



Political Parties

(Roth, H., 2009a)



POLITICAL PARTIES

INDEPENDENT POLITICAL LABOUR LEAGUE

The Independent Political Labour League owed its origin to a resolution of the annual conference of Trades and Labour Councils in April 1904, demanding the immediate formation of an independent labour party to secure labour representation in Parliament and on local bodies. The existing New Zealand Socialist Party had antagonised unionists by its emphasis on revolution rather than reform. The election victory of the Australian Labour Party in December 1903 seemed to point the way for a renewed attempt at Labour independence, this time on more moderate lines. In September 1904, Trades Council delegates meeting in Wellington under the chairmanship of J. T. Paul drew up a provisional constitution and platform for a new political organisation. The main demands put forward were land nationalisation and extension of State ownership of industry. At the first national conference, in April 1905, which claimed to represent more than 1,000 members in 10 branches, the name Independent Political Labour League was adopted.

The league contested the general elections of 1905 when seven of its eight candidates lost their deposits. Efforts to gain the support of radical members of Parliament failed. The leaders of the league were themselves divided on their attitude to the Liberal Government, whether to oppose it or support it, and this confusion spread through the ranks.

The death of Seddon seemed to ease the task of weaning the workers from the Liberal influence but Sir Joseph Ward, the new Premier, was able to decapitate the league by promoting some of its leaders to the Legislative Council. The league held its fourth, and last, conference in Christchurch in December 1907, under the chairmanship of James Thorn. It fell apart the following year, having become all but indistinguishable from the Liberal Party. Several league members, however, contested the elections of 1908 and one of them, David McLaren, was returned for Wellington East in the second ballot.

by Herbert Otto Roth, B.A., DIP.N.Z.L.S., Deputy Librarian, University of Auckland.

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