

### MR. DUNDAS WHITE JOINS THE INDEPENDENT LABOUR PARTY

Mr. James Dundas White, LL.D., who was Liberal M.P. for Dumbartonshire from 1906 to 1910, and during the 1910 Parliament, and for the Tradeston Division of Glasgow from July, 1911, till the end of the last Parliament, has addressed the following letter to Mr. Ramsay Macdonald:—

43, BURTON COURT,  
CHELSEA, LONDON,  
28th August, 1919

DEAR RAMSAY MACDONALD,

After careful consideration, I have come to the conclusion that I should join the Independent Labour Party. I am in general agreement with its attitude on both Home and Foreign Affairs, and, instead of being merely a sympathetic outsider, I am desirous of sharing its membership and of taking some part in its work.

When we were in the House of Commons together, as you will remember, I always gave special attention to the Taxation of Land Values and the Untaxing of Houses and other Improvements, and to other subjects that are of particular importance to the welfare of the workers. It seems to me that I can work most effectively along these lines by throwing in my lot with the Independent Labour Party.

The Independent Labour Party stands for Free Trade, which is essential for national well-being and International Peace. Both Unionist and Liberal leaders have been going backwards to Protection. The first Coalition Government under Mr. Asquith was responsible for supporting the Paris Conference Resolutions, and for the introduction of the protective duties on motor cars, musical instruments, clocks and watches. Mr. Lloyd George's Government has continued these duties, has introduced a system of what is called Imperial Preference, and has also sanctioned the setting up in India of protective duties on various manufactured cottons, which are a tariff against these goods when imported into India and exploit the Indian peoples for the benefit of certain Indian mill-owners. We are learning again, even from our own experience, that privilege and Protection impoverish the people, promote the formation of rings and trusts, and prepare the way for jobbery and corruption. Their International effects are no less disastrous, because they obstruct the processes of trade that would bind nations together, and they themselves are fertile causes of International antagonism. The Party which opposes them is entitled to support, even on this ground alone.

Another consideration is that, as shown by recent Resolutions, the Independent Labour Party is associating itself more closely with the Taxation of Land Values. This reform is the complement of Free Trade, because it is the key to Free Production. It seeks to enforce the rights of the people to the land which Nature has provided, by making those who hold the land pay a rent or tax to the community according to the market value of the land that they hold, whether they are using it or not; and it seeks to stop the present system of taxation which imposes heavy penalties on the building of houses and the making of other improvements. It is the first and necessary step to better housing, increased production, and the opening of the natural opportunities to the people.

The Taxation of Land Values was a Liberal watch-word long before I entered politics; but official Liberals have gone back on it. Their pledges were not redeemed when they were in office. The Increment Value Duty, the Reversion Duty, and the other land taxes of 1910 were unworthy substitutes for the real reform. Even the valuations were unsatisfactory, and the proposals for their amendment were futile and came to nothing. Then, during the war, we had the Corn Production Act—a reactionary corn-law which gives financial guarantees to the landed interest at the expense of the taxpayers—and the attempt to set up Petroleum Royalties for landlords. These measures were brought in by Mr. Lloyd George's Government; but Mr. Asquith and other leading Liberals must bear the responsibility of an acquiescence that amounted to consent. What opposition there was came from a few independent-minded men, who were either Liberals like myself or Labour Members. I gave support to each successive Government in matters relating to the war; but I was against the war-conditions being used to strengthen landlordism and facilitate profiteering.

Since the Armistice, things have been going from bad to worse. Abroad, there has been a wicked sacrifice of British lives and British money in an unjustifiable attempt to interfere with the internal affairs of Russia. At home, the colossal extravagance at Slough and the gross abuses brought to light by Sir John Hunter's recent Report, are but instances of the way in which the nation has been made the victim of exploitation and swindling, the cost of which will fall heavily on the people. Under the plea of controlling trade, the Government has been applying a restrictive policy, which has aggravated the shortage of supply, increased the prices, and played into the hands of the profiteers. Moreover, the dishonest conduct of the Government at the last General Election has shaken public confidence in our representative institutions. No wonder that there are Labour troubles, present and to come. The fruits of reaction are unrest, confusion and chaos.

If we are to escape disaster, we must turn again towards the guiding stars of Liberty, Justice, and Human Brotherhood. Free Trade and Free Production are but applications of these principles in the economic sphere. Even economic justice, in its largest meaning, is not the ultimate aim; but it is a necessary condition for the development of a free co-operative commonwealth, with better opportunities for every one to realise the possibilities of life, and to develop those faculties and aspirations which are now so often starved and disappointed. It must ever be remembered that the well-being of each is bound up with the well-being of all, and the drawing together of the nations must be kept steadily in view. These ideals may seem far-off; but they will at least keep us heading in the right direction. They represent the direction in which the Liberal Party used to move, and in which the Independent Labour Party is moving now. Like many of that Party, I am strongly opposed to any policy that would narrow personal freedom or increase the power of a bureaucracy, from whatever quarter it may come. For the reasons already stated, I am fully convinced that, in this stage of our political progress, the course which I am taking is the right one.

Yours sincerely,

JAMES DUNDAS WHITE.