

Speech by H.A. Robson:
The Revival of Liberalism¹

HUGH AMOS ROBSON



“MANITOBA CAN’T WAIT”

¹ The following is a verbatim republication of Hugh Robson’s Speech given at a meeting of the Manitoba Liberal Party. Copies of the speech were distributed at the event and discovered at the Provincial Archives.

MR. CHAIRMAN, LADIES AND GENTLEMEN:

It has been a revelation to me to witness, during the past few weeks, the revival of the spirit of Liberalism which is showing itself, not only in the City of Winnipeg, but at the various points throughout the Province of Manitoba which I have had the privilege of visiting. Tens of thousands of citizens of Liberal thought want to form into line again for another great Liberal advance. There are great things to be done and to that end we must form a partnership of all of those who have in them the traditions and inspirations of the Liberal party, as left to us by such great leaders as Gladstone and Bright and our own Sir Wilfrid Laurier.

Liberalism had its birth in great struggles: There was the early fight for the common people against class privilege in various forms and there was the fight against entrenched special interests and now we have here a fight on our hands against an inactivity which, if permitted to continue will mean the indefinite retarding of our growth and prosperity. Liberalism stands for beneficial reform and human progress; the policies of our predecessors have all been for the good of the common people.

Liberalism stands for loyalty to the Crown and to the Empire, and stands firm for the national development of Canada as a bright star in the constellation of nations that compose the British Empire.

Manitoba is now subject to disability as a Province in that it is not the owner of its natural resources. The Liberal Party can best provide the force and determination to have that disparity removed and to procure for this Province adult and autonomous status in the group of Provinces that form our great Confederation. This year the Dominion celebrates its Diamond Jubilee. Three years hence this Province will celebrate its Diamond Jubilee, and I can safely predict that if the interval is properly employed the completion of the transfer of the natural resources to the Province will be one of the causes of another celebration which we should hold then.

Liberalism does not believe in class government. Either government by privileged interests, or government by a section of men of a certain occupation or government by a manufacturing class or government by aristocracy are all equally obnoxious to Liberalism. No one section of a community, or part of a section should be allowed to assume government. You must not have laws made or administered by any group looking only through their own particular spectacles. Such a government makes for self-centred selfishness.

Liberal administration in the Province has exemplified in every detail the true spirit of Liberalism. For example, Liberal administration is to be honored for elevation of the status of women through the Women's Suffrage law and for their protection through the Dower Laws, for the protection of labor under the Workmen's Compensation for INJURIES ACT, owing to which Act hundreds of injured persons and their families, that otherwise would have been destitute, are now guaranteed a subsistence. The Liberal Administration was responsible for the Minimum Wage Act; sweatshop operation has no place in Liberalism. The Industrial Disputes Act provided a buffer between Capital and Labor and contained a provision for which labor had been groping for years, that is, the recognition of collective bargaining.

Look at the broadening out of the Child Welfare Act, and the Mothers' Allowance provision; all legislation of a highly liberal type tending to raise the human standard in the Province and producing most beneficial social reform. There was one other piece of legislation which I have no doubt if the Liberal Administration had been continuing in power would have been placed upon the Statute Book, and that is the Old Age Pension law and this duty of providing for the old pioneers who bore the burden and the heat of the day will be one of the first a Liberal Government will enter upon.

Some criticism has been directed towards the Farm Loan and Rural Credits legislation, but I say that the legislation was of a highly liberal character for the good of agriculture, enacted at a time when it was very necessary; capital was being withdrawn from the farm, foreign loan companies were sending their money over to Europe. The replacement of funds and control of interest rate was furnished through the legislation which was of immeasurable benefit to our farming interests.

Instead of retrenching or neutralising this legislation the Liberal Party propose to continue same, subject to intelligent control and with strict supervision, and I believe that with proper supervision Farm Loans and Rural Credit System can be carried on without any great risk of loss and to the enormous benefit of the community concerned.

Compare the above legislation, benefiting not the one class only, but all classes in its direct and indirect influence with the lack of progressive legislation by the present administration. Its first move was to restrict progressive legislation. Look at the Public Utilities Act. It was a species of that legislation that was the great desire of Robert M. Lafollett, the leader of the Progressive Movement in the United States. This progressive legislation was introduced in to Manitoba by a Conservative Government but was cramped and restricted

into insignificance by the present “Progressive” Party. As applied to the present administration the word “progressive” is merely an alias.

You will be told that the Liberal Government was extravagant. Considering the times we were in there is in truth no ground for any such allegation. When the Norris Government came into power the Province was in a bad financial condition. There was the Parliament Buildings trouble and these had to be completed. The war was at a critical stage and our soldiers had to be provided for as far as the Province could do so. Was it extravagance that our Government expanded a Million Dollars for taxes on soldiers' lands? That is applied a large sum for an addition to the Ninette Sanatorium for the benefit of returned soldiers? That it lost \$600,000.00 or mere on exchange to pay our debts in New York? That it built the Deaf and Dumb Institute, which provided work for honest labor when work was most needed, even if it cost 20% more that it would have cost during cheaper times? No thoughtful person will overlook the conditions and no patriotic one will find fault with a single one of these and the many other similar war and post-war expenditures the Liberal Government made.

There has been one vague suggestion of dishonesty, and that was made by a prominent ex-member of the present administration who suggested impeachment, but who withdrew the insinuation when he realized the meaning of his words.

The present administration proposes going to the people “on its record” and points with pride to the fact that it has “balanced the Budget” and asserts that the financial condition of the Province of Manitoba has been much improved through its administration.

Balancing of the Budget is supposed to be a sign of progress, and it is supposed to indicate a satisfactory condition throughout the Province. Let us analyse this matter a little: The present Government received a substantial revenue from taxation of Pari-Mutuels, viz: over \$200,000 in one year! Is revenue from such a source an index of healthy progress or of a satisfactory economic condition? The present administration received a most substantial revenue from profits on the sale of liquor, nearly \$700,000 in one year. Is this an indication of economic progress? The present administration also received large revenue from Income Tax, Gasoline Tax, sources of revenue not then available to the Liberal Administration.

But look at the case of the Municipalities, The Municipal Tax Arrears, at the end of 1925, throughout the Province of Manitoba, were over Fourteen Million Dollars, with over Seven Million Dollars additional which had passed

into Tax Sales. The present Administration received through its Supplemental Revenue Levy over \$1,300,000.00 per year from Municipalities which are groaning under their burden, and I say that the existence of these enormous tax arrears does not indicate progress or a healthy economic condition in the country and that when the present administration boasts of balancing the Budget it has done so simply by means of accidental and precarious revenues or by transferring the cost of government to the municipalities. This Supplemental Levy was never intended as a permanent source of revenue for the Provincial Government. It was first established as a means of raising a patriotic fund, and the Liberal Party believes that it should be absolutely wiped out at the earliest possible moment. The Liberal Party believes the profits from liquor sales should as soon as possible be segregated for particular purposes, as it was done in the Province of Saskatchewan, where they use the moneys received from such sources for emergencies such as relieving any distressed areas, fodder loans, grasshopper extermination or capital reduction, but not as a basis of ordinary revenue operations.

There is a great deal to be done in the Province. There are many heavy problems to face and it requires men of vision and courage to deal with them. Take drainage alone. Anyone who has travelled in the Red River Valley, as I have in the last few weeks, will know that here is a problem that will have to be dealt with as a major operation, and the condition cannot be met by ditches along Government roads initiated just on the eve of an election. It seems clear that this drainage problem will have to be dealt with as one problem, and not piecemeal as has been the case. We need taxation relief both for the Municipalities and for the individual. In a country with such immense agriculture, livestock and dairying value we need constant expenditures in aid and encouragement of these basic industries. We need better provision of means to more closely reach our agricultural population with the best forms of example and encouragement. And we must apply ourselves to provide new and increased avenues of labor. The necessity of providing diversified labor is becoming insistent.

Now, what are we going to do about it? Revenues are necessary. That must also be borne in mind. Also, we must have avenues of employment for our population particularly for the young men and young women growing up in our Province, so that they will remain Manitobans and not have to leave the country or go to other parts of Canada where more activity is being shown and where opportunities are more plentiful. It has been demonstrated by our own reliable University staff and by private enterprise that we have in Manitoba,

wonderfully rich mineral resources. The Liberal Party Stands for immediately promoting the development of these resources. No one can now question that we have, in the North and Central Eastern parts of the Province, an assured productive mining area. There is a continuation of the Northern Ontario mineral belt, and private parties have expended thousands of dollars in proving the existence of these minerals in what is known as the Central Manitoba Mining Area.

About twenty-five years ago, Ontario had but little idea of its mineral wealth and it was only when the Liberal party there undertook construction of the T. & N.O. Railway that the extraordinary wealth producing areas of Ontario began to be developed, and today the mines of Cobalt, Porcupine, Kirkland Lake and others are world-famed. Do you know that Ontario is now producing over one-hundred million dollars and finds its way into the pockets of the farmers, the merchants and the mechanics? The benefit is not limited but is widespread over the whole community.

Many people are apt to think that mining is digging in the ground and finding pure gold. This is not the experience in Ontario, nor will it be so in Manitoba. Mineral wealth is extracted in these areas by laborious sifting from large quantities of rock involving heavy expenditure for labor. The margin is small and the mineral wealth of Manitoba can only be reliably extracted if costs can be kept down and this means that good transportation and cheap power must be available to those conducting the operations otherwise the work cannot go on. It is like farming. It goes on a very narrow margin and a transportation and power cost will make the difference between success and failure in one case just as in the other. The Liberal Party stands for the immediate relief of the transportation problem by the construction of an adequate all-weather highway to and through the Central Manitoba Mining Areas. A power line is already constructed at private imitative to serve the area, but that provision must be extended. With these things done that large and promising area should give employment to innumerable young men of Manitoba in technical and mechanical lines and in ordinary labor, and, Winnipeg will then benefit as Toronto benefitted from the opening up of the Cobalt, Porcupine, Kirkland Lake and similar mining areas. Ontario did not wait, but vigorously proceeded with its railway construction policy, and with its policy of providing cheap hydro-electric power, and look at the result.

Quebec did not wait, but Sir Lomer Gouin, years ago, took an active part in providing means of access and power for the opening up and development

of that Province with the result that Québec became conspicuous for its production and for the benefits to the masses of its population.

Our proposed road work should, if at all possible, be started this Fall. Present conditions indicate the serious possibility that large numbers of our people will need work, and I say that neither a man nor a team in Manitoba should be idle when this necessary work is so seriously needed and will be so beneficial, and whether in power or in opposition, the Liberal policy will be to urge for the immediate grappling with this task. Here class government with a limited view-point has failed and will continue to fall.

Then we have another mining area of assured quality in the huge area North of The Pas. Would you believe me that there is demonstrated to be over 16,000,000 tons of copper-zinc ore at the Flin Flon mine, to say nothing of other valuable findings of gold and other minerals in that vicinity? All that is needed in that rich mineral belt are reasonable transportation and power facilities.

These things are such general concern that they are of public importance and will depend on governmental initiative.

Manitoba has wonderful power on the Nelson River, which can be developed and transmitted to the mining area, and Manitoba can build railroads and highways into these areas, just as Ontario and Quebec did for their unopened lands.

This Province has now reached the stage when it must take some risk. Any Government which will not do anything to open up these territories unless it can be absolutely secured for its expenditures, is not government for the development of Manitoba at this time. An illustration of the good that results can be seen in the wonderful new Pulp Mill just completed at Pine Falls. The inauguration of that industry is attributable to a grand old Liberal, the late Mr. J. D. McArthur, who, in spite of set-back and discouragement, pulled doggedly and perseveringly until the industry became established, and I say that that industry is a monument to his vision and perseverance. Already the establishment of that industry furnished winter employment, for two winters, for over one thousand men, on construction alone and will furnish permanent employment for at least five hundred. That industry will mean the bringing in to Manitoba of hundreds of thousands of dollars of foreign money annually, the great percentage of which will be distributed in Manitoba. I am told that we have pulp wood in Manitoba sufficient for many other industries of that kind, and it will be the aim and duty of the Liberal party to encourage the establishment of such industries.

There need be no hindrance to this in the bug-bear of the natural resources question. The Province was extended in 1912. Both Conservative and Liberal leaders have acknowledged the trusteeship of the Dominion in respect of the un-granted land for the people of this Province. There are financial questions involved which are not insurmountable but even if a settlement takes time, we should at once enter on and develop the heritage which, in all but formal legal effect, belongs to us. A bold production policy will provide a momentum that will do more to hasten the formal transfer than any number of Ottawa visits or any amount of tedious correspondence. We have nevertheless immediately to go at this question with a force and determination that will be new to it. But meanwhile as owners-in-fact we would expect to receive the immediate application on our construction obligation of any revenues resulting from our undertakings. The good to our Province and its people resulting from this development is the main thing and to withhold productive action in present conditions is a weak and short-sighted attitude. The realizations of those great assets and their application for the benefit of labor and mechanical skill and the consumption of farm and livestock products are the important considerations. There is in fact no impediment to a productive policy in the hands of an energetic government.

A by-product not to be ignored consists in the facility of approach to newer Manitoba for visitors on inspection and in the opening of tourist areas for the many who would summer in our refreshing North. We have a Muskoka of our own and its possibilities are themselves enough to justify a venture in highways and suitable improvements to provide for and attract this profitable trade.

The burdens of taxation both Provincial and Municipal will be both eased and reduced by prosperity. We have enough confidence in our Province to know that a government actuated by enthusiasm for the Province and courageous enough to put that enthusiasm into realities, can bring about a NEW DAY for Manitoba. It is such a Government that we will provide and we appeal to the people on that basis.

I will have to take later opportunities for discussion of other topics. I will have to stop at this hour. The outstanding issue is the development of the Province and the party that can and will grapple with conditions and advance the Province by strong measures and big steps at this time has a most convincing policy. It is a policy for all the people and it is all the people that we seek to serve.