



George Nicoll Barnes
Labour Leader 1910 - 1911

Born in 1859 in Dundee, he was the son of a Yorkshire mill manager. The family returned to Middlesex where - unlike Hardie and Henderson - he received an education until the age of 11, at which time he obtained his first job as a clerk. By the age of 13 he was an apprentice engineer, spending much of the next 10 years in London.

Barnes was involved in attempts in the 1880's to politicise the Amalgamated Society of Engineers, being elected onto its executive in 1889, becoming its Assistant Secretary in 1892 and its General Secretary in 1896.

His first attempt at entering parliament as an Independent Labour candidate – standing in 1895 in Rochdale – was unsuccessful, but this did not stop his ambition, ensuring the ASE were involved in the negotiations leading to the creation of the Labour Representation Committee. He stood for the Glasgow seat of Blackfriars in 1906 on a Labour ticket beating Bonar Law.

He became the first ever Minister of Pensions in Lloyd George's coalition government in December 1916, joining the War Cabinet in May 1917. When Labour Party support for the coalition government was withdrawn prior to the 1918 General Election Barnes decided to remain in the cabinet. He became the effective leader of the - anti socialist - National Democratic and Labour Party (NDP) of pro-coalition Labour MPs largely funded by the Coalition Liberals and was re-elected on this basis at the 1918 General Election. He remained a member of the Lloyd-George Coalition Cabinet until January 1920, retiring from Parliament at the 1922 election at which the NDP was all but wiped out and formally dissolved a year later.

As an attendee of the Peace Conference in Paris he played a central part the establishment of the International Labour Organisation (ILO) as a central part of the League of Nations, and represented Great Britain at the first ILO conference in 1919.

After a period of pursuing other interests outside parliament, including that as Chairman of the Cooperative Printing Society, George Barnes died on 21 April 1940, aged 81.