

The Late Premier Lea

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Only ten days after we had heard his voice over the radio in a coast to coast broadcast of provincial premiers, we received the sad news that Premier Lea had passed away. Leaders of both political parties united to pay tribute to a man who had been an outstanding figure in public life for twenty years. They felt, as did the people of the province, that they had lost a man whose life was spent in giving his best on their behalf.

Born in the farming community of Victoria in eighteen seventy-four, Walter M. Lea received his early education at the public school there and decided to be a farmer. Despite the fact that he started out under great difficulties, he eventually overcame these handicaps to make his farm a prosperous one. This was accomplished solely through his own intelligent industry and tireless perseverance. Becoming thoroughly acquainted with the problems of the farmer, he was soon a leader in his community. It was not long till he was recognized as one of the leading agriculturists and dairymen of the Island, but his fame was not limited to his native province. For eight years he was a director of a large Canadian dairy association, and in nineteen hundred and twenty-eight travelled in Europe representing Prince Edward Island as a member of the Canadian Farmers' Party. With this group he studied the agricultural and educational systems of many countries and, on returning, gave instructive lectures throughout the province.

The Honorable Mr. Lea was well qualified to play the role of statesman, as his father was associated with such pioneer Island legislators as Whelan, Coles, and Davies, and it is not surprising that throughout his whole life he showed a wide and thorough knowledge of statecraft. In public life, his accomplishments were such as are only attained by a very few. He had the unique honor of being our first "farmer premier." In the House he was an excellent debater, untiring worker, and always a gentleman. Political friends and foes found his personal character to be always above reproach, and the wholeheartedness with which he entered into his work seemed to leave him little time for animosity or personal attack.

Although not able to enter the political field until he was about forty-two years of age, he was to advance rapidly in the ranks of his party. He was first elected in nineteen fifteen and occupied his seat from that time until his death with the exception of one Assembly. In nineteen nineteen he was appointed Minister of Agriculture and Provincial Treasurer in the Bell Government. On the return of his party to power in nineteen twenty-seven he was again made Minister of Agriculture, and in nineteen twenty-nine his colleagues, in recognition of his outstanding qualities of leadership, exceptional ability, and wide parliamentary experience, bestowed on him the high honor of the premiership.

As premier, Honorable Walter M. Lea continued his good work along agricultural lines, making Falconwood farm a model one and using his sound, practical experience in solving the difficult problems confronting his administration. His party, however, was defeated by a small majority in nineteen thirty-one and Mr. Lea was Leader of the Opposition until last year, when he was returned to office with every one of his followers—an unprecedented occurrence in this or any other province.

In the late premier's political life there was that same zeal and energy which had been so evident in his farming activities. It was such that, although scarcely beyond middle life, his intense devotion to duty brought on a decline in health during the past few years. Still his party was able to benefit from his experience and sound judgment. Before the last provincial election his poor health allowed him to take scarcely any part, but he directed the campaign from his sick-bed. Shortly after the election he was restored to a certain extent and, after forming his government, fulfilled the heavy tasks of office for several months. Early in the year, however, he was again taken ill and passed away after only a few days sickness.

At this, our first opportunity, we extend sincere sympathy to relatives and friends.



One God, one law, one element,
And one far-off divine event,
To which the whole creation moves.

—Tennyson.