

# HAPPY BIRTHDAY, 'tit Louis

**J**UNE 27 MARKED THE 10TH ANNIVERSARY of the election of Louis J. Robichaud's Liberal government in New Brunswick. Amid speculation that Premier Robichaud is considering retirement from political life, and the almost certain probability that there will be an election in New Brunswick this fall, it seems that a look back over the past ten years might be an appropriate way of wishing Louis' government a happy tenth birthday.

Ten years ago June 26 the premier of New Brunswick was Hugh John Flemming, a man who had just spent six years being needled by the Opposition Financial Critic, a brash young lawyer from Richibucto named Louis Robichaud. The upcoming election, in which Flemming was opposed by that financial critic, who had two years before become leader of New Brunswick's Liberals, figured to be no contest. Running on a solid, though not very exciting, record of industrial progress and on the premise that a Liberal government would not be able to extract as much from the Progressive Conservative government of John Diefenbaker, the Tories were not very worried by the challenge. No Acadian, after all, had ever been elected Premier of New Brunswick; and Robert Stanfield had just won what seemed to be a trendsetting victory for the Tories in Nova Scotia.

But when Hugh John Flemming woke up on the Morning of June 28 Louis Joseph Robichaud was premier of New Brunswick. To say he was surprised, said Mr. Flemming, "would be a superlative understatement." What had happened? What had the Liberals done — and promised — in order to get in?

If the campaign had had any overriding issue, other than the "leadership" of Hugh John and the fiery platform oratory of Louis, it had been the payment of hospital insurance premiums; the Liberals proposed the elimination of the recently-imposed insurance premium tax, of \$50 per family and \$25 per single person, and the assumption of the burden by the provincial government. The Tories charged that this could not be done without raising — probably doubling — the then three percent sales tax, that it was financially irresponsible and a method of buying votes. Robichaud, however, pledged on June 23 that "So long as I am leader of the Liberal Party, the sales tax will *not be increased to pay for the hospital care plan.*"

There were other promises, too (see box), and the most notable among them was a pledge to study and revise New Brunswick's "outdated" and "unenforceable" liquor laws, which prohibited sale except by the bottle in government stores and private clubs. It seems clear, however, that the major factor in the Liberal victory was the promise to abolish the insurance premium. It seems significant that such an issue should have been decisive in putting into office a government which, ten years later, would look back on the Equal Opportunity Program as its most notable achievement.

Immediately on taking office, the Liberal government began to attempt to implement its platform. Hospital premiums were abolished; a commission was appointed to investigate the liquor laws; the Youth Assistance Act was

passed and the Department of Youth and Welfare established. Acts of industrial development — the expansion of the St. John Shipbuilding and Dry Dock Company and the establishment of the Rothesay Paper Corporation — were announced as accomplishments of the government, as they always are. Four days before the by-election in the spring of 1961, a \$50 million smelter and chemical industry in the Bathurst-Newcastle area was announced; coincidentally, a Liberal was returned from Northumberland. The Chignecto Canal project, that redoubtable New Brunswick political football, was kicked back and forth all fall. Everyone has always wanted to build the canal, but somehow it has never been built, though it must hold the alltime Canadian eastern endurance record as a platform plank, appearing in nearly every New Brunswick election in memory.

That November, the New Brunswick Liquor laws were revised in accordance with the recommendations of the Bridges commission, in spite of the vigorous anti-liquor campaign run by the Baptists and the Canadian Temperance Federation.

The next year, the oft-foretold deficit budget (slightly less than four million dollars out of balance) was placed before the Legislature by the Provincial Treasurer, Mr. DesBrisay. The Opposition pointed to the deficit as the inevitable result of the abolition of insurance premiums, and called for a more active campaign for the Chignecto Canal and the Corridor road. It was clear that they had no issues.

But it didn't take long. The next budget was brought down on March 5, and predicted a deficit of over six million dollars. But even juicier than that, the Tories thought, was the suspicious-looking deal the government had made with the South Nelson Forest Products Corporation, which it had licensed to exploit 382,000 acres of Crown lands in the Miramichi and promised 258,000 more. The company was supposed to establish a groundwood mill. But it was a subsidiary of an Italian company, Cartiere del Timavo, and the Progressive Conservatives, led by C.B. Sherwood, called the deal a "sellout", charging that there was no guarantee that in fact any mill would be built, that the wood would more likely be exported and processed somewhere else. The government pointed out that no special privileges had been extended to the company, which had to pay the same stumpage and fees as anyone else — and that moreover the company had agreed to buy a cord of pulpwood locally for every one cut for export.

Unconvinced, Mr. Sherwood moved in the Legislature that the public interest was not being protected and called for a judicial inquiry. Robichaud, ever the astute politician, not only rejected the charges, but said "I prefer to refer this whole sorry matter to the highest tribunal in the land — the electorate — the people themselves." and called an election. Stunned, the opposition charged that the election had merely been called to cut off debate on the South Nelson Paper affair and — just as important — on the budget which, they charged, contained concealed deficits.





## CAMPAIGN PROMISES: THE LIBERAL RECORD

A Thumbnail sketch

1960:

There were 11 planks, some of them pretty complicated, in the 1960 Liberal platform. The most important of them was the pledge to abolish hospital insurance premiums, with the promise to revise the liquor laws running a distant second. Specifically, the Liberals promised:

1. Abolition of hospital premiums (accomplished within a month).
2. Rural and secondary road development, including the seeking of federal help and the cancelling of spring weight restrictions on a trial basis. (Drive around on our secondary roads in the spring to check this one out.)
3. Health and Welfare ministry divided, with a new program for child welfare and pressure to extend family allowances to age 18.
4. An omnibus plank, which included the Chignecto Canal, a study of tariff relations with New England, pressure for lowering of freight rates, relaxation of tight money policies, establishment of an Atlantic Provinces development fund, and incentives for regional industry (sound familiar?)
5. Help for education through interest-free student loans, higher standards, better conditions for teachers, and Federal assistance.
6. "Elimination of favoritism and discrimination" in law enforcement; a crackdown on reckless driving (another good one.)
7. Investigation and revision of the liquor laws.
8. A larger share of tax rental payments to the municipalities.
9. Revision of Workmen's Compensation Act.
10. "Democratic rights will be restored in the Legislature." (you might ask Wilfred Senechal about this one.)
11. An industrial development and resource exploitation plank, promising, among other things, a million-dollar industrial fund, promotion of full use of forests and crown lands, development of New Brunswick mineral resources, establishment of a fish and wildlife commission, promotion of recreation and tourism, low cost power.
- 11a. The party also promised to arrest the out-migration of young people, but did not make a formal plank to this effect. That's probably why so many have left.

**T**HE GOVERNMENT'S ARGUMENT that an election was necessary because of the opposition's unjustified attacks on the South Nelson deal apparently convinced someone; on April 22 the Liberals were returned to power with one more seat than they had had at dissolution. Their platform (see box) this time seemed no more important to the victory than it had in 1960; though they promised a \$300 million dollar power development programme (including the building of Mactaquac), electoral reform and continued industrial and economic expansion — along with deficit financing — it seems again to have been the magnetism of Louis Robichaud that won the election. People believed his contentions that South Nelson had received no extravagant concessions; that in fact the mill would, when completed, have cost the taxpayer nothing.

More than that, the government had been in a good position to run on its record; what it had set out to do it was accomplishing in highly visible ways. The Atlantic Development Board was formed; when the Liberals came to power in Ottawa its usefulness to a Liberal government in New Brunswick was markedly increased. The New Brunswick Research and Productivity Council was formed, as was the New Brunswick Development Corporation. The Rothesay paper mill was under construction, along with a \$29 million smelter near Bathurst; and other new capital investments were complete or in progress. In statistical terms, New Brunswick's economy was doing all right — even though the unemployment rate was almost twice that of Canada as a whole.

On February 5, 1964, however, a rumbling was heard when the New Brunswick Royal Commission on Finance and Municipal Taxation — The Byrne Commission — submitted its report recommending sweeping changes in the structure of government and taxation in New Brunswick. Not many recognized it as a portent of one of the worst political storms of New Brunswick's history. In general direction, it was an outgrowth of the movement begun with the abolition of hospital insurance premiums, in that it too moved toward shifting the burden of supporting the society as a whole onto those with the most money. As with all such plans, the population seemed to split along roughly parallel urban/rural, English/French, rich/poor lines, but no test of the plan came for a year. It was not until the fall session of the Legislature in the following year — on November 16, 1965 — that the government outlined in its "Program of Equal Opportunity" some means of implementing the principles of the Byrne report and the storm broke in earnest.

In the meantime, in January 1965, work had begun on the giant and contentious Mactaquac power project, fourteen miles above Fredericton. Opposition to the project was violent among conservationists and residents of the proposed headpond area, but not very widespread. In part this was probably because of the predictions of the creation of 2500 jobs during the eleven-year construction period and the reduction of the price of power in New Brunswick. Construction, at any rate, went ahead.



New Brunswick's economic progress continued apace, too, with the opening of the South Nelson Mill, The Rothesay Paper plant, a new plan for a \$117 million project of Brunswick Mining and Smelting Corporation for the Newcastle-Bathurst area, and the official opening of Westmorland Chemical Park at Dorchester Cape. But all this faded — even the Prince Edward Island Causeway plans and the Chignecto Canal project seemed less important; the closing of the South Nelson mill and the drought of that spring and the \$8 million deficit budget were neglected — when the Equal Opportunity programme was put forth in specific terms. Newspapers began pointing out how much power the program would concentrate in the hands of the provincial government; the mayors of New Brunswick's major urban areas formed an organization called the "Six Cities" to fight the programme.

Then the government introduced new legislation to abolish all existing tax concessions — even though Premier Robichaud had assured the public the government had no such plan. That stick stirred the hornets up; K.C. Irving led a delegation to the legislature and pointed out that no investor would put his capital in a province that would do a thing like that; the *Fredericton Daily Gleaner* acclaimed the imminent fall of the Robichaud government, crying "This is war . . . to the death." Some English-speaking New Brunswickers were sure that what they had feared from an Acadian Premier was finally coming to pass, that their capital endeavours were going to be taxed to support an indigent French population. At best, conservative elements were certain that the centralization of power would lead to a dictatorship. Throughout 1966 the struggle continued, with the government steadfastly refusing to call an election and implementing and defending its program. Tax bills were passed; the government began the long task of centralizing the schools, of eliminating duplication in local governments; and deaths and jugglings in the government to a vacancy in Restigouche County which attracted back to New Brunswick one of its most renowned politicians, J.C. (Charlie) Van Horne.

**I**N THE MEANTIME, almost obliterated by the struggle over Equal Opportunity, a new issue was being born along the Saint John River Valley, and elsewhere. In inducing the economic growth of New Brunswick, the government had inadvertently also increased the pollution of New Brunswick's environment. At Woodstock, citizens were concerned about the effect of the Mactaquac headpond on the already serious situation on the Saint John River. A series of articles in the *Fredericton Gleaner* by Frank Withers named offending industries and municipalities. The then chairman of the New Brunswick Water Authority, John S. Bates, claimed that Fraser's mill at Edmundston was responsible for 70 per cent of the pollution in the river, and McCain's plant at Florenceville another 10. He called for the immediate cleanup of the effluent, and Fraser's continued to say they'd try to do it within 10 years. But the issue failed to grasp the public imagination, probably because we had not yet seen pictures of the earth taken from 240,000 miles out in space,



## PLATFORM PLANKS: NEW BRUNSWICK LIBERALS LUMBER ON

1963:

Because of the surprise election in 1963, there was no one major issue. Among the Liberal promises were:

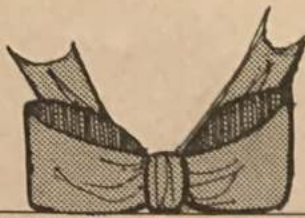
1. Expansion of forest and mineral resource industries.
2. Low-cost electrical power — including the Mactaquac project, thermal power, Bay of Fundy tidal power.
3. Reform of the electoral procedures. (The necessity of this was dramatized by the post-election squabbles over procedures and counting in St. John, during which three seats changed hands.)
4. Appointment of a forest advisory council.
5. A new farm credit policy.
6. Relief from property taxation through implementation of the Byrne Commission report.
7. Close cooperation with the Atlantic Development Board and the Atlantic Provinces Economic Council to further economic development.
8. The attraction of \$200,000,000 in domestic and foreign capital investment.
9. The extension of family allowances.
10. Continued planned deficit financing.
11. Re-introduction of the March budget with no new increase in taxes.

showing us not only now small it really is, but how barren the moon is in comparison.

The issues Charlie Van Horne was concentrating on in winning the Restigouche by-election and catapulting back into the forefront of New Brunswick politics were very different — if they existed at all. For although Van Horne claimed to be running not against his official opponent, J. Alex Savoie, but against Louis Robichaud and the Liberal government, he mounted no consistent or reasoned attack on their policies — especially Equal Opportunity — and offered no clear alternative. He won essentially on the basis of his personality, and in fact it was his personality which was the major focus of New Brunswick political discussion that spring.

His maiden speech in the Legislature offered no useful criticisms of the Throne Speech, which continued the implementation of the Equal Opportunity programme begun the previous fall. Premier Robichaud's comment that the speech "betrayed such an ignorance" of the situation exposure" established the tone of the spring session and ultimately of the election that October. The real issues — all





## MORE LUMBER FROM THE LIBERAL YARD

1967:

For the centennial year, the Liberals doubled the size of their platform, possibly to accommodate the increasing size of their Premier. The planks which were most important this year were the promise to keep the property tax rate at \$1.50 for five years and the pledge of "Responsible Government".

1. Property tax rate freeze. (They of course didn't say anything about how often it would be collected.)
2. Responsible government. (This plank conveyed the brunt of the Liberal attitude toward Charlie Van Horne.)
3. New jobs and continued industrial expansion.
4. Expansion of education in general, and trade schools in particular.
5. Additional tax relief for widows, through a \$4,000 exemption of property tax.
6. Improvement of Labour Act, granting of collective bargaining rights to public employees.
7. Expansion of bursary and scholarship programs.
8. Improvement of highways and adjustment of weight limits for trucks. (See item No. 2, 1960).
9. Pressure for improved transportation connections (ridden the CN lately?)
10. Medicare, without premiums. (then scheduled for 1 July 1968; now scheduled for 1 January 1971)
11. Mobile dental clinics for children. (We could airlift Crest into the boondocks.)
12. Driver training programs.
13. Reduction of down-payment costs for housing by the establishment of a revolving-fund. (Know anyone who's bought a house lately?)
14. Help for farmers to improve their cash returns by the establishment of agricultural courses in high school.
15. Improved welfare benefits.
16. Development of natural resources — acquisition of more fishing waters for the public. (Which waters still have fish in them?)
17. Fisheries development.
18. Pollution control programs: vigorous enforcement will have the St. John river "completely cleaned up" by December of 1969. (The Liberals obviously weren't counting on the help of the Water Authority.)
19. Coal area development.
20. More recreation areas for residents and tourists. (See our last issue, where the tourist attractions were described.)
21. A legal aid system. (A forthcoming article will deal with this in detail.)
22. Alcoholic rehabilitation.

the complexities of Equal Opportunity, such as the education mess, the redesigning of the tax structure, and the government's commitment to supplying incentives to private enterprise to stimulate industrial development — tended to get swept up in a whirlwind of personal charges and countercharges. Charlie's financial problems and supposed irresponsibility and Louis' dictatorial tendencies, monopolized the headlines. Even the \$50 million pulp mill at South Nelson's failure to materialize and the \$100 million dollar Bay Steel Complex in Gloucester County could not compete with Charlie's telephone calls from El Paso, Texas and Louis' agile rhetoric.

And the government was getting into economic trouble. Noranda Mines had taken over Brunswick Mining and Smelting, Fundy Chemical Company found itself unable to pay even the interest on its \$4.5 million loan from the government. A potato surplus caused demonstrations among irate farmers, and fishermen in Tracadie burned three schools in protest over delays in their welfare cheques. And finally the government revealed that the provincial net debt had been increased in the last fiscal year by a record \$83.3 million.

With all these issues, one might have predicted a solid, issue-centered campaign, and one in which the people would be offered a clear-cut choice between the Equal Opportunity Plan and something else. But it was not to happen. The government, calling an election for October 23, offered a 22-point program (see box) which was essentially a continuation of the Equal Opportunity program. Rather than argue the basic principles of Equal Opportunity Mr. Van Horne came up with a 113-point crash program, containing such old political chestnuts as the promises to build the Chignecto Canal and to construct a tidal power station on the Bay of Fundy. The major effect of this program was to yield a campaign prop to the Premier, who delighted to unroll an eight-foot length of newspaper clippings, identifying it as the Conservative platform, which he called a "rummage sale" platform. The only substantive issue which seemed to have an effect on the outcome of the campaign was the charge that Van Horne was being backed by K.C. Irving, who had had enough of the Liberal government's raids on his treasuries. Other than that, it was an election of personalities, and the Liberal victory could hardly be interpreted as a vote of confidence in Equal Opportunity. It was a vote for Louis as opposed to Charlie. Unfortunately, the real issues were lost in the shuffle. There was still no clear idea of how many people in New Brunswick were fundamentally opposed to the government's basic orientation.

Certainly there were some. In 1968 there were demonstrations against school bussing and opposition to the locations of a number of central school projects. School personnel objected to centralization. But the government was not dissuaded and its program continued. And as the economy faltered in the late sixties, taxes rose and the deficit increased; the budget brought down in the spring of 1968 predicted a deficit of \$13 million and increased taxes on gasoline and automobiles and broadened the new six per



cent sales tax. Charges of financial mismanagement became more common; especially since the government seemed unable to predict accurately its own expenses. And taxes continued their upward spiral: the sales tax continued to be expanded and was raised to eight per cent; a ten per cent surtax was imposed on personal income taxes; taxes on cigarettes and alcohol and gasoline continued to soar. So did the debt, increasing by \$42 million in 1968 and \$30 million in 1969.

As the decade drew towards its close it became clear that the financial situation of the government was critical, and that at least some of the economic growth so proudly hailed during the decade had been illusory. Medicare was postponed; hospital construction was frozen; Westmorland Chemical defaulted on its loan payments; Halifax — not Saint John — was named site for a major container terminal; industries were faltering. And out-migration from the Maritimes, in spite of the attempts to stem it which had been part of the Robichaud government's platform from the beginning, had increased over the last five years, according to an Atlantic Provinces Economic Council study.

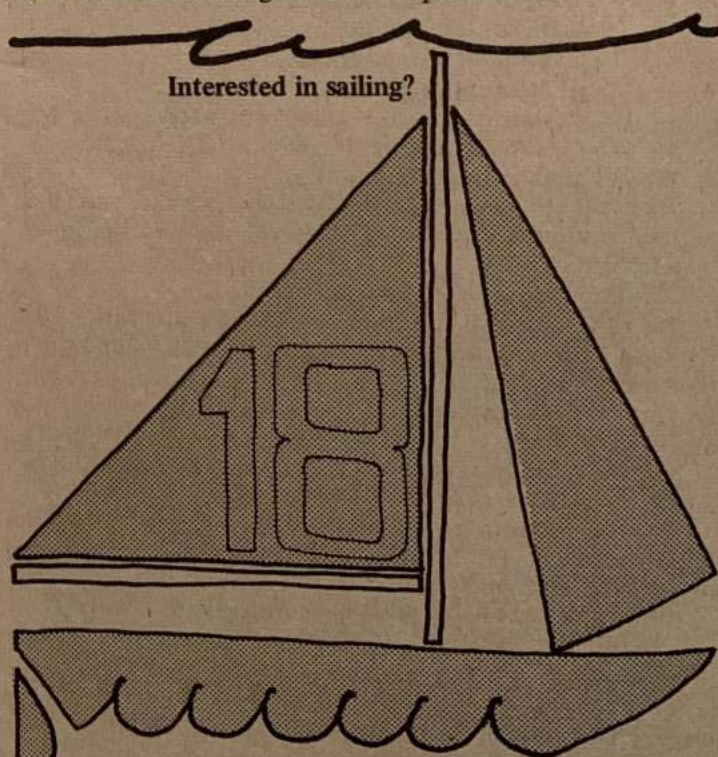
**A**ND THAT OTHER PROBLEM reared its ugly head again; fish began dying near the Mactaquac dam; salmon runs tapered off on the Miramichi, where Heath Steele spilled metallic wastes into the Tomogonops River; and the mouth of the Saint John River began to resemble a cesspool. The citizens of Centreville dammed and damned the Presquile River, and mercury began to accumulate in the Bay of Chaleur, and everyone, perhaps, began to wonder about the long-term effects of the industrialization of New Brunswick.

Statistically, there was no doubt at all that the province had come a long way in the sixties. Premier Robichaud himself would provide the figures. Summing up the accomplishments of his government in the Legislature last March, he listed them: the reopening and expansion of Heath Steele, the Brunswick Mining and Smelting operation, the Nigadoo River mine and concentrator, the Anaconda American Brass copper concentrator under construction, the Belledune smelters and fertilizer complex, the Acadia mill on the Miramichi, the Rothesay Paper plant and its current expansion, Irving Pulp and Paper's expansion, the expansion of the Fraser mill at Newcastle and the rebuilding at Fraser's Edmundston mill, the establishment of Ste.-Anne Nackawic on the Mactaquac headpond, the particle plant at Chatham, the Fundy Forest Industries plant at St. George, the expansion of McCain's food packing plant at Florenceville, the Scoudouc Industrial Park glass plant, the expanded cement plant at Havelock, and of course the doubling of production at the Irving Oil Refineries and their construction of a \$14 million deep water oil terminal. And Premier Robichaud is modest about it: "I am not saying that the government is responsible for all these industries. But I do say that without the continuing climate of economic confidence created as a result of positive government policies, in which continuing expansion is possible, that the story would be far different . . ."

An impressive list, to be sure. But notice what sort of accomplishments are considered most important. Oh, sure, if you ask Premier Robichaud what his most satisfying achievement was, he says it was the implementation of the Equal Opportunity Program. But when he outlines his accomplishments among politicians, it's always the industrialization of the province that is mentioned almost exclusively. During the sixties — and before — the government of New Brunswick has had one major political priority. And statistically, there's no doubt at all that Premier Robichaud's government has brought New Brunswick an immensely long distance along the road indicated by that priority.

And the priority itself has been accepted by nearly everyone. The opposition never challenges it; it offers only to move us faster and more efficiently in the same direction — toward the creation of industries involved in the exploitation and exportation of New Brunswick's mineral and agricultural resources.

But as we begin to notice the gradual deterioration of our environment; as we look at the list of major polluters and notice how many of them are listed as the government's greatest accomplishments; as we look at the government's attitude toward industrial polluters and as we consider how much the actual quality of life has changed for most of the citizens of La Province Dynamique, we've got to begin to wonder whether it might not be a good idea to sit back and look again at those priorities.



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