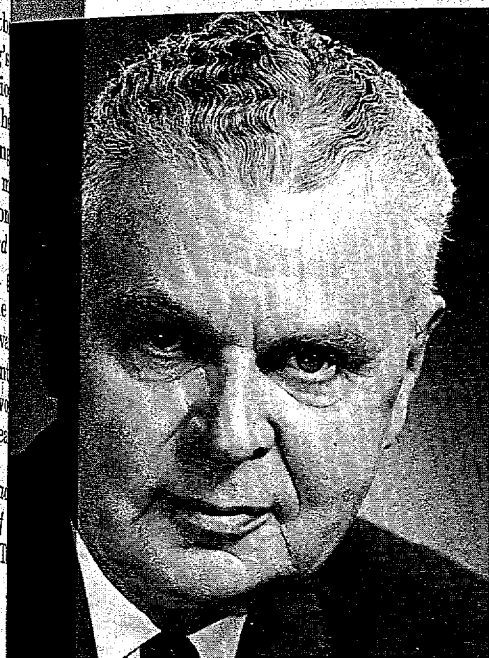




John Diefenbaker

Related to the division amongst Diefenbaker's Cabinet ministers, and flowing from it, was the so-called "conspiracy" that Stursberg emphasizes in this volume. R. A. Bell, Minister of Citizenship and Immigration in 1962, and Pierre Sévigny, Associate Minister of National Defence at the time, strongly deny the existence of such a conspiracy. However, their accounts do refer to the Prime Minister's repeated threats of resignation, which, understandably enough, might have provided the occasion for men around him to discuss a possible successor. Léon Balcer tells of a "very antagonistic" group of ten or 12 Cabinet ministers meeting about twice weekly. But it seems to be largely Stursberg's interpretation, rather than that of the participants, that the Government was defeated by a "plot". This volume, like the first, is a collection of interview excerpts only. Since the portions used are not conclusive, we have no way of knowing at this time if Stursberg quotes words carrying inflammatory connotations with validity or not. Nevertheless, in one of his explanatory notes he says:

The first phase had consisted of *clandestine* meetings and discussions in parliamentary offices during the fall and winter; the second phase of *plotting and planning* took only a few days and came to a head during the weekend of 2-3 February. On 5 February, the Government was defeated in the House. (*Emphasis added*)

Happily for the historian, the entire collection of tapes is preserved and will become available within a few years.

The interviews are not offered, of course, as the presentation of a complete story of the Diefenbaker era. Conversations with Prime Minister Diefenbaker himself have not been included because of commitments to the publisher of his own memoirs. As Stursberg points out, no simple explanation is advanced and no single truth emerges. Recall of the participants can be affected by faulty memory; views may be distorted by emotional pressures both at the time and later.

But the phenomenological approach is a valuable addition to the written record upon which traditional historians most often rely. As a technique, oral or living history is "as modern as the latest generation of portable electronic recording devices". It appears that few leaders keep diaries or write letters today. More and more often, decisions are made in conversation or are transmitted by telephone. If that is the case, interviews on tapes will provide increasingly valuable sources of historical information.

*Interviews
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story on
Diefenbaker*