



Angus L. Macdonald: A Provincial Liberal

T. Stephen Henderson

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Perhaps one of the most influential Canadian premiers of the Twentieth Century and one of the leading political intellectuals of his generation, Angus L. Macdonald dominated politics in Nova Scotia for more than twenty years, serving as premier from 1933 to 1940 and again from 1945 until his death in 1954. One rival referred to him as "the pope" out of respect for his political infallibility. From 1940 to 1945 Macdonald guided Canada's war effort at sea as Minister of National Defence for Naval Services; under his watch, the Royal Canadian Navy expanded faster than any other navy in the world.

This new work by T. Stephen Henderson is the first academic biography of Macdonald, whose life provides a framework for the study of Canada's pre- and post-war transformation, and a rare opportunity to compare the political history of the two periods. Generally, Macdonald's political thinking reflected a progressive, interwar liberalism that found its clearest expression in the 1940 Rowell-Sirois report on federal-provincial relations. The report proposed a redistribution of responsibilities and resources that would allow poorer provinces greater autonomy and reduce overlapping jurisdictions in the federal system. Ottawa abandoned Rowell-Sirois in the postwar period, and Macdonald fell out of step with the national Liberal party that he had once seemed destined to lead. Within Nova Scotia, however, his ardent defence of provincial powers and his commitment to building a modern infrastructure enabled him to win election after election and transform the face and identity of his province.

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