

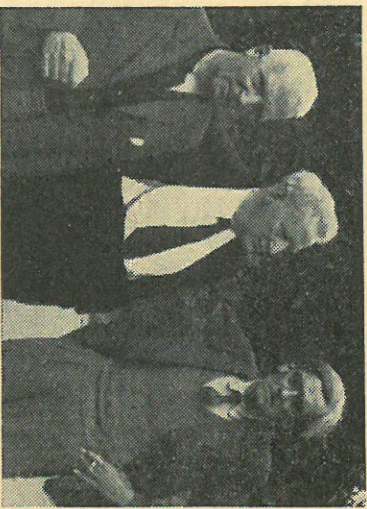
# Prison to Parliament

in the audience, I shall repeat that statement for their benefit. *The men should strike and down tools.*"

Maxton and McDougall were arrested and were refused bail. From Duke Street Prison, Glasgow, Maxton sent a characteristically witty letter to the I.L.P. annual conference, which was meeting at Newcastle. "It is only the fact that I am confined to my room that prevents me being with you," he wrote. "It is a valuable and instructive experience—and everyone should have at least ten days in prison annually for the good both of their health and their immortal souls."

Whilst in prison, awaiting trial, Maxton took advantage of a visit from Miss Cissie McCallum, a fellow teacher, to become engaged to her. "The Defence of the Realm Act," wrote Tom Johnson in *Forward*, "has no terrors for the little lad with wings and avions."

Tried in Edinburgh by the Lord Justice General,



James Maxton with his Parliamentary colleagues, Jo McGovern (left), and Campbell Stephen (centre), at the 1945 summer school at Bangor.

Lord Strathclyde (better known as the Liberal politician, Mr. Alexander Ure), Maxton and McDougall were each sentenced to a year's imprisonment. They served it in Calton Jail, Edinburgh, where W. Gallacher and John Muir were also imprisoned. Maxton saw the barbarities of the prison system, but his philosophy and sense of humour brought him through without harm. He persuaded his gaolers to form a branch of the Police and Prison Warders' Trade Union, and some of them, even, to become members of the I.L.P.

## Worked in Shipyard

Maxton was not permitted to go back to school-teaching. He had a period of unemployment and then got a job at the dry-land shipyard of Messrs. Alley and Macdellan, at Polmadie. In turns he worked as player's helper, shipping clerk, labourer and red-leader. He proved himself a good workman and was respected by and popular among his fellow-workers.

It was inevitable that Maxton should be asked to become Parliamentary candidate. He accepted an invitation from the Montrose Burghs I.L.P., but in 1916 it recognised reluctantly that Bridgeton had a stronger claim. The election did not come until 1918. It was the khaki "coupon" election, held amidst all the jingoism of the military victory just achieved, yet Maxton, anti-war jail-bird, ran his Coalition opponent close. The figures were: MacCallum Scott (Coalition), 10,887; Maxton, 7,860; Miss Murray (Ind. Lib.), 991.

The following year Maxton was elected to the Glasgow School Board, serving until 1922. He put up a great fight against the notorious Circular 51, which limited the school-feeding powers of Education Authorities. He interviewed the Secretary of State for Scotland, Mr. Robert Munro, K.C.—who had conducted the Crown case at Maxton's trial. Jimmie pointed out that some 16,000 children would be handed over to the care of the Poor Law, and described the policy of the Scottish Office as "intolerable and inhuman." By now Maxton was working full time for the I.L.P. In 1918 he became organiser for the Scottish Division and then for the Glasgow Federation. He retained this post until he was elected to Parliament in 1922.

Maxton's marriage to Cissie McCallum took place in 1919. They searched all Glasgow for a house. House owners and agents, when they learned Maxton's identity, informed them regularly that there was "nothing suitable." They had to begin married life in furnished lodgings. Later they got a Council house. It was in a "tough" district of Glasgow, but the cleanly comfort of their home was wonderful to them.

Cissie Maxton was not strong. A severe illness with rheumatic fever left her heart weakened. In 1921 their baby, named once more James Maxton, was born. The baby was ill, the mother was ill. When the child was about eighteen months, he became seriously ill. Cissie Maxton was also still weak, but father and mother fought night and day to save the boy. His life was saved, but the mother sacrificed hers. She overstrained her heart and died in the struggle.

Only once did Maxton ever refer to this tragedy. It was in a Commons debate, when he was protesting against economy at the expense of care for infants' lives. Dr. Walter Elliot had minimised the effects of the saving:

"In the course of his professional career," commented Maxton, "the hon. gentleman must have seen thousands of infants under one year suffering, and he must have seen the parents watching over the little ones, hovering between life and death. I only saw one case, and that made a mark on me I shall never lose. I saw a mother struggling with the last ounce of her energy to save the life of an infant, and, in saving it, she lost her own. I am not interested in the statistics of this. I am interested in the tens of thousands of fathers and mothers to-night who are watching over their babies, wondering whether they are going to live or die. If I can strike the public conscience to see that this is absolutely wrong and unjustifiable in a Christian nation, I should think I had rendered some service to my country."

## Becomes M.P.

The "Coupon" Government came to an end in 1922. Maxton stood again for Bridgeton, and this time won by the large majority of 7,698. He converted not only the electorate. His opponent, MacCallum Scott, was converted and subsequently joined the I.L.P.

Glasgow, as a city, had "gone red." Of the twelve Labour candidates, ten were elected. The Prime Minister, Mr. Bonar Law, only held the Central Division by a handful of votes over Rosslyn Mitchell. The Clyde Group was sent off to Westminster amidst scenes which are unique in Scottish history.

On Sunday, November 20, 1922, the eve of their departure, meetings to "dedicate the newly-elected M.P.s to the service of the People" were held in the two largest halls of Glasgow, the St. Andrew's Hall and the City Hall. The meetings were religious in their fervour. An address of dedication, written by Rosslyn Mitchell, was read whilst all stood. It recorded the infinite gratitude of the new Members "to the pioneer minds of past generations who, by their services and sacrifices, have opened up the path for the freedom of the people." A series of promises of service followed to the men who had fought in the war, to the homeless, the aged, the widowed, the workless, the ill, "to those who have fallen in the struggle of life and are in prison." Finally came this promise:

"In all things they will abjure vanity and self-aggrandisement, recognising that they are the honoured servants of the people, and that their only righteous purpose is to promote the welfare of their fellow-citizens and the well-being of mankind."

In the evening Socialists came from all parts of the West of Scotland to Victory Demonstrations in Glasgow. The largest Picture Palaces in every district were engaged and everywhere overflow meetings had to be organised. Over 3,000 people packed the Olympia in Bridgeton where Maxton spoke.

"People talk about the atmosphere of the House of Commons getting the better of the Labour men," said Maxton in his speech. "They will see the atmosphere of the Clyde getting the better of the House of Commons. All the Labour Members from this city are personal friends. We are not leaving Glas-

gow as so many individuals, but as a team working towards a goal—and that goal is the abolition of poverty."

The new M.P.s, with their wives, had supper together as guests of the Glasgow I.L.P. Federation before catching their trains to London. As they approached St. Enoch Station they met a crowd such as they and Glasgow had never seen before in its central streets. They had to press their way through like Hollywood stars, whilst the people cheered and sang. On the station steps James Houston conducted the William Morris choir: "Jerusalem," the "Red Flag," and the "International." Above the choir a large red flag waved.

One hundred and twenty thousand people filled the square, and overflowed into Argyle Street and nearby thoroughfares. Maxton reached the station platform, his back bruised with thumping, his hands aching with clasps. From a truck he addressed the most frenzied audience he had ever faced. He made fun of Bonar Law's election slogan "Peace and Tranquillity" by paraphrasing a hymn from childhood's memory:

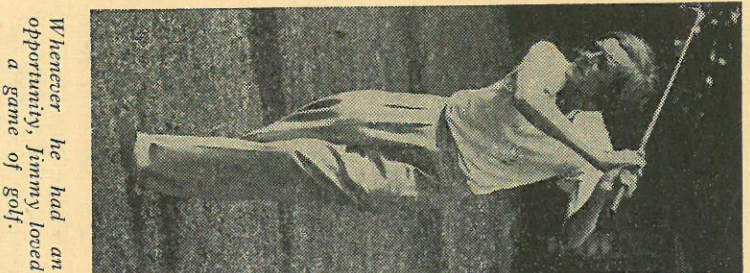
"Bonar, seek not yet repose,  
Cast the dream of rest away;  
Thou art in the midst of foes—  
Watch and Pray."

The Clyde Group kept their word when they got to Westminster. The opening day of Parliament, when the King's Speech is introduced, is generally short. The Scotsmen kept the House sitting until the early hours of the morning, voicing the claims of the unemployed. Maxton did not speak on this occasion. When he did so a few days later the subject was also unemployment. He remarked that after listening to the speeches of the Front Bench he had concluded he would "never become one of the great statesmen." "Thank God!" exclaimed a Member. "Yes, thank God very heartily," responded Maxton.

Before he had been in the House nine months, Maxton was suspended. The occasion was historic. The Scottish Estimates were being discussed. His University colleague, Dr. Walter Elliot, already Under-Secretary for Health, had spoken complacently. Joe Sullivan, Miners' Member for Bothwell, shook the complacency. Unfortunately, he remarked, the Government proposed to save money by cutting down on the treatment of tuberculosis and the care of mothers and babies. "Heart! Heart!" cheered Sir Frederick Banbury, Tory Member for City of London. "I do not object to the interruption," said Sullivan, "but if the honourable gentleman had to bring up his

apartment house, or have his daughter give birth to a child in a one-apartment house, he would think differently."

The debate proceeded quietly until Maxton rose. He was evidently stirred deeply. He compared health in England and Scotland. In Scotland there had been 12,472 cases of tuberculosis. For a similar population in England the number would have been 3,193 less. In Bridgeton 1,935 infants died who would have lived in English conditions. Then, with an emotion he found hard to restrain, Maxton made the personal reference to the death of his wife which has already been quoted.



Whenever he had an opportunity, Jimmy loved a game of golf.

"The whole position is glossed over in the report," exclaimed Maxton. "The honourable and gallant gentleman says the withdrawal of milk and food supplies to mothers has no effect reflected in the statistics. Does he, as a medical man, mean to tell me that the withdrawal of milk from a baby gives it a better chance in life than to continue the provision of the milk? He cannot say that the withdrawal of these things did not make the figures