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AN ADDRESS

TO THE

ELECTORS

OF

BRITISH COLUMBIA

BY THE

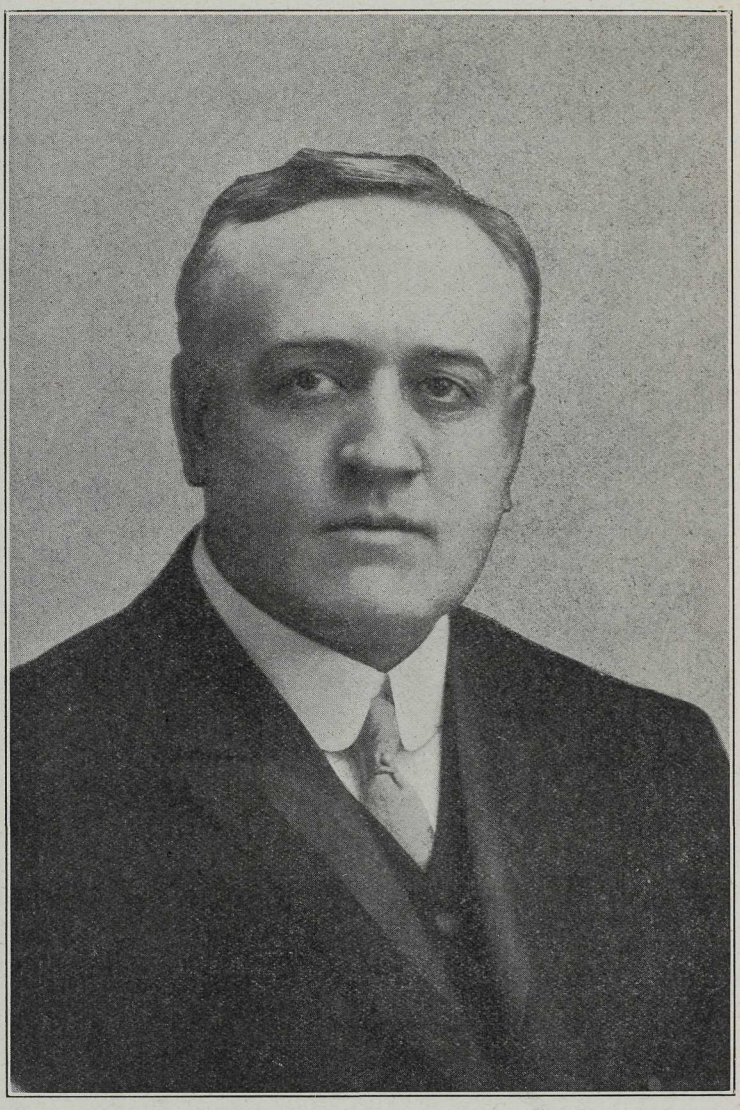
HON. W. J. BOWSER, K. C.

PRIME MINISTER

VICTORIA, B. C.

DECEMBER EIGHTEEN

1915



HON. W. J. BOWSER, K. C.

Prime Minister

AN ADDRESS

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Prime Minister

TO THE ELECTORS OF BRITISH COLUMBIA:

Gentlemen,—While I acknowledge and fully appreciate the great honor which has been done me by placing in my hands the leadership of the Government, I must at once add that I fully recognize the serious responsibilities which that leadership, under present conditions, entails, and which will require of my colleagues and myself much serious consideration and the exercise of sound business judgment if those duties are to be discharged to the satisfaction of the country.

Although I have taken some small part in the past twelve years in assisting to frame the policy of the Government in the Province, which policy has on four separate appeals to the electorate been strongly endorsed, still, in my judgment, the time has arrived when the policy which has marked the regime of the late Administration should in some respects be modified and in some respects expanded.

BUSINESS READJUSTMENT

The circumstances which actuated the McBride Administration to make generous appropriations to various railway companies, so as to expediate the opening up of the country, no longer exists, mainly for the reason that this comprehensive programme of railway construction is about completed; and the cycle of development now brings us face to face with other new and important duties and responsibilities. To put it shortly, I conceive the most vital duty resting upon the Administration of which I am leader, is, in the first place, to adopt a sound business policy, coupled with reasonable retrench-

ment, until such time at least as the serious problems now confronting our Empire shall have been surmounted. To put it in other words—British Columbia needs a period for business readjustment, free from any venturesome or experimental legislation, in which to recuperate from an era of speculative expansion, which was not peculiar to us, but common to the whole Canadian West, and perhaps to the greater portion of the American continent.

COMPLETION OF RAILWAYS

It is for this reason that we should definitely state that for the present there shall be no more aid to new railway enterprises. At the same time we must not forget that we have to face the situation boldly and courageously in order to see that those railway enterprises already undertaken, and which promise so much in the way of making accessible to the settler large areas of fertile land, are carried to completion with due dispatch. To ascertain how best this can be done, I purpose having a thorough investigation and examination made into the position of these companies, in order to decide which will be the most businesslike way of securing their early completion.

FINANCIAL CREDIT

It would appear to me that just as soon as peace is declared the world will witness a financial reaction. Should I be correct in this judgment, it will be necessary for the private individual, the corporations, the various municipalities of the Province, and the Province itself, to approach the foreign money markets with the idea of borrowing. To do so successfully we must keep the credit of British Columbia on the highest possible plane, and with that aim in view I will direct my every energy; and I have a profound conviction that if the Government approaches the discharge of its duties in this attitude, such action will elicit the strong endorsement of the electors.

It would be idle were I to appeal to the electorate for approval on the understanding that we shall at once be able to launch large development schemes and immediately usher in a return of what might properly be termed the abnormal prosperity which marked certain phases of the history of the West for the last few years.

We have no intention of making any such promise to the people of British Columbia, nor have we any delusions as business men regarding the situation which faces the Province as a result of the involved condition of the money markets of the world. Money, for the present, can only be obtained at excessive rates of interest; and while I yield to none in my firm belief and confidence in the future of the Province, in its wonderful resources, and in its recuperative powers, once the normal condition has been restored, still it must,

in my judgment, be our immediate task to make our expenditures conform to the present peculiar and unusual financial situation, rather than waste our efforts in launching ambitious schemes which would, for the present at least, be doomed to failure. We must, however, carry on such necessary public works as the natural development of the country may demand. Our watchword should be: "Courage with Caution."

AID TO FARMERS

The late Government has already passed legislation granting aid by way of loans to further develop the important industry of agriculture; and our efforts will be to borrow money required as quickly and cheaply as possible, so that we may give every incentive and encouragement to bona fide farming.

COLONIZATION

We have also under consideration a colonization policy, which, if worked out successfully, will encourage the rapid settlement of Crown lands by a sturdy, industrious and practical farming population, to the end that the great areas of the Province hitherto untilled may contribute their share to the natural wealth of the community.

SEPARATE DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

In addition to activities along the line of aid to farmers and of colonization above referred to, we purpose, as soon as the necessary legislation can be secured, to establish a distinct department of the Government, under its own minister, to deal exclusively with agricultural matters. It is hoped that in this way our agricultural possibilities will receive the utmost attention and inducements be offered which will result in a distinct and substantial movement towards the occupation and development of our farming and pastoral land.

PUBLIC MARKETS

The Government has also under consideration the question of aiding the establishment of public markets, under proper supervision, in the larger centres of population of the Province, so that the farmer may receive the best returns for his product and that the cost of living may be reduced.

MINERAL DEVELOPMENT

The developments of the last few years have demonstrated the great possibilities of our mineral wealth, thereby increasing the importance of the Department of Mines, and justifying the belief that much can be done to assist the development of the mining industry by active Government encouragement. An important part of the new

Government's policy will be a study of the scientific and practical methods calculated to develop this important industry in all its branches.

EXTENSION OF LUMBER MARKETS

The Government purposes lending whatever assistance may be possible in developing the natural manufacturing possibilities of the Province, with special attention to the lumbering industry. We have an almost illimitable supply of raw material (at least 400 billion feet of merchantable timber), and much of our future success must depend on its development. The market extension campaign, now being carried on by the Government, has already secured most encouraging results, and the work is being most vigorously pushed.

AID TO SHIPBUILDING

Ocean transportation must be provided for the tide-water capacity of our mills, now about 700,000,000 feet per annum, so that we may secure and enjoy our proper share of the world's trade. As the matter stands today, we have surpassing wealth of timber, an immense investment in manufacturing plants, and every facility, save one, for large development. We have no shipping and are therefore powerless to reach the overseas markets. We must have vessels operated directly in the interest of our own industries, and also to carry our natural products. Only thus can the Province market its own timber wealth and so dissipate the depression that has hung over the industry so long. Recognizing the vital importance of this matter and the paramount need of a strong commercial policy to end the shipping crisis, the Government will submit decisive legislation at the forthcoming session of the Legislature. The development of our waterborne lumber trade will benefit our Coast manufacturers and should, at the same time, give the Mountain mill men larger trade opportunities in the Prairie Provinces—their natural markets.

DEVELOPMENT OF SEAPORTS

The Western grain crop of 1915 has accentuated the necessity of using all Canadian ports to their utmost. The questions of shipping and elevator accommodation involved are primarily the responsibility of the transportation companies and the Federal authorities, but this Government appreciates the urgency and importance of this matter and proposes to take whatever action may be open to it to secure early attention for these developments, so that the "all-the-year-around" open ports of British Columbia may be made use of to their fullest extent to export the annual crop of the Western Prairie Provinces, as well as the output of the Peace River District, which will have railway connections at an early date.

IRRIGATION

The Government appreciates the very serious situation confronting the people of certain parts of the Interior, arising out of their irrigation difficulties, and is now addressing itself to the adjustment of the problems involved.

WORKMEN'S COMPENSATION ACT

I personally had the honor, during the late session of the Legislature, of introducing a most modern and up-to-date Workmen's Compensation Act, fashioned after the laws of other countries. This Act will greatly improve the conditions of those who may suffer and be disabled through industrial accidents, and at the same time will not only do away with long-drawn-out and expensive litigation, but will obviate all unfriendly contests between employer and employee. We stand pledged to make this Act law at our next session.

AID TO RETURNED SOLDIERS

The splendid response made by the manhood of the Province at the call for men to uphold the banner of human liberty must be recognized. It will be the duty of this Government to continue such support as it may be able to give during the present period of stress; and we further stand pledged to do our part, together with the Federal Government and public organizations, in seeing that those of our citizens who have suffered personal injury shall receive such permanent care and assistance as is consistent with their heroic sacrifices. The Government will also recognize and make suitable provision in the way of assisting those of our returned soldiers who are not incapacitated to secure suitable occupations in civilian life.

CONFIDENCE IN THE FUTURE

I feel that any public statement made at this time would be incomplete if I failed to put on record that I recognize that but one consideration is paramount in the minds of all of us—our every energy must be expended upon the task of assisting in every way possible the prosecution of the war to a triumphant conclusion.

The people of British Columbia, in common with those in every other part of our Empire, have had many bitter experiences since the fateful August 4th, 1914, when Great Britain, the Mother of Liberty, held fast to the path of duty and resolved, regardless of what sacrifices might be entailed, to summon all her strength to uphold the cause of humanity throughout the world.

Our experiences have been bitter, but they have only served to steel our hearts to meet, undaunted and unafraid, every new danger that may confront us. British Columbians have given ungrudgingly

of husbands, sons and brothers, and generously of their means—and this at a time when civil burdens, well-nigh crushing in their weight, have, as a result of the world-wide financial and commercial depression, been imposed upon them.

Nothing in the history of British Columbia is more significant, nothing, indeed, is more promising than the measure of courage and fortitude which has been shown by our people in the face of these unexampled difficulties.

It has been well said that "the darkest hour is just before the dawn"; and I am profoundly of the opinion that with the achievement of the final triumphant victory which assuredly awaits the arms of the Allies, and the conclusion of a permanent peace, the clouds which now lower upon us shall be dispersed and that the dawn of a brighter and fairer day will witness a restoration of progress and prosperity in British Columbia which will amply reward us for the courage and faith we have shown in this hour of bitter trial.

AGENT-GENERAL FOR B.C.

In conclusion, it is hardly necessary for me to state how incapable I feel in attempting to carry on the leadership in any way comparable with the record of our former popular leader, Sir Richard McBride, but it is not without a measure of confidence that I ask the people of British Columbia to give the new Government an opportunity to show that we can succeed and thereby merit public approval. The public will be pleased to know that we are fortunate in not losing entirely the services and ability of our late Premier, because as Agent-General for British Columbia, to which position he has been appointed, we will have a most worthy representative, than whom there is no one more capable for the office nor more conversant with our great natural resources.

It affords me pleasure at this time to again express our deep appreciation for the excellent work which the retiring Agent-General, Mr. J. H. Turner, has done while residing in London for the last fourteen years.

I hope, together with my colleagues, to be able to visit the various portions of our great Province before a general election and discuss the public issues in each constituency, while appealing for the first time, as leader of the Government, for the endorsement of the electors, with every confidence that they will give me an opportunity to carry out the policies I have outlined.

I beg to remain,

Your obedient servant,

W. J. BOWSER.