

James Maxton quick biography

James Maxton was a Glasgow graduate who became a socialist politician, a teacher and conscientious objector. He was prominent among Red Clydeside activists, a member of the Independent Labour Party and the elected MP for Bridgeton from 1922 to his death in 1946. He was a persuasive and powerful speaker, an intelligent and sincere radical voice inside and outside Parliament.

James Maxton was born in Pollockshaws in Glasgow on 22nd June 1885. Both of his parents were teachers. His father was a unionist. Maxton was educated at Grahamston Public School, Barrhead and Hutcheson's Grammar School, to which he won a scholarship when he was twelve. In 1903 Maxton entered Glasgow Teacher Training College and matriculated as a student at the University of Glasgow. In his first few weeks he joined the Conservative and Unionist Association and campaigned on behalf of the Conservative candidate for the University rectorship.

His education was lengthy, delayed a little by exam failures. He passed English in October 1909 on a tenth attempt and never did obtain a pass in Moral Philosophy. He graduated MA in 1909. He did, however, throw himself into life at university, taking an interest in sport and politics, where he began to question his inherited unionism and to explore socialist texts. He joined the Independent Labour Party (ILP). He entered the teaching profession and like John Maclean, taught evening classes at Pollock Academy. The two men became friends, sharing a passion for radical politics, and later, opposition to the war. Maxton was involved in the formation of teachers' unions in Scotland including the Educational Institute of Scotland and the Scottish Socialist Teachers' Society. With John Maclean, Maxton gave lectures on politics and economics in the Scottish Labour College.

By 1912 Maxton was the leading figure in the Independent Labour Party in Scotland. Like most members of the ILP, Maxton opposed Britain's involvement in the First World War. As a pacifist he refused to be conscripted into the armed forces, an action that cost him his teaching post. Maxton was also involved in organizing strikes in the shipyards, engineering and munitions factories. Dismissed as a teacher he was

arrested in 1916 and charged with sedition. Found guilty, he was imprisoned for a year, in Calton jail.

After the war he stood for Parliament, at first unsuccessfully. Records show that he returned to university between 1920 and 1922 to take classes in Political Economy, Forensic Medicine and Public International Law, perhaps with the intention of completing a law degree. In 1922, however, he won Bridgeton for Labour and went to Westminster. He became disillusioned with the party for its lack of support for the miners and in 1931, when the ILP and Labour split he sided with the ILP. He died on 23 July 1946.