

RT. HONOURABLE

William Lyon Mackenzie King

(Lib.) 1921-1926, 1926-1930, 1935-1948

William Lyon Mackenzie King was confederation's first bachelor Prime Minister. He was an astute politician who won record party victories at the polls. He was prime minister longer than any other British leader—a total of just over twenty-one years.

He led Canada through the Second World War and the many crises it engendered at home and abroad. He was a shy and sensitive man but could rule with an iron hand and often did. He believed it possible to communicate with the spirit world.

Mackenzie King was born December 17, 1874 in Kitchener, Ontario, grandson of the rebel leader William Lyon Mackenzie. He was educated at Toronto University, Chicago University and Harvard. He was made a C.M.G. in 1906 but always opposed the award of titular honours. Mackenzie King became Deputy Labour Minister in 1900. In 1908 he was appointed Labour Minister and entered the House of Commons. He went down with the government in the 1911 elections and was out of the House until 1919.

He succeeded Laurier as Liberal leader in 1919 and returned to the House as opposition leader. He was Prime Minister from December 29, 1921 to June 28, 1926; from September 25, 1926 to August 7, 1930 and from October 23, 1935 to November 15, 1948, when he resigned because of failing health.

Mackenzie King was elected successively in North Waterloo (1908), Prince, P.E.I. (1919), North York (1921), Prince Albert (1926, 1930, 1935 and 1940) and Glengarry in 1945. In 1940 the Liberals won a record 184 seats.

In 1926, faced with a censure vote and likely defeat in the Commons, Mackenzie King asked Governor General Byng for dissolution but His Excellency refused (thus creating the famous constitutional issue), and called on Conservative leader Meighen to attempt to form a government.

With a smaller following than King's, Meighen was defeated within three months. King fought the ensuing election on the constitutional issue, claiming that the Governor General of Canada should take his instructions from the sovereign's Canadian advisers. That point was later established beyond question.

King resigned in favour of Louis St. Laurent in 1948. He never fully regained his health and died at his country home, Kingsmere, in the Gatineau Hills near Ottawa in July 1950.

