Vocabulary

*Before reading, translate these words.*

Immigrate

Amputate

Orthopedic

Strike

Hobo

Living on the streets

Meanwhile

Sat around

House of Commons

Disgusted

In a landslide

Premier (politics)

Union

Publicly owned / publicly funded

Legislation

Priority

biography

Tommy Douglas was born in Camelon, Falkirk, Scotland on October 20th, 1904. He immigrated to Canada with his family in 1910. However, just before he left Scotland, he injured his leg. While living in Winnipeg, the leg developed a bone infection. The doctor said they needed to amputate the leg. However, a well-known orthopedic surgeon offered to treat his leg for free if medical students could watch. He was able to save Douglas’ leg. Because of that, Douglas learned the value of health care.

In 1918, Douglas witnessed the Winnipeg general strike. He watched the strike turn violent from his rooftop. He even saw a police officer shoot and kill one of the strike workers.

In college, Douglas became interested in debating. He was known as an excellent debater. He joined the University of Chicago to earn a PhD in sociology. He never completed the degree, but his studies led him to the hobo camps. This was during the Great Depression in America, so a lot of people lost their jobs and had to live on the streets. They formed communities together. The Chicago community had about 75,000 homeless people living in it.

Douglas interviewed a lot of people living in the hobo camps. He met former bankers, lawyers, and doctors. Meanwhile, other members of the Socialist Party sat around quoting Marx and Lenin. Douglas was angry that they only talked about helping people but wouldn’t do the work.

Douglas was elected to the House of Commons in 1935. He was a member of the Co-operative Commonwealth Federation (CCF) party. They were a socialist party in Canada. During his time, he visited Nazi Germany and was disgusted by what he saw. He supported the war against Germany. He even joined the army when Canada joined World War 2. His old leg issues prevented him from fighting in the war though.

In 1942, Douglas was elected as the leader of the Saskatchewan CCF. Before the war, he worked in the federal government, but he switched his focus to provincial government this year. He won the 1944 provincial election in a landslide (47/50 seats), becoming the Premier of Saskatchewan. He would remain the premier until 1960.

Tommy Douglas became famous during his time as the Premier of Saskatchewan. He created publicly owned companies: Saskatchewan Power Corporation, Saskatchewan Government Insurance Office, and many other government owned businesses. He also made unions legal in for public employees.

He also passed the Saskatchewan Bill of Rights. It was first law that protected the rights of citizens from government and powerful institutions. He passed this Bill of Rights 18 months before the United Nations passed the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Douglas’ bill of rights eventually led to the modern human rights legislation in Canada.

The thing he is most remembered for is creating Medicare. Medicare is a single-payer, publicly funded healthcare system. Health care was Douglas’ number one priority. First, he created medical insurance when he became a premier. He worked hard to gradually adopt universal health care. Unfortunately, Medicare was not established until after two years after his time as premier. Douglas is considered the **Father of Medicare**. He faced many struggles. Even the doctors went on strike because they were against Medicare.

In 1962, Douglas left the provincial government to become the leader of the newly formed New Democratic Party (NDP), a party that is still active today. Although he never became Prime Minister, his work on Medicare eventually led to universal health care across Canada. In 1966, Lester B. Pearson created the first public healthcare program across Canada with the help of Douglas.

Nowadays, Medicare is considered one of the essential qualities of Canada. There is a lot of pride in Canada about their healthcare. It is seen as a basic human right in Canada now.

Questions

1. Where was Tommy Douglas born?
2. How did Douglas learn the value of healthcare?
3. What did he learn while interviewing homeless people in the hobo camp?
4. What party did Douglas work for?
5. When did he become the Premier of Saskatchewan?
6. What is Douglas remember for?
7. What is Medicare?
8. How do Canadians view healthcare now?
9. How is Medicare different from Korea’s single-payer system?
10. What are some bad points about Medicare?
11. How would you feel about Korea adopting universal healthcare?