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## FOR POLITICAL AND ECONOMIC REALISM

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### Political Representation

#### EDITOR'S NOTE:

THE DEBATE IN THE IMPERIAL PARLIAMENT ON THE REPRESENTATION OF THE PEOPLE BILL IS IMPORTANT TO US BECAUSE OF ITS ACTUAL CONTENT, BUT ALSO FOR THE SUGGESTION IT CARRIES OF DETERMINATION, DEVELOPING SINCE LAST OCTOBER, TO MEDDLE WITH THE CONSTITUTION. THE EXTRACTS PREPARED FOR PUBLICATION IN *THE SOCIAL CREDITER* (see *T.S.C. March 6 and 13*) WILL BE CONTINUED AND CONCLUDED NEXT WEEK.

*House of Commons: February 16, 1948.*

#### Representation of the People Bill (*Cont'd.*)

[*Mr. Wilfrid Roberts* (Cumberland Northern) *is speaking*]:—

The 1945 election results were almost exactly like the 1924 election results, although it happened that in 1945 the Labour Party won the toss and in 1924 it was the Conservative Party. In 1945 48 *per cent.* of the electors returned 62 *per cent.* of those elected to this House. That was the same proportion which the Conservative Government of 1924 enjoyed. I do not know whether the Conservative Party have been having any doubts about this system. Very few of them had any doubts about it when it worked in their favour, but when the Leader of the Opposition spoke about the principle of one vote, one value, I was thinking that it was going to lead to something rather interesting. I wish he had developed the point, and explained how in practice the principle of one vote, one value, which he told us had always been the policy of the Conservative Party, would in fact work out. Unfortunately the Leader of the Opposition got on to a much more emotional subject and departed from that line of argument, from which we might have learned something interesting.

I turn to the Labour Party and ask them, are they satisfied with this system? It has worked for them once; are they quite sure it will continue, and that they can continue to have a majority, a large working majority in this House, but a minority of votes in the country? Is it not a rather unstable basis for great and sweeping reforms in our social system to have a minority of the electors behind the Government? After all, if we are increasingly likely to have a system of Single Chamber Government, it is most important that the Government should have the majority of the electors behind them. There has never been a party with a majority both in the country and in the House of Commons since the far off distant days when the Liberal Party had a majority. They are the last political party to have had a majority both in the country and in this House. In the last 25 years or

so it has become quite unfashionable to have both.

Is it really beyond the wit of man to devise a better system than this, because without any exaggeration it does not give us a House of Commons which really represents the will of the people? I do not think that the Home Secretary could have meant that the present system was really effectively carrying out the principles to which he referred; it does not, in fact. The speech of the hon. Member for Devizes (Mr. Hollis) interested me. He made the very good point, I thought, that the ideal House of Commons would consist of two parties and a sprinkling of Independents; perhaps ever a few Liberals might be allowed to come in. That interested me because while it is possible that that is the best form in which the wishes of the public can be expressed, there are some people who think that not two parties but one is the best way in which the will of the public can be expressed. I ask whether we have any more right to maintain a system which frequently completely distorts public opinion because we happen to have made up our minds that two political parties and a sprinkling of Independents, by which he meant the university seats, is the best for the country.

An hon. Member on the opposite side of the House used a phrase which rather shocked me, that it was in the best interests of the electors to have such and such a system. I am an unrepentant democrat. I still think that it is in the best interests of the electors to have their will expressed—that is the reason why they go to the poll—and the present system does not do it. Are those of the Labour Party who believe in progressive Government satisfied with the present situation, are they satisfied to occupy such a false position as their party does at the present time? The right hon. Member for the Scottish Universities (Sir J. Anderson) pointed out that universities had a system of election which did tend to make it possible for persons of individuality to represent the universities. That is a fair point. One of the other things which is wrong with the democratic system of this country is that it does ensure that the leaders of parties, or outstanding personalities, find a place in this House. There are so many examples of that that I need not go back to recall them.

There are other methods of electing a representative House, a representative assembly. There are many variants of various systems on the Continent and elsewhere. I do not want to go into the merits of those various systems, but to declare that some other system is bad—that, for example, the system employed in France is bad—does not rule out any change in our system. There are bad systems on the Continent. There are systems which lead to multiplicities of parties. There are constitutional forms which lead to instability of Government, but I would for a moment draw

attention to one system, that which has prevailed in the South of Ireland—

*Mr. Ede:* Look at the result last week.

*Mr. Roberts:* That is exactly the remark I expected to hear. On the other hand since 1922 there have been only two Governments in Eire, while there have been half a dozen or more in this country, so that on that score Eire can make a better showing than can Great Britain with our system. So far as stable Government is concerned, Eire has a much better record than this country. Considering that the Irish temperament is not one of a placid type, and that we in this country claim to much more conservative and cautious than the Irish politically, it is a remarkable fact that there have only been two Governments in Eire in all that time. The fact that at this particular moment, after all these years between 1922 and 1947, an indecisive result has come about only emphasises that their system has given decisive results.

*Mr. Skeffington-Lodge (Bedford):* Is the hon. Member not aware that there is widespread dissatisfaction with the particular system of proportional representation in Southern Ireland, and that because the recent General Election has led to an inconclusive result, Mr. de Valera is seriously pondering about introducing some change in regard to the whole system?

*Mr. Roberts:* That intervention illustrates a number of interesting points, but perhaps I might first conclude what I was saying. During the same period we in this country have had at least two General Elections which have given indecisive results. I refer to those of 1929 and 1923. Of course Mr. de Valera is now thinking of changing the rules because he has been defeated, but that is not to say that the rules were either right or wrong. Mr. de Valera says they have not worked out to suit him, but they did work to suit him for 16 years.

*Mr. Ede:* The hon. Gentleman has forgotten that the Liberals voted against proportional representation when the 1918 Measure was before the House.

*Mr. Roberts:* As it happens, I am not making a party speech. I am trying to point out that the system we have at the present time does not result in the election of a House of Commons which represents the wishes of the people. It scarcely even roughly represents them. In most of the General Elections before the war the Conservative party were, on an average, consistently 155 Members over-represented. What a difference it would have made to the history of this country and of the world if that had not been the case—[An HON. MEMBER: "Hear, hear"]. At least I get some agreement on that point. If the Liberal Party, or a small section of the Liberal Party, voted with the Conservatives in 1918, actually a majority of the Liberal Party voted for proportional representation. [Interruption.] Yes, they did. I have looked that up. A small section of the Liberal Party, plus the Conservatives, turned down proportional representation. As the result of that campaign and the work that has been put in since, there has been one small example of proportional representation introduced into our system, namely in the form of the university elections. Now the Labour Government are sweeping even that away. I would ask the Home Secretary to consider whether in some other way this system might not be tried out in practice. If it is too far for him to go across the Irish Channel to study results there, or in some of the British Dominions, could not we have an example here in this country?

The opportunity which presents itself in this Bill seems to be in connection with the London County Council elections. What happens at present in the London County Council elections is that both of the Members in any constituency belong to the majority party, and the whole of the minority is unrepresented. In the last election, out of some 60-odd seats there was only one seat in which the representation was split between two parties. That does not give a fair reflection of the views of the public. I would ask the Home Secretary to consider allowing some other system to be introduced there to give a little more fairness in the representation of the party which is in a minority. It is not the case of a third party, but of the second party not being represented at all.

To return to this phrase, "one vote, one value," of the Leader of the Opposition. At the present time there are constituencies in this country—where there are very substantial minorities—which, for 25 years, have never succeeded in recording a vote for a winning candidate. Those minorities have been completely disfranchised. They can go on voting away, but no effective result from their vote will ever appear. That is not one vote, one value. It is possible that a minority party—it happens to be the Liberal Party at the moment, but it may be some other minority party at some time—can poll several millions of votes in this country without obtaining any representation at all. It does not usually happen, but it could happen. I suggest that this system is far from an effective way of translating the will of the electors into results. I believe that a better system could be devised. I hope that the Home Secretary will give a little more thought to this, and will, during the Committee stage of the Bill, provide an opportunity for trying out some modification of the present system.

*Sir Arthur Salter (Oxford University):* . . . I need not, after the exchanges which have taken place, restate all the recommendations and the composition of the Speaker's Conference and what has happened since. The House knows that that conference, presided over by the Speaker, included a strong representation of Members of the Left and several Members who are now Ministers in this House. They know that, while on other matters there was dissent and division, there was on this matter a recommendation without any division at all. I quite understand that if, at such a conference—when, of course, Labour Members were in a minority—there had been some proposal on which they were strongly united as a whole, and on which they had been out voted, it would not be unreasonable, as *The Times* argued, that, after an intervening election which had changed the relative strength of the parties, a new Government might well consider they were entitled to continue the opposition they had made at the conference and now to make it effective.

But this was not such a case. This was a case of a proposal accepted without a division. Not only that. It was afterwards brought forward to the House. It was challenged here, not inappropriately, perhaps, by the hon. Gentleman who leads the Communist Party and by the hon. and learned Member for North Hammersmith (Mr. Pritt). Only 16 in a full House went into the Lobby against the proposal. [\*] The other Members of the Labour Party were led by Mr.

[\*] Following the Speaker's Conference a Representation of the People Bill came before the Commons in October, 1944. An Amendment proposing the abolition of the university vote, put forward by Mr. Gallacher and Mr. Pritt, was defeated by 152 votes to 16.—Editor, *The Social Crediter*.

Pethick-Lawrence into the majority Lobby, after explanatory comments such as have been quoted already.

I say, therefore, that this is a breach of a bargain, and a breach of one of the now recognised customs of the Constitution. But it is more than that, it is also a breach of a definite promise; because, as my right hon. Friend the Member for Woodford (Mr. Churchill) has pointed out, this question was raised in another place only a few months ago, in October, and the answer given about what was to be in this Bill was that it would be precisely what could be read in the Report of the Speaker's Conference, and other associated Reports. . . .

. . . If this decision of an all-party conference is thrown over in this way, is not the consequence likely to be in future that each party in turn, whether of the Right or the Left, will consider itself free to gerrymander the electorate in its own interests, so that the whole electoral system of this country will be subject to competitive and alternating mutilation as Government succeeds Government and party succeeds party? What a terrible prospect for the whole of Parliamentary government in this country! . . .

. . . I should like to add one thing to what I said just now about there being a breach of the custom of the Constitution and a breach of a pledge. It may seem an anticlimax to say that it is also a very gross breach of courtesy to have brought forward a proposal of this kind affecting all the universities without the slightest warning from any official quarter until 17 days ago. When I raised this point on Thursday, the Leader of the House asked me if I did not read the Press. The Home Secretary seemed to endorse that interjection in his speech today. Yes, Sir, I do read the Press. I had seen the rumours in the Press. On the other hand, I knew what was in the Report of the Speaker's Conference; I knew what the decision of this House had been in October, 1944; I knew what had been said by the Lord Chancellor as recently as last October. And in the light of that I did not believe the rumours in the Press. Have we indeed come to this, that when, on the one hand, we have a formal statement on behalf of the Government and on the other anonymous, unauthenticated rumours in the Press, we are to choose the latter and disregard the former? That is what the Leader of the House seems to imply. I hope not.

I owe a very deep apology to my constituents, for a number of them did see these rumours in the Press, and got into communication with me, and said, "Should we not do something about it?" I am afraid I replied, "Look at the Speaker's Conference Report. Look at the Lord Chancellor's statement. I cannot believe that any Government in the light of those would now do what is suggested in the Press." That was a mistake. . . .

. . . The three questions I wish to ask are these. Do the Government, at this time of all times, desire to strike this one additional blow at the professional classes? Do they, at this time of all times, desire to strike this blow—I confess, in this matter, a surprising blow, in view of the Government's previous record—at the universities and higher education? Lastly, do they, at this time of all times, when the Chancellor of the Exchequer is speaking in grave and, indeed, menacing terms of the dangers of totalitarianism in this country, desire to strike this blow at the Constitution and at the best traditions of British public life? For myself, I can only say, with Dr. Albert Mansbridge, that this is an afterthought to this Bill it is a bad afterthought, and I hope

the Government will think again.

*Mr. Hurd (Newbury)*: . . . However, I rise to make one case very briefly. I hope that this House will take the opportunity that this Bill affords to look again at the qualifications required for a candidate for Parliament. As the law now stands, he or she must be a British subject either by birth or by naturalisation. I think we should remind ourselves that we are today, for very good reasons, admitting large numbers of aliens into this country. There are many people who have great calls upon our compassion who are still in displaced persons' camps in Germany whom we expect to welcome to this country; there are many people who will quite soon be able to qualify for British nationality. Over Europe the extreme doctrines of the Left and the Right have taken hold. It is my view that we should do right and that it would be only reasonable to require that a candidate standing for our British Parliament should have had his roots in this country for at least one generation; that is to say, that it should be a required qualification that a man or woman standing as Parliamentary candidate should be British born.

There will be some who will say that that is going too far. I will be prepared to meet them by saying that a candidate for Parliament should be required to make a declaration that he is a British subject and to specify whether that is by birth or whether that is by naturalisation. I think he owes that to the electors whose support he is expecting to get at the poll. A man seeking a regular commission in the Services is required to be of British parents. That is a very right and proper requirement. Also, an applicant for a British passport has to say whether he is British by birth or by naturalisation, and that is shown on the passport. If that is a proper requirement for the obtaining of a British passport, then it is a proper requirement in a candidate standing for Parliament.

The other day, I asked the Home Secretary—by letter, because I did not wish to cause any embarrassment to any hon. Member—how many hon. Members were eligible to sit in this House by reason of acquiring British nationality by naturalisation rather than by birth. I wanted to see how big the problem is to-day, as a possible guide to how big it may be in years to come. Unhappily, the Home Secretary could not give me the information, and said that he did not feel the time and effort involved in getting it would be justified—[HON. MEMBERS: "Hear, hear."] Well, I think that is a piece of information we should have. Most of us—and I am sure the great majority of people in this country—want to feel that this is a British Parliament for British people.

. . . When the Secretary of State for Scotland replies tomorrow, I hope he will say something on this point. There are many people in the country who feel strongly about it. [\*]

*Mr. Driberg (Maldon)*: Rubbish! What a shameful thing to say.

*House of Commons, February 17, 1948.*

*Mr. Osbert Peake (Leeds, North)*: . . . It is perfectly clear from the concluding sentences of Mr. Speaker's letter, in which he reported to the Prime Minister the results of the Conference, that these unanimous conclusions were the result of a bargain, by no means dishonourable to those who

(Continued on page 5.)

[\*] Lieut.-Colonel Walter Smiles later brought up the same point, quoting the example of the United States of America. They received no answer.

## THE SOCIAL CREDITER

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### From Week to Week

Practically every visitor to these shores who does not come with some special interest to exploit, is struck by the sullen apathy of the general population. Words, written or spoken, are just sales talk for another gold brick.

The News-Film for January, in recording the assassination of Gandhi refers to him as "the loftiest soul in Asia, the greatest spiritual force of the last two thousand years." This is A.D. 1948.

Is it really necessary to look further for the explanation of the apathy of a population which is fed on this kind of stuff? We are more than ever convinced that if Gandhi had not contacted Smuts in South Africa, and conveniently transferred his activities to an arena in which they served the ends of Wall Street, instead of hindering them, he would have remained amongst the millions of Hindus whose one consuming ambition is to argue before an audience, whether in Court or "Conference." Which aspect of Gandhi is of vital interest to the British?

The interests in which General Smuts has laboured may be gathered from the comment of Mr. H. C. Armstrong in his informative "Grey Steel; J. C. Smuts, a Study in Arrogance" that he left his native country in 1916 "in a volley of curses" and arrived in the U.S.A. "in a whirlwind of applause." We look forward confidently to a panegyric from the "B."B.C. when and if General Smuts should prove to be mortal, that he was the greatest statesman since Julius Caesar, a military genius by comparison with whom Napoleon was a fumbling amateur, and a tireless labourer in the interests of the British Empire, and its transfer to suitable ownership.

In *The Scotsman* of March 8 under the heading of "The Middle East: Russia, the U.S., and Palestine" a correspondent whose letters will be familiar to our readers, W. L. Richardson, remarks "... it is not too safe to assume that 'Soviet' policies are necessarily made at the Kremlin, or, for that matter, inside Soviet territory at all ... The supreme lesson ... to be learnt from these fateful years ... is that on certain matters of the highest policy the U.S.A. and the U.S.S.R. have acted in the highest accord."

In pursuit of this thesis, the letter proceeds: "From the point of view of the ultimate goal, it does not seem that the successful outcome of war, in the military sense, matters very much."

This statement will clearly bear a great deal of elaboration.

tion. What is probably meant by it, and what is certainly true, is that the promoter of prize fights is careful to see that so long as there is a fight, and it is a big fight, his profits will be a handsome solace to him for any catastrophe which may overtake one or both of the contestants. In fact, if both contestants are nearly killed, the affair will be nearly perfect. But if we analyse this situation, it would appear that *both* gladiators must really be serving the primary interest of the promoter. We know beyond peradventure that prizefighters have no quarrel with each other, neither do they like fighting. They are doing something which is essentially irrational—insane. Without the promoter, and his interests, there would be no fight. For the first time in history mankind has an opportunity to get the promoter into the ring. Signs are not wanting that the New York Jews are seriously alarmed at the turn events are taking in Palestine. If war starts there, they will, for the first time, be in it. The British Honduras and Falkland Islands episodes are attempts to shift the locus, and have evidently failed. If the British manage to draw out of Palestine (and we shall see every effort to upset the present decision to that effect) the Jews will have to find an army, and *call it the Jewish Army*, because U.N. won't. That will be the most hopeful development of the past thousand years, and the first justifiable war of modern times will, we hope, be fought to a finish ("unconditional surrender") since it is clear that nothing else will discourage the Promoters and their jackals.

May we repeat, we are under no delusion that wisdom was born with us. If the ostensible Leaders of this country cannot see that the only beneficiary of a national war is an international power, it is not because much intelligence is required—it is because they are traitors. And, if they cannot see that an international power is potentially the weakest of all powers, they are incompetent traitors.

Wernher Sombart, an able Jew, wrote that "Wars are the Jews' harvests." Rotation of crops is a feature of sound husbandry.

### "Men . . . have made us believe"

" . . . The notion that two such highly placed persons as a King and an Archbishop should have been members of a heretical movement, and one with such pagan affiliations, will certainly come as a jolt to many readers. Some of them will probably dislike the idea for the general reason that its concealment until now implies a very successful conspiracy in the past to hide the facts. If this thesis is true, they will feel, then both we and the historians have been very effectually hoaxed—and English people in particular are perhaps inclined to resent the supposition that they could be the victims of a highly skilled plan to put them off the scent. There have been, in my opinion, several such successful conspiracies in history and literature. We should not rule them out of court because to admit them as successful means to acknowledge that we have been misled by a sustained and astute co-operative effort in planned intelligence. I am labouring this point that we moderns and especially modern Englishmen should not impatiently brush aside a somewhat esoteric account of historic incidents out of the pride which will not admit that men in the past have made us believe for a long time what they wanted us to believe. . . ."—Canon V. A. Demant. (*Preface to Mr. H. Ross Williamson's "The Arrow and the Sword."*)

The Constitutional Issue:

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participated in it. May I, Mr. Speaker, quote your words?

"The conclusions set out in this Report, and the amount of general agreement that we have achieved undoubtedly represent for all a subordination of opinions sincerely held which would not have been possible unless all Members of the Conference had been determined from the first to tackle without bias the thorny problems which confronted us."

. . . It surprises me now that the right hon. Gentleman should come forward and state that there was never any agreement, either in the Conference or in the House, that these recommendations should be carried out.

*Mr. H. Morrison:* The argument yesterday, which was provoked by the rather fervid speech of the Leader of the Opposition, was that it was a bargain which committed any Government and the Parliamentary parties in this present Parliament. The right hon. Gentleman has not adequately quoted what I said. What I said yesterday was . . .

*Mr. Peake:* I am obliged to the right hon. Gentleman. He would make things clearer if he would state categorically now whether he admits there was a bargain and agreement in the Speaker's Conference in 1944. Does he agree to that?

*Mr. Morrison:* Certainly, in the Speaker's Conference in 1944 there were compromises, there were accommodations, that were reached, and the consequence was that I had to defend some of these compromises and agreements in the legislation on behalf of the Government of the day. I have no grievances. I did my duty. There was compromise in the Government, but it all related to action in the Parliament which ended in the middle of 1945.

*Mr. Peake:* I am much obliged to the right hon. Gentleman. He has made it clear that yesterday, when he said there was no bargain, he was saying that there was no bargain that would extend beyond the life of that Parliament.

*Mr. Morrison* indicated assent.

*Mr. Peake:* I am much obliged, because in an interjection only three minutes earlier the Secretary of State for Scotland said this—I will not quote it all:

"But, since the election, the Conservatives have broken that agreement by using the university vote to send back to this House Conservatives whom, at the General Election, the electors rejected at the polls."

I will repeat it:

"since the Election the Conservatives have broken that agreement"—

*Mr. George Thomas* (Cardiff, Central): What agreement?

*Mr. Peake:* The agreement reached in the Speaker's

Conference, to which reference has been made. The right hon. Gentleman sitting beside the Secretary of State said just now that the agreement was for the duration of that Parliament, and that Parliament alone—

*The Secretary of State for Scotland (Mr. Woodburn):* I have not said anything different.

*Mr. Peake:* The right hon. Gentleman has. I will read it once more, as the right hon. Gentleman cannot take it in.

"Since the election, the Conservatives have broken that agreement"—

That was a year after the election. The Secretary of State for Scotland accepts the position that there was an agreement and that the agreement continued to operate after the General Election?

*Mr. Woodburn:* No.

*Mr. Peake:* But the right hon. Gentleman did. When he speaks later he must explain what his words meant. They were plain:

"Since the election, the Conservatives have broken that agreement by using the university vote to send back to this House Conservatives whom, at the General Election, the electors rejected at the polls."—[OFFICIAL REPORT, February 16, 1948; Vol. 447, c. 865 and 867.]

*Hon. Members:* Got him.

*Sir Arthur Salter (Oxford University):* Will the right hon. Gentleman complete the argument by referring to the apparent acceptance and endorsement of the agreement by a statement in another place in October last, which was quoted by my right hon. Friend the Leader of the Opposition?

*Mr. Peake:* I am much obliged to the right hon. Gentleman. Is it not perfectly clear that there is a difference between the Lord President of the Council, who says that any agreement made was automatically dissolved by the intervention of the election, and the Secretary of State for Scotland, who accuses the Conservatives of having broken the agreement 18 months after the election was over? Clearly, the right hon. Gentleman the Secretary of State for Scotland takes a precisely opposite view from that expressed by the Lord President of the Council. . . .

. . . I say that those 11 gentlemen who attended that Conference, Socialist Members of this House, did not go there only in their capacity as individuals. I have not the slightest doubt that they went in a representative capacity. That is, in fact, clear from Mr. Speaker's letter to the Prime Minister of May 24, in which he said:

"Invitations were issued roughly in proportion to party strength in the House of Commons, and we also intended to secure as far as possible representation of the various shades of opinion, different types of constituency, and all parts of the country."

Who were some of these 11 gentlemen? There were two members of the National Executive of the Labour Party, the Minister of National Insurance and the hon. Member for Dagenham. There was the Vice-Chairman of the Labour Party in the House of Commons, Lord Pethick-Lawrence; there was Lord Ammon, Chief Whip of the Labour Party in another place, and there was the Secretary of State of Scotland, who is described, I have no doubt accurately, in "Dod's Parliamentary Companion," as the "Scottish Secretary of the Labour Party."

Can it be believed that they went into this Conference merely as individuals, that they went without any instructions from the headquarters to which they themselves belonged? Is it not ridiculous to suppose that they were not acting in

that Conference on behalf of the Socialist Party as a whole? I submit, therefore, that any agreement made—and it is now admitted that an agreement was made—was binding on the Socialist Party as a whole, as well as upon those individuals who attended the Conference— . . .

. . . [the settlement] should, of course, last either until all parts of the bargain have been implemented, or a new Speaker's Conference has been assembled to express a different view.

What would the Lord President of the Council have said, supposing we had won the 1945 election, and had come forward at this time with a Bill to disfranchise seven million municipal voters, and had said, "Oh, yes, the agreement made at the Speaker's Conference was only binding until the end of that Parliament. Parliament is completely free"? The right hon. Gentleman says that every new Parliament is completely free. Of course, Parliament is always free, but parties are not free, nor are individual Members. If individual Members of parties are freed by the mere fact of a general election, from all their past pledges and promises, what on earth is the good of election addresses and party manifestos?

I think that by now I have satisfied the House, first, that there was a bargain; secondly, that the bargain bound not only individuals but the Socialist Party as a whole—[HON. MEMBERS: "No."] It did not of course bind every person in the Socialist Party, but it did bind the party.

*Mr. H. Morrison:* For all time?

*Mr. Peake:* Of course not for all time.

*Mr. H. Morrison:* How long?

*Mr. Peake:* Either until the bargain was implemented, or until a new Speaker's Conference had assembled and had agreed upon something different. . . .

. . . I think I have established three propositions. First, there was the bargain; secondly, by virtue of their representation on the Conference, the Socialist Party are bound by it; and, thirdly, in the minds of those who made it the bargain would not cease to be operative through the intervention of a general election, and any change of Government which might result therefrom. If this agreement binds the Socialist Party, it clearly binds the Members of His Majesty's Government, who are the leaders of the Socialist Party. It more especially binds those Members of the Government who were Members of the Government in 1944 which established the Speaker's Conference, and which accepted the recommendations of that Conference. I have been waiting throughout this Debate for somebody to unfold a defence to the very grave charges of breach of faith, made yesterday by my right hon. Friend the Member for Woodford. The case of the Lord President appeared to be—or was yesterday—that no agreement had been made, but that point, I gather, he has conceded in the course of my speech this afternoon. Secondly, he says the dissolution of Parliament in 1945 dissolved the agreement made, and absolved the parties to it from its further fulfilment. I hope he will tell us how that can be so, when part of the agreement—the part he wanted to secure—had already been carried out. Moreover, if it is claimed that the dissolution of Parliament put an end to this agreement, surely that claim should have been made immediately after the General Election? We should not have had to wait two and a half years for this claim that the agreement reached in the Speaker's Conference was dissolved in July, 1945.

How came it that the Lord Chancellor was allowed to make a statement in another place, only three months ago, that the Bill to be introduced would contain the recommendations of Mr. Speaker's Conference? . . .

. . . Let me make it clear that, in my opinion, honour would not be satisfied by leaving these great issues in Committee to a free vote of the House. . . .

We cannot, and we shall not, vote against the Second Reading of this Bill, whose main purpose is to secure more accurate representation of the will of the people at the next Election. We earnestly hope, however, that between now and the Committee stage the Government themselves will consider introducing Amendments to give effect to the bargain struck in 1944. . . .

*The Secretary of State for Scotland (Mr. Woodburn):* . . . The Speaker's Conference met under peculiar conditions. The right hon. Gentleman the Member for Woodford was Prime Minister at the time. He laid it down that for that Parliament no legislation which was controversial should be introduced. The Speaker's Conference was appointed with that guidance. We were asked to give agreed recommendations to the Government of the day. The Conference came to agreed recommendations. As both right hon. Gentlemen opposite have said, one cannot have agreed recommendations without agreement. We admit that right away. The Lord President of the Council has admitted, that we agreed at that Conference. There is no doubt about that fact. The point is that none of the arguments which the right hon. Gentlemen opposite have deduced from that follow at all. It is a *non sequitur*. The right hon. Member for Woodford yesterday made the case that there was a breach of that agreement. Since there was an agreement he said we had broken it. I simply point out that the Conservatives have broken that agreement—

*Mr. Churchill: How?*

*Mr. Woodburn:* I am coming to that point. It might surprise everybody to know that at that Conference the Labour Party, by a majority, agreed to support the retention of the university vote. They did that because they had become convinced—

*Mr. Peake:* I understood the right hon. Gentleman to say that the Socialist representatives, by a majority, agreed to accept university representation. Surely, it was a unanimous recommendation?

*Mr. Woodburn:* Let me put it another way. The Labour Party representatives were not unanimous that the university vote should be retained, but a majority of them had been persuaded that they ought to agree to it.

*Mr. Godfrey Nicholson (Farnham):* At a private meeting?

*Mr. Woodburn:* No. In their individual capacity they had become convinced at the Conference. The reason was that during the war it had become apparent that the university vote was being used for the purpose for which it was destined. One of the factors which largely contributed was the wonderful contribution which Miss Eleanor Rathbone made in the House of Commons. There was also Professor A. V. Hill and Sir John Boyd Orr. . . .

. . . During that time there was a *prima facie* case that the universities were, for the first time, using their votes for the purpose for which they were destined. The Labour Party, therefore, were almost convinced that the universities were

going to use the vote as it was intended to be used. Since the General Election, the university elections have reverted to pre-war form; in other words, they have become pocket boroughs where Conservatives who could not get seats at the General Election can be seated at their convenience.

*Sir A. Salter:* Does the right hon. Gentleman mean to say, on behalf of himself and the Government, that the reason—or the principal reason—for introducing a proposal to abolish the 12 university seats permanently is that, in the last year or two, two university constituencies have elected two Conservative Members?

*Mr. Woodburn:* No. I am entitled to comment upon this claim that the university vote is to be used for carrying out the purpose of providing non-party contributions to the House of Commons. . . .

*Mr. Churchill:* Before we leave this important point, I should like to have clearly established the point which the Secretary of State for Scotland is making. He says there was an agreement about the universities, because he was of the opinion that the university Members in the last Parliament were non-party, but that, since the election, because two Conservatives have been elected, he considers there has been a breach of that agreement. He wants, therefore, to abolish the representation of the universities. [*Interruption.*] Surely, that is the position which he has taken up? Is not this an attempt to affront and even intimidate, the free voting in very large constituencies of men who have had the advantage of graduating at a university, and can this be the basis of such a change?

*Mr. Woodburn:* The right hon. Gentleman has been using the word "agreement." It can be one of various forms. He said yesterday that there was a definite agreement, a definite bargain. There was no such thing as a definite bargain at the Speaker's Conference, which discussed these things in the main, on their merits, and came to decisions on the merits, with the exception of the one question about redistribution and partial redistribution, and of the other question of the abolition of the spouse's vote, because, clearly, there could be no agreement on the business vote. The Labour Party is opposed to it, and the Conservatives are in favour of it, and, clearly, no agreement was possible. So far as agreement was concerned before the General Election, it was clearly confined to that one item which I have mentioned.

*Mr. K. Lindsay:* I would like to get this point absolutely clear. Does my right hon. Friend say that the bargain or agreement at this Conference was based on the assumption that Members elected for universities would be of a special order? That is very important. The right hon. Gentleman has said that today, and he said it yesterday.

*Mr. Woodburn:* The point is that at the Speaker's Conference people were discussing these things on their merits. I was pointing out that, although the Labour Party was normally opposed to university representation, they had become, to some extent, almost persuaded about its virtues by the example of Miss Eleanor Rathbone and some other distinguished people who represented the universities during that period, and, had they continued—

*Mr. H. Strauss:* May I ask the right hon. Gentleman a simple question? Is it his case that, at the postwar by-election following the death of Miss Rathbone, the Combined English Universities ought not to have been allowed to have a Tory candidate, or ought not to have been allowed to let

him win?

*Mr. Woodburn:* I think I have made my point. [Interruption.] I do not expect the right hon. Gentleman to agree with it; I have made it, that is all. . . .

*Mr. Henry Strauss* (Combined English Universities): . . . I must say a word about the constitutional position. I shall add little to what was said this afternoon from the Opposition Front Bench, except that it must be absolutely obvious that if we do not proceed by attempting to get agreement in a Speaker's Conference and carrying such agreement out, the result must be that after every general election there may be a constitutional revolution. The Leader of the House the other day and the Home Secretary yesterday taunted the university Members and the universities with not having seen what was coming to them and for not having noted this threat in the papers. Several speakers have mentioned the statement by the Lord Chancellor in another place, and I do not need to refer to that again, but I wish to refer to what was said on the same day in this House. My right hon. Friend the Member for Warwick and Leamington (Mr. Eden) questioned the Prime Minister about the words contained in the Gracious Speech, and expressed the hope that the recommendations of the Speaker's Conference would be followed. In answer, the Prime Minister used these words:

"The right hon. Gentleman raised some points with regard to the Redistribution of Seats Bill. That is brought forward from the Speaker's Conference, and I am sure he will await the Bill before he passes any comments on the details of it."—[OFFICIAL REPORT, October 21, 1947; Vol. 443, c. 33.]

On the 21st of that month the Prime Minister said "await the Bill," and the Lord Chancellor in another place said that the report of the Speaker's Conference and two other documents showed precisely what it was proposed to do. Subsequently we read rumours in the Press that the seats would be abolished.

One of the graduate bodies of the universities that I represent then wrote to me and said, "You see these threats in the papers. Ought we not to take action?" In reply, I called their attention to the recommendations of the Speaker's Conference and to the answer given by the Prime Minister here and the Lord Chancellor in another place, and I said that I believed that the Prime Minister, the Lord Chancellor and the Home Secretary, who was going to conduct the Bill, were all honourable men, and that I thought it would be intolerable to believe, and act on, Press rumours. Now the Leader of the House and the Home Secretary taunt the universities and their representatives because we had some faith in their colleagues. Last Saturday the graduate body of one of the universities I represent invited graduates of that and all other universities, and, at their invitation, I addressed them on this proposal. Socialists were present and proclaimed themselves Socialists. With an insignificant minority they were unanimously against this proposal.

I feel passionately about this matter. [Laughter.] I know hon. Members opposite think it is amusing to feel passionately about anything. I believe this threat to the university franchise is an injury to the universities and to this House; but, apart from the injury which it can do to those two institutions, I believe, above all, that the proposal is completely stupid. It is not only Tories and Liberals who now realise the threat to freedom in this country. [Laughter.] I thought it was not only the Tories and the Liberals, but perhaps it is. I thought

from some recent speeches of the Chancellor of the Exchequer that he, too, held that view. The last people in most countries to go down before totalitarian ideas and threats to freedom are the universities. When one is very busy nationalising the production and distribution of most other things, it is very easy to be tempted to go on to nationalise the production and distribution of ideas. Against that the universities will always stand, in the interests of the public and of the nation, and, above all, in the interests of truth. . . .

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