

C.D. Howe, the “minister of everything”

Learn about C.D. Howe, the “minister of everything,” including wartime minister of the department that is now Public Services and Procurement Canada.

Early years

Clarence Decatur (C.D.) Howe was born in Waltham, Massachusetts, in 1886. He called himself a “Canadian by choice.” Trained as an engineer, he became both famous and wealthy building grain elevators in Canada before he entered Canadian politics. In 1935, he was elected as a Liberal member of Parliament, and in 1936, was appointed Canada's first Minister of Transport.

Minister in war and in peace

Straightforward and forceful, the Right Honourable C.D. Howe was a powerful member of William Lyon Mackenzie King's Cabinet. He was known for getting things done.

In 1940, Howe was appointed Minister of Munitions and Supply, one of the predecessors of Public Services and Procurement Canada. As Minister, Howe oversaw the mobilization of Canada's industrial war effort. Under his watch, 1.1 million Canadians built over 500,000 vehicles, 600 ships, 12,000 aircraft, 85,000 heavy guns and millions of tons of military supplies. Using the wide-ranging powers given to him under the *War Measures Act*, Howe transformed the nation into a war production powerhouse, earning him the moniker “minister of everything.”

Having proved highly successful in running Canada's war production effort, Howe took on the job of returning the country's economy to a peacetime footing. As the Cold War heated up in the early 1950s, Howe served as Minister of Defence Production and presided over the growth of the aircraft industry.

Transforming Canada

Howe was a Cabinet minister for 22 years. He led major projects, such as:

- Trans-Canada Airlines (now Air Canada)
- the National Harbours Board
- Canadian National (CN) Railways
- the St. Lawrence Seaway
- the Trans-Canada Pipeline
- the CANDU (Canada Deuterium Uranium) reactor program
- Canada's first nuclear power plant in Chalk River, Ontario
- the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC)



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Howe was named *Time* magazine's Man of the Year in 1952. He played an important role in transforming Canada into a leading industrialized nation. Howe died in Montréal in 1960.



C.D. Howe Building in downtown Ottawa

A building in downtown Ottawa is named after C.D. Howe. The C.D. Howe Building is located on Sparks Street and is home to Innovation, Science and Economic Development Canada.

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