

LIBERALS IN MANITOBA
PROVINCIAL DECLINE AND RESURGENCE

BY
TIMOTHY O.E. LANG

A Thesis
Submitted to The Faculty of Graduate Studies
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

Department of Political Science
University of Manitoba
Winnipeg, Manitoba

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ABSTRACT

When Manitoba joined the Canadian Confederation in 1870, it did not have clearly defined political parties, and in the legislature many members had only a vague or obscure party affiliation if indeed they had any at all. Twenty years later, however, the province had changed dramatically as new settlers arrived, mostly from Europe or Ontario, which it increasingly resembled. As it developed, the province adopted the political parties that were present in Ontario and at the national level in Ottawa. Although party politics was still not as clearly defined as in the rest of the nation, it was beginning to take shape. The Liberal party in Manitoba first took office in 1888, and by the end of the First World War it appeared to dominate provincial politics. Well after the Second World War it continued to dominate Manitoba politics in one form or another. The Liberals had established themselves as a political force that appeared unbeatable.

By 1970, one hundred years after the birth of Manitoba, the fortunes of the once powerful Liberal party were in serious decline. The party that once had enjoyed such glorious success now seemed on the verge of extinction. Within a decade of Manitoba's centennial, the party that at one time could "do no wrong" could now "do no right", and was practically eliminated from provincial politics by the mid-1980's. In the context of this decline, the 1988 provincial

election results were astounding, as the resurgent Liberals won so many seats that they came close to forming the provincial government. In considering the major factors that evidently contributed to the slow decline and sudden recovery of Manitoba's Liberal party, this study identifies the federal Liberal party's influence, the capacity of local leadership, and the increased competition from the NDP. While the purpose of this study is not to give advice, it must be noted, in conclusion, that the Manitoba Liberals have recently fared somewhat better in meeting the NDP challenge when their emphasis on policy has been relatively progressive in proposing social reform.

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I

I N T R O D U C T I O N :

T H E M A N I T O B A L I B E R A L P A R T Y

Party politics was not clearly evident in Manitoba in the immediate years after Confederation, in part because the leaders in the province believed that a united and relatively non-partisan stand "was the only way to wrest a better deal out of Ottawa and the federal Conservatives led by Sir John A. Macdonald."¹ By 1880, this orientation of provincial politics seemed to be so generally accepted, that only a few members in the legislature claimed to be in opposition to the Norquay provincial government.

The beginning of party politics was in some ways "accidental". Members of the legislature were in accord that they should try to get the best deal out of the federal government, but when some began to feel that Premier Norquay was not getting the best deal from Ottawa, they began to form an opposition group against Ottawa and against Norquay. Manitobans began to associate Norquay with the federal Conservative government, much to his dislike, as the premier maintained the belief that the best way to gain from Ottawa

¹ Peter Brock, Fighting Joe Martin - Founder of the Liberal Party in the West, Toronto: The National Press, 1981, p.5.

was to have a united provincial front.² Norquay also wanted to maintain separation from the federal Conservatives since he was not on the best of terms with them, as historian Gerald Friesen noted:

Norquay's political position was shaky. As a friend of the federal Conservative party, he was branded a Conservative in provincial politics, though he was never close to Macdonald's agents in Manitoba and was never trusted by them.³

However, more and more the question of "provincial rights" arose especially after opposition members charged that the federal disallowance of Manitoba's railway legislation was a clear infringement.⁴ Therefore "after 1882, as Manitoba grievances grew, a definite and partisan opposition to the Norquay government began to form under the leadership of Thomas Greenway."⁵ According to a writer at the time:

Mr. Greenway moved a resolution which condemned the policy of the Dominion government towards Manitoba as well as the Manitoba government for accepting it. Thus the government and the opposition members divided squarely on party issues, and thereafter the political battles of Manitoba were fought between Conservatives and

² W.L. Morton, Manitoba - A History, Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1957, p. 220.

³ Gerald Friesen, The Canadian Prairies - A History, Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1984, p. 213.

⁴ Manitoba, Journals of the Legislative Assembly, 1882, 10 and 14. (from: R.O. MacFarlane, Manitoba Politics and Parties after Confederation, Winnipeg: University of Manitoba, 1940, p. 54.)

⁵ Morton, Manitoba, p.220.

Liberals as in the older provinces.⁶

Since Norquay was associated with the Conservatives at the federal level, it was natural for the opposition to group together under the Liberal banner, since the Liberals were known for their stand on "provincial rights" against the federal government in other regions of Canada. Greenway, and other opposition members like Joseph Martin, who was another very vocal opponent of the Conservatives in Ottawa and Manitoba, began to build local opposition in the form of a stronger provincial Liberal party. The election of 1886 was later recognized by historians as the first really partisan provincial election in Manitoba.⁷

Premier Norquay resigned as Premier on December 22nd, 1887, and handed over the leadership to his Provincial Secretary, D.H. Harrison. When Harrison could not win a crucial by-election he handed power over to the Greenway Liberals.⁸ The new government met with immediate success due to a slight economic recovery and successful negotiations between Premier Greenway and Prime Minister Macdonald which ended the disallowance of railway charters, long a major controversy in provincial politics. Greenway decided to call an election aiming to increase his support in the legislature

⁶ F.H. Schofield, The Story of Manitoba, Winnipeg: S.J. Clark Publishing Co., 1913, Volume I, p. 330.

⁷ Morton, Manitoba, p.221.

⁸ Brock, Fighting Joe Martin, pp. 108-109.

and to firmly establish the Liberal party as the "government by popular vote rather than one by parliamentary upset."⁹ After the election of July 11th, 1888, the Greenway Liberals captured thirty-five seats while the opposition was reduced to five.¹⁰

The Greenway Liberals retained provincial control until 1900, although they became embroiled in the highly controversial Manitoba Schools Question. While Manitoba politics now clearly had two political parties, many federal Conservatives still supported the provincial Liberals and vice versa, so lines were far from strict. Even the Conservative Prime Minister John A. Macdonald once wrote: "I should prefer Greenway (the Liberal leader) at the head of things rather than Norquay who is really a nuisance."¹¹ Similarly, when Greenway's School Act of 1890 cut across racial and religious loyalties, it further disrupted any regular party lines.¹² When it withdrew public support for religious schools, for example, it caused conscientious members to break with their parties, as did Rodmond Roblin, when he left the Liberals to join the Conservatives. The Manitoba Free Press, writing about this period in Manitoba politics, observed:

⁹ Ibid., p.119.

¹⁰ Morton, Manitoba, p. 232.

¹¹ Macdonald letters, from M.S. Donnelly, The Government of Manitoba, Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1963, p. 46.

¹² Ibid.

The politics of Manitoba, like those of any small province, are influenced by all sorts of personal and non-political issues which cut diagonally across party organization.¹³

True party politics did not become definite until after the 1899 election when Premier Greenway was defeated by a party led by Hugh John Macdonald that was "Conservative in fact as well as in name".¹⁴ After 1900, political parties were clear as were the members who supported them.

Norris as Liberal Leader and Premier

The Liberals in Manitoba were now in opposition and due to the strong and durable premiership of Rodmond Roblin, the party remained there for well over a decade. When Greenway resigned, C.J. Mickle acted as House Leader for the Liberals. At the Liberal convention in March of 1906 the party picked the Mayor of Portage La Prairie, Edward Brown, as leader.¹⁵ Brown had integrity and ability, but lacked popular appeal, while Premier Roblin, on the other hand, was nearing his pinnacle of support in Manitoba.¹⁶ These factors culminated in a large majority for the Conservatives in the 1907 Manitoba provincial election and left the Liberals

¹³ "Hon. Thomas Greenway is Dead", Manitoba Free Press, October 30, 1908.

¹⁴ Op.Cit.

¹⁵ Morton, Manitoba, p. 293.

¹⁶ Ibid.

in opposition once again.

Tobias Crawford Norris was first elected to the legislature in 1896 and served as a member of the Greenway government until the government loss in 1899. After the 1907 election loss, Norris led the Liberals in the House and by 1910 he had been chosen to become the Manitoba Liberal leader. Norris, unlike his Liberal predecessors, was likeable to most and seemed to stand above "the rancorous partisanship of the party struggle and...could appeal to the independent voter".¹⁷ Under his leadership, the Liberals were barely defeated in the 1914 election, but the prospects were clearly improving.

Early in 1915 the Liberals called for an investigation into the expenditures for the construction of the Legislative Building. After some delays the commission of inquiry was established by Premier Roblin, but before the findings were produced the Premier resigned, and by May 13, 1915, an administration was formed by the Liberals under T.C. Norris.¹⁸

Premier Norris was known for his dislike of partisan politics and the disputation it evoked. So when he took office, he headed a government which avowedly sought to

¹⁷ Ibid., p. 336.

¹⁸ Hugh R. Ross, Thirty-Five Years in the Limelight - Sir Rodmond Roblin and His Times, Winnipeg: Farmer's Advocate, 1936, pp. 168-169.

initiate a new era of non-partisan politics. This attitude was partly based on Norris's ideals, but it also reflected the wartime weariness with party machinations that seemed to breed corruption. Norris called an election that brought a massive majority: the Liberal candidates won forty-two of the forty nine legislative seats.¹⁹

The Liberal government moved swiftly in implementing reforms, most of which had been promised in the 1914 election. The Norris government was seen as very progressive and was probably influenced by the Progressive movement in the United States. Many of the reform movements in Manitoba supported the Liberals because they "provided the highest common denominator for successful political action for all of them."²⁰ The Liberals followed through with their reform platform, and over the next few years Manitoba was the "centre of reform activity in Canada."²¹ Some of the major reforms included: temperance legislation, enfranchisement of women, compulsory education, worker's compensation, a minimum wage, a public health nursing system, and provision of farm credits.²² The party maintained its progressive nature and it also continued to profess its non-partisanship.

¹⁹ Morton, Manitoba, p. 348.

²⁰ M.S. Donnelly, The Government of Manitoba, p. 52.

²¹ John Kendle, John Bracken: A Political Biography, Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1979, p. 27

²² Ibid.

This was emphasized when the provincial Liberals broke away from the federal Liberals on the First World War issue of supporting Prime Minister Borden's Union government and conscription:

The leaders of the Manitoban Liberals were convinced of the necessity of both (conscription and a Union government), and came to the determination that a western Liberal party must be formed to support a coalition.²³

Despite the Norris administration's many reforms and its non-partisan beliefs, the next Manitoba election in 1920, gave the Liberals only a slim minority government, with twenty-one seats while the Conservatives won seven. Part of the reason for this result, as Donnelly suggests, was that:

The foundation of the Norris government, built as it was on the support of both farm and labour, had always been shaky. The farmers represented a right-wing conservatism that was more in keeping with the traditions of Manitoba than were the radicalism of the trade unions or the reform policies on which the Norris government was based.²⁴

A surprising number of votes went to diverse farmer and labour representatives who won twenty-five seats. The reason for the Liberal decline included the post-war depression in the West, falling agriculture prices, the worrisome provincial deficit, and in part it was also due to the Winnipeg General Strike in which Norris stayed neutral and was seen by critics as being weak - or too much inclined to sympathise with the strikers. According to one writer, the Strike of 1919 left a "lasting

²³ Morton, Manitoba, p. 358.

²⁴ Donnelly, The Government of Manitoba, p. 58.

political legacy":

The increase in class consciousness fostered by the strike helped the reformers gather support.²⁵

Before 1919 most progressive or reform minded Manitobans supported the Liberals, but by 1920 there was a new group of left-wing and labour candidates who took some votes from the Liberals. Also, although there were few formal ties, the provincial Liberals were still associated with the federal Liberals and more importantly with a party system that was regarded as discredited by many Manitobans: "Strong anti-party feeling grew up in the West and political parties were seen as the agents of Eastern capitalists who exploited the West."²⁶

The following two years produced very little effective legislation since the second largest group in the House, the United Farmers' Movement (U.F.M.), refused to support the Liberals.²⁷ Dissatisfaction with the party system was demonstrated once again in the federal election of 1921 when twelve of the fifteen Manitoba seats went to the Progressive party.²⁸ Provincially, the U.F.M., known to some as the Progressives, sensed that it was only a matter of time before they would defeat the Liberal government. When

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Donnelly, The Government of Manitoba, p. 62.

²⁷ Morton, Manitoba, p. 377.

²⁸ Canada. Report of the Chief Electoral Officer, 1921.

the election was called in 1922, Premier Norris fought in a losing cause, winning only seven seats compared to the U.F.M.'s twenty-four.²⁹ As W.L. Morton has noted, the election was critical:

The election of 1922 was a political divide in Manitoban history. It marked the culmination of the effort to get rid of 'politics'.³⁰

The Liberal party in Manitoba had attempted to become a non-partisan group and reform party. To some extent the party had met these goals in some areas; but it was defeated when labour representatives outflanked the Liberals in the reform movement and farm representatives flourished in the non-partisan movement. The Liberal party was evidently compromised by its association with the old party system, even if it was in name only.

Liberals Lose Ground to Progressives

The new 1922 Manitoba government caucus chose John Bracken as leader of the U.F.A. and thus premier of Manitoba. Bracken immediately made it known that his administration was not to operate by party, group or class, but by co-operation: "We are not here to play politics or to represent a single class, but to get down to the serious business of giving this province an efficient government."³¹ This sat

²⁹ Manitoba. Report of the Chief Electoral Officer. 1922.

³⁰ Morton, Manitoba, p. 379.

³¹ Ibid., p. 384.

well with most Manitobans and the spirit which they wanted to see in government. Not only had Bracken captured the popular feeling of Manitobans, he and his administration took the wind out of the Liberal sails, leaving the party with few seats and little support. Manitobans who would normally support the Liberals were now turning to the U.F.M. for reforms and sound non-partisan administration. Many Liberals found it easy to support the Bracken government since the administration seemed to hold many of the same values as most Liberals. In fact, although Bracken was not very involved in politics before 1922, he had worked for the Liberal administration of Walter Scott in Saskatchewan and admitted that he had Liberal leanings.³² Bracken had considered entering into a coalition with the Liberals in 1923 but decisive by-election victories for his government stopped this pursuit for the time being.³³

The provincial Liberals were still being led by Norris who was the "commanding figure in the House": "Widely respected and of dignified mien, he was an excellent debater and in his penetrating, remorseless fashion he continuously made life uncomfortable for the new government."³⁴ After nearly fifteen years in opposition against Premier Roblin, Norris knew the role well, but despite his leading role in

³² Kendle, John Bracken, pp. 29-30.

³³ Ibid., p. 63.

³⁴ Ibid., p. 40.

the house, many Liberals still had little philosophical problem supporting Bracken. By March 1926, more serious discussions about coalition were initiated by Liberals, but it was clear that it would likely be impossible as long as Norris was leader since he did not like the idea of coalition unless he was made premier.³⁵ This was impossible for the Progressives and for Bracken.

Coalition between the Progressive party and the Liberal party meanwhile began to take shape in federal politics, and thus had an impact on Manitoba politics. Many Progressives believed that they were "advanced Liberals...and their ultimate destiny would be absorption by the Liberal party."³⁶ Federal Progressive leaders, like Hon. T.A. Crerar and Robert Forke shared this view.³⁷ During the federal election of 1926, several victorious candidates ran as "Liberal-Progressives", and joined Prime Minister Mackenzie King in government.

In Manitoba, T.C. Norris resigned as leader after almost two decades at the helm, and at the convention on March 20, 1926, the main issues discussed among Liberals was leadership and possible "fusion" with the Progressives.³⁸ At the same time Bracken had been considering asking Judge

³⁵ Ibid., p. 63.

³⁶ Morton, Manitoba, p. 397.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Kendle, John Bracken, p. 64.

Hugh Amos Robson, a prominent Liberal, to join his cabinet in order to initiate a Liberal-Progressive alliance, but nothing materialized.³⁹ It was clear that a coalition was on the minds of many, if not most, Liberals and Progressives, but there remained a small core of Liberals who were solidly opposed, and because there was no unanimity the Liberals maintained themselves as a separate party.

The new leader chosen at the convention turned out to be Hugh Amos Robson, long a prominent figure in the legal profession and a justice in the Court of King's Bench since 1910.⁴⁰ Robson was supported by the Young Liberals because they believed he would favour a fusion with Bracken.⁴¹ However, by the time the June 28, 1927 election was held, Robson had made it clear that he was opposed to any fusion. The federal Liberal-Progressive Crerar, and others who favoured ties, had earlier become worried that an election fight might widen the gap between the two parties and make co-operation impossible.⁴² Some believed that Robson took his firm stance due to pressure from Saskatchewan Liberal Premier Jimmy Gardiner, who did not understand that Manitoba Progressives had once been mostly Liberals, unlike

³⁹ Ibid., p. 63.

⁴⁰ Hon. H.A. Robson, vertical files - Manitoba Legislative Library, Winnipeg.

⁴¹ Kendle, John Bracken, p. 64.

⁴² Ibid., p. 65.

Saskatchewan where the Progressives had once been Conservatives.⁴³ The election outcome was unfavorable for the Liberals since once again many one-time Liberals supported Bracken. The results gave the Government twenty-nine seats, the Conservatives jumped to fifteen, while the Liberals stayed at seven seats. Three Labour candidates, as well as one Independent were also victorious.⁴⁴

Liberal-Progressive Coalition and Government

With the poor election showing of the Liberals in Manitoba, those opposed to a Liberal-Progressive fusion became even fewer in number. Bracken was also ready for an alliance as the Conservatives had become much stronger. John W. Dafoe, editor of the Manitoba Free Press and a long time Liberal, concerned about the party's future, wrote to Prime Minister Mackenzie King:

It is or ought to be obvious that... in a general election which the Liberals and Progressives fight one another this will be lost, both in a federal and provincial sense...the province would be handed to the tories on a platter.⁴⁵

After 1928, although there was still no official fusion, "the Liberal members in the legislature gave the government

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Manitoba. Report of the Chief Electoral Officer. 1927.

⁴⁵ Dafoe papers, J.W. Dafoe to Mackenzie King, Jan. 10, 1929.

steady support for the remainder of the term of assembly."⁴⁶

In Ottawa, Mackenzie King sent trouble-shooters to Manitoba to re-unite the two wings of the Liberal party and also "lay the groundwork for a relationship with Bracken."⁴⁷ Liberal leader Robson finally agreed with the fusion but there remained the obstacle of Norris, who still held his seat after almost thirty years in the legislature, and was opposed to any fusion. Prime Minister King appointed Norris to the Tariff Board and cleared the way for what he hoped would be a smooth transition to a Manitoba Liberal-Progressive party. However, H.A. Robson soon made it clear that he really disliked Bracken and accordingly still opposed party fusion. At this juncture, King and Bracken met to discuss the problem, and solved it with appointment of Robson to the Manitoba Court of Appeal. Robson resigned as Manitoba Liberal leader and as a member of the legislature on January 3, 1930; but the party refrained from immediately picking a new leader.⁴⁸ Meanwhile, because of the worsening economic position of the province due to the Depression, Bracken invited members of the Conservative, Liberal and Labour parties to form a union government to cope with the critical

⁴⁶ Morton, Manitoba, p. 405.

⁴⁷ Kendle, John Bracken, p. 68.

⁴⁸ "Two mentioned for Liberal leadership", Manitoba Free Press, January 4, 1930, p. 1.

situation facing Manitoba.⁴⁹

The Liberals chose Dr. Murdoch Mackay as their new leader in June 1931, and made it clear by November that they were in favour of coalition.⁵⁰ But there still needed to be a delegate endorsement at the party convention held on January 12, 1932. There remained some 'die-hard' Liberals opposed to any coalition, but the majority of the party showed approval by agreeing to a fusion by a count of three to one. On May 27, 1932 the coalition was complete, with three Liberals, J.S. McDiarmid, Ewen McPherson, and Murdoch Mackay, joining the provincial cabinet.⁵¹

Bracken had let it be known publicly that his reasons for coalition were to form a united front so as to put politics aside and get the best deal and aid from the federal government during the crisis of the depression. Many Manitobans and the media tended to agree with the premier's stance, so when the Conservatives and Labour decided to stay out the coalition, critics considered them disloyal to the province and selfish in putting their own political ambitions first. The provincial election held on June 16, 1932, was fought on the record of the Bracken administration and, on the advice of the Liberals, on an anti-Prime Minister Bennett

⁴⁹ Kendle, John Bracken, p. 115.

⁵⁰ Ibid., pp. 115-118.

⁵¹ "Three Liberals in Manitoba cabinet", Winnipeg Free Press, May 27, 1932, p. 1.

and anti-Conservative campaign. Many Manitobans evidently believed Bracken when he declared:

I have no sense of party politics. The only political platform I have is whatever is best for Manitoba.⁵²

With large numbers of volunteers and help from both the Liberals and Progressives, the election results gave the Liberal-Progressives a massive victory, winning thirty-eight seats compared to ten Conservatives, five Labour and two Independents.⁵³

The coalition between the Liberals and Progressives cemented the two parties from that time on, and allowed Liberals once again to become a force in provincial politics. In the following years the ties between the two were completely interwoven and there was no distinguishing between the two former rivals, as both were solidly united under the Liberal-Progressive banner.

Partisan Politics Halts in Manitoba

Problems of the depression continued, and the Liberal-Progressives could no longer blame the federal Conservatives, since Liberal Mackenzie King had returned to power in Ottawa in 1935. Bracken managed to win again in the 1936 provincial election, but only with the help of a coalition with a new Social Credit group. Bracken maintained

⁵² Kendle, John Bracken, p. 125.

⁵³ Manitoba. Report of the Chief Electoral officer, 1932.

throughout his Manitoba political career that non-partisan politics was the most effective method of achieving good government, and by 1940 the premier finally convinced the Conservatives and C.C.F. to join the government in coalition for the war effort. Bracken received an overwhelming election victory in April, 1941, which displayed the confidence that the people of Manitoba held for their premier.

The next year, and after much indecision, Bracken decided that he would resign as premier, in order to become the new leader of the federal Progressive Conservatives.⁵⁴ Although this caused a stir in Manitoba Liberal-Progressive circles, since many could not understand how their leader could run as a Tory, most continued on with the business of running the Manitoba government and picking a new leader and premier for the party. The premiership passed to Stuart S. Garson, who was a Liberal, and a member of the legislature since 1927. He had been a cabinet minister after 1936 as Provincial-Treasurer, and was well respected in the province.⁵⁵ The coalition government lost the C.C.F., but otherwise remained intact for the 1945 provincial election, which led to another coalition victory. The pragmatic Garson continued the effective premiership of Manitoba and continued to maintain the Liberal-Progressive house in good order. But

⁵⁴ Kendle, John Bracken, pp. 183-188.

⁵⁵ Hon. Stuart S. Garson, Vertical File - Manitoba Legislative Library.

after serving as premier for only one term, he decided to enter federal politics as a cabinet minister in Mackenzie King's government, where he took on a prominent role and was seen by some as a possible future candidate for Prime Minister.⁵⁶ His resignation as Premier and M.L.A. took effect on November 13, 1948.⁵⁷

Douglas Campbell first entered the legislature in 1922 as a representative of the United Farmers Movement. Campbell succeeded Garson as premier and became only the second native born premier of Manitoba, after John Norquay.⁵⁸

Campbell continued the Bracken tradition of non-partisan politics:

The new Premier embodied and personified all the main political tendencies of the province in his generation...the electorate of Manitoba, as represented by the dominant rural constituencies, still approved the political changes of 1922....
...an agrarian and rural government, non-partisan, non-political.⁵⁹

The Liberal-Progressives still had a grip on the Manitoba electorate, winning the election of 1949, in coalition only with the Conservatives, and winning the election of 1953 without any coalition. According to Historian W.L. Morton:
"This enduring administration had given the province simple,

⁵⁶ John Bird, "Possible Prime Ministers - Another Man from Manitoba", The Winnipeg Tribune, July 21, 1948.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Hon. Douglas Campbell, Vertical File - Manitoba Legislative Library.

⁵⁹ Morton, Manitoba, p. 463.

honest, straightforward government",⁶⁰ and again, this type of government apparently still appealed to a majority of Manitobans, who were rural dwellers, which is where the Liberal-Progressives now had the majority of their support.

Liberal Strength in Manitoba

The 1953 provincial election victory by the Liberal-Progressives was the pinnacle of success by the party. The government had now been in power, in one form or another, since 1922, and the Liberals had shared this since 1932. After decades of continuous control, the party seemed as though it would never falter. By maintaining the non-partisan style of politics, and capturing the agrarian vote, the government had an effective formula for success. By the mid-1950's the Manitoba economy was in good shape and the budget was being balanced by Premier Campbell, who believed in thrifty pay-as-you-go administration. At this point in Manitoba history it would seem unfathomable that the powerful Liberal-Progressives, with great support in a prosperous province, had just won their last provincial election.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

I I

L I B E R A L S D E - T H R O N E D :

C A N A D A & M A N I T O B A

When Stuart Garson left the Premiership of Manitoba to join the federal cabinet, the Liberal Party of Canada had been in power for longer than many could remember. The government which Garson joined was in many ways similar to the one from which he came. There were also differences between the two parties, and the Campbell administration in Manitoba purposely maintained the Liberal-Progressive name, so as to distinguish it from the federal Liberals. At the same time, however, the two governments had similar records of impressive longevity, both for years enjoyed relatively weak opposition, both ultimately were confronted by new energetic leaders, and both finally, in old age and beset by charges of arrogance, went down to ignominious defeat. In the end, both parties wandered in political wilderness in Manitoba for decades; and in their weakened state, each party, federal and provincial, seemed only to have the strength and capacity to hurt the other.

Liberal Dominance

Opposition parties in Ottawa and Manitoba had tried repeatedly to loosen the grip that the Liberals seemed to hold

on the electorate. The pragmatism of the federal Liberal party had deflated the CCF when the latter thought they were gaining ground, while the Progressive Conservatives could not match the organizational machine that the Liberals ran so capably. As Reginald Whitaker later noted:

...it is absolutely true to say that the strength of the Liberal Party's power lies not in the cabinet so much as in the roots of the organization which extend deep into the electorates of every province.⁶¹

But in Manitoba after 1940, when the Liberal-Progressives broadened their coalition government, they maintained such control over the electorate that they had little or no need for superior organizational skills, since there was little competition. Thus their strength became their weakness.

The Liberals dominated federal politics to an extent that has seldom been seen in any western democracy. The party remained in power for over twenty years between 1935 to 1957. In Manitoba, the Liberal-Progressives had an even more impressive record of government in duration, and likewise remained in power for over thirty five years, from 1922 to 1958. As a brokerage party the federal Liberals did not seem to have any clear ideology. Some would argue that the party was pragmatic and would utilize any policy from any group, as long as it would work and help to maintain party progressiveness. But most would agree that the King

⁶¹ Reginald Whitaker, The Government Party, Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1977, p. 253.

government was willing to adapt to stay in power in Ottawa, as was shown in 1945 when it outflanked the CCF by adopting many of their left-wing policies.⁶² On ideology it appeared that the party was attempting to be an administrator of government and avoid partisan politics if it could. As Peter Regenstreif has noted regarding the Liberal government during this period:

In spite of the extensive social legislation it enacted, its political philosophy was neither of the "right" or "left". It had simply been "governmental" or "managerial".⁶³

In Manitoba, as in Ottawa, the government was also managerial; however the difference was that in Manitoba this style of government had been a Manitoban philosophy since 1922 and remained popular in the province for over thirty years.

Prime Minister Mackenzie King evidently mastered the accommodative approach to politics. He co-opted the Progressives in the twenties and by the forties he was attempting the same to Labour. King believed it was the Liberals who should be representing farm and labour groups, as he "did not see such economic groups, even when organized politically, as the enemy but only as misguided."⁶⁴ With this in mind King felt it was his obligation to guide them

⁶² J. Murray Beck, Pendulum of Power, Scarborough: Prentice-Hall, 1968, p. 243.

⁶³ Peter Regenstreif, The Diefenbaker Interlude, p. 21.

⁶⁴ Peter Aucoin, Party Government and Regional Representation in Canada, (Macdonald Commission), pp. 21-22.

right, which meant joining his Liberal party. In Manitoba, Premier John Bracken had expressed similar views on government, and endorsed the Progressive slogan of Henry Wise Wood: "co-operation, not competition", as the best method of achieving good government. For this reason, the Premier always advocated coalition of parties to utilize attributes of all sides to produce effective administration.⁶⁵ Bracken and King were similar in that both tried co-opting other parties, and both believed that managerial government was the best method to achieve efficient public administration.

When King resigned in 1948, the first Liberal leadership convention in nearly thirty years chose Louis St. Laurent as his successor. Upon becoming Prime Minister, St. Laurent was fortunate that the economy was still strong and that there were no seriously divisive national issues. Most of all, King's legacy for his successor was that he:

...had achieved what his two great predecessors, Macdonald and Laurier, could not achieve. He passed on to his successor a strong and united national political party.⁶⁶

Once again the Manitoba situation was very similar when John Bracken left the Premiership. The Liberal-Progressives chose Stuart Garson as leader in 1943 and Douglas Campbell in 1948. Like St. Laurent, Garson and Campbell inherited a popular

⁶⁵ Bracken believed that a united provincial stance would be more effective when dealing with the federal government. This was similar to Premier Norquay's view in 1886.

⁶⁶ Regenstreif, The Diefenbaker Interlude, p. 21.

party that was showing few signs of losing its appeal to the electorate. Probably most important to the success of the new leaders in Ottawa and Manitoba was the continuing prosperity:

Except for its final two years in office, the St. Laurent government presided over a period of prosperity that verged on boom. In these circumstances, it was able to not only amass large budgetary surpluses and reduce the public debt, but also give the impression of considerable administrative expertise.⁶⁷

This is not to take credit away from the two parties that had been successful and account it only to good economic times, since, as Conservative strategist Dalton Camp would later note about the federal Liberals:

The Liberal party, like the administrators it produced, had the reputation for managerial competence. Always, it seemed...they were superior in strategy, execution, and technique. For all the Tory criticism of them as being, by nature, wasteful, extravagant, and inefficient, the Liberals were in fact competent.⁶⁸

Both parties were powerful political forces and accomplished a great deal; however, many of these achievements would have been far more difficult if not for the fortunate fact that Canada was seeing some of its best ever economic times.

The Liberal Fall in Canada

The federal Liberals managed to win their fifth consecutive majority government in 1953, but by this time,

⁶⁷ Regenstreif, The Diefenbaker Interlude, p. 21.

⁶⁸ Dalton Camp, Gentlemen, Players and Politicians, Toronto: The Canadian Publishers, 1970, p. 138.

some were starting to regard the party as arrogant and insensitive. Even at the 1948 convention some felt like an insignificant part of the Liberal machine; and suspicions developed that the leaders in the party were becoming aloof and insensitive. This attitude was mostly held in the West and the Maritimes, and in the youth wing of the party. Liberals from these groups wanted to play a larger role within the party, but as Whitaker has noted of the party executive: "at the time, nobody seemed to give a damn."⁶⁹ With this indifference at the top, it was only a matter of time before more Canadians started to perceive this "problem" with the Liberals, and as Liberal party organizer Keith Davey later noted: "In politics, perception is reality".⁷⁰

By the mid 1950's, the Liberal party executive began neglecting many areas of party organization that in the past, under King's careful direction, would have never been neglected. At the same time, there began a "noticeable absence of contact between the Liberal Members and their constituents."⁷¹ To a degree exemplifying this tendency, one of the major events that turned public opinion against the Liberals was the pipeline debate of 1956. The government apparently decided that the merits of the pipeline to Canada

⁶⁹ Whitaker, The Government Party, p. 176.

⁷⁰ Keith Davey, The Rainmaker, Toronto: Stoddart Publishing Co., 1986, p. 57.

⁷¹ Regenstreif, The Diefenbaker Interlude, p. 23.

were so overwhelming, that they did not need debate in parliament. In protest, the opposition filibustered and the government eventually forced the issue through Parliament by utilizing the rarely used rule of closure. This appeared less than democratic, and as an editorial at the time argued, was symptomatic of the broader problem:

If the Liberal government is beaten at the next election...historians may well conclude that the Liberals fell, not because of any one policy, and certainly not a pipeline policy of which the average voter knew little and cared less, but because they failed to observe the proper limits of power.⁷²

Adding to the perception that the Liberals were becoming arrogant was their ready use of closure, historically regarded as illiberal. As Liberal Cabinet Minister Jack Pickersgill later wrote in his memoirs:

The closure rule had been adopted by the House of Commons in 1913 on the initiative of a Conservative government....Closure was denounced by the Liberals as a denial of freedom to debate and the tool of a tyrannical government.⁷³

Furthermore, many believed that the government was exhausted from its long period in power. The Prime Minister himself was seventy-five by 1957, and many in the cabinet, like C.D. Howe and James Gardiner, were also elderly. In the 1957 election, these concerns about Liberal arrogance and fatigue,

⁷² Quoted by John Meisel, The Canadian General Election of 1957, Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1962, p. 10. Maclean's, July 7, 1956.

⁷³ J.W. Pickersgill, My Years with Louis St Laurent - a Political Memoir, Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1975, pp.276-277.

exploited by the new Progressive Conservative leader, John Diefenbaker, gave the Conservatives a very slim minority government, with 112 seats compared to 105 for the Liberals, (CCF-NDP: 25; Social Credit: 19; Others: 4).⁷⁴

The defeat was in part due to the weakening of Mackenzie King's traditional alliance with ethnic groups and farmers that had earlier assisted the perennial Liberal dominance in Western Canada. Diefenbaker became popular on the prairies for being a westerner of non-Anglo Saxon background who was apparently sensitive to the region's needs.

The Tories capitalized on voter concerns about Liberal arrogance with the campaign slogan: "It is time for a change."⁷⁵ This slogan, after twenty-two years of Liberal rule, seemed to capture the sentiment of many Canadians. The campaign emphasized a need for a change and emphasized this with the popular new leader, as shown in their second major campaign slogan: "It's time for a Diefenbaker Government...."⁷⁶ Dalton Camp has given his view of this personal appeal:

All this explained the slogan, which needed no explanation. Election campaigns which feature policy are for parties with unpopular leaders; parties with popular leaders do not have to campaign on reckless, irresponsible promises. Besides, as everyone knew, people do not under-

⁷⁴ Canada. Reports of the Chief Electoral Officer, 1957.

⁷⁵ Pickersgill, The Liberal Party, p. 54.

⁷⁶ Camp, Gentlemen, Players and Politicians, p. 279.

stand politics, but they do know who they like.⁷⁷

The 1957 election results were due to a combination of Canadians' perception of government arrogance while the Conservatives campaigned more effectively than ever on a need for Parliamentary and governmental renewal. As Jack Pickersgill summed up the election loss:

I knew there were many areas of irritation and discontent with the government and there was a general feeling that twenty-two years of Liberal government was long enough.⁷⁸

Louis St. Laurent announced his retirement as leader of the Liberal party on October 16, 1957. On January 16, 1958, the party chose Lester B. Pearson to become leader.⁷⁹ Pearson was widely admired for his work in the Department of External Affairs, for his winning of the Nobel Peace Prize, and for his capable term in the cabinet. As leader of the Opposition, however, Pearson was still inexperienced: his suggestion that Diefenbaker step down and allow the Liberals to return to office without an election, drew ridicule as another example of Liberal arrogance.⁸⁰ In the election that did follow, in 1958, the hapless Liberals won only forty-nine seats, while Diefenbaker triumphantly secured two-hundred and eight seats, the biggest landslide in Canadian

⁷⁷ Ibid., p. 282.

⁷⁸ Pickersgill, My Years with Louis St Laurent, p. 321.

⁷⁹ Pickersgill, The Liberal Party, p. 59.

⁸⁰ Christina McCall-Newman, Grits, Toronto: Macmillan of Canada, 1982, pp. 32-33.

electoral history. Ominously for Manitoba's Liberal-Progressive government, the federal Liberals did not win a single seat in all of Western Canada.

Coalition Ends in Manitoba

The Liberal-Progressive decline in Manitoba began perhaps, somewhat earlier, in 1950, when the Conservatives left the coalition government and thus started partisan politics once again. By 1945 the CCF had dropped out of the coalition and in the election that year gained great support, winning only two-hundred and one fewer votes than the Liberal-Progressives in all of Manitoba, but winning thirteen fewer seats, (Liberal-Progressive: 74,054 votes for 26 seats, CCF: 73,853 votes for 10 seats, Conservatives: 38,964 votes for 13 seats.)⁸¹ However, by 1949 the CCF were deeply divided, were compromised by the Cold War, and were doing relatively poorly.

In that year the Conservatives and Liberal-Progressives were still allied in the coalition, and as a reporter noted, seemed happy with the arrangement:

Neither party is prepared to disturb it and both parties consider it to be highly popular with the voters of Manitoba.⁸²

In the election that fall, the coalition was once again

⁸¹ Manitoba. Report of Chief Electoral Officer. 1945.

⁸² Frank Walker, "Manitoba: Love that coalition", Saturday Night, October 25, 1949.

victorious and the CCF, while in opposition, saw its support decline.

Even in the forties some had questioned whether the arrangement was really democratic. One article in Saturday Night had even, with some exaggeration, called the coalition "the lowest point in the history of Canadian democracy".⁸³ Complaints like these from metropolitan media were probably ignored by most Manitobans on the grounds that easterners understood little about the historic reasons for dropping partisan politics in Manitoba. Before long, however, complaints also began to come from Manitobans.

One early advocate of ending the coalition was the grandson of Premier Rodmond Roblin, Duff Roblin, who saw parliamentary parties as essential to responsible government:

Coalition may be all right in time of war or emergency, but the war has been over nearly five years and in practice coalition stifles good government.⁸⁴

Initially, after his election in South Winnipeg in 1949, Roblin sat as an anti-coalition Conservative MLA. As W.L. Morton pointed out, the coalition was founded on a "negative democracy" that "accorded well with the rural political temper".⁸⁵ For years it made sense to cater to the rural

⁸³ B.K. Sandwell, "What coalition means in Manitoba", Saturday Night, April 26, 1941, p. 17.

⁸⁴ Quoted by: E. Hutton, "One man conquest of Manitoba", Maclean's, August 2, 1958, p. 11, 40-41.

⁸⁵ Morton, Manitoba, p. 463.

people since they were the numerically dominant group in the province: but by 1951, although over-representation of the rural areas persisted in the legislature, the rural and the urban populations were almost equal, the urban continuing to increase to 337,331 people compared to 389,592 in the rural regions.⁸⁶ More than many old Liberal-Progressives, Duff Roblin was sensitive to this changing electorate.

It was also becoming apparent to some Progressive Conservatives that their party was being reduced to a very junior role in the coalition government. After the poor election showing in 1949, more began to agree with Roblin that partisan politics could help revive their party. Premier Campbell still steadfastly maintained that the coalition was the best method of achieving good administration; despite his pleas, the Conservatives withdrew and in 1953, under the leadership of Errick Willis, challenged the administration of which they had so recently been a part. Yet, notwithstanding this defection, the Manitoba Liberals, seemingly at the height of their success, won handily in both the provincial and the federal elections of 1953. It appeared that the Conservatives were destined to perennial opposition. In part because of the coalition arrangement, they had for so long failed to contest some seats that some younger voters had reportedly never seen a Tory candidate.⁸⁷ The vote for

⁸⁶ Canada Year Book, 1951, p. 131.

⁸⁷ Hutton, Maclean's, p. 11, 40-41.

the Liberals in both elections was over forty per cent, and thirty-five of the fifty two seats in the Manitoba legislature were now held by the Liberal-Progressives.⁸⁸

Liberal Decline in Manitoba

Without the protective coalition, the Campbell government faced scrutiny of an intensity rare in Manitoba since 1932. Under the former system, most members of the legislature were exhorted to help, not criticize, in their pursuit of more effective government. Now, the government faced a hostile opposition that questioned every move they made. The opposition parties were led by Lloyd Stinson for the CCF and by Duff Roblin for the Conservatives. The latter party, as in Ottawa, had elected a new and progressive leader who started rebuilding the party organization. Like Diefenbaker, Roblin made political inroads in areas, such as the Interlake, that had long ignored the Conservatives.

In the 1958 Manitoba election, the Liberal-Progressives were confident that they could win on their record. The Campbell government had significant achievements, including the extension of rural electrification and the establishment of an independent commission to redistribute electoral divisions. Another accomplishment, as Stinson

⁸⁸ Canada. Report of the Chief Electoral Officer, 1953. Manitoba. Report of the Chief Electoral Officer, 1953.

later conceded, was that Manitoba was "free of debt."⁸⁹ This pleased the many rural voters who were known for their cautious parsimony. As Snidal noted, this was the group which still comprised the Liberal-Progressives solid foundation:

The Liberal party was top heavy with farm votes, and it was this group that it catered, not, it should be added, for purely political reasons, but because the Liberal representatives in the legislature were rural people who sincerely believed the cause which they advanced.⁹⁰

Unfortunately for the aged government, however, half of Manitobans were now urban dwellers. Winnipeg residents increasingly considered Campbell's administration to be unduly constrained by its rural bias, and, in one observer's words, "not responsive to many of the bright, progressive ideas emerging during that time, or to the massive changes occurring sociologically in Manitoba."⁹¹

In this context, there developed an irresistible trend toward government change. Already Diefenbaker's victory in 1957 reduced the federal Liberals from eight seats to one in Manitoba.⁹² As many Manitobans started voting Conservative

⁸⁹ Lloyd Stinson, "Campbell Years", Winnipeg Free Press, February 20, 1971.

⁹⁰ Dorothy Jane Snidal, "A Financial History of Manitoba From 1950 to 1965", University of Manitoba, Master's Thesis, March, 1967.

⁹¹ Ian Manson, "The Liberal Party in Manitoba", (An address to the members of the party), November, 1982, p.2.

⁹² Canada. Report of the Chief Electoral Officer. 1957.

for the first time, a switch at the provincial level went from the unthinkable to the probable. The 'coattails effect' began to work in Manitoba, as local Conservatives used the popular federal leader to full advantage. Diefenbaker had already broken the WASPish Tory stereotype, by attracting widespread ethnic support from diverse minorities. The effect of the Diefenbaker landslide, as one writer noted, was bound to have extensive collateral damage to the Campbell regime:

The massive appeal of Diefenbakerism...sifted through to provincial politics...The agrarian base upon which Campbell and his government relied, was destroyed by the swing Tory.⁹³

Liberal-Progressive candidates sensed this threat and attempted to distance themselves from the federal party; some even dropped the word "Liberal" from their campaign signs. As Ralph Hedlin, an advisor to Diefenbaker, noted, no doubt with some satisfaction, "The 'Liberal' party has ceased to be an asset in elections for the time being."⁹⁴ Another writer, in his history of Manitoba published at the time, claimed that "the Liberals were giving Manitoba 'negative democracy'",⁹⁵ and the latter phrase came to be emphasized by the Progressive Conservative campaign.

Premier Campbell barely lost the 1958 election,

⁹³ Manson, The Liberal Party in Manitoba, p. 4.

⁹⁴ Ralph Hedlin, "'Liberal' a naughty name", Winnipeg Tribune, June 12, 1958, p. 6.

⁹⁵ Hutton, "One man conquest of Manitoba", Maclean's, pp. 40-41.

retaining nineteen seats; full defeat came a year later, when the Liberal-Progressives were reduced to a mere eleven seats. Lloyd Stinson later recorded of the Liberal-Progressive debacle:

The Campbell government was defeated because it did not lead; it always lagged behind public opinion;...Its pay-as-you-go policy which had found favour for so many years finally was seen for what it was, an excuse for standing still.⁹⁶

This view is clearly partisan, but there may be some truth to it. Liberal supporters could point to the Campbell-appointed Macfarlane Commission on education,⁹⁷ but opposition would argue that it was created only after strong positions had been taken by the Conservatives and CCF. Campbell himself admitted later that Roblin was of a new breed of politician that tried to lead the people and awaken them to new ideas, while he admitted of himself that he was "careful and unimaginative."⁹⁸

Although the Manitoba and federal Liberal parties were different in philosophy, both encountered the same fate after maintaining power for decades. Both, despite reasonably creditable records, were seen as having become arrogant, and even stale; and so both were finally and

⁹⁶ Lloyd Stinson, Political Warriors, Winnipeg: Queenston House Publishing, 1975, p. 170.

⁹⁷ James A. Jackson, The Centennial History of Manitoba, Toronto: The Canadian Publishers, 1970, p. 246.

⁹⁸ Provincial Archives of Manitoba - Audio, CBC Interview with Duff Roblin and Douglas Campbell, January, March, 1970.

conclusively defeated by a new mood for change personified in the leadership of John Diefenbaker and Duff Roblin.

Federal Liberals Rebuild Without Manitoba

After 1957, some federal Liberals were still confident that there would only be a short pause before their "government party" returned to office. But the 1958 landslide was a major blow to this expectation, and left many wondering if there was much of a future for Liberals. Pearson turned to Walter Gordon, who recruited Keith Davey, to rebuild the party. There followed a major conference in Kingston in September 1960, and a rally in Ottawa in January 1961, to hammer out policy and strategy for the future.⁹⁹ Later, Pearson would write in his memoirs that these steps "marked the beginning of our comeback."¹⁰⁰ The gatherings attracted new members who began to rebuild for the future. At the same time local organizations began to clear out the party deadwood and "create a more open, democratic party, built on active, involved grass roots base..."¹⁰¹ Within four years of the disastrous 1958 election, the Liberals were making progress: using techniques borrowed from the Kennedy Democrats in the

⁹⁹ McCall-Newman, Grits, pp. 33-36.

¹⁰⁰ The Memoirs of the Right Honourable Lester B. Pearson, Volume 3 - 1957-1968, ed. by J. Munro and A. Inglis, Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1975. p. 52.

¹⁰¹ Joseph Wearing, The L-Shaped Party, Toronto: McGraw-Hill Ryerson, 1981, p. 25.

United States, they targeted areas where they needed to concentrate, and nominated popular candidates in these areas, across most of Eastern Canada.

In the West, however, where the party had not won a single seat in 1958, the outlook was still bleak. The Liberal plan to rebuild the party throughout Canada had consisted of attracting young, urban, reform minded people. This worked well in the East, but in the West, particularly on the prairies, where most Liberals were rural and somewhat conservative, this plan only produced friction.¹⁰² Alberta had rejected the party since 1921 provincially, and such suspicion of Liberals persisted that any local Liberal looked like a "spy for the enemy down east".¹⁰³ Ross Thatcher began reviving the Saskatchewan Liberals after he became provincial leader in 1959, and five years later he led the party to an unexpected victory; but this meant very little to the federal Liberals, since the two parties were similar in name only. Many in the federal party saw Thatcher as too right-wing, while Thatcher believed the federal wing was run by socialists.¹⁰⁴

In Manitoba, the situation was more complex. Government, under the leadership of the dynamic and popular Premier Duff Roblin, kept local Liberals in decline and

102 Ibid., p. 121.

103 Ibid., p. 29.

104 McCall-Newman, Grits, p. 45.

disarray.¹⁰⁵ The federal Liberal plan to attract urban progressives had already been put into action in 1958, but by Roblin. As a result, the Liberal recovery in other parts of Canada could not be duplicated in Manitoba.

Thus in the 1962 federal election, while the Liberals made a heartening comeback and managed to win a hundred seats, in Manitoba only one Liberal was elected, and that was in St. Boniface where Roger Teillet, the grand nephew of Louis Riel, won back the seat that had elected a Liberal every election since the constituency's creation in 1942, with the exception of the 1958 Tory landslide.¹⁰⁶ Hope persisted that the next election would yet bring a Liberal resurgence. But each year confirmed that a consistent anti-Liberal trend had set in, and it became painfully apparent that the federal Liberals now only hurt the provincial Liberals across Western Canada, and especially in Manitoba. Indeed it seemed that the federal and provincial Liberals hurt each other: both suffered from this paradox, and went into a downward spin that worsened as time passed. The lone Western exception was Saskatchewan, where the Liberals captured power in 1964, but to federal Liberals this was an echo from the right-wing rural past rather than the new move of their future.

¹⁰⁵ Wearing, L-Shaped Party, p. 28.

¹⁰⁶ "Manitoba results", Winnipeg Tribune, June 19, 1962, p.10

In Ottawa, with new recruits like Keith Davey and Jim Coutts in the organizational area, and by 1965, new ministers such as John Turner, Gerard Pelletier, Jean Marchand, and Pierre Trudeau, the party began to move forward with renewed vigour. But the prairies had evidently deserted the Liberal party. Manitoba's Stuart Garson and Saskatchewan's Jimmy Gardiner had been powerful western voices in the federal cabinet in the 1950's, but now the absence of any strong Western voice in the party's ruling circles both reflected and reinforced feelings of alienation.

It was now painfully clear that the federal election of 1957 on the prairies had been no mere aberration, but an omen of the generation gap that had split the western party. The new Liberal party in Canada was progressive and urban oriented, while the old Liberals in Manitoba, as elsewhere on the prairies, were rural survivors of a bygone era. Liberal organizers were starting to recruit urban members, but most young, urban, progressive minded voters in Manitoba still preferred Duff Roblin or the New Democratic Party. The old Liberal-Progressive party had been almost totally rural, while the new federal Liberal philosophy tended to be based in urban thinking.¹⁰⁷ In sum, it appeared that the federal Liberal party was rebuilding itself in the mold of the urban-progressives, which worked in eastern Canada, but in

¹⁰⁷ David E. Smith, The Regional Decline of a National Party - Liberals on the Prairies, Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1981, p. 70.

Manitoba, the electorate already had a Premier who had pre-empted the urban-progressives. In an effort to renovate their image in 1961, the Manitoba party finally dropped the 'Progressive' from the official name and thus became more closely associated with the federal party. But beneath the name change, the old conservative Liberal-Progressive party persisted and regarded with some distrust the "new" urban Liberals.

Molgat Liberals: Further Decline

Despite his incurring two defeats in 1958 and 1959, Douglas Campbell stayed on as leader until 1961, and remained clearly in control of the party. As the Winnipeg Free Press noted on March 11th, 1961: "There has not been an outward ripple of the inward strife that splits any party after an election disaster."¹⁰⁸ Most party members faithfully backed Campbell without any push for a leadership change, and when he did step down in 1961, it was apparently his own decision.

The leadership convention later that year was expected to be a contest between Robert Bend and Gildas Molgat.¹⁰⁹ But as the race got underway, the Free Press reported that "Mr. Molgat disclaimed any aspirations to the

¹⁰⁸ Ted Byfield, "Liberal's Douglas Campbell - Fallen chief fights on", Winnipeg Free Press, March 11, 1961, pp. 12, 128.

¹⁰⁹ Financial Post, "Campbell's position strong as Manitoba's Liberal boss", January 24, 1959, p. 31.

post and even announced his support for Mark Smerchanski."¹¹⁰ Molgat seemed to fit the new Liberal attitude, as a young progressive urban entrepreneur, and many party members believed he could lead the party to victory. After sixty prominent Liberals met, they decided to draft Molgat into the leadership race. Three days before the leadership vote, with Smerchanski dropping out to support Molgat, he was convinced to run and at the convention was elected on the first ballot.¹¹¹

Molgat then undertook the difficult task of rebuilding and reshaping the party while competing with the popular Roblin. Memories and habits persisting from the coalition days still hampered efforts to equal the partisan campaigns practiced by the Tories and the newly formed New Democratic Party.¹¹² More importantly however, was the problem of regaining the progressive dynamic centre. As one Liberal later noted: "Molgat and his team provided a strong, effective opposition, but were unable to capture the middle ground from Duff Roblin."¹¹³ Molgat tried to emphasize social issues, but there remained some stubborn resistance within the party. As Molgat would later admit: "the problem was that

¹¹⁰ Arlene Billinkoff, "Molgat almost a legend", Winnipeg Free Press, October 9, 1970.

¹¹¹ Ibid.

¹¹² Smith, Liberals on the Prairies, p. 86.

¹¹³ Ian Manson, "The Liberal Party in Manitoba", (An address to the Party), p. 3.

Roblin had moved into traditional Liberal territory, and it was difficult to be more liberal than Roblin."¹¹⁴

Molgat's first test was the December 14, 1962 election. He denounced the election call as premature and an attempt to escape the now negative association with the disintegrating Diefenbaker administration.¹¹⁵ Also, in trying to depict the Roblin emphasis on hydro development as neglectful of social needs, the party's advertising declared that: "We Liberals believe that people are more important than power plants".¹¹⁶ The theme might have turned out to be popular, but the resourceful Conservatives instead became the "people" party, through a Roblin initiative. Immediately after the Liberals announced their platform, the wily Premier announced a "Human Betterment" plan that, among other things, promised interest free loans to students, increased low-cost housing, and other policies that went beyond the Liberal platform, which was shortly eclipsed.¹¹⁷

One highlight of the campaign was the first televised political debate ever held in Canada. It demonstrated that the Molgat Liberals had to contend with two

¹¹⁴ Senator Gildas Molgat, Interview: October 29, 1990.

¹¹⁵ John Fiske, "Controversy on the Prairies: Manitoba General Elections - 1870-1969", Doctorate Thesis, University of Alberta, May 1, 1975, p. 613.

¹¹⁶ Liberal Party of Manitoba advertisement, Winnipeg Tribune, November 24, 1962.

¹¹⁷ Fiske, "Manitoba General Elections", p. 615.

formidable opponents. Elections most commonly see governments attacked by opposition parties; however, in 1962 the Conservatives attacked the Liberals whom they considered their closest threat, while the NDP also attacked the Liberals, in a determined attempt at becoming official opposition. In the debate, Premier Roblin's fiercest attacks were directed at Molgat and the Liberals.¹¹⁸ Likewise, the NDP leader, Russ Paulley, relentlessly denounced the Liberals and insisted his party would form the next official opposition.¹¹⁹ Thus the hapless Liberals were beset on both flanks.

As expected, Roblin proved victorious, winning thirty-six seats, as he had in 1959. The Liberals did reasonably well, with two more seats for a total of thirteen, while the NDP dropped to seven.¹²⁰ Despite the small increase, at least one reporter saw the result as a Liberal victory since the party's popular vote rose to thirty-six per cent from thirty in the previous election, despite the vigorous challenge from the NDP. Most had expected Roblin to win again; so the results were moderately satisfying for Molgat. But the prospects were disturbing: with only three urban seats, the party was still mainly rural and each new redistribution reduced this traditional constituency.

¹¹⁸ Jim Shilliday, "Political fur flies in historic television debate", Winnipeg Tribune, December 12, 1962.

¹¹⁹ "Liberals turn aside NDP challenge", Winnipeg Tribune, December 15, 1962.

¹²⁰ Manitoba. Report of the Chief Electoral Officer. 1962.

During the next few years the Liberals also continued to do poorly in Manitoba in federal elections, winning only one seat of fourteen in 1962, two seats in 1963, and only one in 1965.¹²¹ The Liberal decline federally in Manitoba was starting to seem, to some pessimists, to be irreversible, while provincially the party optimists continued to hope for a comeback, as Molgat provided vigorous opposition to Roblin, and drew help from "old-hands" Douglas Campbell and Tommy Hillhouse, and newer members such as Larry Desjardins of St. Boniface.¹²²

The 1966 provincial election was seen as especially important for revival but by this time the signs of divisiveness between the rural and urban factions were becoming serious. Some urban Liberals made no attempt to hide their disagreement with Molgat, whom they accused of being unable to unite the urban and rural elements. A group of eight urban Liberals who ran in the election and called themselves the 'Ginger Group', claimed that the party needed to become more urban and focus more on the issues that affect city dwellers. Lloyd Axworthy, one of the Ginger Group, later recalled that the "Liberal platform was rural based and we wanted to ensure that there was more concern for inner-

¹²¹ Canada. Report of the Chief Electoral Officer. 1963, 1965.

¹²² Lloyd Stinson, Political Warriors, Winnipeg: Queenston House Printing, 1975, p. 199.

city development."¹²³ Some issues raised included rent controls, renovation programs, and more policy in the social field, such as low-cost housing for seniors and more day care.¹²⁴ Molgat later said that he had been in complete accord with the Ginger Group and their ideas, but only wanted to maintain a united stance.¹²⁵

The Liberal campaign focused on Manitoba's allegedly lagging growth and its highest in Canada debt per capita, compared to the lowest debt under the Liberals in 1958.¹²⁶ In response, the Roblin Conservatives claimed the economy was promising, and to support the claim, they hurt local Liberals by quoting federal Liberal Cabinet Minister Robert Winters in their campaign ads, that: "The future of Manitoba has never been brighter."¹²⁷ With such help from Ottawa, the Liberals gained only one seat and their popular vote dropped slightly to thirty-three per cent from thirty-six, while the Progressive Conservatives retained power with thirty-one seats, and the NDP won eleven seats.¹²⁸ Molgat was disappointed with this result and saw it as a rejection

¹²³ Honourable Lloyd Axworthy. Former Liberal MLA and Federal Cabinet Minister. Interview: March 4, 1991.

¹²⁴ Ibid.

¹²⁵ Senator Molgat, Interview.

¹²⁶ Fiske, Op.Cit., p. 648.

¹²⁷ Quoted by: Fiske, "Manitoba General Elections", p. 648. P.C. ad in WFP, June 14, 1966, p. 17.

¹²⁸ Manitoba. Report of the Chief Electoral Officer. 1966.

carried over from the federal level.¹²⁹ Also discouraging was the defeat of all the 'Ginger Group' in Winnipeg, so the Liberals stayed a rural party, with continuing division between the progressive urban members and the conservative rural members.

Over the next two years, some Liberals tried to remedy or conceal this split, but tension remained. Federally there was a flash of hope in 1968 when Trudeaumania swept the nation, and for the first time in a decade for Liberals, the West was included. Western Canada did not give a sweeping endorsement to Prime Minister Trudeau by any means, but the popular vote and number of seats rose dramatically compared to the past four elections, which led to optimism in the provincial party. In Manitoba, the Liberals did better than in any other prairie province, winning forty-one per cent of the vote and taking five seats, up from one in 1965.¹³⁰ What originally was hoped to be the start of a return to Liberalism in Western Canada, turned out, however, to be only an aberration from what was now the normal bleak voting pattern. The Trudeau government shortly became as unpopular as the earlier Liberal administrations, as The Official Languages Act, designed to promote French language usage in Canada, was seen unfavorably in Manitoba. This

¹²⁹ Don Newman, "Duff squeaks back with two seat lead", The Winnipeg Tribune, June 24, 1966, p. 1.

¹³⁰ Canada. Report of the Chief Electoral Officer. 1968.

problem was compounded when a market slump caused a drastic decrease in farm income, and Trudeau made things worse when inadvertently he was reported, perhaps unfairly, as asking a group of farmers why he should sell their wheat.¹³¹

Through these ups and downs, the provincial Liberals were becoming discouraged. Molgat had thought of retiring as Liberal leader in 1966 but was convinced to stay on by the party executive. By 1967 Premier Roblin had resigned to contest the federal Conservative leadership, and was succeeded by Walter Weir. The new Premier's first test was in four byelections, held on February 20, 1969. Weir decided to see if the people approved of his role as Premier, while Molgat wanted to prove to Manitobans that the Liberal party was the best choice for the province. Before the byelections, party strategists believed that they could win two or possibly three of the four seats,¹³² But the hostility now being directed against Trudeau began its collateral damage, and the Liberals lost all four, with the Conservatives taking three and NDP one.¹³³ The Tories effectively capitalized on Premier Weir's performance at a federal-provincial Constitutional Conference, in denouncing the Prime Minister and looking like a hero of the West. They

¹³¹ Smith, The Regional Decline of a National Party, p. 96.

¹³² "Is Molgat at the end of the Line", Winnipeg Tribune, February 21, 1969, p. 1.

¹³³ Manitoba. Report of the Chief Electoral Officer. 1969.

now campaigned directly against Trudeau, tactically ignoring the other provincial parties. Noting Weir's apparent advantage, the NDP leader, Russ Paulley, told the Tribune that:

Its very obvious that the people of Manitoba are disillusioned with the Trudeau government in Ottawa and reject the approach of the federal Liberals to Western Canada and Manitoba, particularly.¹³⁴

One Liberal candidate, Ed Shust, even declared: "I was beaten by my own federal party", as the whole campaign in the four ridings was fought mostly on federal policies and not local issues.¹³⁵

Within four days of the dismal result, Molgat announced his resignation, effective as soon as a new leader was chosen. He declared that the results were due to a backlash against Trudeau's unpopular French language policy, and added that his own French-Canadian ancestry, in this anti-French mood, would only hurt the party.¹³⁶ Upon becoming leader in 1961, he had been optimistic: "My eight years in the legislature have been a training period. That's where I learned to walk in politics. Now I'm starting to

¹³⁴ "Molgat", Winnipeg Tribune, February 21, 1969, p. 1,

¹³⁵ "Shust: PM 'Beat Me'", Winnipeg Tribune, February 21, 1969, p. 23.

¹³⁶ "Molgat sees anti-French backlash", Winnipeg Free Press, February 21, 1969, p. 1.

run."¹³⁷ But after eight discouraging years, he gave up the leadership on May 10, 1969. His successor, Robert Bend, was to fare even worse.

Manitoba Liberals De-Throned

In the early 1960's, the Liberals failed in Manitoba largely because of the dynamic leadership of Duff Roblin who, once in office, was able to capitalize on the fiscal surpluses accumulated by the thrift of the Liberal-Progressive governments before him, and thus implement many costly programs. Liberals then found it difficult to compete with a leader who had captured the progressive initiative as well as the treasury. The party was not originally hampered by the federal Liberals, especially since Douglas Campbell discreetly distanced himself from the Ottawa party, as exemplified in his statement after the 1957 federal election: "I never did run as a Liberal - I helped turn them out in this province".¹³⁸ But federal politics did come to hurt the Campbell administration, when the whirlwind popularity of John Diefenbaker helped Progressive Conservatives everywhere in the West. By the sixties, the federal Liberals were hurting the provincial wing more and more with unpopular

¹³⁷ Quoted by A. Billinkoff, "Molgat almost a legend", Free Press, October 9, 1970.

¹³⁸ Quoted by: Winnipeg Free Press, June 28, 1957. Jon H. Pammett et al. The Provincial Political Systems, Toronto: Methuen, 1976, p. 58.

federal policies ranging from language to grain sales. But unlike Campbell, Molgat was a Liberal similar in philosophy to the progressive Pearson government, which he supported.¹³⁹

As the number of federal Liberal members of parliament in Manitoba dropped in the sixties, he was even offered a federal cabinet post as Agriculture Minister, but declined.¹⁴⁰ Years later, in hindsight, he noted that this close relationship with the federal Liberals was: "probably more than was good for me."¹⁴¹

A related problem was the increasing disunity as reformers sought to urbanize the traditionally rural party. Attempts to urbanize were difficult since the party had ignored urban centres for years, and since city voters already had two parties actively securing their support. With the rural Liberal vote dwindling, partly due to Diefenbaker's agrarian populist appeal, and urbanites skeptical of the Liberals, the party started losing not only its traditional foundation but its future prospect:

As a party which could no longer attract the rural vote and which had little new blood or ideas to attract a new type of Liberal, the party's decline began.¹⁴²

139 Senator Molgat, Interview: October 29, 1990.

140 Ibid.

141 Ibid.

142 Manson, Liberal Party - (Address), p. 4.

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Bend Leadership: A Shift-Right

The choice of Robert (Bobby) Bend as new Liberal leader of the Liberal Party was a conscious, but perhaps mistaken, effort to try to win back the rural support that had been the backbone of the party in past decades. Bend had been a cabinet minister in the last Liberal-Progressive government, and was a politician in the same mold as Bracken and Campbell: cautious, conservative, and rural. Some local Liberals still calculated that political success lay to the right of the Conservatives.¹⁴³ Bend as leader posed some problems in 1969 in that the Liberal party was no longer the same rural and cautious group that it had been in the Campbell era. The sixties had seen a growing urban faction within the Liberals that did not want to be ignored or neglected any longer by the rurally dominated party. Thus, the May 10, 1969 convention demonstrated more clearly than ever that two distinct factions were in a contest to control the party's direction. Leadership gimmicks like the "Bend Brigade" and "Bend Wagon", which tried to emphasize joining the team,

¹⁴³ Peter Liba, Executive Assistant to Gil Molgat and I.H. Asper. Interview: November 13, 1990.

were not enough to stop the friction between the two groups.

The youth wing and most urban Liberals were displeased with the rural and conservative minded Bend, and therefore at the leadership most of this group supported the thirty-three year old Duncan Edmonds, who was described by the Winnipeg Tribune as "an up-to-the-minute...new generation politician".¹⁴⁴ Bend, on the other hand, had described his own political position as: "slightly right of centre"¹⁴⁵, and this seemed unacceptable to the new urban progressive Liberals. The divisiveness that had appeared earlier in the decade was now evidently worsening. As one young Liberal put it after Bend was named leader:

For those of us under thirty-five, there may be another convention next month....There will be a mass exodus to the New Democratic Party.¹⁴⁶

In this spirit, some Liberals started looking more closely at the NDP.

The Social Democratic movement in Manitoba had only once been near success. That was in 1945, when the CCF gained almost as much of the popular vote as the dominant Liberal-Progressives. By 1966 the party was firmly established as the third party in Manitoba, but it still seemed that "the party would never be more than a 'conscience'

¹⁴⁴ Chuck Thompson, "Bend support sign of split", Winnipeg Tribune, May 10, 1969, p. 54.

¹⁴⁵ Wearing, L-Shaped Party, p. 128.

¹⁴⁶ Michael McGarry, "'Frustrated' Grit youth first problem for Bend?", Winnipeg Tribune, May 12, 1969, p. 1.

in the legislature."¹⁴⁷ The party became more moderate in a "swing to the right" in the 1956 Winnipeg Declaration of Principles, but Duff Roblin's rise captured much of the progressive support that it had sought.¹⁴⁸ When Roblin resigned, Walter Weir returned the Tories to the traditional conservative position. With the moderate Roblin gone, there seemed to be "an opportunity for the two rival parties to inherit his progressive support."¹⁴⁹

Under Bend's Liberal leadership, it would seemingly pit the two 'right of centre' parties against each other and leave the centre and left to another party. Bend seemed unable to attract the youth who had played a relatively large role in Trudeau's victory.

The result was the emergence of a large group of young, progressive, urban-orientated Liberals who found little that was attractive in the Manitoba Liberal Party.¹⁵⁰

Schreyer Captures Progressive Centre as Grits Move Right

Premier Weir, after his victories in three of the four February byelections, called a provincial general election for June 25, 1969. The NDP were leaderless and

¹⁴⁷ T. Peterson & P. Barber, "Some Factors in the 1969 NDP Victory in Manitoba", Lakehead University Review, Vol III, p. 122.

¹⁴⁸ James A. McAllister, The Government of Edward Schreyer, McGill-Queen's University Press, Kingston & Montreal, 1984, p. 101.

¹⁴⁹ Peterson, "Some Factors In the NDP Victory", p. 126.

¹⁵⁰ Op.Cit., p. 13.

therefore gained much media attention during the campaign as they chose a successor to Russ Paulley. The eventual winner was Edward Schreyer, who was more moderate than past NDP/CCF leaders and was of German Catholic background which appealed to some minority groups, unlike Bend or Weir who were of British descent. Schreyer was the most charismatic of the three leaders and attracted great attention throughout the province. According to one writer, "Schreyer's appeal was that of a young, attractive, well-educated, progressive leader in the mold of a John F. Kennedy or a Pierre Elliott Trudeau."¹⁵¹ As Bend alienated many with his right-wing disposition, several progressive Liberals made the switch to Schreyer and the NDP, who was the only leader in 1969 holding the same reform principles as they did. In fact, Schreyer was so similar to the Liberal philosophy that in the 1965 federal election he had perhaps briefly contemplated running as a Liberal.¹⁵² Schreyer capitalized on the feelings of frustrated Liberals as he attempted to attract them to the NDP, stating that the Liberal leadership had "deliberately steered rightward to arch conservatism".¹⁵³ The threats expressed by young Liberals at the convention had been mostly

¹⁵¹ McAllister, Govt of Edward Schreyer, p. 14.

¹⁵² Apparently some Liberals said they would run the populist mayor of Winnipeg, Stephen Juba, against Schreyer unless he switched. He did not, and the alleged threat never materialized. Peterson Interview: December 10, 1990.

¹⁵³ Fiske, "Manitoba General Elections", p. 706, quoting WFP, June 9, 1969, p.1.

ignored, and with the progressive, charismatic leadership of Schreyer, this group now had an alternative to the right-wing Bobby Bend.

The election campaign confirmed many reform Liberals' suspicions of Bend's leadership, as both Weir and Bend had dull and unspecified platforms that mostly spoke of tax restraint. To most Manitobans in 1969, as Peterson later concluded:

there was little difference between the two parties....Bend himself was a conservative survivor of the coalition period, and in neither style nor program did he distinguish himself from Premier Weir. Hence the electorate's polarization was assisted by its being presented with two clear alternatives: one conservative and expressed by Weir; and the other more progressive, expressed by Schreyer.¹⁵⁴

Right wing votes went to the traditionally right wing Conservatives, not the Liberals; meanwhile because of the Liberal shift-right, moderates now had only one alternative: the NDP. Schreyer's campaign included many reform policies that were unmatched by the other parties and thus appeared more dramatic, since they were the only party to stress this type of policy. As Wiseman noted: "The NDP's platform contained planks that were attractive to the more progressive wings of the opposition parties."¹⁵⁵

During the campaign the Liberals encountered further

¹⁵⁴ T. Peterson, "Ethnic and Class Politics in Manitoba", in Canadian Provincial Politics, Ed. M. Robin, 2nd Edition, Scarborough: Prentice-Hall, 1978, pp. 104, 110.

¹⁵⁵ Wiseman, Social Democracy in Manitoba, p. 121.

problems as Bend refused to commit his support for The Official Languages Act, which caused Larry Desjardins, of the predominantly French-Canadian St. Boniface riding, to contemplate leaving the party.¹⁵⁶ Bend had hoped to avoid any linkage between provincial and federal Liberals unless it might help. In one speech he tried to use the federal government to his advantage:

Last night's federal budget was good for Western Canadians, particularly Manitobans. It acknowledged the need for regional development.¹⁵⁷

The local dissatisfaction with the federal government, however, was too overwhelming, and it further compromised Bend's flailing and troubled campaign.

Manitobans could more easily compare Duff Roblin to Ed Schreyer than they could to anyone in Roblin's own party. Duff Roblin had been victorious in four elections, and after all the ballots were counted in 1969, Schreyer was victorious in his first. The NDP won twenty-eight seats and 38.08 per cent of the popular vote, compared to twenty-two Conservative seats and 35.38 per cent, while the Liberals were reduced to an appalling low of five seats and 23.87 per cent of the popular vote.¹⁵⁸

After the election, Bend accurately placed some of

¹⁵⁶ Desjardins, Laurent. Former Liberal MLA and NDP cabinet minister. Interview: December 10, 1990.

¹⁵⁷ Public Archives of Manitoba, Liberal Party Files, p3414 - "Bend Speeches".

¹⁵⁸ Manitoba. Report of the Chief Electoral Officer. 1969.

the blame on the federal government:

Our candidates were handicapped, We not only had to fight provincial issues, but federal issues as well.¹⁵⁹

Devastated by the unexpectedly poor showing and his failure to win his own seat in the legislature, he stepped down after only a few months at the helm. It was clear that there were some federal party handicaps for Liberals, but Robert Bend realized that under his leadership the party had plummeted to new lows in its history, and he now probably understood that the party had to pursue an alternative route if it were to ever gain success.

The causes of the Liberal decline and the corresponding NDP gains seem fairly clear. Redistribution of seats gave the city more equal representation, where the NDP were traditionally strong. Meanwhile, the Liberals had chosen to retain the rural vote, which was of less significance each new census. Schreyer's leadership was a key factor as he proved to be a charismatic yet moderate leader, who appealed to many who found the leadership of the traditional parties lackluster. The major factor seems to be the Liberal shift to the right, personified in the leadership of Bobby Bend. This not only caused many urban progressives to leave the party, but also allowed the ethnic vote, that had traditionally supported the Liberals, to look for a

¹⁵⁹ Quoted by: Winnipeg Free Press, "Bend may not stay as leader", June 26, 1969.

leader who did not alienate them as Bend apparently did. Furthermore, ethnicity meant less in Manitoba by 1969, as more voted by class, which again would put the right-wing Bend out of touch with middle to lower income groups.¹⁶⁰ In the end, the two most important factors seem to have been the shift-right of the Liberals coupled with the massive appeal of Schreyer who managed to capture the progressive centre as the Liberals vacated.

Asper as Liberal Leader: 1970-1975

Many Liberals were understandably discouraged after the disappointing loss of 1969. But on October 31, 1970, Izzy Asper became their new leader. Asper was a lawyer and tax expert who had written The Benson Iceberg, which became a Canadian bestseller in 1970, and to the Liberals he brought a new sense of enthusiasm and energy.

After he took on the leadership, the first important issue that arose for Asper was the question of a coalition between the Conservatives and the Liberals to stop the "socialists" in Manitoba. The idea came from a Tory MLA who feared that the province would end in ruins if all opposition did not unite to stop the NDP government. After Molgat resigned his Ste. Rose seat for a Senate appointment, the following April 5, 1971 byelections in his constituency and in St. Vital resulted in NDP wins. To the right-wing

¹⁶⁰ Peterson, "Ethnic and Class Politics", p. 110.

faction in the province, an NDP government was still hard to accept and their anxiety increased as the government remained popular. As the fear of NDP political dominance grew, so did the talk of coalition. Many Conservatives and Liberals seemed to like the idea, while some would have none of it. But the idea became so well publicized that Asper addressed the Executive Committee of the Liberal Party on the issue on May 10, 1971. He argued that the party should maintain an open mind on the idea of coalition:

If the public proposes another path through which we can see our goals and hopes materialized, we will have an obligation to the people to give it objective consideration.¹⁶¹

The coalition talks only proved to many Manitobans that the Liberals and Conservatives were still both fairly right of centre. As it became apparent that the coalition was desired much more by the Conservatives than the Liberals,¹⁶² and since coalition would likely mostly help the Conservatives, since at the time they were stronger, the Liberals finally dropped the issue. By then, many feared that it already had caused some damage to the Liberals, by making them appear right-wing in the Bend mold, and reinforcing the perception that the party was indeed still relatively conservative.

¹⁶¹ Report by I.H. Asper to the Executive Committee, Liberal Party in Manitoba, May 10, 1971.

¹⁶² A Poll showed that of party constituency Presidents, 78% of Conservatives favoured coalition while only 28% of Liberals were for coalition. From Winnipeg Tribune, PC, Grit leaders favour party alliance: Poll", June 30, 1971.

Asper managed to bring new life into the dispirited party when he won a Wolseley byelection on June 16, 1972.¹⁶³

The next provincial election followed a year later on June 28, 1973. Fulfilling his supporters' hopes, Asper ran an enthusiastic campaign and managed to attract a number of good candidates. The main problem the Liberals faced was the continuing popularity of Ed Schreyer. In one opinion poll, Schreyer was chosen by most respondents as the party leader who would make the best premier: but he was also chosen above the other two leaders by voters who identified with the Liberals and Conservatives.¹⁶⁴

Both Asper and new Conservative leader Sidney Spivak tried to portray the NDP as radicals with only Schreyer as the moderate.¹⁶⁵ In one Asper speech that was never used, the focus was on the "radical NDP who wouldn't stand a chance of being elected without Ed Schreyer as their leader."¹⁶⁶ This seemingly showed that the Liberals were trying to discredit the NDP without touching the popular Schreyer. That Asper's campaign was right-wing was exemplified in the main Liberal campaign slogan: "Self

¹⁶³ Manitoba. Report of the Chief Electoral Officer. 1973.

¹⁶⁴ John Wilson, "The decline of the Liberal party in Manitoba politics", Journal of Canadian Studies, February, 1975, Volume X, pp. 24-41.

¹⁶⁵ Donald Swainson, "Manitoba's Election Patterns Confirmed", Canadian Forum, Vol. 53, September, 1973, pp. 4-7.

¹⁶⁶ Public Archives of Manitoba, Liberal Party.

Control or State Control".¹⁶⁷ However, some Manitobans probably saw this kind of 'scare' tactic as offensive and exaggerated.¹⁶⁸

In any case, the popularity of Edward Schreyer proved too great for the Liberals to overcome. Peter Liba, Asper's executive assistant, later noted that "the '73 election campaign was one of the best run in years for the Liberals, but Schreyer was still on the ascendancy."¹⁶⁹ The outcome gave the NDP thirty-one seats and 42 per cent of the vote, compared to twenty-one seats for the Conservatives and 36.5 per cent. The Schreyer victory was not unexpected, but some Liberal optimists had hoped for some sign that the party could once again become popular. Instead, the beleaguered party narrowly won only five seats, and dropped further to 18.2 per cent of the vote.¹⁷⁰

Izzy Asper had campaigned strenuously and managed to bring the party up from nine per cent in the public opinion polls when he took over. Also, party membership rose from one thousand in 1970 to seven thousand in 1974.¹⁷¹ Still,

¹⁶⁷ Ibid.

¹⁶⁸ Swainson, "Manitoba's Election Patterns Confirmed", pp. 4-7.

¹⁶⁹ Peter Liba, Executive Assistant to Asper, Interview: November 13, 1990.

¹⁷⁰ Manitoba. Report of the Chief Electoral Officer. 1973.

¹⁷¹ Statement by I.H. Asper - Leader of the Liberal Party, August 2, 1974.

as the Winnipeg Tribune pointed out:

Mr. Asper was in the unhappy position of having to battle Mr. Schreyer, who gave him special attention, and at the same time fight against the silent and powerful force that was polarizing around the conservatives as the real alternative to the NDP.¹⁷²

The Tories waged a very effective "don't split the vote" campaign, and also capitalized on the seemingly entrenched anti-Liberal, anti-Trudeau mood that was prevalent in most of Western Canada.¹⁷³

Commenting later on the 1973 result, Asper admitted that party survival was at stake:

Ed Schreyer was at his peak in popularity and there was no way he was going to be denied a second term. As for the Liberals, We were fighting to simply stay alive to fight another day.¹⁷⁴

But the fact remained that the party had declined further since 1969 and for this reason Asper decided that new leadership was needed to pull the party out of its down-spin. He announced his retirement on August 1, 1974, and stayed on as an MLA until February 28, 1975, when he left Manitoba politics for good, to concentrate on a successful business career.

The Liberals with Asper hoped to attract more urban votes with an urban leader, but the Conservatives had

¹⁷² "Winners and Losers", Winnipeg Tribune, June 29, 1973.

¹⁷³ Asper, I.H., Leader of the Manitoba Liberal Party, 1970-1975. Interview, (written): November 15, 1990.

¹⁷⁴ Asper, Interview: November 15, 1990.

also "come to their senses" and did the same thing by naming Spivak as leader, who also fought for the progressive centre.¹⁷⁵ Also, there was still "some spill-over" from federal politics that may have harmed the Liberals. Liba pointed out that usually for provincial political success "it is better not to have your political brother in office in Ottawa"¹⁷⁶ These were complicating obstacles for the Liberals, but their most important problem was still the popularity of Schreyer and his moderate reform-minded politics which evidently had more electoral appeal than the right-of-centre Asper campaign.

Huband as Leader: The Right Place at the Wrong Time

Liberals were now becoming so weak as to be altogether out of the running except for a few scattered constituencies, and then only with particularly attractive candidates.¹⁷⁷ One news poll showed that the few remaining Liberal supporters were more likely to switch parties than were other partisan voters.¹⁷⁸ Another bleak statistic showed that many more Manitobans had voted in 1973 than ever before, (from 64.42 per cent in 1969 to 78 per cent in

175 Liba, Interview.

176 Ibid.

177 Wilson, "The decline of the Liberal party", p. 30.

178 Ibid., p. 32.

1973),¹⁷⁹ but these new voters went exclusively to the Conservatives or the NDP.¹⁸⁰ Still, a few die-hards in the executive believed that effective leadership might rejuvenate the declining party. Their hopes focused on Charles Huband.

Huband had been on the Metro Council and had served as Chairman of the Canadian Civil Liberties Association. He won the leadership on February 23, 1975 over Lloyd Henderson by 381 votes to 87.¹⁸¹ From his analysis of the 1969 and 1973 results, Huband was certain that the party, if it was to stand any chance of surviving, had to regain the progressive centre position in Manitoba politics from the NDP. In his view, the Conservatives were firmly established as the right of centre party, and attempts to take that position by the Liberals had resulted in the gloomy situation that the party was in by 1975. So he now determined to make the Liberals a progressive and reform party more in the style of the federal Liberals. Huband made it clear that he was not trying to help the Conservatives but, as he stated:

I can tell you in all candour that the chances of improving, or even surviving, hinge upon the Liberal party's ability to win votes from the New Democratic Party.¹⁸²

¹⁷⁹ Manitoba. Report of the Chief Electoral Officer. 1969, 1973.

¹⁸⁰ Wilson, "The decline of the Liberal Party", p. 28.

¹⁸¹ Liberal Party in Manitoba, Convention Files, 1975.

¹⁸² "Huband says Liberals Key to defeat NDP", Winnipeg Tribune, June 21, 1977.

This was not an original thought, as several academics had written on the subject and had illustrated that as the Liberals competed with the Conservatives, the NDP rise in popularity directly corresponded to the Liberal drop.¹⁸³ Also, no small-c conservative party had won an election in the province since 1953, apparently making it clear that the middle progressive position was normally the most popular in Manitoba.¹⁸⁴

Huband attempted to win back all the traditional Liberal strongholds, even if it might have been unpopular with some party members, as he reaffirmed his pledge to Franco-Manitobans to restore French as an official language of the provincial courts and legislature.¹⁸⁵ At a news conference on March 1, 1977, the Liberal leader displayed his party's moderate stance as he stated the Liberal position on many other areas:

The spending of public funds must be for people rather than projects....jobs must be long term career opportunities rather than short term make work projects....Day care facilities and after school facilities should be encouraged by more generous maintenance grants.¹⁸⁶

183 Tom Peterson, "Recent Patterns of Manitoba Voting", Winnipeg Free Press, July 14, 1973, p. 20.

184 Nelson Wiseman, "The Manitoba Election Revisited", Canadian Forum, January, 1974, p. 35.

185 "Huband risks rebellion to secure Francophone votes", Winnipeg Tribune, September 23, 1977.

186 Statement by Charles Huband - Leader of the Manitoba Liberal Party, delivered at news conference, March 1, 1977.

The new leader fit the urban progressive mold that many Liberals had been searching for in a Manitoba Liberal leader for years. The party had not won any of the byelections that were held between 1973 and 1977, but Huband remained optimistic as he addressed the party in a "Leader's Report":

When the Tories and NDP contend that the Liberals are not a factor, remind them that in these byelections we...were the contender for victory in every instance...We came second in every election.¹⁸⁷

Huband had a valid point that showed that if the party was really as low in popularity as some believed, then they would have been third in each byelection. Instead, Liberals had done better than the NDP in three instances and better than the Tories in another. To Huband this indicated that the party was down but not out. With more effort, he insisted, the party could regain lost ground, and he bravely predicted that it would win seven seats in the next election, once Manitobans realized that the NDP were too left-wing and the Conservatives were too right-wing.¹⁸⁸ In this vein, he told a Free Press reporter that Manitobans wanted a choice between the "shrill manifestos of the NDP and the backward moribund

¹⁸⁷ The Manitoba Liberal Newsletter, "Leader's Report", 1977.

¹⁸⁸ "Huband bets leadership on picking up seven seats", Winnipeg Tribune, May 26, 1977.

ideology of the Conservatives."¹⁸⁹

The new Liberal leader failed in his attempt to win a seat in the legislature in a Crescentwood byelection in 1975, when he was edged out by a mere 177 votes. Much later, he commented on his electoral difficulties, noting some damage from federal policy: "the opportunity to get...into the House, [but] federal finance minister John Turner announced an unpopular gasoline tax."¹⁹⁰

Huband conceivably might have saved the Liberals had he been leader in 1969, when the party took its impolitic turn to the right. By 1977, however, the province of Manitoba had been governed by a left of centre party for eight years and the people were now ready to try a right of centre party as they were looking for some restraint in government spending. Sensing the public mood, the Conservatives, now led by Sterling Lyon, campaigned on a restraint platform that was unquestionably right-wing.¹⁹¹ The Liberals had clearly stated that they were a small-l liberal party, but for most Manitobans who were tired of the NDP and Schreyer, who was seen as a small-l liberal, this position was not a popular one. In every election since 1953 this position had meant success, but after almost two decades of small-l liberal

¹⁸⁹ Quoted by: Winnipeg Free Press, "Broadened base urged by Huband", February 24, 1975, pp. 8-9.

¹⁹⁰ Huband, Interview, November 8, 1990.

¹⁹¹ Susan Hoeschen, "Manitoba Election - It was a sharp turn right", Financial Post, October 22, 1977, p. 6.

governments, the electorate, beset by stagflation and double digit interest rates, understandably wanted a rest, however brief, from the innovative "reform."

The Manitoba election of October 11, 1977, was an attempt by the electorate to get rid of the Schreyer government, and the obvious way to achieve this was to vote for the opposition party that had the most seats in the legislature and posed the greatest challenge, and in 1977 it was the Conservatives. The end result gave the Conservatives thirty-three seats and a massive 48.59 per cent of the popular vote, with the NDP winning twenty-three seats and 38.49 per cent. The Liberals continued to fall, as only Lloyd Axworthy won a legislative seat, but worse, the party fell to only 12.25 per cent of the popular vote.¹⁹²

The Liberals had finally established themselves as a small-1 liberal party, but in 1977 the position was unpopular. The Liberals took votes away from the NDP and ultimately helped the Tories secure victory, which was ironically the opposite situation from the two earlier elections, as the Liberals fought the Conservatives and divided the right, thus helping the NDP to victory. It seemed the Liberals could help their opponents but not themselves.

Charles Huband, who had staked his leadership on Liberal gains, resigned after the election:

¹⁹² Manitoba. Report of the Chief Electoral Officer. 1977.

I think it would be appropriate to have a reassessment of the leadership and appropriate for the party to search for someone who could be more effective than I have proven to be.¹⁹³

His resignation took effect the following year.

In 1977, Huband managed to accomplish what many had attempted since 1960: he established the Liberals as a progressive reform party. Although the tide was, perhaps uncharacteristically, against this political position in 1977, it would appear that Huband solidified the Liberal position as a moderate and progressive party. Federal politics still played a role in the Liberal decline as shown when Manitoba's lone cabinet minister, James Richardson, resigned over the federal bilingualism policy, leaving Manitoba with no Liberal cabinet member. Huband, however, later refused to blame his party's loss on federal politics, and on the contrary made the point that "other factors were at work":

I could not lay the blame on the federal party. During Bend's, Asper's, and my time as leader, we (Liberals) were under twenty per cent in popular vote. But the federal party, even in its most unpopular days, was never that low. They may have dragged us up - rather than down. There were other factors at work than the so-called unpopularity of the federal Liberal party.¹⁹⁴

Two probable reasons for the Liberal failure were the public's evident desire for change from the NDP, and the fact that the Liberal party was too small to be seen as a

¹⁹³ Quoted by: Winnipeg Tribune, "Odyssey over, says Huband", October 12, 1977, p. 5.

¹⁹⁴ Justice Charles Huband, Leader of the Manitoba Liberal Party. Interview, November 8, 1990.

viable alternative. Huband also admitted later that "strategic mistakes were made that kept us limping along."¹⁹⁵

Before 1977, Manitobans' perception of where the party stood was unclear, which was understandable considering all the differing positions the past leaders had taken. But one of Charles Huband's undeniable accomplishments as leader was that he began the move toward making the Liberal party a reform party. The road back to contention would be long and arduous, and downhill for a while longer, but the direction now seemed clearer.

Liberals A Non-Factor in Manitoba Politics: 1977-1984

To most politicians, academics, and Manitobans in general, the Liberal party was now a political nonentity. Its only MLA, Lloyd Axworthy, had been a strong voice in the legislature, but had left for federal politics. June Westbury managed to retain his riding in a byelection on October 16, 1979; and enjoyed the dubious distinction of being the only Liberal legislator elected in all of Western Canada.¹⁹⁶ To Liberal party members, some optimism remained, as the Liberal popular vote in the three constituencies that held byelections in 1979 rose from 17.1 per cent in 1977 to

¹⁹⁵ Huband, Interview.

¹⁹⁶ Manitoba. Report of the Chief Electoral Officer. 1981.

21.4 per cent.¹⁹⁷ The party did have some substantial support in certain areas, as shown in the River Heights byelection when Liberal Jay Prober captured 2,477 votes, only 996 away from the victor, Gary Filmon, and compared to 697 for the NDP.¹⁹⁸ But to most of the electorate across the province, the Liberals were not the major alternative, but a minor curiosity.

For two years, from 1978 to 1980, the party was without a leader, which was another indication that there were problems finding someone to run a party that had little political impact in the province. Executives tried to recruit Bill Jackson, a former president of the Manitoba Government Employees Association, but he declined.¹⁹⁹ When the Liberal convention was eventually held on October 30, 1980, delegates chose Doug Lauchlan, a senior advisor to federal Cabinet Minister Lloyd Axworthy, over Hugh Moran by a vote of 493 to 300. Surprisingly, the convention boasted almost twice as many delegates as at the 1975 Conservative Lyon-Spivak leadership Convention.²⁰⁰ As new leader, Lauchlan declared that the party was on an upswing after a Liberal poll

¹⁹⁷ John Drabble, "Voter apathy factor in Fort Rouge race?", Winnipeg Tribune, October 17, 1979, p. 4.

¹⁹⁸ Manitoba. Report of the Chief Electoral Officer. 1981.

¹⁹⁹ Richard Good, former President of the Manitoba Liberal Party, Interview, November 9, 1990.

²⁰⁰ Voix Liberal Voice, A Publication of the Brandon-Souris Liberal Association, Vol 1, # 2, January 1981.

suggested that twenty per cent of Manitobans would vote Liberal,²⁰¹ and he vowed to put the party back in power in two years.²⁰² Lauchlan believed that there were three pressing problems facing Manitoba that the other parties had failed to address: the need for economic development, an end to confrontation with Ottawa, and better government overall.²⁰³

By now, the little press coverage the party received seemed to be solely about how poor it was doing. With only one MLA and the perception that the party was dying, Lauchlan found it difficult even to attract donors, and the party's dwindling finances now reflected its dire straits.

The election of 1981 was not a surprise for Liberals, who expected to do poorly, But losing the one seat they had held was seen by some as the final blow. The NDP won thirty-four seats, and the Progressive Conservatives twenty-three; while the Liberals dropped further into the depths of political insignificance, lowering its popular support to a mere 6.68 per cent, down from 12.25.²⁰⁴ Lauchlan summed up the reasons for the loss:

201 The Manitoba Report - A Publication of the Liberal Party in Manitoba, 1980.

202 Joe Rubin, "Lauchlan vows to put Liberals back in power in two years", Winnipeg Free Press, December 1, 1980, p. 1.

203 Liberal Leadership 80, "The Candidates: Doug Lauchlan". Convention pamphlet.

204 Manitoba. Report of the Chief Electoral Officer. 1981.

The game of electoral politics is there's a government and there's an alternative. When you're number three you're not the alternative. The major task is to get to the point where you at least are perceived as the principal alternative.²⁰⁵

Lauchlan also understood a problem that had faced the party since Ed Schreyer came to provincial politics in 1969, and that was that the NDP continued to take ridings that the Liberals needed to win:

The tradition of liberalism in Manitoba is very strong. That tradition was partly expressed in the NDP win.²⁰⁶

After the election, reporter Paul Maloney summarized the Liberal problem:

The Liberals with no voice in the Legislature for at least the next four years, will have to work tirelessly to maintain visibility and ward off total oblivion.²⁰⁷

With no members in the legislature and plummeting party membership, it appeared that the provincial Liberal party was near extinction. Feeling helpless and unable to stop the free fall, Doug Lauchlan resigned on June 4, 1982.

Liberals in Manitoba had been the most powerful political force in the province for many years. At the time of their peak, few would have believed that a party so strong

²⁰⁵ Andy Blicq, "Lauchlan resigns post as Liberal leader", Winnipeg Free Press, June 4, 1982.

²⁰⁶ Paul Maloney, "Lauchlan warns polarization may create political turmoil", Winnipeg Free Press, November 18, 1981, p. 15.

²⁰⁷ Ibid.

could ever be eliminated from provincial politics. Because of a shift-right by Bobby Bend, and a right of centre Izzy Asper, against a popular moderate premier, the party declined. Charles Huband's moderate progressive leadership was better, but sadly ill-timed during the right wing tide of 1977, while Doug Lauchlan could simply not arrest the accelerating downward momentum. After Lauchlan resigned, the party remained without a leader for the next two years, until 1984. By that time Liberals appeared to be an endangered species in Manitoba, playing no role in provincial politics.

IV

LIBERAL RESURGENCE

After two years without a leader, the Liberal party in Manitoba held a leadership convention on March 4, 1984. Most would have believed that leading a near extinct political party would be a fruitless task. Days before the convention, however, a Winnipeg poll gave cause for optimism. Pollster Greg Mason found that only 11.6 per cent of Manitobans would vote NDP if an election were held that day, while 30 per cent would vote Conservative. But the largest number of people polled, 42 per cent, were undecided as to whom they would vote for.²⁰⁸ This led Mason to believe that the fractured political picture in Manitoba, due to disillusionment with the two main parties, provided a perfect opportunity for a third party to gain ground. He predicted that if the Liberals found a credible leader and "played their cards right", they "could end up holding key seats and the balance of power" after the next provincial election.²⁰⁹ The pollster also stated that "if there is going to be a third party, it

²⁰⁸ Quoted by Fred Youngs and Mary Ann Fitzgerald, "Pollster sees opportunity for Liberals", Winnipeg Free Press, March 2, 1984.

²⁰⁹ Ibid.

is going to come from the middle ground".²¹⁰ This was good news for Liberals and added some enthusiasm to a convention that had little to be cheerful about in decades.

Sharon Carstairs and New Liberal Energy

The convention delegates gave Sharon Carstairs a first ballot victory over Grosse Isle businessman and farmer Bill Ridgeway, by a vote of 307 to 238.²¹¹ Carstairs had been absolutely unknown in rural Manitoba, but after extensive campaigning there, she gained enough rural support to win. An urban candidate gaining rural support was important for the party, as Carstairs stated:

Before, there had always been a split - rural delegates voted for one leader and urban delegates voted for another. In 1984 I managed to get equal representation from both rural and urban delegates.²¹²

For the first time in twenty years, there seemed to be no rural-urban split, which had previously hurt the Liberals.

When Doug Lauchlan had won the leadership in 1980, he stated that he would put the party back in power in two years. Carstairs was more modest, and more realistic, as she pledged to return a Liberal presence to the

²¹⁰ Ibid.

²¹¹ Liberal Party in Manitoba Convention Files. 1984.

²¹² Sharon Carstairs, Leader of the Manitoba Liberal Party, Interview: November 20, 1990.

legislature.²¹³ The new leader believed that the resignation of Pierre Trudeau, who was not popular in Western Canada,²¹⁴ could have a positive impact on the Manitoba Liberals.²¹⁵ The Winnipeg Free Press saw Carstairs as dynamic and, most significantly, leaning toward the left.

The new leader admitted to the media that the "only way to go is up after getting only seven per cent in the last election".²¹⁶ It was true that Liberals were in bad shape, some \$ 200,000 in debt and employing only one paid staff member.²¹⁷ Undiscouraged by this, Carstairs travelled hundreds of thousands of kilometres criss-crossing the province over the next two years, to visit voters who had not seen a Liberal leader since the 1960's.²¹⁸ In one area, Turtle Mountain, the local association was so small that the members held the constituency meeting in a car.²¹⁹

Carstairs' first priority was getting herself elected to the legislature, but failed in the first attempt,

²¹³ "City school teacher elected Liberal leader", Winnipeg Free Press, March 5, 1984, p.1.

²¹⁴ Pierre Trudeau announced his resignation as Prime Minister and Leader of the Liberal party of Canada on February 29, 1984.

²¹⁵ Op.Cit.

²¹⁶ Ibid.

²¹⁷ Carstairs, Interview.

²¹⁸ Ibid.

²¹⁹ Ibid.

in a Fort Garry byelection, when she came second, but managed to triple the Liberal support.²²⁰

In 1986, party membership rose forty per cent from the previous year, to 3717, and up from under 2000 in 1981.²²¹ When the campaign was underway for the March 18, 1986 election, the rebuilding process showed signs of success, as the Liberals fielded candidates in all fifty-seven constituencies for the first time since 1969. In some cases, the Liberal candidates ran only as a favour to Carstairs, and she personally provided signs and pamphlets for them.²²² Some party members believed that the party should field fewer candidates and save money, since some had no chance whatsoever, but Carstairs believed that if the Liberal party was ever to be successful, it had to contest all ridings. This tactic paid off, when Carstairs was allowed to join the leadership debate because she led a province-wide party, overriding objections from the two other parties and the networks. The Liberal leader was attempting to win the River Heights constituency, which would be difficult since the party placed third there in 1981, well

220 Anna Prodonov, "Sharon Carstairs, Manitoba's Lone Liberal", Chatelaine, vol. 15, no. 9, September 1986, p. 183.

221 "Membership Report", The Liberal Party in Manitoba, Executive Minutes, March 19, 1987. NOTE: Membership numbers are only a slight indicator of party health, since membership numbers rise during years when there are conventions and elections and normally fall after such events.

222 Carstairs, Interview.

behind the second place NDP,²²³ but Carstairs went into the riding with characteristic energy "releasing a barrage of press releases" which reportedly "matched the other parties almost one-for-one on issues and promises."²²⁴ The policy ideas put forward by the Liberals were considered innovative, compared to a modest NDP and expensive Tory platforms, but early in the campaign they received little media attention, despite their leader's novel policies and enthusiastic campaign.

The Liberal Platform called for free long distance phone calls within Manitoba; allowing Manitobans to pay Autopac over four months rather than all at once; deferring property taxes on senior citizens homes until the time of sale; providing additional grants for schools on aboriginal reserves; and making more extensive day care available to needy mothers. One reporter commented that such policies represented a "genuine small l-liberal platform."²²⁵

The turning point for the party was the leaders' debate, which was held on March 8. In a Winnipeg Free Press poll after the debate, thirty-seven per cent said Carstairs was the victor, edging out Premier Howard Pawley who received thirty-five per cent, while the Conservative leader, Gary

223 Manitoba. Report of the Chief Electoral Officer. 1981.

224 Frances Russell, "A campaign of promises", Winnipeg Free Press, March 13, 1986, p. 7.

225 Ibid.

Filmon, was considered to have lost, gaining only twenty-six per cent. Many now began to regard the Liberal leader with respect. One poll respondent summed up the new attitude:

Hopefully, the media will give her the coverage she deserves. She has proven that this is a three way race, not two.²²⁶

Another helpful change was that the local Liberals were no longer being hurt by their federal counterparts in Ottawa. Instead it was the provincial Conservatives who received some backlash for their federal party's actions in government, including the controversial Free Trade Agreement and assorted scandals. On the other hand, a popular federal Liberal, Jean Chretien, helped Carstairs with a visit that the Free Press reported brought "electricity" to the Liberal campaign.²²⁷ Apparently encouraged by the unpopularity of Conservative Prime Minister Brian Mulroney, and strong Liberal candidate performances, the party campaign manager, Ernie Gilroy, expressed a cautious hope that the Liberals might win as many as seven seats. Gilroy felt that a strong showing by Jim Carr might even topple Tory leader Gary Filmon in his own riding.²²⁸ Other Liberals were also showing signs of confidence for the first time in years.

226 Doug Speirs, "Reader's response poll highlights Carstairs", Winnipeg Free Press, March 15, 1986, p. 1.

227 Maria Bohuslawsky, "Chretien helps Manitoba Liberals", Winnipeg Free Press, March 16, 1986, p. 10.

228 "NDP, Tories confident of victory, Liberals forecast gains, say Filmon vulnerable in home riding", Winnipeg Free Press, March 17, 1986, p. 1.

The NDP, who were expected to win the election, did so, but with a somewhat smaller margin than anticipated, gaining thirty seats to twenty-six won by the Progressive Conservatives. NDP spokesmen blamed the modesty of their victory on a surge by the Liberals.²²⁹ Carstairs easily defeated her opponents in River Heights, winning 43.3 per cent of the vote for the first Liberal victory in seven years. The more auspicious gains were not in actual seats, but in the popular vote, which more than doubled from 6.68 per cent in 1981 to 13.88 per cent in 1986.²³⁰ Carstairs later acknowledged that all her hard work did not materialize into gaining seats, but maintained that the Liberal "presence" was improving, especially now that the party had at least one seat in the legislature.²³¹ The 1986 election was a Liberal breakthrough, not only because it was the first time in over a decade that a Liberal leader held a seat in the legislature, but because for the first time since 1962, the party increased in popular support rather than decreased. The Sharon Carstairs Liberals were the first to stop the declining trend in almost twenty-five years. It seemed that the long decline was now over, and recovery could now begin.

²²⁹ "Grit surge blamed for losses", Winnipeg Free Press, March 19, 1986, p. 14.

²³⁰ Manitoba. Report of the Chief Electoral Officer. 1986.

²³¹ Carstairs, Interview.

A Liberal Presence in the Legislature

With the Liberal party again present in the legislature, Carstairs took full advantage as she had a question on the order paper every day in the House.²³² She managed to attract media attention, as she later explained, because, another member "would ask three questions, then I would ask the three same questions, with a human touch, and I would get the story."²³³ With new enthusiasm, the party began to gain momentum, and by 1987 party membership was thirty-three per cent higher than in 1986.²³⁴ All three parties were now evidently competing to be moderately progressive, as one editorial noted:

The most significant fact...is that the Conservatives and New Democrats have decided that the centre is where they have to appear to be to win.²³⁵

In this competition, according to Greg Mason, the Liberals needed to succeed to prosper:

The Liberals' continued success will depend largely on their ability to bore out the middle of the political spectrum. Its a formidable challenge because the other two parties will realize the middle ground is where most of the people are.²³⁶

232 Carstairs, Interview.

233 Carstairs, Interview.

234 "Membership Report", Liberal Party in Manitoba, (Liberal members in 1987: 4946.)

235 Editorial, Winnipeg Free Press, March 15, 1986, p. 6.

236 Quoted by Maria Bohuslawsky, "Liberal impact, 'rebirth' assessed", Winnipeg Free Press, March 20, 1986, p. 3.

Apparently the party was finding a formula for success, as a 1987 poll gave the Liberals 23.3 per cent of the popular vote, almost ten percentage points higher than what they had achieved in the 1986 election.²³⁷ Even more promising, when in the city of Winnipeg, the party's support was up to 29.6 per cent, only slightly back of the other two parties.²³⁸ Such findings, Carstairs declared, meant "that all twenty-nine seats in Winnipeg are up for grabs and we should be able to take a large number of them."²³⁹ The leader's optimism was becoming contagious.

Unexpected Election: Good Timing for Grits

The NDP government, which had held power since 1981, was holding on to a slim majority after Larry Desjardins resigned in February of 1988. The actual numbers in the legislature were now NDP twenty-eight, (one appointed speaker), Conservatives twenty-six, and Liberals one. The New Democrats were dropping in public opinion because of several scandals, including the Manitoba Telephone System losing millions of dollars to Saudi Arabia, (MTX), and the withholding of information on the massive fiscal losses for the Manitoba Public Insurance Corporation. The most damaging

²³⁷ Centrepiece, A Liberal Party publication, November, 1987.

²³⁸ Ibid. Winnipeg Poll: Liberals - 29.6 %; Conservatives - 32.3 %; NDP - 36.3 %.

²³⁹ Centrepiece, March 1987.

policy seemed to be the planned 18-24 % Autopac rate increase.²⁴⁰ Still however, the government did not plan on an election for two to three more years, which was plenty of time to gain favour with the public once again. Besides, governments normally are harder on taxpayers in the first two years in office and then let up in the final two years before the election. Soon it became apparent that the twenty-eight to twenty-seven edge that the government held in the legislature was not very secure, since one unhappy NDP MLA, Jim Walding,²⁴¹ could vote against his party and thus defeat the government. As the New Democrats feared, the disgruntled Walding did side with opposition parties on the 1988 budget vote and thereby caused an unexpected provincial election,²⁴² to be held on April 26, 1988.²⁴³

After his government's defeat in the Legislative Assembly, Premier Howard Pawley resigned and the NDP held a leadership race during the ensuing election campaign, which

²⁴⁰ Donald Benham, The Winnipeg Sun, April 24, 1988, S5.

²⁴¹ Walding had been unhappy with Premier Pawley after continually being rejected for a cabinet position.

²⁴² After the government defeat, two cabinet ministers, Jay Cowan and Wilson Parasiuk, visited Carstairs at home hoping to get her support on a second budget that would hopefully convince the Lieutenant Governor to allow the NDP to continue in government. Carstairs said she would discuss this only if the NDP changed their position on Meech Lake, which they would not, so the discussions ceased. (From: Sharon Carstairs, 1990 Election & Meech Lake, A written account of the 1988 and 1990 elections, November, 1990.)

²⁴³ Mary Janigan, "Manitoba faces a choice", Maclean's, March 21, p. 10.

some hoped would have similar results as the 1969 leadership race, which was also held during the election campaign and resulted in an NDP victory. But the difference between the two elections were massive. In 1969 the NDP were a new voice against the establishment, while in 1988 as the government, they were the establishment. Despite attempting to gain extra media coverage through the leadership contest, the party remained unpopular. Even areas of traditional support were eroded by NDP blunders.²⁴⁴

At the outset of the campaign the Progressive Conservatives were seen as the only alternative to the NDP, although doubts persisted regarding their leader, Gary Filmon. The Tories were also hurt by the growing unpopularity of the Conservatives in Ottawa, mostly because of the awarding of a defense contract to a Quebec firm despite a superior bid from a Winnipeg firm.²⁴⁵ The Conservatives thus received more of what the provincial Liberals had received for years: guilt by association. Many Manitobans remembered the Lyon Conservatives and did not like the right-wing elements that remained within that party. Still, in recent years if one did not want to vote NDP, the Tories were thought to be the only other option in Manitoba. But due to the

²⁴⁴ Don MacDonald, "Manitoba's long affair with NDP now cooling in favour of Liberals", Winnipeg Sun, April 25, 1988, p. 10.

²⁴⁵ Rene Mauche, "The Grits come in from the cold", Western Report, March 21, 1988, p. 14.

unpopularity of the two leading parties and the timing of the election call, many Manitobans, for the first time in years, gave some consideration to the Liberal party.

Liberal Resurgence

During her two years in the legislature, Sharon Carstairs was able to create a distinct political profile and received province wide recognition. Carstairs managed to develop a distinct Liberal policy position and for the first time in years gave Manitobans a third option at the polls.

Due to the unpopularity of both the NDP and Conservatives, the number of undecided voters during the campaign was at forty per cent.²⁴⁶ The Liberals managed to capitalize on these circumstances with the campaign slogan "Competence with Heart",²⁴⁷ which attempted to show Manitobans that the party was "competent" and able to manage the government, and at the same time have "heart" and preserve social programs. The Liberals, who had been out of power for three decades, had no record to hide, unlike the two other parties, and this helped attract the undecided voter. As political scientist Allen Mills said, "Mrs. Carstairs' popularity [based on the fact that] she's a fresh

²⁴⁶ Arlene Billinkoff, "Resurgent Liberals could be election wild card", April 10, 1988, p. 7.

²⁴⁷ Centrepiece, A Manitoba Liberal Party Publication, March 1988.

face leading a traditional party."²⁴⁸

The Liberal campaign got off to a good start thanks to some luck. The party's Annual General Meeting coincidentally was scheduled on the first weekend after the election was called. This gave the party some immediate media attention, as well as a chance for Liberals across the province to coordinate their plans. Also, film footage from the meeting was used in campaign commercials that would ordinarily not have been ready for weeks afterwards.²⁴⁹ Policy ideas were also decided and prepared for distribution. These included subsidization for day-care while high income earners would pay, increased private school funding, reducing cabinet and government costs and creating a "leaner" government, improving pay equity, extending loans to farmers in difficulty, selling Manfor and dismantling the Public Investment Corporation as unnecessary.²⁵⁰

Some Manitobans appeared to like the candid style of the Carstairs campaign, with her comfortable manner, as opposed to Filmon who reportedly seemed scripted and unsure.²⁵¹ Soon it appeared that Carstairs was becoming the

²⁴⁸ Andrew Allentruck, "Manitoba Liberal battles history", Winnipeg Free Press, April 18, 1988, p. 7.

²⁴⁹ Carstairs, Interview: December 12, 1989.

²⁵⁰ Maria Bohuslawsky, "Promises", Winnipeg Free Press, April 24, 1988, p. 17.

²⁵¹ Mauche, "The Grits come in from the cold", Western Report, May 9, 1988, p. 14.

most popular party leader in the campaign: an Angus Reid leadership poll in the Free Press stated that "The Liberal surge in popularity has been linked to the one-woman wonder", and showed that forty per cent of the respondents thought Carstairs would make the best premier, including twenty-eight per cent who said they were Tory supporters, while Filmon received only twenty-four per cent and new NDP leader Gary Doer only nineteen per cent.²⁵² As in 1986, Carstairs also fared well in the leadership debate, and helped bring the party's standing in one public opinion poll up to thirty-four per cent, which doubled the amount the party received in 1986. In the poll it appeared that the Liberals were headed for opposition status, as the Conservatives were favoured by forty-three per cent and the NDP by a mere twenty-two per cent.²⁵³

The Liberal party had been confined to third party status and near extinction over the previous decade and a half, and despite the glowing reports from poll after poll, it was un-imaginable that the party would actually win as many seats as the polls suggested. There were a few key factors for such strong Liberal support in 1988. Firstly, the election was called prematurely and left the already unpopular NDP government without their final two years to "make up" for

²⁵² Pauline Comeau, "Carstairs trounces rivals in popularity", Winnipeg Free Press, April 21, 1988.

²⁵³ "Baffled by the Polls", Winnipeg Free Press, April 24, 1988, p. 6.

their first two. Secondly, the people of Manitoba remembered the right-wing Conservatives under the Lyon government, while the Filmon leadership appeared weak and did not help their cause. It would seem that the Liberals were helped by the luck of good timing, just as bad timing had hurt them in 1969, when right-wing leadership by the Liberals coincided with moderate NDP leadership.

Over the two years prior to the 1988 election the Liberals had strengthened their organization and solidified their party leadership. The party seized the opportunity it was given, and this was, in great part, due to Sharon Carstairs.

Carstairs attracted voters to the party through her charisma as Schreyer had in 1969. The elections of 1969 and 1988 had a few similarities. The Liberals lost in 1969 due to NDP gains, while it appeared that the Liberals would gain in 1988 due to NDP losses. On both occasions it was clear that aside from a few other circumstances, the overriding reason for each party's success was the leadership of Schreyer and Carstairs. Fred Cleverly of the Free Press wrote that: "if Sharon Carstairs could run in all fifty-seven constituencies, she would certainly form the next government."²⁵⁴ Cleverly pointed out quite precisely that in 1969 it was not the NDP that won but Ed Schreyer, while in

²⁵⁴ Fred Cleverly, "NDP appears headed for third place finish", Winnipeg Free Press, April 21, 1988, p. 7.

1988 it was not the Liberals that were attracting all the attention but Sharon Carstairs. Without a fairly solid party to back up a good leader they are often ignored, but without an effective leader a party will almost certainly be ignored. The Liberals had done an effective rebuilding job, but leadership was the biggest single reason for Liberal success in 1988.

The Conservative party, as expected, was victorious in the 1988 election, but its victory was eclipsed somewhat by the Liberal resurgence: the party went from one seat in the legislature and under 14 per cent of the popular vote, to an astounding twenty seats and 35.36 per cent of the vote.²⁵⁵ The party had only five seats fewer than the Tories and was within three per cent in popular opinion, while the NDP retained only twelve seats and 23.33 per cent of the vote.²⁵⁶ Becoming Canada's first woman ever to lead an opposition, Carstairs brought the Liberals from near extinction to almost capturing power.

Before 1988, Carstairs believed that it would take several years for the Liberals to become the official opposition, and only hoped to win a handful of seats in the following election to gain official party status.²⁵⁷ But due to the political events that faced Manitoba, the impossible

²⁵⁵ Manitoba. Report of the Chief Electoral Officer. 1988.

²⁵⁶ Manitoba. Report of the Chief Electoral Officer. 1988.

²⁵⁷ Carstairs, Interview.

was realized for Carstairs and the Liberals: official opposition in only a few short years. The party was helped by NDP insensitivity, as New Democrat insiders admitted that they had "lost touch with their grass roots."²⁵⁸ Some argued that the NDP had moved left and vacated the centre which they had previously taken from the Liberals, leaving the Liberals and their small-l liberalism ready to take it back as Manitobans looked for a more moderate party.²⁵⁹ Carstairs and the Liberals had established themselves as a reform party in the mold of Norris and Laurier, in a progressive-centrist position which has generally been the popular position in Manitoba politics for decades.

The party that was basically a non-factor in Manitoba politics only four years earlier, now had substantial power in the minority government. After years in the political wilderness, the Liberal Party in Manitoba had managed one of the most remarkable recoveries in Canadian political history.

²⁵⁸ Rene Mauche, "The Grits come in from the cold", Western Report, May 9, 1988, pp. 12-13.

²⁵⁹ Ibid.

E P I L O G U E

Liberals as Goliath; Liberals as David

For a time, Liberals in Manitoba were the giants on the political scene, as they continually defeated opponents over a span of several decades. After years of victorious elections, it appeared as though the party might never falter. The Liberal "dynasty" was finally 'upset' in 1958 by the underdog, Duff Roblin. The loss, the first since 1922, was due partially to their inability to change as a party as the status quo changed: from mostly rural to a more prevalent urban population. The rurally biased Liberals were defeated by voters who had less in common with the cautious Liberal-Progressive government than in past years. Soon, even the rural backbone was deserting them as their federal cousins became unpopular with farmers. Liberals were hurt within as well, since they were being split into two groups: one urban and progressive and the other rural and conservative. Ultimately this split led to increased friction that, coupled with the growing unpopularity of the federal Liberals, resulted in continual decline. The final blow that worsened the split in the party was the leadership of Bobby Bend, who was of the old style Liberal-Progressives and not

of the new breed of progressive Liberals. After Bend's unpopular leadership and Schreyer's appeal, Liberals began to become a non-factor in Manitoba's political scene, eventually dropping completely out of sight.

The Liberal party became nearly extinct in Manitoba, and attempts to reverse its decline failed until 1986. Due to weariness with the main parties in 1988, Manitobans turned to the refreshing face of Sharon Carstairs and the Liberals. The party that was once the establishment was now fighting against it. Manitobans endorsed the Liberals to such an extent that they were seen as the real "victors", despite receiving the second most seats. The Liberal resurgence was due to good timing with an unexpected election, along with weak leadership by the other parties. The most important reason for the Liberals surge, like the 1969 NDP surge, was leadership.

Conclusion: Leadership, Ottawa, & NDP Competition

In hindsight, it seems clear that the fall and resurgence of the Manitoba Liberal party were due to many of the same factors, only in reverse. Looking at the 1969 election as the critical decline for the Liberals, and the 1988 election as the most dramatic resurgence, there were three main factors. The first and most important reason for the fall and resurgence of the Liberals was local leadership. In 1969 it was the charismatic moderate, Edward Schreyer,

prevailing over the somewhat stodgy right-wing image of Bobby Bend which hurt the Liberals. In 1988, Sharon Carstairs became the only leader since Schreyer to have gained such popularity, while the NDP lacked a popular leader. In both 1969 and 1988, leadership was the most important issue, as the Liberals fell against strong leadership but later recovered with a more dynamic and attractive leader.

A second important reason for Liberal failure and success was federal politics. In 1969 there was a backlash against the Manitoba Liberals for federal Liberal unpopularity. In 1988 there was a backlash against the Manitoba Conservatives for federal Conservative unpopularity, which helped Liberals since the Tories were previously seen to be the alternative to the unpopular Manitoba NDP government. Since provincial and federal parties may be associated in the public perception, many Manitobans voted Liberal against the Conservatives for their federal party's actions.

After leadership, the most important factor in Liberal success is the competition with the NDP. In 1969 it was the NDP who capitalized on Liberal losses, while in 1988 it was the Liberals who caused the massive drop in NDP support as the fourteen of the nineteen new Liberal seats were won from the NDP. It became fairly clear that to succeed, the Liberals had to compete with the NDP for the centre-left position in Manitoba politics. Competition with the

Conservatives only resulted in further decline for Liberals, while 1988 proved that as the NDP had dramatically surged in 1969 while the Liberals plummeted, only the decline of NDP support would cause a substantial Liberal increase.

In every election, many factors contribute to the result, but in recent Manitoba elections it appears that three major factors caused the fall and resurgence of the Manitoba Liberal party: leadership, federal politics, and competition with the NDP for the progressive centre to left position.

Liberals in Opposition: Optimism and Inexperience

After the astounding Liberal resurgence in 1988, the prospects appeared excellent for the party to regain power within a few years. It appeared to have gained enough support to be a political force for the future. After increasing its legislative representation from one to twenty and its popular vote from 13.88 to 35.36 per cent, it seemed clear that the party was on the rise and it appeared that the next step would be government. With nineteen new MLAs, however, on closer look it was clear that Liberals still had a great deal of work to do if they hoped to improve. Even the leader had only two years experience, and none at all working with a caucus. As Carstairs herself noted on the difference between twenty members and previously being the sole Liberal: "I soon learned decisions were much easier when I only had to argue with

myself!"²⁶⁰ The first few months were difficult ones for the Liberal caucus, as they were inexperienced, with inexperienced staff, while competing against the NDP members, some of whom had years of experience, in some cases even as cabinet ministers. Despite these handicaps the Liberal caucus did relatively well, but Carstairs realized that a great deal of work had to be done if the party were to increase its electoral success. She later wrote:

Very few of the members accepted, despite my admonitions, that 1988 was a fluke and would never happen again, and the next election would be fought at the doors.²⁶¹

Carstairs had expected the party to make a substantial comeback in 1988, but even she was inclined to see the resurgence as partly a result of luck that could not be maintained unless party rebuilding continued. Unfortunately, some of the new inexperienced Liberal MLA's believed that the "magic" of 1988 would always be there to help them in future elections: they simply could not accept that 1988 was an aberration unlikely to recur.²⁶²

Liberals and the Accord: Winning Issue Gone Sour

In addition to all of the other difficulties that faced the new caucus, there was the Meech Lake Accord. The

²⁶⁰ Sharon Carstairs, 1990 Election & Meech Lake, A written account of the 1988 and 1990 elections, November, 1990.

²⁶¹ Carstairs, "Election 1990".

²⁶² Carstairs, Interview.

Accord, which Prime Minister Mulroney was hoping would be ratified by all provinces, was rejected in Manitoba, first by Carstairs and later by Filmon and Doer. Meech Lake dominated the entire period between the election and its failure in June 1990.²⁶³ Carstairs, as Maclean's noted: "Became a symbol of provincial political defiance",²⁶⁴ and was seen as the anti-Meech champion by Manitobans. Because of the united stance by all three leaders, the anti-Meech stance was soon associated more with Filmon since, as Premier, it was he who dealt with Mulroney, despite his having Carstairs and Doer with him for advice. A united stance by party leaders to fight the federal government is an old policy in Manitoba politics, dating back to John Norquay, and subsequently used by Bracken, Garson, Campbell, and now Filmon, and to all it resulted in favour of the governing party, not the opposition. Manitobans overwhelmingly agreed with the leaders against Meech Lake, but now they saw Filmon as their defender of provincial rights, not Carstairs. Filmon, who had switched sides on the issue, was getting the credit for Carstairs' issue. When the Accord was finally agreed upon by all premiers, some saw this as a cop-out by Carstairs. As she later pointed out:

It was easy for Filmon and Doer to compromise on Meech - they had compromised since day one.

²⁶³ Carstairs, "Election 1990".

²⁶⁴ "Taking The Prize", Maclean's, September 24, 1990, pp. 12-14.

I was always opposed, so when I had to compromise, people partially blamed me.²⁶⁵

When the First Ministers Conference on Meech Lake ended, Filmon was now perceived as the Manitoba Statesman, while NDP MLA Elijah Harper stopped passage of the Accord in the legislature and he became the anti-Meech hero. Carstairs, who had started the fight against Meech in the first place and who had previously been perceived as the anti-Meech hero, was not only lost in the shuffle, but some saw her as giving in. It was possible that Carstairs could have maintained massive popularity if she had upheld her anti-Meech stance, but she later emphasized that: "My first concern was Canada, and not my own political career."²⁶⁶

When the provincial election was called for September 11, 1990, the Liberals were not fully prepared, and worse, some candidates had not built their party constituency executives or campaign teams. Some apparently believed, or hoped, that the "magic" of 1988 could be duplicated, and thus some did not bother to raise enough money for the contest since money had not been needed in the 1988 campaign.²⁶⁷ The outcome, due to Filmon's increased

²⁶⁵ Carstairs, Interview.

²⁶⁶ Ibid.

²⁶⁷ One example of winning without campaign teams or money in 1988 was Ed Mandrake in Assiniboia. The Liberals spent approximately \$ 1300 while the Tories spent \$ 33,000. From Michael Sangster, Assistant to Sharon Carstairs, Interview: December 4, 1990.

popularity, was expected to be a Conservative majority with the Liberals losing some seats, but due to a poor campaign and still not fully rebuilt party base, the Liberals were soundly beaten, winning only seven seats, while the NDP won twenty, leaving the Tories with a slim majority with thirty seats.²⁶⁸

Liberal Prospects

The discouraging election result for Liberals caused some analysts to wonder whether the party was again in decline, as a casualty of polarization. On election night Carstairs told reporters that when she became leader in 1984 she planned to win a small number of seats followed by a slightly larger number, and only after four elections would the party be ready for government:

If I had to do it all again, I would have won ten seats in 1988 instead of twenty. We grew too fast and there is a danger in that."²⁶⁹

Carstairs believed that winning official opposition status in 1988 with such an inexperienced caucus put great pressures on them. If they had won only ten seats then it would have been up to the NDP to criticize while Liberals gained experience and were the positive critics.²⁷⁰ In sum, Carstairs believed

²⁶⁸ Manitoba. Report of the Chief Electoral Officer. 1990.

²⁶⁹ "Grits 'caught in middle'", Winnipeg Free Press, September 12, 1990, p. 4.

²⁷⁰ Carstairs, Interview.

that the situation the party was in after 1990, was where it should have been in 1988. With this in mind, the Liberal leader saw party growth still very possible. In accord with Carstairs, Free Press reporter Christopher Dafoe explained:

She (Carstairs) got seven seats, which is seven more than the Liberals used to get before she became leader...The latest poll has put the party of Laurier and Norris about where it belongs on the comeback trail at this stage.²⁷¹

Some see the 1990 election results as a move back to the two party system, believing that it is possible that the Liberals may go from seven seats down to three, and so on, as Manitobans will look to the NDP, and not the Liberals, to defeat the Tories next election.²⁷² Carstairs sees it differently, believing that 1990 was the worst case scenario and the party still gained a solid twenty-eight per cent of the vote. Furthermore, the NDP received only one percentage point more but were fortunate that the seats fell in their favour. Most importantly, in ridings where the NDP won, there are many who voted Conservative but would not move as far left to vote NDP. Should the Conservatives become unpopular, perhaps because of a worsening economy, she believes that "We can inherit the voters that are dissatisfied with the Tories".²⁷³ Backing Carstairs' belief is an Angus

²⁷¹ Christopher Dafoe, "The pundits have spoken", Winnipeg Free Press, September 16, 1990.

²⁷² Huband, Interview.

²⁷³ Carstairs, Interview.

Reid poll, which indicated that the Liberals enjoy an advantage over the other two parties in residual support. Liberals were chosen as "second choice" by thirty-three per cent compared to twenty-three for the NDP and fifteen for the Conservatives. This would indicate that if one party became unpopular after the current term, many would turn to the Liberals. Further, the poll found that only one in ten would not support the Liberals in the 1990 election while the figure was one in four for the two other parties.²⁷⁴ In sum, this would signify that the party can inherit support simply through dissatisfaction with the other parties, and with a strong agenda this might occur more easily. To a Free Press reporter, Carstairs remained optimistic on the party's chances:

When I took over this party in 1984, we had six per cent of the popular vote. This election, we have twenty-eight per cent of the popular vote. Don't tell me this party isn't growing. The Liberal party has a future in this province.²⁷⁵

She also emphasized that "If they couldn't destroy me then, (Meech Lake), they'll never destroy me!"²⁷⁶

The 1990 Liberal caucus is considered to be a strong one, since only the best and strongest Liberals could have

²⁷⁴ Angus Reid & Free Press/CKY-TV Manitoba Election Poll, Part One. September 6, 1990.

²⁷⁵ "Grits 'Caught in middle'", Winnipeg Free Press, September 12, 1990, p. 4.

²⁷⁶ Pat Doyle, Winnipeg Sun, "The Liberal party has a future in this province", September 13, 1990.

won against the "worst case scenario" that faced them. Carstairs said of her MLA's: "If I had to choose, these are the ones I would have chosen. I obviously wish we had a few others, but these are strong members."²⁷⁷ The Liberal party that had almost no members in 1977, had close to 18,000 on file in 1990, which to some would demonstrate that despite the election setback, it remains strong.²⁷⁸

Whether the Liberals will decline or rise in the future could be debated endlessly, but the only true indicator will be the elections that take place in the years to come. For the Liberals to gain success, however, recent history appears to indicate where they should stand on the political spectrum. Since the Liberals last held power, every attempt to be a right of centre party has resulted in disaster. It seems that the Conservatives have permanently staked out the right end of the political spectrum, and any attempts to fight against them in their territory only results in the Conservatives winning the battle, while the NDP win the war, as the right is partially split. Events appear to have proven that there is little future for a Liberal party on the right. Former Liberal leader Gil Molgat stated: "I don't think there is any future for the Liberal party to be

²⁷⁷ Carstairs, Interview.

²⁷⁸ Manitoba Liberal party files: Executive Minutes.

conservative. The only future is to be a reform party."²⁷⁹ The Liberals originally lost much ground by fighting the Tories and vacating the centre-left, leaving the NDP to take Liberal votes. The 1988 election proved that fighting centre-left against the New Democrats was a formula that worked, as Liberal success came mostly from NDP losses, when fourteen of the nineteen new Liberal seats came from the NDP.²⁸⁰ Al Munro, assistant to the Manitoba Liberal leader, admitted that: "In the 1990 election we lost sight of where we should be"²⁸¹ The Liberals have the difficult task of tackling both the left and the right to show Manitobans that they are a pragmatic party for all, but still ensure that they do not sway from their centre position. But most importantly, the party must not appear wishy-washy. This is a demanding assignment for a centre party, since the left or right has clearly defined positions on most issues, while a centre party can vary, therefore, an important feature for Liberals is to be clear on policy. After the 1990 election, pollster Greg Mason noted that much of the electorate did not know where the Liberals stood: "they presented a confused image to the electorate. In the end, the voters chose what was

²⁷⁹ Molgat, Interview.

²⁸⁰ Manitoba. Report of the Chief Electoral Officer. 1988.

²⁸¹ Al Munro, Assistant to the Leader of the Liberal Party, Interview: November 14, 1990.

clear."²⁸² If the party is to sway, it should be only leftward. If, as has happened in the past, and they concentrate solely on the Conservatives by fighting them on their traditional turf, the centre to left voters will desert the Liberals. In 1990, some Manitobans saw the Liberals as trying to compete only with the Conservatives, in a turn to the right. The 1990 Liberal campaign focused on economic issues while the NDP concentrated more on social justice. The party chose to fight the Conservatives on the economy as their top priority, despite the perception that the Tories were strongest in that area. Liberals might have had more success if they had attacked the government on social policy.

The 1990 election policy proposals included deinking plants to facilitate recycling; \$ 300 million for a rural income support program; and subsidized day care. The electorate, however, noticed that the main push of the Liberal platform was on economic issues, as the Liberals pledged to give large corporations tax breaks to encourage investment. To Manitobans this made the Liberals appear right of centre, which is disastrous for the party. After narrowly defeating Liberal Avis Gray, NDP MLA Conrad Santos stated his analysis:

What the voters are telling the Liberals is that people's needs cannot be ignored. We hit the issues based on human needs versus corporate

²⁸² Ruth Teichroeb, "Resignation predicted", Winnipeg Free Press, September 12, 1990, p. 4.

needs.²⁸³

It would seem that the formula for Liberal success should be to emphasize their social policies with as much or more vigour as they do their economic platform. Former Liberal leader Charles Huband stated on several occasions that for the party to be electorally successful it needed to challenge the NDP on social issues, as Mackenzie King successfully did to meet the CCF threat in 1945. Former federal Liberal strategist, Senator Keith Davey, likewise advised the party to establish itself on the centre-left to gain success in western Canada: "For generations now, western Liberals have been outflanked on the left."²⁸⁴ An example of Liberal success due to a firm centre-left position has been Lloyd Axworthy, who has won provincially and federally in Manitoba for eighteen years, even during the most unpopular Liberal times. With his clear position, Axworthy managed the only victory for Liberals in the 1977 provincial election, and was one of only two Liberals in all of western Canada to win against the federal Tory landslide in 1984. With this in mind, it would seem clear where the party must stand to gain success. Axworthy points out that the provincial party is finally moving in the right direction, as opposed to the Bend era, but that it must not only talk about social issues but

²⁸³ Gerald Flood, "City voters spill Liberal blood", Winnipeg Free Press, September 12, 1990. p. 17.

²⁸⁴ Davey, The Rainmaker, p. 111.

actually get involved and have people in the party who come from all walks of life, not just "south end lawyers."²⁸⁵

The lessons from history were forgotten too quickly. Bend's right shift was an obvious error, while in 1988 the Liberals challenged the NDP and made a historical political comeback with a progressive platform. The 1990 campaign saw the party mistakenly competing with the Conservatives, while the NDP understood that their real opponents were the Liberals and therefore spent most of their time focusing on them, resulting in NDP gains at Liberal expense.²⁸⁶ The NDP under Schreyer left little room in the centre, as he was studiously moderate, but the current party may be less careful, leaving the progressive centre open, as a Liberal opportunity. Carstairs summed up the party's dilemma, noting that the party:

wants to be right in the centre, but it's tough to be in the centre. The media like an antagonist and protagonist, but that isn't reality. Manitobans are generally in the centre and want a centre party.²⁸⁷

Unfortunately in 1990, whether perception or reality, the Liberals appeared to be slightly right of centre. The party fell into the same trap that Bend fell into in 1969, fighting mostly against Conservatives because pre-election polls showed

²⁸⁵ Axworthy, Interview: March 4, 1991.

²⁸⁶ Frances Russell, "Polarized politics", Winnipeg Free Press, September 12, p. 9.

²⁸⁷ Carstairs, Interview.

they were the ones to beat. The NDP were evidently not hoping to win the election, however, but to avoid further losses by fighting, mostly against Liberals, to regain a viable base for the future.

In all fairness, the Liberals have had the supremely difficult task in this century, of having to change their party base and their orientation. The Liberals of early years were mostly rural and cautiously conservative, while Liberals since 1970 have had to become urban and progressive. The reform party of T.C. Norris was similar to that of Molgat, Huband or Carstairs, in proposing new ideas; but the party of Bracken, Campbell and Bend, was much different, in emphasizing care, caution and conservative restraint. Today most Manitoba Liberals understand that they need to be a progressive centre-left party on the political spectrum. Now they must fight for that position, which most modern political activist leaders appear to seek, as did Roblin, Schreyer, and Filmon. It has been the dynamic and creative position in Manitoba politics since 1953, and the position where most parties have met with electoral success, with only 1977 as an aberration. The Liberals now have the difficult task of trying to regain this position despite criticism from both sides.

The Liberal resurgence has given the party a chance, and with a progressive agenda, it may capitalise on this opportunity. From a dominant force, to a third party, to

near extinction, the party has evidently solved all its internal fighting and philosophical friction that was present between the right-wing Campbell rural conservatives and the centre-left Ginger group, and has become a progressive party of liberal Liberals, potentially better able to attract reform-minded voters. With this instructive experience as its guide, the Liberal party may one day prove able to return to government in Manitoba once again.

APPENDIX A

Liberal Election Results in Manitoba - 1953-1990

Provincial Election	Seats	% Votes
1953	35 (52)	41
1958	19 (56)	35
1959	11 (57)	30
1962	13	36
1966	14	33
1969	5	24
1973	5	18
1977	1	12
1981	-	7
1986	1	14
1988	20	35
1990	7	28

Federal Election	Seats	% Votes
1953	8 (14)	40
1957	1	26
1958	-	22
1962	1	31
1963	2	34
1965	1	31
1968	5 (13)	41
1972	2	30
1974	2	27
1979	2 (14)	22
1980	2	28
1984	1	22
1988	5	37

Source: Manitoba. Report of the Chief Electoral Officer.
 Canada. Report of the Chief Electoral Officer.

APPENDIX B

The Liberal Party in Manitoba Policy Platform Outline 1989

The Liberal Party in Manitoba continues to develop policies in every area, from agriculture to youth. These policies are developed by speaking with Manitobans across the province and listening to their concerns. We consult with groups and organizations representing the cultural and economic initiative of our province.

There is a choice. The Liberal Party continues to present Manitobans with credible policy alternatives.

The central theme of the Liberal Party in Manitoba is rights and responsibilities. This theme is applied to every area of policy.

It is the right of each individual in our society to have access to good education and health care, the opportunity for employment, as well as the right to full protection of the Charter of Rights and Freedoms.

It is the responsibility of each individual to work for his education. He or she is equally responsible for ensuring as much as possible his own good health, and for seeking opportunities for employment and to respect and protect his or her own rights and the rights of others.

The Liberal Party in Manitoba is the party of initiative and incentive. Individuals such as civil servants, students and welfare recipients should be encouraged to show initiative, and they should be rewarded when they do so. Incentive should be offered to farmers, property owners, employers and employees, so that all can contribute to the economic growth of our province.

There are numerous policy points in every area, consistent with the principles of rights, responsibilities, initiative and incentive. A sampling:

-It is important that a greater emphasis be placed on agriculture by the provincial government. The current percentage of the provincial budget devoted to agriculture must be increased to reflect the importance of agriculture in Manitoba's economy. Both Alberta and Saskatchewan devote considerably larger percentages of their budgets to agriculture.

-A department of Rural Development should be established to place a suitable emphasis on the rural life of Manitoba, including towns and municipalities as well as farms. Such a

policy would clearly indicate that the government was ready to address the concerns of the rural areas of the province.

-It is the policy of the Liberal Party that any individual who can live either at home or in a minimal care facility should be given that opportunity. Home care services care services should be provided rather than expensive hospital or personal home care. This is both morally and fiscally responsible. However, these alternatives must be provided before bed closures take place.

-The emphasis of government employment policy should be on long-term, permanent job creation rather than short-term make-work projects.

-The Liberal Party advocates the eventual elimination of long distance telephone rates within Manitoba, with a view towards establishing a unified telephone system throughout the province. Toward that goal we recommend the immediate elimination for long distance calls for emergency calls for ambulance, fire protection and for contacts with municipal offices and school boards.

-The Liberal Party is opposed to compulsory retirement. However, retirement or part-time retirement from age sixty should be encouraged in order to free jobs for young people. This should be done in a way as to not lessen pension benefits.

-The Liberal Party is in favour of the establishment of a Registered Small Business Savings Plan (RSBSP) which would allow individuals to save tax free dollars for a future investment in a Manitoban small business or farm.

-It is the policy of the Liberal Party that parents have rights to all information regarding their child. Moreover, they should be informed of these rights. A parent has the right to know what level of achievement his or her child has reached, to receive regular meaningful progress reports and to have concerns regarding the child taken seriously. Curriculum development by the department of education should include input from parents as well as educators. A parental advocate should be established immediately in school divisions which refuse to provide information.

-Tourism has long been devalued as a major economic activity in Manitoba. This first priority must be the twining of Highway 75 in order that access to our province is made easier.

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