situation from day to day and decide upon their orderly course of action, its only effect would be to throw men individually on the mercy of their masters who are insisting upon exacting hard work from them on wage ranging from Rs. 9 to Rs. 15 per month for maintaining whole families (say 5 pence to 7 pence a day) when minimum living cost per month for labourer's family of four is thirtythree rupees. I am sure such is not the intention of your government and that your Excellency will be good enough to have this matter rectified without delay."⁶⁴

As usual this letter fell on deaf ears. But the class-conscious workers of Great Britain had expressed their deep sympathy to the fellow workers' struggle in India. In a letter addressed to Saklatvala, the Pimlico branch of the Transport and General Workers' Union had sent the unanimous resolution supporting the movement of Indian working class. The resolution runs as follows:

"We recognise that the working-class movement in

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 22 February 1927.

India has a terrible struggle against British imperialism. Our sympathy goes out to our oppressed comrades, and we assure them of our wholehearted support in whatever action they may take to throw off the oppressors.”⁶⁵

This is a clear contrast between the two wests—one oppressor and the other oppressed. In a message to the BN Railway Labour Union Sak wrote: “I have visited Kharagpur and found strikers’ determination excellent, also their peaceful militant conduct in face of provocation, military exhibition admirable. Trust all your members will stand by your comrades in distress with every ounce of brotherly help in their power.”⁶⁶

The strike of the BN Railway workers was unique in many respects. Only recently a communal riot had broken out in India between the Hindus and Muslims. Tension was still there between the two communities. The Kharagpur workers were mostly of South-Indian origin. There were considerable sections of Muslims, Sikhs, Christians among them. They were alienated from the main current of Bengal’s political or social life. In spite of that the top-most political leaders and intelligentsia of Bengal came forward to render help to the striking brethren of BN Railways who were waging a determined struggle against a British company. Anti-imperialist nationalist sentiment led the leaders of Bengal to join hands with the workers of BN Railways at Kharagpur.

To express sympathy and render all possible help to the striking workers of Kharagpur, a public meeting was held in the Albert Hall (College Square, Calcutta), the celebrated cultural and political centre of Calcutta. The first citizen of Calcutta—J. M. Sengupta, the mayor—presided over the meeting and Pandit Shyamsundar Chakravorti, Jogendranath Moitra, Mrinal Kanti Bose, Hemendralal Sen, Dr Sundari Mohan Das, Swami Karunananda, Kishorilal

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

Ghose and many other prominent leaders were present in that meeting. Saklatvala was the main speaker of the meeting where he pilloried imperialist rule in the strongest words. "The imperialists are subjecting the poor worker to that sort of life for their economic as well as political ends and yet they held the poor Indian wage-earner guilty of political conspiracy when he refused to live on Rs. 10 or Rs. 15 a month with his family."⁶⁷ He concluded with an appeal for the formation of trade unions and for funds to help the strikers. A committee was formed in the meeting for the purpose of raising funds comprising people of all walks of life. Tulsi Charan Goswami, the veteran national leader, was elected president and treasurer of the committee and Amarendranath Chatterjee, a great revolutionary, was elected secretary. The committee included persons like the Mayor of Calcutta and veteran congress leader J. M. Sengupta, Sarat Chandra Bose, Mrinal Kanti Bose, the TU leader, Kishorilal Ghose, Upendranath Banerjee, Mahbul Haq, M. Daud, Waheed Hossain, B. N. Sasmal, Rajendra Deb, P. D. Himmatsinghka, D. P. Khaitan, N. M. Joshi, M.L.A., Kumar Debendra Lal Khan, Pijus Kanti Ghose, etc.⁶⁸ All the members were wellknown political or social figures of Bengal. By his illuminating speeches he aroused tremendous enthusiasm in Bengal.

On his arrival at the Howrah station on 1 February he was accorded a very rousing reception there. The celebrated national daily of Calcutta reported: "The train arrived at 10-40 a.m. But long before the arrival a large number of people consisting of many congress workers began to assemble on the platform, prominent among them were: Bepin Chandra Pal, J. L. Banerjee, Tulsi Goswami, J. M. Sengupta, Basanta Kumar Mazumder, Dr Pratap Chandra Guha Roy, Mrinal Kanti Bose, Satyanarayan Bakshi, Santosh K. Gupta, Hemendra Nath Das Gupta,

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

A. C. Banerjee, Rai Purosottam Rai, Suresh Chandra Bhattacharjee. In response to the congress appeal issued under the signature of B. N. Sasmal, secretary, Bengal Provincial Congress Committee, a large number of congress volunteers as also members of many labour unions arrived at the station in procession and stood in a line on the platform waving flags and shouting "Bande mataram".⁶⁹

Like many other cities and towns of India, the Calcutta corporation and the Howrah municipality accorded him civic receptions. But it was not an easy task to take this decision regarding a communist leader considered to be the "greatest enemy of the Union Jack". In Howrah municipality, the decision was passed with a majority vote and a committee was formed for that purpose with Barada Pain, Nirmal Chandra Mitra and Bholanath Roy as members of the civic reception committee. But in the Calcutta corporation meeting, it was not so easy. The nominated European members were strongly opposing the proposal and the Mayor J. M. Sengupta was not too enthusiastic at the beginning. However after the heated discussion on 26 January 1927, the resolution was passed by 29 votes to 12 votes with six remaining neutral.

"Moving the resolution Mr Sarat Chandra Bose said that Mr Saklatvala was the only Indian M.P. He had also distinguished himself in many other spheres of life and it was due to his work for three years in Indian jungles when he explored iron ore, coal and limestone there that the Tata Iron and Steel works owed its existence. In Bombay he had done some philanthropic service in connection with plague hospital and slums there. They might not agree with his political views and the speaker did not see eye to eye with him on many questions but surely he was one of the most distinguished men today and the corporation would be only doing honour to itself by honouring such a man."⁷⁰

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 19 February 1927.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 27 January 1927.

The corporation of Calcutta presented Mr S. Saklatvala M.P. with an address of welcome in the Town Hall on the evening of Sunday, 20 February. Long before the appointed hour the hall was packed with an eager crowd of citizens representing all sections of the community gathered to see and hear the Indian member of the British Parliament whose political creed had been the subject-matter of such curiosity, criticism and controversy. The Town Hall was beautifully decorated. Outside it was a blazing mass of colours with multicoloured electric lamps and inside it was the same with flowers of every hue most tastefully arranged.

After the Mayor had read and presented the address to Mr Saklatvala, he replied in a most remarkable speech :

“You have proven to the world that you are not such stupid unintelligent citizens who swallow everything that imperial press and imperial statesmen are saying against the communists. By adopting the fairminded principle of welcoming a communist and not boycotting him, you have not only defied the studied antagonism of the apostles of imperialism, but have rendered signal services to those poverty-stricken enslaved men and women of imperial Great Britain who desire to be relieved at our hands, just as much as we ourselves desire to relieve ourselves.”

Saklatvala suggested in the course of his reply that the corporation of Calcutta should undertake the task of housing, feeding and educating the citizens on the lines of the socialist municipal administration of Vienna. He urged upon the corporation to realise that in the interest of the poor section of the people, it was its duty to trade on co-operative basis in the essential articles of food, so that they might not only obtain these articles in a purer form but also cheaper.

The reply took more than an hour and a quarter after which the Mayor thanked Mr Saklatvala for his speech in a few wellchosen words. Mr. Sengupta said :

“There was in the mind of some—I do not excuse myself

from that group—certain amount of misgiving as to the action of the corporation in according Mr Saklatvala a welcome on behalf of the corporation today. But I can say truly that I do not view a communist with that antagonism and that spirit of suspicion after I have heard Mr Saklatvala.”

XI

The Bombay corporation by a majority vote of 43 to 29 defeated a motion urging the corporation to accord civic reception to Saklatvala. The proposal was moved by the Nationalist Party (B. G. Horniman and others) which was opposed by the Progressive Party (Modi and others) along with the nominated European bloc on the plea that Saklatvala “had done no service to India” and principles for which Saklatvala stood were not clear and where they were clear, they were revolutionary.⁷¹ In view of the corporation’s rejection of the proposal, a movement was on foot in Bombay to send a requisition to the Sheriff to call a public meeting to vote an address to him before his departure to England.

While the Bombay corporation rejected the proposal, the Madras corporation accorded him civic reception with great dignity. Dewan Bahadur G. Narayanaswami Chetty, president of the corporation, read the token of the civic honour which spoke of Mr Saklatvala’s “Brave and selfless struggle on behalf of labouring millions of world” and wished him god-speed in his mission of service. In his speech Saklatvala expressed gratefulness to the Madras corporation for courageously braving unjustifiable prejudice against communists and socialists and went on to say: “We are out not to add to the troubles and distress of world. We look at the world as it stands today and we, who see disease, human starvation and moral degradation, are struggling to restore to world a human dignity, a humani-

⁷¹ *Forward*, 2 March 1927.

tarian civilisation and right of men and women to lead a happy, beautiful, healthy and pleasurable life."

XII

The AITUC session extended its cordial welcome and greetings of Indian workers to Saklatvala. In the delegate session Saklatvala, as the fraternal delegate of the British working-class movement, declared that freedom was a mockery unless the workers could not become their masters. Trade unionism, he stated, was devised to secure that object. It was established with the set purpose of overthrowing capitalism and imperialism and its substitution by a workers' state and their control. It was no use saying that they should wait until everybody was educated. As a matter of fact trade unionism in Great Britain started in 1858 and compulsory education after it. Saklatvala then averred that in all western countries the trade-union movement was beginning to advance and had achieved greater importance than five or seven years ago. Directly addressing the delegates he said that their task had been made easier by the readymade reputation and prestige of the movement in other countries and they must strive to come into line with the advanced trade unions of the world.

Proceeding, Saklatvala suggested certain improvements in the existing management of the trade-union movement in India and advised them to call a meeting of every branch at least once a month, exchange literature and systematise accounts. They should also maintain a research department to collect data regarding the ramification of companies and institute an economic enquiry into the condition of the workers.⁷²

Veteran labour leaders like Lala Lajpat Rai, Shiva Rao, Dewan Chamanlal, Mrinal Kanti Bose, Jhabwala, Kirk, Philip Spratt, Chandramadhab Ghose, Thengdi, V. V. Giri,

⁷² *Amrita Bazar Patrika*, 13 March 1927.

P. C. Bose (Jharia), Sethi (Jamshedpur) and others were among the delegates. Speaking on the constitution of the AITUC Saklatvala declared that labour in India was experiencing the same difficulties as labour did in England. But Indian labour, he said, was not required to start from the very beginning. It had inherited the traditions and experience of the British labour movement. Urging upon the delegates to keep close contact with the international labour movement he said—the trade unionists in India were to forge ahead and keep themselves abreast of the labour movement in the world. He said also that the congress should have a standing committee for international negotiations.⁷³

XIII

National leaders like Motilal Nehru, Maulana Mohammed Ali, Dr Ansari, Mr Kidwai, Mr Sherwani received him in Delhi. He delivered an excellent speech demanding withdrawal of British troops from China, in a public meeting held in Delhi under the chairmanship of Pandit Motilal Nehru. At the Delhi session of the Trade Union Congress (1927) Saklatvala attended as a fraternal delegate.

Saklatvala observed that one of the greatest impediments of India's independence was communal tension between Hindus and Muslims. He tried his best in this short visit to forge unity among the two communities. He appealed again and again for Hindu-Muslim unity. The Muslim community had a great trust in him. He was accorded the most rousing reception in Bombay by the Muslims.

“A most enthusiastic welcome was accorded to Mr Saklatvala by the Bombay Muslims under the auspices of Central Khilafat Committee. Over six thousand Muslims attended the meeting. Maulana Shaukat Ali presided. He

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 17 March 1927.

was given a unique garland purse.”⁷⁴ In spite of somewhat communal welcome address of Maulana Shaukat Ali, Saklatvala’s reply was sober and political. Shaukat Ali’s welcome address stated: “Muslims in India are weak today. We have no wealth or position but, thanks to god, we have our great faith with us. We fully believe that all that was best in the world is included in the Koran, god’s final message for mankind. . . . We have lost our empire and our all because we had disobeyed god and deserve to lose.”⁷⁵ Saklatvala appealed to the assembled Muslims for Hindu-Muslim unity on a stronger foundation. He also pleaded for the religious toleration and perfect freedom to preach. In a Madras meeting on 29 January, he appealed: “Communists appeal against communal basis. Empty stomach is enough incentive for building workers’ unity.”⁷⁶

In another meeting in Bombay on 19 January Saklatvala fervently appealed for Hindu-Muslim unity. He appealed for development of internationalism and solidarity of workers as in that lay the strength and sure remedy against present ills—economic, social and political.⁷⁷ He explained that the spread of international outlook and class-consciousness was the remedy against narrowness and communalism among working masses.

Saklatvala ended his Indian tour on 8 April. On that day an enthusiastic and tumultuous ovation was accorded to him at a crowded meeting in Bombay held to give him a hearty send-off on the eve of his departure for England. Admission to the meeting was by tickets and the proceeds amounting to three thousand five hundred and one rupees were presented to him in a purse. At the end Saklatvala explained his personal financial matters. He said that he had received fourteen thousand and three hundred rupees by way of

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 22 January 1927.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 30 January 1927.

⁷⁷ *Forward*, 20 January 1927.

public collections in India out of which he was able to pay all his expenses of his visit and repay a loan of three thousand rupees that was advanced to him by a friend for political work at a time of difficulty. In his reply to the welcome, he lucidly explained the principles and necessity of communism. "Though he had discussed this subject threadbare during his tour in India for the two months, he did it with such a freshness and originality today as to create a renewed interest among the audience."⁷³

Thus ended the whirlwind tour of Saklatvala. What were the effects of his tour in India? Has he rendered any service to Indian national movement and in popularising communism? The popular English daily, *Amrita Bazar Patrika*, in its editorial on 26 February had excellently explained the services rendered by Saklatvala during his Indian tour. It is worthwhile to reproduce here the editorial in full:

"Mr Saklatvala is on a lecturing tour in India. He addressed huge audiences in Calcutta and made a very profound impression. He has given a powerful shaking to vested interests and preconceived notions. He has taken out without mercy the idols of popular worship and exhibited to the populace the feet of clay. He did not beat about the bush or say sweet words to please this man or that, this powerful faction or that but drove his ideas straight into the hearts of the thousands who listened to him with supreme unconcern as to whose corns he might be treading on. His speeches were singularly free from those conventions and insincerities which we have learnt to associate with the public utterances of public men. He seemed to be inspired with the idea of telling the truth and nothing but the truth as he conceived it to be without any manner of reservation.

"His earnestness and logical simplicity of argument appealed to heart as well as to the intellect. It is not necessary to agree with all that he said to be able to appreciate

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 9 April 1927.

his desire that his countrymen should seriously ponder over the problems of the Indian situation particularly in its relation to the world situation as understood by him. What is the kind of swaraj that the Indian people want and how could they realise it? Politicians have chosen to evade an answer to these questions and have in a manner wanted a *carte blanche* from their countrymen to work out an undefined swaraj in this undefined way. Their slogan is swaraj first and everything else afterwards. With this shibboleth they have sought to stifle every enquiry and every criticism. Mr Saklatvala has raised his powerful voice of protest against these tactics. He has demanded that the toiling masses must know what they are asked to fight for and how to fight for it. They must not be used as footstools of ambition and pawns in a game of which they are to know practically nothing but which is intended as far as possible to supplant the white bureaucracy by a brown bureaucracy.

"The masses are now practically let down in the scheme of the struggle for swaraj. No serious efforts have been made to understand their problems and harness them to the battle for freedom. On the other hand there is a disposition to look down upon the labour movement in the country. Busy in their political quarrels not many of our public men have time, even if they had the inclination, to seriously think of the man at the wheel or the plough. They promise that they would some day extend the sphere of their activities to the factories and fields and when they will do it such work will have the look of respectability. Till then they would not condescend to take any notice of the activities of the 'small' men in these fields. The unwillingness of many of our publicmen to seriously think of organising the masses—labour, industrial and agricultural—is also to be explained by the fact that the most influential among them are themselves exploiters of labour, intellectual or manual. Their commanding position in the country, obtained by ability or intrigue or both, has enabled them to cast a spell over the minds of their countrymen. Snobbery is the general weakness of mankind and a few so-called labour leaders tied to the apron-strings of these powerful men have by

their own snobbery encouraged the nation that the salvation of the millions can only come from these men with a long purse.

"The great service rendered by Saklatvala is that he has destroyed this spell to some extent. His message to the downtrodden millions is that they must learn to stand on their own legs and look for guidance to the men who are helping them to stand on their own legs though these may not have a long purse. The swaraj must be the swaraj of the masses in terms of the remedy of the grievances of the millions who do not know what a full meal is. The enemies of these masses are not only the white bureaucracy but no less the brown capitalists, who champion the cause of the millions in public, but who are themselves the most cruel exploiters of labour. Mr Saklatvala disclaimed any intention of creating a class war in this country but he pointed out that there was already a class war only that one of two parties in this war is hopelessly weak. There is a war in the family, father fighting against son, brother against brother, because of the crushing poverty. There is war in the community for the same reason. It is only on equitable adjustment of legitimate claims of individuals that class war or, in fact, any war can be avoided. Till then, he said, the attempt to stop people's mouth in the name of avoidance of class war is not only dishonest but is bound to be infructuous.

"The reconstitution of the society on an equitable economic basis cannot be accomplished in a day. But we think the time has come for the clarification of the ideals and methods. The ideal of swaraj must be clearly defined and not in the terms of political ambition but in the terms of the satisfaction of the economic needs of the toiling millions. The methods must be clear and straightforward, understood and devised by the masses themselves and not prescribed for them by people who have as little understanding of their needs as the bureaucracy and whose sympathy, to judge by their own actions as employers of labour, is open to serious doubts."

It is needless to explain further the contribution that Saklatvala has rendered during his short Indian visit. Had

the Indian left got the time and opportunity, the future of India would have been different. Since his departure, India witnessed the greatest tide of working-class advance. Trade-union organisation shot up. "The political strikes and demonstrations against the arrival of the Simon Commission in February (1928) placed the working class for the moment in the vanguard of the national struggle."⁷⁹ R. P. Dutt in his celebrated work on India, *India Today*, gives a vivid description of the growth of communist ideas among the working class and the increasing anxiety of the vested interests. The Viceroy, Lord Irwin, in his speech to the Legislative Assembly in January 1929, declared that "the disquieting spread of communist doctrines has been causing anxiety", and announced that the government would take measures. "The growth of communist propaganda and influence", records the government annual report *India in 1928-29*, "especially among the industrial classes of certain large towns, caused anxiety to the authorities." "Experience of the past two years", stated the *Manchester Guardian* in August 1929, "has shown that the industrial workers in the biggest centres are peculiarly malleable material in the hands of unscrupulous communist organisers." "Socialism is in the air", proclaimed the *Bombay Chronicle*, May 1929: "for months past socialistic principles have been preached in India at various conferences, especially those of peasants and workers."⁸⁰

Despite initial sectarianism, the left in India had registered spectacular advance among the working class and the peasantry. The government acted. In March 1929, the government fell upon the leaders of working class. The main and active leaders from all over India were rounded up and the so-called Meerut Conspiracy Case began. It was one of the longest and most elaborate state trials in history-

⁷⁹ R. P. Dutt, *op. cit.*, p. 339.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 340.

It took many years for the Indian left to recover its strength from the blow at Meerut.

XIV

Returning to England, Saklatvala got involved in hectic political activities. He undertook a raging campaign all over Britain exposing the plight of the Indian masses under imperialism. The *Morning Post* of Britain, in a fatuous leading article, denounced him as "the perfect example of a modern Pagett, M.P." which, considering that Saklatvala spent the first 30 years of his life in India and always maintained the most intimate personal contact with his countrymen and with his native land and had just returned from a three-month whirlwind tour, was really very funny.

A similar point was made by millionaire Sir Philip Sassoon in the House of Commons after Saklatvala had launched a fierce indictment of British rule in India in 1927. Said Sassoon: "We, English, are no more intruders in India than you Parsees." The parallel was foolish and illogical. The Parsees first settled in India in the eighth century, after the Arabs had overrun Persia, whereas the political relations of Britain with India did not start until the eighteenth century. Besides, the parallel was difficult to sustain. The British went to India to oppress and exploit the people; the Parsees went there as peaceful settlers and traders.

While he was exposing the ruthless British rule in India, the bourgeois newspapers took pleasure in announcing: "His (Saklatvala's) last visit to India was not a success. He made himself unpopular by attacking Gandhi." It is needless to discuss here again the triumphal progress of Saklatvala's tour in India. The greatest indication of the success of his Indian tour was the determination of the British government never to let him go to India again. It revoked his permit to visit India immediately on his return and this was confirmed by succeeding governments. Intimating the cancellation of his passport, the Foreign Office wrote to him:

in the following terms: "With reference to the endorsement on your passport granted on 21 December 1926, I am directed by Sir Austen Chamberlain to inform you that the validity of your passport for India has been cancelled. The fee for the endorsement can be refunded to you on your returning the passport to this office for cancellation of the endorsement." The *Sunday Chronicle* understood that his passport was cancelled by the Foreign Office to stop another projected visit to India. In the Legislative Assembly of the British India questions on the cancellation of his passport were raised. Replying to questions, Mr Crerar, Home Member, stated that Mr Saklatvala's passport had been cancelled largely on account of his conduct during his last visit to India. The Secretary of State and the government were completely agreed that this action should be taken.

That did not deter him in demanding abolition of British colonial and imperial exploitation in India. Wherever he got the opportunity, whether in the Parliament or outside it, he raised the question of independence of India and other colonial and dependent countries. He closely followed Indian politics and wrote two articles—one on Indian Round Table Conference and the proposed Indian constitution of 1935. As a true internationalist he served the British working class up to the last days of his life in spite of failing health or defeat in the parliamentary election in 1929. Not only Britain, other imperialist powers were afraid of Saklatvala. The US government did not allow him to visit that country. In 1929 he was held up by the Belgian authorities at Ostend on his way to Germany. The Egyptian government did not allow his entry.

XV

In 1934 he visited Soviet Union, the first socialist state in the world. He saw with his own eyes tens of thousands of people freed from the yoke of tsarism by the great Russia

revolution. He saw the new industry, new collective farms, new culture and life, that free peoples can develop when once communism has been established. He said to Harry Pollitt, "Oh, Harry, what my people could do in India if only they were as free as my comrades in those autonomous republics in the USSR."¹ This experience seemed to give Saklatvala a new and greater energy and impulse in all his later work. He went with renewed enthusiasm into the struggle for Indian freedom and solidarity between British and Indian workers, and for unity between all those organisations in India that fight against British imperialism.

In 1929 he had to face stiff Labour opposition and lost his parliamentary seat. But the defeat did not demoralise him from pursuing his cherished goal—emancipation of the oppressed people from capitalist exploitation and imperialism. As a trade unionist he took his job with full heart and moved from one corner to another of Great Britain for party and trade-union work. Whenever he got the opportunity, he would not miss to meet the Indian students studying in Great Britain. Mr Himmat Sinha, an exstudent of Oxford University, recalls his past association with Saklatvala in the following words:

"It was in the year 1935 that Comrade Saklatvala was invited to Oxford to take part in a debate organised by the Oxford Majlis—a social and political body of Indian students studying at the university. The subject of the debate was: 'That in the opinion of this house communism is the last resort of a scoundrel'. Comrade Saklatvala was the main opposition speaker, and with his thundering oration he won an overwhelming majority in his favour. I had the privilege then of being the host of the visiting dignitary who stayed with me in my 'digs'. During the conversation, he astounded us by saying that it was quite easy to learn any European language and to deliver a fluent speech in it, provided one knew any one of the Indian

¹ *Daily Worker*, 18 January 1936—Pollitt's tribute.

languages. He then narrated the incident about his participation in one of the international conferences called in Germany against war and for peace under the auspices of the League against Imperialism. As an Indian delegate to the conference, Comrade Saklatvala considered it humiliating to have to speak in English. At the same time he recognised the futility of speaking in any Indian language. He thereupon devised an effective alternative. He requested his hosts in Germany to translate his speech, to be delivered at the congress, into German from English. Much as he was not used to writing out his speeches in advance, Saklatvala made an exception on that occasion and dictated his speech first in English and then got it translated into German. Thereafter, he got the German translator to read out the speech slowly to him, and, he, in turn, took it down in the Gujarati script and after some rehearsal on his part, Comrade Saklatvala was able the next day to go to the rostrum and deliver his speech in fluent and chaste German. The audience was amazed at this performance and at the mystery of the Indian delegate being able to learn German within a matter of less than 24 hours and delivering his address with such fluency. The mystery was divulged by the author only to stress the phonetical accuracy and efficiency of the Indian languages.

“Not many could have adopted such a novel method of overcoming the sense of national humiliation which Comrade Saklatvala felt he would have experienced in the context of the then existing Indo-British relationship if the choice was to speak in a language foreign both to himself and his audience. In view of his wellknown mastery of the English language and the great reputation which Comrade Saklatvala enjoyed as an orator in that language, it also shows his spirit and sense of national pride not based on any narrow linguistic prejudice. For, he preferred to speak in German not merely to impress but to honour a national sentiment shared in common with his foreign hosts.

“I also remember how during that visit of his to Oxford, Comrade Saklatvala impressed upon the Indian students to remain conscious of the national cause and their duty

towards it. He missed no opportunity to advise them to return home fully equipped to contribute in the national struggle against the British imperialist domination over our country. In that struggle, Comrade Saklatvala felt the need also of integrating the youth in order to strengthen and reinforce the anti-imperialist base which the national struggle symbolised, and which it was necessary to champion through similar movements outside India. Comrade Saklatvala was to revisit Oxford in the Hilary term (March-April) again in 1936. But alas! he could not, as he died just before then and the Oxford Majlis, which was to have him as the chief guest at their annual dinner, had to grieve his sudden demise in London and record the loss as eternally poignant.

"The one characteristic which Comrade Saklatvala displayed during his contacts with the Indian students was of complete oneness and identification despite any disparity in age. He was at once an elder and a confrere, a close participant and a colleague in the great human upsurge against all iniquities, injustice and exploitation."

Pollitt in his tribute to Saklatvala correctly assessed his contribution in the following words:

"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 selfsacrificing 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 of 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, and 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.

"In very truth we can say of our beloved comrade :

*He died for the workers
In life he was one whose
Love knew no stint, whom
No fear could appeal.*

"Only those who have known him intimately can form any idea of the work that 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.

"Only those who also participate in this understand the ceaseless strain and anxiety it entails. No comrade ever did more of this work so uncomplainingly as Comrade Saklatvala.

"No call was ever made upon him to which he did not respond. Be the meeting, large and small, it was always the same. Be it near or far, it was all the same.

"On the very day of his death he carried on his work. I know that all Thursday, and to 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 Indian people its freedom' were his last words."⁸²

Thus was laid to rest Comrade Saklatvala, at the age of 61, on 16 January 1936.

R. Bishop, his personal friend and secretary, was with him in Moscow. There he was first attacked with heart trouble. "I was with him in Moscow in 1934", said R. Bishop, "when he fainted at a big meeting in the Red Army Theatre in Moscow. It was a heart attack, a precursor of his final end."

The family of Saklatvala and the *Daily Worker* were inundated with messages of condolence from people and organisations all over the world on the death of Shapurji Saklatvala, beloved fighter for working-class emancipation and national freedom.

⁸² *Ibid.*

Jawaharlal Nehru telegraphed from Austria, where he was undergoing medical treatment. Dimitrov wired from Moscow in the name of the Communist International. S. A. Brelvi, editor of the *Bombay Chronicle*, sent a message from India. Maisky, Soviet Ambassador in London, sent his condolences to Mrs Saklatvala and the family, so did the Mayor of Battersea and the Secretary of the Anglo-Russian Parliamentary Committee. The British labour mourned Saklatvala. George Lansbury, C. P. Attlee, M.P., William Gallachar, M.P., Reginald Bridgeman, Tom Mann, Will Thorne, M.P., Ben Bradley paid glowing tributes to Saklatvala. The Congress Socialist Party of India also sent a message.

Subhas Chandra Bose wired Mrs Saklatvala from Antwerp. The communist parties of the USA and Ireland sent condolence messages to *Daily Worker*. Numerous ordinary workers also sent their last tribute to Saklatvala.

Saklatvala was cremated at Golders Green crematorium. The *Daily Worker* reported:

“The crematorium was filled to overflowing by several hundred people, who had waited for nearly an hour in the slight rain which was falling, in order that they could pay their last tribute to one whom they had known as a great fighter for working-class emancipation and national freedom.

“Mrs Saklatvala, her three sons and two daughters followed the motor hearse bearing the coffin from his home to the crematorium. Behind them came a fleet of cars filled with closest friends.

“For several hours before the cortege left St Albans Villas, Highgate, closest friends and comrades brought wreaths and cut-flowers. The room in which Saklatvala lay was filled with floral tributes. ‘He was always a lover of flowers’, said Mrs Saklatvala as she took us to the room where we saw for the last time ‘Sak’ as he was always known to thousands.

“It was all hard to realise that we should no more hear his passionate appeal for the oppressed.

"An hour before we leave for the last journey with our dear comrade, Mrs Saklatvala, bearing bravely her burden of sorrow, talks of her husband to Reginald Bridgeman, one of his closest associates in the struggle against imperialism. 'He was always working hard', she said, 'He was working all night some nights. He never gave up till 2-30 a.m. He worked so hard...'

"And all those who stood in the crematorium knew for whom he had work so hard. Harry Pollitt, taking his stand by the coffin, following the conclusion of the Parsee funeral service, paid great tribute to the work of our dear dead comrade. 'It will be hard', he said, speaking in the name of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Great Britain and the Executive of the Communist International, 'for us to live up to the work of Comrade Saklatvala. But in paying him our last tribute we pledge ourselves that the Red Flag which he bore so nobly aloft shall remain unsullied in our hands.'

"It was hard to catch all that Pollitt said. We were too full with grief. Women and men, comrades who had known and loved 'Sak', were moved to tears. It was the singing of the *Internationale* which lifted our bowed heads again. The body of Shapurji Saklatvala had passed to be cremated, but as Pollitt said, 'His work will live, and we shall in our time build up that beautiful life for which Saklatvala had always fought.'

"Saklatvala died, but his work remained to be finished.

"He is gone from our 'midst,

The stalwart and brave;

A foe to the tyrant, a friend to the slave.

We hearken in vain for the voice that is stilled.

In our hearts there's a void that can never be filled.

Keen, tireless and brave was the life he led;

We mourn over the loss of the comrade that's dead.

At the horns of the plough we may pause and look back

*To scan o'er the furrow and follow our 'Sak'."*⁸³

(J. H. KILMARNOCK)

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 20 January 1936 (Editorial).

APPENDICES

Appendix: 1

SAKLATVALA-GANDHI CORRESPONDENCE

I

(A) SAKLATVALA'S OPEN LETTER

Bombay
8 March 1927

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.

I realise the khaddar movement as it stands is not entirely your virtue or vice, but poor, ardent and enthusiastic followers have added much to or subtracted from your intended programme. However the world must guide itself by practical results.

The Charka Movement

Several of your enthusiastic supporters have assisted me greatly by criticising me openly in the public press. Unfortunately my present nomadic life with a very heavy programme of work in every town I go prevents me from carrying on my correspondence or journalistic work. However these several critics have effectively replied to each other and one has contradicted the other and each one has tried to prove a different case on your behalf. You may not be responsible in creating this

confusion. But I consider you are in duty bound now to clear it. Let us understand, openly, whether the charka movement is or is not an attack upon machinery, upon physical science, 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.

What Is Art?

Is it or is it not a protest against artistic development on up to date lines, irrespective of geographical or national considerations as to their source? What is art but a free display of human taste, both instructive as well as acquired? One of your critics maintains that your movement was to drive away western fashions, etc. and when I discovered that the khaddar production was doing nothing of the kind, another critic blames me as if I was suggesting that it should try such an impossible as well as harmful procedure. In view of this confusion, you ought to give a clear lead that you would like in every modern article of life in all forms, designs, eastern or western, or mixed to be produced in khaddar.

Khaddar Earning Power?

As to the economic argument that khaddar adds to the earning power of the agricultural worker, I consider this to be a feeble case altogether. It is pointed out to me by a newspaper correspondent that if I had seen the great ocean of khaddar in India in 1921 and 1922 and the tremendous enthusiasm of people at that time, I would not have ventured upon the criticism that I am now doing. That is perfectly true, but this conclusively proves that my criticism now is fully justified, and that all that ocean of khaddar and all that enthusiasm has dwindled if not disappeared on their merit or demerit, long before I came here and offered my criticism.

It is the duty of every sincere public man in India to find out how and why this tremendous enthusiasm was created, how and why it died out and how far the faults or the mistakes of your followers have been responsible for this state. The present condition of affairs demands a criticism and not a condemnation of criticism.

The methods adopted by 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. The government schemes of canals, scientific manuring and carrying on agricultural work by machinery will add ten times more to the economic prosperity of the peasantry than the charka, but you have already described the government to be satanic. Let us have a clear idea as to your position in this matter. Is a person adding to the economic value of the poor peasantry a friend or an enemy of the poor?

I want you to put one question to your own conscience, irrespective of public articles—had you come out in this country after the genera

failure of your attempts to free Indians in South Africa from political and civic slavery, and after the mess you made with some young Indians in London, in drawing them into some direct or indirect service of war, would India have given you any importance, would India have allowed you to take the political leadership, would India have poured in lakhs of rupees in response to your demands if you had said that you wanted all this only for the purpose of adding As. 2 a day to the income of barely three per cent of Indian peasantry?

Were not all these great powers laid at your entire disposal because you made a definite political promise and allowed the people at least to believe that you had some plan or method which would quickly, within a limited period of less than two years, give to Indians political freedom from the British yoke? 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 two years to four years or to twenty years or to two hundred years? Do you suggest that a rise of As. 2 income, say of the whole population, is a process which is going to drive the British out of this country or do you suggest that a still higher figure will have to be reached? Did you believe this government to be satanic because it brought poverty upon the people, did you then believe that this poverty could never be cured before the satanic government was overthrown? Do you now believe that you can improve the economic condition of the people without removing the satanic government or without any reference to politics, or have you suddenly come to the conclusion that the immediate poverty of the people has touched your heart so much that you launch out into that problem of life and have made up your mind to ignore the problem of the existing political slavery of the country?

Economy of Charka

Reverting to the economic value of charka, it is the admitted experience of the whole world that out of all handicrafts in competition against machinery, handspinning is of the least economic value; hand-weaving, embroidery, carpentry, shoe-making or making of any kind of footwear, etc. have a much greater value. If you would look at the Parsee Girls' Industrial Home in Karachi or a still more splendid institution of the Hindu Orphanage at Surat, namely Hardevram Vakil Hindu Orphanage, you will realise how the earning power of the helpless poverty-stricken people can be improved by one or two rupees a day. I clearly see that such crafts cannot be taken up on a large scale by all villagers, whereas handspinning can. But why do you persevere in handspinning with superstitious adherence, and why not introduce alongside of it other more profitable handicrafts for a few persons in each village if economic salvation is your present object?

"Robbing Peter to Pay Paul"

You are not teaching the 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, and how can you fail to realise that you are robbing Peter to pay Paul, and while you are improving the economic condition of some, you are doing it at the expense of others. Sensible economists, socialists and trade-union organisers have within a short period increased the economic earning of their followers by more than a 100 per cent; they have taught their followers to use more food, more furniture, more clothes: they have thus created great demand which has taken away the burden of man from the land, and have left the land workers more prosperous than before.

You are afraid or unwilling to follow this natural and sensible course, which is of course very inconvenient to a few rich manufacturers, merchants, and zamindars who grow rich by starving millions of people. You are freely receiving gifts from these selfish rich in order to carry on work in the opposite direction of increasing the economic value of workers in industries or on land. The poverty of the population on land can easily be remedied, instead of being played about with, by bravely fighting the causes which directly produce such poverty, such as the unnatural and unjustifiable rights of the zamindars over God-created land and low wages of agricultural labourers.

Thus I say that if you had not put forward political claims you would never have acquired the power and opportunities which you have, and if you had purely economic aims, you are standing against the economic interests of the masses and in favour of the interests of the wealthy classes by deliberately "noncooperating" with and indirectly obstructing the work of those who would bring about an economic regeneration of the people along lines that have proved successful in all parts of the world.

Entirely Wrong Theories

You have raised the objection against western methods of organising labour on your mistaken notion that such a process would introduce class war and that acute oppression of capitalists over labour does not exist in India. In both these theories you are entirely wrong. Those who organised labour had not created class war. Modern system of production, commerce and finance produces class war, the parties in which are the capitalists and the workers. Those who organised labour are doing nothing but the great moral work of helping and strengthening the weaker of the two parties in that class war. Those who organise labour always do so deliberately with a view to abolishing class distinction by making capital the common property of all, and by making manual or mental labour the common duty of all. This alone will stop class war, and you who would not assist in organising labour help in the continuance of class war, which is going on every day in all industrial countries of the world, among which India today occupies the fifth place and not an insignificant place.

"Class War So Acute in India"

The acuteness with which class war operates upon the wage-earners of India is more than in most of the advanced European countries where thanks to the organisers of labour, several of the cruelties of class war are being removed. Just look at the palatial houses of any millowner of Bombay, Ahmedabad, Nagpur or Calcutta and look at the disgraceful and diabolical one-room tenements of poor workers, devoid of all furniture, appointments or artistic embellishments. Such acute difference between dwelling conditions of the rich and poor does not exist in Great Britain, America, or any part of Europe where labour is well organised. It is unjustifiable defence of the rich industrialists of India to describe them to the world as endowed with some special virtues, when all the facts of poor people's life proclaim loudly that these virtues are not existent. The personal obsequiousness of the poor workers towards their masters, the utter helplessness before arbitrary dismissals and the ill-treatment as it actually exists in India everywhere are unthinkable in Europe or America, where labour is organised, and your defence of the Indian master class is an unpardonable mockery of the poor suffering working class. The way in which zamindars, khotas and malguzaries claim by force the labour of their tenants at certain seasons for half an anna a day is a diabolical disgrace to humanity and does not exist in countries where modern agricultural trade unions are existing.

That is not all. The class war in India is literally murderous and more cruelly murderous because it is infanticidal. Just analyse the figures of death. The death rate of the adults, and specially of the infants, in large industrial towns is much in excess of the normally bad death rate of India. Now kindly follow me in still closer analysis of these figures obtained from municipal health officers of infantile mortality of well-to-do Parsee, Hindu and Mohammedan families in Bombay, Ahmedabad, Calcutta or other industrial towns. You will find that the mortality amongst infants under 12 months of age among the rich would be about 80 to 90 per thousand whereas the infantile mortality in the municipal wards where the factory workers live would be from 600 to even 830 per thousand. 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.

Then take the other important elements of life—the dignity, the consciousness and the selfrespect of man, and look at our unfortunate clerks, teachers, postmen and railway station staff, etc. The treatment which they are made to suffer, and are almost habituated to, is a disgrace to human society; and the only salvation out of it is efficient labour organisation. Class war is there, will continue to be there till any successful scheme of communism abolishes it. But in the meantime not to

organise the people and not to struggle against the evil effects from day to day is a doctrine which cannot appeal to any genuine humanitarian.

"Charka Does Not Make"

During my conversation with you at certain periods you did not seem to take a definite attitude with regard to the value of organisation of labour and peasants. You emphatically argued that the charka movement was making organisation. I emphatically deny it. There must be conscious and deliberate work of organisation, to be carried out for its own sake in a proper scientific manner and for the purpose of our national object, with a straightforward and unconcealed imparting of political consciousness. The same similarity of operation of the working of charka, with some vague idea, religious zeal or economic welfare or a great Gandhiji's command, does not and cannot do any effective organising work, and cannot create and has not created any political consciousness. For centuries together millions of men and women in India have been boiling rice, utilising similar quantities of rice and water and conducting cooking operations of a similar nature, doing some industrial work when cooking it and producing food of economic value without buying ready-made food. All these operations surely have not produced any organisation, and the work of spinning can never do so any more than the work of cooking.

Psychological Value of Movement

Then we come to the psychological value of the movement. This was great. It began well and it almost became wonderful at a certain stage. But why create a psychology if you do not intend to mobilise the spirit so created, and if you do not intend immediately to form men and women into an organisation for a definite material object while they are under a psychological influence and before that influence passes away? That is exactly my complaint, and the bitter disappointment of your world-critics against you. You missed an opportunity and you only opened the eyes of the political opponents of India, and by your inaction, after a certain psychology was aroused, you only brought India under a tighter grip of her opponents and made her enslavement a little worse than before. Not only that, but the position of India worsened that of Egypt and, for a time, of China, and at any rate became harmful in Turkey, Persia and Afghanistan. All these people have a right to complain against us if we bungled our affairs in such a manner as to have an indirect harmful effect upon them.

Whatever may be the feelings of some of your ardent admirers, I hope you and I are both agreed that we are both very common and ordinary persons. The political world that lives, works and struggles consciously can analyse you or me with the same completeness as dissecting an ordinary insect. After the year 1900 the world changed from what it was immediately before the year 1900. Before 1900 leaders who gave expression to submission and to legislative hypocrisy and worked to build

up hopes of salvation on such instruments of legislation were popular leaders, as Gladstone was to the British, Bismarck to the Germans, or Parnell to the Irish, or Dadabhai or Pherozeshah and Surendra Nath to the Indians. By the year 1900 the masses of men got tired and sick and their hearts began to burn with fire. The change came on very rapidly and universally and only such individuals as expressed the burning fire of the heart and the revolt of the suffering human beings were taken as leaders.

The first task of these leaders was to express boldly and fearlessly the unexpressed voice of the people. The second task of these leaders was, without waiting for the new, to obstruct the old with such efficiency as to make it absolutely impossible for the old order to continue to function. The third task was to reconstruct and arduously and slowly to build up new life. Ireland produced a De Valera. He did No. 1 and No. 2 and his people are now bravely carrying on his task No. 3. Russia has produced Lenin. He did No. 1 and No. 2 and, though his life was short, he led his people on the right path regarding No. 3. Turkey produced Kemal. He did No. 1 and No. 2 and is fortunate enough to be living and vigorous to carry on his task No. 3. China produced Sun Yat-sen. He completed No. 1 and No. 2 and after his death his wellorganised and welldisciplined followers are carrying on task No. 3. In Italy, though in contrary direction, Mussolini plays the same individual part. India at that moment announced to the world her leader to be Gandhi.

You performed No. 1 and but you abandoned task No. 2, and so task No. 3 is out of question, and we are so overwhelmed with the disastrous defeat at the second stage of your struggle that our lot today is harder than before to attain success over the conditions of the past. Instead of making the past conditions inoperative, they have become more vigorously operative in India, and now worse still, the hopes of future struggle are being continually lessened even by the reversal of the psychological advantage that we had. Your own admission and that of your followers, as well as the facts of life, make it clear that the psychology and the enthusiasm of the early days has vanished and the readiness of the people to work for the rightful heritage is turned into hesitancy and fear.

It is from this point of view that we, who observe your mistakes and carefully study your further perseverance in them, make bold to demand from you in the name of the suffering humanity of India, as well as of other countries, that you give your services to humanity in consultation and cooperation with others so as to retrieve the lost position. Pray do not misunderstand me as "attacking" you or wishing for your disappearance from public life. The purpose of this letter is to show you the faults and defects of your policy and your acts, and therefore this letter contains only your defects, but it by no means argues that you do not possess qualities that are estimable and that can be yet of great value. These qualities require no enumeration.

The great psychological wave having once died away, the perseverance of yourself and your immediate disciples in the same direction

automatically become a degenerate form of the original activities. Here again you must permit me to speak as man to man.

How to Make People Ready for Civil Disobedience

You have created an influence over our countrymen in the lowest strata of society wider and deeper than anybody else. However, what is your real object? If your object is metaphysical or religious, your policy should be to cultivate a psychology of obedience and reverence towards you and diffidence in themselves as compared to your great self. 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 into them. From this point of view you must stop allowing people to address you as Mahatma. You have no doubt intimated to your many friends that you have never wished this word to be used, and no one really expects you to do otherwise, but that does not mean that you should not or that you cannot suppress it immediately. 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 declare your wish publicly, instead of whispering about it to a few friends and the thing will be done.

With some experience of political propaganda and mass mentality, I am speaking to you in earnest that our first approach to the people must be based on the fact that our powers are not greater than that of others. If you go into a bunch of villagers and start out by being called and known as a brother, you create a source of confidence and selfreliance in them. If you go to them with a long story first spread by your friends about 21 days' fasting and then with discovery of yourself as a Mahatma, even though the villagers may think about your charka with superstitious awe, they acquire no confidence in themselves, and they will only believe that what you say or do is the task of such superior persons and high souls like yourself and not of ordinary mortals. Such a mentality spread wholesale over the country becomes most injurious in the long run.

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 phase of abject submission of man to man, no wonder that you should yourself despair of obtaining civil disobedience from your own followers. You now complain that the masses are not ready for any such selfassertion, but even if that were so, your whole procedure is certainly not making them more ready for it.

Then there is one thing that I witnessed at Yeotmal which has hurt me greatly, and I had slight evidence of it before. 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 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 may misunderstand me, I must call upon you to stop this nonsense. It is no use saying that you do not like it, it is a matter of your not stopping it when nothing is easier in the world for you than to stop it. You are ruining the mentality of and the psychology of these villagers for another generation or two. You are preparing the country not for mass civil disobedience but for servile obedience and for a belief that there are superior persons on earth and Mahatmas in this life at a time when in this country the white man's prestige is already a dangerous obstacle in our way. Politically this career of yours is ruinous and from humanitarian point of view its degenerating influence appears to me to be a moral plague.

Organisation of Industrial Labour

As regards the organisation of industrial labour, you are not ready to give your share, when we know that your cooperation would be of a higher value in inviting workers to the fold of Trade Union Congress. You do not realise that by such cooperation you would actually help in preventing many preventable deaths, specially of poor, innocent babies. Then you go one step further, and you use your influence by frequent declarations which discourage others from taking up this most necessary and urgent work. Then at times you go still further and you actually and deliberately fraternise and cooperate with the master class, so as to make the task of labour organisers not only difficult but almost unjustifiable in the eyes of poor workers. You may defend the process whichever way you like, but the experienced world can only say that it is the exploitation of the spirit of superstition and of ignorance among poor workers at the cost of human lives and their families and for the benefit of the bank accounts of the happy minority that rules the roost.

I remember in London we all read the description of your royal reception at Jamshedpur and your acceptance of an address in a steel casket with a purse, as if in that Jamshedpur underfeeding, bad housing, underclothing does not go on, as if deaths, which are preventable under modern scientific principles, are not daily taking place, as if men were never driven to resort to strike, through unreasonable obstinacy of their employers, and as if even military operations against workers had never taken place. I have confessed above that I have looked at this picture of your performance with disappointment from a long distance. Comrade, you have to take the world as it is, and you have to believe that all labour world have looked upon that picture with a similar disappointment.

Even with all your personal power and success you will not be able to change the great law of worldly life that those who are not with us

are against us, and in the name of the working classes and I want to call upon you to remember it.

A Personal Appeal

I have put down my candid thoughts in the above paragraphs not with a view to disburden my soul of personal grievance; I fully realise that I am courting great unpopularity in the eyes of my fellow countrymen whose good wishes and good opinion are as dear to me as to you. 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 you to be most fitted and your service to be most valuable. I have already read to you my notes, in which I have mentioned what psychological, political and even revolutionary value can be attached to the khaddar movement. I have no prejudice against it, and I would even preserve and build upon whatever value it may have for a nation's liberty and life. I attach full copy of these notes again, which I am now submitting to the Working Committee of the Congress for a preliminary consideration.

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 (as you alone by yourself have failed) our workers, our peasants, and our youths, not with a metaphysical sentimentality, but with a set purpose, a clearcut and welldefined object and by methods such as by experiment are making success for all human beings.

I am not a believer in slavishly obeying persons, prestige or organisations, but I always believe all past efforts and actions have their elements of good on which we can, if we will, build a stronger future. Instead of developing the vanity of making underclothing or overclothing a primary object of administration, and starting some traditions of a sage of Sabarmati, as an ordinary rough-and-tumble man making your food and clothing secondary and unimportant items that should not require any special thought of you, you would still be able to undo your great mistakes of the past, and 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 own countries.

Yes, when I have cast my eyes on you, I am not going to take any point-blank refusal from you. I know there will be the usual popular cry against me that I ought not to have used such language or such words, etc., etc., but I do not believe that in an attempt to use artificial polish in our language, we become as unfair to the addressee as to ourselves, and it is much better policy to say things as we think, as we talk among friends. 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

[*Amrita Bazar Patrika*, 12 March 1927]

(B) MAHATMA GANDHI'S REPLY

Ahmedabad
17 March 1927

Gandhi has written an article under caption "No and Yes" in today's (17 March) "Young India" in reply to Mr Shapurji Saklatvala's open letter to him:

"Comrade" 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 a 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 mere sincerity for sincerity, or if I am to act according to my faith. But I can say "Yes" to his appeal after my own fashion. For underneath his intense desire that I should cooperate with him on his terms, there is an emphatic implied condition that I must say "Yes" only if his argument satisfied my head and heart. A "No" uttered from the depth of conviction is better than a "Yes" merely uttered to please, or what is worse, to avoid trouble.

Against A Blind Wall

In spite of all desire to offer hearty cooperation I find myself against a blind wall. His facts are fiction and his deductions based upon fiction are necessarily baseless. And where these facts are true my whole energy is concentrated upon nullifying their (to me) poisonous results. I am sorry, but we do stand at opposite poles. There is, however, one great thing in common between us. Both claim to have the good of the country and humanity as our only goal. Though, therefore we may for the moment seem to be going in the opposite directions, I expect we shall meet some day. I promise to make ample amends when I discover my error.

Satanic Civilisation

Meanwhile, however, my error, since I do not recognise it as such, must be my shield and my solace. For unlike "Comrade" Saklatvala, I do not believe that multiplication of wants and machinery contrived to supply them is taking the world a single step nearer its goal. "Comrade" Saklatvala swears by the modern rush. I wholeheartedly detest this mad desire to destroy distance and time, to increase animal appetites and

go the ends of the earth in search of their satisfaction. If modern civilisation stands for all this, and I have understood it to do so, I call it satanic, and with it the present system of government, its best exponent.

Its Baneful Effects

I distrust its schemes of amelioration of the lot of the poor. I distrust its currency reform. I distrust its army and navy. In the name of civilisation and its own safety, this government has continuously bled the masses. It has enslaved, it has bribed the powerful with distinctions and riches and it has sought to crush under the weight of its despotic regulations liberty-loving patriots who wanted not be won over either by flattery or riches. I would destroy that system today, if I had the power. I would use most deadly weapons, if I believed that they would destroy it. I refrain only because the use of such weapons would only perpetuate the system though it may destroy its present administrators. Those who seek to destroy men rather than their manners adopt the latter and become worse than those whom they destroy under the mistaken belief that manners will die with the men. They do not know the root of the evil.

Movement of 1920

The movement of 1920 was designed to show that we could not reform the soulless system by violent means, thus becoming soulless ourselves. But we could do so only by not becoming victims of the system, i.e., by non-cooperation, by saying an emphatic "No" to every advance made to entrap us into the nets spread by satan. The movement suffered a check, but it is not dead. My promise was conditional. The conditions were simple and easy. But they proved too difficult for those who took a leading part in the movement. What "Comrade" Saklatvala believes to be my error and failure, I regard to be the expression of my strength and deep conviction. It may be an error, but so long as my conviction that it is truth abides, the very error must, as it does, sustain me. Retracing of my steps at Bardoli, I hold to be an act of wisdom and supreme service to the country. The government is weaker for that decision. It would have regained all lost position if I had persisted after Chauri Chaura in carrying out the terms of what was regarded as an ultimatum to the viceroy.

South African Movement — A Failure?

My "comrade" is wrong in saying that the South African movement was a failure. If it was, my whole life must be written down as a failure. And his invitation to me to enlist under his colours must be held to be meaningless. South Africa gave a start to my life's mission. Nor do I consider it to be wrong to have offered during the late war services of my companions and myself, under my then convictions, as ambulance men.

Khadi Movement Not on Wane

This great M.P. is in a hurry. He disdains to study facts. Let me inform him that the khadi movement is not on the wane. It did last year at least 20 times as much work as during 1920. It is now serving not less than 50,000 spinners in 1,500 villages, besides weavers, washermen, printers, dyers and tailors.

Mr Saklatvala asks what khaddar stands for? Well it stands for simplicity, not shoddiness. It sits well on the shoulders of the poor and it can be made, as it was made in the days of yore, to adorn the bodies of the richest and the most artistic men and women. It is reviving ancient arts and crafts. It does not seek to destroy all machinery, but it does regulate its use and check its weedy growth. It uses machinery for the service of the poorest in their own cottages. The wheel is itself an exquisite piece of machinery.

The Poor and Khaddar

The khaddar delivers the poor from the bonds of the rich and creates a moral and spiritual bond between the classes and masses. It restores to the poor somewhat of what the rich have taken from them. Khaddar does not displace a single cottage industry. On the contrary, it is being daily recognised that it is becoming the centre of other village industries. Khaddar brings a ray of hope to the widow's broken-up home but it does not prevent her from earning more, if she can. It prevents no one from seeking a better occupation. Khaddar offers honourable employment to those in need of some. It utilises the idle hours of the nation. My esteemed comrade quotes with pride the work of those who offer more lucrative employment. Let him know that khaddar does that automatically. It cannot put annas into the pockets of the poor without putting rupees into the pockets of some, whereas those who begin their work in the cities, though they are no doubt doing good work, touch but a fringe of the question. Khaddar touches the very centre and therefore necessarily includes the rest.

Indian Conditions Ignored

But the whole of the impatient communist's letter concentrates itself upon the cities and thus ignores India and Indian conditions which are to be found only in her 700,000 villages. The half a dozen modern cities are excrescence and serve at the present moment the evil purposes of draining the life-blood of the villagers. Khaddar is an attempt to revise and reverse the process and establish better relationship between the cities and the villages. The cities with their insolent torts are a constant menace to the life and liberty of the villagers. Khaddar has the greatest organising power in it, because it has itself to be organised and because it affects all India. If khaddar rained from heaven it would be a calamity, but as it can be manufactured by the willing cooperation of the starving millions and thousands of middle class men and women, its success

means the best organisation conceivable along peaceful lines. If cooking had to be revived and required the same organisation, I should claim for it the same merit that I claim for khaddar.

My Work among Labourers

My communist comrade finds fault with my work among the labourers in Jamshedpur because I accepted the address in Jamshedpur not from the Tatas but from the employees. His disapprobation is due, I expect, to the fact that the late Mr Ratan Tata was in the chair. Well, I am not ashamed of the honour. Mr Tata appeared to me to be a humane and considerate employer. He readily granted, I think, all the prayers of the employees, and I heard later that the agreement was being honourably kept. I do ask and receive donations for my work from the rich as well as the poor. The former gladly give me their donations. This is no personal triumph. It is triumph of nonviolence, which I endeavour to represent, be it ever so inadequately.

A Triumph of Nonviolence

It is to me a matter of perennial satisfaction that I retain generally the affection and trust of those whose principles and policies I oppose. The South Africans gave me personally their confidence and extended their friendship. In spite of my denunciation of British policy and system I enjoy the affection of thousands of English men and women and in spite of unqualified condemnation of modern materialistic civilisation, the circle of European and American friends is everwidening. It is again a triumph of nonviolence.

Labour in Cities

Lastly about labour in the cities. Let there be no misunderstanding. I am not opposed to the organisation of labour, but as in everything else I want its organisation along Indian lines or, if you will, my lines. I am doing it. The Indian labourer knows it instinctively that I do not regard capital to be the enemy of labour. I hold their coordination to be a perfectly possible. The organisation of labour that I undertook in South Africa, Champaran or Ahmedabad was in no spirit of hostility to the capitalists and the resistance in each case and to the extent it was thought necessary was wholly successful. My ideal is equal distribution, but so far as I can see it is not to be realised. I therefore work for equitable distribution. This I seek to attain through khaddar—and since its attainment must sterilise the British exploitation at its centre—it is calculated to purify British connection. Hence in that sense khaddar leads to swaraj.

Charge of "Mahatma"

The Mahatma I must leave to his fate. Though a noncooperator I shall gladly subscribe to a bill to make it criminal for anybody to call

me Mahatma and to touch my feet. Where I can impose the law myself, i.e. at the Ashram, the practice is criminal.

[*Amrita Bazar Patrika*, 18 March 1927]

(C) GANDHIJI'S LETTER

Nandi Hills,
10 May 1927

Dear Friend,

Srimati Anasuya Bai has sent me your letter to herself, and your joint letter to her, Gulzarilal and Desai. I have read them carefully. I had your letter also. I could not reply to you earlier for want of your address.

As soon as I heard from Anasuya Bai, I put myself in communication with Motilalji. I am daily expecting his reply. You shall know it as soon as I receive it. I thank you for the confidence you repose in me and it will be a joy to me if I can render any personal service to you; but I am afraid my longing and ability to render service have to stop there.

So far as our ideals are concerned, we stand apart. Whilst Anasuya Bai and Shankarlal Banker, as also Gulzarilal and Desai, are absolutely free agents, they have exercised their choice of accepting my guidance in framing their labour policy and administration. I must therefore shoulder my share of the responsibility for what is happening about labour in Ahmedabad. I have certainly advised them to keep Ahmedabad labour aloof from the other labour movements in India so long as Ahmedabad labour chooses to remain under their guidance.

My reason is exceedingly simple. Labour in India is still extremely unorganised. The labourers have no mind of their own when it comes to matters of national policy or even the general welfare of labour itself. Labourers in various parts of India have no social contact and no other mutual ties. It is provincial, and even in the same city it is highly communal. It is not everywhere wisely guided. In many places it is under selfish and highly unscrupulous guidance.

There is no absolute cohesion amongst provincial labour leaders; and there is little discipline among the subleaders. The latter do not uniformly tender obedience to their provincial chiefs. Leaders in different provinces have no single policy to follow. In these circumstances, an all-India union can only exist on paper. I hold it to be suicidal, therefore, for Ahmedabad to think of belonging to it.

My own conviction is that Ahmedabad is rendering a service to labour all over India by its attention, or, as I call it, selfrestraint. If it can succeed in perfecting its own organisation, it is bound to serve as a model to the rest of India and its success is bound to prove highly infectious.

But I am free to confess that there is as yet no assurance of success in the near future. The energy of the workers is sorely tried in combating disruptive forces that ever continue to crop up. There is the

Hindu-Muslim tension. There is the question of touchables and untouchables in Hinduism, etc.

Add to this extreme ignorance and selfishness among the labourers themselves. It is a marvel to me that labour in Ahmedabad has made the progress it has during the last 12 years of its corporate existence. If then Ahmedabad remains isolated it does so not selfishly, but for the sake of labour as a whole.

Labour and Capital

One word as to the policy. It is not anticapitalistic. The idea is to take from capital labour's due share and no more; and this not by paralysing capital, but by reform among the labourers from within and by their own selfconsciousness; not again through the cleverness and manoeuvring of nonlabour leaders, but by educating labour to evolve its own leadership and its own selfreliant, selfexisting organisation. Its direct aim is most in the least degree political, but is internal reform and evolution of internal strength. The indirect result of this evolution, whenever it becomes complete, will naturally be tremendously political.

I have not therefore the remotest idea of exploiting labour or organising it for any direct political end. It will be of itself a political power of first-class importance when it becomes a selfexisting unit. Labour, in my opinion, must not become a pawn in the hands of the politician on the political chess-board. It must, by its sheer strength, dominate the chess-board; and my aim can be achieved if I can retain the intelligent and voluntary cooperation of workers in Ahmedabad, and if our joint effort ultimately succeeds.

This is my dream. I hug it because it gives me all the consolation I need, and the policy I have outlined, you will recognise, is a direct outcome of my implicit belief in and acceptance of nonviolence. It may be all a delusion; but it is as much a reality with me as life itself so long as I do not see it as delusion, but see it as the only life-giving force.

You will now see why I cannot, even if I had the power, respond to your appeal for dividing the funds collected by me in accordance with your suggestion. But I may tell you that I have not even the power. The funds have been collected purely for khadi work; and it would be criminal misappropriation on my part to direct them to any other use.

This letter may not please you. I shall be sorry if it does not. But I regard you as a fellow-seeker after truth and if my reading of you is correct, there is no reason why my having told you the truth and nothing but the truth should not please you immensely. It is not given to all of us to agree with one another in all our opinions; but it is given to every one of us to tender the same respect for the opinions and actions of our fellows as we expect for our own!

Yours sincerely,
M. K. GANDHI.

(D) SAKLATVALA'S REPLY

1 July 1927

Dear Comrade Gandhi,

I am in receipt of your letter of 10th May, and I see that you have written it from the Nandi Hills, where I presume you are recuperating from your illness. I trust you will be restored to health by the time this letter reaches you.

Let me say in my usual blunt way that "I am returning to my attack upon you". Of course, you understand the meaning and nature of my "attacks" upon you, namely, that recognising in you a man of indomitable spirit, with a real propagandist's heart and qualities, I want you to deal with the various Indian movements in the way in which success is made for such movements in other parts of the world.

I am not coming to you in the midst of your success, in the midst of great victories for our poor people, in the midst of great defeats and setbacks to our imperialist oppressors, with merely a fanciful appeal to you to adopt some new method. I come to you, rather in the time of great reverses for our country, when on every front—political, economic and social, we are suffering reverse upon reverse, are being pushed back everywhere, are disorganised, disunited and dispirited in all departments of public life, and our insolent antagonists are launching attack after attack upon us.

I still want you to recognise that the forces within a nation do not depend merely on relative numbers. Now one small section of a nation and now another becomes an important factor, occupying a key position at some critical moment in the affairs of the country, and counting as a national force even though in itself a minority. The peasants and the villagers may become at times the most successful factor in defying the tax gatherers; the soldiers and the fighters may become at times an important factor to reckon with, when in their own mind and consciousness, they are unwilling to launch out upon an unholy campaign such as the one carried out by the Government of India in China. And at times the industrial workers, however small in numbers, may become for a country the all-important factor of life, and may bring about a paralysis of the most powerful activities of the imperial exploiter or of a dominating class.

Need for All-India Trade Union Movement

Because our country is largely agricultural, it does not at all follow that in the economy of modern life our organised workers shall be of less value or shall become a less important section of the community than in any other country which is more industrialised and less agricultural, under similar circumstances. If a large country has to depend upon a small number of industrial workers as compared to agriculturists, the power of the industrial workers does not become any the less on that account.

It is with the above observations that I have been constantly attempting to direct your mind to the necessity and importance of an organised industrial labour movement within our national activity. Such a movement, in the first place, must be national and embrace the whole country. It is not for you and me today to devise new and fantastic organisations when we see the value of the existing trade union movements in all the advancing and powerful countries of the world. We must have an All-India Trade Union movement.

I am not at the present moment arguing about your methods or about your ideals. I am only denouncing your idea that the organisation of labour should be sectional, should be communal and should be limited to a little spot like Ahmedabad. Did you ever try to have an Indian National Congress for Ahmedabad alone? Did you ever try to confine the khaddar movement to Ahmedabad alone? Did you ever try to have the National Education movement confined to Ahmedabad? Why, then, should you try to restrict your ideal labour movement to Ahmedabad?

You are not weakening the political movement, the khaddar movement, or the National Education movement by encouraging Ahmedabad or any one important district to fall away and stand aloof from the whole national movement; then why should you do so in the case of the large national labour movement by asking and encouraging an important industrial centre like Ahmedabad to stand aloof and alone? Let me examine your reasoning at some length.

The State of Indian Labour and the "Remedy"

You say labour in India is extremely unorganised. Do you not say, therefore, that I am right in appealing to you to employ your great power in organising labour on an adequate national basis? You cannot argue that our numbers are unwieldy, for many western countries have larger number of workers to deal with; nor can you find fault with the vastness of the area of our country, for both Russia and China have overcome their greater difficulties in the respect.

You complain that Indian labourers have no mind of their own on matters of general policy or even of labour policy. That is exactly where the value and need of propaganda comes in. Had our workers their conscious policy, I would not have been driven to urge you to help them and to preach to them in order to organise them.

For khaddar and for noncooperation, you fearlessly carry out a whirlwind campaign all over the country amongst villagers and workers who had no conception of your ideal before your propaganda reached them. You, with your colleagues, confessed to carrying out a labour propaganda in Ahmedabad, all that I ask is that Ahmedabad should be merely a part of a whole and that your services should be unreservedly given to the whole movement.

You say in your letter "Labourers in various parts of India have no social contact and no other mutual ties." That is where you ignore and

overlook the most powerful common factor of life that has unfailingly united men and women in other countries despite their hundred and one, and sometimes very bitter, differences on religious, social or clan questions. No man has succeeded nor shall one now succeed in stopping modern industrialism, and the economic factor is the one common factor that applies to, and that unites, men and women of various social, national, religious and communal textures. Hours, wages, standards of life, political and legislative needs of the workers are on the whole so uniform that when organised to battle around those wants they have invariably forgotten and drowned their internal dissensions. The absence of labour unity and trade union discipline is a more serious loss to the India of today than we have yet learned to observe.

Position of Ahmedabad Labour

On the one hand, you blame Indian labour for being sectarian and communal, and on the other hand, when the All India Trade Union Congress is struggling to build up national and international labour unity, you feel tempted to induce Ahmedabad to stand separate and apart, you say "It is not everywhere wisely guided". Does that not rather support my argument that you and other popular congress and swaraj leaders must take up the work? Then you describe various factors making for dissension and disunity amongst labour organisers. All that merely strengthens my appeal that all sane and truly selfless persons in public life should devote themselves to the task of organising the industrial and agricultural workers.

The persons who have been organising labour in Ahmedabad may be doing well owing to the fortuitous circumstances that they possess more means than most other Indian groups could possibly have. There is a mild form of welfare work carried on and conciliation is established between individual complainants and their bosses. This is all. That is not modern trade unionism which is struggling for justice and the right of the workers to possess in common what they produce for the common good, and to control and regularise their own destiny.

What has Ahmedabad labour done? What can Ahmedabad labour do, if it is torn away from the all-India trade union movement? It can certainly never aspire to be either a pattern or a model. Can Ahmedabad labour secure better hours, better wages, better education, a better franchise and the right of the workers to compensation in industrial accidents, unemployment allowances, old age pensions, etc., unless and until labour in the whole Bombay Presidency and in all India obtain the same? Ahmedabad district by itself, as a district, even of well-organised labour, cannot possibly do anything for itself, whereas by holding aloof it can weaken the labour movement in the rest of India and can strengthen the power and opportunities of the master class to oppress the working class.

No Need for Ahmedabad to Stand Aloof

Ambalal Seth from Ahmedabad showed me a commendable welfare scheme of his own, but I soon discovered him to be the exception and not the rule. I say unhesitatingly that 90 per cent of the labourers in Ahmedabad are living under conditions much worse than the conditions prevailing amongst the employees of some European firms that I observed in Cawnpore and Calcutta. I put it to you unhesitatingly and without exaggeration, that 90 per cent of the children of Ahmedabad workers are made to live by their masters, whom you consider so virtuous and patriotic, under condition which would be condemned and punished as criminal if dogs, horses or other domestic animals were kept under them in most parts of Europe and America. The standard of wages in Ahmedabad is, on the average, lower than prevailing in Bombay.

Despite all this, nothing will hinder Ahmedabad labour from carrying on its own experiments, merely because it is affiliated to the All India Trade Union Congress. All over the world the Trade Union Congresses of various countries contain within them labour federations and trade unions of different trades and provinces pursuing different policies, and yet united together for national demands and general standards. That neither the All India Trade Union Congress nor any federation of textile workers can afford to remain for ever without its branches in an important industrial city like Ahmedabad is quite obvious, and your policy is only forcing a division in Ahmedabad itself.

We had in Britain a very unfortunate example of a miners' organisation in Fifeshire, attempting such aloofness to the detriment of both sides, but they have at last seen the wisdom of working for unity. I do not see that any of your reasons prove that the circumstances in Ahmedabad are peculiar and necessitate its holding aloof to such an extent as to justify a damaging breach in the All-India Trade Union movement. The best that Ahmedabad can do is to agree to the affiliation to the TUC. The question of Ahmedabad policy being a model of help and assistance to other unions can arise and be of practical value only after such affiliation. Your personal decision as to whether you should confine your interest in labour to Ahmedabad alone, or should extend it to the larger national movement, can remain the same even if the Ahmedabad labour union becomes affiliated to Congress.

Question of Labour Policy

Now with regard to your labour policy, which you explain so clearly, do let me submit at once that whatever your individual views may be on policy and whatever may be acceptable to, or not acceptable to the workers of Ahmedabad, all that has no bearing on Ahmedabad's affiliation to the TUC of India, and all that provides no justification for Ahmedabad's aloofness from and splitting of a large national movement.

Your idea of a policy for labour, as you explained, would in reality put you outside even those who are regarded as the "friends of the

workers", never mind the champions of their cause. However you confess that you are still in a dream, and even that it may all be a delusion, you show the ordinary confusion of thought of all apologists for capitalism by not sharply distinguishing between capital, capitalism and the control of capital, and you do not clearly see that in order to avoid any clash between labour and capital, the ultimate stage must be one of the control of capital by labour, which produces the entire hundred per cent of capital, and that society itself must be composed entirely of labourers by hand or brain serving one another as a common duty and not for the sake of making something out of it for individuals who would not labour, but who would exercise their legal rights of confiscating the fruits of other people's labour.

The one great thing to me is that you so readily and frankly admit that labour should be so organised as to remain selfconscious, selfreliant and selfexisting, evolving its own leadership and aim, and that such evolution, when developed, would be tremendously political and would dominate the chess-board of national polity. This outlook of yours satisfactorily defines the confusion, the timidity and the limitations of labour's rights that you seem inclined to impose upon the earlier stages of labour development.

Whilst Indian labour is illiterate, underpaid, underfed, mercilessly exploited and legislatively outplayed, it needs the help and assistance of outside people like yourself and those who are valiantly struggling to build up a Trade Union Congress and also a Workers' and Peasants' Party for all India. Black sheep there always will be, especially when society is fired with an evil zeal to make economic, political and social progress along the lines of an individualist competitive system, but I have really met and seen in India some fine men and women working in the cause of labour, who would be equal in trustworthiness to any European organisers, although perhaps less experienced. Hence my second request to you personally, which I still press for, viz., that besides securing the affiliation of Ahmedabad to the AITUC, you personally give your valuable assistance to that body, especially in the matter of organising industrial workers and peasants on a large scale all over India.

Despite your failing health, you are an active and truly all-India propagandist capable of covering enormous areas in a short time. Your popularity and charm enable you to capture the mass psychology and would render easier the otherwise stupendous task of organising an illiterate, overawed and semistarved population of many millions; your inspiring cooperation would give zest to the other voluntary workers in labour's cause, and I may even frankly say that your own new activity would give a suitable opening for practical work to the thousands of our youth who once enlisted in your movement and then cooled down in the absence of a practical and convincing programme.

Our Immediate Task

I do not consider it necessary to discuss the various reactionary sentences that you use against the full economic and political rights of labour. During the past month, during the debate in the House of Commons on the diabolical Trade Union Bill, we have heard Tory and Liberal capitalists use almost identical sentences and arguments, but all the intelligent working class would realise such sentiments to be but a cloak for the unholy desire of a rapacious and murderous employing class. In your case you merely lay it down as your speculative idea of what the early stages of labour organisation would be, and it is not worth while quarrelling over so long as I can see that in the ultimate outcome of labour organisation you are not drawing any close line of unnatural limitations.

You may think it must be twenty years hence before this final stage can be reached, and I may think it can be reached within two years, but it is not a question to be decided by you and me. It can only be decided by events. Our immediate task and duty is to unite together and to start vigorously on this great work.

I also do not share your views regarding the use of public funds entrusted to you. By calling it a Khaddar Fund, you are warping your own vision and limiting it in terms of yarn and cloth, but I feel sure that the public who subscribe funds to you are doing so with the idea of working out the emancipation and liberation of their country and are not sending you instalments as shareholders in a primitive company with circumscribed duties in their Articles of Association. Every national movement must fail, and will fail, if under modern conditions of industrialised life and capitalist power the labourers and the peasantry are not organised. As much of my future programme depends upon your present decision I shall be grateful for early consideration of the matter by you.

Yours fraternally,
SHAPURJI SAKLATVALA

WELCOME ADDRESSES TO SAKLATVALA

(A) CALCUTTA CORPORATION

We, the aldermen and councillors of the Corporation of Calcutta, beg to offer you a cordial and respectful welcome to our city.

We gratefully recall your services towards the economic regeneration of our country. As one of the pioneers in the field of patient industrial research, you succeeded by silent and unostentatious work in exploring the hidden resources of this land, and helped to build up the mighty structure of one of the national industries of India.

We rejoice to think that you stand today in the British House of Commons as a conspicuous and outstanding figure by reason of your unbending courage and uncompromising devotion to the cause of the poor, the weak, and the oppressed. By electing a worthy son of India as its representative at successive contests, your great and important constituency has paid a compliment to our motherland which we deeply appreciate.

You have utilised in the service of your country your untiring energy, your persuasive eloquence, and the manifold opportunities of your unique position. May you be spared long to continue these services and earn the gratitude of your admiring countrymen.

Bande Mataram.

Calcutta

30 February 1927

(B) BOMBAY CITIZENS

Bombay, the city of your birth, welcomes you with all her heart. It has been Bombay's pride and privilege, that all the 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 so 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, Jagadis Chandra Bose and T. L. Vaswani are all labouring with such love and light; and pray 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, 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!

Bombay

24 January 1927

(C) BENGAL YOUNG MEN

Allow us the members of the All-Bengal Youngmen's Association to join on behalf of the youngmen of Bengal in the universal chorus of rejoicings which your homecoming commemorates after a long stay in foreign land.

We recall with joy and pride your glorious labours in the cause of downtrodden humanity. You have not only stood out as an ardent champion of your country's cause but you belong to the small band of advanced thinkers who are eager to raise labour to a level of dignity and human equality. It is in the fitness of things that an Indian should be found in the vanguard of human emancipation. For those who are acquainted with the inner psychology of the Indian culture know it to be based on the bedrock of democratic principles.

The political cult which you preach demands courage in its exponent and your record has proved you undoubtedly to be one of those who would shrink from no sacrifice to which the clarion call of duty may lead them. Great in your eloquence, great in your convictions, great in your determination, your character has revealed a courage which has been the crowning point of this greatness.

It is not only patriotic impulse but also the desire of receiving from your contact, however shortlived, a vital inspiration for the work which our society has taken upon itself to perform. Though a good number of our organisers and workers have fallen victims to the arbitrary regulations and ordinance of the government we have taken the vow to carry on our work of service with unending courage and redoubled enthusiasm. The future alone will show how far we may approximate to our ideals,

we fervently pray to the Almighty that he may give us the strength to benefit by your mighty and living inspiration.

Assuring you once more of our love, esteem and fullest sympathy in your cult of human regeneration.

(D) KARACHI MUNICIPALITY

We, the members of the Karachi Municipality, greet you and offer you a most hearty and respectful welcome on your visit to our city. Your return to your country, temporary though it is, after an absence of many years, has been welcomed everywhere and must be of special interest to you from several points of view. It must have revived many pleasant memories and associations, and we hope you will carry with you pleasant thoughts through your touch, howsoever brief, with our city.

Our city is comparatively of modern growth, but within a short space of time it has come to occupy an important position and has a bright future before it. With its growth it has to face many and varied problems. The municipal activities of an important and rising city like Karachi are multiple but we shall try to give you a brief glimpse of those specially in which you are known to take a keen interest.

Karachi recorded a total of 9,450 births during the year 1926 and a total infantile mortality of 2,354, or nearly 252 per 1000 born. We confess this is a high death rate specially when compared to that prevailing in the western countries, and we are trying to bring it down. The municipality are establishing a number of maternity homes. The local health association is also doing useful work in this direction. A scheme for the supply of pure milk is under the consideration of the municipality. Much however remains to be done. The care of the expectant mother, her examination and instruction; and the care and tending of the mother and the child after birth are all matters which afford a vast field for philanthropic work.

The total mortality during the year was 6,698 or an excess of about 33 per cent of births over deaths. In addition, we have an influx of population from the surrounding districts, Kathiawar, Baluchistan and other places. The total population according to the last census of 1921 is 2,16,883. The population has nearly doubled within 20 years and at this rate will go up to 4½ lakhs within the next 25 years.

This phenomenal increase in the population brings us to our next problem of housing congestion. Although not so apparent, it has been admitted that overcrowding here is certainly worse than in other cities of the presidency. The total number of residential buildings according to the census reports is 27,514. Practically half the population lives in rooms each accommodating six or more persons. The shortage of houses is engaging the serious attention of the municipality. The government have appointed a committee to report on the housing congestion in the city and we hope that its labours will soon bring forth tangible results.

The question of housing labour is another problem that confronts the city. The city's prosperity lies chiefly in its transit trade and thousands of dock, transport and other labourers flock here for their living. Karachi is not at present an industrial city, there is practically no textile industry and the chief industrial concerns number only about 24. There are therefore no slums in Karachi as are generally to be met with in large industrial cities. We cannot, however, conceal that there are some ugly spots which disfigure the fair face of our city and we are trying to improve them. The city is eminently suited for industrial development; its geographical position, its rich hinterland, its climate and other conditions are all favourable for the establishment of industries and it is said that several industries will be established at no distant date. This will only make the housing problem more acute. Fortunately, Karachi has not yet developed to its fullest extent. There is still vacant land available and schemes for establishing labour colonies are under consideration. The importance of a well-housed and contented labour cannot be overestimated. If the middle class forms the backbone of a country, the labour class is its very life's blood. We admit, it would be therefore well for our successors (as the term of office of the present municipality will expire by April next) to keep in view the present and future needs of the city in this respect. We have dwelt at length on this question as we know the deep and passionate interest you take in these matters.

We request that you will be pleased to accept this Address containing a few typical scenes of the city and some statistics, as a token of our regard for you and as a memento of your visit to our city. The statistics which are incorporated along with the album of scenes will enable you to visualise a true picture of our city's needs and requirements for the poor and the labour class in which you are so keenly interested and we hope your personal touch with our city and its people will enable you to better understand our problems and to extend to us your sympathy and guidance when needed.

Apart from the differences of views and opinions on principles of life and its problems which must exist, we do admire your zeal and love for those who are needy and suffering and we pray that you may live a long and healthy life to work for them and their welfare, to get them happiness in life and guide them along the path of upliftment, sound judgement and selfreliance.

Once again we extend a hearty welcome to you and wish you and your family all happiness and joy that life can afford.

Karachi

9 February 1927

SAKLATVALA'S MESSAGE TO MADRAS CONGRESS

(26-28 December 1927)

Dear Comrades,

The might of tyrants holds me away from my countrymen. Many have tried this trick before, to save their illgotten empires but no one yet has really succeeded.

Yes, I can be shunned and held in exile only if you, my countrymen and countrywomen, shut your hearts against me and turn a deaf ear to my pleadings. If you receive me in your hearts, if you incorporate my suggestions in your deliberations at this critical juncture of our struggle for our freedom and in the cause of world peace I am as much in your midst as any other delegate.

I honestly hold the view that the human being who stands reconciled to an imperialist bondage, who basks in the sunshine of foreign rule is responsible for many more evils in the world at large, than merely for the degradation of his own country and his own people.

British rule in India means our people's perpetual starvation, ignorance, physical deterioration and social backwardness. British rule in India means a standing curb on Egypt, Iraq, Persia and Afghanistan. British rule in India means an overpowering militarism by British that compels the rest of the world to weigh itself down under the cursed burden of armaments.

British rule in India means the continual menace to the wages, to the work, and the living standard of the British masses, and an actual frustration of their trade union rights and socialist aims.

British rule in India means a constant unseen war upon the rapid development of the masses in all the nations of Europe and America.

If by a magic touch the British empire were to be sovietised and the conquered races under her control set free, there would be not only real peace and prosperity for the liberated races, but there would be a sudden jump in the economic, social, political and cultural development of the human race.

As a friend of Great Britain, an equal brother of the British, as of the Indian worker and peasant, I devote myself and appeal to all of you to devote yourselves to the great task of getting Britain to abandon imperialism once and for ever. Pray, do not be led into merely raising protests against this act and that act and a hundred and one of the day-to-day grievances of a sorely tried people. What else is imperialism but a crushing mill? The prince and peasant must feel victims by turns, as you see a Nabha or a Nizam can be sacrificed to it as easily as the poorest of Akalis or Moplahs. Imperial prisons exempt no castes or religions when a spirited person makes a stand; a Subhas Bose, a Maulana Mohammad Ali, a Sardar Karan Singh, a Manchershaw Awari are all hateful to imperialist arrogance and latterly you must have seen that when at last—thanks to the teaching of the communist movement—British boys like Allison or Spratt stand up for the rights of a people to be free the imperialist ruler forgets the white man's prestige and is ready to wreak vengeance upon his own "jat bhai".

Let us rise above wailing over pain endured by individual sufferers.

British imperialism is a destined factor in the rise and fall of modern capitalism; it was conceived as an economic power and it has grown up to be an economic evil.

We who have led in the van with a purely political concentration have proved too feeble for the task. Awaken our working masses, organise our teeming peasants, take these myriads of India's toiling children right inside our national organisation by direct affiliation, discipline them within their trade unions and within an All-India Workers' and Peasants' Party for direct economic passive resistance that can dry up the sources of imperial power and prosperity.

Organise our youths of both sexes from the age of ten into a large All-India Young Comrade's League, and without scorn for their youthfulness affiliate them also with the Congress.

Now is the time for a genuine nationwide boycott movement not of a picturesque political kind but of an economic character that will everlastingly impress upon the ruling caste that a Royal Commission which goes out to sow fresh power may bring back a harvest of disaster. If the British Labour Party have declined to respect the declared wishes of India's representatives and the Indian Trade Union Congress and have become partners in the imperial game of the capitalist rulers of the British empire the responsibility is theirs of making the workers of Britain share in the penalties of a severe economic boycott. Do let me appeal to you to avoid the mistakes of the past and to take a more courageous and scientific line of action.

In the first place do not try to declare a boycott of all foreign goods, but let us be honest and voluntarily avoid contact with British goods. To keep out of India all foreign goods in the present stage of our development is impracticable in national economics. But it is impossible to demand and obtain foreign goods from other nations to substitute goods of British origin at least as long as the representatives of British labour

insist upon sitting on this Royal Commission. Then again do not fail to enlist the assistance of the working class as by mere dependence upon its commercial and educated section no nation carries its ideals to success. Indian dock-workers, transport workers, carters, clerks and all should refuse all contact with goods of British origin. When you have done all this you have taken action only against a part of commercial imperialism. One of the main objects of imperialism is transplantation of British interests into India, and in the economic and unjust enrichment of British capitalism these transplanted activities play a bigger part than exports of goods from Britain. Any scientific ostracism of the interests of British capitalism is impossible unless effective measures are adopted to refuse contact with the economic interests of British capitalist representatives in India. Let imperialism take care of itself politically or legislatively, it has no right to demand economic cooperation from the conquered. We are legally and constitutionally entitled to refuse commercial and industrial cooperation and hospitality to those who are only out to abuse both.

Let the present Indian National Congress concentrate itself on large and fundamental issues instead of discussing details of everyday grievances. Appoint your All-India Congress Committee on a specially larger scale so that men and women of talent and power can function unceasingly in towns, taluks and villages and carry out your national schemes with the full support and cooperation of our workers and peasants.

Let me pray you in the end not to minimise the difficulty of our task; the problem is not merely an Indian problem, not a problem of foreign ministers or officials ruling India, it is a world problem. It is the problem of freeing all humanity from a militarist civilisation that it may build a new era of genuine equality, fraternity and liberty. Do not therefore conclude your sittings without adopting adequate measures and without creating necessary machinery for your cooperation with the workers of all nationalities who are struggling to attain the same end.

With my heartiest good wishes and trusting in your efforts to get me back in your midst as soon as possible despite the cunning and stupid attempts to exile me.

I remain, yours
SAKLATVALA

THE INDIAN ROUND-TABLE CONFERENCE

(SHIPURJI SAKLATVALA)

And so the Round-Table Conference has come at last, after a dozen years of travail, of intrigue, of moves and countermoves, but true to its original prophecy of coming with the accompaniment of bloodshed, bombing, daily baton charges and arrests by the score.

In the dark days of the world-capitalist war, Lloyd George's intriguing mind was the one constant glimmer of hope and eventual escape for the capitalist landgrabbers and imperialist warlords of Britain. Round him came drawn lesser satellites with a second-rate genius for plotting and intrigue. Declaration to the Jews to repossess the Promised Land, and counterpledges of freedom to the Arabs, alluring promises to Irish Americans to get into the war and Black and Tans in Dublin and Cork, Arthur Henderson's mission to Kerensky to keep up the bloodbath and promises of peace and plenty to the Poles and Czechs, and finally — India. A Round-Table Conference was to be set up somewhere to do something somehow. One Lionel Curtis went across to India, to promise good things to the Indians in return for their share in the bloody orgy of world power for Britain and British financiers. Unto his bosom he took James Meston, a "sympathetic" official, and William Marris, the Inspector-General of Prisons in India, to hammer out a charter of freedom and liberty. Mysterious documents were prepared and printed with the utmost secrecy, and some benevolent *Round-Table* movement was preparing Britain to grant something to the Indians in response to their clamour for bread and liberty.

It was mentioned in the secret document that the Indian princes and bourgeoisie would be placated with political sops of a few high offices and "reforms", and talk of "dominion" goals, but for the masses, for the hungry and exploited workers and for the enslaved peasantry there would have to be application of "law and order", stricter discipline and ultimately unavoidable bloodshed. When this *Round-Table* Magna Charta for India became prematurely known, Meston apologised, Marris explained away his

part, Curtis got away from the Indian public gaze and there emerged a smug and wellpolished document as the Montagu-Chelmsford Report, and the *Round-Table* was driven into obscurity.

The "reforms" came on with all the trumpet-blowing of hollow hypocritical parliamentary democracy. The Indian National Congress, as predicted by the *Round-Table* of Lionel Curtis, walked into its snare and sent a weighty deputation of which the ornamental leader was Tilak and the brain power was Vithalbhai Patel. When, at a public meeting of Indians in London, I moved an amendment to reject all parliamentary reforms, to severely boycott the proposed new Legislative Assembly and Councils, and to get on with the work of organising labour and the peasantry towards the establishment of Workers' and Peasants' Republic, I was denounced and defeated, and after a lot of "buts" and "ifs" and bluff and thunder the congress leaders did in fact accept the reforms, as a germinal start of Dominion Status. The Indian proletariat had to pay for it with their blood in order to fit themselves for a place "within the empire", and there followed the butchery at Amritsar, the Rowlatt Acts, the massacre of the Moplahs and shootings at Bombay, Jamshedpur, Ahmedabad and other industrial centres.

The Congress accepted, rejected, again accepted and then once more rejected the reforms. They saw no inherent objection to a system of ruling the peasants and workers from above through a dictatorship of plutocracy, but they mainly attacked the system of dyarchy. There was no cry of land for the people, but for remission of tax on landowners, rich as well as poor, there was no stand for a human wage of seven rupees a day instead of seven annas for the industrial serf, but there was a surging demand for tariffs, protective duties and safeguarding of dividends. Three or four people picturesquely renounced British titles and 300 to 400 more begged for them and acquired them with gratification and gratitude twice a year. The need of organising the masses and working for a peasants' revolution was distinctly felt, but the dread of the ultimate power of workers and peasants over a society of vested interests made the congress leaders decide to go so far and no further, and the first great betrayal at Bardoli was the result.

The bewildered politicians thought of another "Round-Table Conference", but different in kind from what Lionel Curtis and the Inspector-General of Prisons had devised, though not different in nature. The main idea prevalent in the minds of Indian politicians in 1924 and 1925 was that it was dangerous to organise masses and to lead them to a revolt to establish mass freedom as against imperialist terrorism, for after all imperialism was only an extended and intense form of capitalism.

It was therefore considered impolitic to organise a nationwide fight socially, economically and politically against the imperialist boss, and it was considered safer and more diplomatic to get round a table with the enemy of the masses and to come to a new compromise, mainly for abolishing dyarchy without destroying British imperialism. The British imperialists soon saw through the selfconfessed weakness in this proposal

of the Delhi Assembly for a Round-Table Conference; they saw in it the Indian bourgeoisie's resolve not to "play with fire" in the shape of a workers' and peasants' movement. So after a couple of years of defiance, bluff and palaver the British imperialists produced the Simon Commission, and when unsuccessful in placating political leaders, tried to attach to it an Indian counterpart of chosen men from the Assembly at Delhi.

In the meanwhile, the mass spirit was mobilising and mass determination was hardening. The strikers on railways, in cotton mills, in docks and in mines were showing a new spirit, an inherent organisational strength of their own, and the workers began to march on with a swing and a jolt that dazed their bosses. The Indian leaders produced an exclusively Indian Round-Table Conference of their own to minimise their own internal differences, and with an unexpected harmony and forensic ability, they did produce the Nehru Report as a forestalling of and counterblast to the expected Simon Report. The Nehru Report did make the Simon Report a discredited document in advance.

The workers and peasants saw more value in the Girni Kamgar (Mill-workers') Union than in any other organisation, they were being helped to understand that the tax-gatherer and the rent-collector were both one common enemy, and the police officer and mill manager stood united together against the right of the workers, and so did the moneylender and the bailiff with his eviction warrants. The men who were soon to become the Meerut prisoners spelt a more immediate and effective danger to the British raj than the Nehru Committee or the congress camp of those days, and with fixed bayonets and trumped-up charges they were put under arrest and still continue to be so after 18 months.

The congress leaders saw the gathering force of mass opinion, and though in their annual resolution they proclaimed themselves ready to be partners in a terrorist, militarist landgrabbing, exploiting empire, they put it forward as a revolutionary sounding ultimatum with a 12 months' limit.

The Congress came out with a separatist demand, under the old leaders with the added new blood of Jawaharlal Nehru, but this time led more from the bottom than from the top. The campaign that was launched out as a pacifist prayer-reciting movement of holy resisters to technical forms of law soon developed into a fighting movement, and Chittagong, Mymensingh, Peshawar and Sholapur became the landmarks of the people's real revolt.

The mutiny of the Garhwal troops and the open attack of the Afridis gave a formidable appearance to the congress movement, which in itself under its orthodox leadership would have confined itself to experimental technical breaches of the law. Strenuous efforts were made by MacDonald and Irwin to restore the pacifist leadership of the Congress to its pre-dominance, but no sooner did the leaders seek for rapprochement with Irwin than the push from behind proved too strong.

MacDonald and Irwin had to invoke the aid of the twice-killed Round-Table Conference. It was to have the appearance of the Nehru

Round Table, but it was to have the imperial nature of the Curtis-Marris Round Table of a dozen years ago. And so here we have it!

Three blind mice! See how they run!! They sit around a circular table. MacDonald, the Great Moghal, and his British courtiers occupy the centre. Around them sit a Princely India, a Mahomedan India, and a British India, divided into a dozen different interests. The King, in his speech, gives to the Simon Report a place which no one else is expected to give it at the conference. Then poor Irwin is forced to issue an unintelligible dispatch to unsay what he has said in the past a document which is framed by at least five different minds.

There come the princes with a strange claim. If King George himself will dare to come out tomorrow to assert that he is on the British throne not by the consent and will of the people but by a treaty of support from a foreign monarch, he will discover that to be the quickest way of losing it. Here sits a Labour Prime Minister to say to the 600 princes of India, that their subjects, a mere trifle of 70,000,000 human beings, count for nothing, but it is the British imperial power that will keep them upon their throne to bleed and torture their subjects in order to extort wealth out of their toil.

A parliamentary representation of Britain quickly offers to a bunch of handpicked place-hunters two alternative systems: federal or unitary. A unitary system may mean an openly-elected Parliament by the common people. The unitary system is mentioned only to be killed. It did not even receive the importance of condemnation, as in this august assembly of imperialist buffoons from Britain and India, there has not been one person found to advocate the system of a Central Legislature freely and entirely elected by the people.

A Liberal from India, a Conservative prince from India, a Tory peer of Britain all *sotto voce* decide upon a federal system.

In the past, if a prince dared to deliver a political speech, he was threatened with dethronement, and the Gackwad had been the worst sufferer. These very princes have been brought here today with rebel speeches prepared for them by their English staffs to impress upon India that their advent into the body politic would be an asset. The idea of ruling India through native agencies and princes with an imperialist European overlordship is not a new one. Dupleix, the French conqueror of India, was very fond of it.

So here will be a Federal Council for India, say of 200 members, of whom 50 might be princes, then 50 would be Mahomedan landlords, feudal chiefs and luminaries in higher professions, 25 would be nominated puppets to safeguard the interest of the depressed classes, 15 or 20 would safeguard European investments, the rest would be divided among Hindu millionaires, landlords, Parsi merchants, and bright lawyers. There would be three or four government puppets to protect the interest of Indian labour.

The main purpose of this conference, almost the only one, is to lay the foundations of a federal system as the most effective way of excluding

the masses. The princes and the Mahomedans are to be the trump cards. The capitalist papers are openly advocating the acceptance of the "Moslem Charter", which is being forged behind the scenes. This Moslem corruption serves another unexpected purpose at the present moment. The leading Islamic representatives are clearly warned to keep off the Palestine question, and if they dare to espouse the Arab cause they are threatened with the complete withdrawal of the "gifts" for Indian Moslems. Of course, if the Arabs are crushed, and the Afridis and the brave tribesmen are once bombed into slavery, the Indian Moslems and Hindu politicians, it is calculated, could easily be kept in subjugation for another century.

In the meanwhile, there are reports of daily shootings and imprisonment in India. Who are those thus dealt with? They are not any of the privileged minorities; they are the completely ignored majority.

The Round-Table Conference is to give a megaphonic expression to the rights of privileges and interests, and like the proverbial ostrich, buries its head in the sand in order to ignore the very existence of 280 millions of suffering and enslaved humanity, living or dying on 6d a day income.

Constitutions framed in London, and agreements for the division of the spoils arrived at by smug sycophants of a foreign ruler will not affect the mass mentality. The workers and peasants will rise, they are rising, as indeed they have risen. The banner of their revolt will soar above the din of political manoeuvres, and the inevitable mass revolution will sweep all before it. Bombs and bullets, bayonets and poison gas will some day be discovered by the British proletariat to be all the work of their hands, and some day their conscience will prevent them from slaying their oriental comrades.

The Viceroy's prisons are as full as those of the Czars and his cup of violence has become full to overflowing. MacDonald and Wedgwood Benn are disgracing even the spirit of a Kerensky; they are more the Rasputins attached to an unwary throne. The Indian Round-Table Conference in London seems like the culminating act.

The desperate gamblers are now trying their last throw. It is MacDonald's last chance to save the Labour government, the princes' last chance to stick to ill-gotten wealth, the Indian politicians' last chance to escape from a Workers' Peasants' Revolution! But will they?

[*Labour Monthly*, December 1930]

SOME TRIBUTES TO SAKLATVALA

JAWAHARLAL NEHRU: "I wish to pay my tribute to the memory of Shapurji Saklatvala, who throughout his life was a brave and intrepid soldier of freedom."

GEORGI DIMITROV: "The Communist International lowers its fighting banner over the coffin of our true comrade, Shapurji Saklatvala, a worthy son of the Indian people, a true friend of the working class and a tireless fighter in the cause of socialism."

S. A. BRELVI: "Accept my heartiest condolences of your sad and irretrievable loss which is also the loss of the entire Indian nation, for whom the dead leader was also a fearless fighter."

SUBHAS CHANDRA BOSE: "Your loss is India's loss. Please accept heartfelt condolences from Indian community and myself."

GEORGE LANSBURY: "Through the death of Comrade Saklatvala the whole international labour movement has lost one of its very best comrades and workers. India has lost one of the best of her sons; he will be missed very much indeed in the struggle for Indian freedom. I can only express the hope that the fact we all mourn his loss as a comrade and friend will in some way help his wife and family to bear their loss.

"I should like to say that although Saklatvala and I often found ourselves in disagreement on questions of method and organisation, we always remained true friends."

C. P. ATTLEE, M.P.: "Mr Saklatvala was devoted worker for the causes in which he believed. He was always a very pleasant man with whom to have dealings.

"He was ever courteous and was gifted with a very vivid sense of humour and personality. I always got on well in personal relationship with him. His loss will be felt by many."

HERBERT H. ELVIN (*Gen. Secy. National Union of Clerks; Member, General Council of TUC*): "I have known Saklatvala for many years, both

as a member of the NUC and in public life. Although in late years our path has diverged I have always had the utmost respect for him. I had a firm belief in his sincerity of purpose, and it may be because of my sojourn in India for many years, I always had a profound admiration for him in his championship of the depressed and distressed classes of that great country. The Indian workers indeed have lost a strong advocate, and one who was prepared to sacrifice personal interest for the workers' interest."

R. BRIDGEMAN (*International League Against Imperialism*): "The sudden death of Comrade Saklatvala comes as a great shock to all the thousands who have been personally associated with him.

"His tireless efforts on behalf of Indian freedom have told on his remarkable vigour and it may be truthfully said of 'Sak' that he has sacrificed his life in the struggle for the freedom of India from foreign domination."

BEN BRADLEY (*British section of the League Against Imperialism*): "In Comrade Saklatvala's death the working-class movement has lost one of its most sincere and courageous revolutionary fighters.

"The Executive Committee of the League Against Imperialism has lost not merely a valuable member, but a staunch friend whom it will be impossible to replace."

WILLIAM GALLACHER, M.P.: "The death of Shapurji Saklatvala will leave a gap in our ranks that can never be filled. He, more than any man of our age, cemented the ties binding the toilers of Britain and of the colonial countries together.

"Wherever I have gone on propaganda work in England, Scotland and Wales, I have found Saklatvala respected, loved and honoured by the workers, who appreciated his sterling worth, his utter selflessness, his devotion to duty.

"The workers of West Fife learned to know him well during the recent elections, and the more they knew him, the more they loved him.

"In Parliament and outside, loyal and devoted was Saklatvala, the friend and champion of all who were oppressed. Physically frail, he had tremendous courage, both physical and moral. The utmost that any of us who are left behind can hope to do is to carry on the struggle with the same untiring faith and devotion that inspired Saklatvala throughout his life."

R. SAWYER (*Negro Welfare Association*): "It will be a great shock to all the Negro peoples throughout the world to learn of the death of Shapurji Saklatvala".

The Communist Party of the USA: "With the revolutionary workers of the world we share your loss. Let the world mark the significance of the fact that Saklatvala, a native of India, and battler for the liberation of that oppressed land from the yoke of British imperialism, was the first spokesman of the Communist Party of Great Britain in Parliament.

"He was the forerunner of greater victories of which a new series is now opened with William Gallacher's election to Parliament.

"We salute Comrade Saklatvala and accord his memory an eternal place in our midst."

The Communist Party of Ireland: "Irish workers are deeply moved at the death of Comrade Saklatvala, valiant fighter for Indian liberty and for all oppressed people, and the unwavering supporter of the struggle for Irish independence."

PAT DEVINE (*Belfast Communist Party*): "Sak was a fine fighter and will be greatly missed. As a communist fighter he raised a lone voice in Parliament in 1923 against the partition of Ireland. Convey our heartiest sympathy to his family. Our party expresses its heartfelt regret at his passing."

Congress Socialist Party of India: "The death of Shapruji Saklatvala has removed a great champion of the submerged and exploited classes all over the world. He was a stalwart among the communists outside Russia and was an active member of the British Communist Party at the time of his death. He was an ex-M.P. from the constituency of North Battersea. In him India mourns the loss of a fearless champion of her cause in England."

TOM MANN: "I desire to express my heartfelt sympathy with our dear Comrade Saklatvala's family in their terrible bereavement. Our capable, loyal and loveable old comrade has been snatched from us with awful suddenness; his devotion and zeal for the movement were of the highest order, and we shall honour him by ourselves working with greater zeal."

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TWO MEN: TWO FAITHS

Two men are being buried today, each in his way a great national figure. They will both be buried in London, though one of them is not an Englishman. They are Saklatvala and Kipling.

Saklatvala, frail, passionate, intensely courageous, the revolutionary who devoted his whole life to the struggle for the liberation of the Indian people from British imperialism, who fought for the right of the oppressed to life in every country, will be remembered forever not only by his own countrymen, but by the best of all countries.

Kipling, the poet of imperialism, the great artist who was the involuntary prisoner of his own caste and class traditions, is being exploited after his death by all the most reactionary and vile elements in British imperialism as a means for whipping up jingo sentiment and class and racial hatreds.

Saklatvala saw the future of his great country, with its rich and splendid civilisation, as lying in the hands of its millions of workers, peasants, artisans and poor intellectuals. He saw it as a struggle against the struggling forces of medieval feudalism and capitalist imperialism, forces which had destroyed the national life of his country and reduced the masses of his fellow-countrymen to abject poverty.

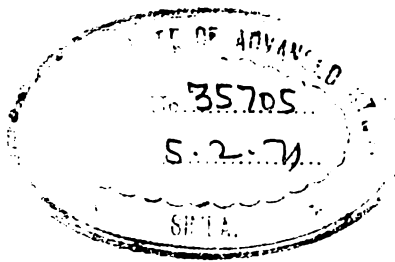
The British rulers of India, the civil servants, magistrates, army officers and businessmen will use the name and work of Kipling in order to perpetuate those forces and deepen that poverty.

Saklatvala fought to restore elementary human rights to millions of humanity. Kipling used his genius to defend the men who had taken their rights.

There should be little difficulty in judging between the two. If Kipling is to leave anything to the common treasure of humanity it will only be because men like Saklatvala have lived and fought. East and West are in Saklatvala, but it is through the common cause of suffering humanity and the great battle for its liberation.

In the end it will be victory in that fight which sorts the dross from the gold in the work of Kipling.

[*Daily Worker* editorial, 20 January 19





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