



W. J. M. MACKENZIE

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# William James Millar Mackenzie

## 1909–1996

BILL MACKENZIE liked puzzles, not for the sake of displaying cleverness but because of a profound appreciation that life was not tidy, as mechanically scientific types claimed, but also that it was not random, as mature scholars know. An early education in the classics encouraged him to look at life in the round and to take an interest in differences within civilisations as well as between them. He was at home with both politics and poetics, and all his writings were marked with an eclecticism of citations. A single chapter could cite books about the life of James Mill, the parallels between Lucretius and Marx's early Greek scholarship, Morley on Gladstone, classic American political sociologists and edible dormice as described in Roman texts and BBC television.<sup>1</sup> The references were not pedantry but reflected a mind well stocked by a lifetime of reading and rumination, and the capacity to come up with an apt comment from a totally unexpected angle.

In achievement as well as appearance he was a big man, white haired from early days with a ruddy complexion and a wide, blue-eyed gaze both friendly and quizzical. Throughout his life he was a builder, starting with his own *Bildung*, the foundations of which were laid in Edinburgh, where people read as well as published books. Education was meant to be hard work and respected for it, and it did not have to be boring to do you good. In the 1930s he was one of a group of Oxford

<sup>1</sup> This and subsequent unattributed quotations are taken from the autobiographical Introduction to W. J. M. Mackenzie, *Explorations in Government: Collected Papers 1951–1968* (1975). It is well worth reading not only for information but also because it displays so well the character of the author and his way of commenting on life, his own as well as others.

dons in philosophy, politics, and economics who turned Magdalen College from a place that Edward Gibbon would still have recognised into an outpost of a larger world of scholarship, where 'intellectual rather than social distinction' mattered. In 1948 he was appointed the foundation Professor of Government at the University of Manchester, building a department and contributing to a faculty of social science that was the closest that England has ever come to the excitement of the University of Chicago in the 1930s. He did not found a school, for indoctrination of any sort was repellent to him; he was a paradigm-breaker rather than a paradigm-maker. He hired promising young persons as assistants, encouraging them to think for themselves and then cautioning them when they started going off the deep end. The expansion of the universities in the 1960s resulted in his department of ten people providing more than two dozen professors to departments of political science in Britain and abroad.

No one could appear more the Oxford don in his old tweed jacket, sweater, and slightly hesitant manner, but while W. J. M. Mackenzie spent two decades at Balliol and Magdalen, he was in Oxford but not of Oxford. All his roots were in Scotland, and after leaving South Britain in 1948, he never turned back. He frequently went to London for committee meetings in and around Whitehall; a listing of these activities make him appear just another entry on the list of the great and the good or, as he might have said, serving in the secretariat of the great and the good. His colleagues put it differently, he was good and in his chosen field he was also great.<sup>2</sup> He was an unusual person of distinction, and not just a person of unusual distinction; as several who read a draft of this memoir also emphasised, he was also enormously kind and encouraging to young people, and good fun to be with. The puzzle can be explained in one word: Scotland. He once asked me, 'How old were you when you came to England?' He added, 'I was 18'.

## I. The Scottish Foundation

The ground of Scotland was the ground of Mackenzie's being. In all seasons he could stride the hills and rough terrain of Rannoch Moor and Glencoe. In appearance he was craggy, in demeanour he was as

<sup>2</sup> Sheila Hamilton and John Money, in the preface to a bibliography of Mackenzie's writings, at p. 287 of a *Festschrift* edited by Brian Chapman and Allen Potter, eds., *W. J. M. M.: Political Questions* (Manchester, 1974).

gentle as a mist, in opinions he was as full of surprises as a Scottish summer day, his range of thought juxtaposed ideas as different as Edinburgh and Glasgow, and in friendship and integrity he was solid as granite. In intellect he was eighteenth-century, sharing the interests of the moral philosophers such as David Hume and Adam Smith, more free than presbyterian, and always a democratic intellect.<sup>3</sup>

The great-grandfathers of William James Millar Mackenzie were born in Central Scotland in the 1780s, after the clans had been suppressed and Gaelic was waning. He was born in Edinburgh on 8 April 1909, the son of Laurence Millar Mackenzie WS, and Anna Marion McClymont. Scotland had long before come to terms with Britain, education was the path to advancement, and the ministry the pinnacle of achievement, combining practical 'feloosfy', political economy, and a confidence in 'the Scottish myth of the chosen people of God, a People of the Book, often chastened like the Children of Israel, but heirs to freedom and to a Promised Land'. His grandfathers were on the radical side in the Great Disruption of the Church of Scotland in 1843; his parents were churchgoers but not fanatical. This experience 'spelled such an infinity of boredom that to this day I am overcome by yawning at the mere sight of a man talking in a pulpit'.

Edinburgh Academy gave him a broad education in the Scottish tradition. He was precocious, by the age of fourteen passing the Higher examinations for university entrance, including maths with some calculus. Instead of proceeding to Edinburgh University the Headmaster selected him to stay on at school to do classics and prepare for the Oxford scholarship examination. At the Academy his studies were 'very free and very glorious', as he gained fluency in reading Greek and Latin, with a special treat the nearly complete and unexpurgated edition of the Delphin classics, published in the seventeenth century for use by the Grand Dauphin of Louis XIV. At 16 years of age he won a classics scholarship to Balliol.

## II. Oxford

To someone who had always read widely, Greats offered a great education, combining literature, philosophy and political and social history. Balliol was a Scottish foundation and Mackenzie's Edinburgh

<sup>3</sup> G. E. Davie, *The Democratic Intellect* (Edinburgh, 1961).

background did not make him out of place. The Master of Balliol was the formidable Scottish philosopher, A. D. Lindsay. While sharing with Lindsay an inclination to the left and a respect for German philosophy, starting with Kant, Mackenzie reacted against the overtones of 'preachiness' in the Scottish tradition. In moral philosophy he was 'compulsive and obsessive about what I ought to do' but believed the worst thing in the world was to tell others what their duties were: 'explain, amuse, analyze but do not seek to impose'.<sup>4</sup>

As a student Mackenzie was able to extend his omnivorous reading habits; his tutors and the syllabus did not obstruct, the bookshops and libraries were differently stocked than Edinburgh, and his fellow students were varied and their interests rubbed off. He took contemporary poetry seriously, as well as the poetry of the classics. In 1929 by his own account, he 'bulldozed' his way to the Ireland prize in classics by his skills in translation and general knowledge. He took a first in Mods and in 1931 a first in Greats. While only a few years ahead of John Austin and A. J. Ayer, Mackenzie's philosophical foundations and inclinations were a generation, or even a century older. His approach to linguistic philosophy was based on a training in juggling three written languages, Greek, Latin and English, and also Scots. As he later wrote, 'The Cambridge books were there in Blackwells, but they were difficult, and there was no one in Oxford to advertise and expound them.' Politics in the years between the General Strike and the Great Slump was in the air. An early introduction to Marxism provided inoculation against the uncritical enthusiasm of the late 1930s; Bill Mackenzie never followed anyone's party line, not even his own.

Like a Rhodes scholar, Bill Mackenzie returned home after four years abroad to read law at Edinburgh University with the intention of following his father, a Writer to the Signet, into law practice in Edinburgh. But after his father died in 1933, he seized the opportunity of a classics fellowship at Magdalen. While he found some colleagues in Magdalen congenial, this was insufficient. A scholar should follow a specific line of enquiry, and find a senior person to work with, an assumption emphasising the commitment with which at all times he approached continuing education, his own included. Since this was not feasible he began thinking about going to the tax bar in London.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. the discussion, both technical and personal, of a long-time Manchester colleague, Dorothy Emmet, 'Three Strands of Morality', in Chapman and Potter, eds., *W. J. M. M.: Political Questions*, pp. 69–80.

By good fortune a politics fellowship came up at Magdalen in 1936 and he was able to switch to teaching Philosophy, Politics, and Economics, a diversity (even incoherence) of subjects that suited his eclectic interests. On becoming a politics don, he sought the critical apparatus; it was not in German, as was the case with classics, nor was it even in German-American, the natural language of political scientists subsequently. He took out a subscription to the *American Political Science Review* in 1932 and for decades read it carefully and critically, virtually the only person in England who did so.<sup>5</sup>

At Magdalen he taught PPE to students, while learning it himself. Then a bachelor, he was a regular in 'Harry's Room', where T. D. Weldon kept open house and a keg of beer to encourage evening conversation on serious matters, with dons such as Peter Medawar and John Austin, as well as students. Mackenzie's verdict on their efforts to provide intellectually rigorous stimulus was: 'We made ourselves rather unpopular at Eton and among old Magdalen rowing men, and our radicalism now looks rather old-fashioned. But we moved the place, and we got good students.'<sup>6</sup>

### III. The Shadow of War and Whitehall

In politics, the 1930s were formative years for Bill Mackenzie. While never an activist in the manner of R. H. S. Crossman or a politician like Quintin Hogg, Bill Mackenzie was concerned about what was going on. He read publications of the Left Book Club as well as legal and administrative texts, and was a founder subscriber to Claud Cockburn's *The Week*. He travelled the continent, and what he saw he did not like, in Vienna just after Dollfuss was shot in 1934, in Paris just after the Popular Front strikes, in Prague when it was being left to fend for itself by Britain and France. When in the Soviet Union in August, 1939, his eye caught the Cyrillic headlines that proclaimed that Stalin and Hitler had done a deal, he made for home fast.

<sup>5</sup> In the early 1960s, when David Hennessy (later, Lord Windlesham, author of books on political communication) asked for a copy of the *American Political Science Review* at the British Museum, he was told it had been discontinued in 1939.

<sup>6</sup> For the teaching of politics in a normal Oxford college, see John Redcliffe-Maud, *Memoirs of an Optimist* (1981), pp. 21 ff. An account of the subject in terms of University committees can be found in Norman Chester, *Economics, Politics and Social Studies in Oxford, 1900–85* (1986).

The battles that shaped Bill Mackenzie's understanding of politics were fought at the higher reaches of Whitehall during the Second World War. When the war broke out, he was enlisted as a temporary civil servant in the Air Ministry, with a ringside seat at disputes between air marshalls, politicians, and civil servants about anti-submarine warfare, aircraft production, the bombing of Germany, and the development of radar and application of operational research to convoys. They involved personalities such as 'the Prof' (F. A. Lindemann of Christ Church, latterly Viscount Cherwell) and Sir Henry Tizard (a Magdalen man of old) and the outspoken Air Chief Marshal Sir Wilfred Freeman. The battles took place in committee rooms in Whitehall and cut across conventional boundaries of science and politics. At the end of the day, it was politics not science that mattered most. Six months were spent in Washington coordinating vital links with that arsenal of democracy. When asked what he did during the war, the answer was: 'I was jobbed into Whitehall by Tizard to help hold down Bomber Harris. He was mad.'

The experience of wartime Whitehall made public administration come alive to Mackenzie. It became peopled with individuals who were expert in forms of rhetoric and politics unknown to Aristotle; for example, 'statistical bargaining', the art of finding a consensus number that everyone could agree upon—whether or not it accurately represented what existed in reality.<sup>7</sup> From 1945 to 1948 he was an Official War Historian writing a history of the Special Operations Executive, which was meant to aid the resistance to Nazi forces within Europe. The 1300-page tome, still unpublished, was an unflinching account of heroic and hum drum activities that sometimes went right. Although the obituary in *The Times*<sup>8</sup> described him as having had a 'good war', Mackenzie was aware that much of which he knew was also 'a gruesome story of personal and administrative tragedies'.

The conclusion Mackenzie drew from wartime experience was, 'If administration is important, it is politics.'<sup>9</sup> And, as he might have added, quoting Finlay Peter Dunne's Mr. Dooley, 'Politics ain't bean

<sup>7</sup> See Ely Devons, *Planning in Practice* (Cambridge, 1950). The practice is still alive. See the special thanks given by Lord Jenkins to David Butler for producing 'a consensus report on technical issues where academics traditionally disagree' in *The Report of the Independent Commission on the Voting System* (Stationery Office, Cm. 4090-I, 1998), p. 79.

<sup>8</sup> 'Professor Bill Mackenzie', *The Times*, 2 September 1996.

<sup>9</sup> Mackenzie, *Explorations in Government*, p. 1. For a systematic reflection on Whitehall, see W. J. M. Mackenzie and J. W. Grove, *Central Administration in Britain* (1957).

bag.' Latterly, when taxed by youthful questioners to explain (and, presumptively, defend) some untoward action of British government, his scholarly integrity and radical politics would produce the reply, 'I can explain it but I can't justify it.'

The war years also brought the unexpected: a meeting with a temporary civil servant in the Air Ministry, Pamela Malyon; they married in 1943, and lived together happily for 53 years, with five children, and latterly, numerous grandchildren. Pamela Mackenzie qualified as a social worker while they lived in Manchester and after their return to Glasgow became a psychiatric social worker, providing an insight into intra-family disputes different from those found in Whitehall or in Greek tragedies. While she dealt at the coal face with mismatches between the needs of individuals and the organisation of social services, he puzzled about the problem in his writings.

#### IV. He made Manchester—and then some

While academics as well as businessmen might say, 'Manchester made me', in the world of the social sciences the apt phrase for W. J. M. Mackenzie is, 'He made Manchester'. Under his inspiration as its foundation Professor of Government, it became the first research-oriented centre for the study of politics in Britain, and one of the first in Europe, producing a stream of books and journal articles that stand the test of time as landmarks in the field.

In Mackenzie's mind, it was time to leave Oxford. 'I had really published nothing, and saw gathering round me the Nirvana of the ineffectual College Tutor. And I was married and needed the money.' There were scholarly reasons too; 'by this time I had been infected by the research bug', and he realised that in Oxford one did not 'do research'. Nor did being appointed a faculty fellow of Nuffield College in 1948 change his mind. He also was motivated by a desire to get closer to the ground of public policy. While Mackenzie knew Scotland, Oxford, and Whitehall, he realised that he had 'by-passed England', that is, the world of industrial cities in which the great majority of the English people live. Manchester was an industrial city more like Glasgow than Oxford. It was in cities such as this that branches of the welfare state were meant to deliver public services equitably and efficiently, even if not generously. In his view, 'We "knew" immensely



more about grass-roots politics from the age of Elizabeth (that of J. E. Neale) to the age of Namier than we did about our contemporaries. Such a situation I found to be in a scholarly sense indecent and undignified.'

The Victoria University of Manchester was closer to Scotland than to Oxford, wearing with pride the badge of non-conformity to the Church of England and all it seemed to stand for, and also being committed to useful knowledge. A part-time Diploma in Public Administration had been taught and also evening degrees in Administration, pursued by able and ambitious young lads from town halls in the North West, such as D. N. Chester. The opportunities offered by the 1944 Education Act meant that the best and the brightest of the North of England no longer had to leave school at 14 or 15 but instead could come straight to Manchester to study full time for a degree. Manchester expected staff to be committed to doing research to international standards, initially German and latterly American. The University sought to expand this work by appointing Mackenzie Professor of Government and Administration in 1948, and their hopes were fulfilled and even exceeded.

At Manchester Mackenzie combined scholarship and engagement with practical elements of administration, in this way fertilising what he had learned about the theory of local government and politics as a reader of the great Chicago school of urban sociology and politics. He served on all kinds of committees: a co-opted member of Manchester City Education Committee, 1953–64; appointed member, British Wool Marketing Board, 1954–66; Royal Commission on Local Government in Greater London, 1957–60; Committee on Remuneration of Ministers and Members of Parliament, 1963–4; Maud Committee on Management in Local Government, 1964–7; and the North West Regional Economic Training Council, 1965–6. From this involvement, he learned a great deal about how the 'big mules' of local government got things done in the way that they wanted them done; how they played his friends in Whitehall; and what Whitehall thought of them.

When decolonisation began placing the administration of African colonies in African hands, Mackenzie was mobilised as a wise and sympathetic advisor who understood where Africans were coming from, a byproduct of a decade of dialogue with Max Gluckman, an expert on African law, and with civil servants in Whitehall, who also ruled by 'customary' law. He was appointed special commissioner for constitutional development, Tanganyika, 1953; and constitutional

adviser to Kenya, 1959; he described his role as trying to persuade the white settlers to take the money rather than fight. He carefully avoided Central Africa. He was vice-chair, Bridges Committee on Training in Public Administration for Overseas Countries, 1962. The programme in development administration at Manchester offered ideas and practical wisdom to select students from Africa. Byproducts of these activities were his Sidney Ball lecture on exporting electoral systems, delivered at Oxford in 1957;<sup>10</sup> *Free Elections* (1958), still cited for the breadth of its coverage, and *Five Elections in Africa* (1959), edited with Kenneth Robinson.

Students in public administration were offered the stimulating thoughts of a well furnished mind applied afresh in each lecture to problems of everyday life, and applied with an absence of cant. Not for him the then fashionable theories of 'scientific management', or 'management by exhortation', widely prevalent in different forms in Thatcher and Blair's Whitehall. (One can almost hear Mackenzie's characteristic grunt turn into a groan at the mention of such things.) To enlarge their minds beyond the everyday business of getting by and getting on, he could elaborate on insights into committee life found not only in such characteristically English writings as in F. M. Cornford's *Microcosmographia Academica* and K. C. Wheare's *Government by Committee*, but also in Herbert Simon's *Administrative Behavior* and Dwight Waldo's *The Administrative State*, which he endorsed in setting 'a high standard of clarity and rigour, a warning against the mushiness of so much administrative writing'.

The epitome of Mackenzie's approach to administration is his 'translation' of the Plowden Report on Public Expenditure, a perennial concern of Treasury mandarins. He treated it as if it were a document in a lost classical tongue, like Minoan Linear B, requiring translation into demotic language. It started as follows:

For various political reasons we were asked to attempt the impossible; to accept criticisms without accepting them, to have a public inquiry which is not public.

At first I was expected to carry the can alone. Then I got them to add three pretty safe people . . .

Naturally, there was a great wrangle about what should be published, and this was ended by a nonsensical compromise embodied in this document. The Civil Service members of the inquiry (who are officially nameless, but you can

<sup>10</sup> Reprinted in *Explorations in Government*, pp. 132–54, along with a related article, 'Representation in Plural Societies', pp. 111–31.

easily find who they were) do not agree to this paper, but they do not disagree in any respect whatever.

#### REPORT

1. We proceeded on two principles: no dirty linen in public; outside critics are bores.
2. We did however chat to a great many civil servants, and two years of that is more than enough.
3. Unluckily, it turns out that the real problem is about the nature of government in general, and of British government in particular. This is what we are discussing, but of course we have to wrap it up in Mandarin prose.
4. Our general impression is that the Civil Service is extremely old-fashioned and riven by jealousies: but there is public spirit there, and some of them do try quite hard.<sup>11</sup>

This was not his ideal role model for administrators. While Jowett's Balliol men might write such prose, his ideal was closer to the great pre-Northcote-Trevelyan reformers, such as Chadwick, who made our cities habitable. He endorsed civil servant rulers who were 'ruthless, enterprising, well-read, well-travelled, ready to talk to any man in his own language; that keeps the options open'.<sup>12</sup> And such persons could be found, and be more outspoken in local government than in Whitehall.

What Mackenzie got from Dover Street, as the Faculty of Economics and Social Studies was colloquially known, was the intellectual companionship of colleagues who believed in the unity of the social sciences and brought a similar breadth of knowledge and experience from different fields. They were vigorous but never dogmatic in their challenges to received wisdoms, including those of their colleagues. They included Arthur Lewis, Ely Devons, and Harry Johnson; Max Gluckman and his tribe of anthropologists; Dorothy Emmet, a philosopher in the Lindsay tradition of thinking hard and doing good; and Michael Polanyi, who had moved from chemistry to social studies, and 'was there to remind us that academic boundary lines are prison walls to be resented and bashed down'. There were also visiting Simon fellows, financed by the civic munificence of Lord Simon of Wythenshawe; they included Bertrand de Jouvenel, Edward Shils, C. H. Sisson, Alexander Werth, and Stein Rokkan.

In Dover Street, the principal meeting was intellectual not administrative, the Faculty Seminar rather than the departmental committee.

<sup>11</sup> Initially published in *The Manchester Guardian*, 25 May 1963. Quoted here from the text in *Explorations in Government*, pp. 238–9.

<sup>12</sup> 'The Civil Service, the State and the Establishment' in B. Crick, ed., *Essays on Reform, 1967: A Centenary Tribute* (1967), p. 201.

The atmosphere was exciting, and the action fast. A seminar held in a street where Friedrich Engels had kept a mistress and surrounded by two up, two down houses (one of which was the birth place of David Lloyd George), was not a place for small talk, or exquisite analyses of trivia. It was the major league and each presenter of a paper was pushed to explore a chosen topic as far as it could be driven. In the evening the Mackenzie house in Stockport, just over the Mersey, was open to the speaker, faculty and spouses for informal discussions. When the evening was over, guests left feeling good about the life of the mind, and about a house full of books, children and hospitality. There were also informal seminars, described as 'discussions held in various environments, some of them not very academic'.<sup>13</sup>

In Manchester, as in other universities of nineteenth-century foundation, staff with interests in a common subject were grouped into departments rather than being dispersed into separate colleges on the basis of dining rights. His Manchester Department of Government had a staff of only ten into the 1960s; this was small by the standards of an American research university but ten times the size of the 'politics department' of an Oxford college. Although the least Germanic of persons, he preferred the ethos of a department or *Lehrstuhl* to that of an Oxford college in which commensality came before talking about one's subject.

As the sole professor, Mackenzie was responsible for recruiting staff, and he showed an eye for talent that would have made him a fortune had he applied it to breeding horses or signing pop musicians to recording contracts. His habit was to recruit people who showed intellectual promise without regard to their disciplinary background or their social background. They came from Oxford and Hull, Aberdeen and Cambridge, from Columbia University and the *Sciences-Po* in Paris. Every person hired by Mackenzie had one thing in common, an interest in researching politics in a university environment. The fact that the university was located in what the South of England considered a provincial city but was viewed abroad as a major European city affected recruitment and, on balance was for the better. A meeting or clash of minds was far more important than the fact that the department was located in a late Victorian school converted to the University's use. When staff expanded in the 1960s, the building turned out to be an asset, for the provision of space by a late Victorian local education authority was far more generous than that mandated by the post-Robbins Treasury.

<sup>13</sup> W. J. M. Mackenzie, *Politics and Social Science* (Harmondsworth, 1967), p. 5.

of enduring value. This approach was most evident in his treatment of the ambitious books of American political scientists at the start of the behavioural revolution. Each was read with interest promptly on publication—and some had circulated in typescript or been presented by the author in a Dover Street seminar before publication. Their seriousness, novelty and aspiration to science were positively valued. But nothing was to be swallowed and regurgitated uncritically to students, or treated respectfully as Holy Writ. Mackenzie had no wish to replace the Holy Willies and Bible-bashers of his Scottish upbringing with secular evangelisers of a new political science.<sup>17</sup>

## V. Political Science as an Education

As a classicist, W. J. M. Mackenzie had no difficulty in regarding politics as a subject worthy of study by persons wishing to become educated. After all, Aristotle had called politics ‘the master science’. But he understood that the Greeks were interested in politics because they were interested in Greek society; they did not regard it as a subject concerning a far away country about which they knew (or could do) little. While he and Michael Oakeshott had read many of the same authors and poets, they responded very differently to that experience. For Mackenzie, politics was a way of talking about reality, and decisions about convoys and bombing raids were part of that reality. And unlike both Laski and Oakeshott, whose influence dominated the London School of Economics for half a century, Mackenzie understood how scientific methods could and should be used to improve our understanding of politics. At the end of the day, he was thus closer both to Aristotle and S. M. Lipset than to those who set the curricula for the teaching of politics in the South of England.<sup>18</sup>

But what precisely is the study of politics? And what is science? These were questions that Bill Mackenzie was fond of asking in print—

<sup>17</sup> This atmosphere is well captured in A. N. Birch and R. N. Spann, ‘Mackenzie at Manchester’. For a contrast, see Jean Blondel’s endorsement of the “‘Americanization’” of European political science, which he successfully put into practice as the founding professor of government at the University of Essex. ‘Amateurs into Professionals’, in Hans Daalder, ed., *Comparative European Politics: the Story of a Profession* (1997), pp. 116 ff.

<sup>18</sup> See W. J. M. Mackenzie, *The Study of Political Science Today* (1970), p. 11 ff, a reprint of a contribution to a UNESCO symposium on Main Trends of Research in the Social and Human Sciences. See also ‘Political Theory and Political Education’, in *Explorations in Government*, pp. 17–30, and the report for which he was responsible for the SSRC, *Research in Political Science* (1968).

There was a rejection of the idea of the gentlemanly don, a pose that would have been absurd in the hideous 1950s building that served as the University's Faculty Club. But there was no suggestion of publish or perish.<sup>14</sup> Each new recruit was expected to find a subject worth examining for up to half a dozen years and get on top of it. The syllabus enabled each lecturer to teach what interested him or her rather than subject matter imposed by outsiders and frozen by intra- and inter-departmental battles. Mackenzie's motto was that half the year should be devoted to teaching and half to research. When thoughts were organised, a young member of staff would submit a draft of a manuscript for his comments, and receive handwritten replies that 'disorganised' it by casting fresh light on points that had been overlooked or required expansion. For example, his response to the first draft of my *Politics in England* (1965), which had an introduction trying to deflect criticism of its novel approach by linking it with an earlier tradition represented by Walter Bagehot and Graham Wallas, was: 'Scrap the book and expand the introduction. Political science started going wrong when Dicey was jobbed into the Vinerian chair at All Souls.' David Donnison has described his ways with youthful staff as those of a 'benevolent despot'.<sup>15</sup> Benevolent certainly, and enlightened too, but his authority came from wisdom and experience, not bureaucratic office.

Almost half a century on the books produced by his Manchester department still stand out for imagination, freshness, and depth. In the 1950s Mackenzie opened up the study of pressure groups in Britain with a pair of journal articles.<sup>16</sup> Junior (and subsequently senior) colleagues such as A. H. Birch, Peter Campbell, David Donnison, and Allen Potter wrote early works on voting behaviour based on the 1950, 1951, and 1955 elections, and H. J. Hanham wrote on *Elections and Party Management* about an era when general elections were not yet general. A. H. Birch's *Small-Town Politics*, a sophisticated social and political study of urban politics, appeared before Robert Dahl published on

<sup>14</sup> Henry Parris's experience in researching a penetrating book on *Constitutional Bureaucracy: The Development of British Central Administration since the Eighteenth Century* (1969) was not unusual. In singling out Mackenzie for special thanks in the acknowledgements, he noted, 'When I began, he told me it would take 10 years. Although I have never disbelieved him on any other occasion, I am glad I did so then. He was absolutely right but, had I known that, I should never have had the heart to go on.'

<sup>15</sup> David Donnison, 'Obituary: Professor W. J. M. Mackenzie', *The Herald* (Glasgow), 29 August 1996.

<sup>16</sup> 'Pressure Groups in British Government', *British Journal of Sociology*, 6, 2 (1955), pp. 133-48; and 'Pressure Groups: the "Conceptual Framework"', *Political Studies*, 3, 3 (1955), pp. 247-55.

community power in America, as did J. M. Lee's *Social Leaders and Public Persons*, a study of the evolution of 'county' government into government by professional administrators in Cheshire. Brian Chapman's study of *The Profession of Government* was a wide-ranging comparative examination of a central element in the modern state. Many more books were written by those who had spent a few years in Dover Street, before moving to permanent posts elsewhere, such as David Donnison and John Erickson. Mackenzie was proud of these intellectual godchildren, keeping a special shelf in his Dover Street room for books by members of staff. And staff were happy to present him with published work. A mere line of acknowledgement at the start of such books could hardly reflect the indebtedness of people who flourished under his gentle tutelage.

Students were respected without being coddled; they were treated as adults capable of finding things to do on their own in Manchester, free of parents and headmasters at last and, if they got into trouble, able to learn how to get out of it themselves. There was no false assumption that an 18-year-old would have the knowledge to argue with a lecturer twice that age. Just as a classicist had to learn the language first, so Manchester students, who often combined history with politics, were expected to acquire a grounding in their subject first. There was no orthodoxy to which students were expected to subscribe. Mackenzie's lectures set students the puzzle of figuring out what he was pointing toward. This was no easy task; some of his young lecturers needed up to 18 months for that. But even if uneasy about the absence of notes for exams, students realised that they were not exam fodder; they were expected to think for themselves, and learn about the world beyond their previous experience. Being the cream of North of England grammar schools, they were proud to be treated so. Some, like Lord Levene and Anna Ford, afterwards achieved more celebrity than academics normally enjoy. Others, such as Dennis Kavanagh and Jeremy Richardson, went for an academic career, and Roger Williams moved to a professorship and then Vice-Chancellorship of Reading.

The Manchester of Bill Mackenzie was a state of mind or culture; it was not a bureaucratic structure. Staff were hired as individuals and treated as individuals, and post-graduates were treated the same way. There was never an agenda or a programme to be imposed. New dogmas were treated with the same scepticism as conventional wisdom; each required analysis to see why it had come forth and, before being discarded in search of something better, each was sifted to see what was

and he sometimes gave different answers, or presented answers that called attention to different characteristics within a family of answers. As a lifelong student of philology, he was far too intelligent to assume that either question would have a single, or even a stable answer. And as someone for whom Wittgenstein and Austin and Weldon were chaps one could debate with as well as read, he insisted only that different answers could be given. His pluralism was closer to that of Isaiah Berlin than to Harold Laski. His concern was with the substantive problems for which words were signs; he quoted approvingly John Austin's statement, 'In searching for and finding such definitions we are looking not merely at words . . . but also at the realities we use words to talk about.'<sup>19</sup>

To Bill Mackenzie, politics was a word that had a commonsense meaning; it could be ostensibly defined by pointing at phenomena that people saw as political activity, such as the exercise of power and influence within more *or* less legitimate structures of authority. It was not only about articulating values but also about bargaining and reconciling differences. It required order maintained without the use of force. As a classicist, Mackenzie was conscious that the words for politics, policy, and police had the same Greek root, and he could enjoy pointing out that the Glasgow phrase, 'Here comes the polis' was not an invitation to talk political philosophy but a warning that in London would refer to Bobbies and in Belfast to Peelers.<sup>20</sup>

Talk about politics, including the study of politics, was in his view part of the political process—and none the worse for that. The point was well brought out in the distinction between the 'liberal' and the 'Whitehall' versions of the Constitution, in a book that grew out of a Dover Street discussion.<sup>21</sup> While very conscious of the position of the modern state, his experience of politics in Africa, and of administering the rules of an unwritten and even unspoken constitution made his view of structures of authority much broader, even cultural, than those of constitutional lawyers or students of institutions who ignored the character of those who administered them.<sup>22</sup> The politics of the apolitical

<sup>19</sup> *Politics and the Social Sciences*, p. 13.

<sup>20</sup> It was no accident, as a Marxist would say, that a rare political science study of the morass that Anglophones have got into over this family of terms was written by a Dover Street person, Brian Chapman, *The Police State* [that is, the *Polizeistaat*], (1970).

<sup>21</sup> A. H. Birch, *Representative and Responsible Government* (1964).

<sup>22</sup> Thus, Hugh Hecllo and Aaron Wildavsky's *The Private Government of Public Money* (1974) is a 'Mackenziesque' study of the Treasury in the spirit of Mackenzie's translation of the Plowden Report. Hecllo was a Manchester MA (Econ).



were given short shrift; he had served on too many college and university committees to believe such guff.

Science was used as a term of art; Mackenzie was comfortable talking about political science as well as the politics of scientists, for he saw the former as a classical challenge of knowing about politics. He understood science in the German sense of *Wissenschaft*, a systematic and, insofar as possible impersonal inquiry into political institutions and activities, their goals, and their relationships. The task of politics was not to emulate mechanical engineering but to deal with the difficult bits that the so-called hard sciences left out, including that left out by hard-nosed political behaviourists in the United States. He was sufficiently comfortable with mathematics and statistics to see the point of abstract models of politics and quantitative studies, but regarded them as means, not ends, of inquiry. He regarded science as speculation tested against what was going on in the world 'out there', much more akin to diagnostic medicine than to 'laws', a word he would not treat with reverence, given his knowledge of Greek, Roman, English, and Scots law and comparative jurisprudence. Relevance to the world as it actually is was as important to Mackenzie as to the applied natural philosophers (that is, physicists) with whom he dealt in life-and-death discussions in wartime Whitehall.

In puzzling about real phenomena, Mackenzie liked to raise 'partly answerable' questions that would both broaden and deepen our understanding of a particular puzzle, and link it up with other not dissimilar phenomena in what Robert Merton (whose thinking was represented in the Manchester seminars by Dorothy Emmet) would describe as theories of the middle range, much more general than conclusions drawn inductively from the examination of a limited number of cases or theories produced speculatively in what Carlyle described as the University of *Weissnichtwo*. As a professional, he was committed to 'the search for principles in politics', while recognising that principles could harden into dangerous ideologies and he had no wish to make (or enforce) politics as a discipline. It is the search, rather than arrival, that makes the effort worthwhile.<sup>23</sup>

Unlike many who profess politics in England, Mackenzie was ready to recognise progress in its study during his scholarly lifetime, without in any way being an academic empire-builder. At a time when the

<sup>23</sup> See 'Political Theory and Political Education', as reprinted in *Explorations in Government*, p. 29.

founder of the Nuffield election studies could refer to elections as an 'eleusinian mystery',<sup>24</sup> he was in favour of the demagification of politics, encouraging young assistants to leave the library and interview people. In particular, he encouraged researchers to talk with people who actually made government work, whether elected politicians, civil servants or employees of 'private' institutions such as pressure groups. There was statistical analysis in Dover Street by a team of dedicated persons working with desk calculators in the days before the Atlas computer was built on the other side of Dover Street. However, Bill Mackenzie had a horror of the bureaucratisation of learning, whether in the form of fat textbooks organised for rote memory, or research claiming to make advances by adding one more grain of sand to a pile of materials that were never used to build a worthwhile edifice of knowledge. While Dover Street was full of people who exchanged ideas with each other, it did not encourage large-scale research projects or research teams, nor was there ever any suggestion that the way to advance was to raise money for its own sake.

The expansion of British universities after the Robbins Report dealt a double blow to the Manchester department. It expanded until it had two dozen members in fields so disparate that the unity of the Friday seminar could not be sustained. The Victorian University's practice of telling junior staff to go elsewhere if they wanted promotion to a chair produced a great diaspora. A department that initially had no more than ten staff members produced more than a score of professors on four continents.<sup>25</sup> Given the seller's market for talent, the influence of Manchester was indirectly extended by the movement of people to other institutions. This was in keeping with Mackenzie's non-dogmatic vision of advancing political science in varied ways across a broad front. But it also meant that the Dover Street of the 1950s and early 1960s was no more.

Because Bill Mackenzie had a breadth of knowledge, experience and vision, he was a natural candidate to become a founding member of the Social Science Research Council created in 1965 under the leadership of Michael (now Lord) Young, and he chaired its Political Science

<sup>24</sup> R. B. McCallum, 'The Study of Psephology', *Parliamentary Affairs*, 8, 4 (1955), pp. 508–13.

<sup>25</sup> They included Mudathir Abdul-Rahim, Malcolm Anderson, A. H. Birch, Jean Blondel, Coral Bell, Peter Campbell, Brian Chapman, Clement Dodd, David Donnison, John Erickson, Cherry Gertzel, W. H. Greenleaf, J. W. Grove, Lewis Gunn, H. J. Hanham, Martin Harrison, J. M. Lee, Henry Parris, A. M. Potter, F. F. Ridley, Richard Rose, R. N. Spann, Roger Williams, and Maurice Wright.

Committee. He served on the Parry Committee on University Libraries, 1964–7 ('Libraries are always a political problem', he once told me). His work on government committees was recognised by the award of a CBE. In 1968 he became a Fellow of the British Academy. The first honorary doctorate was awarded by Dundee University in 1968; it was followed by Lancaster, 1970, Warwick, 1972; Manchester, 1975; Hull, 1981; and the Open University in 1984. A few years before his death he was made an honorary fellow of Magdalen College, Oxford.

## VI. Rounding Off

After decades of motoring back and forth between Manchester and a home in the Highlands beside Rannoch Moor, in 1966 Bill Mackenzie decided to come back to Scotland. (A chair at the London School of Economics had been offered him, but he had no desire to go back South.) He did not return to Edinburgh but to Glasgow, a city that few graduates of Edinburgh Academy would live in, but like Manchester a real city in its setting and civic munificence. Unlike Manchester, it was not a 'provincial' city but the Second City of Empire. He closed his memoir with a quote from T. S. Eliot's *Little Gidding*, '. . . To arrive where we started/And know the place for the first time.'

A former Oxford colleague, Sir Charles Wilson, had become Principal of Glasgow University and enticed Mackenzie to take the James Bryce Chair of Government, a title consistent with his familiarity with political systems far and wide, albeit he was more eclectic but less systematic than Bryce. In 1970, when his colleague, David Raphael, left Glasgow he moved to a chair named for Edward Caird, a former Glasgow professor of moral philosophy and subsequently Master of Balliol. His office was in the Adam Smith Building, an appropriate address for someone also engaged in moral philosophy. The expansion of Glasgow University offered opportunities to expand the department, and he added to an illustrious list of people whom he had hired as unknowns Christopher Hood and Stephen White, the former now professor at the LSE and the latter professor at Glasgow. However, the changing character and tempo of university life made Glasgow in the late 1960s different in kind as well as scale from conversations in 'Harry's Room' at Magdalen or in Dover Street.

The move was followed by a burst of publications, commencing with

a leave of absence at Bergen, where Stein Rokkan provided intellectual companionship for discussions about *Politics and Social Science* (1967), a *tour de force* that informed, stimulated and puzzled readers. The opening chapters dealt with traditional, albeit varied, theories of political science, and then moved to contemporary theories outside the field of political science, including metaphysics, general systems and cybernetics, biology and anthropology. His discussion of game theory was illustrated with quotations from Dashiell Hammett's *The Maltese Falcon* and Snorre Sturlasson's history of the first great kings of Norway. A lengthy section on politics without states brought together his thoughts on institutions as remote as African tribes and French insurance companies, and as down to earth as the shop floor of factories. Characteristically, the concluding section was not quite the conclusion; it was followed by a postscript and a copious book list ranging from Abel-Smith and Stevens on *Lawyers and the Courts* to Solly Zuckerman's *The Social Life of Monkeys and Apes*.

At Glasgow University he sought to continue practices established in Manchester. He lectured second year students on comparative government, not only covering then current interests in Marcuse and Fanon and Orwell, but also many other interesting but out of the way areas that he observed in 'spaceship earth'. No one could be sure what his next lecture would be about, but the better students knew that it would awaken thoughts that would be worth thinking. He also continued to be an indefatigable attendee at seminars in politics and in other fields. Before and after retirement from Glasgow University in 1974, he published a series of books, including characteristically wide-ranging studies of *Power, Violence, Decision; Political Identity*, and *Biological Ideas in Politics*, as well as on such microcosms of politics as *Social Work in Scotland* and *Power and Responsibility in Health Care*.

Interest in public affairs, both British and now Scottish, was maintained through membership in the Advisory Committee for Scientific and Technical Information, 1966–71; the British Council Committee for Foreign University Interchange; chairing the Joseph Rowntree Memorial Trust working party on the Social Work (Scotland) Act, 1968–9; the Police Advisory Board for Scotland; the Advisory Council on Public Records; and the Children's Panel Advisory Committee of Glasgow Corporation. Visits to Kinloch Rannoch became more frequent, where he could roam in body and spirit over Highland hills, progressing upwards across a large terrain with a grand view and without a clearly marked path.

While a Scot by nationality, having won the glittering prizes that Oxford offered, Mackenzie moved easily between North, Middle, and South Britain, as well as up and down the social ladder. In his politics he was anti-Tory, like his Liberal forebears who had cheered Gladstone in Midlothian, and a long-time member of the Reform Club. While far too cosmopolitan to accept the arguments of the Scottish National Party at face value, he could endorse much of the intellectual argument for an independent Scotland. While normally a Labour voter, he was never a party man, and could be tempted to change his vote by the SDP candidate in his constituency of Hillhead, Roy Jenkins, yet another ‘damned Balliol man’! It is characteristic of his unpredictability that neither his wife nor his friends can be sure whether he ever voted Scottish National Party.

By good fortune the Political Studies Association of the United Kingdom held its annual meeting at Glasgow University in April, 1996. Although Bill Mackenzie was then in his final months, he was able to attend its annual dinner and present the Mackenzie Prize, established by the Association to recognise an outstanding new book. Most of the audience was too young to have been his students, but many were students of his former assistant lecturers or students, and had benefited from having professors imparting wisdom that they had acquired while under his generous tutelage.

Bill Mackenzie died on 22 August, 1996. He was cremated at the municipal crematorium in Clydebank and his ashes scattered above Loch Voil, near his daughter Leslie’s home. While he is gone, his way of looking at the world—quizzically, thoughtfully and invoking an apt insight or comparison from a great wealth of knowledge—will always remain relevant. His epitaph was written in early Roman times: *Humani nil a me alienum puto.*

RICHARD ROSE

*Fellow of the Academy*

*Note.* W. J. M. Mackenzie’s own account of his intellectual formation is given as the Introduction to his *Explorations in Government: Collected Papers, 1951–1968* (Macmillan, 1975), a book that brings together scattered writings on scattered subjects, including local government, Africa, the study of organisations, and political institutions. His thoughts on ‘Political Theory and Political Education’ were first published in *Universities Quarterly*, 9, 4 (1954–55), pp. 351–63—and rewritten regularly thereafter. On Manchester, see A. H. Birch and R. N. Spann’s ‘Mackenzie

at Manchester', at pp. 1–23 of B. Chapman and A. Potter, *W.J.M.M.: Political Questions* (Manchester, 1974). A bibliography of his publications, prepared by Sheila Hamilton and John Money, appears at pp. 288–94 of that volume.

In writing this account I have also drawn on personal recollections, especially as a lecturer in Dover Street, 1961–6 and comments from Professor David Donnison, Professor J. M. Lee, Mrs Pamela Mackenzie, Richard Osborne, and Professor Stephen White.