

## Beware the Canadian Wolf The Maritimes and Confederation

Phillip Buckner

Volume 46, Number 2, Summer/Autumn 2017

URI: [https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/acad46\\_2pp03](https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/acad46_2pp03)

[See table of contents](#)

---

### Publisher(s)

The Department of History at the University of New Brunswick

### ISSN

0044-5851 (print)

1712-7432 (digital)

[Explore this journal](#)

---

### Cite this document

Buckner, P. (2017). Beware the Canadian Wolf: The Maritimes and Confederation. *Acadiensis*, 46(2), 177–195.

## Beware the Canadian Wolf: The Maritimes and Confederation

IN MARCH 1990 I WROTE A BROAD OVERVIEW for the *Canadian Historical Review* entitled “The Maritimes and Confederation: A Reassessment.”<sup>1</sup> As we mark the 150th anniversary of Confederation, I want to reassess that reassessment. All historians are influenced by the climate of opinion of the times in which they live and I was no exception. The 1980s were a period when historians of the Atlantic region sought to engage with what Ernie Forbes described as the stereotype of Maritime conservatism, and in my 1990 article I sought to show how this stereotype had distorted the historical literature on the Maritimes and Confederation. In a perceptive critique of my paper, published in the same issue of the *Canadian Historical Review*, Bill Baker was critical of my “rather static view of the literature from the 1920s to the 1960s.”<sup>2</sup> In retrospect I think that he may have been right about my comments on the interwar years, but I still maintain that the stereotype of Maritime conservatism was embodied in the major works written about Confederation in the 1960s. These works established what became the dominant interpretation of the attitude of the Maritimes to Confederation, one that saw the Maritimes as a conservative backwater dragged kicking and screaming into union with the United Province of Canada. The central theme of my 1990 paper was that this interpretation drastically underestimated the degree of support for Confederation in the Maritimes by lumping together the die-hard anti-confederates who were opposed to Confederation on any terms with those who were not opposed to Confederation in principle but who objected to the terms of the Quebec Resolutions – usually described as the “Quebec scheme” by its opponents. Many of the latter were converted, with various degrees of enthusiasm, into pro-confederates when they came to the conclusion that Confederation was indeed necessary to meet the challenges of the mid-1860s and that the “Quebec scheme” was the only option available. I did convince Bill Baker on this point. He had written a biography of one of the leading anti-confederates in New Brunswick, and my article persuaded him that his biography “significantly underrates the force of the pro-confederate movement in the Maritimes.”<sup>3</sup>

In the immediate aftermath of union, many of those who had opposed Confederation continued to insist that the Maritimes had been forced into an unequal

1 The paper, along with commentaries by P.B. Waite and William M. Baker can be found in “CHR Dialogue: The Maritimes and Confederation: A Reassessment,” *Canadian Historical Review* 71, no. 1 (March 1990): 1-45. An earlier version of this piece was given as the W.S. MacNutt Memorial Lecture in Fredericton in November 2016. In terms of its title, I am paraphrasing a Newfoundland folk song written in 1953: “Come near at your peril, Canadian wolf!” I am grateful to Margaret Conrad for giving me comments upon my paper and for allowing me to read her unpublished paper on the same theme – “‘A Cacophony of Drumbeats’: The Maritime Provinces in Confederation, 1867-2017,” now to be found at <http://www.margaretconrad.ca>.

2 Baker, “CHR Dialogue,” 38

3 Baker, “CHR Dialogue,” 39-40.

and unfair union with Canada. Gradually anti-Confederation sentiment in the Maritimes did dissipate, as politicians from the Maritimes came to occupy influential positions in the federal government, as the provincial governments received larger financial subsidies from Ottawa, and as the region benefitted from industrialization. The Maritimes shared (though not equally) in the prosperity of the Laurier boom years from 1896 to 1911, and the outmigration of Maritimers to the United States, which had begun before Confederation, was temporarily halted. In the 1920s, however, the Maritimes entered a deep recession, one from which the region never really recovered. In that decade the region lost about half of its manufacturing jobs, and nearly 20 per cent of its population emigrated to the United States. That decline was reflected in the smaller proportion of MPs from the Maritimes in the House of Commons, thus reducing the region's political influence. Faced with this changing reality, many Maritimers began to long nostalgically for the world they had lost and the Maritime anti-confederates came to be seen as prophets who had correctly predicted the decline of the region within a continental union. In *The True Story of Confederation*, one of the leaders of the Maritime Rights movement, Alexander Paterson, argued "Time has more than justified practically every point raised in opposition to Confederation by Maritime Anti-Confederates."<sup>4</sup> This interpretation entered the popular imagination and many Maritimers accept as a given that Confederation turned Maritimers away from their true destiny as a sea-bound people, leaving them with "Empty Harbours" and "Empty Dreams."<sup>5</sup> Although I hinted in my 1990 paper that this was an oversimplified version of regional history, I did not confront it strongly enough, partly because, like most regional historians in the 1980s and 1990s, I was more concerned to show that the Maritimes had indeed been treated unfairly within Confederation in the 20th century and that the region had special needs that could only be alleviated by sympathetic federal policies. I still believe that the latter argument is true, but it is also true that the whole debate in the Maritimes during the 1860s over Confederation has been distorted by our understanding of what happened in the 20th century.

It has, for example, become the accepted wisdom that because the initiative for a union of the British North American colonies came from the United Province of Canada, Confederation essentially reflected the political needs of the Canadians. As John Saywell puts it: "Whatever other purposes it served, the federal constitution of 1867 was not the product of a grand dream of British North American nationality inhabiting a transcontinental state. Paradoxically, it was driven and drawn by the inability of French and English to live together in the unitary state imposed by the British a quarter of a century earlier."<sup>6</sup> Yet this emphasis on the internal problems of the United Province of Canada does not explain why the majority of Canadian politicians supported the proposal to give priority to the attempt to create a larger federal union of the whole of British North America rather than a smaller federal union of the two Canadas. Moreover, this interpretation blinds Canadian historians

4 Alexander Paterson, *The True Story of Confederation*, 2nd ed. (Saint John: n.p., 1926), 17-18.

5 See the documentary film *Empty Harbours, Empty Dreams* (dir. Kent Martin, National Film Board of Canada 1979).

6 John T. Saywell, *The Lawmakers: Judicial Power and the Shaping of Canadian Federalism* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2002), 4.

to the fact that support for the creation of a transcontinental union was growing throughout all the British North American colonies in the 1860s. Confederation, Charles Tupper proclaimed in 1860, held out the promise that “British America, stretching from the Atlantic to the Pacific, would in a few years exhibit to the world a great and powerful organization, with British Institutions, British sympathies, and British feelings, bound indissolubly to the throne of England.”<sup>7</sup> At a public dinner in 1864 Leonard Tilley argued that the Atlantic and Pacific should be bound together “by a continuous chain of settlements and line of communications for that [was] the destiny of this country, and the race which inhabited it.”<sup>8</sup> And at the Quebec Conference in 1864 Colonel John Gray, the head of the government of Prince Edward Island, declared that it “has been the dream of my life to be one day a citizen of a great nation extending from the Great West to the Atlantic seaboard.”<sup>9</sup> A sense of manifest destiny was not confined to Americans and Central Canadians.

While the anti-confederates in the Maritimes denounced the terms being offered or argued that the time was not yet right, few of them denied that in the long run British North American Union was desirable. When Timothy Warren Anglin was asked in the New Brunswick Assembly whether he was opposed to any form of union, he replied “I do not know of anyone opposed to union in the abstract, but my impression is that the time has not arrived for any kind of union, and I will oppose it to the last.”<sup>10</sup> As Baker points out in his biography of Anglin, the argument that the time had not arrived was the greatest weakness in Anglin’s position on Confederation: “If he supported the concept of union, as he claimed he did, he ought to have seen that at no point in time would conditions be perfect.”<sup>11</sup> The same could be said of Albert J. Smith. After the defeat of his anti-confederate government at the polls in New Brunswick in 1866, Smith declared that he was not opposed to Confederation in principle; but he then moved a series of modifications to the Quebec Resolutions that were so extreme that there was not the remotest chance that the United Province of Canada could agree to them. Part of the reason for Smith’s intransigence was that, like many of the anti-confederates in New Brunswick, he never accepted the legitimacy of his electoral defeat, which he blamed on “Fenianism” and “the treacherous unconstitutional conduct” of Lieutenant Governor Arthur Hamilton Gordon.<sup>12</sup>

Too many historians have opted for simple answers to explain why the pro-confederates won the day in the 1860s. In New Brunswick the electorate was bribed by generous Canadian donations to the pro-Confederation campaign, by a fear of the Fenian raids that was exaggerated for political purposes, and by the interference of

7 Quoted in Phillip Buckner, “Sir Charles Tupper,” *Dictionary of Canadian Biography*, [http://www.biographi.ca/en/bio/tupper\\_charles\\_14E.html](http://www.biographi.ca/en/bio/tupper_charles_14E.html).

8 Quoted in Carl Wallace, “Sir Samuel Leonard Tilley,” *Dictionary of Canadian Biography*, [http://www.biographi.ca/en/bio/tilley\\_samuel\\_leonard\\_12E.html](http://www.biographi.ca/en/bio/tilley_samuel_leonard_12E.html).

9 G.P. Browne, ed., *Documents on the Confederation of British North America* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1969), 129.

10 *Debates of the House of Assembly of the Province of New Brunswick for 1866* (First Session): 105.

11 William M. Baker, *Timothy Warren Anglin, 1822-96: Irish Catholic Canadian* (Toronto: UTP, 1977), 117.

12 See the eight resolutions moved by Smith in *Debates of the House of Assembly of the Province of New Brunswick for 1866* (Second Session): 69, 20.

the lieutenant governor in the political process. In Nova Scotia the existing legislature was pressured by the imperial government into entering a union that was against the colony's interests. Prince Edward Islanders were persuaded to build a railway that they neither wanted nor needed, and thus were forced into Confederation by the threat of bankruptcy. These conspiratorial theories were precisely those used by the die-hard anti-confederates to explain their defeat at the time. They were accompanied by the claim that the Maritime pro-confederates were men more concerned with their own self-interest than with the interests of their constituents (an argument that is also found in the history of Confederation in Quebec).<sup>13</sup> Maritimers are treated as if they lived on a different continent from the more enlightened inhabitants of the United Province of Canada; they had to be bribed, coerced, deceived and railroaded into union.

This interpretation embraces a series of unfounded assumptions. The first is that prior to Confederation the three Maritime provinces had relatively little in common with the two Canadas. There were, undeniably, low levels of trade between the United Province of Canada and the Maritimes, primarily because both regions had similar economies based largely upon farming, fishing, forestry, and to a lesser extent mining. Even the timber trade and shipbuilding, though comparatively more important to the Maritime economy, were also important industries in Canada. In the larger urban centres of both regions one can see the beginnings of industrialization, although there were only two substantial urban centres in the Maritimes, Saint John and Halifax, and the Maritimes already lagged behind in the development of a manufacturing sector. Both regions had benefitted from the Reciprocity Treaty of 1854, and from the huge increase in demand created by the American Civil War. The economic and political elites in the Maritimes were, however, increasingly aware that the limits to the expansion of their traditional economy were being reached, as shown by the fact that a growing number of Maritimers were emigrating to the United States. In New Brunswick and Nova Scotia (and somewhat later in Prince Edward Island, although for the same reasons) the elites had begun to see railways as essential for the further growth of their colonies. Railways, it was hoped, would expand access to existing markets and encourage the development of more diversified industrial economies. Yet the building of long-distance railways involved more capital investment than any of the Maritime colonies could raise on their own. The attempt to build a railway from Saint John to Bangor, Maine (usually described as the "Western Extension") floundered because of the failure to find a partner in Maine willing to commit resources to the project and the construction of an intercolonial railway floundered because of the failure to reach an agreement with the Canadian and British governments over how it should be financed. By the mid-1860s it was becoming increasingly apparent that the only long-distance railway

13 The argument that the pro-confederates were prepared to sell their colony to Canada for mercenary reasons runs through the Confederation debates in all three of the Maritime Colonies and it is implicit in the literature that is favourable to the anti-Confederation cause, such as David Weale and Harry Baglole, *The Island and Confederation: The End of an Era* (Charlottetown: Williams and Crue, 1973). A similar argument is found in Stéphane Kelly, *Comment la Couronne a obtenu la collaboration du Canada français après 1837* (Montréal: Les éditions du Boréal, 1997).

likely to be built was the Intercolonial, and it was only likely to be built if Confederation took place. Although there was much less enthusiasm for vastly expanded expenditures on railways in communities that relied on the fisheries and the seaborne trades or in agricultural areas remote from the proposed railway lines, there were no hard and fast economic divisions over Confederation. Some timber producers, some ship owners, some merchants, and some farmers and some fishers, fearing Canadian competition or increased taxes, opposed Confederation, while others saw Confederation as bringing new opportunities.

It is a gross oversimplification to interpret the decision to join Confederation as a movement away from an imperial oceanic economy to a continental economy. This interpretation lies at the very heart of the "Empty Harbours, Empty Dreams" story of the history of the region, but it is based upon a misunderstanding of the nature of the pre-Confederation economy of the Maritimes. There was, of course, an important oceanic component in the economy of the region, but the oceanic trade was increasingly with one country, the United Kingdom, since even the once-important trade with the West Indies was already in decline before Confederation. The United Kingdom imported timber and wooden ships and sent back manufactured goods and immigrants, and this continued after Confederation although the number of immigrants declined as did, more gradually, the timber trade and the import of wooden ships. A substantial majority of the settled population of the Maritimes by the 1860s were, however, employed primarily as farmers and as coastal fishermen and what they produced was sold and consumed within the region or exported to the region's most important external market: the United States. So too were the newer natural resources produced within the region, such as coal. Even before Confederation most of the inhabitants of the Maritimes thought of the economy in terms of local and continental, not oceanic, markets. This was why the debates over reciprocity and railways were so central to the debates over Confederation, as the Maritimes were compelled to move from increasing continental integration with the American states to the south to greater integration into a transcontinental economy with Canada. The American decision to abrogate the Reciprocity Treaty, in fact, not only destroyed the argument for the Western Extension, but it also made a free trade agreement with Canada the only game in town if the Maritime colonies wished access to expanded continental markets. Even after Confederation, the American government refused to enter negotiations over reciprocity with the new Canadian government. In 1868 General Butler, an American congressman, did hold out the hope of a separate reciprocity treaty with Prince Edward Island, but there was never any realistic prospect either of the American Congress agreeing to such a treaty or of the imperial government accepting a reciprocity agreement that ignored the interests of the Dominion of Canada.<sup>14</sup>

Economic pressures will, in any event, only go so far in explaining why most Maritimers accepted the idea of Confederation in principle. In recent years there has been a strong tendency to emphasize the ethnic diversity that existed within the British

14 These issues are discussed in Ronald D. Tallman, "Annexation in the Maritimes? The Butler Mission to Charlottetown," *Dalhousie Review* 53, no. 1 (Spring 1973): 97-112.



North American colonies at the time of Confederation, to see in those colonies the roots of modern, multicultural Canada. Yet given the fact that about 92 per cent of the population could trace their ancestry (sometimes a bit indirectly) to either the British Isles or to France, this is a bit of a stretch. The French-speaking population in Lower Canada had already developed a strong sense of communal identity, and though the linkages between the Québécois and the Acadians were weak there was a slowly growing sense, at least among the Acadian elite, of having common interests with the French Canadian population in Quebec. When asked why he was not anxious to unite with the French people of Canada, Amand Landry of New Brunswick declared “He would like to unite with the French” but (in a veiled reference to George Brown) “that there were people there worse than the French, with whom he did not wish to have any thing to do.”<sup>15</sup> The English-speaking population of British North America were also evolving an increasingly strong sense of their collective identity as British Americans, a term indicating not only a sense of cultural affinity with Britain (frequently referred to as the “mother country”) but also that their roots were now on the continent of North America. Whether they lived in Canada or the Maritimes, the vast majority of the English-speaking (and Gaelic-speaking) population could trace their ancestral origins to the British Isles and they shared a firm commitment to continuing their membership in the British Empire, to living under a constitutional monarchy with a representative system of parliamentary government, and to a belief that “under British Institutions, the people have an amount of personal security for life, property and liberty not enjoyed by any other Government in the world.”<sup>16</sup> As early as the War of 1812-1815, Maritimers had shown their support for their fellow colonists in the Canadas and they showed it again during the rebellions of 1837 and the American incursions into Canada that followed the rebellions. Their reactions to external events like the Crimean War and the Indian Mutiny were similar, and they competed with each other in showing their enthusiasm for the monarchy during the royal tour of the Prince of Wales to British North America in 1860. Indeed, the argument that because the Maritimes had a larger trade with the West Indies than Canada, Maritimers knew more or cared more about the West Indies is risible. Although they may have developed a taste for rum and ginger ice cream, there is little evidence that most Maritimers viewed the West Indies as anything other than a faraway and exotic place. On the other hand, John A. Macdonald was exaggerating but not by much when he declared in a toast at Charlottetown in 1864 that British Americans felt themselves to be of “one ancestry – except a portion of Canada.”<sup>17</sup> Certainly the most extreme anti-confederates tried to arouse anti-Canadian feeling during the debates over Confederation, but this does not mean that these sentiments were widely shared – even by the majority of the anti-confederates.<sup>18</sup>

15 *Debates of the House of Assembly of the Province of New Brunswick for 1866* (First Session): 80.

16 Tupper, 20 December 1864, quoted in British North American Association, *Confederation of the British North American Provinces* . . . (London: F. Algar, 1865), 91.

17 Edward Whelan, ed., *The Union of the British Provinces* . . . (Charlottetown: G.T. Haszard, 1865), 9.

18 When one reads the debates in legislative assemblies of the Maritime colonies, it becomes clear that anti-Canadian sentiment was clearly not as widespread as is usually assumed. All the debates (some 1,500 pages of them) are being put on line at <http://theconfederationdebates.ca/>, and all of the references in this piece are drawn from the transcripts of the debates published there.

When Thomas D'Arcy McGee visited New Brunswick in 1859, he came to the conclusion that Maritimers were "not actively adverse" to Confederation. What was needed was a pressing reason to turn this passive sentiment in favour of Confederation into a more active effort to achieve it.<sup>19</sup> In his critique of my 1990 paper, Bill Baker felt that I had downplayed "the atmosphere of crisis, to use C.P. Stacey's words, in which the Quebec Resolutions were drafted."<sup>20</sup> Once again he had a point. I did not ignore the impact of the American Civil War, but I was more concerned with the economic issues surrounding the Maritimes' decision to enter Confederation – once again reflecting the scholarship on the Maritimes at the time. If I were re-writing my paper, I would now make the American Civil War much more central to my argument.<sup>21</sup> It was the American Civil War – not the political crisis in the Canadas – that led the Canadian politicians to agree to make Confederation a priority, and it was the American Civil War that persuaded the bipartisan delegations sent to Quebec from the Maritimes to work together and to make the concessions necessary to reach agreement on the terms of union. The single most important issue uniting the pro-confederates across British North America was the threat posed to the survival of the British colonies on the North America continent by the looming victory of the North in the American Civil War. Stacey was quite right: the Confederation agreement hammered out at Quebec was hammered out in an atmosphere of crisis. Indeed, if Greg Marquis is correct in his argument that the Maritime Provinces were more sympathetic to the South than the inhabitants of the United Province of Canada, the dread of what would follow a Northern Victory may have been stronger in the Maritimes than in Canada.<sup>22</sup> This fear was stoked by the actions of the American government in the aftermath of the Civil War. The American decision to cancel the Reciprocity Treaty and to tie its renewal to political union alienated virtually all British Americans; so did the tardiness with which the American government moved to put an end to the Fenian threat. The pro-confederates were aware that war with America would only come if there were a breakdown in Anglo-American relations and that, if it did come, the British North American colonies would have to rely on the Royal Navy to win that war. But they also recognized that Britain expected them to take on more responsibility for defending their own border against incursions by filibustering groups like the Fenians. They also feared that if they did not take control of the Canadian West, it might go the way of Oregon or Texas. On these issues, the majority of the anti-confederates, who did not deny the necessity of British North American union at some point, adopted a shortsighted, isolationist perspective. They argued that there was no need to worry about American intentions (when clearly there was), that they could always rely on Britain to protect them (a dubious

19 McGee, quoted in Ged Martin, "The Idea of British North American Union, 1854-1864," *Journal of Scottish and Irish Studies* 1, no. 2 (March 2008): 323.

20 Baker, "CHR Dialogue," 43.

21 I have done so in Phillip Buckner, "'British North America and a Continent in Dissolution': The American Civil War in the Making of Canadian Confederation," *Journal of the Civil War Era* 7, no. 4 (December 2017): 512-40.

22 Greg Marquis, *In Armageddon's Shadow: The Civil War and Canada's Maritime Provinces* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1998).



assumption about the future if Confederation did not take place), or that defending the Canadian border and taking control over the West were problems for the Canadians that did not affect the Maritimes (when clearly they did in the long run).

It is also time that we abandon the claim that the Maritime delegates played an essentially passive role at the Charlottetown and Quebec conferences. The leading Maritime pro-confederates accepted that Canada was absolutely essential to any scheme of union, but they were blindsided neither at Charlottetown nor at Quebec. It was always highly unlikely that any scheme of Maritime Union would have been agreed to by all three Maritime legislatures and therefore not surprising that the Maritime delegates at Charlottetown were easily converted to the grander vision of a transcontinental British nation that would stretch from sea unto sea. The broad guidelines of Confederation worked out at Charlottetown formed the basis for the discussions at Quebec. The Maritime delegates at Quebec were therefore not faced with a set of proposals from the Canadians of which they had had little or no warning. It is true that the United Province of Canada was given two votes instead of one at the Quebec Conference, but it was hardly an unreasonable compromise to treat the United Province of Canada as the two provinces it would become after Confederation and it still meant that Canada had only two votes out of six. Even if Canada had been given only one vote, it is unlikely that this would have resulted in any substantial changes to the Quebec Resolutions. On only one issue were the Canadians opposed by all four Atlantic colonies, and that was the comparatively minor issue of how the first members of the Senate would be chosen from the existing legislative councils. On this issue the Canadians yielded to the demands of the Atlantic colonies. Although the ease with which agreement was reached over the 92 Resolutions – an agreement opposed by only a handful of the delegates from the Maritimes – has been attributed to the fact that the Canadian delegation was allowed to set the agenda and to draft the resolutions to be debated at the conference, there is no evidence that the Canadians had a secret agenda and manipulated their position to confuse and confound the gullible Maritimers.

The Canadians did have two non-negotiable objectives. The first – a priority of George Brown and the Upper Canadians – was that the House of Commons should be elected on the basis of representation by population. The vast majority of the delegates at Quebec accepted that there was no way of avoiding this principle, one that was embodied in the structure of the American House of Representatives. Even the Prince Edward Island delegates only asked that they be given one extra member, even if it meant increasing the size of the House of Commons (a suggestion rejected by all the other delegations, even Newfoundland's). The decision to adopt representation by population was the sticking point for many anti-confederates, even for many moderate anti-confederates, who feared that the influence of the Maritimes would be insignificant in a House of Commons dominated by a large and united phalanx of Canadians. Yet, given the history of the United Province of Canada, the Maritime delegates at Quebec were surely correct to assume that there would not be many occasions when Ontario and Quebec would be united in a common cause. Indeed, George Brown, the man for whom rep by pop was a *sine qua non*, assumed that "race" would be the uniting feature of politics and that the British population in the Maritimes and Ontario would unite to extinguish French Canadianism. This turned out to be an equally inaccurate assumption. Moreover, the anti-confederates

were never able to come up with a viable alternative to representation by population. After Confederation, the Government of Canada was prepared to be slightly more flexible on the issue of representation by population. Prince Edward Island had a larger population in 1873 and was probably entitled to the sixth member it was now given in the House of Commons, but the small provinces of Manitoba and British Columbia were given more members than they were entitled to receive. Nonetheless this was seen as a temporary expedient in areas where it was assumed there would be rapid population growth. In the long run it was inevitable that some form of representation by population would remain at the root of the Canadian constitution in an increasingly democratic society.

To ensure French Canadian support the second non-negotiable decision taken at Charlottetown was that Confederation would be a federal, not a legislative, union, a decision with which a substantial majority of the Maritime delegates agreed. When the model of the New Zealand constitution was raised at the Quebec Conference, Macdonald dismissed it as inappropriate because it had created a legislative union rather than a federal union: "This is just what we do not want. Lower Canada and the Lower Provinces would not have such a thing."<sup>23</sup> At the London Conference both Tilley and Tupper pointed out forcefully to the representatives of the Colonial Office that their intention was not to create a "Legislative Union."<sup>24</sup> Of course the devil was in the details, and the delegates at Quebec did not entirely agree over the structure of the new federal system. But these divisions were not between the Maritimers and the Canadians. On the one side were those Anglophone liberals like Tilley and Brown and the conservative French Canadian bloc headed by Cartier who believed that the provinces should play an important role in the Canadian political system. On the other side were Anglophone conservatives like Tupper and Macdonald who accepted somewhat reluctantly that a federal union was necessary but still wished to restrict the powers of the provinces and inflate those of the new federal government. The result was a series of compromises. On the one hand, Tilley successfully insisted at Quebec that the responsibility for local public works, such as roads and bridges, should be left with the provinces and upon returning to New Brunswick he pointed out that 54 of the 59 acts passed in the previous session of the New Brunswick legislature would continue to fall under provincial jurisdiction. On the other hand, Tupper helped to work out a system of federal subsidies to the provinces that was based on the assumption that the provinces would have little to do. One thing the vast majority of the delegates at Quebec clearly did agree upon was that the dominant authority under the new system should be the federal government. Indeed, for anyone who has carefully read the Quebec Resolutions and the British North America Act it is impossible to come to any conclusion other than that the delegates at the Quebec and London conferences intended to give the preponderance of power to the government in Ottawa. Not only did the British North America Act give the federal government the sole power to levy customs duties (the major source of revenue during the 19th century), but it also deliberately departed from the

23 Quoted in Jennifer Smith, "Origins of the Canadian Amendment Dilemma," *Dalhousie Review* 61, no. 2 (Summer 1981): 305.

24 Browne, *Documents on the Confederation of British North America*, 211.

American model in a number of important respects. It gave the federal government the residual authority, control over criminal law, and the power to enact militia laws and to call out the troops in an emergency, as well as the power to appoint the lieutenant governors, the members of the Senate and provincial and federal judges, and to disallow provincial legislation. In this sense the critics of the Quebec scheme were right in arguing that the resolutions that the delegates adopted at Quebec were highly centralist.

Many pro-confederates – particularly the more liberal pro-confederates – agreed that the Quebec Resolutions created an overly centralized federal system, but argued that this was a battle that they could continue to fight after Confederation. In fact, in the latter part of the 19th century the Canadian constitution was effectively decentralized, thanks mainly to the decisions of the Judicial Committee of the Privy Council. Yet rather than leading to greater provincial equality, decentralization saddled the provinces with a host of new responsibilities without providing any new financial resources. One of the most controversial issues at the Quebec Conference was over how to share the existing colonial revenues between the federal government and the provinces. Since the major source of tax revenues was customs duties it was inevitable that they would be surrendered to the federal government, which was tasked with all of the most expensive responsibilities of a mid-19th century state. It was the issue of how to compensate the provinces that proved difficult to resolve. The end result was a per capita funding formula based on the assumption that the financial needs of the provinces would dramatically go down after Confederation, because the costs of running the provincial government and the provincial civil service would be reduced and because the federal government would assume the bulk of the public debts of the provinces and take over many essential services such as running the post office and regulating the fisheries. In retrospect, it is clear that this was a fallacious assumption. The role of the provinces in areas like education, public health, and social welfare would be dramatically expanded, and the Maritime Provinces, with limited revenues from the sale of public lands and natural resources, would not be able to cope. This problem was alleviated by periodic revisions of the federal subsidies given to the provinces but the system became increasingly dysfunctional, particularly during the 1920s and 1930s as the Maritimes began to lose businesses, jobs, and tax revenues. Yet it does seem unreasonable to blame the Maritime delegates to the Quebec Conference for not foreseeing how much the world would change during the 20th century. They designed a system meant for an age that believed in limited government. The problem is that Canadian politicians (and that includes some Maritime politicians) in the 20th century have been unwilling to redesign that system to ensure that all the provinces – including the poorer ones – have sufficient resources to meet their vastly expanded responsibilities. Equalization payments did something to fill the gap since the 1950s but they are dependent on the whim of the federal government and on the willingness of the wealthier provinces to pay for a re-distribution of resources in the national interest, something unfortunately that can no longer be taken for granted.

In retrospect, it is also easy to blame the Maritime delegates at Quebec for placing so much hope in the ability of an appointed Senate to protect regional interests at Ottawa. Virtually all of the delegates at Quebec were opposed to a democratic system of government, and the American Civil War had strengthened

that sentiment. Not only was the franchise in the British North American colonies restricted to adult males, but most of the colonies also had a property requirement both for voting and for running for either of the houses of the colonial legislature. One of the concessions made to Prince Edward Island and Newfoundland at the Quebec Conference was to lower the property qualification for appointment to the Senate. In the 1860s the legislative councils still played an important part in colonial politics; indeed, 6 of the 19 delegates from the Maritimes at Quebec were legislative councillors. Although a few of the Maritime delegates did question whether senators should be appointed by the federal government, the debate at Quebec focused mainly on how many senators would come from each region. Would the Senate have been more effective at protecting the interests of the Maritimes if all the provinces had been given equal representation, as in the United States? This would have been somewhat anomalous given the vast difference in size between Prince Edward Island and Ontario and it would have become even more anomalous over time in a union composed of a much smaller number of units than the United States. It is hard to believe that a Senate with 60 per cent of its members from the Maritimes in 1867 (or 40 per cent from Atlantic Canada today) would not have had its powers dramatically curtailed by a House of Commons that more accurately represented Canadian public opinion. Would the Senate have been more effective if the right to nominate senators had been given to the provincial governments? It is more likely that party loyalties – rather than provincial or regional concerns – would still have become the critical factor in determining how senators would vote. Would the Senate have been more effective if it had been decided to have a second chamber directly elected by the people? Perhaps, but the system of responsible government which was and is at the heart of the Canadian system of government (and which both the pro-confederates and the anti-confederates believed was far superior to the American republican system) inevitably centralizes power in the hands of the House of Commons and therefore in the hands of whichever party commands a majority in that House. Indeed, it hard to see any institutional change that would have ensured substantially greater power to a region which has shrunk from about 20 per cent of the Canadian population in 1871 to just over 5 per cent today – 6.6 per cent if you include Newfoundland.

The real divisions at Quebec were not between the Maritimes and Canada, but between the individual delegates. Because the Canadians formed part of a single cabinet, they tended to thrash out their differences ahead of time; but on at least one issue, George Brown found himself in a minority when he threatened to move to abolish the legislative councils in the provinces. Finding hardly any support among the other provincial delegations, he abandoned the effort (leaving the legislative councils to be abolished one by one over the subsequent 100 years). There were no coalition governments in the Maritimes, but all of them sent bipartisan delegations to Quebec. As Tupper admitted, the delegates from Nova Scotia did not always see “eye to eye” and were “obliged on many occasions to arrive at a common result by a compromise of our individual opinions; but in the measure as whole . . . we were all heartily and thoroughly united.”<sup>25</sup> This was not quite true. Robert Barry Dickey

felt that the financial arrangements agreed upon at Quebec was unfair to Nova Scotia, but he was essentially a pro-confederate and abandoned his opposition to Confederation after a slight adjustment of the financial terms was made at the London Conference in 1866. The New Brunswick delegation was more united. At least one of the delegates – Edward Barron Chandler – had been an outspoken critic of the highly centralised constitution created at the Quebec Conference, but he supported the overall package contained in the Quebec Resolutions. The most divided delegation was the one from Prince Edward Island. In fully half of the recorded votes at Quebec, Prince Edward Island voted against all the other delegations; its delegation returned deeply divided over the issue of Confederation, with four in favour and three opposed.

In both New Brunswick and Nova Scotia the existing party divisions were disrupted by the issue of Confederation, as the returning delegates from Quebec formed the nucleus of a bipartisan alliance committed to Confederation.<sup>26</sup> In New Brunswick that alliance was not strong enough to win the election of 1865, but it was able to win the subsequent election in 1866 by an even wider margin than it had lost the election in the previous year. In my 1990 paper I argued that the anti-confederate government elected in 1865 in New Brunswick collapsed primarily because of the internal divisions within that government over the issue of Confederation, but I probably did underestimate the importance of the Fenian raids. In this, too, I was in line with the literature of the day that tended to see the Fenians as posing a somewhat comic threat, exaggerated by the pro-confederates – particularly during the election of 1866 in New Brunswick. In the recent literature, the Fenian raids are taken far more seriously than they were in 1990.<sup>27</sup> The Fenian attack on New Brunswick may have been a bit of a farce, easily repelled by British troops and the New Brunswick militia, but the Battle of Ridgeway in Canada West was a Fenian victory. As Peter Toner pointed out many years ago (though few believed him at the time), Fenianism was a far stronger force within British North America than is usually assumed. As many as 3,000 men of Irish descent belonged to Fenian lodges, mainly in the Canadas, but potentially there were many more who loosely sympathized with the objectives of the Fenians. John A. Macdonald – who was in charge of dealing with the Fenian threat in the United Province of Canada – certainly believed that the Fenians posed a serious threat. So did the Maritime pro-confederates, who were concerned not merely with the threat to New Brunswick but with the larger threat to the whole of British North America. This threat was effectively ended with the crushing of the Fenians at the Battle of Eccles Hill in June 1870, although there were rumours as late as the fall of 1871 of Fenian activity near Manitoba.

The importance of sectarian conflict in the election of 1866 has been exaggerated. Certainly in the Orange press, Irish Catholics were identified as Fenian

26 For a fuller discussion of the Quebec Conference, see Phillip Buckner, “L’élaboration de la constitution canadienne au sein du monde britannique,” in *La Conférence de Québec de 1864: 150 ans plus tard*, ed. Eugénie Brouillet, Alain-G. Gagnon, et Guy Laforest (Québec: Presses de l’Université Laval, 2016), 34.

27 See, for example, Peter M. Toner, “The Fanatic Heart of the North,” in *Irish Nationalism in Canada*, ed. David A. Wilson (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2009), 34-51.



sympathizers; but anti-Catholic sentiment had been a staple in New Brunswick politics for decades and there is some evidence that, as in the United Province of Canada, Maritime Orangemen and Catholics were prepared to bury their differences, at least temporarily, in the interests of achieving Confederation. During the 1866 election Tilley deliberately stressed that most Irish Catholics were not sympathetic to the Fenian invasion, seeking to gain the support of Irish Catholics for Confederation and not to alienate them.<sup>28</sup> His appeal was successful. Bishop John Sweeney, who had reservations about Confederation, stayed quiet during the election, while Bishop James Rogers of Chatham abandoned his previous neutrality and openly defended Confederation. The Irish Catholic vote had never been monolithic, and it now swung decisively into the Confederation camp. It was this substantial swing in the Irish Catholic vote that helped to unseat both of the leading Irish Catholics in the assembly, Timothy Warren Anglin and John Costigan. Indeed, the only group in New Brunswick who did not respond at all to the loyalty cry was the Acadians, who were not represented at the Charlottetown and Quebec conferences and whose interests were ignored in the making of Confederation. But if anyone deserves the ultimate credit for undermining the anti-confederates in New Brunswick, it was the United States government. Its refusal to renegotiate the Reciprocity Treaty undermined the viability of a future for New Brunswick outside Confederation, and its tardy response to the Fenian raids gave a sense of urgency to the need for British Americans to unite to ensure that they had a future outside of the United States.

In Nova Scotia, Tupper refused to call an election but set about converting the anti-confederates in the existing assembly into pro-confederates. Anti-confederate sentiment does appear to have been stronger in Nova Scotia than in New Brunswick, but very similar factors were at work in both provinces. In the winter of 1864-1865 there was very little chance that Tupper could have persuaded a majority in the Nova Scotia assembly to vote for Confederation. Many Nova Scotians continued to believe that the American government would not cancel the Reciprocity Treaty and that the end of the Civil War would bring a return to business as usual. By 1866 public opinion in Nova Scotia, as in New Brunswick, was beginning to change, and enough anti-confederates had switched sides to enable Tupper to persuade the assembly to adopt a resolution in favour of Confederation. For Tupper this was something of a pyrrhic victory since the anti-confederates won the bulk of the Nova Scotia seats in the federal and provincial elections in 1867. The scale of the anti-confederate victory was inflated by the anger many Nova Scotians felt at the way they had been taken into Confederation, but the Nova Scotian anti-confederates were just as divided as the New Brunswick anti-confederates had been and along very similar lines. Many of those elected to the Canadian House of Commons as anti-confederates soon decided that Confederation should be given a fair trial and settled for slightly better financial terms. It is at least arguable that even if an election had been held in Nova Scotia before Confederation and the anti-

28 William M. Baker, "Squelching the Disloyal, Fenian-Sympathising Brood: T.W. Anglin and Confederation in New Brunswick, 1865-6," *Canadian Historical Review* 55, no. 2 (June 1974): 141-58.



confederates had won, the end result might not have been all that different with Nova Scotia eventually entering Confederation a few years after 1867 on terms not very different from those negotiated by Joseph Howe in 1869.

The pro-confederate delegates from Prince Edward Island had little support in the assembly, and the head of the government, Colonel John Hamilton Gray, was forced out of office by the anti-confederates in his own party. There is an unfortunate tradition in both Prince Edward Island and Canadian historiography of treating Prince Edward Island as fundamentally different from the other British North American colonies. Prince Edward Island did have some unusual features. It is a small island with a large proportion of arable land, almost all of which had been distributed at its foundation to absentee landlords. Because of the landlord system, the Island did not attract as many middle-class immigrants with substantial capital and, while there was certainly inequality among the Island's farmers, it was less pronounced than in the other British North American colonies. Given this social reality and the mobilization of the population in various campaigns to sweep away the landlord system, it is hardly surprising that Prince Edward Island had the most democratic political system in British North America at the time of Confederation with something very close to universal male suffrage and an elected upper house. In some ways, Prince Edward Island was the most "British" of all the Maritime colonies since it had received hardly any migrants from Europe, had only a very small number of Blacks and Indigenous people, and contained relatively few Acadians. Although Prince Edward Island did have the largest proportion of Catholics in the Maritimes, many of the Catholics were Scottish and not Irish. The roots of the British population, moreover, did not go back many generations since the vast majority of the immigrants had arrived after 1815, unlike Nova Scotia and New Brunswick where far larger numbers of immigrants had arrived during the 18th century.

The majority of the Island delegates did not go to the Quebec Conference to oppose Confederation, but they came away without any substantial concessions. The Island was denied even one extra member in the Dominion Parliament. There was no recognition of the fact that although the Island had a low debt (because it had not built any railways) this was unlikely to remain true, and that since the Island had very limited sources of revenue (since virtually all the Island's land had been given away at its foundation) it would require a more substantial per capita grant than the other provinces. Above all, the Island was denied any financial assistance to deal with the land question. The anti-confederates on the Island declared that they would never enter Confederation. Yet there is danger of taking the overblown political rhetoric of the anti-confederates at face value. Many of them might have supported the Quebec Resolutions if they had included financial aid for extinguishing the remaining proprietary estates. Although the Prince Edward Island Assembly passed a resolution in 1866 declaring that there were "no terms" that could persuade the Island to enter Confederation, James Pope, who moved the motion, admitted in private that he was less dogmatically opposed to Confederation than the resolution suggested.<sup>29</sup> Over the following few years, it became clear that reciprocity with the

29 Ian Ross Robertson, "James Colledge Pope," *Dictionary of Canadian Biography*, [http://www.biographi.ca/en/bio/pope\\_james\\_colledge\\_11E.html](http://www.biographi.ca/en/bio/pope_james_colledge_11E.html).

United States was not likely to be renewed, that the Island could never afford to purchase the remaining large estates on the Island, and that the Island would increasingly be placed under Canadian control when it came to negotiations with the United States, the regulation of the fisheries, and even the conduct of the lieutenant governor. Many of those who had voted for the “no terms” resolutions began to talk about getting “better terms.” One of the reasons why the Island elite was willing to undertake the high debt necessary to build a railway was the belief that it was only a matter of time until the Island entered Confederation and that it would be wise to build the railway before that happened since the debt would then be assumed by the federal government. The promise of money from Ottawa for this purpose and to buy out the remaining proprietary estates, as well a substantially larger grant to the province than had been offered in 1867, persuaded a majority of the Islanders to become Canadians in 1873.<sup>30</sup>

The Canada that Prince Edward Island entered in 1873 was not simply the United Province of Canada writ large. Although the 1866 tariff of the United Province of Canada would become the first tariff of the Dominion of Canada, in crafting that tariff Alexander Galt reduced the level of the Canadian tariff so that it would be more acceptable to the Maritimes. It still contained a number of elements that the Maritimes disliked, especially the substantial duties on grain and dairy products. In the first few years of Confederation, the Maritime Provinces were weakly represented in the federal government; this was partly because Nova Scotia had returned an almost solid bloc of anti-confederates, five of the fifteen members from New Brunswick were anti-confederates, and Prince Edward Island had yet to enter Confederation. The Macdonald government, nonetheless, did not ignore the interests of the region, and over the protests of Ontario farmers the most objectionable features of the new tariff were removed in 1868. The federal government did negotiate a “better terms” deal with Nova Scotia, even at the cost of alienating the Liberals of Canada West, and the terms it offered to Prince Edward Island to enter Confederation were, most Islanders admitted, generous.

Because the federal civil service was based in Ottawa, initially it was composed largely of Canadians; yet while this Ottawa bureaucracy would remain tiny in size for many years, a substantial number of federal appointments in the Maritimes were made locally (including postal employees and customs officers). By the time Macdonald left office in 1873 most of the anti-confederates elected to Parliament had been integrated into the political system and Maritimers were increasingly well represented in successive cabinets and well placed to defend the interests of their region. Three of the eight prime ministers before the First World War were from the Maritimes as were five of the ten finance ministers (including two of the most important, Leonard Tilley and W.S. Fielding), half of the ministers of Marine and Fisheries and of the ministers of Railways, and just under a third of the ministers of Justice and ministers of Customs. Maritime politicians were as good as central Canadian politicians at exercising patronage, and Maritimers soon came to occupy a growing proportion of the positions in the civil service in Ottawa. During the early

30 For a much fuller discussion of the debates in the three Maritime colonies, see Phillip Buckner, “The Debates over Confederation in the Maritimes,” <http://theconfederationdebates.ca>.

years of Confederation the national government spent large sums in the Maritimes constructing the Intercolonial Railway and no one has discovered any evidence that there was a spending bias against the region during the 19th century. Of course, the balance of power was changing as Canada expanded across the continent. Although the Maritimes grew at a steady pace during the wheat boom of the early 20th century, it did not benefit anything like Central Canada, either in terms of manufacturing or population growth. But even in 1914 Maritimers were influential enough to get a resolution through the House of Commons ensuring that no province would have fewer MPs than senators, thus breaking the principle of proportional representation agreed upon at Quebec – an historical anomaly ensuring that the Maritimes continues to be overrepresented in the House of Commons even today (by my calculation with 25 seats rather than the 17 to which proportional representation would entitle the region).

It is also misleading to believe that from the beginning the Maritimes was on a rapid path to economic disaster. The new tariff in 1867 was structured primarily to raise revenue, not to protect nascent Canadian industries, and there is no evidence that it seriously hurt the economy of the Maritime Provinces as the anti-confederates had predicted. The Maritimes were adversely affected by the end of reciprocity with the United States but so were Ontario and Quebec, who were just as eager to renegotiate a new reciprocity agreement. The refusal of the Americans to renegotiate remained the real barrier to any renewal of the treaty, and it was their refusal, as well as the growing volume of American manufactured goods entering Canada, that led the Canadian government to introduce a protective tariff in 1879. This was not a decision imposed by Ontario and Quebec on the Maritimes. The Conservatives only won the election of 1878 because of their support in the Maritimes, and the new tariff crafted by Leonard Tilley included a number of features designed specifically to assist in the industrialization of the Maritimes. The pace of industrialization in the Maritimes before the First World War, in fact, was impressive, even if it paled by comparison with the much more rapid industrialization taking place in central Canada. The problem was that the Maritimes started with disadvantages that were difficult to overcome. Because much of the agricultural land in the region was marginal, the Maritime Provinces had a lower population density than the more settled areas of Canada, the settlements were dispersed and discontinuous, and there were few major urban centres. Even in the late 19th century, the population density of settled areas in the Maritimes was about a third of that in Quebec and Ontario and only about 20 per cent of the population lived in urban areas compared to 29 per cent in Quebec and 35 per cent in Ontario. These disparities grew wider over time, right up to the present, when a higher proportion of people live in rural areas and small towns in the Maritimes than in any other Canadian region. Inevitably, the industrial establishments scattered around the Maritimes that were created after 1879 employed fewer people than those in central Canada and they were harder to sustain in the long run, Kris Inwood has suggested, “because they were small.”<sup>31</sup> The disadvantages faced became more extreme as British imports were gradually replaced by American imports,

31 Kris E. Inwood, “Maritime Industrialization from 1870 to 1910: A Review of the Evidence and Its Interpretation,” *Acadiensis* XX1, no. 1 (Autumn 1991): 150-1.

giving southwestern Ontario an enormous locational advantage. But can the Maritime pro-confederates, all of whom were long since dead and buried by the 1920s, really be held responsible for the fate of the region in what would become an increasingly integrated North American economy in the 20th century?

Those anti-confederates who argued in the 1860s that the Maritimes should reject a continental destiny and cling to industries tied to the sea were not great prophets either. Confederation was not responsible for the decline of the shipping industry in the Maritimes, for Maritimers continued to build and own wooden sailing ships after Confederation. In fact, Maritime entrepreneurs built ever larger ships, held on to more of them instead of exporting them for sale, and sent them to the four corners of the world in search of cargoes. But it was an industry in decline, and its benefits to the region were increasingly marginal. Many parts of the region had exhausted the supply of timber on which the shipbuilding industry depended. The British market for wooden ships collapsed in the early 1870s and never returned. Fewer ships were being built in the later 1870s, and the ships that were built stayed at sea for ever-longer periods of time in ever more distant waters. Some never returned to the places where they had been constructed, and the proportion of seamen who came from the Maritimes steadily declined. Building and owning wooden ships was an increasingly risky business, and so many Maritime entrepreneurs took the rational decision to reinvest their profits in the new industries that were springing up across the region because of the protective tariff. The building of sailing ships gradually declined until the end of the 19th century; all that was left was the production of fishing schooners for local use. If the Maritimes had not entered Confederation, the decline of shipbuilding and the shipping industries might have taken a little longer since fewer alternatives would have been available; but it is hard to believe that it would not have happened. Nor is it likely that the Maritimes could have made the transition to building iron steam ships. Even if they had made the transition, it is worth remembering that some of the great shipbuilding centres of the 19th century, like Glasgow and Baltimore, have gradually become de-industrialized shells with some of the worst slums in their respective countries in the late 20th century.

The options for a series of dispersed communities on the northeastern edge of the North American continent were always limited. One option might have been to seek annexation to the United States and a few of the more extreme anti-confederates did advocate annexation. In his study of *Britain and the Origins of Confederation*, Ged Martin argues "Confederation was not the most obvious answer to the continental challenges of 1864. Indeed, if the overwhelming priorities were the need to secure a larger market, better communications, and to put an end to the threat of American invasion, the obvious solution – certainly by 1865 – would have been to seek annexation to the United States." Confederation, he maintains, was not a logical solution to the problems of the 1860s but "a form of sacrificial gesture to British opinion."<sup>32</sup> I find Martin's argument unpersuasive. The overriding priority of most British Americans was to avoid annexation to the United States and to remain part of the British Empire, even if this came at the cost of the Reciprocity Treaty and the

32 See Ged Martin, *Britain and the Origins of Confederation, 1837-1867* (Houndmills and London: Macmillan Press, 1995), 40, 70, 73-4, 79, 261, 295.

threat of American invasion. Moreover, the implication that British American politicians opted for Confederation simply to appease British “opinion” is also unconvincing. Of course, British Americans needed to retain British support for the new nation they were creating. But it was the internal pressures in North America that persuaded British American politicians of the need for union. British backing for Confederation would have had little impact – indeed it would have been counterproductive – if the British Americans themselves had not come to the conclusion that Confederation was in their long-term interests. Moreover, the imperial government played virtually no part in creating the constitutional structure worked out at the Charlottetown and Quebec conferences. When news about the decision of the British North American colonies to meet at Quebec reached London, the head of the North American department in the Colonial Office noted “This federation movement is getting beyond the scope of Secretaries of State; and it is of no use to impose restrictions if you can’t well enforce them.”<sup>33</sup> Events moved so fast that the secretary of state did not even know what had been decided at the Quebec Conference until the Quebec Resolutions arrived on his desk, and only minor changes were made at the London Conference in 1866. The main contribution that the British government made to the creation of Confederation was to inform Nova Scotia that since its legislature had consented to Confederation in 1866, it could not change its mind. And the limits of imperial power were clearly shown in Prince Edward Island, which refused to join Confederation until it was ready to do so despite the imperial government bringing all the pressure to bear that it could without violating Prince Edward Island’s right to local self-government.

Confederation can hardly be described as illogical when it did exactly what the pro-confederates claimed it would do. It led to the creation of a single trading block with a sufficiently large revenue base to allow it to finance a policy of continental expansion and to retain for nearly a century a strong imperial connection. But even if these policies had failed and the Maritimes had become part of the United States, would the region have been more prosperous? As Patricia Thornton argued in 1984, it is not enough to blame “Canada, Confederation and the National Policy” for the huge volume of outmigration in the 1880s and 1920s, since the root of the problem was the rapid growth and enormous pulling power of the New England economy in these years. Outmigration from this perspective was “a *cause* as well as a *consequence*” of the economic decline of the region.<sup>34</sup> Similarly, it was the strength of the Ontario economy – as Ontario became integrated into a North American economic system – that explains why so many Maritimers and Newfoundlanders decided to go “down the road” in the 1950s. And these pressures would have been just as strong – indeed probably even stronger – if the British North American colonies had joined the American Union. The forces of continental integration would still have consolidated economic power in central Canada and in New York and southern New England. Maine, after all, is one of the most sparsely populated and one of the poorest states in the American Union. Most of its wealth and

33 Thomas Blackwood, quoted in William Menzies Whitelaw, *The Maritimes and Canada before Confederation* (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1934), 230.

34 Patricia A. Thornton, “The Problem of Out-Migration from Atlantic Canada, 1871-1921: A New Look,” *Acadiensis* XV, no. 1 (Autumn 1985): 30 (emphasis in original).

population is concentrated in the urban south of the state, close to the industrial heartland of New England, and the further north you go the less populated and poorer it gets. In 1870 Thomas Heath Haviland warned those anti-confederates on Prince Edward Island who supported annexation to be careful of what they wished for, pointing out that under American law an area had to have a population of 127,000 (a number PEI would not reach for over a century) before it was entitled to a member of the House of Representatives.<sup>35</sup> It also seems unlikely that the American government would have allowed the Maritimes to have six senators in the 1870s when American Senate had only 66 members. It is more likely that if the Maritimes had entered as a unit – in itself a problematic assumption – that it would have ended up like Maine, with two senators in a much larger Senate and perhaps three rather than two members in a larger House of Representatives and with about the same influence that Maine has within the American Union.

Another option for the Maritimes might have been to become an autonomous state, presumably after some form of Maritime Union, but this was an option that had little contemporary support during the 1860s and it is questionable how long such a state could have survived on the North American continent and how prosperous it could have become. Many years ago David Alexander used the example of Newfoundland to point out that Confederation at least enabled the Maritimes to maintain what he described as a “shabby dignity.”<sup>36</sup> I am not sure that this is an entirely fair description. The Maritime Provinces have a comparatively high standard of living and a flourishing higher education sector. Admittedly the latter essentially trains people to leave, but I fear that in the 21st century the concentration of political power and employment in a country’s large metropolitan centres is well nigh inevitable, at least until the capitalist system is overturned (and that is not likely to happen in the foreseeable future). I am not arguing that Maritimers should simply learn to live with economic inequality. In the 1920s and the 1950s Maritime politicians of both political parties were able to work together to gain significant concessions from the federal government. Whether it any longer has the political clout to do so is questionable, especially as one of the by-products of the North American Free Trade Agreement is the growth of an economic regionalism along north-south lines. Even during the 1950s and 1960s most of the major gains for the people who live in the Maritimes were made not by fighting a campaign based on regional grievances (real as they may be), but by insisting that Canadians, wherever they might live, are entitled to a reasonable standard of living and a reasonable level of public services. It is important to remember that Confederation was about creating a sense of Canadian nationalism and it has succeeded. Every study I have ever seen indicates that most Maritimers, especially young Maritimers, do feel deeply committed to Canada. In this sense the Maritime pro-confederates did succeed in their ultimate political goal – to create a Canadian nation in which most Maritimers would feel they belong and to which they would feel their primary loyalty.

PHILLIP BUCKNER

35 Assembly of Prince Edward Island, *The Parliamentary Reporter* (1870): 20.

36 David Alexander, “Economic Growth in the Atlantic Region, 1880-1940,” *Acadiensis* VIII, no. 1 (Autumn 1978): 75-6.