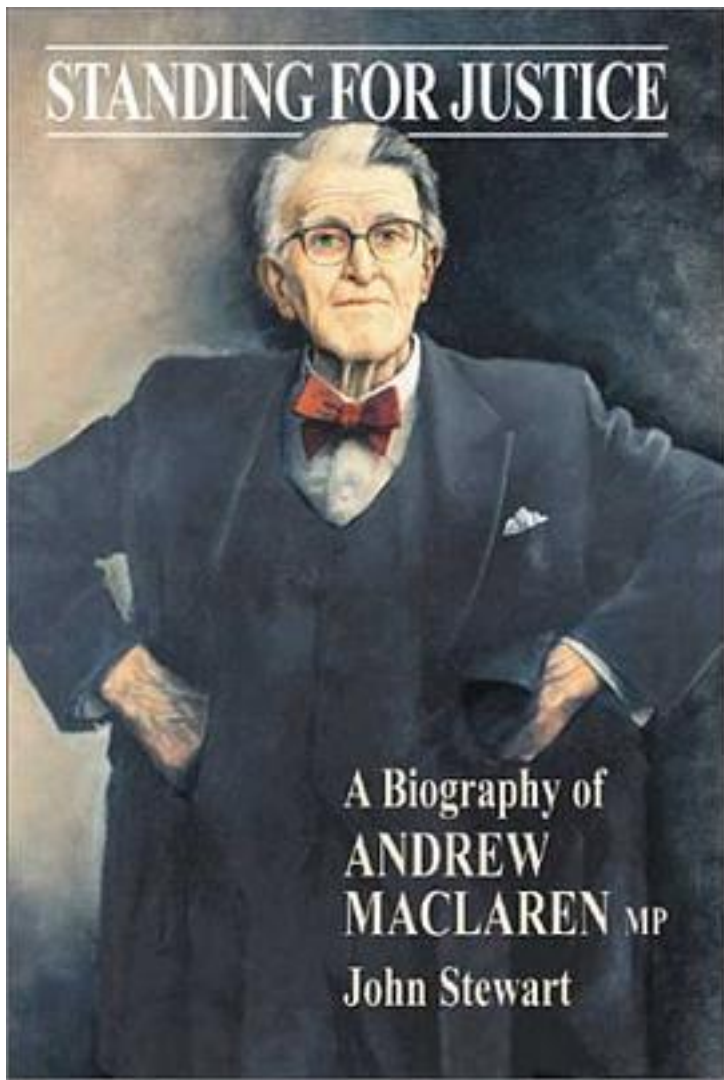


Standing for Justice



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A radical, Andrew MacLaren fought not for right or left, but for justice. Long before George Orwell, he recognised the dangers of bureaucratic socialism, while attacking the Tories for blocking the one reform that would eradicate the poverty and social injustice of the 19th century, without diminishing the liberty and sturdy independence of the individual. Born in Glasgow the year Karl Marx died, his was not a privileged beginning: aged ten, his first job was as a tailor's errand boy, followed by an engineer's apprenticeship at sixteen, though he had little feel for engineering. Art was his love, but times were hard and he had to help support the family. However, his fierce denunciation of the degrading effects of poverty and his gift for public speaking soon brought him to the fore. Two men dominated the thinking of radicals at the time: Karl Marx and Henry George. The latter is scarcely remembered today, but his was the inspiration behind the Liberal government which swept to power in 1906. George's influence was also considerable in the emerging Labour Party, enjoying the support of Ramsay MacDonald and Phillip Snowden, respectively the first Labour Prime Minister and Chancellor of the Exchequer. MacLaren entered parliament in 1922 as a Labour member, supporting the Georgist approach to social reform rather than bureaucratic socialism. He was an outstanding constituency MP, twice winning against the national swing. So what was this approach? The way MacLaren described it was that, "whilst a man had the right to possess what he produced or received in exchange for his work, there is no such right to private ownership of the elements upon which all men depend - air, water, sunshine and land. Indeed, he held that the right of access to these basic elements is as strong and equal for all men as the right of life itself, and that if such private ownership of the basic elements is permitted, the suppression and exploitation of one class of the community by another is inevitable. The consequent hardship and injustice must become more acute as the community develops". The accuracy of this forecast is borne out by the fact that the gap between rich and poor has continued to widen during the 20th century, despite the huge increase in wealth and all the efforts to redistribute income through taxation and welfare. This biography is a timely reminder of an unbureaucratic method of undoing the social injustices of the 19th and 20th centuries

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