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MACKENZIE KING: THE INCREDIBLE CANADIAN. By Bruce Hutchison (Longmans Green).

For more than half a century Canada has been a factor of considerable and ever increasing importance in the world economy. During the past decade Canada's political importance has begun to match her economic weight. For this reason students of politics and practising politicians and diplomats everywhere warmly welcome any information concerning Canadian political movements and personalities which can help to dispel the vast ignorance of Canada which is only too common in the world at large. This desire for information about a large, rich, and important 'new boy' is undoubtedly part of the explanation for the wide publicity given to "Mackenzie King: the Incredible Canadian."

Its author, Mr. Bruce Hutchison, is well known in Canada as a skilful propagandist of the Liberal party. The book was published in Canada six months before the Canadian general election of 1953. The authorship and the timing of publication help to explain its character and its contents; for it is an elaborate apology for a man who, in the absence of a leader identified with any known political principles, still leads the Liberal party of Canada from beyond the grave. In the composition of his apology Mr. Hutchison has abandoned the devices of his predecessors in the same office who wrote while Mackenzie King was still alive. He has not essayed to paint a picture with no warts at all. Instead he teaches his readers to admire all that Mackenzie King ever did, but to regret occasionally his manner of doing it. The only exception which Mr. Hutchison allows to this rule of writing concerns Mackenzie King's Munich phase when the late Canadian Prime Minister was a cordial supporter of Mr. Neville Chamberlain.

The reasons why Mr. Mackenzie King alone among the men of Munich was able to survive during the war and on into the post-war world make an interesting study. If Mr. Hutchison had endeavoured to solve one problem such as this he would deserve our thanks. But Mr. Hutchison has not suggested an explanation of this problem or of any of the many problems relating to Mackenzie King's political career. Instead, the author has placed Mackenzie King in the centre of a melodrama. The necessities of Mr. Hutchison's scenario have excluded a treatment of the structure and movement of Canadian politics and Mackenzie King's part therein.

For this reason Mr. Hutchison has produced a book disappointing to students of politics. There are few facts in "Mackenzie King: the Incredible Canadian" capable of making the subject's life intelligible except as a personal adventure. The first forty-five years of his subject's life, when Mackenzie King laid the foundation of his leadership, Mr. Hutchison has disposed of in fifty empty pages which repeat what was said by Norman McLeod Rogers, who repeated what was said by Lewis, who repeated what was said by McGillicuddy, who repeated what Mackenzie King said about himself in the House of Commons on 20 April 1920. In so far as he has any explanation of Mackenzie King's selection as Leader of the Liberal party in 1919, Mr. Hutchison seems to suggest that he owed his elevation to his abilities as a minister and his loyalty to Laurier during the battle over conscription in 1917. A study of the Laurier Papers lately opened to public inspection in the Public Archives of Canada show that both points of Mr. Hutchison's 'explanation' are incorrect. As the minister concerned in the politically disastrous Grand Trunk strike of 1910, Mackenzie King had a heavy responsibility for the defeat of the Liberal party in 1911, and he came under such a cloud after the election of that year that he was obliged to withdraw from federal politics for eighteen months. In the Laurier Papers there is some evidence for Sir Robert Borden's assertion that Mackenzie King tried to enter the Unionist coalition in 1917. There is abundant evidence that Laurier greatly distrusted Mackenzie King and that Sir Wilfrid was repaid during the election by Mackenzie King's refusal to accompany him on an election tour in Western Canada, to speak in the Province of Quebec, and even to support Laurier's policy of a referendum on the subject of compulsory military service.

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