

Tommy Douglas: The Road to Jerusalem (Western Canadian Classics)

Thomas H McLeod

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2004 marks the 100th anniversary of Tommy Douglas's birth, and the beginning of production of a CBC mini-series about his life

Tommy Douglas was a Baptist preacher who organized his church as a relief centre for the poor in the hungry 1930s and rose to become a political legend in Saskatchewan, winning five straight majority governments and transforming the province. This acclaimed biography, written by a longtime friend and associate, closely follows his life through his working-class childhood and his boxing and political careers on the prairies to his years of national prominence as an advocate for peace, human rights, and Canadian independence.

Douglas chose a hard road: in provincial government and federal opposition, he faced continuing hostility from mainstream institutions and the media. Often, though, his seemingly radical proposals simply anticipated later events. The Saskatchewan government's medicare program provoked a bitter doctor's strike and continent-wide controversy in 1961, but the program proved to be a success, and medicare was soon introduced across Canada with the support of all political parties.

Tommy Douglas is still remembered as one of the country's most eloquent orators and as a critic of the status quo. He was passionate in opposition to corporate power and in defence of Canadian nationalism; his refusal to support the War Measures Act during the terrorist scare of 1970 earned widespread condemnation, but is also considered by some to have been his finest hour.



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