

JAMES DUNCAN..American Union Leader

Was born on the 5th of May 1857 at Hillside Portlethen Kincardineshire , to David and Mary “nee Forbes “ Duncan . His father “ a local farmer “extended his small 15 acres of rough ground to 30 acres of good arable land over a period of 10 years , and within another 10 years had increased the acreage to 50 and converted the unit to Hillside Dairy Farm ..

James received his education in Aberdeen some 7/8 miles away , and was raised a Presbyterian .

After school he was apprenticed as a granite cutter , and eventually became a fully qualified Granite Cutter making headstones and granite statues ..

This , all at a time when granite quarries throughout the North East of Scotland were booming because of the huge World wide demand for houses built from granite , Cassies for roads , and elegant granite statues etc etc ..

During 1880 James Duncan along with many other granite workers emigrated to America and settled in New York City .

Whilst in New York , he joined the Granite Cutters National Union and was soon elected their Local Secretary.. James Duncan moved to Baltimore Maryland and once again linked up with the Granite Cutters National Union and in 1885 was elected it”s President ..

During his first few years in office Duncan proposed and won passage of numerous amendments to the unions constitution forming it into one of the most effective unions in the country .

He was not however a supporter of Civil rights for African Americans .Duncan negotiated contracts in the Deep South which required employers to fire black granite cutters and hire Caucasian ones . When the American Federation of Labor complained ,Duncan strongly defended his stance and invoked the A.F.L.”s principle of “”autonomy for member Unions “. The matter was dropped ...

In 1886 Duncan attended the founding convention of the American Federation of Labor as a delegate of The Granite Cutters Union . He was elected second Vice President of the A.F.L in 1894 and served on it”s Executive Council, a position he held until his death in 1928 .

In 1900 Duncan led the Granite Cutters out on a National strike which began on the 1st of March of that year and was settled on the 16th of May 1900 after the intervention of Senator William Clark ((whose home required granite for its construction)) . The strike was successful and the collective bargaining agreement made the Granite Cutters Union the FIRST American Labor union to win the 8 hour day for it”s members ..

In 1903 , Duncan proposed the expansion of the Unions jurisdiction over North America , but his suggestion was not approved by the Unions national convention , he did however win passage? of the jurisdictional passage in 1905 ??, and afterwards the union was known as the Granite Cutters International Association

In the same year James Duncan established the first old – age pension plan for union workers in the United States of America .. and in 1913 President Woodrow Wilson appointed Duncan to a national commission to study workers Compensation Insurance..

After the February 1917 Russian Revolution , President Woodrow Wilson organised a Special Mission to Russia in order to open dialogue with the New revolutionary Government . “ This was called the” Root Mission” led

by the former Secretary of State Elihu Root .The men chosen were titled” Envoy Extraordinary” i.e Diplomats Representing Labor leader was our man James Duncan the others being Edward Russell , George Cree , Samuel Bertron , James H Glenon , John Mott and Charles R. Crane .(This is a huge story in itself)!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!

During 1918 President Wilson choose Duncan to be one of his Delegates to the Paris Peace Conference .

In 1924 Samuel Gompers “a close friend of Duncan “ named James one of the A.F.L. delegates to the Pan – American Federation of Labor in Mexico City .The ailing 74 year old Gompers collapsed and doctors informed the delegates “ he did not have long to live “ . When the train arrived in San Antonio in Texas Gompers was taken to a private home .James Duncan held his hand As his friend died at 4.10 am December 12th .1924.

James Duncan died at his home in Quincy Massachusetts on the 14th of September 1928