Review Articles

THE MACKENZIE KING SAGA

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The Mackenzie King Record, Vols. III and IV. By J. W. Pickersgill and D. F. Forster. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1970. Vol. III, 1945/46. Pp. viii, 424; Vol. IV, 1947/48. Pp. v, 472. $17.50 each vol. Vols. III and IV, the set $30.00. Vols. I-IV, the set $50.00.

With the publication of volumes III and IV, Mr. Pickersgill's *The Mackenzie King Record* comes to an end. Like the two earlier volumes these consist almost entirely of extracts from King's diary pieced together in narrative form by editorial notes. The four volumes are intended as substitutes for the official biography which will stop at 1939. As Mr. Pickersgill points out, *The Record*—King's term for the diary—is not a biography, nor a history of King's life and times, nor yet an assessment of King's career. It is rather King's own account, written contemporaneously, of his part in affairs of state during the war and postwar years. It is the raw material of history and biography, not the finished product.

Few Canadian public men have been diarists, fewer still, whether from lethargy or modesty, have been systematic diarists over any long period. King was a rare exception: he kept a detailed, comprehensive and intensely personal diary for some 58 years, in early years written in his own hand, in later years dictated daily and rarely revised. A model of discretion in public, King let himself go in the diary. Into it went meticulously accurate reports of conversations on public affairs with the great and near great, accounts of meetings of cabinet and caucus, observations on events, caustic comments on colleagues, unabashed statements of his hopes, his fears, his ambitions, even accounts of his prayers and evidently of his explorations of the occult. The editors have endeavoured to present King's public rather than his private life, and they have therefore included in *The Record* material of a private nature only when it seemed to throw light on King's public life. This distinction between his public and private life may not satisfy professional historians, but the sheer bulk of the diary and the terms of King's will, which contemplated destruction of the diary in whole or in part, seemed to inhibit publication of the diary in full.

The diaries are virtually the exclusive source for the four Pickersgill volumes, and they are a main source for the two volumes of the official biography which have already appeared: *William Lyon Mackenzie King, A Political Biography*, 1874-1923, by the late R. MacGregor Dawson, and vol. II—under the subtitle, *The Lonely Heights, 1923-1932*, by H. Blair Neatby. It is understood that Professor Neatby has

in hand a third volume of the official biography to cover the gap between 1932 and 1939. The diary was also a main source for a special study on *The Conscription Crisis of 1944* by Professor Dawson which was done while most of the principal participants were still alive and could be interviewed; and of a special study on King's career in the United States after defeat of the Laurier Government in 1911—*The Fall and Rise of Mackenzie King, 1911-1919* by F. A. MacGregor. And the end is probably not yet. Now that the public's appetite has been whetted by many extracts from the diary, it may well be asked whether, in fairness to other historians and the public generally, the Literary Executors should now carry out King's apparent but confusing instructions about destroying the diary.

But we are mainly concerned in this review with volumes III and IV of *The Record*, the other volumes mentioned having been reviewed previously. Although these volumes of *The Record* contain extended accounts of domestic affairs, for reasons of space this review is largely concerned with King's postwar role in external policy, a field he felt peculiarly his special preserve.

Volume III begins with early September, 1945. The atomic age had arrived; Japan had just collapsed; a new world order seemed to have arrived with the establishment of the United Nations. The Canadian government had decided against participation in occupation duties in Europe or Asia and the legions were being rapidly brought home and demobilized. While some tension was developing between the USSR and the Western allies, Canada seemed to be merely a remote onlooker. Peace seemed to be in the air. Suddenly the government, and shortly thereafter the public, was confronted with the realities of the postwar world by the Gouzenko revelations that an extensive spy ring, promoted by the USSR, was operating within the Canadian public service. King's disillusionment with the USSR, begun at San Francisco, was profound, and it was to be confirmed with the opening of the United Nations a few weeks later. He was, however, disposed to play down the Gouzenko affair lest it exacerbate relations between the USSR and the West. He could not believe, he told Parliament, that Stalin or the Russian Ambassador in Ottawa had anything to do with setting up the spy ring. But there was no doubt from then on that he became increasingly distrustful of the USSR, convinced that Communism was on the march and that a war was in the making. Churchill was right, he repeatedly declared, in his opposition to passing on to the Russians the secrets of the bomb.

King's reaction to the growing international tension was reminiscent of his pre-war policy; it was to condemn the United Nations as he had the League of Nations.

In 1944 when discussing in Parliament the projected world security system, he had firmly declared that Canada would do her full share in carrying out agreed security schemes "whether they involved the creation of an international police force or, alternatively, of measures for seeing that there will always be an over-

whelming preponderance of power to protect the peace". But his support for collective security was shortlived. Before he went to London in September, 1945, to discuss the implications of the Gouzenko disclosures with Atlee, he warned caucus: "[I said] I hoped they would not put their faith in any organization as to world security, that I greatly feared a new organization might in some cases be as much a blind as the League of Nations". Referring to the U.N.'s handling of Korea and Palestine he wrote later in his diary, that it was "sheer madness and wanton folly the way the United Nations is rushing into partitioning different parts of the world, and worst of all, the way in which Canada has tagged along at the tail, cheering them on their way as though they were a world power which could effect miracles". The U.N. was "a dangerous institution", "a menace", and he told Cabinet that "they would find that the United Nations would be getting them into more and more trouble in different parts of the world". Again, "it is truly appalling how far the Russians have been permitted and have been able to get ahead in the four years since the war. I cannot but have the feeling that the United Nations with its fiddling and fussing and interfering in everything, and of providing them the platform they have had, have been responsible as was the League of Nations for enabling the situation to develop the way it has,—a perfectly appalling menace". On one occasion he asked Churchill whether he thought the world war would have come had there been no League of Nations. When discussing the appointment of Canada to the Korean commission, he told the American Ambassador and the Cabinet that if the United Nations continued the way it had been going he was quite prepared to resign and warn the people of Canada about the dangers of membership in it.

Until the last few months in office, he was no less opposed to Canada intervening abroad outside the U.N. context. When a memorandum from Pearson suggesting that Canada might contribute food supplies and air transport to the Berlin airlift in 1947 came before him, he lashed out: "This is right along the lines that External Affairs has been taking for some time past, to get into every situation and as much in the front as possible, not realizing what the appalling possibilities are" (*Ibid.*, IV, 191). Largely because of King's opposition, Canada took no part in the airlift to break the Russian blockade, whereas other Dominions, even South Africa, intimated willingness to do so.

In September, 1946, King vacated the post of Secretary of State for External Affairs in favour of St. Laurent, but having held the reins of Foreign Affairs so long in his own hands, he was reluctant to let them go and St. Laurent was subjected to a period of tutelage. Friction began to develop, particularly over India, Palestine, and Korea.

On India the issue arose first over a telegram from Atlee informing the government about the proposed arrangements for independence within the Commonwealth for India and Pakistan and asking Canada's views on a proposed aid

scheme for the two states into which India would likely be divided. St. Laurent brought a draft reply to discuss with King, but King found it much too warm. India was Britain's problem, not Canada's. He detected the fine hand of British bureaucracy attempting to work out a common policy on India which all Commonwealth members would be expected to follow. Canada should not commit herself one way or the other on the question of independence within the Commonwealth or Dominion status. The final result was a non-commital reply, though when independence came he did send formal congratulatory telegrams.

On Palestine he deeply regretted in his diary that he had ever agreed to the appointment of Justice Rand to the U.N. Commission on Palestine. He was strongly opposed to the American proposal to impose partition and insisted that Canada must not support it. St. Laurent, Ilsley and Pearson, on the other hand, were inclined to do so. He was, however, prepared to support the British proposal which did not imply the use of force. A split in the Cabinet was fortunately avoided by the withdrawal of the American resolution.

The third incident—Canadian representation on the United Nations Temporary Commission on Korea—nearly brought down the government. During King's absence in England, St. Laurent, after consultation with Ilsley, who was acting Prime Minister, accepted membership on the Commission under pressure from the United States. When St. Laurent later proposed in cabinet an appointment to the Commission, King bitterly opposed. He said the time had come to speak out, "A great mistake was made by Canada being brought into situations in Asia and Europe of which she knew nothing whatever, of interfering with the great powers without realizing what consequences might be". "Canada's role was not that of Sir Galahad". St. Laurent, supported by Ilsley, argued that having accepted membership in the United Nations, and especially since Canada was then standing for election to the Security Council, she had special obligations to carry out U.N. decisions. If we wanted to avoid these obligations, we should resign from the United Nations. King insisted that we must withdraw from the Commission and inform the United States accordingly. St. Laurent and Ilsley, however, stood firmly on the principle. Both sides mentioned resigning, but in the end a formula was worked out. The issues between King and St. Laurent, and their respective supporters in cabinet, were, however, fundamental and the split could not have been bridged by a mere formula. St. Laurent and Ilsley accepted the implications of collective security as embodied in the Charter; King never did.

Suspicions of London also persisted in King's mind to the end; when Atlee invited him to attend a meeting of the Commonwealth Prime Ministers to discuss a peace settlement before the meeting of the Council of Foreign Ministers which had been agreed to at the Potsdam conference, King promptly declined. He suspected London was trying to manoeuver the Commonwealth into agreeing on a

common policy on peace terms. He would agree to bilateral talks but not to a Prime Ministers Conference.

He took occasion to remind Atlee that Canada was not satisfied with sitting on the sidelines to be called in at the convenience of the United Kingdom, and that after the great sacrifices Canada had made in the war she deserved to be represented on the Council of Foreign ministers. Whether the U.S. and the USSR would have agreed to Canada being a member of the Council even if the British pressed it, is, however, doubtful. Also doubtful is the question of whether King would in fact have welcomed membership on the Council which would have implied supporting the peace settlements proposed by the Council. There is indeed little indication that the Canadian government really pressed hard for membership; King seems to have left the table-pounding to Evatt of Australia. But the fact remained that the Dominions, including Canada, had formally less of a voice on the peace settlement after the second world war than they had after the first. But they were in no worse a position than other small powers.

But King was far from being a continentalist, whatever critics were inclined to say. He had clearly recognized during the war the necessity of Canadian cooperation with the United States in defence, but he was always aware of the dangers of American control over Canadian affairs. He had insisted during the war that any facilities offered the United States for military purposes should terminate with the return of peace, and he had strongly opposed acceptance of "lend lease" aid lest it afford an excuse later for pressure on Canada. After hostilities ceased, American forces were, in fact, promptly withdrawn, and in order to avoid any claims for continuing use by the American forces, the United States was compensated by Canada for facilities it had constructed in Canada and which were still of continuing use to Canada.

Defence again became an urgent matter early in the postwar period, particularly because of the technological advances in long-range aircraft and because of the invention of atomic weapons. As early as 1946 the United States defence authorities were becoming concerned with the lack of defence facilities in the Canadian Arctic, and they began urging restoration of joint defence arrangements in force during the war. As a first step the Permanent Joint Board on Defence recommended a joint declaration of principles to govern joint defence arrangements, but King declined to accept before discussing the situation with the British. In the end, he approved the Statement and the establishment of weather stations manned jointly by Canadian and American civilian personnel, with the understanding that Canada could take over complete control and operation as and when desired. But King repeatedly stressed that the British must be kept informed about any new ventures in defence relations with the United States. He commented in the diary that the Joint Statement of Principles was a "far reaching

supplement" to the Ogdensburg Agreement, and that Canada was getting to be not merely the interpreter between the United States and Britain but the pivot—"the pivotal point of union between those two great countries".

But, like many Canadians, King was apprehensive of the long-run intentions of the United States. To quote the dairy again: "I spoke to cabinet very plainly as to my convictions. I said I believed the long-range policy of the Americans was to absorb Canada. They would seek to get this hemisphere as completely one as possible. They are already in one way or another building up military strength in the North of Canada. It was inevitable for their own protection that they would have to do that. . . . It might be inevitable for us to have to submit to being so few in numbers and no longer able to look to the British for protection".

But the apprehensions of Britain and the United States soon gave way to the imperatives of defence. During his visit to England in 1946, King was deeply impressed by the worsening international situation which he felt was like that at the time of Munich. During his return voyage from England, he confided in the diary: "I am beginning to feel that the time has come to change the orientation of our whole policy with regard to defence. Britain herself recognizes that she is helpless in the world to defend herself as it is now and will continue increasingly to be. That it will require the U.S. and the aid of all the Dominions. . . . As a single nation, we are perhaps the most vulnerable in the world. As a part of the British Commonwealth and continent of North America we are perhaps the most fortunate that policies will have to be based on this geographical fact. I think we must seek to get more people and develop our industries and resources". During his visit to England he actually got down to reading papers on Commonwealth defence policy.

After a briefing session of Ministers by the Chiefs of Staff on defence of the Allies he was shocked by the "fantastic expense" involved. "Canada simply could not do what was necessary to protect itself . . . the U.S., the U.K., and Canada must all work together. . . . The great thing was for Canada to be the link that would keep the other two great powers united". A revolutionary idea in Canadian foreign policy was beginning to take shape in the mind of the seventy-three-year-old King.

He was thus not unprepared for the British announcement in March, 1948, of the proposed Brussels treaty; the day the Pact was announced by the British Government, President Truman gave it his blessing; King followed the same day indicating Canada's approval. King's statement was surprisingly positive. Declaring the Pact to be a regional arrangement as provided for in the Charter of the United Nations and as such a partial realization of collective security, King declared:

> "The peoples of all free countries may be assured that Canada will play her full part in every movement to give substance to the conception of an effective system of collective security by the development of regional pacts under the Charter of the United Nations."

King pressed for an immediate approach to the United States; Pearson was sent to Washington to follow up the President's hint of interest in a wider association. Talks looking to an Atlantic security arrangement shortly got under way. "I like the idea very much", wrote King in the diary. "It seems to me in every way best that the whole matter should become one of United States leadership. It puts increasingly upon the United States, the obligation of maintaining peace in the Atlantic". Once again the new world had come in to redress the balance of the old. In this, he was convinced, rather than in a separate national defence policy, or in bilateral defence arrangements with the United States, or in the United Nations, lay Canada's security.