

**Name:** Dysart, Albert Allison (Hon.)

**Riding:** Kent, County of

**Party:** Liberal

**Date Elected:** GE 24 Feb. 1917. GE 9 Oct. 1920. GE 10 Aug. 1925. GE 19 Jun. 1930. GE 27 Jun. 1935. GE 20 Nov. 1939.

**Positions Held:** Elected Speaker of the House of Assembly, 17 Mar. 1921 - 30 Apr. 1925. Appointed Minister of Lands and Mines, 10 Jul. 1925 - Mar. 1926. Leader of the Official Opposition, Mar. 1926 - 16 Jul. 1935. House Leader of the Liberal Party of New Brunswick, Mar. 1926 - 1932. Leader of the Liberal Party of New Brunswick, 1932 - 13 Mar. 1940. Elected Premier, 16 Jul. 1935 - 13 Mar. 1940. Appointed Minister of Public Works, 16 Jul. 1935 - 16 Jul. 1938. Appointed Chairman of the New Brunswick Electric Power Commission, 16 Jul. 1938 - 10 Jan. 1940.

**Cabinet Shuffle:**

**Retired:** Resigned from the Legislature citing ill-health, 13 Mar. 1940.

**Defeated:**

**Died:** Died at age 82 on 8 Dec. 1962 in Moncton, NB. Buried in the Roman Catholic Parish Cemetery, Shediac, NB.

**Notes:** Born on 22 Mar. 1880 in Cocagne, Kent County, NB. After he received his Masters degree from St. Joseph's University in Memramcook, NB, Dysart attended the Guelph Agricultural School in Ontario. Further study earned him his L.L.B. from Dalhousie University's Law School in Halifax. Admitted to the bar as an attorney on 11 Nov. 1913, and as a barrister on 12 Nov. 1914, Dysart established a law practice in Bouctouche, NB. He retained a keen interest in agriculture, maintaining a farm and raising purebred livestock. Although descended from a tradition of politicians -- his grandfather, Robert Cultler (q.v.), had been an MLA -- throughout his life Dysart's first love remained agriculture.

Dysart was first elected to the Legislature in 1917, and was chosen to Move the Address in Reply to the Speech from the Throne at the opening of the 1919 session, on 6 Mar. 1919. On 17 Mar. 1921 he was chosen as Speaker, a position he filled until the end of the 1925 session. He then entered the ministry of P. J. Veniot (q.v.) as Minister of Lands and Mines, remaining until the Liberal government's defeat at the polls later that year. In Mar. 1926, after Veniot's resignation to enter federal politics, Dysart was chosen as the House Leader of the Official Opposition, and the de facto Leader of the Liberal Party. As his private secretary R.A. Tweedie would later note, ""Dysart was a good-humoured man who rarely lost his temper despite many invitations to do so over a long political career.""

Despite his able leadership of the party through the late 1920s, many within the party thought it impossible for Dysart to win an election. Dysart was a Catholic in a province where Catholics were a minority and political weight swung with the Protestant vote. For many Liberal insiders, their 1925 defeat stemmed directly from Veniot's Catholicism and they would not support another Catholic as Liberal Leader. Despite support from the widely attended party convention on 23 Apr. 1930, under pressure from the party executive, Dysart bowed out of the leadership race, citing ""health"" as his motivation. Wendell Jones (q.v.) a former cabinet minister was chosen as the new Leader of the party. At the election, however, Jones failed to win even his own seat, and by the 1930 session Dysart was once again at the reins of the Liberal Party. At a party convention in 1932, Dysart was selected the official Leader of the Liberal Party. At a Jun. 1935 convention he soundly defeated John B. McNair (q.v.), the rising-star of the party, to remain leader.

By the time of the 1935 election, the province was in the depths of the Great Depression and, following an excellent Liberal campaign, the L.P.D. Tilley (q.v.) government was swept from power. Dysart's Liberals were elected largely due to his personal popularity. During the campaign he promoted himself as a beacon of hope for those ravaged by the Depression. Liberal campaign literature asked voters to ""give Dysart his chance to provide

work and wages instead of dole and despair." In the economic circumstances of the mid-1930s, Dysart's religion now seemed to matter little.

While Veniot may have been the first Roman Catholic to inherit the position of premier, Dysart was certainly the first to be elected to the position. As soon as he took office, Dysart sought social-minded policies to ease the burden of hard times. His first official act as premier was to establish Old Age Pensions. He also strengthened co-operative societies, supported the establishment of credit unions, and stabilized the government's financial footing. Instead of people on the dole - Direct Relief - which he abolished, Dysart wanted people on the payroll. To this end, he used his secondary position as Minister of Public Works to create jobs through bridge and road building projects. His government also pursued a farm settlement plan to root young New Brunswickers to the province. In 1937 his administration established a Fair Wage Board, which sought to lower the number of working hours per week, while encouraging higher wages. He also briefly served as Chairman of the New Brunswick Electric Power Commission, and is remembered as the premier who created the Department of Education.

Although Dysart's schedule was busy enough to warrant his being the first premier to employ a full-time private secretary at the public's expense, Dysart was generally unhurried in his personal manner. When arriving late for a meeting, the premier would nonchalantly stride in, full of good cheer and joke that he was working on "Bouc-touche time." Clearly, he enjoyed life and relished humour. R.A. Tweedie gives a picture of Dysart's character by noting: "As a matter of conviction he belonged to no clubs or organizations, believing that as Premier he should avoid...being identified with special interests."

Dysart's manner of administration was to give ministries and committees the widest latitude in the running of their own affairs in freely administering all matters, which fell under their purview. One result of this was that the Liberal Party did not always act as a harmonious unit. H.F.G. Bridges (q.v.), A.D. Dyas (q.v.) and Fraser Keay (q.v.) were among those Liberals to publicly voice their discontentment with Dysart. Dyas even openly suggested that the Liberals were being controlled by business interests. To quell internal dissension, Dysart shuffled his cabinet a number of times. To counter criticism that he and McNair were exercising oligarchic control of the party, Dysart eventually gave up all his secondary portfolios to act solely as premier.

Dysart was able to resolve the party's internal rifts in time for the 1939 election. With the colourful, but pompous slogan, "Dysart Stays - Still Better Days," the virtuous record of the Liberals was extolled through the glossy, picture-filled Oct. 1939 edition of the "Maritime Advocate." Households were flooded with leaflets, which enumerated the government's prior accomplishments, but did little to capture the imagination of the electorate. While the Liberals conducted a lazy, over-confident campaign, their under-estimated opponent, Conservative Leader F.C. Squires' (q.v.) tireless tirades on the hustings won over many voters with his fiery oratory. The results of the election were much closer than expected, but Dysart's government was returned for another term in office.

Despite his height of six feet and robust physical build, Dysart was frequently ill. As a result, he was away from the Legislature for long periods of time. In one case, Dysart took leave two days into the 1939 legislative session, and did not return to his seat until Apr. 1939, when the session was almost complete. In his absences, McNair was Acting Premier. By the 1939 election, it was well known that his doctor was advising him to resign the premiership and take on a less onerous role. Dysart unsuccessfully attempted to convince Fred Pirie to be his successor. Austin Taylor (q.v.) was also mentioned, and everyone knew McNair's ambitions. Dysart could have foiled McNair's bid for party leadership, but it would have been out of character. He was a man who bore no grudges, political or otherwise, and therefore he engineered a by-election for McNair.

When a judgeship became available, Dysart resigned the premiership on 13 Mar. 1940, and gave his blessing to McNair as his successor. In his memoirs R.A. Tweedie argued that "Allison Dysart was a far more effective leader and administrator than generally thought." The day following his resignation, Dysart was appointed a County Court Judge of Westmorland and Kent Counties. He remained on the bench until his 1955 retirement.

Following Dysart's death in 1962, Louis J. Robichaud paid tribute to him on the floor of the House on 13 Feb. 1962. Robichaud praised the former premier's "innate sense of fairness and warmth of personality," and noted that Dysart had been an idol of his "from the earliest years."

For more information see also: "Speakers of the Legislative Assembly Province of New Brunswick, 1786-

1985"" (328.71505 N532Sp NB Coll.); ""The History of New Brunswick Provincial Election Campaigns and Platforms, 1866-1974"" (329.023 W899 NB Coll.); ""The Premiers of New Brunswick"" (971.5 D754 NB Coll.); ""A Brief History of the Liberal Party of New Brunswick"" (329.9715 H868 NB Coll.); the ""Maritime Advocate and Busy East"" (Oct. 1939); A.A. Dysart, ""Premier Dysart Renders Account of Stewardship"" in ""Maritime Advocate and Busy East"" Vol. 27, No. 3 (Oct. 1936); and the New Brunswick Pamphlet Collection.

*Last Modified:* 2005-05-11