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Barry Cahill

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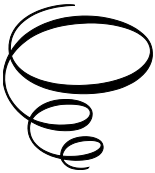

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IN MEMORIAM

Gordon Douglas Pollock, 1939–2019

Historian and Mentor

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PREFACE

My first and greatest debt is to the grandchildren of Norman McLeod Rogers, who graciously accepted my offer to write a scholarly biography of him. John MacLeod Rogers QC, custodian of a significant portion of his grandfather's papers, shared my view that a biography of Rogers should be written, and has gone out of his way to be as helpful as possible. Without his generous assistance this book could not have been written. I am also indebted, and deeply grateful to my research associate, Heather Long, to whom Queen's University Archives awarded a McWatters Visiting Fellowship to peruse the Norman Rogers papers held there. I am grateful to Stephen Azzi and Norman Hillmer for authorizing the *Dictionary of Canadian Biography* to grant me access to the text of their unpublished article on Rogers; to Dr Robin Darwall-Smith, archivist, University College, University of Oxford; to Wendy Robicheau, archivist, Acadia University Archives; to Heather Home and Lisa Gervais of Queen's University Archives; to my friend and former colleague at Nova Scotia Archives, Barry Smith; and to Margaret Ross, PhD candidate, Department of History, Queen's University, for research assistance under the very difficult circumstances of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Barry Cahill

INTRODUCTION

Though his public career lasted a mere five years (1935–1940)—from mid-Depression to early Second World War—Norman Rogers's meteoric rise on the Canadian political scene saw him became to Prime Minister W. L. Mackenzie King what King considered himself to have been to Sir Wilfrid Laurier: his chosen successor. How did Rogers achieve such a status, only to be undone by sudden and tragic death?

Norman Rogers was born in Amherst NS July 1894, the second of four sons of Henry Wyckoff Rogers, a lawyer and municipal politician, and Grace Dean McLeod, author and antiquarian; his mother was one of the early women students at Dalhousie University. The Rogers family was prominent in Conservative political circles in Nova Scotia: Wyckoff's younger brother, Tecumseh Sherman, stood unsuccessfully for Parliament in 1904 before becoming an elite lawyer in Halifax, chair of the Halifax Relief Commission following the 1917 Halifax Disaster, and a justice of the Supreme Court (1921). In the 1920 provincial election, after women in Nova Scotia were enfranchised, Grace McLeod Rogers stood as a Conservative in the three-member constituency of Cumberland County and received the most votes of any of the Conservative candidates, all of whom were defeated.

Years later, when professor of political science at Queen's University, Rogers reminisced about growing up in a thriving industrial town:

> My early years were spent in a community where factory whistles were barometers of progress and prosperity. As a schoolboy I soon became instructed in their profound significance. In time I was able to distinguish one from another and could welcome proudly and joyfully the new additions which came in rapid sequence during the first decade of the century. There was the deep bass of the engineering works [Robb Engineering Ltd] which manufactured engines and boilers for the busy lumber mills. There was the rich baritone of the [rail]car works [Rhodes Curry and Company Ltd] where passenger and freight cars were turned out day by day to meet the requirements of the insatiable West with its advancing frontiers and its spreading railways. ... Intermingled with these were the whistles of the woollen mills, the shoe factory, the stove foundry and many another of the numerous progeny of manufactures which are born of unbounded optimism in an age of rapid industrial progress.[1]

In 1912 Norman entered Acadia University, the Baptist college in Wolfville NS. He financed his studies through summer employment as a labourer in the railcar works; he also sold magazine subscriptions. (According to a 1939 interview, "Back in the early days he answered an advertisement in *Maclean's Magazine*. He secured credentials and sold subscriptions on a house-to-house canvas. He pays tribute to the valuable experience in sales work he gained at that time.").[2] Rogers was probably planning to follow his father, uncle and maternal grandfather into the legal profession and Acadia offered a law course as part of its undergraduate arts degree program. By the end of his sophomore year, in June 1914, he had definitely decided to become a lawyer and took the first, and most essential step by becoming articled to his father.[3] Had it not been for the Great War, Rogers might very well have persevered on his path to the law. Instead, towards the end of his junior year, in March 1915, he enlisted in the 6th Canadian Mounted Rifles, a battalion raised in Amherst. (A letter he wrote to the editor of the local paper in the spring of 1916 appears as an Appendix.) By October he was in France, where in June 1916 he participated in the catastrophic defensive battle of Mont Sorrel. Gassed at Hill 62 (Sanctuary Wood), Rogers's war was over. Though eventually promoted lieutenant, he spent time in hospital and never saw active service at the front again; his wartime experience permanently impaired his health.

During his absence on active service Rogers had been nominated as prospective Rhodes Scholar for Nova Scotia, but instead of returning immediately to Acadia in order to complete his degree, he chose to pursue academic legal study and spent 1917–18 as a freshman undergraduate at Dalhousie Law School. In 1918, however, when the provincial Rhodes Trust Committee confirmed him for the award, Rogers had no choice but to abandon legal studies and return to Acadia to complete his degree, without which he could not have taken up the scholarship. Rogers spent the years 1919–22 at University College, Oxford. After having taken the degrees of BA (1920 – modern history), BLitt (1921– political economy, by thesis) and BCL (law – 1922), he returned to Canada to take up the post of professor and chair of history at Acadia. In addition to teaching and administrative duties, Rogers also began to write, paying particular attention to Québécois and Acadien subjects: all then unfashionable among the imperialist school of English-Canadian historians.

After a few months in pious Wolfville, Rogers had had enough of teaching history at Acadia, and was looking for more congenial work in an area that appealed most strongly to him. In April 1923 he wrote Prime Minister Mackenzie King asking for a job in the federal civil service. Though there was "no particular vacancy," King was impressed with

Rogers's credentials, no doubt especially with two glowing testimonials from Oxford faculty; his response to the young professor was prompt and friendly.[4] King and Rogers appear to have met later that year when they were both serving on the general committee struck to organize the commemoration of the centenary of the birth of continental historian, Francis Parkman.[5]

Rogers was not to be deterred but wrote again to the prime minister in December 1925. According to King's official biography, "Norman McLeod Rogers was an intense intellectual ... who had long aspired to a life of public service. He had been impressed by Mackenzie King's high principles and ... had written him an adulatory letter: 'My object in writing to you now is simply this', he had explained; 'if you have some hard task to be done, you will find me ready and happy to undertake it. Indeed, I shall not be quite happy until I have thrown myself into the work for which I have planned'."[6] By then Rogers was a Liberal, having abandoned the Conservative Party, embarrassing his arch-tory family and causing an estrangement from his father which lasted until Norman became an MP and Cabinet minister in 1935.[7]

In April 1924 Rogers had been called to the bar of Nova Scotia, but there is no evidence that he ever practised law or intended to. That month he also published in the *Dalhousie Review* an article on Canadian post-confederation politics and government.[8] Taking stock perhaps of Canada's imminent diamond jubilee (1927), he presented "a plea for the cultivation of a national sentiment."[9] As a Canadianist intellectual, Rogers was far ahead of his time. This important essay, written when he was just thirty, is full of wisdom borne out by subsequent events down to the present day. For Rogers himself it was the shape of things to come. Yet despite this promising debut, he languished another three years at Acadia, largely confining himself to historical research and writing on the colonial period. His first article had been a bridge too far in a traditionalist backwater like Nova Scotia, where the publication of so radical a thought-piece by the chair of history at conservative Acadia could not have won him any friends.

Rogers might well have stood for election to Parliament as a Liberal in 1926 in the constituency in which he resided—Hants-Kings (then held by a Conservative)—had the university not told him he would have to resign his professorship if he did so. By then Rogers was well tired of the post, which hardly matched his ability or ambition and offered no opportunities for upward mobility. In 1927, therefore, he gratefully accepted an invitation from Prime Minister King to go to Ottawa to serve as secretary for Cabinet relations.

Two years with King deepened their relationship, but in 1929 Rogers was gone, the reasons for his departure unclear: the work, the workplace, the boss, the colleagues, his health—or better prospects elsewhere. There had been hard work but perhaps little job satisfaction. It seems clear that King was not dissatisfied with Rogers's performance; his new protégé was just not cut out to be a civil servant. Public service meant politics—and prospectively power to effect change. His next move was back to academe, though not to the Maritimes, Nova Scotia, Wolfville or Acadia, the dust of which he had shaken off his feet. Why Queen's University and how so? The link was almost certainly Oscar Douglas Skelton—Dr Skelton—a former head of department of politics at Queen's and one of King's closest advisers. He took Rogers under his wing; the two became close friends and remained so to the end of their lives in 1940 and 1941, respectively. According to the official history of Queen's University, Rogers, "a leading student of history and law, by way of Acadia and Oxford, had been rescued from the turmoil of the prime minister's office (PMO) in Ottawa and given a temporary and joint appointment to both political science and history."[10] There was also an enviable tradition of social responsibility and public service at Queen's; Rogers and the university took to each other immediately. Just as Acadia was too small, marginal and sectarian, Presbyterian Queen's (secularized in 1912) was of the right size, sophistication and scope: the perfect fit for a professor fed up with the hinterland who had aspirations for national politics. Moreover, Rogers's departure from Ottawa did nothing to dim or diminish his relationship with Mackenzie King, for whom he worked hard during the disastrous 1930 federal election.

Ironically, the defeat of the Liberal government that year had the effect of launching Rogers into politics. He became active in Kingston's federal constituency association, eventually rising to first vice-president; and in September 1933 joined a galaxy of prominent Liberals including John W. Dafoe, Vincent Massey, H. M. Cassidy and James Layton Ralston, at the first Liberal summer conference at Port Hope ON. Among the published proceedings of the conference was a paper presented by Rogers entitled "Federal-Provincial Relations."[11]

Rogers's progressive liberalism, well to the left of King's, showed in his participation in the teaching activities of the Workers' Educational Association of Ontario, a leftish 'continuing ed' organization founded on the British model in Toronto in 1918, and in his quiet support of the League for Social Reconstruction (which, though established at Queen's in 1932, he did not actually join). In his history of the LSR Michiel Horn explains Rogers's reluctance to join by quoting his letter to Frank

Underhill declining the invitation to do so: "I know you do not hold the view that there is any real basis for hope in Canadian liberalism, but perhaps our difference of opinion arises from the fact that your radicalism started from a Liberal background, whereas all my earlier associations were Conservative."[12]

In 1931 Rogers had given up teaching history to devote himself full-time to political science. That year he published in the *Queen's Quarterly* an article entitled, "The Imperial Conference and Provincial Rights," which well illustrates his pivot from colonial history to constitutional law and politics. In late 1933 he was invited by his close personal and political friend, Premier Angus L. Macdonald of Nova Scotia, to prepare that government's submission to the provincial royal commission of economic inquiry (Jones Commission). The result was Rogers's 263-page magnum opus: *A Submission on Dominion-Provincial Relations and the Fiscal Disabilities of Nova Scotia within the Canadian Confederation*. This was the work which made his reputation, though of course he was not an economist and few economists agreed with his views on economic history.

In May 1934 Rogers was promoted full professor at Queen's, and a few months later took over as interim chair (sabbatical cover) of the then combined department of political science and economics. In anticipation of the next federal election, he had also by then begun work on a revised edition of Mackenzie King's 1925 campaign biography, which appeared in time for the election, called in August 1935. (King was so pleased and proud of this work that, on his official visit to Germany in June 1937, he presented a complimentary copy of it to Chancellor Hitler.) King also encouraged, if he did not actually recruit Rogers to stand for election to Parliament as the Liberal candidate for Kingston and Portsmouth. Though opposed by six other candidates (all with stronger local connections) Rogers triumphed, probably because he was known or presumed to be King's personal choice. The riding was a Conservative stronghold, not having gone Liberal since 1908. But election day, 14 October 1935, saw Rogers trounce the Conservative incumbent by nearly 1000 votes; nationally, the Liberals returned to office with a majority government. The university having granted him a leave of absence for the duration, Rogers was free to take his seat in Parliament without endangering his permanent job. On 23 October he entered the government as minister of labour, symbolically the very post King himself had held at the outset of *his* ministerial career in 1909. At one leap Rogers had bounded from professor to politician: member of Parliament and cabinet minister. Mackenzie King was determined to lead a younger, leaner cabinet and had no intention of restoring all his 1930 ministers still in Parliament to office. In his case

study of cabinet-making in 1935, Fred Gibson introduces Rogers as one of the Young Turks who

> stood out for immediate recognition. Norman McLeod Rogers was a university professor whom Mackenzie King had brought into the public service in 1927 as one of his secretaries. In 1930 [1929] Rogers returned to academic life, but he continued to assist King informally, ... King admired Rogers's idealism, valued his assistance and respected his knowledge of constitutional and economic problems. Now that Rogers had acquired a political footing, King foresaw for his protégé a bright political future, and was anxious to promote him to larger responsibilities.[13]

Rogers was immediately tasked with organizing the federal-provincial first ministers' conference held in Ottawa in December 1935, and also advised the prime minister on the establishment in April 1936 of the National Employment Commission (NEC), the work of which he supervised as minister of labour.[14] His four years in the Department of Labour, during which he saw out the Depression and saw in the Second World War were not easy; the honeymoon lasted well into 1936, when King took Rogers to Geneva to attend the assembly of the League of Nations. When composition of the Canadian delegation to the upcoming assembly was being discussed in Cabinet, King wrote in his diary for 5 August: "At Council I told Rogers I intended to have him come along whether [Ernest] Lapointe came or not. He was greatly pleased. Said it would mean very much to him. He spoke of the advantages of 'youth' represented on the delegation. ... Rogers is the best all-round man in the Cabinet; (if he has the strength, he may yet be the party leader & PM)."

Rogers's representing an Ontario seat recaptured after 28 years in Conservative hands, and his appointment to Cabinet as one of four Ontario political ministers, saw his influence in the party grow so fast that by 1940 he and C. D. Howe were the acknowledged leaders of the federal Liberal Party in the province. The Second World War, in which Canada became involved on 10 September 1939, proved to be both the making of Rogers and the death of him. On 18 September Ian MacKenzie, who had been minister of national defence since 1935, was demoted to pensions and national health and succeeded by Rogers—a promotion described by the Montreal *Gazette* of 20 September as "a complete surprise." They were not reckoning, however, with the depth of King's commitment to his protégé. In his 2016 study of the Canadian Army and conscription in the Second World War, historian Daniel Byers speculates that Rogers was appointed because "King considered [him] better able [than Mackenzie] to resist the increased role that the military would inevitably play in war-time

policy making."[15] Rogers, despite his unmilitary persona, had been conspicuously successful as minister of labour, running the most difficult and demanding portfolio in government in the years when he held it and was responsible for unemployment relief.

According to a Nova Scotia newspaper which ran a feature on Rogers in December 1939, he was one of the local Big Three success stories, the others being Layton Ralston, minister of finance, and Loring Christie, Canada's ambassador in Washington.[16] In nine short months as minister of national defence Rogers launched Canada's war effort at home and abroad. He appointed Andrew McNaughton to command the Canadian Army overseas, organized two divisions for wartime service, prepared the groundwork for the British Commonwealth Air Training Plan (thus rendering Canada the "aerodrome of democracy") and oversaw the transition from one minister responsible for all three services—army, navy and air force—to three ministers, each responsible for a separate branch, himself as minister of national defence assuming direct responsibility for the army. The general election of March 1940, which was a referendum on the government's war policy, and in particular on Rogers's performance as minister of national defence, saw both the government and Rogers himself overwhelmingly re-elected.

Rogers's swansong was his month-long mission to England and France, April–May 1940. Accompanied by Major-General Victor Odlum, Rogers was wined and dined—and perhaps flattered—by British officialdom. He took luncheon with the Cabinet, was received by King George VI and dined at Buckingham Palace. He also dined with Winston Churchill, then First Lord of the Admiralty, and was accorded a meeting with Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain. Accompanied by the Canadian high commissioner, Vincent Massey, Rogers also flew to France, consulting with the prime minister (Reynaud) and the commanding general of the French Army (Weygand), inspecting the front and visiting the Vimy Memorial, which it was feared might be damaged or destroyed in a German invasion. He was still in England when Germany invaded the Low Countries and France, and Churchill became prime minister—on 10 May 1940. The very warm reception accorded Rogers on his first and last overseas mission reflected British perceptions of Canada's usefulness as a wartime ally.

On 10 June 1940 Rogers was scheduled to address a joint luncheon meeting of the Empire and Canadian Clubs at the Royal York Hotel in Toronto. The international situation could hardly have been worse. France was about to fall to the Germans and Italy was declaring war on both England and France. Rogers felt his place that day was in Parliament but

King persuaded him to keep his engagement. Rogers agreed to do so, intending to be back in the House later that day. Around noontime he boarded—unaccompanied, which was very unusual—a Royal Canadian Air Force (RCAF) Lockheed Hudson light bomber assigned to transport VIPs. En route to Toronto from Ottawa, the aircraft developed catastrophic engine failure. While trying to turn back to Base Trenton, the pilot lost control of the aircraft, which nosedived and crashed at speed a short distance east of Newtonville ON; there were no survivors. Rogers, trapped in the cabin, was burned beyond recognition and could only be identified through documents he was carrying; mercifully he would have died on impact. Of all the mournful editorials in newspapers across the country, only Peterborough's *Examiner* asked the hard question:

> Just what did take place in the plane in which he was riding may or may not be determined. Those who were at the scene within a few minutes of the disaster informed us the wreckage was complete. No doubt experts will go into the situation as fully as [the] wreckage permits of intelligent investigation, and they can do so knowing the people of this [country] desire to know all that it is possible to tell them. It was evidently a good plane in competent hands, but something unspeakably wrong took place. Even in the hour of Hon. Norman Rogers's death the people have that unanswered question WHY? firmly in their minds.[17]

All the histories mention that Rogers died in an airplane crash, but few that he was on an official mission as minister of national defence travelling in an RCAF aircraft flown by a specially assigned pilot who had flown him before. Eyewitnesses on the ground testified they saw the aircraft's engines (or one of them) catch fire, but their evidence was discounted lest it raise suspicions of sabotage—that the minister was the victim of a plot to assassinate him. The report of the RCAF flying accident court of inquiry, released in October 1940, blamed pilot error. Flying Officer J. J. Cotter, who could not defend himself, was unfairly scapegoated.

Rogers's posthumous reputation was sustained by his political science scholarship, all produced in just over ten years, and of a very high quality. In 1971, for example, the distinguished series, *Issues in Canadian History*, published in one of its monographs a shortened version of Rogers's most famous and influential article, "The Compact Theory of Confederation," in which, as a critic of the theory, he argued there was "no justification [for it] in history, practice, federal theory or practical convenience."[18] The following year, an important university textbook in Canadian history included one of his articles, "The Genesis of Provincial Rights," reprinted from the 1933 *Canadian Historical Review*. According to the editors' introduction,

> Although written many years ago, this article by the late Norman McLeod Rogers still has a clear freshness and relevance about it. A great Nova Scotian, and a great constitutional lawyer [political theorist?], Rogers was later to become a distinguished wartime federal cabinet minister and thus participate in the second great attempt at centralism. Without using the phrase, Rogers is discussing the elitist nature of the Confederation achievement. ..."[19]

Though Rogers is covered in all the biographies of Mackenzie King, as well as in standard histories of Canada's emergence from the Depression and entry into the Second World War, there is no biography of him. The closest one gets is Richard John Rowell's 1978 MA thesis at Queen's University: "An Intellectual in Politics: Norman Rogers as an Intellectual and Minister of Labour, 1929–1939." Though purporting to cover Rogers's six years at Queen's, when his most important and influential scholarly writing was done, it really deals only with his election to Parliament in 1935 and his four years as minister of labour. According to the abstract,

> Norman McLeod Rogers was the foremost in a group of intellectuals which played an important role in transforming the policies of the Mackenzie King government in Canada from decentralist, laissez-faire Liberalism in the 1920s to centralist, reformist Keynesianism by the end of World War II. This thesis examines four main aspects of Rogers's life—his constitutional and economic ideas; his close personal relationship with Mackenzie King before and after his entry into politics into 1935; his efforts as minister of labour in 1935–1939 to secure effective and generous unemployment relief policies in the face of budget restrictions by the Cabinet leadership; and finally, Rogers's ultimate significance as a catalyst of change in Liberal economic and federal-provincial policies.[20]

The chief difficulty with this approach is that while Rogers may have been sympathetic to Keynesianism, he was not—nor did he pretend to be—an economist, and instead drew upon political science for his critique of historical economics. When Rogers became a politician, he ceased to be an intellectual and productive scholar. It is going too far to claim (as Rowell does) that "Rogers is recognized as one of the foremost representatives of that intellectual interest group which gained tremendous influence during the King administrations of 1935–1948."[21] Rogers, moreover, died too soon to have had much of an impact.

Nevertheless, Rowell was on the right track to state, "The main thrust of this study is to examine the evolution of Rogers from intellectual to politician."[22] He could not have been both and he was not. But Rowell also

errs in supposing "his evolution from intellectual to politician can be fully examined in a study of his years as minister of labour."[23] That evolution instead ended the day Rogers announced he would stand as a candidate for the federal Liberal nomination in Kingston. Thereafter, it is his evolution as MP, minister and highly partisan Liberal attack dog which must be studied. Rowell is also mistaken to assert that Rogers's relationship with King began with his employment as one of the prime minister's principal secretaries 1927–29,[24] which was effect rather than cause. The relationship had been growing since 1923, when they first met. Whether one can agree with Rowell that "Rogers's transformation from intellectual to politician"[25] took place during rather than at the outset of his parliamentary and ministerial career is another matter.

The Mackenzie King biographies offer various segues into Roger's life history. Reginald Hardy's biography, published during King's lifetime, provides a workmanlike sketch of Rogers as one of the Men about King:

> The late Norman McLeod Rogers, who before his death in 1940 was regarded by many as King's political heir, was another young Canadian who wanted a career in the public service. A veteran of World War I, a university teacher, a Rhodes Scholar, ... he wrote to King asking if there was not some place in the government service where he could be of use. He became secretary to King in the latter's capacity as president of the Privy Council, but King was so impressed by his ability that he persuaded him to enter politics. Elected to the House of Commons in 1935, he was appointed minister of national defence in 1939. Rogers became one of King's most trusted ministers and, indeed, King's affection for the young man was close to that of a father's love for his son. When Rogers died in the wreckage of the National Defence Department plane in which he was travelling on official business, King's grief was deep and personal.[26]

In his "candid portrait of Mackenzie King: his works, his times and his nation," published two years after King's death, Bruce Hutchison described Rogers thus: "The [1935] Cabinet contained a promising newcomer in young Norman Rogers, as minister of labour and King's chosen successor. He had many of King's virtues and few of his faults. He was learned, gentle, courageous and admired by everybody. Just as he began to make his mark, he died in the line of war duty."[27] In his 1964 collective biography of Canada's prime ministers, Hutchison describes Rogers as "King's brilliant young heir-apparent,"[28] an insight he could only have gleaned from King himself, whom he had interviewed.

In the third volume of the official biography of Mackenzie King, which takes the story up to the outbreak of war and Rogers's appointment as minister of national defence, Blair Neatby stated,

> His [Rogers's] influence on King is not easy to assess. He seems never to have doubted King's commitment to humanitarian ideals or to have questioned King's political judgment. He had a more youthful zest for social reform, however, and laid more stress on the need for positive government action. ... Rogers was also more of a centralist and frequently warned King against any statements which might prejudge 'The future question of widening the sphere of federal action in the field of social and economic relations.' King was pleased to have a devoted assistant to draft speeches for him, but he also listened with respect to a young man whom he considered almost a protégé and for whom he felt an almost paternal pride.[29]

In the most recent biography of King, Allan Levine, who tends otherwise to downplay Rogers's role, memorably describes him as someone whom "King trusted as much as he did [Ernest] Lapointe."[30]

In his introduction to the first volume of *The Mackenzie King Record, 1939–1944*, J. W. Pickersgill, jealous as he probably was of Rogers's too-rapid ascent from bottom to near the top, tends to downplay Rogers's significance in relation to that of Lapointe and Oscar Douglas Skelton (undersecretary of state for external affairs):

> Of all his colleagues during the whole period he [King] was prime minister, Ernest Lapointe was undoubtedly closest to him. Next only to Skelton's, he relied on Lapointe's judgment in all fields, and no one completely took the place of either after 1941. After Lapointe, Norman Rogers, who had been one of his secretaries in the twenties, was closer to him than any other; but in a way Rogers never quite became a colleague rather than a subordinate.[31]

Both Skelton and Lapointe died in 1941. Rogers was not there to take their place in King's orbit as he most assuredly would have done, his leverage having increased dramatically over his nearly five years in Cabinet, when he *was* a colleague—and an increasingly important one, second only Lapointe in closeness to the prime minister.

In his 1957 biography of C. D. Howe, Leslie Roberts (formerly an assistant to Rogers) provided a pen portrait which bears witness to the persistence of what might be called the Rogers tradition:

> After service in the secretariat of Mr King from 1927 to 1929, Rogers had become professor of political science at Queen's University, and it was there that King had sought him out in 1935 to contest the Kingston seat. He, like Howe, had come from private, professional life to plunge overnight into the tasks of a Cabinet portfolio, as minister of labour. In many minds there has never been doubt that Mr King was grooming the

> young professor to be his successor. Much similarity was to be found in their philosophies. Rogers was quiet, self-effacing, efficient, but he had strength of character and a deep sense of probity, which implied great possibilities of leadership. Many Liberals vow that if he had lived, he would now be prime minister of Canada.[32]

In his memoirs Charles Gavan (Chubby) Power, who was appointed minister of national defence for air in May 1940, in order to relieve some of the pressure on Rogers, described him thus:

> I should like to add that during five years of my association with Norman Rogers, I had come to respect him and to have a deep affection for him. A quiet, unassuming man of gentle disposition, he was far and away the most cultured member of the cabinet. He had a profound knowledge of history and political economy. His studies of classical literature had made him a master of the English language. I venture to prophesy that his speeches in the House of Commons will be read and studied by students of the future both for their matter and their form. There is no doubt in my mind that, had he lived, he would have been called upon to fill the highest office, and that in that role he would have accomplished great things for Canada. It would perhaps not have been expected that a man of his character and disposition could have successfully administered a war department. ... He was, above all, a thoroughgoing Canadian, well-versed in constitutional history and practice, and capable in any discussion with statesmen overseas or in Canada of putting his views plainly and convincingly. His death was a serious blow to our war effort.[33]

Perhaps the most poignant comment on Rogers occurs in the memoirs of then career diplomat Lester Pearson, when Rogers was in England on his last mission:

> I should also mention Norman Rogers, an old and dear friend who was now [April–May 1940] minister of defence and for whom even higher responsibilities were predicted. We spent one glorious late April day, in his crowded and busy visit, at Oxford trying to recapture the magic of those peaceful days when we were together as undergraduates. It was, alas, only a few weeks later that he was killed in an aeroplane crash. Rogers and his party had come to London armed with facts and figures to combat the feeling ... that Canada was not pulling its weight in the war.[34]

No memoir by a contemporary goes more deeply or intimately into Rogers's political career than the first volume of Paul Martin's, published in 1983. First elected to Parliament in 1935, like Rogers, Martin was a social progressive who in 1946 would become minister of national health and welfare. Though nine years younger, he had many things in common

with Rogers, and even served as Rogers's "unofficial parliamentary assistant." He wrote that from 1935 to 1940

> only Norman Rogers seemed to share my reformist views. I had known Rogers slightly before I went to Ottawa—he was at gatherings of groups interested in international affairs and also at the Port Hope conference in 1933—and had found him more prepared to adopt a 'new deal' liberalism than any other leading member of the party. Norman was an intellectual who belonged neither to management nor to labour, but yet had strong sympathies for the oppressed. I came to see a good deal of him and would often go up to his office to have a chat. At one point he asked the prime minister whether I could act as his parliamentary assistant. King was unwilling to sanction it and said that if Rogers kept pressing for an assistant or let it be known that I was helping him, other members [of Cabinet] would become annoyed. So Norman arranged for me to work for him on the quiet, lending a hand with speeches on unemployment and on social questions.[35]

Commenting in his second volume on the principle of Liberal Party alternation between Anglo- and Franco-Canadian leaders, which King applied in his 1948 cooption of Louis St-Laurent as successor, Martin states, "Norman Rogers had really been the prime minister's first choice .... Back then, King had never spoken of this convention of alternation."[36]

In his classic 1975 study of the politics of the Mackenzie King government 1939–1945, J. L. Granatstein introduces Rogers thus:

> The new defence minister was a former political science professor at Queen's University and probably King's favourite among his ministers. In addition to writing a glowing campaign biography of Mackenzie King for the 1935 election, Rogers had done well during the Depression in his difficult Labour portfolio, some observers believing that he had initiated modern planning techniques in the government. A veteran of the Great War, Rogers was young [45], ambitious and energetic. Above all King believed him trustworthy and unlikely to fall under the sway of the generals, unlikely to yield to demands for more men, more money, more of everything. He seemed the ideal choice, and King was delighted with Rogers' first performance as minister of national defence in Cabinet: 'We got the first intelligent and clear-cut statement from the minister of the Department we have had in a year past'.[37]

No one understood better the significance of Rogers's constitutional thinking than historian Colin Howell, who gave him six pages in his 1976 dissertation: "There was no more eloquent spokesman for a refurbished Canadian federalism than Norman McLeod Rogers. Born in Amherst, Nova Scotia, Rogers was a widely-respected political theorist and university

teacher noted for his expertise in Dominion-provincial relations. … Rogers was convinced that Canada needed a more flexible constitution."[38]

Reginald Whitaker's 1977 study of "organizing and financing the Liberal Party of Canada, 1930–58" comments on Rogers's entry into politics at the time of the 1935 federal election, when King was expected by prospective Liberal candidates to promise them offices in return for standing:

> King told [Norman] Lambert[39] that he must never make any commitments in King's name: 'He would not give any promises; when people like Rogers were willing to take a chance on election, he would *not* promise others definite appointments.' The reference was to Norman McLeod Rogers, Queen's University professor and confidant and adviser of King, who had decided to resign his position and run in Kingston.[40] Lambert was impressed enough with this example to employ it against those seeking promises through his office. King was not being entirely ingenuous in this argument, however. As early as September 1934 he had written his good friend a word of advice as to whether he should offer his candidacy. King suggested that he would very much like to see Rogers [again] as a member of the prime minister's office but would not stand in the way of his candidacy. 'I should be surprised ... if that latter would not lead to an equally intimate association, but of that I cannot write at the moment.' It is obvious that King was capable of giving a virtual promise of a cabinet position to someone of the stature of Rogers. Lesser mortals would have to take their chances.[41]

In 1986 Frank Strain published an article on Rogers subtitled "a neglected Nova Scotian contributor to regional economics."[42] Whether Rogers really contributed to the economics of the Maritimes by blaming Ottawa for regional economic underdevelopment is a red herring, but Strain considers Rogers's 1934 magnum opus, *Submission on Dominion-Provincial Relations and the Fiscal Disabilities of Nova Scotia within the Canadian Federation,* fit the bill. Strain's article, which comprises an extended commentary on the work, concludes, "Although Norman McLeod Rogers was not an economist, his good intelligence and his accurate, shrewd and independent observation of economic development in Canada enabled him to produce a remarkable piece of economic analysis."[43] Few economists would have viewed the work as economic analysis at all. It was instead an essay in political economy, highlighting the impact of federal government policy on a small regional economy.

Rogers appears prominently in Doug Owram's magisterial 1986 study of Canadian intellectuals and the state, 1900–1945. His comparison of Rogers and senior civil servant, O. D. Skelton is especially revealing:

> He [Skelton] had also brought in Rogers as private secretary [to Prime Minister King]. Even after Rogers went to Queen's [in 1929], King continued to look to him for advice, and both he and Skelton were actively involved during the 1930 election campaign. The bond was mutual, and when King lost, Skelton confessed that he wished he had left the civil service to assume the principalship of Queen's. ... Henceforth Rogers became even more important to King. Over the next few years pilgrimages were regularly made between Ottawa and Kingston, with the Queen's political scientist acting in a multitude of capacities—speech writer, policy adviser, link with the academic community, and reassurer of the temperamental King. Rogers was seemingly more trusted than most other academics with whom King had contact, in part perhaps because they shared the same spiritualist inclinations, or so King thought. In those massive diaries in which King so often criticized those closest to him, there are few if any negative comments on Rogers. The 1932 comment that 'he is an exceptionally fine fellow' is both consistent with others and an amazing comment from a man who rarely gave unstinted praise.[44]

In relation to Rogers's entry into Cabinet Owram argues convincingly,

> The main preparatory work for the [December 1935 federal-provincial] conference thus fell to King's new minister of labour, Norman Rogers ... . It was natural that the new cabinet minister, Rogers, should assume such a role. He was well-known within intellectual circles both as a leading expert on constitutional matters and as an exponent of reform. In coming into government he had expressed the opinion that he should be given a task involving federal-provincial relations. King, for his part, continued to think highly of his long-time adviser and considered Rogers, like himself, representative of the sort of intellectual whose presence around a cabinet table raised the level of debate: 'I had some sort of vision of myself and Norman Rogers at the outer edge as it were of a complete sweep. Most else seemed to be washed away. This seemed to have significance of our part in the campaign on a high plane, and possibility of our association together in a closer relationship for years to come.' It was thus highly symbolic, as King pointed out, that Rogers was assigned the Labour portfolio, the same one held by King when he first joined the cabinet. Also, in assigning Rogers the complex and delicate task of convening a dominion-provincial conference, King was both expressing confidence in his new minister and testing his abilities.[45]

According to Robert Bryce's 1986 history of the Department of Finance during the Depression ("Relief Reconsidered"), King's "selection of Norman Rogers, a young, ambitious and energetic professor of political science from Queen's University, as his minister of labour was evidence of his seriousness in approaching the relief system."[46] Bryce also includes

Rogers (King's "white-haired boy") among the seven strong ministers of the 1935 cabinet, the other six being Crerar (Mines and Resources), Dunning (Finance), Gardiner (Agriculture), Howe (Railways and Canals), Ilsley (National Revenue) and Lapointe (Justice).[47]

Hugh Grant's 2015 biography of elite economist W. A. (Bill) Mackintosh, a colleague of Rogers at Queen's University who was among his closest friends, quotes the Mackenzie King diary (5 August 1936) relating to Rogers as a prospective prime minister: "Rogers was the rising star in the cabinet, where he was a strong and progressive voice for increased spending, in opposition to finance minister [Charles] Dunning's attempts to avoid a budgetary deficit."[48] It was Mackintosh who wrote a lacerating obituary of Rogers for the *Canadian Journal of Economics and Political Science*: "More than anyone he was responsible for smashing that product of the parochial ignorance of Ontario and New Brunswick, the compact theory of confederation."[49] In his biography of O. D. Skelton, also published in 2015, Norman Hillmer compares Skelton and Rogers in these terms: "They were both former Queen's University teachers, smart, quiet and scholarly, but politically adept and skilful in the ways of the prime minister. Along with Ernest LaPointe, Skelton and Rogers were the colleagues in whom King had the most confidence."[50]

Until September 1939, when he was promoted minister of national defence, Rogers as minister of labour figures prominently in Taylor Hollander's 2018 study of Mackenzie King and labour. According to Hollander, only Rogers

> consistently supported the collective rights of workers. Rogers announced in his New Year's message of 1938: 'It is an obligation of government to uphold freedom of association and the right of workers to organize in unions of their choice.' But for three reasons the labour minister and his department weren't up to the challenge of pushing politicians for a collective bargaining policy. First, Rogers was busy trying to convince the provinces to accept a constitutional amendment that brought unemployment insurance under the jurisdiction of the federal government. Second, the civil servants in the department ... were not prepared to make their own policy recommendations. ... Third, King considered the Department of Labour to be his personal domain. 'No minister of labour, not even Norman Rogers in whom he had exceptional confidence, ever had a free hand,' a close associate [J. W. Pickersgill] remembered. Even though the prime minister held Rogers in high regard, he sometimes found it necessary to temper the labour minister's enthusiasm for reform—to remind him about political realities.[51]

Simply put, Rogers became a Liberal and a politician because he was a reformer in principle and in practice. Though beholden to King for his position, and sensible of the compliment paid him by King's appointing him minister of labour, Rogers did his own thinking. He was no lapdog.

Hollander also provides valuable insight into the impact on King of the death of Rogers, who had ceased to be minister of labour nine months before:

> Rogers had been 'a close friend', and one of 'the best men in the administration.' Much like a protégé, he had shared the same progressive ideals as the prime minister. He had understood—though not necessarily supported—the reasons for King's evasive approach to policy innovations. His death would make it much more difficult to deal with Conservative forces in the Cabinet. And to make matters even worse, the prime minister's deep grief was compounded by guilt. He had pushed a reluctant Rogers to make the trip to Toronto [by train] the night before.[52]

It remains unclear why he did not do so.

In his 2018 study of "income taxation and the modernization of the Canadian political imaginary," David Tough begins the chapter entitled "The Curve of Progressivity: 'Fiscal Need' and the Constitution, 1921–39" with Norman McLeod Rogers, who

> rose in the House of Commons in early 1939 to deliver one of his many blasts of wit at the opposition's expense. The clever Liberal minister of labour was a favourite of his party and the community of intellectuals engaged in government work to which he belonged, but he was a source of continual annoyance to Conservatives. Speaking as part of the debate on the speech from the throne, Rogers kidded R. J. Manion, the leader of the opposition, about his success in reabsorbing H. H. Stevens, a renegade Conservative who had fled the party in 1934 to found the Reconstruction Party, into the front ranks of the Conservative Party. 'We,' Rogers noted, meaning either the government or Parliament or the country as a whole, 'have yet to learn what the terms of the reconciliation have been'—whether, that is, 'the Reconstruction [P]arty is to be conserved or the Conservative Party reconstructed.' And then, in an extravagant display of wit, Rogers noted that Stevens, in returning to the front row, had 'moved, at least in the physical sense, from the extreme left to the extreme right of the Conservative Party benches.' ... Although Rogers was politically better-connected and better-educated than most Canadians, he was not alone in wondering how to make sense of bewildering changes in the party system and in using the left-right spectrum as his instrument of attempted clarification.[53]

Norman Rogers became a Liberal and a politician because he was a progressive reformer in principle and in practice. He effectively remade

himself in the image of Mackenzie King's own self-image and rose as fast and as high as his tragically foreshortened life permitted. It seems probable that had he lived, he would have succeeded King as prime minister. King stayed on as long as he did (1948) mainly to prevent J. L. Ilsley, the powerhouse minister of finance, from replacing him. In the end the top job went to Louis St-Laurent, who had replaced Ernest Lapointe as minister of justice in 1941 and King himself as minister of external affairs in 1946. St-Laurent did not want the top job, but it was more or less forced on him by King, there being no tolerable alternative but the dead Norman Rogers. Of course we cannot with certainty know whether Rogers would have succeeded King as prime minister. We do know, however, what happened directly as a result of his death and can credibly predict the rest. Layton Ralston replaced Rogers as minister of national defence while Ilsley succeeded Ralston as minister of finance. The rest, as they say, is history.

Norman McLeod Rogers was both a federalist and a social democrat perfectly at home in the Liberal Party of Mackenzie King. It is no exaggeration to claim that his premature, sudden and disruptive death changed for the worse the course of Canadian history. Had he survived long enough to become prime minister, he would have been the English-Canadian Pierre Trudeau. A tantalizing question is whether a government led by him would have made Canada a republic. Over the eighty years since his death, Liberal prime ministers—St-Laurent through the second Trudeau—have all stood in his shadow, but progressive liberalism and political leadership of that calibre have been conspicuously lacking. Norman Rogers was Canada's last, best hope. His like has not been seen again and Canada is the less for it.

CHAPTER ONE

PREPARATION

The years between 1912 and 1929 saw Norman McLeod Rogers begin university, go to war, resume his interrupted education after the war, attend Oxford University as a Rhodes Scholar, commence his academic career, temporarily abandon it in order to go to Ottawa to serve as secretary to the prime minister, and then, after two years, return to academic life at Queen's University. It was an eventful two decades, replete with promise and achievement. The town of Amherst in which Rogers grew up,[54] perched near the border between New Brunswick and Nova Scotia, in addition to being the commercial, legal and political capital of Cumberland County, was a major manufacturing centre. The town had begun to industrialize in the 1870s, thanks to completion of the Intercolonial Railway. By the time Rogers was born, in 1894, the pillar of local industry was Rhodes Curry and Company Limited (Canadian Car and Foundry), which produced railcars.

After graduating high school, where he led the class in his third and final year (1911–12), Norman followed older brother Arthur to Acadia University, arriving in October 1912. Founded in 1838 as a Baptist college, it grew out of the failure of the non-Church of England denominations (Baptist, Presbyterian and Roman Catholic) to agree on a provincial university without religious tests, as an alternative to the Anglican-establishment University of King's College. Acadia was where Baptist parents sent their children to be educated. From the late nineteenth century onwards Acadia had been undergoing a revitalization and contemporization so significant that its centenary historian, R. S. Longley, devoted a chapter to the period he called "The New Acadia."[55] In short, by the time Rogers arrived, Acadia was a modern university.

As an undergraduate Rogers especially distinguished himself at intercollegiate debating, where in his junior year he was Acadia's team leader. He was also vice-president of the students council—another innovation—and assistant to the staff of the student magazine, *The Athenaeum*, for which he wrote several articles, the first entitled "Why

Has Nova Scotia's Progress Been so Slow?" But he was chiefly remembered for his "splendid record in all of the college sports, excelling in hockey and tennis."[56] This would prove critical in Rogers's subsequent nomination and selection as Rhodes Scholar, despite his then being neither a graduate of the university nor even in attendance at the time. By the end of his second year, 1913–14, Norman had decided to become a lawyer and, on the first of June 1914, was duly articled to his barrister father. "Wyc" had graduated Dalhousie law school in 1887 and been called to the Bar the same year; Norman, however, was not going to interrupt his BA studies for the sake of a law degree, which was not required for bar admission. Two months later, Norman found his plans for a professional career upended regardless. Ironically, the outbreak of war in August 1914 seems not to have affected student life at Acadia—at least not at first. According to Professor Longley, "attendance at Acadia remained almost normal. Even the year 1915–16 began with only twenty-four less than the preceding year. Early that term, however, a number of students enlisted ..."[57]

Rogers answered the call to arms in March 1915; his militia service (Kings County Horse) would have stood him in good stead. The tipping point was probably the raising in Amherst of a sixth battalion of the Canadian Mounted Rifles [CMR], a quasi-cavalry regiment. Rogers, not yet twenty-one, joined the colours and the battalion went overseas in July 1915, crossing from England to France in October.[58] Norman's fighting war began and ended over eleven days in June 1916 at the Battle of Mont Sorrel, within the Ypres Salient.[59] In January the 6th Canadian Mounted Rifles—they were never actually mounted but fought as infantry—had been broken up and its officers and men absorbed by the 4th and 5th battalions; as a separate unit it had existed for a mere nine months, March through December 1915.[60] The CMR, fighting as part of the 3rd Canadian Division (8th Infantry Brigade) was in the defensive line against the attacking Germans. The battle was fierce. The major-general commanding the 3rd Canadian Division was killed while reconnoitering, and the brigadier taken prisoner; the forward gun position in Sanctuary Wood was captured by the Germans, the Canadians having resisted to the last man, and was then recaptured by the Canadians; and the 4th Battalion, CMR lost nearly 90 per cent of its strength.[61] This hard-won Canadian victory—the first of the war—was dearly bought, losses amounting to some 8,400. Among the surviving casualties was Norman Rogers, who was severely gassed. His war was over. Invalided home in September 1916 he was given a lieutenant's commission in the 246th Battalion (a reserve unit raised at Camp Aldershot to supply reinforcement drafts to the Nova

Scotia Highland Brigade) and afterwards declared medically unfit for active service overseas. Any further efforts Rogers undertook were limited to recruiting, Principal Cutten of Acadia being second in command of the 246th.

Though his recovery was long, painful and slow—both his heart and lungs had been affected by the poison gas—Rogers was well enough to register at Dalhousie law school in October 1917. In those days only one year of university was required for law school admission; Rogers had 2.5 years and a certificate from Acadia to that effect. He arrived in town in time to witness the catastrophic Halifax Disaster of 6 December 1917 and to see his uncle, Tecumseh Sherman Rogers, appointed chair of the federal Halifax Relief Commission in January 1918.

The first-year courses for the LLB were history of English law, contracts, torts, crimes and real property and—if not already taken as part of the BA—constitutional history. The 1917–18 class was small, all of three: Vincent MacDonald (afterwards dean of law), Vincent-Joseph Pottier (afterwards MP and justice of the Supreme Court of NS) and Rogers. As he did not sit any examinations, however, it seems probable that he did not complete the year. The following one, 1918–19, saw him return to Acadia to complete his BA. His legal studies were interrupted again, but the articles of clerkship with his father did not run out until September 1921, by which time he was working on his bachelor of civil law (BCL) at Oxford University.[62] He would not be called to the Bar of NS until April 1924, when his BCL was well in hand and he was teaching history at Acadia University. (The BCL was the degree of which Rogers was proudest. In official lists of The Canadian Ministry 1935 through 1940 one invariably finds after his name only "BCL [Oxon.].")

On graduating BA from Acadia in the spring of 1919, Rogers proceeded to Oxford University to take up his Rhodes Scholarship. He was assigned to University College, one of the oldest (1249) foundations—hence its name—but not of the front rank among Oxford colleges.[63] In his commentary on University College in the immediate post-war years ("Starting up Again: 1919–1923") the official historian states,

> The Armistice was declared halfway through Michaelmas Term 1918, and it was only in January 1919 that the college began to fill up, as forty undergraduates took up residence. It took time to refurbish the college's requisitioned buildings, but other aspects of college life quickly revived. .. Few freshmen of 1913 and 1914 chose to return, but there was now a whole generation of men previously deprived of a university education, and in 1919 University College accepted 134 freshmen—a total not exceeded until 1982. They were, inevitably, older than usual: more than

> half the freshmen of 1919, and even one-third of those of 1920, were aged 20 or over [Rogers turned 25 in July 1919]. To clear this backlog, special two-year courses were offered, as alternatives to the traditional honours degrees. College traditions were rekindled by the dons [tutorial fellows] and the few pre-war undergraduates, ... Buel Trowbridge (matriculated 1920), an American Rhodes Scholar, observed that, although many of his British friends had served in the war, only once did he ever hear them discuss their experiences, and undergraduates too young to have fought ... had difficulty relating to former soldiers.[64]

During the academic year 1919–20, Rogers lived in Kitchen Staircase Room 3 and then in Michaelmas Term 1920 in Kitchen Staircase Room 5. He was not recorded as living in college after that date but must instead have gone into digs (lodgings) in the town. It was quite common for undergraduates at University College to live in college for their first two years before moving out; but during Rogers's time there was an especial demand for rooms, because so many people were trying to get through their education. When Rogers matriculated in autumn 1919, he was just given whatever space could be found for him, but it is striking that he did not try for better-appointed rooms when he could have done so. That tends to suggest that he was keeping careful watch on expenditures.[65]

Rogers took three degrees at Oxford: a second BA (1920), a BLitt (1921: junior research degree) and a BCL (1922: law), as well as a diploma in economics and political science. When he came up to Oxford in 1919 he read law, but in a somewhat unusual way. After the First World War, when there were so many ex-servicemen wanting to restart their lives by going to university, Oxford created special shortened courses, so that those who wished could sit those, in order to get on with their lives more quickly. Rogers chose to do such a special short course, and sat his law finals in 1920, just a year after coming up. However, he then stayed on to do a BCL, but took two years over this, getting a Third in it in 1922. Rogers would have been taught by Australian Carleton Kemp Allen, appointed college lecturer in jurisprudence in February 1919 and then law fellow in December 1920.

Rogers's BLitt (modern history) was on the strength of a 165-page thesis entitled "The Settlement of Labour Disputes in Canada." According to the prospectus, the work was

> a history of the development of legislation for the settlement of labour disputes in Canada and an analysis of the various measures enacted for this purpose by the dominion and provincial governments. It is proposed to examine the general grounds for state intervention in labour disputes, to trace the growth of Canadian legislation providing machinery for such