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MPC

"I have listened to more

CANT AND HUMBUG . . "

(Geo. Buchanan, M.P.)

Extracts from Speeches by

JAMES MAXTON, M.P.

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on the

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MAXTON OPENS ATTACK

I RISE to say a few words on this unprecedented situation and I realise that I am speaking in a House in which an overwhelming proportion of the membership is under feelings or very strong emotion. I share with others in this House the human sympathies that go out to the King. I share the same human sympathies with the Prime Minister, who has had to shoulder a task which few if any of the occupants of his office have ever had to shoulder before. The decisions that he has made are, I believe, in strict accordance with his Conservative principles, on which he has been chosen as the leader of this country in the House of Commons, and, therefore, I make no criticism of them whatever.

But I do say that, in the very nature of the monarchical institutions on an hereditary basis, circumstances of this kind were bound to arise, and they have arisen now in conditions which have created very grave difficulties.

It is a question whether now this House will not be prepared to look at this particular political problem as a practical political problem, recognising that the problems of our age cannot be met and solved with the ideas and the institutions which have come down to us from earlier times. We are living in a new kind of world, with new kinds of problems, and the institutions that date back centuries are not necessarily the institutions which can cope with the problems of modern times.

We therefore intend, however it may be against the general run of opinion in this House, to take strongly the view that the lesson of the past few days is that the monarchical institution has now outlived its usefulness. The happenings of the past few days have only indicated the grave perils that confront a country that has as its centralising, unifying figure an hereditary personality who at any time may break under the force of the circumstances that gather round about him.

We hope to take the opportunity given us, to try to persuade this House now to face the situation with the idea in their minds that for the future, Great Britain and its allied countries across the seas shall become, among other advanced countries in the world, one of the republican nations.

WILLIAM GALLACHER SUPPORTS.

Danger lies before us, and it is going to be very bad if we close our eyes to that fact. How was it possible that such a crisis as has arisen should come upon us? The King and Mrs. Simpson do not live in a vacuum. Sinister processes are continually at work.

I want to make it understood that we have here not an issue between the King and Parliament, but two forces fighting with one another on this issue, as they have been fighting continually on every important issue that has come on foreign policy.

I am concerned with the working class. I see terrible dangers arising. There is not a Member here who believes that this finishes the crisis and that the forces which have been operating behind this will now stop. There is victory for one group at the moment, but they will not stop. The forces will go on.

It is an issue between two groups which are fighting continually for domination, and it is a thousand pities that the Labour movement should show any signs of falling into the trap. The only hope for the working class is that the Labour Movement should adopt an independent policy and pursue it against these groups, accept the proposal of Mr. Maxton and finish with it all.

If you allow things to go on as they are going, you will encourage factions to grow of a dangerous and desperate character.

I appeal to the Labour movement to take strong determined action to arouse the people of the country to the urgent need of uniting all their forces for peace and progress in face of the dangers that lie in their path.

BUCHANAN HITS OUT.

I feel that I ought to express my own view and go a step farther than Mr. Maxton.

I have listened to more cant and humbug than I have ever listened to in my life. I have heard praise of the King which was not felt sincerely in any quarter of the House. Who has not heard the tittle-tattle and gossip that is going about? If he had not voluntarily stepped from the Throne, everyone knows that the same people in the House who pay lip service to him would have poured out scorn, abuse and filth.

I have no doubt that you will go on praising the next King as you have praised this one. You will go on telling about his wonderful qualities.

If he is a tenth as good as you say, why are you not keeping him? Why is everyone wanting to unload him? Because you know he is a weak creature. You want to get rid of him and you are taking the step to-day.

The great tragedy of it is this: If an ordinary workman had been in this mess, everyone in the House of Commons would have been ashamed of him. You would have refused him benefit. You would

have ill-treated him. Look at the Minister of Labour sneering at collusive action.*

The whole Law Courts were set at defiance for this man. A divorce case was taken when everyone of you knows it was a breaking of the law. There is an association which everyone of you knows is collusive action. If a little boy in Wales leaves his mother to get 7s. extra, he has to stand the jeers and taunts of a miserable Minister of Labour.

Talk to me about fairness, about decency, about equality! You are setting aside your laws for a rich, pampered Royalty. The next set will be pampered too. You will lie and praise them and try to laud them above ordinary men. Instead of having the ordinary frailties that all of us have, they will have this additional one, of being surrounded with a set of flunkies who refuse to let them know the truth. It is time the people ceased to trust those folk, but only trusted their own power and their own elected authority.

THE I.L.P. CHALLENGE.

"This House declines to give a Second Reading to a Bill which has been necessitated by circumstances which show clearly the danger to this country and to the British Commonwealth of Nations inherent in an hereditary monarchy, at a time when the peace and prosperity of the people require a more stable and efficient form of government of a republican kind, in close contact with, and more responsive to, the will of the mass of the people, and which fails to give effect to the principle of popular election."

In moving the amendment JAMES MAXTON said: I am concerned primarily with the condition of the people and with the economic problems of our time. I am concerned with the breaking-down of class barriers. Here to-day we are confronted with an important political problem. It seems to me quite wrong that there should be any suggestion that in this democratic House, elected by the people on diverse political principles, no suggestion of any division of opinion between the warring political principles should be voiced.

My friends and I have been sent here, election after election, standing as Socialists, and for the Socialist system of society as a society of equality with neither Kings, nor courts, nor nobles, nor peers—for a no-class society. Here to-day we are asked to give our consent to the continuation of the outstanding symbol, the very head and front, of a class society.

*This was a reference to the Minister of Labour's attitude sneering earlier in the day as towards single unemployed men alleged to leave home in order that the family Means Test allowance should not be cut.

I say that after the experience of these last few weeks republicanism has become more an issue of practical politics than it has been for many years. I know that a large proportion of the Members of this House will do their utmost to place monarchy back in the position it was in some months ago. I want you to remember your childhood's nursery rhyme:

"Humpty Dumpty sat on a wall,
Humpty Dumpty had a great fall,
All the King's horses and all the King's men,
Could not put Humpty Dumpty back again."

Members of this House are charged with a greater responsibility in these days than any monarch, are asked to face greater problems than ever a monarch was asked to face, and I want them to look at the thing as sane men, and realise that constitutional monarchy is only a device which worked reasonably well during three reigns, which has not worked well in these last weeks, and which is unlikely ever to have so long a run as it has had of smooth, easy working. This crack-up of a monarch is not merely just the matter of a failure of a man, but is something deeper and more fundamental—the whole break-up of social conceptions, of past ideas of a Royal Family clear of the taints and weaknesses of ordinary men. The King is victim of something that has swept over the world, and cracked Crowns in every corner of the globe. Members here, with supreme egotism, say that Great Britain can remain immune, clear of all the movements that sweep over the world.

Let Members, if they care, go on living in their fool's paradise. The economic and social forces that are at work in the world will affect this country as they have affected other countries. I have hoped that the necessary social and economic changes may take place here by more humane methods than have arisen in other countries. That still remains my hope, but it will be fulfilled only if the representatives of the Commons of this land are prepared to meet their difficulties in advance and create a political structure which can respond speedily and accurately to the will of the mass of the people, and which can give effect to the changes that have now become necessary in human affairs.

The step we are taking is a reactionary step, in attempting to set up again a governmental form which pertains to a class society, to a past age, which has a connection with problems that are not the problems of to-day. We are doing a wrong and a foolish thing if we do not establish in our land a completely democratic form of government which does away with all monarchical institutions.

HUMILIATING ADULATION.

CAMPBELL STEPHEN in seconding the amendment said: The issue is one of very great significance for the working people in

this country. As I sat and listened yesterday to the Debate I thought of how a few weeks ago the impression was abroad throughout the land that the Monarch was almost a unique personality.

There was something very humiliating yesterday in the attitude of so many Members who, a short time ago, were prepared for every form of adulation of the Monarch; yet yesterday there was not one who was prepared to stand up and make an appeal that those who had tried to persuade the country that he was a unique personality, should make another appeal to him to change his decision. Not one of his friends was prepared to challenge the assumption that this man of mature age, was not the person best entitled to say who should be his wife.

The passage in the Prime Minister's speech was of very great significance, in which he told us how he had put it to His Majesty that a great position had been built up for Monarchy in this country and how, in a short time, all that might be lost. This effort being made in connection with a constitutional issue cannot meet with success and the glamour be restored to this ancient institution. The one argument for its retention is that it remains the only link binding the Dominions and keeping the Empire together. I think it is a complete illusion.

As I see it, the British Commonwealth of Nations is not held together by sentimental attachment to a particular Royal Family, but because of the associations that grew up with the development that took place. I believe that there is a real economic interest between them, that they will stay together in the Commonwealth, and that this form of government is of no vital importance. The dilemma of the King arose because the King was, like any of the rest of us, a human being. In spite of all that Governments can do, his successor or successors will also only be human beings, and the problem that has arisen in the present instance may very well arise in the next few years.

Let me remind the House also that the success of the Monarch in some of the years past was due to the fact that the Monarch was outside of politics. The King could do no wrong, because the King's function had become largely a decorative function. But I know that there was a great deal of misgiving in the Labour Party in 1931; I know that one of their leading authorities on constitutional history thought that the events of 1931 were a Palace revolution. Labour Members will recollect how they felt that there had been intervention into politics by the Monarch. It showed one of the dangers inherent in a hereditary Monarchy. I believe that with the development of events in the world, the Monarchy may be used by Tory Members more and more as a buttress of their class privileges. I would suggest to Labour Members, is there not something very significant in the

way which the Conservative party goes to the lengths that it does in order to try to create this glamour about the Monarch?

Our function here is to deal with great fundamental economic problems, but those problems are also closely associated with this monarchical system, which has a very great significance with regard to the maintenance of the present economic order. It is for that reason that my friends and myself have always taken the opportunity of pressing the importance of making democracy a real democracy. One question that is debated often enough with regard to the social struggle is whether it is possible to make the transition peacefully from the present economic order to a Socialist economic order, and, I believe that the forces which render it practically impossible are the forces which gather round the hereditary Monarch, and the association of the armed Forces so particularly with the Crown. It is the King's Army, the King's Navy, the King's Air Force. It is of the utmost significance that the forces upon which the State rests are so associated with the King.

I would like to say one thing in conclusion. It is only right that I should indicate what my view is with regard to the Oath of Allegiance. The Members of this House took the Oath of Allegiance to the present Monarch. Now, by this legislation, Members will be released from that Oath of Allegiance. I look upon the Oath of Allegiance very much in the same way as Members here are *acting* with regard to the Oath of Allegiance.

This crisis has revealed the weakness of the hereditary Monarchy. It has destroyed so much of the glamour that has been built up about it, and there will be many who will join us in saying it is time to put an end to all this flummery and to bring into being a modern and real democratic government.

RULING CLASS "LOYALTY."

WILLIAM GALLACHER: What I am most concerned about is that there seems to be a tendency to accept this event as something that has happened, and then life will go on as though nothing had actually taken place. But this is the most unparalleled event in the history of this country, and it expresses and represents something.

The crisis itself is superficial, but beneath the superficial crisis there is something that demands, and must get, attention.

I have listened to the attempts being made to put a case for the Monarchy. Sir A. Chamberlain states that he represents a poor constituency, with poor streets, awful houses, terrible poverty, suffering and hardships, these people living in wretched unhygienic houses, no clothes, no sufficiency of food, part of them broken—he has the audacity to tell us that they look upon the Monarch as their guardian. Guardian of what? Guardian of their poverty; guardian of their suffering?

The ruling class know no loyalty. As long as the King served their interests, they would keep the King. When the King failed to serve their interests, out the King would go. Where is your loyalty to-day? It is not there because he ceased to serve the interests of a particular group that surrounds the Monarch, the Cabinet at the present time. You cover it all up by talking about the Constitution, but underneath is the crisis of unemployment, the means test and the derelict areas, and, instead of dealing with the superficial crisis, we ought to be dealing with the real, fundamental crisis.

Last night Mr. Buchanan made a reference to the effect that a working man getting into such a mess would be deprived of his benefit, and Members shouted "No, no!" The Minister of Labour has gone away, but I would like to ask him whether, if a working man in any particular town got into a mess, left his job and went to live in another town, he would get Unemployment Benefit? No! In every part of the country workers are suffering from unemployment and the means test—suffering terrible poverty. That is the problem we ought to be discussing.

The only way in which we can overcome the forces that represent both sides of this trouble is to unite all the people we can for the purpose of solving the economic problem, the problem of unemployment, the abolition of the means test, the abolition of the unemployment assistance Regulations, construct huge schemes for the derelict areas and get a peace policy based on collective security.

It is on these lines that I appeal to Members of the Labour Party to support the Amendment and to go forward with a policy of peace and progress, appealing to the masses of the people, confident of getting their support.

The following members voted for the I.L.P. motion:

JAMES MAXTON, CAMPBELL STEPHEN,
WILLIAM GALLACHER, Dr. A. SALTER, GEORGE HARDIE.
JOHN McGOVERN & GEORGE BUCHANAN
acted as I.L.P. tellers.

65 LABOUR M.P.s VOTED THE OTHER WAY.

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