

MITCHELL F. HEPBURN AND THE ONTARIO LIBERAL PARTY
1930 - 1937

History 28

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The first thirty years of the twentieth century were lean years for the Ontario Liberal Party. With one brief interruption (the U.F.O. interregnum 1919-1923), the Conservatives had held power in Ontario continuously since 1905. In 1929 the Conservatives had practically wiped out the opposition by winning 91 of the 112 seats.¹ In 1930 there was little reason to believe that any great change was imminent. Although brilliant and popular Howard Ferguson, the Tory premier, had been appointed Canadian High Commissioner in London, he had been replaced by colourless but capable George Steward Henry, "a plain, blunt, honest man."² But times were changing. A depression had hit Canada and the old time-worn policies were not adequate to meet the pressing needs of the people. Most of all, the people needed hope, and faith that times were going to improve. Although they did not at first realize it, the Liberals elected a leader who would provide this hope. A man who, if he could not solve their problems, would at least provide the scapegoats on whom they could place the blame for all their miseries. This man was Mitchell Frederick Hepburn.

Mitch Hepburn (b. August 12, 1896) was never one to fit into a system. He was a born rebel. In 1919 he joined the U.F.O., but with their demise, he returned to the Liberal fold. In 1926 he was elected Liberal Member of

1. *Canadian Annual Review (C.A.R.)* Toronto, 1929-1930, p. 350

2. *Globe*, March 15, 1934.

Parliament for Elgin County, Ontario. At the age of thirty he was the youngest Member of Parliament in the Federal House. When the Liberals were defeated in the federal election of 1930, Hepburn increased his majority in Elgin.

On December 16-17, 1930, the Liberals held a leadership convention to elect their eighth leader in the last twenty-five years.³ There were three candidates: Hepburn, Captain Elmore Philpott, an assistant editor of the Globe, and W.E.N. Sinclair, the Liberal leader since 1923. Sinclair withdrew just before the balloting and Hepburn easily beat Philpott, 427 to 97.⁴ Despite the ease of his victory, however, he did not have a strongly united party behind him. There was a great deal of resentment over the rejection of Sinclair in favour of the young upstart from Elgin, whose performance in the Federal House had been anything but distinguished.

Hepburn needed an issue or a miracle with which to united the fragmented Liberal party before he could have any hope of conquering Ontario which had become a virtual Tory satrapy. Between his accession to the leadership in 1930 and the June, 1934, election Hepburn found three issues: liquor, religion and electric power.⁵ Ontario's industrial growth of the 'twenties demanded more hydro power than the province could supply. The Conservative Government contracted

3. C.A.R., (1930-1931) p. 108

4. Ibid.

5. Neil McKenty, S.J., "Mitchell F. Hepburn and the Ontario Election of 1934," C.H.R., Vol. XLV, December, 1964, p. 294

to buy the power surplus from private interests in Quebec. Unfortunately, with the advent of the depression, Ontario's demand for power decreased, yet it had to continue paying for the surplus power. This laid the Government open to charges of waste and extravagance. The Government's position became more precarious when it was disclosed that Premier Henry held \$25,000 in bonds of a private hydro company which The Conservatives had taken over to save it from bankruptcy. ⁶

The depression also caused the religious schools problem to become acute. Roman Catholic ratepayers were finding it difficult to finance their schools and they were demanding a proportionate share of public utility and corporation taxes to ease their burden. This was an extremely delicate problem for the Henry Government because a decision one way or the other was sure to alienate either the Roman Catholics or the Protestants (especially the Orange order, still a potent force in provincial politics). ⁷

A third serious problem which threatened the Government was the liquor issue, but it was even more dangerous to the Liberals. In 1926 and 1929 Howard Ferguson had introduced and extended the sale of liquor, beer and wine under Government control. Most Tories supported this position although Henry was under pressure by some to extend it further. The Liberals, however, had been Ontario's traditional prohibitionist party

6. Mail and Empire, April 6, 1933

7. McKenty, op. cit., p. 295

and Hepburn was convinced that this was a major reason for successive Liberal defeats. Hepburn himself was a 'wet', but he faced serious opposition from the 'drys' within his own party, led by the former leader, William Sinclair.

The depression itself was a major factor in the early 'thirties. The Government faced mounting financial difficulties when its revenues declined at the same time that relief payments were skyrocketing. In 1934 Ontario had Half a million people on relief; a married labourer was lucky to earn \$22 a week and an unemployed head of a family of four might receive \$4.22 weekly in relief payments.⁸

If the prospects were bleak for the Conservatives they did not look any better to the Liberals. Hepburn needed time to consolidate his hold over the Liberal party. William Sinclair still had strong support within the party. At first, when Sinclair agreed to remain as House Leader until Hepburn should be elected in 1934, the leadership question did not seem to be a very important problem. However, by 1934, relations between Hepburn and Sinclair had broken down and Sinclair was removed from his position as House leader. Sinclair vowed that he would not support the party in the coming election unless it advocated rescinding the liquor laws passed by the Conservative administration. Hepburn tried to strengthen his position by touring the province and attacking the

8. Globe, April, 6, 1934

the Government record, but he came under constant attack for not running for a provincial seat. He was told to "quit shouting from behind the barn."⁹

Hepburn was too radical for many Liberals. Shortly after he became leader he stated that Ontario needed good doses of inflation and the firing of so many Civil Servants that the exodus from Queen's Park would dwarf the annual Orange parade.¹⁰ The principle Liberal newspapers were cool towards Hepburn and often ignored him. The Globe and the Ottawa Journal seldom mentioned him in their editorials. The Toronto Daily Star did not become reconciled to Hepburn's leadership until after his victory and even then it had reservations.¹¹

By May 1934 the Conservatives felt confident enough to call an election. On the surface it appeared as though their decision could be easily justified. The worst of the depression seemed to be over. In May, 1934, 360,000 persons were receiving direct relief in the province, a drop of 40,000 from the previous year.¹² Just before the campaign began the Henry Government announced several multi-million dollar works projects.¹³ The food allowance for families on relief was boosted 25% and Premier Henry wrote to Prime Minister Bennett to encourage the Federal Government to undertake more

9. McKenty, op. cit., p. 296

10. Ibid.

11. Ross Harkness, J.E. Atkinson of the Star, University of Toronto Press, Toronto, 1963, p. 231

12. McKenty, op. cit., p. 297

13. Globe, March 31, 1934.

federal relief programs because "any work that is under way will absorb some of those who are at present out of employment and generally sweeten the situation.... " 14

The Conservative position with regard to the hydro power, aid to separate schools and liquor issues seemed quite satisfactory. A Royal Commission had completely exonerated the Government from charges of mismanagement in the hydro issue. The Liberals as well as the Conservatives feared the separate schools issue and so there was not much open discussion. Henry referred the question to the courts and so this removed it from the political arena until after the election. The liquor issue seemed safest from the Conservative standpoint because they were united and the opposition was split.

The Government introduced new liquor legislation just before the dissolution of the House. It pleased the 'wets' because it extended the sale of beer and wine, but it did not alienate the prohibitionists because it retained government control and the local option. Despite Hepburn's efforts to obtain unanimous support for the bill, six of the fourteen Liberal members voted against it. 15 Several members threatened to run separately on a 'dry' platform. The party appeared to be disastrously split on the eve of an election. Several newspapers called for a convention to settle party

14. Henry to R.B. Bennett, Mar. 22, 1934 (quoted by McKenty, op. cit., p. 297)

15. C.A.R., 1933, p. 149

policy. A popular joke was that the Tories again had "Grits on the Rocks."¹⁶ However, by April 22 Hepburn was able to announce that if the Liberals were elected they would proclaim the new Liquor Act without amendments and would retain the local option.¹⁷ On March 27, 1934, the Windsor Star editorialized, "We find the Administration emerging from the session with a greatly enhanced prestige. Premier Henry stands much higher in public estimation than he did 3 or 4 months ago and his party generally is in a more favourable position.

The Opposition has suffered a good deal from an appearance, at least, of internal differences centring chiefly around (sic) the deposing of Mr. Sinclair as House leader and the fact that Mr. Hepburn.... has not had a seat in the Legislature."¹⁸

The greatest enigma in the election was the Liberal leader, Mitch Hepburn. He had defeated a Tory back in Elgin in 1926, but could he upset a party that had held power in Queen's Park since 1923? He was only thirty-eight and his limited experience at Ottawa was relatively undistinguished. He had made wild, unsubstantiated charges against the Government and had alienated the Liberal old guard. The most the Liberals could hope for was that with another term as Opposition leader he might mellow and grow enough so that by 1938 they could present a responsible alternative to the Tory government.

16. McKenty, op. cit., p. 298

17. Globe, April 23, 1934

18. McKenty, op. cit., p. 299

Very few expected that Ontario voters would be attracted so soon by this "Huey Long of Canada." ¹⁹

The prognosticators and political pundits were wrong. Hepburn was not an easy man to categorize. It proved too difficult to predict the appeal of this new personality, a personality which encouraged utterly devoted loyalty and implacable hatred and hostility. Said one acquaintance of Hepburn, "You either hate his guts or you love that guy. There is no middle course." ²⁰ His charism and personal magnetism were such that they encouraged the 'little guy' to believe that only Hepburn could overcome the forces which prevented universal enjoyment of material goods. He had a power to move people, "a power that controlled, might take him to the heights but, undisciplined, would destroy him." ²¹ He aimed his appeals and his policies at the masses. "The little guy," said Hepburn, "doesn't get enough of the good things in life," but, realizing the requisite for success, he added, "and anyway, its good politics to give a hand to the majority." ²² His greatest forte, however, was his ability to establish rapport with his listeners. He could "take a complicated issue, translate it into easily grasped bread and butter terms, dramatize it, and wrap it in emotion." ²³ When he called for a new deal

19. "Mitchell F. Hepburn", Current Biography, (1941), p. 377

20. Globe and Mail, January 6, 1953.

21. McKenty, op. cit., p. 299

22. Globe and Mail, January 6, 1953

23. McKenty, op. cit., p. 300

in the province, the people believed him.

Hepburn's strategy was that the election must be fought on the record of the Henry Government. He believed the issue was clear and simple; the government was guilty of gross mismanagement and corruption. He attacked political extravagance, high taxes and 'the interests'. He promised to crack down on the power companies, to cut salaries of public officials and to place their 'official' cars on public auction. ²⁴ "What Ontario needs," said Hepburn, "is a new deal and an auctioneer." ²⁵

Hepburn's attacks were not all wild generalizations. He soon got down to details and levelled specific charges and accusations against the Government. He charged that a 'toll-gate' system existed in the liquor industry. ²⁶ Before a foreign distillery could sell its goods to the Liquor Control Board it had to appoint an agent in Ontario, a "Tory ward-healer" said Hepburn. This agent collected commissions, a portion of which went toward Conservative campaign expenses. ²⁷

Whether true or not, these accusation had three favourable effects on Liberal fortunes: It transferred the liquor question from the morality of drinking, on which the Liberals were divided, to the immorality in Government, on which they could be unanimous in their condemnation. It gained Hepburn a great deal of publicity,

24. Current Biography, op. cit., p. 377

25. Globe, June 22, 1934

26. McKenty, op. cit., p. 302

27. Ottawa Citizen, February 27, 1934

which was vitally necessary because he was so new to the provincial political scene. Finally, it re-enforced his theme of corruption in high places at a time when the 'little guy' was finding it difficult to supply the bare necessities of life for his family. He further emphasized his point by reminding his audiences of the take-over of the private power company in which Premier Henry held \$25,000 in bonds. He would, he vowed, get rid of all those Tory 'fat cats' at Queen's Park.

In reply, the Conservatives tried to picture Hepburn as being some wild-eyed revolutionary. They said he was a dangerous radical, as socialist as the C.C.F., a Red, and a rabble-rouser. But to the 'little guy' Hepburn was a breath of fresh-air. Finally someone had appeared who offered hope for the future.

On the morning of June 20, 1934, Hepburn awoke to find himself Premier of Ontario as a result of the most "decisive.... reversal in Canadian political history." ²⁸ The Liberals had increased their representation from fifteen seats to sixty-six. Tory strength had declined from eighty-four to seventeen. There were four Liberal Progressives, one Independent, one U.F.O. and one C.C.F. The Conservative party's share of the popular vote dropped from 56% in 1929

²⁸
28. C.A.R. (1934), p. 177

to ~~52%~~ 40% in 1934. The Liberal (+ Progressive supporters) share rose from 34% in 1929 to 52 % in 1934. Another significant fact is that while only 56% of the electors cast their ballots in 1929, more than 73% did so in 1934. ²⁹

Initial attempts at analyzing the reasons for this tremendous upheaval attributed it to the depression. But this is a far from adequate explanation. It is doubtful if William Sinclair would have gained this much support, and equally doubtful that Howard Ferguson would have lost so severely. George Henry himself blamed rum, Romanism and the Orange order for his Government's defeat. ³⁰ He believed that the temperance forces had voted against him for extending the sale of liquor, that the 300,000 votes of the Catholic taxpayers had gone to Heburn and that the Orangemen resented his steering a middle course and therefore they "sat on their hands." Henry, many believed, was responsible for the dry rot which had beset the Conservative party. He allowed the party organization at the constituency level to deteriorate and did not recognize the problem until it was too late.

No doubt all these issues were contributing factors but the most decisive factor in determining the Liberal sweep must

29. Dennis H. Wrong, "Ontario Provincial Elections, 1934-1955: a Preliminary Survey of Voting", C.J.L.P.S., XXIII, (1957), p. 398

30. McKendry, op. cit., p. 309

be the leadership of Mitchell Hepburn. He alone had provided a genuine alternative to the Conservative Government. As the Globe said, "To Mr. Mitchell Hepburn, Liberal leader, must go the lion's share of glory in bringing about the victory.... " ³¹ The people had responded to Hepburn's promise as well as promises. They now waited to see how the youngest Premier in the history of the Province would handle its most serious problems. Everyone agreed with the defeated Premier that under Hepburn the people of Ontario "are in for interesting times." ³²

The first six months of Hepburn's Government saw many changes. They can be divided into two categories: instituting economy into the public services and investigations into what he considered to be Conservative malpractices. One of the first items of economy was to cut the salaries of public officials. He sliced his own annual salary from \$12,000 to \$10,000 and those of his associates from \$10,000 to \$8,000. ³³ On August 23, 1934, at Varsity Stadium in Toronto, he sold 87 Government-owned cars for \$33,902. ³⁴ He began cuts in the number of Ontario Provincial Police, magistrates and Justices of the Peace. He dismissed several provincial-appointed officials of the Toronto Police Commission.

31. Globe, June 20, 1934.

32. Henry to Ferguson, June 21, 1934 (quoted by McKenty, op. cit. 313)

33. Current Biography, op. cit., p. 377

34. C.A.R., 1934, p. 182

He set about to re-organize government departments and corporations. He requested the retirements of several senior officers of the Hydro Electric Power Commission, including the Chairman, Chief Engineer, Chief Solicitor and several Commissioners. He re-organized the Departments of Labour, Health, Agriculture and Lands and Forests. There were forty-two dismissals from the Department of Agriculture alone. ³⁵ Hepburn instituted many government investigations the most famous of which were the Liquor 'Toll-Gate' Inquiry, The St. Patrick's Election Inquiry, The P. and N.W. Railway Inquiry, The Ontario Air Services Inquiry and the Niagara Parks Commission Inquiry. Premier Henry's purchase of bonds of the Ontario Power Service Corporation of Ontario was also investigated. The Commission judged George Henry's position to be untenable but not requiring legal action.

Hepburn soon set about to solve the liquor question. As he had promised during the campaign, the Government immediately proclaimed the beer and wine measure which had been put through the 1934 session by the Conservatives. The local option was retained and the Government promised to share the profits with the municipalities. Hepburn would not, however, allow any beer or wine referendum. He claimed

35. C.A.R., (1935-1936), p. 203

that "such a referendum does not settle the question; it only aggravates it. No wet sections of Ontario will be allowed to enforce their opinion on the dry sections and conversely no dry sections will enforce their views on the wet sections. The geography of this Province is such that we can't settle this thing with referenda. I believe absolutely in the principle of local option, and any municipality which petitions for a vote may vote itself from wet to dry, or from dry to wet as it wishes. That is the Government's policy. Let me repeat that certainly there will be no Provincial wide referendum in Ontario." 36

Hepburn then began negotiations with the Federal Government over relief payments. By August 10, 1934, the Minister of Public Works, David Croll, was able to announce a new relief plan for the province. It was based on the principle of "relief to workers, nothing to shirkers". On September 26, Croll announced that there would be "no more relief shoppers in Ontario." 37 The residence requirements for recipients of relief in a municipality was raised from three months to one year. On October 25, Croll announced a drastic re-organization of the Old Age Pensions, and on November 1, he pledged the province to

36. C.A.R., (1935-1936), p. 203

37. Globe, September 27, 1934

independent action with regard to unemployment insurance if the Dominion failed to act. It was also announced that the municipalities were relieved of the burden of paying 25% toward Provincial highway costs.

In 1935 Hepburn announced that the Government was instituting a new road-building program from Toronto to Pembroke. All recipients of relief were expected to work "No work, no relief," he said. The Government also began a campaign to induce jobless men to work on the farms. It was intimated that during the harvest season all able-bodied men would be struck off the relief roles. It was decided that the relief program would be put on a pay-as-you-go basis. There would be no further borrowing for relief purposes. Furthermore, new taxation for relief expenditures were predicted. However, the Government further eased the burden on the municipalities by increasing the per capita relief grant of all solvent municipalities by \$5.00 per month and of bankrupt municipalities to \$7.50 per month. ³⁸ Hepburn carried on a continuing controversy with Ottawa over his efforts to get the Federal Government to accept more and more responsibility in carrying the burden of relief and unemployment insurance in the country.

38. C.A.R., (1935-1936), p. 195.

Hepburn also had to face the issue of public aid and corporation taxes for separate schools. During the election campaign he had made no definite commitment one way or the other on the question, but he did say that he would give the Catholic ratepayers a fair hearing.³⁹ By April, 1935, Hepburn was still procrastinating but this is perhaps understandable since the issue was political 'dynamite'. He said, "Plans are complete to make a thorough study of the whole problem. We recognize that an inequality exists. This has been recognized by previous Governments in the making of additional grants to separate schools. A practical solution should be applied and that is the problem that we must solve as soon as possible."⁴⁰ He sincerely believed that this inequality was unjust, but he faced serious opposition within Liberal ranks to a more equitable distribution system. In the Speech from the Throne on February 11, 1936, the Government notified the Legislature of its intentions to introduce amendments to the Assessment Act. Finally, on April 3, 1936, the Government introduced a bill "to provide that Corporations which may divide their taxes between public and separate schools in proportion to the rates of Roman Catholic and Protestant shareholders shall be obliged to do so in future."⁴¹ Although the bill

39. McKenty, op. cit., p. 306

40. Globe, April 12, 1935

41. C.A.R., (1935-1936), p. 239

did not go as far as the Roman Catholic minority wanted, it went further than the public school supporters wanted it to go. The degree of opposition is easily measured by noting that ^{the} Conservatives threatened to repeal the legislation when they returned to power.

The death of James F. Hill (Cons.) necessitated a by-election in East Hastings on December 9, 1936. The candidates were Dr. Harold E. Welsh, Cons., and Dr. Harold A. Boyce, Lib., Both Hepburn and the new Conservative leader, Earl Rowe, spent much time campaigning throughout the riding. Considerable time was spent in the discussion of the separate school tax legislation which had figured rather prominently in the election campaign along with other provincial issues. It was a severe blow to Hepburn when the Conservative, Dr. Welsh, ~~won~~ won by a larger majority than the Conservatives had won by in 1934. ⁴² He felt as though the 'little guy' had betrayed him.

During the by-election in East Hastings the Conservatives had promised to press for the repeal of the separate schools act. In March, 1937, they moved to implement this promise. Hepburn was forced to agree that it had not been a satisfactory solution. While accusing the Conservatives of fomenting religious strife in the East Hastings by-election campaign, Hepburn concluded, "I say, Mr. Speaker, that it is my

42. 1,136 as compared to 418 (C.A.R., 1935-1936, p. 208)

responsibility now to forestall at whatever cost the possibility of a religious war in this Province. I am man enough to stand up in this Legislature and swallow what is a very bitter pill." ⁴³ The bill was repealed and the separate schools issue was back where it started.

Hepburn also faced the problem of the power contracts of the Hydro-Electric Power Commission of Ontario (H.E.P.C.O.) It will be recalled that during the 1934 election campaign he threatened to cancel these contracts. In 1935 Hepburn introduced legislation cancelling four contracts with Quebec power companies. He noted several objectionable features: payments had to be made in US funds through the New York money markets, Ontario power purchases were subject to increased taxation by the Province of Quebec, they were subject to limitation by the Province of Quebec against exportation, and most important, much power was purchased but not used. In December, 1935, two of these companies, the Gatineau and the McLaren-Quebec Power Companies, signed new contracts to supply power at a reduced rate, but the other two instituted court action. The courts found the Ontario 1935 Bill ultra vires and found in favour of the two power companies for approximately \$500,000 each. ⁴⁴

43. E.A.R., (1937-1938), p. 173

44. Ibid., p. 152

Hepburn replied by launching appeals against these decisions and passed protective legislation providing immunity for H.E.P.C.O. and thus prevented collection on either judgment. By June, 1937, new contracts were signed with both companies and all court action was dropped.

Hepburn faced strong opposition within his own province and within his own party over the power contracts. Many feared it would destroy Ontario's credit on the world money markets. On December 7, 1935, the Mail and Empire said, "Hope now lies in the prospect of disallowance at the hands of Mr. Mackenzie King." ⁴⁵ Hepburn knew that disallowance was a distinct possibility, but on the same date he declared, "both Mr. King and Mr. Bennett declared in their campaign speeches that they would do nothing of the kind. If they do disallow, however, I have only one recourse - that is to dissolve the House and present the issue to the people. This I am quite willing to do." ⁴⁶ King did not intervene and so the people were not asked to pass judgment.

Shortly after Hepburn announced his intention to cancel the power contracts the Ontario Government issued \$15,000,000 in Government bonds, but they could find no takers.

45. Mail and Empire, December 7, 1935.

46. C.A.R., (1937-1938) p. 198

Hepburn claimed that "the financial interests undertook to discipline the Government of Ontario because of their stand on the power purchase question." He said, "the plain question is whether the country is to be governed by elected representatives or by the dictators in control of the machinery of money." ⁴⁷ Reacting against this self-styled persecution, he advocated nationalization of the Bank of Canada. He created further consternation in financial circles by advocating refunding of all governmental bond issues at 3%. He was at his eloquent best when he believed himself beset by mysterious forces in powerful places. However, he was also splitting the Liberal party by causing an irreparable breach to divide himself and the 'old-line' Liberals.

One of Hepburn's favourite targets was John L. Lewis, president of the American-based C.I.O. (Congress of Industrial Organizations). The C.I.O. was formed in the United States in 1935 to protect the interests of the workers excluded by the craft unions like the A.F. of L. By 1937 it was ready to enter Ontario, but this Hepburn was determined to fight. He spoke of a "Red tide" which must be beaten back with every means; of "outside agitators" who had he said, "reduced the U.S.A. to a state of anarchy." ⁴⁸

47. C.A.R., (1935-1936), p. 192

48. Current Biography, op. cit., p. 373

The first test of strength between Hepburn and the C.I.O occurred at a strike at the B.F. Goodrich plant at Kitchener. Hepburn vowed Ontario would tolerate no sit-down strikes. This stand turned a projected sit-down into a walkout at the General Motors plants at Oshawa and Windsor, organized by the U.A.W. Association, a C.I.O. affiliate. Hepburn mobilized a force of 300 provincial police and swore in 200 university students as special police to suppress the "Communist uprising" he professed to fear. These actions led the Toronto Daily Star (April 14, 1937) to suggest that "The fear of Communism by which Mr. Hepburn is trying to excite the people of this province is the pretext that Fascism is using in all countries as it pushes its advances in its efforts to overthrow Democracy." 49

Hepburn's crusade seriously split the Ontario Liberal party. J.E. Atkinson, Publisher of the Toronto Daily Star, became an influential Hepburn opponent. David Croft and Arthur Roebuck, two Hepburn cabinet ministers, were asked to resign because of their opposition to Government policy. When the Dominion Government expressed its disapproval of Hepburn's actions, he countered only by references to the "vacillating, weak-kneed" King Government. 50

49. R. Harkness, op. cit., p. 233

50. Current Biography, op. cit., p. 378

Hepburn also had some powerful supporters. George McCullagh, Publisher of the newly-organized Globe and Mail, was at his side throughout the entire fight. George Drew, the Chairman of the Ontario Conservative Party's Campaign Committee, supported Hepburn's stand. On May 6, 1937, the Toronto Daily Star reported that Drew and Hepburn were considering a Liberal-Conservative alliance.⁵¹ On December 3, 1938, Earl Rowe published a letter dated April 30, 1937, confirming that George Drew/ favoured the idea. Drew lost any hope of carrying the Conservative party with him when it passed a resolution in favour of collective bargaining. George McCullagh was a strong advocate of a Hepburn-Drew coalition because it would be a bulwark against the encroachment of the welfare state and thus protection of his concept of "true Liberalism."⁵²

The Windsor Star, a Hepburn supporter, quoted the Premier as telling its correspondent, "The strike there (at Oshawa) is merely a pawn in a much larger game."⁵³ The larger game was to prevent the C.I.O. from organizing the gold-miners. Roger Irwin, former secretary to David Croll, wrote in the Nation that the campaigns against the C.I.O. were dictated by gold-mining interests who had persuaded Hepburn to make Oshawa the battleground. It is

51. Harkness, op. cit., p. 328

52. Ibid., p. 232

53. Ibid., p. 236

worth noting that William H. Wright, the gold-mining magnet, financed McCullagh's purchase of the Globe. Whatever Hepburn's motives, his interference prolonged the strikes and caused general labour unrest throughout the province.

During the height of the labour agitation Hepburn received a request from the Minister of Justice (Ernest Lapointe) requesting the withdrawal of the R.C.M.P. from Toronto. Hepburn replied: "In view of the vacillating attitude taken by your Government with respect to Federal assistance in case of illegal disturbances, we have decided to depend no longer on Federal aid." ⁵⁴ Several weeks after the strike settlement, Hepburn declared his determination to oppose the C.I.O. and the Federal Government: "I can speak only for Ontario.... I am a reformer but I am not a Mackenzie King Liberal any longer. I will tell the world that and I hope he hears me." ⁵⁵

This split with King was a culmination of a process which began shortly after Hepburn became Premier of Ontario. Hepburn believed that Ontario had become his political satrapy after 1934 and that he alone was responsible for the victory. He claimed most the credit for the federal Liberal sweep in 1935 and demanded the homage he felt his due.

54. C.A.R., (1937-1938), p. 166

55. Ibid.

Scarcely had the ballots been counted then Hepburn was off to tell King when he should appoint to his cabinet. He resented Federal Finance Minister Dunning's refusal to consider arbitrary reduction of the Public Debt. He charged that the Dominion was attempting to invade the provincial field of taxation with regard to incomes and mining. He attacked King when the Federal Government refused to approve the export of hydro-electric power and the diversion of water from Hudson Bay to Lake Superior. He opposed King's plan to join with the United States in the St. Lawrence River development. He ^{considered} ~~said~~ it a personal insult when King refused to appoint a Hepburn orony to the Senate. ^{In} ~~By~~ 1940, he had a motion censuring the Dominion war effort passed in the Ontario Legislature and joined with Quebec Premier, Maurice Duplessis, in defense of provincial rights. He was probably the most irritating thorn in King's side.

King in turn believed Hepburn was a demagogue, a fascist at heart and a threat to democracy. His usual policy was to publicly ignore Hepburn; however, he did use Hepburn's motion of censure as cause to call an election in 1940. Hepburn received further rebuffs when the Federal Liberal caucus re-affirmed its confidence in King and Maurice Duplessis was defeated in 1940.

When Hepburn dissolved the Legislature on August 23, 1937, and issued writs for a General Election on October 6, at least three major questions loomed as potential issues on which contesting Parties would appeal to the electors. The Liberal party stood mainly on its record and the promise to continue existing policies. These were: (a) continued opposition to the attempts of foreign "labour agitators", typified by the C.I.O., to invade the Ontario field; (b) continued efforts to collect Succession duties wrongfully withheld; (c) continued pay-as-you-go financial policy, reflected in the 1937 Budget; (d) further progress in the field of social legislation, including a measure to inaugurate unemployment insurance; (e) further measures to reduce real estate and other taxation and to encourage home building; (f) a natural resources program which included reforestation and fish propagation and (g) measures to increase Ontario's tourist trade. 56

The Conservatives took issue with most of the planks in the Liberal platform. The Conservative leader, Earl Rowe, promised to free the H.E.P.C.O. from "political domination and control." The Conservatives supported Mackenzie King's plan to develop the St. Lawrence Seaway,

56. C.A.R., (1937-1938), p. 176

a project vehemently opposed by Hepburn. The Conservatives urged free association for the worker but promised defense of law and order. Rowe stated: "It is and has been for many decades, a fact that both capital and labour are international in their organization. Accordingly, the right of the worker to belong to the union of his own choosing, Canadian or International, craft or industrial, is fully established." ⁵⁷ During the campaign, C.I.O. union representatives appeared on the platform with Conservative candidates.

The C.C.F., under the direction of J.S. Woodsworth, made an attempt to establish itself in Ontario during the 1937 election campaign. Their emphasis was on economic and social welfare measures. In addition the campaign saw an attempt to establish a fourth party through a merger of United Farmer and Labour members with a small number of Communist adherents, including Tim Buck, General Secretary of the Communist Party of Canada, as observers. This prompted Hepburn to state that the recruiting of police (during the C.I.O. Incident) had not been for Oshawa alone but for Communist uprisings in Hamilton and Toronto. ⁵⁸

During the election campaign Mackenzie King did nothing to either hamper or aid the provincial Liberal cause. Although King and the majority of his Cabinet were noticeably absent

57. Globe and Mail, August 27, 1937.

58. C.A.R., (1937-1938) p. 177

from Hepburn's Ottawa rally, there was no prohibition on aiding the Ontario Premier. Most of the Ontario Federal Ministers took an active part in promoting the Liberal cause. One prominent exception was the Federal Minister of Labour, Norman Rogers. While Rogers spoke in favour of the Provincial candidate in his home riding of Kingston, he did not refrain from attacking Hepburn's stand on the C.I.O. Rogers also spoke in favour of Arthur Roebuck, who had been dismissed from the Government by Hepburn.

The voters returned the Hepburn Government to power with a loss of only three seats.⁵⁹ There were several interesting results which show both a consistency and a contradiction on the part of the voters. Most of the third party representatives were defeated.⁶⁰ The Liberals lost seven seats including those of two cabinet ministers,⁶¹ but they took three seats from the Conservatives and one from the C.C.F. Hepburn himself was given an increased majority. Paradoxically, the two former Ministers who had broken with Hepburn over the C.I.O. issue, David Croll and Arthur Roebuck, also returned with increased majorities.

59. See Appendix, (C.A.R., 1937-1938, p. 178)

60. The U.F.O. member, Farquhar Oliver, and the Liberal-Progressives were consistent supporters of the Liberal party and were not opposed by Liberal candidates.

61. Peel - Duncan Marshall, Minister of Agriculture
West Hastings - Dr. J.A. Faulkner, Minister of Health

Liberal Gordon Conant gained a 2,000 vote majority in Oshawa, the site of the C.I.O. strike (although the Combined vote of his Conservative and C.C.F opponents exceeded his total).

There was also a paradox in some of the Conservative results. Conservative leader, Earl Rowe, was defeated in Simcoe East. The rebel from the Rowe camp, George Drew, was also defeated in his riding, Wellington South. George Henry was re-elected with the smallest majority in his twenty-four years in Provincial politics.

It is difficult to draw any final conclusions or objective assessments of Hepburn because no detailed study has been made of his life. The papers of most of the principals of the Hepburn era are unavailable since most are still alive. It is likely that many of the longer-lasting effects of his years in power are a result of the post-1937 years which are beyond the scope of this paper.

Hepburn appears to be a product of his times. He voiced the resentment and the suspicions as well as the hopes and aspirations of small town and rural Ontario. He led the last fight against the forces of society which were swamping the 'little guy' and taking away his freedom

and independence. The world was becoming more complicated and more frightening and more impersonal. Progress required many sacrifices; it was Hepburn's role to voice the anguish people felt at paying the price.

Mitch Hepburn had many virtues. He was warm-hearted, loyal to his friends and commanded affection where others commanded only by strength.⁶² He had a deep concern for the average citizen of Ontario. He fought the C.I.O., not just because it threatened the gold-mining interests, but because he saw it as a threat to the entire structure of Ontario society. Although he no doubt created bogey^s with his crys of 'Red agitators', it must be remembered that Communist subversion was considered a definite threat during the 'thirties.

Hepburn's faults, unfortunately, compounded the real problems rather than solved them. He was too blunt, prejudiced, suspicious, egotistical and partisan to be considered a successful public servant. Several incidents can be cited to show the pettiness of the man. He ostentatiously travelled with a group of bodyguards and drove through Ontario streets in an armoured car. He once replied to the criticisms of a group of prominent United Church clergymen by calling them "psalm-singing sanctimonious preachers in Toronto who

62. Globe and Mail, January 6, 1953.

have lost touch with public sentiment." ⁶³ In April, 1939, at the Ontario C.C.F. convention, Professor George Grube, editor of the Canadian Forum, spoke in support of the C.C.F. notion characterizing "present Defense estimates" as "a waste of public money in the interests of British Imperialism" and suggested that the money be used to alleviate the unemployment problem. Hepburn called Grube "this foreigner, easily discerned by his name" and demanded that he be immediately dismissed ~~dismissed by him~~ from his employment "for speaking disparagingly of the British Empire." ⁶⁴ However, it is even more discouraging to note that George Drew supported this view and that no one in the Legislature protested. Perhaps it was this atmosphere prevailing throughout Ontario society during the 'thirties which allowed Hepburn to be so successful at the polls.

Hepburn's two landslide victories appear to have had no lasting effect on voting patterns. ⁶⁵ The Liberals failed to build up a coalition of the voting groups which had been responsible for their election in 1934 and 1937. Hepburn's anti-labour crusades are partly responsible for this. When the crucial labour vote grew rapidly during ^{after} the War, it went to the Conservatives and to the C.C.F.

63. Current Biography, op. cit., p. 378

64. Humphrey Carver: "Premier Hepburn and the Professors", Canadian Forum, Vol. 19, May, 1939, pp. 40-41

65. Dennis H. Wrong: op. cit., p. 399

Hepburn was a talented demagogue who combined both leftist and rightist appeals to the electorate. The provincial Liberal party failed to become a political force independent of his personal magnetism.⁶⁶ Perhaps his most important legacy is that the party he fashioned has not been able to gain power in the twenty-two years since he left office.

66. Dennis H. Wrong, op. cit., p. 400

APPENDIX

Ontario Election Results

	1929		1934		1937	
	<u>Seats</u>	<u>Votes</u>	<u>Seats</u>	<u>Votes</u>	<u>Seats</u>	<u>Votes</u>
Liberal	15	323,509	66	754,000	64	793,000
Liberal-Progressive	5	37,500	4	38,000	2	17,081
Conservative	83	586,000	17	621,000	23	627,000
U.F.O.	..		1	8,500 0	1	7,300
C.C.F.	..		1	108,000	..	77,744
Farmer-Labour	..		..	.....	..	14,700
Labour	..		..	.....	..	11,700
Socialist-Labour	..		..	.....	..	2,290
Independent	..		1	18,950	..	4,000
Communists	9,775	..	404
Others	9,500
	<hr/>		<hr/>		<hr/>	
Total		1,011,000		1,561,825		1,571,434

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