

Book Reviews

Canada's most impressive but also most controversial industrial achievements, the harnessing of nuclear energy for the generation of power. No one needs to be reminded of how contentious nuclear energy has become, and not only in this country; in contrast to much of the emotion-suffused literature on the topic, Bothwell's book provides an invaluable and balanced account of the origins, growth, and eventual configuration of the Canadian nuclear power industry. But it is also, for this second constituency, a work that supplies more than is reasonably needed to accomplish its task. At times, the narrative pace becomes so plodding that one wishes the author would quickly, as they say in the nuclear trade, "go critical." Readers who share this reviewer's preference for a more energetic pace will be well-served if they concentrate on skimming much of the book and studying its "Epilogue," which is an admirably concise summary of the major themes of *Nucleus*.

Space does not allow a restatement of all of these themes, but among the more important points noted by Bothwell, one stands out: that notwithstanding a succession of technical, financial and political blows, AECL did manage to create a system for generating electricity from nuclear energy that could hold its own against the best of what the world had to offer. It is well to be reminded, especially given the current malaise attending nuclear power stations, that while not easily marketable outside of Canada, Ontario Hydro's CANDU reactors have been "year after year...at or near the top of the world ranking of capacity factors." Pickering and Bruce have delivered on the early (and frustrated) promise of Douglas Point: to demonstrate that Canada could reliably produce reasonably low-cost power from indigenous sources.

Lest one conclude from the above that Bothwell has indulged merely in corporate ego-stroking, it must be said that he also turns a critical eye on the foibles of Canada's nuclear power industry, which he traces from its birth during World War II, when what was being sought was a path not to cheap electricity but rather to an allied atomic bomb. Since we like to imagine ourselves to be among the world's most chaste nuclear states, Bothwell does a service not only in describing how the quest for the bomb motivated the country's pioneers of nuclear energy during the war years, but also in explaining the important role played by Chalk River in providing facilities (in the event, use of the NRX

reactor) to the US Navy's atomic submarine program in the postwar decade.

In light of the current anxiety on the part of some Canadians that tritium from Darlington might, if exported to the United States, find its way into American nuclear warheads, it is of more than passing interest that, in its early days, Canada's nuclear power industry was critically dependent upon US supplies of heavy water from Savannah River. Largely to reduce this dependence upon a foreign — if friendly — state for such a critical input, Ottawa decided on a policy of achieving self-sufficiency in heavy water. This would eventually be attained, but not before the fiasco of Glace Bay inflicted a black eye on the industry.

The story of nuclear power in Canada, as presented by Bothwell, conjures up yet another English historical figure: for in the Chalk River accident, the dreadfully inadequate Douglas Point reactor, Glace Bay, and the disastrous Indian explosion (to cite the most prominent misfortunes), Bothwell has presented us a portrait of AECL very much like the famous one of Cromwell, "warts and all."

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Fighting Prime Minister

by Matt Bray

King's War: Mackenzie King and the Politics of War 1939-1945 by Brian Nolan. Toronto: Random House, 1988, 188 pages, \$21.95.

Twenty-five years ago, while working on a study of John W. Dafoe and the *Manitoba Free Press*, I happened to find in the Dafoe correspondence a scrap of paper on which was scrawled a note, undated and unsigned but apparently in the handwriting of Grant Dexter, one-time Ottawa correspondent of the Winnipeg daily. Brief and to the point, it read simply "William Lyon Mackenzie King, a dirty little man with fetid breath." In *King's War*, Brian Nolan of Carleton University's School of Journalism has painted a picture of King that more than most accounts seems to justify this unflattering description of Canada's longest serving Prime Minister. To be sure, the author repeatedly stresses the contradictory

aspects of King's character, his ability "to display gestures of kindness, sympathy and social grace," and yet also "to be mean, cruel, cold-blooded and ruthless." In the end, however, it is King's darker side that leaves the strongest impression.

In sketching this portrait Nolan has made extensive use of primary sources such as the voluminous King diaries, the conventional secondary literature, and, most imaginatively, the complete film interviews of the CBC's 1973 7-part television documentary series, *The Days Before Yesterday*. The last in particular was a mine of illustrative detail which the author has put to good use. Nolan's peculiar system of referencing this material is quite a different story, so cryptic that fleetingly I wondered whether it was intended to serve as a diversionary tactic, deflecting the reviewer away from the real substance of the book. Decode, for example, the following footnote in Chapter 11: "You court-martial": Smythe (Young) *CS: IYCBEITA*. (See answer at the end of the review.)

Given Nolan's eye for telling detail, much the strongest feature of *King's War* is his treatment of the people at the center of the various political storms that swirled around King in the years from 1939 to 1945 — the Ralstons, the Howes, etc. Decidedly weak, in contrast, is the analysis of the Canadian war effort itself. Chapter 8 on "The Sailor's War," for example, is devoted largely to describing the many failures of the Royal Canadian Navy, only to conclude how remarkably successful this branch of the services really was. Questionable from an analytical perspective, too, is Nolan's determination to damn King on quite contradictory grounds — for not bringing in conscription when Ralston demanded it in the fall of 1944, and then for betraying Quebec by adopting the measure when McNaughton called for it few weeks later — and all the while stressing his political astuteness.

Still, *King's War* is entertaining and easy reading, worth the investment of a few spare hours of time.

(Answer to footnote puzzle: "You court-martial" — the beginning of the sentence quoted in the text: Smythe [Young] — authors: *CS: IYCBEITA* — book title, *Conn Smythe: If You Can't Beat 'Em In The Alley*.)

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