

MACKENZIE KING and the
CONSCRIPTION CRISIS

He appeared harmless enough -- a roundish, pompous little man who loved his dog and communicated with his dead mother with the help of a crystal ball -- but, in fact, William Lyon Mackenzie King was a ruthless politician who knew how to walk the knife edge of Canadian politics. Never was this more evident than during one of the most important political events in Canadian history; the Conscription Crisis.

From the beginning of the war in 1939, Prime Minister King tried to avoid conscription, lest civil war break out in Canada. Most English Canadians thought they had a duty to the Mother Country; young men should be sent to fight. Most French Canadians vehemently disagreed. They saw the War as a European war and wanted no part in it.

Mackenzie King had seen this same division nearly tear the country apart during the First World War. Now a similar pressure was building. Should he impose conscription? In spite of delaying tactics, King had to make a decision in the final year of the war.

Mackenzie King and the Conscription Crisis combines archival footage with excerpts from *The King Chronicles*, a dramatic film series written and directed by Donald Brittain.

SOME SCENES CONTAIN GRAPHIC LANGUAGE.

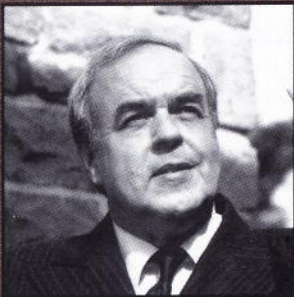
Actor Sean McCann as Mackenzie King.

Produced and distributed by National Film Board of Canada/Studio B

Director: Erna Buffie

Producers: Adam Symansky
David Wilson

Order number: C 9191 062
31 minutes 02 seconds



MACKENZIE KING and the
CONSCRIPTION CRISIS



VHS

113C
9191 062



Closed captioned for the deaf and hard of hearing. A decoder is required.



National Film Board of Canada

Office national du film du Canada



National Film Board of Canada

Office national du film du Canada

MACKENZIE KING *and the*
**CONSCRIPTION
 CRISIS**

William Lyon Mackenzie King has often been characterized as a muddle-headed eccentric. *Mackenzie King and the Conscription Crisis* challenges that stereotype. The longest-serving Prime Minister in Canadian history, King was actually a shrewd politician who clearly understood the dangers presented by the idea of conscripting Canadians to bolster the troops fighting in Holland during World War II. King vividly remembered the conscription crisis of 1917 when the Canadian army had to use machine guns to quell anti-conscription rioting in Quebec, rioting that left four people dead. English Canadians were clamouring for conscription so that the burdens of the war effort would be spread equally across the Canadian population. Many French Canadians stood firmly opposed to conscription for they believed World War II was a European war and therefore was of little concern to them. Whatever decision he made would offend and alienate a portion of the Canadian population and possibly lead to a civil war.

This burden was shouldered by William Lyon Mackenzie King, who spent most of the war years trying to avoid making a decision.

Sean McCann
 as Mackenzie King

Writer/Director
 Erna Buffie

Editors
 David Wilson
 Denise Beaudoin

Original Music
 Louis Babin

Narrator
 Terri Nash

Research
 Donna Dudinsky
 Ronnie Blumer

Sound Editor
 Les Halman

Music Recording
 Louis Hone

Re-recording
 Jean-Pierre Joutel
 Shelley Craig

Producers
 Adam Symansky
 David Wilson

Executive Producer
 Colin Neale

Produced and
 distributed by
 National Film Board of
 Canada/Studio B

with the assistance of
 The Secretary of State

Color
 31 minutes 02 seconds

Order number:
 C 9191 062

© 1991 National Film
 Board of Canada
 P.O. Box 6100
 Station A
 Montreal, Quebec
 H3C 3H5

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Was William Lyon Mackenzie King an enlightened, but ruthless, politician or a muddled, aging prime minister who wanted, above all else, to cling to political power?
2. Weighing the merits and demerits of conscription, where would you stand on the issue?
3. Was there a real danger of civil war in Canada over the conscription crisis?

SUGGESTED AUDIENCE

Senior level History and Social Studies.

COMMENTS FROM THE CLASSROOM

"I think that it helps people to understand why conscription happened and why many French Canadians were opposed to it and why most British Canadians were in favour. The (earthy) language in parts of the movie doesn't bother me because I think it was used naturally."

Vi Norman, student

"In all the history courses I have taken, the role played by Canada in World War II has not been particularly clear to me. After seeing this video, I feel I have a good basic understanding not only of Canada's role but also of a good Prime Minister who had to face incredible pressure within his own country."

Heather Harris, student

"In this video, the viewer is made to identify with William Lyon Mackenzie King as he tries to avoid conscription in the final year of World War II. Through the skill of the writers and cinematographers, William Lyon Mackenzie King is seen as a man who clearly understood the danger to the future of Canada so sharply focused in the single issue of conscription."

Alan Skeoch, M.A.
 Head of History

Parkdale Collegiate Institute, Toronto



National
 Film Board
 of Canada

Office
 national du film
 du Canada