



CHARLES TUPPER

TRANSCRIPT

HOLLY DOAN, CPAC Host: He was a Father of Confederation; he helped build the country by force of personality.

JOCK MURRAY, Biographer: Tupper was not only a man who was committed to what he was doing, but he could make it happen.

HOLLY DOAN: But his private life scandalized colleagues. Charles Tupper. Welcome, I'm Holly Doan. He was called "The Old Lion". In his lifetime, Charles Tupper was rated a great statesman. He changed the map of Canada. And he championed the most progressive reforms of his day. Yet, he was prime minister only a few weeks. And he is remembered not for his public role, but rather a reckless private life. We present, Charles Tupper.

NARRATOR: He was raised in the church; the son of a Baptist pastor from Amherst, Nova Scotia. He was made to study Scripture as a boy. The family followed the Ten Commandments, and then some. There was no tolerance of laziness or liquor.

CHARLES TUPPER, Descendant: He read the Bible fully from cover to cover by the age of eight. Well, he was the son of Baptist minister so I'm sure that you know the switch was out if he didn't do his bible reading.

VINCENT DURANT: His mother was very big in the temperance movement. At age six months he was dragged off to temperance meetings with his mother and she would be railing against the evils of booze. So he grew up with a very serious attitude towards life.

NARRATOR: Later, a colleague said in all the years he knew Tupper he never once saw him laugh.

JOCK MURRAY: He wasn't a big man, he wasn't very tall. But he was husky, he was strong looking and he had a stern look about him that meant he meant business. So people were always impressed when he was in a room. And he always took command.

NARRATOR: In time he left the church. Despite his mother's appeals, he took a drink. And he led a private life that would have offended the congregation.

CHARLES TUPPER: I've always heard that Sir Charles was referred to in his county seat as the "Ram of Cumberland" and of course the Warlord or Warhorse of Cumberland. And he was a friendly person who, being a male, enjoyed what in those days was called the fairer sex.

NARRATOR: Womanizing was a sin in polite society. Tupper as a young man was said to have seduced a young lady for her money to pay his tuition at medical school in Edinburgh.

VINCENT DURANT: He was a brilliant man, very studious. He came back from Scotland for example a full fledged doctor and a surgeon at age 22. So he had some brain power, he had a lot of brain power. But in his interpersonal relationships, I think that Tupper was man who – well perhaps it's crass but – he used people.

NARRATOR: As a physician and family man, Tupper was followed by the whisper of scandal. He called it "slander". But some suspected he was not the man he appeared to be.

VINCENT DURANT: Sir Charles definitely had an eye for the younger women and for pretty women. When in he was a young man in Nova Scotia, he came from Cumberland County and he's been called the "Warhorse of Cumberland" and various other nicknames. One of them was the "Ram of Cumberland" meaning you know that the sexuality just flowed from him. Now whether this is true or not, there is a lot of gossip about him, he was a young good looking doctor, I think there was probably a lot of jealousy towards the man. But this seemed to stick with him.

NARRATOR: Scandal was not fatal to his career. He would become a nation builder. When *The Prime Ministers* returns – the bulldog, Sir Charles Tupper.

NARRATOR, Continued: Charles Tupper was a champion campaigner. He was drawn to Conservative party politics in his 30s. He won 15 elections as a member of parliament and a provincial legislator. In 1864, he was premier of Nova Scotia.

VINCENT DURANT: Sir Charles Tupper was a bulldog of a man. When he came into the room you would know that he was there. His stance was as though he was always facing into the wind. He planted his feet. He was fairly stocky, medium height, maybe 5'7" or 5'8". Mutton chop whiskers, black hair, heavy eyebrows – you knew he was there!

NARRATOR: In debate, Tupper was tireless. He could speak 4 hours at a stretch; he was so forceful one journalist described his style as vulgar. He called his opponents "cowards" and "block heads". His demeanor warned others to stay out of his way.

VINCENT DURANT: I analyzed one of his speeches that was given in 1896, the first sentence was 110 words long! The average -- now this was an analysis done by my computer, I didn't count all this – but the average sentence was 32 words long. Contemporaries of his and opponents of his in the House of Commons talked about, again, this torrent of words, constant hammering away and almost invariably he won the day I think it was just through the sheer power of the rhetoric.

JOCK MURRAY: He fought for causes that were very important so you admired him for the strength of his ideas and his vision. You didn't know whether you'd enjoy spending an evening with him however because he was a stern fellow. I don't remember in all the research we did if he ever told a joke or even found anything faintly amusing. He was very serious about what he was doing.

NARRATOR: What he did made history. In the 19th century many Canadians rarely saw the inside of a classroom. School fees were high. Education was expensive. Few workers could afford the luxury of having children finish their schooling. Illiteracy was common. In 1866 Nova Scotia pioneered free schooling. It was the nation's first system of public education funded by a universal school tax.

JOCK MURRAY: He made it very clear early that he was going to bring in legislation that would allow free education for all children. Nobody wanted it! The taxpayers didn't want it. His political Party thought it was poison and it would end their reign. The opposition didn't want it. He felt that was important. He was going to do it. He announced it. He laid out the process and he rammed that through and achieved something we now take for granted but it was a very, very important step. The first time there was free education for all children in British North America.

NARRATOR: The young premier didn't stop there. Maps of the day showed Canada and Nova Scotia. They were separate British colonies. Nova Scotians were proud to run their own affairs. In defiance of public opinion, Tupper brought Nova Scotia into Confederation in 1867.

VINCENT DURANT: He went against almost all Nova Scotians in ramming this through, again with his bombastic style, and his party paid a heavy, heavy political price for it. The first election after confederation in 1867, every seat in Nova Scotia in the federal government, every seat was lost except Tupper's seat in Cumberland. So they paid a huge price, but he again was a visionary. He saw that it was better to have Nova Scotia as part of a bigger amalgamation of the provinces, then to have it continue to be isolated and alone.

CHARLES TUPPER: He always had Canada on his mind. That's my sense. And he made a huge contribution to this country; we're here because of him. Nova Scotia is not the 14th colony of the United States because of him. And I'm very proud of him.

NARRATOR: It was as if the whole country was under construction. The new capital was growing. New territories were gained – Manitoba in 1870, British Columbia in 1871. The country needed a bigger parliament and new public works. With so much to do, Prime Minister John A. Macdonald complained members of his cabinet were useless – a bunch of yes men, he said. He brought Tupper to Ottawa as his right hand man.

JOCK MURRAY: Tupper knew that he lacked the diplomatic skills that John A. Macdonald had. John A. Macdonald knew that if things were really tough and had to get

done, and people had to be won over, Tupper was the person who could do it. And so the two together worked very closely and they did that for many, many years.

VINCENT DURANT: People described him as being a bully, a thunderer. He was! No question about it. In his mind, he was always right and any means that he used – he had a very serviceable temper –he could become indignant on a moments notice. And he would bring this into play whenever he wanted to win the day. And indeed he won most of the days.

JOCK MURRAY: So here's a tough bull of a man who could make any major principle or vision happen. People didn't necessarily like that process. He never lost an argument. When he got in a room he used very strong arguments. He used data. In an age of Victorian oratory he was very matter of fact; pound the tables, use strong arguments, always left the room winning an argument. But people don't necessarily like that process, so he often left a lot of bruised people behind, but he always won the day.

NARRATOR: "I have worked in season and out...for the good of the party," Tupper said. He served in six cabinet portfolios and supervised what became the biggest job in the country. It was a 3-thousand mile transcontinental railway, the Canadian Pacific. Once completed, a locomotive could steam from Montreal to Vancouver in six days. Before the arrival of the railway, the journey had taken all summer by riverboat and stagecoach. As minister of railways, Tupper was put in charge of bringing train service to the West.

VINCENT DURANT: He, again, bombastic, charge ahead, pushed ahead, and he didn't really worry about where the funding was coming from and he pulled some strings to get it done. So I think an awful lot of the credit has to go to him in that sense.

JOCK MURRAY: What you did admire about him though was his ability to have a vision and to march that vision into a reality. And everyone else, John A. Macdonald and all the others, recognized that about Tupper, that Tupper was not only a man committed to what he was doing, but he could make it happen. And so they often looked to Tupper when they really wanted something to happen. 'Get Tupper on side and Tupper would make it happen'. If there was something that was really difficult to get done, somebody who needed to be won over, Macdonald often said: 'Call Tupper.' Because Tupper could make it happen.

NARRATOR: It did not happen without scandal. In 1883 a British Columbia contractor close to Tupper was awarded a two million dollar job though rivals submitted lower bids. The opposition suspected a payoff. Tupper faced a legal challenge and demands for a full inquiry. He promptly sailed for London, far from the cry of scandal, to take a diplomatic posting.

VINCENT DURANT: People said that he was a scoundrel. People said that he feathering his pockets. 1885, the Canadian Pacific Railway, the syndicate, gave him

\$100,000 worth of stock. What was that all about? You know it was politics – raw-boned, rough politics.

JOCK MURRAY: Although no personal charges were made against Tupper at the time, there was that whole aura and shadow over him and others. Now later on after he left government he was given \$100,000 worth of C.P.R. stock by those who had built the railroad in gratitude in building the railroad from sea to sea as the minister and I think you might look at that somewhat askance.

CHARLES TUPPER: I think he worked for his money and I think he may have invested wisely. But kickbacks and pay offs? I don't think so. I don't think so.

NARRATOR: It was said Tupper's bank account soon ran to six figures. When *The Prime Ministers* returns – a leader's rise and fall.

NARRATOR, Continued: Charles Tupper's private passions drew disapproving gossip. In 1891 a secretary threatened Tupper with a lawsuit.

VINCENT DURANT: There was a situation in Washington where a woman brought a charge against him in 1891. Said that he had impregnated her and then he had advised her to have an abortion. The case was either thrown out of court, withdrawn, or paid off because there are no records beyond that.

NARRATOR: Tupper was 70 at the time, still married to his wife Frances. He appeared to be a grandfatherly statesman. Others saw another side to Tupper. Lady Aberdeen, the governor general's wife, said his "whole life has been devoted to scheming." She wrote in her diary: "It seems so untrue to the country to have to place it bound in the power of such a man." By 1896, Conservatives looked to Tupper. The party had had lost its best talent. Conservatives had gone through four leaders in five years.

JOCK MURRAY: The Party, the Conservative Party, at the time was in great disarray. And as people commented at the time it was such a sick party that not even Doctor Tupper could save it.

NARRATOR: "I found the Conservative party utterly demoralized," Tupper said. He believed he save the government. In two weeks of campaigning, he made 42 speeches.

VINCENT DURANT: One famous speech that he made in June in Massey Hall in Toronto was almost a riot. The Liberals had salted the audience and every time that Sir Charles would say: "And I", the crowd would break out "I, I, I, I..."! In a way he was a spent force. I mean he was definitely yesterday's man.

NARRATOR: The country said it was time for a change. In the newspapers, Tupper was ridiculed as an old man who talked too much. In the Commons, the Conservatives lost a quarter of their seats in the election of 1896. Tupper was out as prime minister after only 10 weeks.

JOCK MURRAY: If you were rating him as a prime minister, you would rate him as a failure. He didn't accomplish much in the few months that he was a prime minister. But if you look at him in terms of his political contribution to this country, it's hard to find many who have made the kind of contribution. So if they were rating politicians who had an impact on Canada, Tupper would rate very highly.

NARRATOR: In his last years Tupper cast his memory back to his boyhood in the Baptist church. He was the first prime minister to publish his memoirs. But he revealed nothing of his deepest secrets.

VINCENT DURANT: He was getting on in age, he was about 91, 92 years old at the time. So he gathered together all the papers. And he had a pile that was going to go to the Archives, the official documents. And then he had a pile that was going to be the family ones. And then he had another pile that went right into the fireplace. He made sure that history would be told the way he wanted it to be told on his life.

NARRATOR: At the close of his life, Tupper had visions. His late wife came to him in dreams; he recalled time spent with her by the sea when they were young. "I dreamt I saw my darling," he wrote in his diary. "I dreamt I saw my darling."

POSTSCRIPT: Charles Tupper died in his sleep at age 94. He was Canada's longest-surviving Father of Confederation, and the shortest-serving prime minister – 67 days.

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