

## **MANITOBA'S LIBERALS: SLIDING INTO THIRD**

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## Introduction

The essential task in analyzing the history of the Liberal Party of Manitoba is explaining how it became Manitoba's third party. Manitoba's Liberals have deep roots in the province's history, including participation in a government that lasted three and half decades in the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century. Why then have they arrived at their current diminished state: two seats in the legislature, just 12% of the vote in May 22, 2007 provincial election?

When viewed from elsewhere in Canada there is much about Manitoba that suggests one could expect to find a strong Liberal presence here. For example, it has much of the urban, ethnically diverse character traditionally associated with Liberal strength in Ontario. Indeed Nelson Wiseman characterized Manitoba as the "Ontario of the prairies" because the wave of immigrants from Ontario during Manitoba's first few decades had a formative impact on its political culture.<sup>1</sup> However, the Ontario immigrants were British and prosperous, settling the good farmlands in Manitoba's south and west.

Indeed it helps to understand the state of Manitoba's Liberals by comparing their situation to that of the Liberal Party in Ontario. Today Ontario Liberals are in a markedly different position than their Manitoba counterparts. The Ontario party has had considerable electoral success over the past few decades. Since 1987 it has won three decisive majority victories in Ontario elections, and by 2011 will have governed the province for 13 out of 26 years. In Manitoba By contrast since 1969 the Liberals have generally won just a few seats in Manitoba provincial elections – with the notable exception of 1988 when Sharon Carstairs achieved a dramatic breakthrough.

There are two critical junctures, 1932 and 1969, which determined the Manitoba Liberals fate. The more recent is familiar to living Manitobans, but the roots of Liberal decline go back in history to longer term historical developments over several decades. Most Manitobans recognize the importance of 1969, when Ed Schreyer's New Democrats relegated the Liberal Party to third place. There it remained firmly stuck until 1988 when the party rose phoenix-like from its electoral ashes and appeared briefly to be on the path to taking power. That upward bounce turned out to be short-lived, and the party slipped back within three subsequent elections to its diminished post-1969 state, where mere survival seems the most it can expect.

The path the party followed earlier during the twentieth century set the stage for 1969. In 1932, just prior to the election campaign that year and after months of

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<sup>1</sup> Wiseman, Nelson. 2001. "The Pattern of Prairie Politics", in *Party Politics in Canada* (8th edition) eds. Hugh Thorburn and Alan Whitehorn. Toronto: Prentice-Hall. p.352. See also Peterson, T.E.. 1972. "Ethnic and Class Politics in Manitoba". In Robin, Martin ed. *Canadian Provincial Politics: the Party Systems of the Ten Provinces*. Scarborough, Ontario: Prentice-Hall of Canada, p. 70

discussions, the party entered into a coalition with John Bracken's Progressives.<sup>2</sup> Bracken's administration originally came to power in 1922 as the United Farmers of Manitoba (UFM). By joining with the Liberals, Bracken created the Liberal-Progressive coalition that would continue to hold power until 1958.

The long-term consequence of the Liberal Party's 1932 decision to abandon its status as an independent party was the transformation of what had until then been a party with an important urban wing into a rural, conservative political force. The party's subsequent failure in the sixties to transform itself into the urban-friendly party it needed to be led directly to their slide into third place in 1969.

In Manitoba politics it can be easy to confuse nomenclature with ideology. One should not be misled by the term 'progressive'. Widely used as self-description today by American small 'l' liberals, progressivism is perceived as synonymous with liberalism. However, this has been an effort by American liberals to give the philosophy a different brand name. They felt the need to do so because of the success of American conservatives during the Reagan era and after in demonizing their liberal opponents.

The capital 'P' Progressives of Canada started out as agrarian radicals in federal politics but evolved by the 1930s in Manitoba into rural small 'c' fiscal and social conservatives. The Progressive Party disappeared from the Canadian political landscape during this decade. However, in Manitoba the Progressives had an enduring impact on Manitoba's Liberals through their coalition experience. By the fifties the Liberal-Progressive party was clearly a party on the right.

The Liberal Party of Manitoba dropped the Progressive suffix in 1961 but the party's lingering conservatism was too deeply embedded. It would be the key factor in pushing it to the political margins in 1969, setting the stage for long run decline. The party needed to shed its 'Progressive' heritage in the sixties and change with the times but failed to do so. Some in the party recognized its dilemma but failed to alter its course. Although the Manitoba Liberals could not adapt to changing circumstances, the federal Liberal party was able to renew and transform itself sufficiently during the same decade to assure continued political strength and viability into the twenty-first century.

The Manitoba Liberal party today is a small 'l' liberal party similar to the moderate centre-left federal Liberal party. However, this transformation arrived too late to save it from its current third party status. Nevertheless, forty years on it remains an important player in provincial politics, contesting every constituency in the 2007 election while retaining a somewhat distinctive character and outlook.

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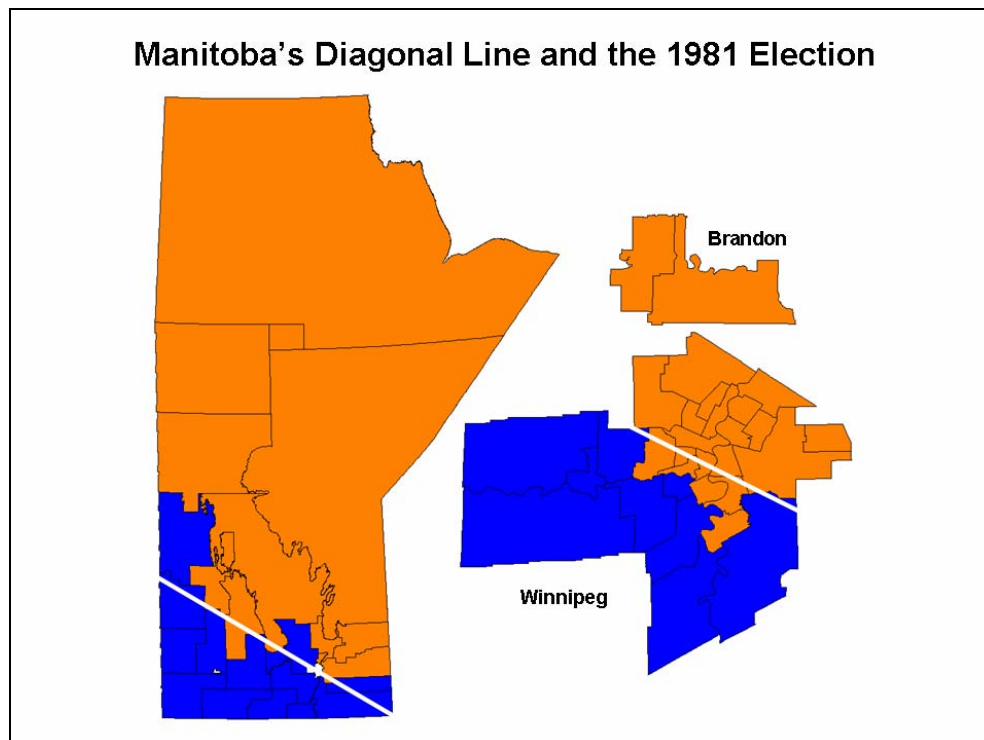
<sup>2</sup> Kendle, John Edward. 1979. John Bracken: a political biography. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, pp. 124, 125

## 1) Geopolitical Context and Historic Roots

The geopolitical context for Manitoba's politics shaped by the province's history was summarized this way following the 1969 election:

... if one had stood on the corner of Portage and Main in downtown Winnipeg and faced north-west, he would have been upon a line that divided the whole province from the Lake of the Woods to the Swan River Valley. To the south and west of this line lay the older more prosperous urban and rural districts tracing their ancestry to Ontario in the 1880's. On the north and east of this dividing line were the non-British and relatively poorer areas....<sup>3</sup>

The diagonal line describes the dominant geographic expression of politics in Manitoba post-1969 – NDP seats north and east, PCs south and west, the few Liberals generally in between. The modified graphic below from Wikipedia illustrates the situation. It is based on the results of the 1981 election, the post-1969 nadir of Manitoba's Liberals, when they won not a single seat. Liberal success, limited though it was, has generally been in seats close to the diagonal line, as befits a centre party.



<sup>3</sup> Peterson, T.E. and Barber, P. 1970. "Some Factors in the 1969 NDP Victory in Manitoba". *Lakehead University Review*, III, 2 (Fall 1970), p.122

Thomas Peterson has summarized this divide in Manitoba's politics as follows:

The development of party politics in Manitoba has been influenced by the interaction of two social and economic classes. One of these has generally been more prosperous and generally more secure. Most of its members were of British origin and many of them originally came from Ontario. For a hundred years this group controlled political and economic power. The second or lower class was more heterogeneous, comprised of several cultural groups including working class immigrants from Britain, various other immigrants of non-British origin and the province's native Indians and Métis.<sup>5</sup>

The Liberal Party, both in the Greenway and Norris administrations in Manitoba's early decades, and as a participant in the Liberal-Progressive coalition, was rooted in the prosperous British group described by Peterson. When the province polarized along class lines in the 1969 election, the Liberals, having been largely displaced by Duff Roblin's Progressive Conservatives in the south and west in 1958, found themselves squeezed into a weak third position. Instead of polarization, the party needed a politics that would permit it to do well on both sides of the diagonal line. They should have become a moderate, centre party that could appeal to both the affluent and the less well off. But this was not to be, and to discover why one must trace the party's evolution from its origins in the 1880s.

The first Manitoba Liberal Premier was Thomas Greenway, who would come to represent "the triumph of Ontario democracy"<sup>6</sup>. With origins in Huron County Ontario, Greenway was a champion of "provincial rights", and would become known best to Canadian history for the Laurier-Greenway compromise that preserved limited minority educational rights following Greenway's elimination of the dual system of French and English language rights in Manitoba that had been part of Manitoba's entry into confederation. Greenway's Liberal Party represented prosperous British Manitoba, and to a modern eye his opposition to federal power and coolness to French rights resembles more the rural, conservative forces of the Reform Party and the Canadian Alliance, than the Liberal Party of Pearson, Trudeau and Chrétien.

At the same time as partisan politics took root in Manitoba, in the United Kingdom the Liberal Party began to evolve into a fully formed political party. British Liberals combined support for free trade with sympathy for the emerging needs of labour and the working class. They championed institutional reforms such as the extension of the franchise and the secret ballot along with social

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<sup>4</sup> Graphic obtained from Manitoba General Election 1981 on Wikipedia:  
<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Image:MB1981.PNG>. Image edited and line added by author

<sup>5</sup> Peterson, *Ethnic and Class Politics in Manitoba*, p. 69

<sup>6</sup> Morton, W. L. (William Lewis). 1967. *Manitoba: a History* (second edition). Toronto: University of Toronto Press, Chapter 9, *The Triumph of Ontario Democracy*, 1881-1888 pp. 199 to 233

reforms such as universal state-provided education. They made an effort to win votes from the working class with changes sought by the labour movement around trade union rights, wages and hours of work.<sup>7</sup> British liberalism integrated promotion of free trade with advocacy of equality of the human condition plus an interest in institutional reforms, reflecting openness to changes that transform antiquated practices to modernize society.

Canada's Liberals have a similar reformist tradition that has been central to the party's appeal for many decades. T.C. Norris, the second Manitoban to become Liberal leader, achieved high office in 1915 by linking himself closely to the burgeoning reform movement in Manitoba in the early part of the twentieth century.

If Greenway represented a right leaning tradition for Manitoba Liberals, T.C. Norris was quite his opposite. Between the Greenway and Norris administrations, the Conservative Party ruled Manitoba for over fifteen years, mostly under the Premiership of Rodmond Roblin. A tumultuous period featuring strong population and economic growth<sup>8</sup>, the era produced social strains that led to the creation of a powerful reform movement. Pressures came from suffragettes pressing for women's votes and a related temperance movement seeking to curb the abuse of alcohol. A growing labour movement wanted to combat the ills of an urbanizing and industrializing society including working conditions, "safety at work, hours of labour and compensation for injury"<sup>9</sup>. Various groups supported direct legislation (the referendum), tax reform, and greater integration of immigrants.

These stresses, in combination with a general revulsion at the legislative building corruption scandal, created a political tsunami that swept the Roblin Conservatives from office in 1915 and installed the reform Liberal administration of T.C. Norris with the second largest electoral majority in Manitoba history<sup>10</sup>. Norris' administration went on to enact over the seven years of its existence a comprehensive reform program, described later as "breathtaking" in scope.<sup>11</sup>

The cost of the Norris government's program plus postwar inflation produced a perceived fiscal crisis for Norris' successor to tackle. As Lionel Orlikow put it, the "achievement of short run objectives and the strain of wartime" brought the

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<sup>7</sup> Cook, Chris. 1998. *A Short History of the Liberal Party*. Fifth Edition. Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire, and London: Macmillan Press, pp. 2-4

<sup>8</sup> Population increased by 81% between 1901 and 1911 and then by another 32% by 1921. See Table A2-14: Population of Canada, by province, census dates, 1851 to 1976, <http://www.statcan.ca/english/freepub/11-516-XIE/sectiona/sectiona.htm>; See also Peterson, *Ethnic and Class Politics in Manitoba*, pp 73-76

<sup>9</sup> Orlikow, Lionel. 1970. "The Reform Movement in Manitoba 1910-1915". In *Historical Essays on the Prairie Provinces*. ed. Donald Swainson. Toronto/Montreal: McClelland and Stewart, p.222

<sup>10</sup> Morton, *Manitoba: A History*, p. 220

<sup>11</sup> Orlikow *The Reform Movement in Manitoba 1910-1915*, p. 228

reform movement to an end by 1922 when the United Farmers of Manitoba swept the Liberals from office.<sup>12</sup>

### Liberals and Progressives – the Path to Coalition

After the UFM victory their leaderless but victorious caucus soon persuaded John Bracken, then President of the Manitoba Agricultural College, to become Premier. Bracken's outlook on politics suited the farmers well: sceptical of party politics Bracken was both cautious and a fiscal conservative. His government also enacted a series of measures we would now characterize as socially conservative, for example, the introduction of film censorship.<sup>13</sup> Over the course of the next five years the government, known first as Brackenites and later as the Progressives, was sufficiently successful to win re-election. The Liberal party fell to third place in the 1927 election. Their relatively weak position and the evolving political situation in Ottawa soon put coalition on the Liberal agenda.<sup>14</sup>

Originally the Progressive Party was the vehicle in federal politics for a prairie farm revolt against a political system that farmers viewed as stacked against them. Western farmers saw the federal parties as captive to the eastern business interests that benefited from the high tariff of the National Policy. Moreover, partisanship itself was equated with the traditional party system.

The Mackenzie King Liberals in Ottawa spent much of the twenties coaxing the Progressives to join with the Liberals. Some such as T.A. Crerar had originally been Liberals who had broken away from the national party over specific issues such as the tariff, and thus eventually found it easy to return to the fold. The precarious character of the King minority governments of the twenties, which depended on Progressive support, meant the federal Liberals had a powerful incentive to encourage Liberal cooperation with the Progressive government in Manitoba. The Manitoba Liberals won just eight of fifty-five seats in 1922 and seven in 1927, but their support was important to the UFM/Progressives who won narrow majorities in those two elections and sought Liberal support to ensure the government's stability.

## **2) The Coalition Years**

The Liberal-Progressive coalition that came together just before the 1932 election was prompted by Bracken's faith in the idea that non-partisan government was essential to achieve the efficiency and economy in government he believed was the right way to respond to the fiscal calamity of the Depression. Non-partisanship had purely political benefits too: coalition helped Bracken

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<sup>12</sup> Orlikow, *The Reform Movement in Manitoba 1910-1915*, p. 229

<sup>13</sup> See Peterson, *Ethnic and Class Politics in Manitoba*, pp. 85, 86

<sup>14</sup> Kendle, *Bracken*, p. 63 p. 63

remain in office by defeating the provincial Conservatives in the 1932 election and proved effective in warding off defeat in later years.<sup>15</sup>

Despite Liberal weakness in the twenties the party might have been able to stage a comeback as a consequence of the politics of the depression – most incumbent governments of the early thirties in Canada, both federal and provincial, did not survive. Instead, by entering into coalition with Bracken in 1932 the Liberals enabled the renamed Liberal-Progressive government to survive, and ultimately to thrive, as the coalition expanded eventually to include the Social Credit, the Conservatives and even, for a brief period during World War II, the CCF.<sup>16</sup>

Bracken's cautious conservative character along with his provincial political success would lead to his selection ten years later as the leader of the federal Conservative Party. Just as he turned the Manitoba Liberals into Liberal-Progressives, so he would insist that the national Conservative Party rename itself Progressive Conservative before he would agree to assume its leadership. More importantly, his administration put the stamp of the Progressives on Manitoba Liberals.

By joining a farmers' movement with its emphasis on fiscal frugality the Manitoba Liberals put themselves on a course that would leave them vulnerable in a modern urban world that wanted a more activist state than their inherited beliefs would permit. When the idea of coalition first arose in the twenties some Liberals believed that it would enable the party to absorb the Progressives.<sup>17</sup> Mackenzie King succeeded in doing so in Ottawa, but in Winnipeg, coalition with the Progressives led the Liberals to ideological domination by their new partners, even if it was the Liberal label that would eventually prevail.

In 1942 Stuart Garson replaced Bracken as Premier in Manitoba when the latter moved on to federal politics. Garson, originally elected in 1927 as a Progressive, made the full transition from Progressive to Liberal when he entered the St. Laurent government in 1948 becoming justice minister.<sup>18</sup>

The last premier in the regime that governed from 1922 to 1958 was Douglas Campbell. In contrast to Garson, Campbell said in an interview after retiring that he always thought of himself as a Progressive rather than a Liberal.<sup>19</sup> Historian John Saywell, in the 1961 edition of *the Canadian Annual Review*, also noted that long-time Liberal Progressive Premier Douglas Campbell "was reported

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid, p. 116

<sup>16</sup> Wiseman, Nelson. 1985. *Social Democracy in Manitoba*. Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, Chapter 2, pp. 24-36

<sup>17</sup> Kendle, *Bracken*, p. 64

<sup>18</sup> Jackson, James A. 1970. *The Centennial History of Manitoba*, Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, pp. 239, 240, and Vajcner, Mark E. Stuart Garson and the Manitoba Progressive Coalition, *Manitoba History*, 26 (Autumn 1993), p.12

<sup>19</sup> Interview with Nelson Wiseman, May, 1977.



several years ago to have said the only three conservatives left were Hoover, Meighen and himself".<sup>20</sup> The Progressive regime, built originally on the United Farmers of Manitoba victory of 1922, drew its support primarily from the farm community, particularly in the Anglo-Saxon southwest but also from the business community of Winnipeg.<sup>21</sup> Ironically, the Liberal Progressive Party would eventually be defeated by the *Progressive Conservative Party*, whose descriptive adjective has the same roots.

The coalition government throughout its reign was always staunchly fiscally conservative. For much of this period among Canada's provinces, "Manitoba had the lowest per capita levels of both public expenditures and public debt."<sup>22</sup> When confronted with the onset of the depression, the Bracken government's instinct was to slash expenditures wherever possible. No detail was too small to escape their attention. Thomas Peterson cites this example:

When the stock market crashed, Premier Bracken was away on a European tour. He returned shortly and instituted a program of paring costs everywhere possible to the extent of cutting the *per capita* daily bread allowance of mental patients from 11.99 to 11.68 oz.<sup>23</sup>

The Bracken government also raised taxes and pressed the federal government for assistance. Indeed the Rowell-Sirois Commission on Dominion-Provincial Relations would be appointed partly in response to Bracken's initiatives and pressure.<sup>24</sup> Although one could justify retrenchment during the lean years of the depression, Bracken's successors, particularly Douglas Campbell, failed to recognize the changed circumstances after the war. The government was proud of its investments in rural electrification, which appealed strongly to its rural constituency,<sup>25</sup> although even these efforts followed by a decade rural electrification in the United States under the New Deal.<sup>26</sup> Moreover, the coalition failed to invest adequately in many other public services and infrastructure such as education and highways. An account of the 1949 legislative session, when the CCF led the opposition, observed the following:

The low level of provincial government services was the focus of the opposition attack. The conditions and teaching standards in Manitoba schools, the poor quality of the province's roads and limited health care

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<sup>20</sup> Saywell, John. The Provinces: Manitoba. In *Canadian Annual Review of Politics and Public Affairs*, 1961. ed. John Saywell. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, p. 60

<sup>21</sup> Kendle, *Bracken*, p. 41

<sup>22</sup> Chorney, Harold and Hansen, Phillip. 1992. *Toward a Humanist Political Economy*. Montreal: Black Rose Books, p. 46

<sup>23</sup> Peterson, *Ethnic and Class Politics in Manitoba*, p. 89

<sup>24</sup> See Kendle, *Bracken*, Chapter 10, Manitoba's Case, pp. 147-163

<sup>25</sup> Gerrard, Jon. 2006. *Battling for a Better Manitoba: A History of the Provincial Liberal Party*. Winnipeg, Heartland Associates, p. 111

<sup>26</sup> For an account of rural electrification in the hill country of Texas, the result of efforts by Lyndon Johnson, then a member of the U.S. House of Representatives, see Robert Caro, *The Years of Lyndon Johnson, The Path to Power*, Chapters 27 and 28 pp. 502-528

facilities were the issues constantly raised. The Government response was always the same: that the administration was spending the maximum possible consistent with its policy of rapid retirement of the provincial debt.<sup>27</sup>

In 1949 the Progressive Conservatives were still a part of the Campbell government. This broader coalition ultimately broke up in 1950 when they left to become the official opposition. The Progressive Conservatives did so as a consequence of the prodding of Duff Roblin who entered politics because of frustrations he felt with the performance of the coalition in the postwar period.

Elected to the legislature in 1949, Roblin's view was that the days of war and depression were over and it was time for the province to be more expansive. In his memoirs he declared: "We could see better days ahead and wanted to be part of it. Manitoba was ready to move. The coalition responded but poorly, to the hopes of the public."<sup>28</sup> Despite the word 'Conservative' in its name, Roblin viewed his party as a centre force in provincial politics falling between "the far-right views of the Liberal-Progressive government and muted radicalism of the minority CCF"<sup>29</sup>.

Perhaps the single most important event in the province's postwar history was the 1950 Winnipeg flood. The coalition government's weak response provoked a negative reaction:

Even the Winnipeg Free Press, which consistently supported coalition, declared that the mishandling of the flood crisis demonstrated the need for an alternative to the government in power. Premier Campbell compounded his problem when he balked at paying compensation for flood damage once the rivers were within their banks. By the time the premier gave in on the question Roblin and CCF leader Lloyd Stinson had been very effective in using the issue against the government.<sup>30</sup>

The government requested engineering and flood control studies but deferred any action on flood prevention pending the results from a commission appointed to investigate the cost benefit ratio of the proposed works. This tepid response meant flood control would be a major Conservative plank in 1958. The slow response to the flood crisis symbolized Campbell's approach to governance, a tight-fisted approach extending to all government programs. Manitoba had the lowest expenditures, measured as a percentage of personal income, of any province in Canada, even though it had the revenue to spend more:

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<sup>27</sup> McCormick, David "The Dissolution of the Coalition: Roblin's Rise to Leadership". *Historical and Scientific Society of Manitoba Transactions*, Series III, Number 28, 1971-72: p. 37

<sup>28</sup> Roblin, Duff. 1999. *Speaking for Myself*. Winnipeg: Great Plains Publications, p. 53

<sup>29</sup> Roblin, *Speaking for Myself*, p. 77

<sup>30</sup> McCormick, *Dissolution of the Coalition*, p. 38

From 1950 to 1957 the government ran substantial surplus budgets every year but one; its net revenues exceeding expenditures for the period by \$48.3 million – some 11% of total net expenditures for the period.<sup>31</sup>

This was also inconsistent with the Keynesian policy approaches then emerging in Ottawa.<sup>32</sup>

### **3) Liberals in the Sixties: the Failure to Renew**

In Canada the fifties brought significant political change to both Canada and Manitoba. Two long running Liberal dynasties crashed in the latter part of the decade. The King-St. Laurent era ended in 1957 when the minority government of John Diefenbaker took office in Ottawa. The defeat of the federal Liberals was not lamented by Campbell who commented (in an apparent reference to 1922), “I never did run as a Liberal. I helped turn the Liberals out of office.”<sup>33</sup>

The federal Liberals’ hopes of a quick return to office were crushed in Diefenbaker’s landslide victory in the March 31, 1958 general election. The political drama in Ottawa was soon echoed by developments in Manitoba. The Liberal-Progressives lost office to Duff Roblin’s Progressive Conservatives less than three months later. The federal pattern repeated itself as Roblin’s minority was turned into a majority triumph the following year. The Roblin party held the political centre, fighting “one campaign against the Liberals on the right, strange as it may seem, and another against the CCF on the left in the city.”<sup>34</sup>

For their part the federal Liberals rebounded by 1963 and formed the federal government for 33 of the following 45 years while Manitoba Liberals experienced continuing futility. Comparing the response of Manitoba Liberals to their federal counterparts following election losses less than three months apart helps explain why the fates of the two Liberal parties diverged so completely.

After their devastating loss, the federal Liberals recognized they needed to renew themselves. The organizational drive of cell 13 and the Walter Gordon Toronto Liberals are now part of Liberal mythology.<sup>35</sup> A key aspect of this process of renewal was a rethinking of the cautious business Liberalism of St. Laurent and C.D. Howe through gatherings such as the Kingston thinker’s conference in September 1960 and a policy convention called the National Liberal Rally. As Christina McCall Newman put it:

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<sup>31</sup> Chorney, Harold. 1970. “The Political Economy of Provincial Economic Development Policy 1950-1970”. Master’s Thesis. University of Manitoba, p. 37

<sup>32</sup> Lewis, Timothy. 2003. *In the Long Run We’re All Dead: The Canadian Turn to Fiscal Restraint*. Vancouver: UBC Press, pp. 38-41

<sup>33</sup> Winnipeg Free Press, June 28, 1957 cited in Smith, David E. 1981. *The regional decline of a national party: Liberals on the Prairies*. Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 1981, p. 69

<sup>34</sup> Roblin, *Speaking for Myself*, p. 86

<sup>35</sup> McCall-Newman, Christina. 1982. *Grits: An Intimate Portrait of the Liberal Party*. Toronto: Macmillan of Canada, pp. 14-19

The ideas discussed at both conventions were wide-ranging, as befitted such loosely constituted ideological groupings, but the overwhelming impression that emerged for public consumption was one of newness, vitality, and progressivism.<sup>36</sup>

Pearson also recruited a Manitoban in 1959 as part of this renewal. Tom Kent, a recent British immigrant, was editor of the Winnipeg Free Press at the time. Kent strongly advocated fundamental policy renewal. In his autobiography *A Public Purpose*, he quotes from a letter he wrote in 1959 to British Liberal leader Jo Grimond about Canada's Liberals:

In Canada it is necessary to explain why the Liberal Party today, without being any less concerned about freedom, would extend public expenditures on education, health (including medical insurance and sickness benefits), housing and urban renewal. This has to be combined with a national policy for securing more equality among our regions.... Primarily, I would say that Liberals need to shift the emphasis of their thinking a good many notches (in our case) towards egalitarianism.<sup>37</sup>

Here one can see the reforming impulses of the Pearsonian era that would result in fundamental changes to the welfare state such as universal public health care and the Canada Pension Plan, along with many other reforms. Kent would play a key role as a policy advisor in the Pearson PMO through all of this.

While some Winnipeg Liberals early on saw the need for rebuilding and renewal<sup>38</sup>, the post-1959 history of the Manitoba Liberal Party stands in marked contrast to the federal experience. The party organization had languished in the long years of the coalition.<sup>39</sup> It needed to revitalize and renew.

The Roblin government had demonstrated a reforming zeal, undertaking investments in infrastructure such as highways as well as proceeding, over considerable Liberal opposition in the legislature, with construction of the Red River Floodway.<sup>40</sup> There were also reforms to education and municipal government. The contrast with the provincial Liberals was striking. Historian W.L. Morton remarked:

Here was the real clash with the policy of the administration it had displaced: the core of Campbell's policy was to expand expenditure as

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<sup>36</sup> McCall-Newman, *Grits*, p.36

<sup>37</sup> Kent, Tom. 1988. *A Public Purpose*. Kingston and Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, pp. 76-77

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 45, 46

<sup>39</sup> Smith, *Liberals on the Prairies*, p. 69

<sup>40</sup> Liberal Elman Guttormson in opposing the floodway complained that "All over the province people were becoming 'tax poor'. Winnipeg Free Press, March 14, 1961. See also Roblin, *Speaking for Myself*, Chapter Nine, Duff's Ditch, pp. 166-173

revenues allowed, but to abstain rigidly from all borrowing, provincial and municipal.<sup>41</sup>

The Liberal-Progressive Party that emerged from decades of coalition rule continued into the early sixties as a small 'c' conservative party. Its outlook accurately reflected its rural, conservative base, but would be an obstacle to political success in the sixties because the City of Winnipeg was emerging to become the dominant geographic and demographic fact in provincial politics.

After his defeat in 1958 Douglas Campbell carried on as party leader for a further two years, losing the 1959 general election. Despite stepping down as leader in 1961 he remained the MLA for Lakeside constituency until 1969, and continued to exercise influence within the caucus and party. As the 1961 leadership and policy convention to replace him got underway, the Liberals found themselves being lectured by the pro-Roblin Winnipeg Tribune who editorialized that Manitobans would "no longer vote for the old 1922 platform. They will no longer buy the story that Manitoba can no longer afford a reasonable level of public services. Policies of retreat and retrenchment will no longer win elections in Manitoba."<sup>42</sup>

While the Manitoba Liberals selected Gil Molgat as their new leader in 1961 and dropped the name Progressive, it was about as much renewal as was accomplished. Molgat supporters were reported as believing "a swing to the left was in the cards".<sup>43</sup> However, in a convention that needed to move the party towards the centre and left, the Liberals opted for a keynote guest speaker, the outspoken conservative Saskatchewan Liberal Leader Ross Thatcher, who devoted his speech to excoriating the policies of the "New Party", the fledgling organization shortly to become the NDP.<sup>44</sup>

As early as 1959, responding to Roblin's successful occupation of the centre, the Liberals had made an effort to capture lost ground. Their platform that year edged towards the centre including a pledge to increase the minimum wage, more road building, and a medical benefit plan that it cautioned nonetheless would not be "state medicine". However, they adhered to their traditional fiscal approach, calling for "a sane, practical policy of paying for current expenditures out of current revenues and borrowing for capital expenditures on a sound repayable basis, thus avoiding tax increases and a sales tax."<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> Morton, *Manitoba: A History*, p. 485

<sup>42</sup> Winnipeg Tribune, April 19, 1961, p.6

<sup>43</sup> Winnipeg Tribune, April 20, 1961

<sup>44</sup> Ibid

<sup>45</sup> J.F. O'Sullivan, Memo to Liberal Candidates April 30, 1959 in Appendix, Gerrard, *Battling for a Better Manitoba*, p. 200

Molgat made an effort “to emphasize social issues but there remained some stubborn resistance in the party.”<sup>46</sup> However, he recognized that the Roblin Conservatives had outflanked the Liberals, noting “the problem was that Roblin has moved into traditional Liberal territory, and it was difficult to be more liberal than Roblin.”<sup>47</sup>

The result was a decade of ideological ambiguity. Molgat considered himself a Pearsonian Liberal.<sup>48</sup> However, his attempts to move the party to the centre were frustrated by a caucus that included not just Douglas Campbell but other rural members like him, some first elected in the fifties before Roblin changed the tenor of Manitoba politics. This forced the party to bridge the differences within. During the 1966 election, for example, Liberals campaigned under the slogan: “The Job to be Done Can Be Done”.

It is instructive to review the accounts of government and politics in Manitoba found in the *Canadian Annual Review*<sup>49</sup> covering this period. Tart comments by authors Thomas Peterson, Murray Donnelly and John Saywell reflect the dilapidated state of Manitoba Liberalism during the sixties. John Saywell commented on the events of 1961:

The Liberal Progressive Party led by D.L. Campbell continued the schizophrenic behaviour that had characterized it for some years. The most visible division came on April 14 when the members split 6-5 on a CCF housing motion. It was this left-right division on policy and the related replacement of Mr. Campbell by a younger man that dominated the April 19-21 Liberal convention in Winnipeg.<sup>50</sup>

The party’s choice of Molgat meant in Saywell’s words: “it had at least moved back to the centre of the road.” In 1965 Donnelly said of the Liberals that they “floundered in a mire of ineffective scandal mongering.”<sup>51</sup> The following year Peterson observed dryly that Molgat’s critique of the 1966 Throne Speech could be characterized by the comment “Why wasn’t more of this done earlier?”<sup>52</sup>

One episode illustrated that there was some recognition within the Liberal Party of the failure to renew. Calling themselves the “ginger group” (after a breakaway faction of the Progressive Party in the House of Commons in 1924) eight urban Liberal candidates articulated an urban reform platform during the 1966 provincial election as an effort to create a more urban presence in a party defined

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<sup>46</sup> Lang, Timothy. 1991. “Liberals in Manitoba: Provincial Decline and Resurgence. Master’s Thesis. University of Manitoba, pp. 42, 43. Quote is from interview with thesis author October 29, 1990

<sup>47</sup> Ibid

<sup>48</sup> Ibid, p. 51

<sup>49</sup> *Canadian Annual Review of Public Affairs*, John Saywell (ed.) Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1961-1969

<sup>50</sup> Saywell, John, *Canadian Annual Review*, 1961 p. 60

<sup>51</sup> Donnelly, *Canadian Annual Review, Manitoba*, 1965, p. 160

<sup>52</sup> Peterson, *Canadian Annual Review, Manitoba*, 1966, p. 131

by its rural roots. More broadly however, it reflected a growing dissatisfaction with the state of the Manitoba Liberal Party.

Although publicly the “ginger group” was said to have “the blessing of Molgat”<sup>53</sup> it led to the public impression, as the Winnipeg Tribune put it, that “it would leave the Liberal party... with two distinct factions: one urban and one rural.”<sup>54</sup> In the end all eight members of the “ginger group” were defeated in the June 23, 1966 election. Molgat acknowledged the NDP hurt the Liberals “substantially” in the election.<sup>55</sup>

Lloyd Axworthy, a key founder of the “ginger group” agreed there was “a general trend to the NDP,” which he thought unjustified: “there’s no reason why there should be. Our policies are just as good but perhaps we (the ginger group) got into the race a little late.”<sup>56</sup> Another defeated “ginger group” candidate admitted the existence of rural-urban divisions but blamed the problem on the party’s leadership.<sup>57</sup>

The failed urban results meant the Liberal caucus from 1958 to 1969 had a number of members who were holdovers from the coalition era, almost all representing rural constituencies. Several still in place after 1966 would finally lose in 1969. After the 1966 election the Manitoba Progressive Conservatives, moved decisively to the right. In 1967 they chose a rural conservative, Walter Weir, to replace Roblin. This shift in orientation on the part of the Progressive Conservatives subsequently extinguished the rural, conservative wing of the Liberal party for good.

Today Winnipeg is fairly represented in the legislature with thirty-one out of the province’s fifty-seven seats. However, for much of the twentieth century this was not the case. In 1914 despite having one third of the population the city was represented in the legislature by just six members out of forty-nine.<sup>58</sup> By the time Roblin came to power in 1958 Winnipeg still had just twenty of fifty-seven – 35% of the members in the legislature but 48% of the province’s population.<sup>59</sup> However, one institutional reform put in place by the Campbell government contributed to the Liberals’ undoing. Manitoba was the first Canadian province to appoint an independent commission to revise constituency boundaries. The initial redistribution favoured rural areas by a statutory 7:4 ratio, but the second exercise, completed in 1968, allowed only a twenty-five percent tolerance in

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<sup>53</sup> Winnipeg Free Press, May 5, 1966

<sup>54</sup> Winnipeg Tribune, June 21, 1966

<sup>55</sup> Winnipeg Free Press, June 24, 1966

<sup>56</sup> Ibid

<sup>57</sup> Winnipeg Tribune, June 24, 1966

<sup>58</sup> Three other constituencies might now be considered part of the city. Orlikow, *The Reform Movement in Manitoba 1910-1915*, p 226

<sup>59</sup> Statistics Canada. *Canada Year Book 1957-58*.

<http://www66.statcan.gc.ca/cdm4/document.php?CISOROOT=/eng&CISOPTR=3386&REC=19>  
[Accessed August 26, 2008], pp. 124, 125

riding size, and this narrowed the rural advantage considerably.<sup>60</sup> Combined with demographic change, this meant that by 1969 close to half of all ridings were in Winnipeg.

Gil Molgat resigned his leadership in early 1969 following four by-election losses in which the Liberal vote slumped badly. The growing unpopularity of the federal Liberals was perceived to be a key factor. Molgat cited a backlash against Trudeau's language policies, an anti-French public mood, and his own French-Canadian ancestry, as reasons why he could no longer be party leader. In the end, Molgat's efforts to move the party from the right to the centre encountered too much resistance from a party where the centre of gravity was too far to the right. The Liberal brand was at best indistinct as the sixties drew to a close. Not surprisingly the urban and rural wings of the party clashed when the leadership of the party was at stake.

A leadership convention was called for early May. R.W. "Bobby" Bend, a former cabinet member in Campbell era who described himself as "right of centre", was selected as leader over urbanites Duncan Edmonds and Bernie Wolfe. Despite Bend's success, the mood in the convention was bleak:

Beneath the bubbling optimism of the Liberal leadership convention is a disquieting undercurrent of discontent.

Top Liberals are suggesting that the wrong choice at the ballot box today spells the end of Manitoba Liberalism and others say privately any choice is the beginning of the end.

A party member of long standing said bluntly in the third floor bar at the Winnipeg auditorium that if the predicted favourite came out on top his party card was as good as burned.<sup>61</sup>

In choosing Bend the party rejected two urban candidates and made a choice that symbolized and confirmed the absence of renewal after 1958. Perhaps unduly impressed by the by-election results, they misread the public mood. They chose a leader who resembled in background and outlook Premier Walter Weir. As Nelson Wiseman notes in his history of the Manitoba CCF-NDP, *Social Democracy in Manitoba*:

In effect the Liberals chose a fiscal conservative to fight another fiscal conservative (Weir). The shift of both the older parties to the right permitted the NDP to make an effective appeal to Liberal and Conservative supporters who considered themselves progressives and reformers.<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>60</sup> Peterson and Barber, *Some Factors in the 1969 NDP Victory in Manitoba*, pp. 124, 125

<sup>61</sup> Winnipeg Free Press, May 10, 1969, p. 1

<sup>62</sup> Wiseman, *Social Democracy in Manitoba*, p. 120



Many younger urban Liberals found Ed Schreyer's moderately left of centre image sufficiently attractive that the outcome of the leadership contest caused many to defect from the Liberals to the NDP during the 1969 campaign, some declaring as they did so that they saw Schreyer's NDP as representing true small 'l' liberalism.<sup>63</sup> The PCs rightward shift consolidated their support throughout rural Manitoba at the expense of Liberals. Just three Liberals were re-elected in 1969 in rural Manitoba including Molgat (whereas in 1966 twelve were elected). By 1973 there were none.

It was the 1969 election that drew the province's diagonal line as Manitoba politics polarized along the southeast to northwest ethnic-economic axis that separates the more British, prosperous southwest from the poorer, more ethnically diverse, north and east. The Liberals represented neither class and were squeezed out. In contrast one finds Liberals in Ontario representing constituencies of both the highly affluent and the very poor.<sup>64</sup> When the Manitoba Liberals did achieve some success in the 1988 election, they successfully straddled Manitoba's diagonal line.

Part of the Manitoba Liberals' failure to renew, as the "ginger group" recognized, was its inability to see the political implications of demographic change. Following World War II citizens living on Canada's farms migrated in large numbers to cities including Winnipeg. The Liberal-Progressive Party of Manitoba was, because of its roots in the United Farmers of Manitoba, an agrarian party. There were parallels to its experience among the agrarian parties in Western Europe. As Arend Lijphart notes:

Where agrarian parties are found, mainly in Nordic countries, they have tended to become less exclusively rural and to appeal to urban electorates too, prompted by the decline in rural population. A clear sign of this shift is that the Swedish, Norwegian, and Finnish agrarian parties all changed their names to "Center Party" between 1957 and 1965.<sup>65</sup>

In Manitoba the Liberals implicitly acknowledged rural decline when they dropped the Progressive prefix in 1961. However, the European parties described in Lijphart all had the advantage of competing in electoral systems based on proportional representation. No such advantage helped sustain Manitoba's Liberals as the province became more urban.

#### 4) Disintegration in the Seventies

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<sup>63</sup> Ibid, pp. 120, 121

<sup>64</sup> For example, in the 2006 election the federal Liberals won the Ontario constituencies of Don Valley West and Davenport. The latter has an average family income of \$53,687 while the former has an average of \$136,032, compared to the Ontario average of \$73,849 Statistics Canada. 2001. Federal Electoral District Profile (2003 Representation Order) Data for Don Valley West and Davenport:

<http://www12.statcan.ca/english/census01/products/standard/fedprofile/selectFED.cfm?R=FED03>  
[Accessed August 31, 2008]

<sup>65</sup> Lijphart, Arend. 1984. *Democracies: Patterns of Majoritarian and Consensus Government in Twenty-One Countries*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, p. 136

In a first past the post electoral system there is a world of difference between second place and third, especially if one of the two major parties overlaps ideologically with the party in third place. In this context the third party can vault itself into major party status only when at least one of their two major opponents suffers a catastrophic political loss sufficient to permit a breakthrough. Initial success must subsequently be consolidated to endure. This is what happened in 1969 for the NDP, which went on to win two critical by-elections in 1971 and then the 1973 general election. The problem for the Liberals in the years that followed was finding an opportunity comparable to the one seized that year by Ed Schreyer and the NDP.

"I took the party to the right, Charlie (Charles Huband, Manitoba Liberal Leader 1975 to 1978) took it to the left and neither strategy worked."<sup>66</sup> This comment by I.H. Asper, the Winnipeg tax lawyer who replaced Bobby Bend as Liberal leader in 1970 after the electoral debacle of 1969, summarizes the eroding fortunes of the Liberals through the seventies. The party had lost members and support to the NDP on their left, especially in the City of Winnipeg. Asper, chosen at a convention in October 1970, was urban, but ideologically on the right.

Asper had previously published a book attacking a federal Liberal tax reform white paper. In a leadership campaign speech he denounced the white paper for "its punitive capital gains taxes, its confiscatory estate taxes and its crushing taxes on farmers and small business men, and its incentive-destroying taxes on those wage earners who rise to the middle-income level."<sup>67</sup> Not surprisingly, Asper briefly flirted with the idea of coalition with the Progressive Conservatives just after becoming leader, but was dissuaded by opposition from within the party.<sup>68</sup>

The party won five seats in 1969 and repeated this performance in 1973 when as leader Asper campaigned under the slogan "Self Control or State Control." The party finally moved left when it selected Charles Huband as its leader in 1975. Huband set out to take support from the NDP declaring that, for the Liberals, the chances of "surviving, hinge upon the Liberal party's ability to win votes from the New Democratic Party."<sup>69</sup> By the mid-seventies the effort to recapture the centre proved futile. Huband was never able to secure a seat in the legislature, being defeated in a by-election and then in the 1977 general election when the Liberal Party was reduced to a single member, Lloyd Axworthy, who represented the urban riding of Fort Rouge. Within two years Mr. Axworthy departed the legislature to enter federal politics while Mr. Huband resigned the leadership and abandoned political life.

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<sup>66</sup> Former Manitoba Liberal Leader Izzy Asper in conversation with the author the day after the October 11, 1977 provincial election.

<sup>67</sup> Quoted by Peterson, *Canadian Annual Review, Manitoba*, 1970, p. 261

<sup>68</sup> Lang, *Liberals in Manitoba: Provincial Decline and Resurgence*, p. 60

<sup>69</sup> Winnipeg Free Press, June 21, 1977 cited in *Ibid*, p. 65.

## Provincial Liberals and Federal Liberals

The provincial Liberals survived as a party through the seventies and into the eighties in part because the federal wing of the party was in power during most of this period. It was a source of strength both in terms of inspiration and in the less venerable aspects of politics – honours and appointments to boards and commissions, to the Senate, and to political jobs.

In a preface to a history of the Manitoba Liberals written by the current Manitoba leader Jon Gerrard, Lloyd Axworthy writes this candid assessment of the impact of the federal Liberals in Manitoba:

In a small province there is only a limited quantum of men and women who will run for office, contribute to a campaign, and become poll workers. That quantum gets divided amongst various parties and is further subdivided between federal and provincial wings – though there are many who do double duty. In the case of the Manitoba Liberals, the attraction of becoming a “fed”, with the possibility of holding office, achieving policy results, and somewhat more crassly, gaining appointments, honours and acknowledgement, often works to the disadvantage of the provincial party. I know whereof I speak.<sup>70</sup>

Apart from the pull of the federal party, it was simultaneously a source of weakness. Being branded with the same name as the federal party, which controlled the government in Ottawa most years following 1969 often proved to be a liability. Accounts of the Manitoba Liberals during these years cite a number of specific federal actions that had political costs for the provincial party. Examples included:

- In 1969 federal Liberal popularity dropped all over western Canada as a consequence of the federal government’s new bilingualism policies and incidents such as the Prime Minister appearing indifferent to western agriculture when media reports quoted him as at a Winnipeg fund raiser in December 1968 saying, “Well, why should I sell the Canadian farmers' wheat?” (His remarks were taken out of context as he was actually justifying the role of government in selling wheat.)<sup>71</sup> These developments hurt Liberal prospects in the by-elections held early in 1969 that led to the resignation of Gil Molgat.<sup>72</sup>
- In 1973 the Liberals’ provincial election campaign was hurt by a federal budget that raised taxes.<sup>73</sup>

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<sup>70</sup> Axworthy, Lloyd, Preface to Gerrard, *Battling for a Better Manitoba*, pp. 8,9

<sup>71</sup> Westell, Anthony. 1972. *Paradox: Trudeau as Prime Minister*. Scarborough, Ontario: Prentice-Hall, p. 67

<sup>72</sup> Lang, *Liberals in Manitoba: Provincial Decline and Resurgence*, p. 48

<sup>73</sup> Axworthy in Gerrard, Preface, *Battling for a Better Manitoba*, p. 8

- In 1975 an increase in the federal gas tax days before a by-election in Crescentwood contributed to the defeat of Charles Huband.<sup>74</sup>
- The introduction of federal gun control legislation during the 1995 Manitoba election had an adverse impact on the Liberals' campaign.<sup>75</sup>

Both the federal and provincial Liberals reached a low point in western Canada in the late seventies. By the end of 1979 there was just one elected provincial Liberal in the west, June Westbury, who was elected in a by-election to replace Axworthy in the Manitoba legislature after he was elected to the House of Commons in the 1979 election.<sup>76</sup> After the 1980 federal election there were just two elected Liberals at the federal level from western Canada, both from Manitoba.<sup>77</sup> One was Lloyd Axworthy who entered the Trudeau cabinet as Minister of Employment and Immigration.

The provincial Liberal leadership remained empty for over two years following Huband's departure. In 1980 the provincial leadership was filled by a Lloyd Axworthy staffer, Doug Lauchlan. More recently Manitoba's Liberals have created a separate federal party structure as a consequence of the Doer government's reforms to election finance law.<sup>78</sup> Despite the formal separation, the personnel involved in the two organizations are largely interchangeable.

Lauchlan led the party in the 1981 provincial election as it reached its post-1969 nadir when not a single member was elected and the party's share of the popular vote dropped to 6.7%. It is clear that Liberal voters defected in the city to the NDP, while the residual rural Liberals still around from the Campbell era went to the Progressive Conservatives. NDP support in 1981 rose to 47%, almost nine percentage points greater than the party had secured a dozen years earlier in 1969. In losing the Progressive Conservatives obtained 44%, about eight points more than in 1969.

## 5) From the Ashes – the Carstairs Insurgency

Sharon Carstairs was raised in a Nova Scotia family steeped in Liberal politics. Her father, Harold Connelly, was a member of the Nova Scotia legislature and served briefly as Premier before being appointed to the Canadian Senate.<sup>79</sup> Carstairs inherited his interest in politics, becoming a Liberal activist. When she

<sup>74</sup> Gerrard, *Battling for a Better Manitoba*, p. 141

<sup>75</sup> Three rural Manitoba Members of Parliament actually voted against the legislation. Drummond, Robert Andrew. 1996. "Liberal Party organization and Manitoba's 1995 provincial election". Master's Thesis. University of Manitoba, pp. 66, 67

<sup>76</sup> Lang, *Liberals in Manitoba: Provincial Decline and Resurgence*, p 71

<sup>77</sup> Penniman, Howard ed. *Canada at the Polls, 1979 and 1980*. Washington and London: American Enterprise Institute for Public Policy Research, p. 405

<sup>78</sup> Stewart, David and Wesley, Jared. "Electoral Financing Reform in Manitoba: Advantage Doer?" Paper for Presentation at the Conference on Party and Election Finance: Consequences for Democracy, p. 13

<sup>79</sup> Carstairs, Sharon. 1993. *Not One of the Boys*. Toronto: Macmillan, p. 4

moved to Alberta in the sixties and later on to Manitoba in 1977, it was natural to involve herself with the Liberal Party in both provincial and federal politics. While the provincial scene in both provinces was bleak for the Liberals, the federal Liberals were enjoying their sixteen years in power in Ottawa (save for the brief Joe Clark interregnum). Carstairs was a strongly committed Trudeau Liberal who as she put, “had fought the battles for bilingualism in Alberta and had the flat nose – from doors being slammed in my face – to prove it.”<sup>80</sup> Having demonstrated her willingness to embrace seemingly hopeless political struggles, Carstairs assumed the leadership of the Manitoba Liberals in early 1984 at a time when party fortunes, at an all time low, were about to rebound. In a meaningful coincidence the convention commenced just three days after Pierre Trudeau announced his resignation. The transition from Liberals to Conservatives in Ottawa later that year meant that instead of an unpopular federal Liberal government weighing on the popularity of the provincial wing, it would soon be the provincial Tories who would have to cope with unpopular federal relations. When the Mulroney government awarded a maintenance contract for the CF-18 fighter jet to Canadair of Montreal rather than to a bid judged technically superior from Winnipeg’s Bristol Aerospace, the scandal hurt the Manitoba Conservatives.<sup>81</sup>

It is evident from the account in her autobiography that the party’s revival over the next four years owed a great deal to Carstairs’ prodigious energy.<sup>82</sup> Her efforts were successful enough that by 1986 the party was able to run a full slate of candidates for the first time since 1969. While she was the only candidate to secure a seat, the party more than doubled its vote share to 14%. The NDP won the election by a narrower than anticipated margin, with some New Democrats blaming their shortfall on the Liberal surge in support.<sup>83</sup> Party membership, which had dropped below 2000 in 1981 reached 3717.<sup>84</sup>

The narrowness of the NDP win permitted the single vote of backbencher Jim Walding to bring down the government on its budget in 1988, triggering the campaign that made Sharon Carstairs Leader of the Opposition in the Manitoba legislature in the wake of the April 25 election.

Many factors contributed to the Liberal success. Of critical importance were some unpopular actions by the NDP government of Premier Howard Pawley, in particular the announcement of large increases in public auto insurance rates. The government’s doomed budget had also proposed tax hikes on tobacco, alcohol and some fuels.<sup>85</sup> Pawley took the unprecedented step of resigning as

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<sup>80</sup> Ibid, p. 63

<sup>81</sup> Harrison, Trevor. 1995. *Of Passionate Intensity: Right-Wing Populism and the Reform Party of Canada*. Toronto, Buffalo and London: University of Toronto Press, p. 103

<sup>82</sup> Carstairs, Sharon. *Not One of the Boys*, Chapter Nine, A Provincial Liberal Party is Rebuilt, pp. 82-96

<sup>83</sup> Lang, *Liberals in Manitoba: Provincial Decline and Resurgence*, p. 82

<sup>84</sup> Ibid, p. 79

<sup>85</sup> Geoffrey Lambert, *Canadian Annual Review, Manitoba*, 1988, p. 253

party leader at the same time as the election was called, being replaced by Gary Doer at a convention held mid-campaign.

One campaign issue that assumed importance because of Sharon Carstairs was the Meech Lake Accord. Strongly opposed to the Accord, she made it a central campaign theme even if some observers felt it wasn't of great interest to the electorate.<sup>86</sup> Seen as "a fresh face" she gained exceptional popularity during the campaign.<sup>87</sup> The 1988 election had a much stronger turnout than 1986 due in part to Carstairs appeal.<sup>88</sup>

When the votes were counted the Liberals had won twenty seats with 35.5% of the popular vote. They finished a strong second to the Progressive Conservatives of Gary Filmon, but benefited as well from Tory weakness. Filmon formed a minority government despite winning a smaller share of the vote in 1988 than in 1986.<sup>89</sup> For her part, Sharon Carstairs declared at her press conference the next day: "Meech Lake is dead!" She believed that it had been a key to her success and that public opinion in Manitoba would not now let it proceed.<sup>90</sup>

The 1988 Manitoba election produced highly contrasting results in Winnipeg and elsewhere. In the city, the Liberals won a landslide victory, gaining 42% of the popular vote while winning nineteen of twenty-nine constituencies. But outside Winnipeg it was the Conservatives who won most rural seats, while the NDP swept the northern constituencies.

### 1988 Provincial Election Vote Share by Region

	NDP	PC	Liberal
Winnipeg	23.0%	33.2%	42.3%
Rural	20.8%	47.5%	27.5%
North	52.5%	28.9%	18.6%
Manitoba	23.6%	38.4%	35.5%

The Liberals drew support from both sides of the diagonal line inside the city's boundaries, winning seats north and south, in both affluent and poorer areas. In the party's traditionally strongest area, south Winnipeg, nine constituencies collectively cast 48% of their ballots for the Liberals.<sup>91</sup> The map below from 1988 illustrates what fate might have had in store for Manitoba Liberals if their history had looked more like that of Liberals in Ontario.

<sup>86</sup> Carstairs, *Not One of the Boys*, p. 120

<sup>87</sup> Lang, *Liberals in Manitoba: Provincial Decline and Resurgence*, p. 87, 88

<sup>88</sup> Lambert, *Canadian Annual Review, Manitoba*, 1988, p. 255

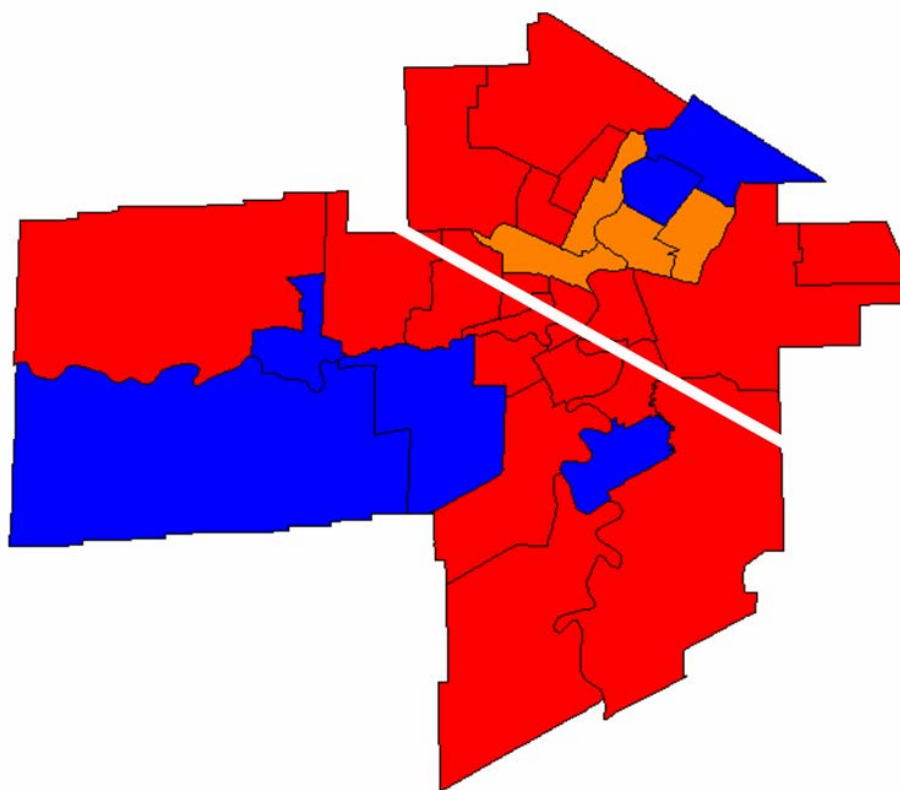
<sup>89</sup> Elections Manitoba, *Historical Summaries 1870 to 2003*

[http://www.electionsmanitoba.ca/pdf/2007\\_statvotes\\_history.pdf](http://www.electionsmanitoba.ca/pdf/2007_statvotes_history.pdf) [Accessed August 30, 2008], pp.269, 271

<sup>90</sup> Carstairs, *Not One of the Boys*, p. 128

<sup>91</sup> The ridings included here were Fort Garry, Fort Rouge, Niakwa, Osborne, Riel, River Heights, St. Boniface, St. Norbert and St. Vital

## 1988 Manitoba Election – Winnipeg Constituencies



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The Liberal advantage over the NDP was lost two years later in the 1990 election when the NDP edged out the Liberals in popular vote 28.72% to 28.02% but won twenty seats to the Liberals' seven. The NDP has benefited from a highly efficient, concentrated vote since 1969, perhaps most critically in 1990.

The Liberals were unable to either maintain or improve their position. They made the breakthrough but their follow-up was thwarted. The most important reason for this perhaps was that the failure to form a government meant 1988 votes cast for the Liberals by disenchanted NDP voters could not be transformed into positive enduring support that might have been won had there been a successful and effective Liberal government that demonstrated its bona fides.

Despite the many kilometres travelled by Sharon Carstairs all over rural Manitoba, the party won only the constituency of Selkirk outside the City of Winnipeg in 1988, although it did register large gains in vote share in some rural constituencies. This appears to be the key factor that kept the party short of victory in 1988. For a party to be successful Manitoba politics it must at least

<sup>92</sup> Graphic obtained from Manitoba General Election 1988 on Wikipedia: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Image:MB1988.PNG> Image edited by author including addition of the diagonal line.

demonstrate some ability to win both city and country. For example, when the NDP won in 1969 largely based on victories in the city, it also made gains outside Winnipeg, both in rural areas and the far north.

A failure on Carstairs' part stemmed from her preoccupation with federal issues, particularly Meech Lake. She devoted considerable time and energy to the issue from 1988 to 1990. Despite strong support among the public for her position, concentrating on Meech meant not building a profile on provincial issues. When she accepted a compromise in the spring of 1990 it muted differences among the party leaders on the issue, and opposition to Meech came to centre on Elijah Harper. Carstairs in particular paid a political price since she no longer seemed to be quite the 'fresh face' that the electorate found so attractive in 1988. The 'lady in red' who had appeared to be a strong leader on this issue instead appeared "indecisive and weak."<sup>93</sup>

## **6) Post Carstairs – Third Party Status Again**

The Liberals still had a caucus of seven after the 1990 election. However, Sharon Carstairs departed in 1993 after campaigning against the Charlottetown Accord and was replaced by Paul Edwards.

While the Liberals entered the 1995 contest in a strong position in the polls the pre-election polling may have been influenced by the overall popularity of the federal Liberal government at the time. Respondents can confuse federal with provincial politics in answering polling questions so the Liberals' apparent strength could have been an illusion. However, Paul Edwards stumbled early in the campaign – on the abortion issue when a campaign event happened by the Morgentaler abortion clinic, and Edwards could not articulate a clear position. Other missteps followed as divisions within the party revealed themselves on federal gun control and the question of a new hockey arena for Winnipeg's NHL franchise.<sup>94</sup>

The 1995 campaign, coming eleven years after the party began to revive under Carstairs, was beset with organizational and logistical difficulties that suggested that the party's weakness after long years in the wilderness remained despite its recent gains.<sup>95</sup> The Liberals managed to field a full slate of candidates in 1995 and did hold on to three seats although Paul Edwards was not among those elected. Their vote share continued to decline from 28% to 23.6%.

It proved to be the last gasp of the revival begun under Carstairs. By the 1999 election the party was no longer able to field a full slate of candidates. Although enjoying stable leadership from former federal MP and cabinet minister Jon

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<sup>93</sup> Drummond, *Liberal Party organization and Manitoba's 1995 provincial election*, pp. 17, 18

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 66-70

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid* pp. 100-107



Gerrard, since 1998 the party has won no more than two seats while averaging 13% of the vote over the course of the 1999, 2003 and 2007 elections.

## **7) Voting NDP and Voting Liberal – Federal and Provincial Politics**

Strategic voting has entered the vocabulary of Canadian politics in the last couple of decades. This has happened because Canadian conservatives, who had views relatively close to the political centre in the 1960's have gradually shifted to the right. Roblin could position the Manitoba Progressive Conservatives as a centre party to the left of the Liberal Progressives in the late fifties because Canada's Progressive Conservatives as a whole were close to the political centre.

This shift of Canadian conservatives to the right was documented in a study by one-time federal Liberal pollster Martin Goldfarb and former Trudeau Principal Secretary Thomas Axworthy.<sup>96</sup> Based on surveys of delegates to the 1967/1968 Progressive Conservative and Liberal leadership conventions that chose Robert Stanfield and Pierre Trudeau, and the 1983/1984 Progressive Conservative and Liberal leadership conventions that elected Brian Mulroney and John Turner, the authors argued:

As Canada moved from the affluent sixties to the recession of the eighties, the Liberal party stayed liberal or even became a little more progressive or left of centre. This minor shift in Liberal policy values contrasts with a dramatic change in Conservative party beliefs....The new right-wing agenda of American conservatives has entered Canada through the Conservative party....<sup>97</sup>

The result of this growing gap between the right and centre-left has been that voters with moderately left of centre views have found it easy to switch from the Liberals to the NDP and back, beginning in Manitoba with putting Ed Schreyer and the NDP into office in 1969. There has been an inverse relationship between support for the NDP and support for the Liberals that one can trace all the way back to 1958 – higher support for the NDP has meant weaker Liberal support and vice versa. The pattern has been especially clear since 1969 as one can see in the graphic below.<sup>98</sup>

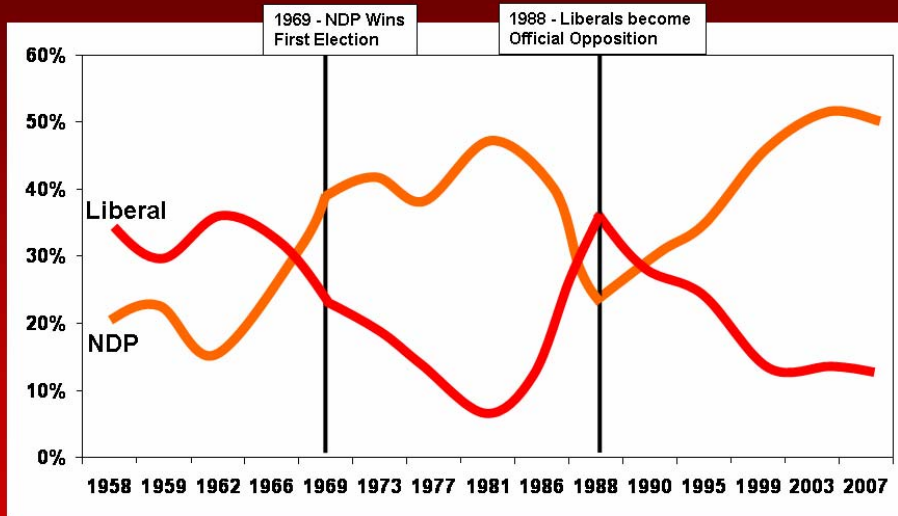
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<sup>96</sup> Goldfarb, Martin and Axworthy, Thomas. 1988. *Marching to a Different Drummer: an Essay on the Liberals and Conservatives in Convention*. Toronto: Stoddart

<sup>97</sup> Ibid, p.89

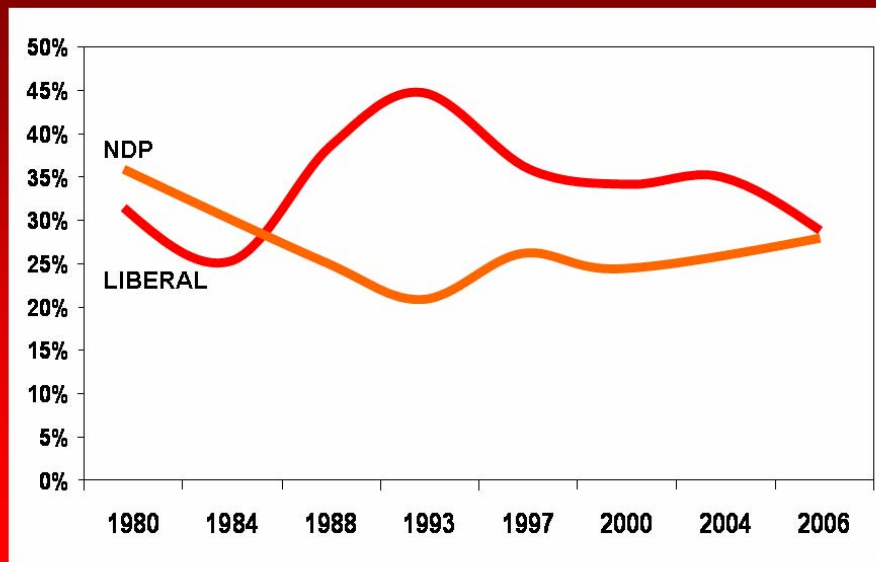
<sup>98</sup> Graphic created from elections results by author.

### Liberal & NDP Support in Manitoba 1958 to 2007



The provincial pattern is also visible in federal politics. The next chart illustrates support levels for the two parties since 1980 in federal elections in Manitoba.

### Liberal & NDP Support in Manitoba Federal Elections 1980 to 2006



A more recent illustration has been delivered as part of the unprecedented success of Gary Doer in winning progressively larger majorities over the course of the past three provincial elections. The heartland of Liberal support has always been in Winnipeg's south end. As noted earlier when Sharon Carstairs won 35% of Manitoba's popular vote in 1988 she secured 48% in the nine provincial constituencies in south Winnipeg. The NDP picked up only 17% of the vote.

However, if we compare that to the total vote covering the elections 1999, 2003 and 2007 in eleven constituencies that now represent approximately the same area we find the following:<sup>99</sup>

**Voting in 11 South Winnipeg Provincial  
Ridings 1999-2007**

<b>NDP</b>	<b>PC</b>	<b>Liberal</b>
45.4%	35.0%	17.7%

These eleven constituencies approximately overlap the boundaries of the federal constituencies of St. Boniface, Winnipeg South Centre and Winnipeg South. In these latter constituencies if we total the votes for the 2000, 2004 and 2006 federal elections, which are closest to the provincial contests in the table above we get the following outcome:<sup>100</sup>

**Voting in Three South Winnipeg Federal  
Ridings - 2000 to 2006**

<b>Liberal</b>	<b>C.P.C</b>	<b>NDP</b>
43.5%	38.4%	15.1%

Overall, the linkages and inverse voting pattern strongly suggest an ideological affinity between federal Liberal and provincial NDP voters. In Winnipeg's north end the NDP has long dominated both federally and provincially. It is the south end results that clarify the relationship between the two.

**8) The Dilemma of Manitoba Liberalism**

The core rationale for any political party is that it offers a distinctive voice and approach to governance that it hopes voters will prefer to the alternatives. Political parties have been transforming themselves in response to such contemporary trends as technological change and the growth of new

<sup>99</sup> The ridings were Fort Garry, Fort Rouge, Fort Whyte, Lord Roberts, Riel, River Heights, Seine River, Southdale, St. Boniface, St. Norbert, and St. Vital

<sup>100</sup> For the 2000 election the votes of the Canadian Alliance and the Progressive Conservatives were combined. 2000 vote results based on Elections Canada. 2003. Electoral Districts: Ranking of Political Parties, by Electoral District, Following Transposition of Valid Votes, 2003. <http://www.elections.ca/content.asp?section=cir&dir=tran&document=index&lang=e&textonly=false> [Accessed on September 13, 2008].

institutions.<sup>101</sup> Public opinion polling has been of growing importance as parties seek out public views and shape their platforms to conform as best they can to public perceptions. Responding to the perceptions gives parties an incentive to re-shape their public profile and image in a manner that blurs their differences. This makes it increasingly difficult for a party such as the Manitoba Liberals to create a profile that is at the same time politically attractive and unequivocally distinct.

Since 1975 the Manitoba Liberals have generally been positioned as a centrist small 'l' liberal urban party. In the 2007 election its extensive and detailed platform offered improvements in health care, education, the environment, the justice system, and social services as well as prescriptions for the economy that had the goal of making Manitoba a 'have' province by 2020. The party also offered a wide-ranging and detailed program in 2003.<sup>102</sup>

If one looks at Manitoba Liberal commitments offered over time one finds a centrist but fluid ideological orientation - similar to the NDP but not identical. The Liberal Party's struggles to define its character distinctively are complicated by the differing interpretations party activists apply to its outlook. Jared Wesley finds influences in the Liberals' 2003 platform from the "neo-liberal" right and the "reform liberal" left, but notes that the platform as a whole had a "dual nature."<sup>103</sup> It left the party "wavering on either side of the political centre" and, further, that to the party's opponents, the NDP and PCs, the Liberal platform was both "ambiguous" and "eclectic."<sup>104</sup>

Wesley surveyed the Liberals' 2003 candidates and found that on average while the Liberals as whole were clearly "centre-left" there was a significant division between older and younger Liberals:

Namely, younger Liberal respondents tended to identify more closely with the tenets of the New Right, whereas the attitudes of those born prior to 1960 could be more accurately described in terms of reform liberalism. Younger Liberals were more populist and individualist than their elder counterparts, for instance. While the former supported continentalism, privatization and tax relief, the beliefs of the latter were located on the opposite side of the spectrum entirely. Older Liberal candidates, instead, were in favor of protectionist measures, increased funding for public services, and the public provision of health care in the province. And while younger Liberals preferred "economic growth, even at the cost of

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<sup>101</sup> Meisel, John and Mendelsohn, Matthew. 2001. "Meteor? Phoenix? Chameleon? The Decline of and Transformation of Party in Canada", in *Party Politics in Canada* (8th edition) eds. Hugh Thorburn and Alan Whitehorn. Toronto: Prentice-Hall, p.164

<sup>102</sup> Wesley, Jared. 2004. "Spanning the Spectrum: Political Party Attitudes in Manitoba." Master's Thesis. University of Manitoba, p. 142

<sup>103</sup> Ibid

<sup>104</sup> Ibid p. 148

damage to the environment,” older candidates opted for “protection of the environment, even at the cost of economic growth.”<sup>105</sup>

Depending on historical circumstances a centre party can move to the right or left to seek political advantage. For the most part in federal politics Canada’s Liberals, especially in recent decades, have been a left of centre party, overlapping and competing with the CCF-NDP and more recently the Greens. However, they have also shown a capacity to move to the right when it is deemed advantageous.

During the mid-nineties the federal deficit became an increasingly important political issue. In 1995 under Paul Martin the federal Liberals slashed spending, and the deficit quickly became a surplus. With the success in deficit reduction in the context of the strong economic growth of the nineties, the idea of balanced budgets acquired considerable popularity.<sup>106</sup> We find support for the idea across the political spectrum. For Jon Gerrard this means that Manitoba Liberals emphasize “responsible financial management and the creation of a compassionate and caring society”.<sup>107</sup> However, this mix of compassion and fiscal responsibility differs little from the NDP.

Looking at the last few decades perhaps the clearest Manitoba Liberal consensus has been with respect to the constitution and individual rights, issues generally seen as being in the federal sphere. Sharon Carstairs regards one of her “proudest moments as a Liberal” as the day the Charter of Rights and Freedoms was enshrined in the constitution.<sup>108</sup> Devotion to Trudeau’s constitutional vision made Carstairs and other Manitoba Liberals fierce opponents of the Meech Lake agreement. Indeed the party adopted a resolution at its convention held during the 1988 election unanimously rejecting the Meech Lake Accord.<sup>109</sup>

Apart from their constitutional vision the Liberals’ overall lack of coherence in their ideas and their overlap with the NDP means the party needs one of the major parties to discredit itself in a manner similar to the Pawley NDP of 1988. The Liberals have grown stronger since the 1999 election when they could not field a full slate of candidates. Despite energetic campaigns in both 2003 and 2007 and full slates of candidates, the party’s popular vote increased marginally. Changes to party finance enacted by Gary Doer, also suggest the party faces greater financial challenges in the future.<sup>110</sup> Nevertheless, the Liberal

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<sup>105</sup> Ibid p. 153

<sup>106</sup> See Lewis, Timothy, *In the Long Run We’re All Dead*, for an account of the decline in influence of Keynes in the federal Finance Department during the 1980s, particularly pp. 117,118.

<sup>107</sup> Gerrard, *Battling for a Better Manitoba*, p. 185

<sup>108</sup> Carstairs, *Not One of the Boys*, p. 111

<sup>109</sup> Ibid, p. 105

<sup>110</sup> Stewart, David and Wesley, Jared, *Electoral Financing Reform in Manitoba: Advantage Doer?* p. 13

organization is currently sufficiently strong financially that as of April 2008 the party no longer charges a membership fee.<sup>111</sup>

Some political scientists in Canada have seen the path followed by the British Liberal Party as a precedent for Canada. Shattered by tensions within its coalition generated by World War I, the British Liberals were supplanted by the Labour Party over the space of three elections in the twenties as the party of the political centre and left. In addition to social scientists, many CCF-NDP activists and leaders also saw in the British experience a natural evolution of democratic politics towards a two party system where one party embodied the labour movement and progressive social reform while the other party represented conservative elements in society including support for the market, leaving little or no room for centre parties like the Liberals. Manitoba after 1969 became a focus of this attention for its potential as a precedent that would show up elsewhere.<sup>112</sup> While this phenomenon can be seen in Western Europe, it did not become a feature of Canada's national politics nor did it happen in Ontario where the NDP's only electoral success proved short lived and the Liberals remained a major party.

The ideological congruence of the NDP and Liberals in both federal and provincial politics exists in the context of an increased ideological gap between the Conservatives and the other parties. The gap creates an ongoing incentive for strategic voting, a threat to third parties<sup>113</sup>, while assisting the fortunes of the major party that is the preferred alternative in a strategic voting scenario. This is true in both federal and provincial politics.

Voters approaching the ballot box reason about their choices.<sup>114</sup> If they have strong feelings about seeing their values reflected in government, as many do, they will assess both which party best expresses their values, and, of the choices available, which party has a chance to win. The latter assessment weighed upon the Manitoba Liberals for the past four decades as many potential supporters, who supported the party in federal electoral contests, abandoned them in provincial elections to vote NDP. While few have perceived the Manitoba Liberal Party as a prospective winner in the past three provincial elections, an average of 13% have nonetheless said to themselves this is the party that represents how I

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<sup>111</sup> MLP Newsletter, July 2008, [http://mlp.manitobaliberals.ca/?page\\_id=64](http://mlp.manitobaliberals.ca/?page_id=64) [Accessed Sept. 6, 2008]

<sup>112</sup> Wilson, John, M. "The Decline of the Liberal Party in Manitoba Politics", *Journal of Canadian Studies* 10, 1 (1975): pp. 28, 29

<sup>113</sup> Blais, Andre, Young, Robert & Turcotte, Martin. "Direct or indirect? Assessing two approaches to the measurement of strategic voting". *Electoral Studies* 24 (2005): 163-176. The authors argue that the net number of strategic voters is small but drawn disproportionately from the third party. In the case under consideration by the authors, the 1999 Ontario Election, this meant the NDP was most affected. The percentage of the electorate estimated by the authors to have voted strategically in 1999 was four to six per cent. p. 173

<sup>114</sup> Popkin, Samuel L., *The Reasoning Voter: Communication and Persuasion in Presidential Campaigns*, Second Edition, Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1994, p. 7

view politics and government, and is therefore my only rational choice. It is a number that appears sufficient to ensure survival if not success.

The steep slide of Manitoba's Liberals to third place in 1969 transformed a three party system in Manitoba into a two and a half party system, the Liberals playing the part of the half party.<sup>115</sup> Current ideological trends and tensions suggest the capacity of Manitoba Liberals to influence politics in a way that would permit them to escape their forty year dilemma is limited.

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<sup>115</sup> Adams, Christopher. 2008. "Realignment in Manitoba: The Provincial Elections of 1999, 2003, and 2007." Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Canadian Political Science Association, Vancouver, BC. June 4, 2008, pp. 16, 17

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