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## W.L. Mackenzie King: Rockefeller's 'other' public relations counselor in Colorado<sup>☆</sup>

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### Abstract

This study profiles William Lyon Mackenzie King's role as a counselor to John D. Rockefeller Jr. in the aftermath of the bitter 1913–1914 Colorado coal strike. Mackenzie King—not his more recognized counterpart, publicist Ivy Lee—provided many of the modern public relations ideas that Rockefeller eventually adopted to alleviate tensions and improve labor relations. These included the development of the Colorado Industrial Representation Plan, a prototype company union structure that was designed to facilitate employee communications. Mackenzie King, who later served 22 years as prime minister of Canada, also advised Rockefeller on a wide range of public relations activities, including testimony before government hearings, meetings with union leaders, community philanthropy in Colorado, and Rockefeller's historic visit to Colorado in September–October 1915.

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The bitter Colorado coal strike of 1913–1914 was a milestone event in public relations history that is best known for publicist Ivy Lee's success in neutralizing negative public opinion toward

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the coal operators. His client was John D. Rockefeller Jr., whose family was the largest investor in the biggest coal company in the state, the Colorado Fuel & Iron Company.<sup>1</sup>

Although Lee gained widespread notoriety for himself and for the emerging practice of publicity, Lee actually was only one of two counselors hired to help the Rockefellers address the serious labor and public image problems confronting them.<sup>2</sup> Less known in public relations annals is the work of William Lyon Mackenzie King, a labor Canadian labor relations specialist who would gain world prominence only seven years later when he became the prime minister of Canada.

## 1. Mackenzie King retained by the Rockefeller Foundation

### 1.1. *Progressive reformer*

Mackenzie King was born in 1874 in Kitchener (then Berlin), Ontario, Canada. He was the grandson of the radical newspaperman and Toronto mayor, William Lyon Mackenzie, who led the aborted Upper Canadian rebellion against British rule in 1837.

King was educated at the University of Toronto and briefly pursued a career in newspapering. Then, following a brief stint in graduate studies in social work at the University of Chicago, the future Canadian politician transferred to Harvard, where he earned a master's degree in economics in 1898.<sup>3</sup>

King devoted his early studies and career to labor issues. Beginning in 1900, following a year studying abroad, he became editor of the *Labor Gazette*, a publication of the Canadian federal government. King arbitrated about 40 labor disputes and served as a royal commissioner studying anti-Asiatic riots in British Columbia. Soon after being elected to Parliament in 1908, he was appointed Canada's first minister of labor. He held that position until 1911, when his Liberal Party was swept out of office in fractious parliamentary elections.

### 1.2. *The Rockefellers' call for help*

King spent three years in political oblivion, until June 1914, when King received a telegram from Jerome D. Greene, secretary of the Rockefeller Foundation in New York, who wanted to know whether King would be available to consult on a major project. Greene didn't divulge the client until later.<sup>4</sup> King knew little about the Rockefellers or their problems in Colorado after eight shootings of miners and militiamen and the suffocation deaths of 13 women and children in what came to be known as the "Ludlow Massacre." However, based on his experience with the Lethbridge coal strike in western Canada in 1906, King was quite familiar with the coal industry and its unions.

During the same week that Greene contacted King, JDR Jr. had met with a young publicist, Ivy Lee. Lee was retained to help deal with the adverse publicity across the country. Lee's charge was to conduct a publicity campaign to tell the coal operators' side of the story.<sup>5</sup> Meanwhile, King would focus on the labor problems themselves.

## 2. Initial consultations

King came to New York, where he met with JDR Jr. and his staff. Rockefeller was concerned about the situation in Colorado, but also the larger issue of improving employer–employee relations after the strike. JDR Jr. told King that he believed in collective bargaining and providing workers adequate representation.<sup>6</sup> The conversation then turned to the prospect of conducting a larger study, to be funded by the Rockefeller Foundation, to better understand the origins of and solutions to problems between workers and management, which King was confident he could conduct. Work began immediately, although King’s appointment as director of the new Department of Industrial Relations at the Rockefeller Foundation didn’t become official until October 1.

### 2.1. Advice to Rockefeller

The importance of conciliation and improved relationships and communication were central themes in King’s first two meetings with JDR Jr. Two months later, on August 1, 1914, JDR Jr. wrote King to ask him to elaborate on his ideas. Rockefeller’s letter was prompted by a *New York Times* editorial, which was written in response to one of Ivy Lee’s publicity bulletins and called for the Colorado coal operators to consider employer-organized “open unions.”<sup>7</sup>

In response, King dashed off a hurried memo amid the political turmoil surrounding him following Canada’s entry into World War I. King wrote JDR Jr. that mere recognition of the union was a less pressing concern than getting workers to “regard as their friends and allies companies large enough and fair enough to desire to maintain . . . standards of their own accord.”<sup>8</sup> Contrasting with recognition of unions on one extreme and with the negotiation of individual agreements on the other, King called for a conciliation board composed of employers and wage earners employed in the company. The board would meet regularly to make grievances known and to seek adjustments or settlements.

Rockefeller was smitten with the idea and wrote company officials in Denver to suggest that King might come to Denver to discuss his proposal.<sup>9</sup> But both CF&I Chairman Lamont M. Bowers and President Jesse F. Welborn were opposed. Bowers argued that the strike was entirely the result of outside union agitation.<sup>10</sup> Welborn questioned whether rank-and-file workers would be really interested in such a scheme.<sup>11</sup> In keeping with the family’s long-time policy of delegating decisions to local managers, Rockefeller acquiesced,<sup>12</sup> and King went along.<sup>13</sup> Rockefeller left matters to his Colorado officials, and never imposed King as an arbitrator in the dispute.

## 3. Counselor on government and labor union relations

From June until December 1914, King’s contact with Rockefeller was mostly by mail between Rockefeller in New York and King in Ottawa.

When the Colorado strike came to an end on December 10, 1914, King talked with JDR Jr. about the need to readjust matters as quickly as possible, to reemploy all the men possible, and to introduce practicable and desirable reforms. Rockefeller asked King to go to Colorado to assess the situation first-hand, and King agreed to do so.<sup>14</sup>

Later in the month, he returned to New York to discuss with JDR Jr. and company officials a plan of conciliation developed by CF&I management along the lines suggested by King. CF&I already had hired a former state mine inspector to oversee what would become an interim scheme of employee representation.<sup>15</sup> The idea was to hold occasional employee meetings in Denver. King challenged the idea that officers should select the participants, urging instead that miners at each camp elect representatives. Later that evening, at JDR Jr.'s request, King helped company officials to draft the notice that would be distributed to workers.<sup>16</sup>

### 3.1. *U.S. Commission on Industrial Relations*

King's appointment was controversial within labor circles, and King had to explain to his client that the American labor unions wanted desperately to avoid legislation similar to Canada's Industrial Disputes Act, which King had authored to mandate arbitration before any strike could be called. Canadian critics had already attacked King and the Rockefellers. For example, the *Toronto World* and *Montreal Mail* wrote stories to the effect that the former labour minister had sold out to Standard Oil.<sup>17</sup>

King's appointment was the perfect political grist for the pro-labor leadership of the U.S. Commission on Industrial Relations. The Commission was established in 1912 as an independent agency to investigate U.S. labor conflicts and was supposed to represent industry, labor and the public-at-large. But the commission was hardly an impartial body under the chairmanship of former Kansas City labor attorney and Congressman Frank Walsh.<sup>18</sup> In October, the USCIR announced it would hold hearings on the Colorado strike, including the possible misuse of tax-exempt philanthropies such as the federally chartered Rockefeller Foundation<sup>19</sup> Hearings were set for late January 1915.

King was not a newcomer to the USCIR. In April 1914, he had testified about the Canadian Disputes Resolution Act.<sup>20</sup> When King visited Rockefeller in early December 1914, the two men carefully reviewed the first draft of answers to the questionnaires submitted by the commission and made extensive revisions.<sup>21</sup> In early January, King, Lee, Greene, and attorney Starr J. Murphy held extensive meetings with JDR Jr. to discuss strategy for the young millionaire's forthcoming testimony. King and Lee squared off on several strategy issues, including whether to publicize the Rockefeller's answers in advance.<sup>22</sup> The group also went back and forth about whether to treat the Colorado situation specifically or to focus on broader labor issues.<sup>23</sup>

King played a central role in preparing Rockefeller for the testimony—the beginning of his role as a personal public relations adviser, not merely an industrial relations expert. The process of revising answers to the questionnaires and of framing JDR Jr.'s testimony continued for nearly two weeks.<sup>24</sup> King continued to recast much of the testimony during this period.<sup>25</sup>

While Lee focused mostly on compiling the seemingly endless revisions, the outgoing Canadian politician courted members of the USCIR prior to the hearings in order to collect intelligence and, to a lesser extent, to tell the Rockefellers' story. King met more than a dozen times with at least six commission members representing industry and the public (but not labor).<sup>26</sup>

When Rockefeller's three days of testimony began on January 25, 1915, King was in the gallery along with other staff members. King thought that JDR Jr. presented himself well, but

spotted several weak spots in JDR Jr.'s first day of testimony. He and Lee coached Rockefeller that night. The public's response to his presentation was much more positive the next day.<sup>27</sup>

### 3.2. *Meetings with union leaders*

During the hearings, King demonstrated his knack for personal public relations by bringing Rockefeller together with several union leaders. King held a preliminary meeting with UMWA Vice President Frank Hayes, where King said that JDR Jr. had suggested a meeting with union leaders.<sup>28</sup> Two days later, JDR Jr. and King met with national union President John P. White, Green, and District 15 Secretary Edward L. Doyle to discuss conditions and grievances in Colorado—the first time any Rockefeller had ever met with a union official.

Rockefeller's most celebrated encounter was with the outspoken Mother Jones, the controversial "angel of the mines camps" who was adored by most union members. At the end of the third day of hearings, King brought the feisty 83-year-old union activist to JDR Jr.'s office for a two-hour session. Jones told her life story, described the problems in Colorado, and reviewed her work to marshal union support.<sup>29</sup> When JDR Jr. asked her for specifics, Mother Jones rattled off a litany of problems and remedies.

Rockefeller was not entirely comfortable with the encounters. JDR Jr. told King, "Don't fail to be down at the office when these men turn up. I want my god-father there, or I won't know what to say."<sup>30</sup>

## 4. **Representing the Rockefellers in Colorado**

King returned to New York in February 1915, for meetings with Rockefeller and his staff. JDR Jr. admonished the group that there must never be another strike in the mines of CF&I "no matter what is to be done."<sup>31</sup> The discussions included a range of recommendations raised or supported strongly by King. JDR Jr. also repeated his intention to visit Colorado—an idea he had announced publicly at the USCIR hearings at King's suggestion.

### 4.1. *Fact-finding and promotion in Colorado*

Soon thereafter, King left on his own preliminary investigative tour of Colorado. King and his secretary, Fred McGregor, visited a dozen CF&I mining camps, as well as sites operated by competitors. He interviewed superintendents and pit bosses, visited with the miners and their families, interviewed staff, compiled demographics on the ethnic composition of each camp, and recorded information on conditions in every place he visited. However, most of King's time was spent in Denver, where he came to know company managers.<sup>32</sup> He also met with government officials, including the former and current governors, the speaker of the state house, the state attorney general, and the state mine inspector. King met with several union officials, including Mother Jones, the UMWA's lawyer, and the attorney for union leader John Lawson, plus more than a dozen community leaders.<sup>33</sup> Although King's trip ostensibly was to conduct research, he took every opportunity to promote Rockefeller and CF&I's position on labor practices.

#### 4.2. *Spearheading philanthropy in Colorado*

One of King's most important contributions was to urge Rockefeller to address social conditions in Colorado in the aftermath of the strike. Many people were out of work, and the economy was depressed.

In February 1915, miner Joe Rizzo sent a telegram to JDR Jr. that appealed for financial help to feed starving men in southern Colorado. The telegram was later published in the newspapers and generated considerable discussion among JDR Jr.'s staff. JDR Jr. was inclined to only help former CF&I employees in distress. But King quickly persuaded Rockefeller an unrestricted gift was more appropriate.<sup>34</sup>

King then had to persuade the Foundation's board members that a relief project was consistent with the Foundation's new commitment to enhancing industrial relations, and was no different than the Foundation's work then under way to help starving people in Belgium in the aftermath of the invasion by Germany. While in Denver, King met at least four times with Governor George Carlson and the three-person Relief Committee appointed by the governor to oversee the relief project. Their discussions ranged from the proper protocol for dealing with the Foundation, to procedures for disbursing the funds, and to the particulars of which road construction and other projects that would be undertaken to employ laborers. On March 21, King went to Trinidad, Colorado, as Rockefeller's personal representative, to be formally announce and publicize the gift.<sup>35</sup>

#### 4.3. *Called to Washington, DC*

Beyond research, one purpose of King's initial trip was to clear the way for JDR Jr.'s visit originally scheduled for April, but postponed because of the deaths of JDR Jr.'s mother in March and his father-in-law soon thereafter. King's own fact-finding was cut short when he was called to testify, along with Rockefeller again, before the USCIR.

King, from Denver, felt compelled to advise Rockefeller on how to handle this next round of hearings in an encrypted telegram. King urged Rockefeller to begin with only a brief introduction. No reference would be made to any of Rockefeller's earlier testimony. Rockefeller should also avoid being trapped into addressing labor leader John Lawson's recent murder conviction or efforts to grant him a new trial. King implored his client to challenge Chairman Walsh to explain the timing of the hearings (which were politically motivated).<sup>36</sup>

The May 1915 hearings quickly turned into a mockery that heaped negative publicity on the USCIR and its Chairman Frank Walsh. The Rockefellers, guided by Ivy Lee, had prepared a hard-hitting set of responses to accusations leveled several weeks beforehand when the USCIR staff leaked subpoenaed documents to the press.<sup>37</sup>

Whereas Ivy Lee had been grilled at the January hearings concerning his involvement, now it would be the other counselor's turn. Chairman Walsh went after King viciously. In particular, he twisted one of King's responses to make it appear that King had said that JDR Jr.'s will (the term King used was "conscience") was the most powerful force in rectifying the problems in Colorado. In other words, Walsh insinuated JDR Jr.'s will was more powerful and important than the opinions of the citizens of the state or nation. King became outraged and told Walsh his handling of the hearings was disgraceful.<sup>38</sup>

## 5. Colorado industrial representation plan

Rockefeller's purpose for traveling West in the spring was to see conditions in Colorado for himself. JDR Jr. had not been in the state since 1903. However, with the delay until September 1915, the trip's mission was transformed to also include the announcement of a program for improving employee relations at CF&I mines. The Colorado Industrial Representation Plan, also known as the Rockefeller Plan, was King's creation.

### 5.1. *Outlining the plan*

While in Denver in early May, King wrote and reviewed basic elements of his idea with CF&I President Welborn.<sup>39</sup> Among other things, the company would commit itself not to interfere in local politics, religion or education. The plan also outlined much-needed improvements in sanitation, housing, clubhouses and recreational facilities, and medical care in the mine camps. (These improvements eventually were undertaken in 1916–1918. Many of them—particularly improved church and medical facilities—were gifts eventually paid for by Rockefeller personally.)<sup>40</sup> Most importantly, King proposed a policy of representation so “the employees of the Company have a voice in conference with the president and its officials.” King gave a copy to Rockefeller in May, then proceeded in June and July to develop a full text.<sup>41</sup>

In September 1915, King met with Rockefeller and his staff in New York to hash out final details.<sup>42</sup> The resulting Industrial Representation Plan had four parts: The first section specified terms and conditions for the election of employee representatives. The second outlined the functions and details of a series of district conferences, joint committees and joint conferences to involve workers and company officials. The third section identified actions to be taken to prevent disputes and to bring about adjustments, including referrals to the state's new Colorado Industrial Commission. The fourth defined the company's program for achieving social and industrial improvements. A Memorandum of Agreement was added as an attachment that defined terms of employment, rents for company-owned houses, and other standards of living and working conditions.<sup>43</sup>

### 5.2. *Promoting the plan in Colorado*

King successfully sold his proposal, and the group concurred that Rockefeller should go to Colorado to present the plan personally. King left for Colorado a week in advance of his client to explain the plan to company officials. King indoctrinated company officials, but listened to objections, invited suggestions and agreed to changes.<sup>44</sup>

Rockefeller arrived in Denver, accompanied only by his personal secretary, Charles O. Heydt. Rockefeller, King, Heydt and McGregor—spent three weeks traveling along the Front Range of the Rocky Mountains. “I never could have made the trip without him. He knew exactly what to do. I learned more from him than anyone,” Rockefeller recalled about King's role.<sup>45</sup> Based on his prior visits, King was able to provide his client a comprehensive and balanced perspective.

The miners and their families found JDR Jr. unassuming and self-effacing. Many of these meetings were one-on-one. JDR Jr. and King twice donned miner's suits to delve into the

mines. The eight newspaper reporters who accompanied the group were mostly excluded from all but group events. Although JDR Jr. wanted to focus on fact-finding and avoid making too many statements to the press, King fed reporters information.<sup>46</sup>

After touring the mines and meeting many of the camp representatives personally, company officials convened a meeting of camp representatives in Pueblo on October 2. JDR Jr. charmed the group by emphasizing how he had come to already know many of them personally. He then delivered a pep talk on the need for cooperation between labor and capital, illustrating his point with a miniature table and a stack of coins. He explained the table had to level in order for the coins not to fall on the floor. Similarly, if too many coins were placed under one of the legs, the table would become unstable and could topple.<sup>47</sup> King had primed his client on every point, but kept himself in the background.<sup>48</sup> After his introductory remarks, JDR Jr. and company officials outlined details of the Industrial Representation Plan. A lively, mostly positive, discussion followed among the delegates, who then endorsed the proposal unanimously.<sup>49</sup> Rank-and-file miners approved the proposal by a wide margin the following week.

While in Denver, King introduced JDR Jr. to the governors of both Wyoming and Colorado. JDR Jr. also delivered a public address to 500 guests at a Denver Chamber of Commerce luncheon. His remarks, which started with an emotional tribute to his father, extolled the new industrial representation plan pact and foretold a new era in personal relations in business.<sup>50</sup> The Denver speech would be the first of many talks on industrial relations to be delivered in the coming years by King's convert, who soon acquired a reputation as a "new voice" in industrial relations.<sup>51</sup>

## 6. Later activities

During the autumn of 1915, King helped JDR Jr., Lee, Greene and Murphy to write and revise an invited article on labor and capital to be bylined by Rockefeller. The piece appeared in the January 1916 issue of *Atlantic Monthly* and received wide attention.<sup>52</sup> King also worked with Welborn to find funding to assure publication of the printed report of the Colorado Committee on Relief and Unemployment, which extolled the generosity of the Rockefeller Foundation.<sup>53</sup> He also completed his own comprehensive report on his activities to the Rockefeller Foundation.<sup>54</sup>

King's work for the Rockefellers was interrupted in 1916 by a series of personal problems, including the need to relocate his parents to a new home and the death of King's father only two months later. King became distraught and chronically nervous, which ultimately led him (at JDR Jr.'s suggestion) to obtain treatment at the Rockefeller-supported Johns Hopkins University Hospital in Baltimore.<sup>55</sup>

King's appointment at the Foundation ended in February 1918 amid questions by board members about whether he had fully completed his charge. But King continued to serve as a part-time labor relations adviser to Rockefeller directly in 1918 and 1919.<sup>56</sup> Rockefeller encouraged King to become a consultant to other large industrial concerns, and paved the way for him to do so through introductions at International Harvester, Standard Oil of New Jersey, Bethlehem Steel, and Youngstown Sheet and Tube.<sup>57</sup>

In 1918, Rockefeller invited King to accompany him and his wife on a vacation to Colorado, where JDR Jr. wanted to see the progress being made. While visiting Pueblo, JDR Jr. heard

about plans to dedicate a memorial to the miners and family members killed at Ludlow. Upon arrival at the large gathering, the Rockefellers stayed in their car, unnoticed by the large crowd. JDR Jr. wrote a note to the chairman of the event, which was delivered by King. But the inquiry was declined out of fear of violence or of the union event being upstaged, or both.<sup>58</sup>

The following year Rockefeller led the moderate contingent at an industrial conference that tried to bridge the gap between the American Federation of Labor and open-shop proponents. In May 1919, King arranged for JDR Jr. to meet Samuel Gompers—perhaps King’s greatest triumph. Gompers had viciously attacked Rockefeller and King and their industrial representation plan in 1915<sup>59</sup>. However, Gompers’ dislike for Bolshevism was even stronger. The labor leader used the meeting to ask Rockefeller for financial support of his American Alliance for Labor and Democracy.<sup>60</sup>

## 7. King’s industrial/public relations philosophy

King spent two years, from 1916 to 1918, while still on the Rockefeller Foundation payroll, outlining his ideas about industrial relations and the need for large industrial concerns to take a more humanistic approach, to improve communications, and to enhance relationships with employees.<sup>61</sup>

The resulting book released in 1918, *Industry and Humanity*, failed to achieve the acclaim that King had hoped for from critics or from JDR Jr. or from Rockefeller Foundation officials who were looking for easy solutions to complex problems.<sup>62</sup> *Industry and Humanity* instead philosophized that industry existed to serve humanity, not vice versa. King rejected the then-popular notion of social Darwinism, which idealized conflict and stressed survival of the fittest. Instead, King advocated social Pasteurism, which suggested that peace—not competition and violence—was the universal order of things.

Public relations theorists will find the precursors of several important tenets of modern organizational-public relationships within the pages of King’s tome. These include King’s recognition that organizations (a) depend upon and serve multiple stakeholders; (b) must be sensitive to public opinion and communicate with publics; and (c) must engage in direct communications with groups whose interests differ from their own.

King contended that four groups were parties to industrial relations: capital, management, labor (unions and workers), and the community (public-at-large). King’s model of industrial relations was depicted as a large circle representing the community. Within the large circle were three equally sized, overlapping circles representing capital, management and labor. Where the four circles overlap, cooperation flourishes; where only two or three circles overlap, confusion or discord prevails.<sup>63</sup> The parties are drawn together through communication and the pursuit of mutually beneficial peace, work and health.

In large measure, King was influenced by the early sociologists of the day, such as Fernand Tönnies and Max Weber, who were concerned about the transformation of social life as result of urbanization and industrialization. King argued that the governance of industry was similar to governance of a democracy: “An industrial system characterized by antagonism, coercion and resistance must yield to a new order based on mutual confidence, real justice and constructive good-will.”<sup>64</sup>

King also was keenly aware that perceptions about an organization's actions are critical to the organization's acceptance. In part reflecting the libertarian notion of the free marketplace of ideas, King believed that public awareness of an organization's activities and positions was critical to the equitable and expedient resolution of disputes. King had an enormous faith in publicity to inform citizens about the merit of opposing contentions and to redress injustices or social wrongs.<sup>65</sup>

King appreciated the importance of direct contact between parties—and was an early advocate of the notion that public relations is ideally practiced as two-way communication. In contrast to Ivy Lee's approach, which depended upon the power of mediated communications, King's brand of public relations emphasized person-to-person interfaces along with publicity. In a 1914 magazine profile published several months after being retained by the Rockefellers, King chided contemporary business leaders for their mistreatment of labor: "You make a mistake in thinking these men are ruled by self-interest alone. They also have self-respect. One of their leaders writes you a letter, and you do not answer it, and you expect to meet them afterward on a plane of sweet reasonableness."<sup>66</sup>

## 8. Discussion

Mackenzie King's work for John D. Rockefeller Jr. between 1914 and 1919 was a brief interlude in the Canadian politician's life. Upon the death of Liberal Party leader Wilfrid Laurier in 1919, King returned to Canadian politics. One of several heirs apparent, King was elected leader of the Liberal Party in August 1919. Only two years later, when the Liberal Party won a majority of seats in Parliament, King found himself organizing a government as the Prime Minister of Canada. He would serve as leader of Canada during three separate terms (1921–1926, 1926–1930, and 1935–1948).

Few prominent world leaders from the 20th century have played such a direct role in the evolution of modern public relations as Mackenzie King—at least outside of their official roles as political figures. King's five-year stint addressing labor issues in the United States made a lasting mark on American labor relations. And although it's not entirely known whether King thought his work for the Rockefellers would ever advance his political career, King eventually came to view *Industry and Humanity* as the foundation for a the program of liberal reforms he helped institute in Canada.<sup>67</sup>

King is important in public relations history for three reasons.

### 8.1. King's role in resolving the Colorado strike controversy

First, the details of King's public relations work for the Rockefellers provides a richer understanding of one of the most important—and much chronicled—milestones in early American public relations.<sup>68</sup> Whereas Ivy Lee's efforts primarily concentrated on swaying public opinion by bringing out unknown facts about the conflict, King was more directly involved in fixing the root causes of the problem. Although Lee had recommended changes when he visited Colorado in August 1914, it was King—not Lee—who made substantive recommendations.

In addition to proposing new labor policies and practices, King deployed his political knowledge and personal relations skills to help Rockefeller. King, of course, never fashioned himself as a “public relations specialist” or “advocate” and would probably blanch at such characterizations. He resented intimations that he was a hired gun for the Rockefeller. Earlier in his career King had refused to work for large Canadian industrial firms.<sup>69</sup>

Lee continued to work for the Rockefellers for two decades, until his death in 1934. But Lee never became as close to JDR Jr. as King. The affable King counteracted Rockefeller’s tendency to be serious, aloof, colorless, and introverted. King also was the first business adviser of Rockefeller’s own choosing—and provided advice that was often just the opposite of that provided by his father’s inner-circle.<sup>70</sup> King challenged JDR Jr. to be his own person.<sup>71</sup>

### 8.2. *Industrial representation plans and company unions*

King is important in public relations also because of the legacy he left in creating industrial representation plans or company unions—mechanisms for improving employer–employee relations that operated in American industry for nearly two decades in the early part of the 20th century. Between 1916 and 1935, when the Wagner Act guaranteed the right of unions to engage in collective bargaining, the Colorado Industrial Representation Plan—crafted by King and promoted by Rockefeller—served as a model for labor relations.

Importantly, the creation of a company union structure was an alternative to the growing doctrine of Fordism, named after Henry Ford, who opposed unions but thought the way to promote industrial relations was merely to pay higher wages. The cooperative approach advocated by King allowed employers to improve productivity (and control costs) by involving employees in decision-making and the settlement of grievances.<sup>72</sup> These elements of cooperation, dialog, and collective problem solving are at the foundation of models of modern participation-based management.

### 8.3. *King’s brand of personal public relations*

Finally, King illustrates that the antecedents of modern ideas of public relations actually can be traced back much earlier in history than sometimes thought. Models of public relations practice that suggest public relations evolved out of press agency and public information may be overly simplistic in explaining the evolution of the field.<sup>73</sup> King personified the two-way symmetrical model at work at the turn of the 20th century.

The Colorado coal strike occurred during a period in which a major shift was occurring in the industrial, cultural and political order. Progressivism had reached its height; the ideals of reform, cooperation and participation were prevalent in human affairs generally. Public relations historians would do well to recognize how the roots of contemporary public relations practice can be traced to Progressivism. King cannot be credited for having originated all of these ideas, but he is important because of his efforts to codify them in a coherent model. Moreover, he was successful in persuading America’s most prominent business leader to actually implement them.<sup>74</sup> This is King’s public relations legacy.

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- [1] For an overview of the coal strike, see G.S. McGovern, L.F. Guttridge, *The Great Coalfield War*, Houghton-Mifflin, Boston, 1972.
- [2] For a biography on Lee, see Ray Eldon Hiebert, *Courtier to the Crowd. The Story of Ivy Lee and the Development of Public Relations*, Iowa State University Press, Ames, IA, 1966; also K. Hallahan, Ivy Lee and the Rockefellers' response to the 1913–1914 Colorado coal strike, *Journal of Public Relations Research* 14 (2002), pp. 264–314.
- [3] A useful book on this phase of King's life was written by his personal secretary: F.A. McGregor, *The Fall and Rise of Mackenzie King*, Macmillan of Canada, Toronto, 1962. King's definitive biography is R.M. Dawson, *William Lyon Mackenzie King, A Political Biography, 1874–1923*, Methuen and Company, London, 1958. See also H.R. Hardy, *Mackenzie King of Canada. A Biography*, Oxford University Press, London, 1949; H.S. Ferns, B. Ostry, *The Age of Mackenzie King*, Heinemann, London, 1955. A useful resource is G.F. Henderson, *W.L. Mackenzie King. A Bibliography and Research Guide*, University of Toronto Press, Toronto, 1998. A useful web site devoted to King is at: <http://www.mackenzieking.com>.
- [4] Greene had met King at Harvard in 1909, when the University, based on several government projects he had submitted, granted King a Ph.D. in economics. King had been offered lecturer positions at Harvard in 1906 and 1908. He was recommended to Greene by Charles Eliot, president of Harvard, who also served on the Rockefeller Foundation Board.
- [5] K. Hallahan, Ivy Lee and the Rockefellers' response to the 1913–1914 Colorado coal strike, op. cit., pp. 269–271.
- [6] W.L.M. King, *Diary*, University of Toronto, Toronto, 1973; June 6, 1914, p. 10.
- [7] After Colorado strike, *New York Times*, July 30, 1914, p. 8; See also S.J. Scheinberg, Rockefeller and King: the capitalist and the reformer, in: J. English, J.O. Stubbs (Eds.), *Mackenzie King: Widening the Debate*, Macmillan of Canada, Toronto, 1977, p. 49.
- [8] W.L.M. King to John D. Rockefeller Jr., August 6, 1914, RAC RG2, Business Interests, Box 23, File 212.
- [9] J.D. Rockefeller Jr. to J.F. Welborn, August 11, 1914, RAC RG2, Business Interests, Box 23, File 212.
- [10] L.M. Bowers to J.D. Rockefeller Jr., August 16, 1914, RAC RG2, Business Interests, Box 23, File 212.
- [11] J.F. Welborn to J.D. Rockefeller Jr., August 20, 1914, RAC RG2, Business Interests, Box 23, File 212.
- [12] J.D. Rockefeller Jr. to W.L.M. King, August 28, 1914, RAC RG2, Business Interests, Box 20, File 177.
- [13] W.L.M. King to J.D. Rockefeller Jr., September 2, 1914, RAC RG2, Business Interests, Box 20, File 177.
- [14] Lee visited Colorado in August 1914, and had discussed the need for conciliation with company officials, who had just received JDR Jr.'s proposal from King. I.L. Lee to J.D. Rockefeller Jr., Ivy Lee Papers, Box 3, File 23.
- [15] J.F. Welborn to J.D. Rockefeller Jr., December 18, 1914, Jesse F. Welborn Papers, Box 1, File 4.
- [16] W.L.M. King, *Diary*, op. cit., December 28, 1914, p. 2539/69. The initial meeting of employee representatives took place January 15, 1915—the first time in the history of coal mining that a delegation of employees was assembled in a time of industrial peace to advance and better their mutual interests. Speech by D. Griffiths, January 19, 1915, RAC RG2, Business Interests, Box 13, File 120.
- [17] W.L.M. King, *Diary*, op. cit., September 9, 1914, p. 54.

- [18] For background on the USCIR, see G. Adams Jr., *The Age of Industrial Violence, 1910–15*, Columbia University Press, New York, 1966.
- [19] J.D. Greene to F.P. Walsh, October 13, 1914, RAC RG2, Business Interests, Box 23, File 212. See also correspondence between the USCIR and Rockefeller's staff, RAC RG2, Business Interests, Box 23, File 211A and RAC RG3, Series 200, Box 20, Folder 155.
- [20] R.M. Dawson, *William Lyon Mackenzie King. A Political Biography*, op. cit., p. 236.
- [21] W.L.M. King, *Diary*, op. cit., December 8, 1914, p. 2526.
- [22] W.L.M. King, *Diary*, op. cit., January 11, 1915, p. 2539/77; January 20, 1915, pp. 2539/128–129.
- [23] W.L.M. King, *Diary*, op. cit., January 19, 1915, p. 2539/126.
- [24] W.L.M. King, *Diary*, op. cit., January 13, 1915, p. 2539/94.
- [25] W.L.M. King, *Diary*, op. cit., January 14, 1915, p. 2539/97. King expressed frustration about the sometimes stilted and legalistic answers prepared by Greene and attorney Murphy. He thought these might mislead the public. "Repeatedly, I have to urge on all of the Rockefeller group that it is the letter than killeth, but the spirit that maketh whole." He later observed, "over-exactness may destroy the whole spirit of what one is attempting to portray" (pp. 2539/96–97).
- [26] W.L.M. King, *Diary*, op. cit., January 21–30, 1915, pp. 2539/131–150.
- [27] W.L.M. King, *Diary*, op. cit., January 25, 1915, pp. 2539/146–147.
- [28] W.L.M. King, *Diary*, op. cit., January 26, 1915, p. 2539/161.
- [29] W.L.M. King, *Diary*, op. cit., January 27, 1915, pp. 2539/169–170.
- [30] W.L.M. King, *Diary*, op. cit., January 27, 1915, p. 2539/175.
- [31] W.L.M. King, *Diary*, op. cit., February 21, 1915, p. 2539/214.
- [32] W.L.M. King, *Diary*, op. cit., May 8, 1915, p. 2539/641.
- [33] W.L.M. King, *Diary*, op. cit., March 19–May 9, 1915, pp. 2539/365–640.
- [34] W.L.M. King, *Diary*, op. cit., March 19–20, 1915, pp. 2539/336, 344, 349.
- [35] W.L.M. King, *Diary*, op. cit., February 25, 1915, pp. 2539/235, 253.
- [36] W.L.M. King, *Diary*, op. cit., May 10, 1915, pp. 648a–649d.
- [37] K. Hallahan, Ivy Lee and the Rockefellers' response to the 1913–1914 Colorado coal strike, op. cit., pp. 290–292.
- [38] Testimony of William Lynn Mackenzie King, U.S. Commission on Industrial Relations, Washington, DC, 1916, vol. 8, p. 8816. See also F.A. McGregor, *The Fall and Rise of Mackenzie King*, op. cit., pp. 162–174; G.S. McGovern, L.F. Guttridge, *The Great Coalfield War*, op. cit., pp. 329–332.
- [39] Memorandum concerning work of industrial and social betterment, RAC RG2, Business Interests, Box 13, File 104.
- [40] CF&I paid directly for various other improvements and outlined guidelines for improved living conditions in an addendum to the plan when published. Rockefeller paid for two dispensaries and three bandstands in mining camps, and contributed to building drives for six churches in mining communities. His contributions to the national YMCA also funded, in part, work performed by the Y's industrial relations department.
- [41] W.L.M. King, *Diary*, op. cit., July 1–31, 1915, p. 2539/682.
- [42] W.L.M. King, *Diary*, op. cit., September 8–11, 1915, pp. 2539/711–714.
- [43] Address to the employees of the Colorado Fuel and Iron Company, in: J.D. Rockefeller Jr., *The Colorado Industrial Plan*, privately published, New York, 1916, pp. 32–48. For a discussion, see H.L. Scamehorn, *Mill and Mine: The CF&I in the Twentieth Century*, University of Nebraska Press, Lincoln, NE, 1992.
- [44] F.A. McGregor, *The Fall and Rise of Mackenzie King*, op. cit., p. 176.
- [45] R.B. Fosdick, personal notebooks, p. 37. RAC RG2, OMR Series V Biographical Works, Box 57, File 305.
- [46] F.A. McGregor, *The Fall and Rise of Mackenzie King*, op. cit., p. 178.
- [47] P. Long, *Where the Sun Never Shines*, Paragon House, New York, 1989, p. 317.
- [48] F.A. McGregor, *The Fall and Rise of Mackenzie King*, op. cit., p. 181.
- [49] Summary of discussion [prepared by C.O. Heydt], October 2, 1915, Jesse F. Welborn Papers, Box 1, File 27.
- [50] Address to the people of Colorado, in: J.D. Rockefeller Jr., *The Colorado Industrial Plan*, op. cit., pp. 49–62.
- [51] R.E. Hiebert, *Courtier to the Crowd*, op. cit., p. 107.
- [52] J.D. Rockefeller Jr., Labor and capital, *Atlantic Monthly* 117 (January 1916), pp. 12–21. See K. Hallahan, Ivy Lee and the Rockefellers' response to the 1913–1914 Colorado coal strike, op. cit., p. 295.

- [53] Report of the Colorado Committee on Relief and Unemployment; also, W.L.M. King to Jesse F. Welborn, December 8, 1914, Jesse F. Welborn Papers, Box 1, File 29.
- [54] W.L.M. King, Study of Industrial Relations, December 31, 1915. Typescript manuscript, RAC RG3, Series 900, Box 20, File 151. King's report generated questions from Jerome Greene, who thought it devoted too much space to the relief project [J. Greene to W.L.M. King, January 17, 1916; RG3, 900, Box 20 File 151], to which King wrote a length justification [W.L.M. King to J. Greene January 19, 1916, RAC RG3, 900, Box 20, File 151]. As late as October 22, 1916, a trustee was sufficiently concerned about the report that JDR Jr. called a conference with King [see P. Roazen, *Canada's King, An Essay in Political Psychology*, Mosaic Press, Oakville, Ont., 1998, p. 68].
- [55] P. Roazen, *Canada's King*, op. cit., pp. 115, 124–129. This work details King's medical problems and examines his psychological state in 1916.
- [56] J.D. Rockefeller Jr. to W.L.M. King, May 6, 1919, RAC RG2, Friends and Services, Box 71, File 548.
- [57] Previously, in 1917, JDR Jr. suggested to Jesse Welborn the possibility of hiring King in Denver if his executive assistant ever left. J.D. Rockefeller Jr. to J.F. Welborn, May 23, 1917, RAC RG2, Friends and Services, Box 71, File 548.
- [58] R.B. Fosdick, personal notebooks, op. cit., January 7, 1953, p. 44C.
- [59] S. Gompers, Rockefeller organizes and recognizes a "union," *American Federationist* 12 (November 1915), p. 975. Gompers had editorialized previously about Rockefeller: S. Gompers, The Rockefellers condemned and doomed by themselves, *American Federationist* 12 (January 1915), pp. 42–43.
- [60] W.L.M. King, *Diary*, op. cit., May 14, 1919, cited in: S.J. Scheinberg, Rockefeller and King: The capitalist and the reformer, op. cit., p. 101.
- [61] This approach was consistent with the charge that King received from Jerome Greene in 1914, who suggested that King's role was "that of the expert in preventive medicine and public health whose business it is to devise and promote practical applications of remedial measures [see J.D. Greene, Report to the Members of the Executive Committee of the Rockefeller Foundation, August 27, 1914, cited in: S.J. Scheinberg, Rockefeller and King: The capitalist and the reformer, op. cit., p. 92].
- [62] For analyses, see S.J. Scheinberg, Rockefeller and King: The capitalist and the reformer, pp. 98–102; F.A. McGregor, *The Fall and Rise of Mackenzie King*, op. cit., Chapters 12–13, pp. 215–246.
- [63] W.L.M. King, *Industry and Humanity*, op. cit., pp. 535–536.
- [64] W.L.M. King, *Industry and Humanity*, op. cit., p. xv.
- [65] W.L.M. King, *Industry and Humanity*, op. cit., pp. 515–516.
- [66] William Lyon Mackenzie King. Capital and Labor Specialist. *Everybody's Magazine* 31 (December 1914), pp. 761–763, quoted at p. 763.
- [67] W.L.M. King, *Diary*, November 11, 1918, quoted in F.A. McGregor, *The Fall and Rise of Mackenzie King*, op. cit., p. 246.
- [68] P. Long, *Where the Sun Never Shines*, op. cit., pp. 308–311.
- [69] H.S. Ferns, B. Ostry, *The Age of Mackenzie King*, op. cit., p. 193.
- [70] F.A. McGregor, *The Fall and Rise of Mackenzie King*, op. cit., p. 138.
- [71] H.M. Gitelman, *The Legacy of the Ludlow Massacre*, op. cit., p. 49.
- [72] H.S. Ferns, B. Ostry, *The Age of Mackenzie King*, op. cit., p. 215.
- [73] J.E. Grunig, T. Hunt, *Managing Public Relations*, Holt Rinehart, Winston, Fort Worth, TX, 1984. See also in: D. Wilcox, G. Cameron, P. Ault, W. Agee, *Public Relations Strategies and Tactics*, 7th ed., Allyn & Bacon, Boston, 2003, pp. 50–51.
- [74] H.S. Ferns, B. Ostry, *Mackenzie King of Canada*, op. cit., p. 216.