



**William Adamson**  
**Labour Leader 1917 - 1921**

Born in Dunfermline on 2<sup>nd</sup> April 1863, son of a Coalminer, he would begin his career in his father's footsteps from the age of 11 after leaving school working in the mines. He was an activist within the Fife and Kinross Miners' Association of the NUM from the 1880's, holding a number of positions within the branch until becoming its secretary in 1908. He was also a devout Baptist, he also co-founded the Dunfermline Temperance Council and a local mutual society

A staunch democrat, he favoured conciliation and arbitration as the means by which the trade-unions could secure better conditions for working people. He would spend a significant amount of energy over the years fighting the radicalisation of Scottish miners lured increasingly by the Communist Party.

Politically he was initially a member of the Liberal Party, joining Labour in 1905 where he became a local Dunfermline Councillor. He was elected to Parliament for East Fife in the second General Election of 1910. As an MP he consistently urged for the nationalisation of the mines.

By 1914 the Labour Group in Parliament had split over the introduction of War Bonds, with Adamson supporting the faction in favour of the war. Henderson, Leader at the time remained in Government but himself resigned in 1917 both from Government and as Labour Leader. Adamson was elected as Labour Leader in October of that year unopposed.

The 1918 General Election proved a disaster for the Party with a number of Prominent Labour MP's losing their seat, including the previous Leaders Arthur Henderson and Ramsey MacDonald.

His Leadership did not produce any significant points of note, being noted as a poor speaker and he had an extended period of 18 months where he was ill and functioned as Leader in name only. He stood down as Labour Leader in February 1921.

This was not the end of his political career as he became an effective minister in both of MacDonald's minority governments of the 1920's, serving as the Government's Scottish Secretary on both occasions. It was during this time that he also became a vocal supporter of the Scottish Home Rule Association.

By 1931 Cabinet was divided over the introduction of austerity measures, with MacDonald resigning to form a National Government with the Liberals and Conservatives – Adamson (as did the overwhelming majority of the cabinet) remained loyal to the party and refused to participate in what was seen as a betrayal. The 1931 General Election was a complete disaster for the Labour Party, standing against the "National Government" – falling back to just 46 seats – with Adamson one of many to lose their seat.

He attempted to get back into Parliament at the 1935 election, losing by 593 votes, ironically to William Gallacher of the Communist Party. It was not long after this defeat that Adamson's wife died, followed by himself due to Pneumonia on 23 February 1936, aged 72.