

Ritchie at San Francisco 1945

by Charles Ritchie

*The United Nations was founded at San Francisco in 1945. Canada was represented by a strong delegation, one member of which was Charles Ritchie, who later became Canada's ambassador to the United Nations. He is now retired, lives mostly in Ottawa, and along the way published bits from the diary he kept. What follows are some of his entries made at San Francisco, as found in *The Siren Years*, the winner of the Governor General's Award for 1974. It was published by MacMillan of Canada, whom *International Perspectives* thanks for permission to reprint this excerpt.*

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On the train *en route* to San Francisco. Luncheon with Mackenzie King and was charmed by the fat little conjurer with his flickering, shifty eyes and appliqué smile. He has eyes that can look like grey stones or can shine with amusement or film with sentiment. He chats away incessantly — he seems very pleased with himself, delightfully so, pleased with his own cleverness and with his own survival. He talked of the “fun” of parliamentary tactics which cannot, he added regretfully, be so freely indulged in time of war. He talked of the conscription crisis and said that when it was viewed from the historical point of view its most significant feature would seem to be that the French-Canadian Ministers remained in the Government. That is what saved Canada's unity. I irritated him by remarking that our troops must be thoroughly tired by now. He replied, “They have had two months' rest,” (*when?* I should like to know) and said, “I knew during the recruitment crisis that they were due for that rest but this I could not reveal.”

He described Roosevelt's funeral at Hyde Park naturally and effectively, the silence in the garden and the rightness of the ceremony. He spoke affectionately but not over-sentimentally of Roosevelt himself, adding, “When I last saw him I felt the end might come at any moment. When any subject came up about which he had a complex of worry he collapsed completely. When they called me from the White House to tell me of his death I did not even go to the telephone. I knew what had happened without being told.”

Talking of Mussolini he said, “A remarkably finely-shaped head — the head of a Caesar — deep-set eyes full of intelligence. He did a lot of good —