



MysteryQuest 39

Support Materials 1 (Background)

Herbert Norman and the Cold War

Herbert Norman was the son of Canadian Christian missionaries and was born and raised in Japan. He returned to Canada for his post-secondary studies and then went on to famous universities in the United Kingdom and the United States. In 1939 he joined the Canadian foreign services and served in various posts for 18 years, until his death in 1957. Like many well educated people of his time, Norman openly discussed political matters. As well, living through the Depression during his formative years, Norman saw how those hardships polarized people's political views either to the right with fascism, or to the left with communism.

In his youth Norman sympathized with those for whom capitalism did not 'work' and felt a connection for left-leaning Canadians and Americans who joined in 1936 to fight fascism during the Spanish Civil War. His left-leaning political sympathy would come back to haunt him years later.

The 'Red scare' that grew out of World War II and the Cold War spawned intense distrust between the USSR (the east) and the USA (the west) and their respective allies. In the United States, this fear led to an ugly movement to expose people who were suspected of believing in any aspects of communism. This movement called 'McCarthyism' was named after Joseph McCarthy, the U.S. Senator who headed the campaign. People suspected of communist or leftist sympathies were publically exposed. As a consequence, many lost their jobs and some were sent to jail. People who were merely sympathetic to the left but innocent of wrongdoing or extremism, were often unable to repair their reputations and suffered abuse and hardship for many years after.

To a lesser extent than in the United States, Canada had its own version of a communist witchhunt. From the 1950s to the 1970s, the RCMP kept records on Canadian citizens who were viewed to have leftist tendencies. Their files included prominent Canadian names such as Tommy Douglas, George Ignatieff (father of Michael Ignatieff, federal Liberal Party leader from 2008 - 2011) and Saul Rae (father of Bob Rae, interim federal Liberal Party leader from 2011-2012). Even Irene Norman, Herbert Norman's wife, was tracked for years after her husband's death and was interviewed about her late husband in 1969, over a decade after he died.

An unconfirmed tip in 1940 caused the RCMP to open a file on Herbert Norman. Ten years later, without being substantiated and without the permission of the Canadian government, this file was mysteriously handed over to the FBI. Shortly after, the U.S. Senate Internal Security Subcommittee accused Norman of being a communist and questioned his loyalty to Canada. After a seven-week investigation Norman was cleared of all suspicion by the RCMP and resumed his work with the Canadian foreign service. However, the American accusation had tainted his good reputation. In 1957, when his name was brought up again by the American government, Norman was driven to commit suicide amidst the scandal.