

RENEGADE IN POWER:

The Diefenbaker Years

By PETER C. NEWMAN

INSTALLMENT 7: DONALD FLEMING

...taken from the much longer version contained in RENEGADE IN POWER: THE DIEFENBAKER YEARS, copyright Canada, 1963, Peter C. Newman; published by McClelland & Stewart.

On the basis of dedication to his portfolio and his capacity for sheer hard work, Donald Mackenzie Fleming should have turned out to be the best Minister of Finance Canada ever had. Instead, he became both the chief victim and the agent provocateur of John Diefenbaker's unrelentingly vicious fiscal adventures.

During the five contentious years he spent as Canada's Minister of Finance, Fleming appeared to be the most formidable member of the Tory cabinet, beating off the impious assaults of political opponents like a Salvation Army major decrying the taunts of street-corner drunks. But all the time, this show of besieged righteousness was really the mask for a betrayal of the financial orthodoxy that was the most cherished of his political beliefs.

The minister of finance is normally closer to the prime minister than any other member of the cabinet, enjoying a kind of veto over the spending plans of all government departments. Under Diefenbaker, Fleming never achieved this status. He was constantly overruled and frequently not even informed ahead of time about new major spending proposals.

When he insisted on his prerogative, he failed to exercise it, and so lost it altogether. The dimensions of Fleming's surrender were impressive. He served as Minister of Finance for 1,874 days and tabled seven budgets. The federal revenues collected during his tenure amounted to just over \$32 billions, while expenditures totalled just over \$35 billions.

This fact meant that Fleming was responsible for spending an average of \$1.56 millions more per day than he was taking in—a record in peacetime federal government that surpassed even the depression years of the 'thirties. (Between 1931 and 1933 the federal government's daily deficit averaged \$329,000.)

It was an astonishing performance for a man of Fleming's background who would have been expected to have exercised extravagance in the national estate with the disapproving eye of a paragonous club steward, and was known to argue with members of two hundred lawyers and accountants. The dichotomy between his nature and his performance gave rise to a verbal rumour over Fleming's qualities, both as a man and as a minister.

THE BEST ARMED MAN IN CANADA He was admired in his department for his knowledge and attention to work and won the respect of delegates at the many international conferences where he represented Canada. One of Diefenbaker's ministers who had dealt with many of Diefenbaker's ministers in private conversation, Fleming said, "I am impressed by Mr. Fleming, as a one-eyed man impresses one in the world of the blind."

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Winters Denies Rumor of Return to Federal Field

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New York Stock Turnover Is Greatest In 20 Months

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