

An Indian Doctor and His Family

25 Mill Road at the Turn of the Twentieth Century

The first doctor in the surgery, founded c1895, was Upendra Krishna Dutt. He lived and practised here with his family until 1921—at this point he and his Swedish wife Anna retired to Leatherhead, his two sons Clemens and Rajani were involved in full time political work in London, and his daughter Elna was working in Switzerland for the International Labour Organisation.

Upendra Krishna Dutt

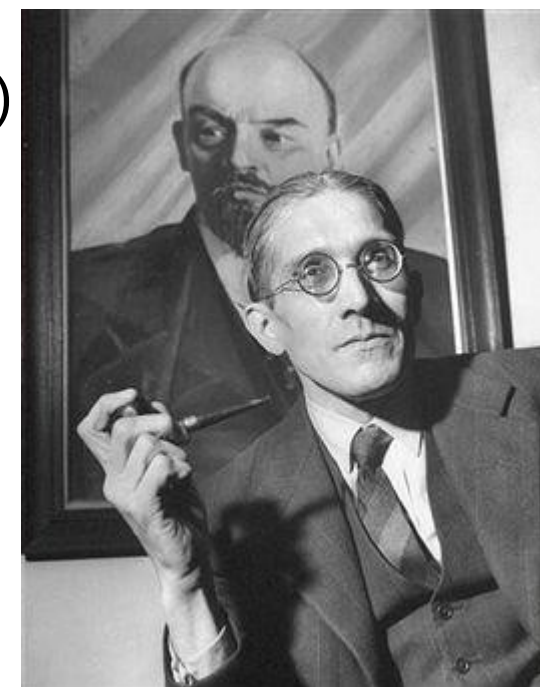
Born to a Calcutta family of modest means, and many children, Upendra won the prestigious Gilchrist Scholarship to study in England. Although the scholarship covered his tuition, money was a constant struggle, and he was forced to copy out medical textbooks by hand. While in London, he met and fell in love with a Swedish woman, Anna Palme, and after various difficulties including disapproving parents and marriage in Sweden being restricted to Christians only, they were married and moved to Cambridge, settling in the Mill Road area. From 1895, Upendra set up surgery in 25 Mill Road, and Anna served as his dispenser, serving what was then a poor neighbourhood. The family was well-regarded, and sympathetic to difficulties in paying for treatment, this being in the days before the NHS. Upendra never lost touch with his Indian roots, and hosted the Majlis, an Indian students' society, in the house. He also maintained an international correspondence, including with Leo Tolstoy, Tom Mann, and Jawaharlal Nehru (the first Prime Minister of India).



Elna Palme Dutt
(1891-1982)



Clemens Palme
Dutt (1893-1975)



Rajani Palme Dutt
(1896-1974)

Citizens of the World

In 1916, in the middle of the First World War, Rajani appeared before a Tribunal as a conscientious objector to military service. He argued that he was a 'citizen of the world', and that the war was morally wrong and against the interests of the working class. Clemens took a similar line, but being slightly older, and engaged in work of national importance in seed development, was given an exemption. Rajani, meanwhile, was refused, and upon being called up, failed to appear, thus being arrested and imprisoned. Throughout the rest of their lives, Clemens, Rajani, and Elna, maintained a close awareness of the international situation, and the place of Britain and India within it, making many trips abroad. Clemens, in particular, travelled frequently to the USSR, while Elna took up work in Switzerland. In 1920, Rajani first met his future wife, Salme Murrik, an Estonian sent to England by Lenin to help organise the Communist Party of Great Britain, and his fond postcards to her, which survive in the Labour History Archive, show just how far and frequently he travelled for his party work.

'A little job hunting quickly revealed the economic foundations of society, and the whip by which it keeps recalcitrant members in line.'

Rajani's Diary, July 1918

'I was a socialist before I knew what socialism was. I did not become a socialist by reading a book or hearing some speech, but simply by seeing the facts of life around me in the sleepy little town of Cambridge.'

Rajani's unpublished biography

'We who are living today are faced with big issues in the coming years. They are world issues. We cannot cut down our limit our outlook from facing them, as they must be faced, on a world plane.'

Rajani writing in World Politics, 1918-36, published in 1936.

Comrades!

After the upheaval of the First World War, many throughout Britain hoped for a better world, one where workers would have a good quality of life and where war would no longer threaten. Socialism had been growing in strength before the war, but it wasn't until 1920 that the Communist Party of Great Britain was founded. Clemens and Rajani were founding members, and Rajani played a substantial role in its reorganisation on more strictly Marxist lines in the mid-1920s. Throughout his life and political career (which were largely one and the same), Rajani argued for the strictest interpretation of Communist doctrine. Rajani and Clemens were both prolific writers, though Clemens preferred to stay in the background, leading to no end of suspicion from MI5. Rajani edited Labour Monthly from its inception, and Clemens was an accredited journalist for the Daily Worker during the Second World War, though at one point the authorities regretted giving him such a pass and restricted his movements. All three siblings were highly intelligent, with firsts from Oxford (Rajani) and Cambridge (Elna and Clemens), and put that to the service of the Party.

'As you know, I do not approve of marriage' its ultimate end is 'to produce cannon fodder'

*Upendra to Rajani 9 February 1925
(shortly after Rajani had married)*

'The problems of the world cannot be solved by a meeting together of capitalist governments, since it is the existence of capitalist governments that creates the problems.'

Rajani in Labour Monthly, December 1921

At the International Socialist Students Conference, 'discussion was held in an attic and continued into the small hours; at one point the police arrived... we adjourned through the attic window into a neighbouring attic and the discussion continued.'

Rajani recalling his first contact with the Communist International

Family Life and Letters

From 1921, the family had all moved away from Cambridge. Upendra and Anna retired to Leatherhead, but stayed in constant contact with the rest of their family. This was not always the easiest task – Rajani's handwriting in particular was atrocious, and frequently commented on by his mother, who pitied the typist who had to decipher his scrawl for political pamphlets. The family remained close-knit, the letters betraying a clear affection, albeit one sometimes tempered with alarm. This was particularly true when Clemens arrived in Leatherhead with minimal warning and the wife of another man, whose family had kicked her out after she refused to stop seeing Clemens, along with her young son. This was Violet Lansbury, and after a degree of discomfort, and particular concern as to what the affair would do for the Communist Party's reputation, the relationship was accepted, by Clemens' family at least, and the couple remained together. (And this despite, in the 1950s, a question being raised in the House as to the situation! Violet felt it was no business of theirs, but said 'I suppose they have to talk about something.')

With grateful thanks to the Labour History Archive (Salford), who hold the papers of Rajani Palme Dutt (RPD/IND), and whose staff were considerate and helpful during the preparation of this poster. The Security Service files for the Dutt family were also consulted via the National Archive's website.

