

OBITUARY

LORD MAYBRAY-KING

First Labour Speaker of the Commons

Lord Maybray-King, PC, a Deputy Speaker of the House of Lords since 1971, died yesterday at the age of 85. As Sir Horace King, he was Speaker of the House of Commons from 1965 to 1970, the first in history to be chosen from the Labour ranks.

He had represented the Itchen Division of Southampton from 1955 to 1970 and the Test Division for five years before that.

King's success as Speaker of the House of Commons rested largely on his ability to balance the claims of tradition and reform at a time when Parliament's conduct of its affairs had come under lively questioning.

Change for its own sake made no appeal to a man so deeply versed in history and procedure and so sensitive to the appeal of ancient usage. The test he applied to any proposal to jettison a custom hallowed by time was whether or not it served the cause of efficiency. A reform which he had no hesitation in helping to effect was a quickening of the momentum of Question Hour.

His capacity for firmness with Ministers, as with backbenchers, owed much not only to his years of experience on the Chairman's Panel but to his possession of all the qualities of the best type of headmaster. His fatherly tolerance did not extend to standing any nonsense.

He was one of the best raconteurs in the House, a virtuoso on the piano and piano accordion, whose range as a composer embraced not only lively ballads but at least one charming Christmas carol, "Is the Little King Sleeping?".

Entertaining children was one of his hobbies. There could be little room for pomposity in the make-up of a Speaker who within a couple of months of attaining the position could be found leading a party of schoolchildren in rollicking songs or organizing a treasure-hunt along the corridors of the Palace of Westminster.

He was born Horace Maybray King on May 25, 1901, the son of John William King of Newcastle upon Tyne. He was educated at Norton Council School, Stockton Secondary School, and King's College London. He graduated



with first class honours in 1922 and took his PhD in 1940.

He was head of the English department at Taunton's School, Southampton, from 1937 to 1947 and headmaster of Regent's Park Secondary School in the same city until 1950, the year in which he entered Parliament as Labour member for the Test division. He had unsuccessfully contested New Forest and Christchurch in 1945, and was for many years leader of the Labour group on Hampshire County Council, and an alderman.

He quickly established himself in the Commons as a thoughtful and persuasive advocate of Labour policy on education, and as a man of cultivated literary tastes. Within four years, he was appointed to the Speaker's Panel of Chairmen of Committees and steadily won golden opinions for the skill, impartiality and good humour with which he carried out his duties.

It was no surprise when, in November, 1964, he was elected chairman of Ways and Means and Deputy Speaker. Seven months later he was sworn of the Privy Council.

Little did anyone guess that, in a few months, death would remove the Speaker, Sir Harry Hylton-Foster, and that on Horace King would soon fall the burden of guiding a House in which the tide towards reform was running strongly. His election that October to the Speakership was unanimous; it was a sign of the times that the procedure was

telescoped into a fraction of the customary time.

Since his election to the Chair, he had been trying to implement recommendations from the Procedure Committee for tightening up Question Hour. His methods did not lack the headmasterly touch. Long supplementaries and ministerial answers brought prompt admonitions: even the Prime Minister and the Leader of the Opposition were told to keep them shorter. The result of this campaign was that King was able to report that in the first month of the session a third more questions had been orally answered than the average for the first month of the previous ten sessions.

But King never gave an impression of bustling. His rulings were invariably delivered with deliberation, the fruit of careful thought. If he felt he had misjudged a member, his apology was prompt.

In April, 1966, his re-election as Speaker was automatic, and when the House rose for the Whitsun Recess he went on a visit to the United States. While he was there, his wife, Victoria, whom he had married in 1924, died suddenly in Southampton.

He announced his retirement in December, 1970, and in 1971 was made a life peer, taking the title of Lord Maybray-King. In that year, too, he was made a Deputy Speaker of the House of Lords, a position whose duties he tended to find onerous as the years went by, and he found it increasingly difficult to attend the House.

He was a devoted honorary treasurer of Help the Aged from 1972, president of the Spina Bifida Association, and sat on the BBC Complaints Commission from 1971 to 1974. He was a Deputy Lieutenant for Hampshire, and the recipient of several honorary degrees.

He published or edited several books on subjects that ranged from Homer and Macaulay to Hansard and the duties of the Speaker.

In 1967, he married, second, Una Porter. She died in 1978, and he married, third, in 1981, Mrs Ivy Duncan Forster. This marriage was dissolved last year, and he married, fourth, in March this year, Sheila, a former family friend. There was a daughter of the first marriage.

LORD MAYBRAY-KING

Mr Hugh Faulkner, OBE, writes:

I was Director of Help the Aged from its beginning in 1961 until 1983 and during that time the contribution of Lord Maybray-King to the growth of Help the Aged was profound.

When he agreed to become Honorary Treasurer the cause of the elderly, both at home and overseas, was only beginning to be recognized by the general public, but it was one which he embraced with enthusiasm and gusto.

He gave his time unstintingly, and was available for advice at all times. His integri-

ty and insight, combined with his assessment of people and policies, made him a tower of strength.

When he joined Help the Aged in 1972 as Honorary Treasurer the income was just under £1.8 million. He saw with delight the organization's funds rise by 1983 to £10 million, placing it among the ten leading charities.

His compassion for the old and needy was always at the forefront of his mind. His wise guidance, sympathy and encouragement helped those working for the cause to see problems in perspective and gave them courage to fight for what was right.

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P. 101.

Labour's first Speaker dies aged 85

Lord Maybray-King, aged 85, the first Labour MP to become a Speaker of the House of Commons, died yesterday in Southampton's Royal South Hants hospital.

As Dr Horace King, MP for Southampton Itchen, he was Speaker from 1965 until his retirement in 1971 and presided over some of the stormiest parliamentary sessions of the first Wilson administration, when the Government's overall majority fell to two.

He won a seat in the Commons in 1955.

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MAYBRAY-KING on Wednesday 3rd September peacefully in hospital. The Right Honourable Lord Horace Maybray-King MA. PC. Phd. Aged 85 years. Dearly Beloved Husband of Lady Sheila Catherine Maybray-King. Loving Father of Margaret Eleanor Wilson, loving Grandfather of John, Louise and Elizabeth and Great Grandfather of Emma and Gareth Wilson. The funeral will take place 12 noon Wednesday 10th September at St Mary's Church, Southampton, followed by private cremation. Family flowers only please. Donations in Memory, if desired, to 'Spina Bifida', C/O Rev David Langford, 4 Cobbett Road, Bitterne Park Southampton

LORD MAYBRAY-KING

Ronald Bedford writes:

Your obituary of Lord Maybray-King made no mention of one aspect of his work that gave a new lease of life to thousands.

I refer to his skill in piloting to the Statute Book the Corneal Graft Act of 1952.

Horace King, MP, as he then was, worked tirelessly for

this great cause, along with the late eminent eye surgeon, Sir Benjamin Rycroft.

It was my privilege to see their contribution at first-hand, as I helped them with the campaign to inform Parliament and public of what this legislation would mean to many who would otherwise have been condemned to a life of blindness.

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