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Nimmo, Sir Adam (1866-1939), coalowner, was born at Slamannan, Stirlingshire, on 7 November 1866, the second or subsequent son of James Nimmo (1840-1912), a coalmaster who was himself the son of a coalmaster, and his wife Jessie (*née* Clarkson) (c. 1837-1916), of Airdrie, Lanarkshire, the daughter of an ironstone miner. His namesake, Adam Nimmo (1864-1927), Chairman and Managing Director of the Edinburgh Collieries Co. from 1914, and Chairman of the Lothians Coal Owners' Association from 1920, was a first cousin.

Nimmo was educated at the Royal High School, Edinburgh, where he joined the classical side of the School, and at the University of Edinburgh (1884-7) from which he graduated MA after taking a broad range of courses from Latin and Greek to Mathematics. This liberal education was becoming unusual for a coalowner's son; many of his contemporaries and even his seniors in the Scottish coal industry gained a technical education in mine engineering. In 1889, along with his father, mother and his sisters, he was received by the Adelaide Place Baptist Church, Glasgow. In the same year he began working for his father's partnership which owned and ran collieries near Slammanan, and became secretary when the firm became a private limited company in 1893. On 9 January 1901 he married Isabella Mackinnon (1876-1908), the daughter of Daniel

Robertson Gardner, master cabinet maker, and his wife Jane or Jeanie *née* Maitland. They had two sons. Nimmo was left a widower at the age of 41 and never re-married.

In 1908 Nimmo succeeded his father as managing director of James Nimmo & Co, which was by then a public limited company. It was, however, to the public life of the industry, particularly to the affairs of the Lanarkshire Coal Masters' Association (LCMA) and later to the coal owners' Mining Association of Great Britain (MAGB) that he devoted himself. He first came to public notice on the Conciliation Board established in October 1899 to fix miners' wages for the whole of Scotland. By 1902 he had assumed his father's role as representative of the Slamannan district and put forward proposals for a sliding scale to link wages with coal prices, a proposal which was an anathema to the miners and directly contrary to the policy of the unions, the Miners' Federation of Great Britain (MFGB) and its Scottish affiliate the Scottish Miners' Federation (SMF). In 1907, when the Lanarkshire Coal Masters' Association began recruiting in the counties adjacent to Lanarkshire, James Nimmo & Co were eager to join. Adam Nimmo was elected to the Executive Committee. He was made president of the association in 1911 and in 1912 was able to report that the association represented 90 per cent of the

coal output of the districts which it represented. In 1911 he became a director of the Fife Coal Company and was increasingly identified with the much bigger Fife company rather than his father's firm.

The 1912 national coal mining strike brought a new note into the industrial relations of the Scottish coal masters. On 12 March 1912 they issued a pamphlet, *The Coal Crisis*, that professed to see behind the demands for a minimum wage the pursuit of 'a Socialistic policy' to nationalize the mines. From this point until at least the end of the 1926 Lockout, the Scottish owners saw themselves as 'fighting socialism', a perception that was shared by Nimmo and which hardened his stance in the industrial relations of the time. It may have been this politicization that resulted in the invitation sometime before 1917 to stand as a Unionist candidate for Parliament. Nimmo did not accept and, although he served on the General Committee of the Glasgow Conservative Club in the 1920s he never held a seat in Parliament or in local government.

During the First World War the coal industry came under increasing government regulation. In April 1915 Nimmo was appointed an employers' representative on the Coal Mining Organisation Committee (CMOC), an advisory committee appointed by the home secretary to recommend ways in which the output of coal could be increased to meet wartime demand. Nimmo took a hawkish line, favouring longer working hours and increasing the number of working days from ten or eleven a fortnight to twelve, and imposing prohibitions on the sale of alcohol. In 1916 he was elected President of the MAGB and for the next decade his public life was centred on London. His position made him the leading spokesperson of the industry and he was one of the first people to be consulted by the Government on questions affecting the industry or requiring its co-operation. Having requisitioned the South Wales coalfield at the end of 1916 to guarantee the supply of Admiralty grade steam coal the

government took over the rest of the British coal industry early in 1917. Day-to-day management of the collieries remained with the owners but the determination of coal prices, distribution, finance and, crucially, national wage negotiations were assumed by the Department of the Controller of Coal Mines (the 'Coal Control') in the Board of Trade. In March, Nimmo was appointed to a newly established Coal Control Advisory Board (CCAB), 'the lineal descendent' of the CMOC. He served on this Committee until September 1918 when he accepted an invitation to join the staff of the Coal Control; he resigned the latter post in April 1919. Although Nimmo and his coal owner colleagues on the CCAB had to bow to the great accretion of power enjoyed by the MFGB in the military and economic circumstances of the War, the very high levels of net profit enjoyed by the industry during the War years (Supple, *History*, 112-14) despite excess profits taxes and coal mines excess payments nevertheless indicate a substantial success for the coal owner members of the Board.

In June 1916 Nimmo had been appointed a member of a Board of Trade Committee on the Coal Trade after the War under the chairmanship of Lord Rhondda, and in January 1917 succeeded Rhondda as its chair. Despite its official status, this was largely a coal owners' committee with no representation of the MFGB. Its focus was international competition and its report, published in 1918, insisted that with the return of peace international competition could only be met if British miners' wages were reduced. For this conclusion, or at least the bald and unqualified way in which it was stated Nimmo was largely responsible.

The end of the War saw Nimmo at the height of his success. He had led the industry in its relations with the state, co-operating on the regulation of exports to allies and neutrals, but ensuring that Government control was always seen as a temporary measure, while enhancing the industry's profits. In 1918 he was knighted KBE and made a chevalier of the Legion of Honour. He stepped down from the Presidency of the MAGB in 1918, becoming one of the Association's two Vice-Presidents, a position he retained until his death. In 1919 he became one of the representatives of the coalowners on the Coal Industry Commission, chaired by Lord Sankey, and worked with his successor as MAGB president, Evan Williams, to present the owners' case against nationalization of the mines. Their success was confirmed in March 1921 when the mines were decontrolled and returned to the owners.

Nimmo's personal involvement in the coal industry expanded after the war. In 1920 he became a director of the Shotts Iron Company, a large iron and coal in east Lanarkshire and was Chairman from 1934 till his death. He became Chairman of the Fife Coal Company in 1923, a post he retained till his death. In

1926 he was a director of the Earl of Rosslyn's Collieries Ltd and Chairman of the Portland Colliery Co. Ltd. In 1928 he became a director of the newly established Ailsa Investment Trust and became its Chairman in 1932.

During the crisis in the industry which culminated in the general strike and seven-month lockout in 1926, Nimmo was an outspoken opponent of nationalization in what he saw as an apocalyptic fight against communism and socialism, and continued to insist that wages in the British coal industry had to be reduced once more or hours increased or both to meet foreign competition (*The Times*, 22 January 1925). He became a bogey-man for the miners and their political allies. His intransigence also frustrated those in government who sought to preserve industrial peace. The previously close and harmonious relations between Nimmo and government ministers deteriorated and by late March 1926 ministers were trying, unsuccessfully, to encourage a coup inside the MAGB against the Williams-Nimmo regime by more moderate coal owners such as the Earl of Crawford, the chair of the giant Wigan Coal and Iron Company. In a speech in July 1926 the prime minister, Stanley Baldwin, criticized Nimmo by name for his belief that there are 'two raw alternatives –nationalization and private enterprise' rather than 'an indefinite series of intermediate

positions between Socialism and *laissez faire*.' (*The Times*, 19 July 1926). As the owners' position hardened during the lock-out, Winston Churchill commented to his cousin and friend Lord Londonderry, a coalowner prominent in the north east that 'there could be no worse way of combating Bolshevism than to identify the Conservative Party and His Majesty's Government with the employers, and particularly with a body of employers like those headed by Mr Evan Williams and Sir Adam Nimmo' (Churchill to Londonderry, 3 November 1926, in Gilbert, *Companion*, 865-6).

Although the MAGB eventually won their fight against the MFGB, if not communism, the costs were enormous. Almost immediately some coalowners, Nimmo among them, began to consider ways of re-organizing the industry to avoid the necessity of periodic cuts in wages. Nimmo was involved in a voluntary scheme in 1928 offering coalowners financial compensation to reduce excess capacity in Scotland. It was as clear a statement as could be desired that the policy with which he had been so closely identified, of wage cuts and extensions in hours, had failed. But the costs of the scheme were high and it lapsed after a year's operation.. By 1934 he had come to favoured planning as a solution to the industry's problems but continued to reject nationalization, and in 1936 and 1938 he chaired meetings of coal

owners to resist the compulsory amalgamation of colliery companies by government.

Although a leader of the industry, Nimmo was not an exceptional businessman. During his ownership James Nimmo & Co was neither unusually profitable, nor did it enjoy a reputation for good management, sound engineering or rapid innovation. The high reputation of the Fife Coal Co for profitability and engineering excellence predated his directorship. Similarly, the Shotts Iron Company's era of extraordinary profits finished with the First World War and Nimmo's advent to the board did not restore it nor did it prevent the emergence of a level of strike activity at the company's collieries extraordinary even by the standards of the industry (Church and Outram, *Strikes and Solidarity*, 91).

Outside the coal industry, Nimmo undertook lifelong work for the Baptist church in Scotland. He was a Bible class leader, a deacon, and a senior trustee, as well as treasurer of the Adelaide Place church, and was joint secretary of the Baptist Theological College of Scotland, founded in 1894. He advocated measures to secure the standards of efficiency and education among the

church's ministers, and was convenor of a fund to pay salaries to ministers.

Nimmo died suddenly of heart failure at his holiday residence at Auchmar, Buchanan, on 10 August 1939. He was a more complex man than is usually recognized. Many saw in him only a diehard, active only in his own interests. What was rarely appreciated was that his public life was pursued with a strong sense of the duty of public service. Although moderately wealthy, he showed little personal interest in accumulating money and rather saw the coal industry rather as one of the foundations of the national community. To his co-religionists in Adelaide Place his devotion to service was his primary quality; they also saw integrity, wisdom and kindness. If he often took a position of opposition and resistance he was more than an inflexible dogmatist; if he was stout in the defence of profit and private property he was also willing to shoulder religious responsibilities and public duties.

Quentin Outram