

The Man Who Might Have Been

AN INQUIRY INTO THE LIFE AND DEATH
OF HERBERT NORMAN

On April 4, 1957, Herbert Norman, the Canadian ambassador to Egypt, leapt to his death from a Cairo rooftop.

During his remarkable life, Norman helped set the course of post-war Japan and played a key role during the Suez crisis. But with all of his talents and achievements, there was something haunting Herbert Norman and following him to every corner of the globe: the accusation that he was a Soviet spy.

Director John Kramer's chilling and revealing documentary **The Man Who Might Have Been: An Inquiry into the Life and Death of Herbert Norman** takes us back to a time when the Cold War was heating up and when the mere accusation of communist sympathies could destroy a man's career. Using declassified documents, interviews with key players and dramatizations filmed around the world, Kramer reconstructs the ordeal that Norman endured for seven long years, as a US Senate subcommittee relentlessly probed his past beliefs and current loyalties.

During his meteoric rise and fall, Norman crossed paths with some of the greatest personalities of his time: Nobel-prize winning Canadian diplomat and politician Lester B. Pearson; FBI director J. Edgar Hoover, whose organization had an 800-page security file on Norman; General Douglas MacArthur, to whom Norman was a trusted aide; and charismatic Egyptian leader Gamel Abdul Nasser.

Director: John Kramer Producer: Gerry Flahive
98 minutes, 2 seconds Order number: C9198 071



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National Film Board of Canada
P.O. Box 6100, Station Centre-Ville
Montreal, Quebec H3C 3H5

Printed in Canada



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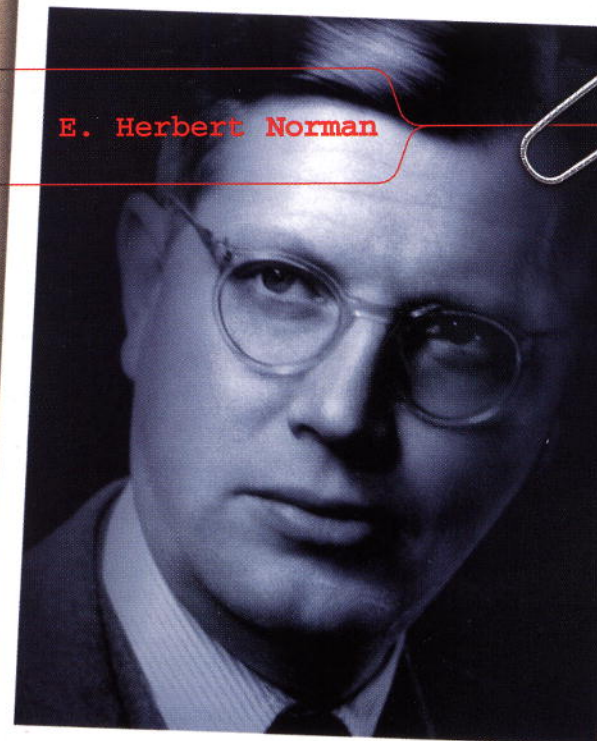


VHS

C9198 071



E. Herbert Norman



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Historical Context

The life of Herbert Norman (1909-1957) intersects with many of the major ideas, ideologies and events of his era. Born to Canadian missionaries in Japan in 1909,

Norman, at the age of 30, authored a ground-breaking study of Japanese society that is still held in high esteem. With his intimate understanding of Japan, Norman was chosen to serve in Allied intelligence under General MacArthur during Japan's post-war occupation. Norman went on to serve Canada in the diplomatic corps, culminating in his 1956 posting as ambassador to Egypt where he played a pivotal role in resolving the Suez Crisis.

Unfortunately, Norman lived in treacherous times. As a young man, he had been attracted to the potential of communism to create a better world. In the Cold War, such an attraction could be a fatal mistake. From 1945 to the final fall of the Soviet Union in 1991, the Cold War dominated East-West relations. This political and ideological war was waged against the backdrop of an arms race between the United States and the Soviet Union. These two nations had emerged from WWII as dominant world powers. Together as allies they had battled fascism. But by the end of WWII, the perceived threat of Soviet communism had replaced fascism as the prime enemy of Western democracies.

During this period, the old world order was undergoing tremendous change. In 1948, the Soviets invaded Czechoslovakia. In 1949, the communists seized control in China; a year later, they invaded South Korea. In the Middle East, tensions arose between the new state of Israel and its Arab neighbours, and in 1956 Israel attacked Egypt. Throughout the 1950s, Third World colonialism was in marked decline, opening the door to political and military powers eager to fill the void. It was a time of struggle and global insecurity. On the international scene, the communist presence was clearly in evidence.

In North America, the Cold War was manifest primarily as a state of fear fuelled by the West's perception of the threat posed by the Soviet Union and its communist agenda. Canada's 'official' entry into the Cold War in 1945 coincided with the Gouzenko affair: Canada's discovery of a communist spy ring operating out of Ottawa. By 1949-50, with the inception of NATO and the advent of the Korean War, Canada's commitment to the Cold War was complete.¹ However, despite its anti-communist stance, Canada attempted to avoid the witch-hunt approach to routing out the 'enemy within' which came to characterize the US during the McCarthyism of the 1950s.

The Cold War engendered particular forms of cooperation between the US and Canada in the name of mutual security and defence. While Canada did not overtly pursue a McCarthy-style inquisition of its own, the RCMP provided information on many 'suspicious' Canadians to the FBI in exchange for foreign intelligence. In the case of Norman, even though US Senate accusations against him in 1950 were investigated and discharged by the RCMP, the FBI remained unconvinced, and his case was repeatedly pursued by the US Senate Internal Security Subcommittee (SISS). In the end, information originating with the RCMP formed part of the arsenal used against Norman by the SISS.²

While Norman himself once struggled with the competing paradigms of Christianity and communism, it seems that his values never wavered. Rather, he sought the most honourable means by which to realize them. As Whitaker and Marcuse conclude: "His death was a tragic finale to the era begun with the defection of Igor Gouzenko... To many Canadians, then and now, the most powerful image of that era is that of Herbert Norman—scholar, diplomat, humanist—a life of great promise stifled, dreams of a better world dashed, standing in his last despairing moments at the edge of that roof in Cairo" (pp. 424-25).²

Suggested Audience

This film is recommended for students at the senior high school, college and university levels.

The accomplished yet tragic life of Herbert Norman provides an invaluable vantage point from which to view the evolution of the key social and political issues of the 20th century. As such, it bears particular relevance to the study of modern history, political science and sociology.

Director and Writer
John Kramer

Producer
Gerry Flahive

Executive producer
Louise Lore

Editor
David Kazala

Director of Photography
Andreas Poulsson, C.S.C.

Original Music
Mark Korven

Actor
Greg Ellwand
as Herbert Norman

Order number:
C9198 071

98 minutes
2 seconds



Themes for Discussion and Research

- political movements and conversion to mass movements
- ideology, faith, spirituality and idealism
- communism, capitalism, fascism and democracy
- beliefs vs. behaviour: what constitutes freedom of expression?
- Canada-US relations
- Canada's evolving international role
- Lester Pearson's role during the Cold War

Chronology of Some Key Historic Events

1909	Herbert Norman born in Nagano, Japan
1917	Bolsheviks stage coup in Russia
1929	The stock market crashes: the Great Depression begins
1933	Hitler becomes Chancellor of Germany
1936	Stalin begins purge
	Spanish Civil War begins (ends 1939)
1939	Canada declares war on Germany
1941	Japanese army bombs Pearl Harbor
1945	Atomic bomb dropped on Hiroshima
	Soviet Embassy clerk Igor Gouzenko defects in Ottawa with proof of spy ring
1949	Communists take control of China
	Soviets test first atomic bomb
1950	Senator McCarthy charges publicly that 205 Communists have infiltrated the State Department
	Communists invade South Korea: Korean War begins (ends 1953)
1951	Julius and Ethel Rosenberg are sentenced to death
1952	Lester Pearson elected president of the UN General Assembly
1956	Nasser seizes Suez Canal
1957	Herbert Norman commits suicide in Cairo
	Lester Pearson awarded Nobel Peace Prize for his solution to Suez Crisis

References

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- Sawatsky, John. *Men in the Shadows*. Toronto: Doubleday, 1980.
- Schrecker, Ellen. *The Age of McCarthyism: A Brief History with Documents*. Boston: St. Martin's Press, 1994.
- 2 Whitaker, Reginald & Marcuse, Gary. *Cold War Canada: The Making of a National Insecurity State, 1945-1957*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1994.

Related Web Sites

Canadian Security Intelligence Service (CSIS) — www.csis-scrs.gc.ca
 Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) — www.rcmp-grc.gc.ca/html
 Cold War Hot Links (US) — www.stmartin.edu/~dprice/cold.war.html
 Post World War II (US) — www.hist.unt.edu/09w-amw5.htm

Related NFB Videos

The Un-Canadians (1996): One million Canadians were investigated by their own government during the Cold War. A documentary by a filmmaker whose father was blacklisted. 72 minutes. Order number C9196 078.

On Guard for Thee, Parts 1-3 (1981): A trilogy of one-hour films on Canada's national security operations and civil liberties, from WWII to the FLQ crisis and the War Measures Act in the 1970s. Order numbers C0181 067, C0181 068, C0181 069.

Visit the Herbert Norman Web Site: www.herbertnorman.com