

Parties and Constituencies: Federal Elections in Nova Scotia, 1867-1896*

D. A. Muise

Volume 6, Number 1, 1971

St. John 1971

URI: <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/030465ar>

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.7202/030465ar>

[See table of contents](#)

Publisher(s)

The Canadian Historical Association/La Société historique du Canada

ISSN

0068-8878 (print)

1712-9109 (digital)

[Explore this journal](#)

Cite this article

Muise, D. A. (1971). Parties and Constituencies: Federal Elections in Nova Scotia, 1867-1896*. *Historical Papers / Communications historiques*, 6(1), 183–202. <https://doi.org/10.7202/030465ar>

PARTIES AND CONSTITUENCIES:
FEDERAL ELECTIONS IN NOVA SCOTIA,
1867-1896*

D. A. MUISE

National Museum of Man

The detail concerning Nova Scotia's stormy passage through the portals of Confederation is well enough to know to allow me to forego any extended commentary here. The general tendency among Canadian historians has been to emphasize the extent of the demonstrated opposition to political union in Nova Scotia, especially as expressed in the general election of 1867. (In that election, eighteen of the nineteen members elected to represent Nova Scotia in the House of Commons were outwardly pledged to seek the repeal of Confederation.) This has been buttressed by the tendency to focus on the quasi-diplomatic settlement arrived at in the "Better Terms" agreement of 1869.¹ Few have attempted any systematic analysis of the locus of anti-Confederation sentiment. Fewer still have addressed themselves to the elements that comprised the pro-Confederation side of the political dichotomy that convulsed Nova Scotia in the 1860's.

But a concentration on the events immediately surrounding Confederation gives a rather false impression of the political attitude of the province toward union with Canada. If one sets aside the debacle of 1867, and the equally disruptive 1874 election, the Conservative, i.e. 'Confederation', Party emerges as by far the strongest political force in Nova Scotia during the period between 1867 and 1896. (The validity of 1867 election must be questioned because of the highly-charged emotional content of Nova Scotia's anti-Confederation movement; 1874 was the 'Pacific Scandal' election, which was a deviating election all across Canada.) In the other six federal elections between 1867 and 1896 the Conservative, or Union Party won a total of 83 seats, compared to the Reformers' 42.² That kind of record certainly does not tally with the accepted impression that the province was unalterably opposed to union and remained a smouldering bed of anti-Confederation sentiment for the rest of the 19th century. Either the impression given in 1867 was a transitory phenomenon, or the Nova Scotia Con-

* This study was completed with the financial support of the National Museum of Man, National Museums of Canada.

servatives staged the most remarkable display of political adroitness in Canadian history. Nova Scotia's federal political response to the new nation during its first three decades forms the topic of this paper.

The basic interpretations of the events surrounding Nova Scotia's entry into Confederation tend to differ only in emphasis. The most commonly accepted version argues that Union was imposed on Nova Scotia by Imperial and Canadian exigencies, rather than the result of any combination of local conditions. This argument normally sees the thrust of these external exigencies reinforced through the complicity of a group of rather unscrupulous and ambitious local politicians, representative of nothing so much as their burning ambition to broaden the field for their undoubted political talents. This line of thought has led to a rather unhealthy preoccupation with the personalities of the participants in the Confederation struggle, especially those of Charles Tupper and Joseph Howe, the leading protagonists before the public. A further consequence has been the general acceptance of the rather provincialistic view that the province was forced unwillingly into union. This interpretation probably owes as much to subsequent developments as it does to any real understanding of the forces that were active in Nova Scotia in the 1860's.

Opposition to Confederation in Nova Scotia is usually explained by reference to two brief phrases: "Wood, Wind and Sail" and "Nova Scotianess". It is rightfully argued that powerful social and economic forces within the province were genuinely fearful that political alignment with Canada would disrupt the essentially commercial disposition of the Nova Scotia economy. It was a point of view which envisaged Nova Scotia's future, like its past, deeply rooted in the positional advantages of the province with reference to the economies that depended upon the sea. It is further argued that a peculiar sort of limited nationality had emerged in Nova Scotia during the two or three decades preceding Confederation. This combination of socio/political and economic maturity has led many historians to refer to that period as Nova Scotia's "Golden Age". Concerning Confederation, the argument is that this "Nova Scotianess" refused to be submerged by the greater nationality that was the promise of Confederation.³ It is important to realize that the "Nova Scotianess" had two elements, the economic and the emotional-political. The two were closely linked into a kind of "identity" for the province.

The major drawback of this nationalistic interpretation (and it is interesting to note that the major centralist historians of Canada have

fully accepted its implications) lies with the rather simplistic view that it takes of Nova Scotia's socio-economic structure on the eve of Confederation. The assumption is that Nova Scotians spoke with a unified voice in economic and political affairs. In this context, the pro-confederates are explained away as a tenacious minority, to be admired or condemned, depending upon the point of view of the author. It is more important that we examine the total response of Nova Scotia to Confederation, not only in 1867 but in the decades that followed as well. To do this, one must first accept the pro-confederates as a viable political force, reflecting the interests of groups and regions within the provincial community which had a legitimate voice in provincial affairs.

The decade immediately preceding Confederation had brought momentous social and economic changes to Nova Scotia and it is there that we must look for the antecedents of the Confederation movement. Not only did the province's sea-oriented economies mature to a degree only anticipated by previous generations, but the province leaped forward into the railroad era and expanded its industrial potential to an extent not generally anticipated prior to 1850. The building of the railroad to Truro and Windsor from Halifax and the decision to extend it to Pictou and Annapolis were important. Equally important was the rapid expansion of the provincial coal industry. For some, coal was simply another resource, to be harvested and sold like the fish from the sea. For others, it represented the essential ingredient for the fulfillment of provincial potential. Coal was to be the essential input in the industrial future of Nova Scotia.⁴ The fact that annual production rose from well under 200,000 tons in 1854 to an excess of 600,000 by 1865 gave them true cause for hope.

The most important development in Nova Scotia's political life during this period was the emergence of a party dichotomy of real substance. It was to be the crucial factor in the debate over the merits of Confederation. At its centre was the question of the role of government in the management of the economic and social affairs of its constituents. In essence there were two sides to the debate. Over the period, there emerged a group of politicians who were convinced that government had to involve itself more directly in the economic and social life of the province. This positivist group was continually attempting to expand the role of government, especially in the context of its responsibility for realizing provincial potential. The opposing group was more *laissez faire*. It was mainly composed of merchants and commercial men of one sort or another. This was in direct contradistinction to the

more positivist group of politicians who tended to be representative of the professional community. For the merchants, the best form of government was that which did least and was least expensive; for the positivists, the extension of the role of government was the necessary prerequisite for progress within society.

There were several issues during the fifties and sixties that reflected this dichotomy. Railroads and education were the most durable; but there were others of almost equal significance. The repatriation of the provincial coal resources in 1858 was one. The arrangement of the civil list for the province was another. These issues were important in that they forced public men to assess their position *vis-à-vis* the central issue of the role of government. In the beginning, the dichotomy crossed party lines, and there is a great deal of difficulty in isolating the various components in the debate. Over time, however, it became evident that there was a real separation among groups concerning the role of government. Those in favour of a more active policy argued that only the government could legitimately promote the full realization of provincial potential. The extension of railroads and the development of a comprehensive free school system were conceived of as vehicles for the full achievement of provincial potential in human and natural resources. Confederation would be viewed in the same light by its supporters.

These forces reached something of a culmination in the provincial election of 1863. The incumbent Reformers stood firm on the prosperity of their years in power, promising more of the same, while the Conservatives, under the inspired leadership of Dr. Charles Tupper, advanced a program of positive action in a variety of fields, particularly education, railroad extension and industrial development. The Conservatives won an overwhelming victory and went on to advance their aims. In a number of ways their victory reflected a significant political realignment for the post-responsible government era. The Conservatives became a more closely-knit party group than had previously been common in the province. Their members tended to be younger, more likely professional men than merchants. They dominated all of the urban areas in the province, especially those in the northern and eastern portions. The Reformers maintained their strength in the rural areas, particularly in those areas directly involved in the fishing or carrying trade. The political dichotomy which had crossed party lines in the period prior to 1860 became a clear-cut party division following the election of 1863.⁵

Perhaps the most important element in this dichotomy was the regional aspect of the distribution of support and the extent to which the Conservatives dominated all countries with any potential for industrial development. It is difficult to get even an estimate for industrial capital accumulation prior to Confederation. In 1871, six counties controlled 74% of all industrial capital. These were Halifax, Hants, the northern counties of Colchester, Cumberland and Pictou, and Cape Breton. In 1863, the Conservatives held fifteen of the nineteen seats from these counties. These counties also contained all of the important coal fields in the province, as well as the constructed railways. There was a strong division between the interests of these counties and the rest of the province, especially those areas which related directly to the sea and the economies of the fisheries and the coasting trade. "Wood, Wind and Sail" had been challenged by "Iron, Coal and Rails" in 1863 and the latter had come out victorious. It was the beginning of a struggle between commercial and industrial interests that would provide the basic division for political parties in the post-Confederation era.

The Tupper government transformed their victory of 1863 into an impressive accomplishment in the legislative field. The construction of the Pictou railway extension; the free schools legislation of 1864 and 1865; the undertaking of the Windsor-Annapolis extension; all promised or fulfilled the positivist objectives of the Conservative Party. The thrust towards Confederation was a function of this development. For its supporters, Confederation was the ultimate consolidation, designed to promote the influx of capital necessary to propel the province to its industrial future. It should be noted that this was not a development which was envisaged by its initiators as inimical to the more traditional interests within the province. Rather, it was the discovery of a newer potential and the determination to exploit it in a more complete manner.

The results of the 1867 elections, if not altogether unexpected, constituted a severe blow to the Unionists in Nova Scotia. The eighteen Nova Scotia Party supporters returned to Ottawa seemed like a solid block of immovable opposition to Confederation. Tupper was the lone Conservative survivor, but he was a most important exception. It did not take long for qualifications to the apparent rout to begin arriving. Tupper was the most articulate apologist for the defeat and, at the same time, the most vociferous defender of the finality of union.⁶ In spite of the near shut-out in the Commons, the Union Party had not done nearly so badly in the popular vote. Their strength through the

northern and eastern sections of the province, and in the urban areas, had not been seriously eroded. Pictou, Halifax and Colchester Counties could all have been carried by the Confederates if the turnout had been a bit higher in Conservative strongholds. They actually carried Halifax City but lost the two seats on the basis of the strong anti-Confederation vote in the County.

In Nova Scotia the 1867 election was a deviating one, in the sense that highly-charged emotional issues were brought to bear on the electorate by the anti-Confederates.⁷ The question of the economic incompatibility of Nova Scotia and Canada had remained in the forefront during the campaign. That issue had been hotly debated ever since the initial union proposal of 1864. It reflected a significant difference of opinion on the direction of Nova Scotia's future, especially its economic future.⁸ It is worth noting in this connection that twelve of the eighteen antis elected were merchants and/or ship-owners. The anti-Confederates buttressed their opposition to union with the issue of loss of the hard-won constitutional separateness of responsible government. Union was thus portrayed as a semi-traitorous act against the dual identity which Nova Scotia had achieved in the 'Golden Age'.

In a very real sense, the positive thrust generated by the Conservatives in the 1863 election was deflected by the injection of these highly charged emotional issues into the election campaign during the summer of 1867. The immediate consequence of this deflection was a lower turnout in those areas of the province where the Conservatives had been strongest in 1863 and a much higher turnout in other areas. In spite of this, the Unionists came out of the election determined to prevail and the distribution of votes offered them ample room for hope. As it turned out, the pressures on the antis for submission to Confederation were too strong. Joseph Howe was quickly persuaded to negotiate with the government of Sir John A. Macdonald for "Better Terms". That development broke the back of anti-ism in Nova Scotia. By 1869, two-thirds of the solid eighteen of 1867 were found in full support of the government of Sir John A. Macdonald.⁹

The interval between 1869 and 1872 witnessed a gradual defusing of the emotional issues that had been so prominent in the 1867 election campaign. The result was a return to a more understandable dichotomy among the interests that had demonstrated their force in 1863. This was not, however, matched by a corresponding hardening of party lines. There was a certain amount of outright party affiliation. Tupper and

Howe were the cabinet representatives in the Macdonald ministry during the period.¹⁰ They were fully endorsed by six other members. Another six, mostly representatives of the merchant community, remained firm in opposition and openly cooperated with the Reform Party which was beginning to congeal under the dual leadership of Alexander Mackenzie and Edward Blake. Five other members retained an independent status, but only occasionally opposed the government. This was the alignment when the first Parliament was dissolved in 1872.¹¹

The first Macdonald government had demonstrated its awareness of Nova Scotia's expectations in Confederation in a number of ways. Undertaking the construction of the Intercolonial was the most obvious, but there were a number of others as well. In 1870 a duty of 50¢ per ton was placed on foreign coal. The same year a hard line was taken on the question of American access to the inshore fisheries. This issue was finally put to rest, in a manner almost completely acceptable to Nova Scotia, by the Treaty of Washington of 1871. Various support payments were made to interprovincial steam communication lines. And, in addition, a whole host of harbour improvements, and other public works were initiated. While there continued to be tension between the federal and provincial governments, the meshing of federal politicians with national political institutions moved forward dramatically. In fact, the central preoccupation of the government was to insure that the older and newer elements of Conservative support worked in tandem.

The 1872 election confirmed the ascendancy of the federal Conservatives in Nova Scotia. The basic issue of the campaign was its handling of Nova Scotia's affairs during the first five years of Confederation. The Conservatives defended their activity and argued in favour of more involvement on the part of the government. The opposition denied that Confederation had brought any benefits to the province and argued in favour of a closer alignment with the more *laissez-faire* Reformers of Ontario. This latter alignment was not as complete in 1872 as it would become. For the opposition press in Nova Scotia, the Ontario "Grits" were the lesser of two evils. In those constituencies where the two parties were joined in a direct confrontation, the essential question at issue was the Conservative commitment to economic nationalism as opposed to the more retrenchment-oriented position of the Nova Scotia mercantile community in alignment with the central Canadian "Grits". It is important to note the success with which the Conservatives characterized the "Grits" as a narrow, Ontario-oriented party.

The election results reflected the progress made by Nova Scotia's Conservatives and the strength of their commitment to Canada's first national policy. They carried 15 of the 21 seats, six by acclamation.¹² In many other constituencies there was virtually no contest, as independents, pledged to offer fair support to the government, were returned. In areas where there was a clear two-party contest the Conservatives won without difficulty. They carried all the urban areas with ease and made substantial showings in all counties except Yarmouth, where the Conservative candidate carried only 27% of the vote.

The question of party attribution is still a somewhat vexing one for 1872. While the Conservatives seemed to know what they were and where they were going, they did not trouble themselves to erect a substantial extra-parliamentary machine for governing their affairs. As a result, some government supporters called themselves Liberals or Independents, although they would offer steady support to the government. The anti group had been shattered by the "Better Terms" arrangement. The nucleus of that original anti group was particularly ill-suited to lead a political party. A. G. Jones and Patrick Power of Halifax and James W. Carmichael of Pictou had been the recognized leaders of that rump. All three were singularly devoid of political acumen. All three were merchants. All three lost their seats in 1872. The surviving opponents of the government in the House of Commons were virtually leaderless.

In spite of their failure in the election, Jones, Power and Carmichael had given the tone to the Reform Party in Nova Scotia. Along with other mercantile men, they were opposed to the national aspirations of the Union Party and the kind of government expenditures that nation building entailed. During the House of Commons sittings between 1869 and 1872, they had given steady opposition to the development of nationally-oriented public endeavours. They had opposed the incorporation of the Northwest. They had opposed the construction of the C.P.R. They even opposed the imposition of a tariff on coal and, not unexpectedly, they opposed the government's position *vis-à-vis* the development of a higher tariff schedule. They had carried into the House of Commons the central features of their opposition to Confederation and this continued to be the ideological position of reformism in Nova Scotia after 1869. In 1872 that ideological position was rejected by the Nova Scotia electorate. That happened because the province, or at least a large proportion of the province's voters, was committed to the idea of national development for Canada and seemed

determined to see Nova Scotia play a vital role in the development of the nation. A close examination of the results of the 1872 election reveals that the Conservatives had re-established the position of dominance in Nova Scotia's federal politics that they had lost temporarily in 1867.¹³

At the 1873 sitting of the House of Commons the Conservatives of Nova Scotia gloried in their restoration to power. It was made all the more sweet by the fact that they virtually held the balance of power in Ottawa. The near 'saw-of' between the "Grits" and the government in Quebec and Ontario had made the loyalty of the Nova Scotia Conservatives essential to the survival of the government. This resulted in a spectacular series of concessions by the government and the virtual collapse of Reform morale in Nova Scotia. The continued commitment of Nova Scotia's Conservative leaders to the national aspirations of the Conservative ministry was significant. Equally important was Tupper's determination to see the legitimate interests of Nova Scotia forwarded by the government. The movement in that direction in 1873 was very impressive.¹⁴

The "Pacific Scandal" burst the great nationalistic bubble that had been so carefully inflated by the Unionists. The great purge that took place in the general election of January 1874 was a sort of national self-purification. Nova Scotia did not escape the wrath of the politicians or the people. In some respects, it was the first truly national election ever held in Canada. The fervour of the Nova Scotia editorialists had little to distinguish itself from the rantings of their Ontario counterparts, save the ease with which the Reformers associated the scandal with all things 'Canadian', harking back to cursed '67 for inspiration; as if the voters needed any urging to vote for Reform following the holocaust of the summer of 1873.

The Conservatives never really tried to fight in Nova Scotia in 1874. In the areas where they had been strongest in 1872 they hardly fielded candidates. In Halifax the sitting Conservative members, M. B. Almon and John Tobin, refused to run. The Conservative banner was carried, perhaps one should say dragged, by a young labourer who was able to garner only a few votes in the working districts. The provincial turnout, at 68%, was well below the average for the province in the first eight elections after Confederation. It was especially low in urban areas where the Conservatives had been strongest in 1872. Only two of the twenty-one members returned were Conservatives, the indestructible

Tupper and William McDonald, who managed to split the vote in Cape Breton. Five Reformers were returned by acclamation. No matter from what vantage point one views the 1874 election, the conclusion that one must arrive at is not that the government was overturned by a wave of Reform, but that the Conservatives had simply failed to fight the election in any substantial manner. It was, in short, another 'deviating' election, this time all across the country.

The Reform ministry (1873-1878) was not a particularly happy one, especially from the Nova Scotia point of view. The "Great Depression" was as severe in Nova Scotia as anywhere, and it put an enormous strain on the rather weak alliance of individuals who comprised the Reform group from Nova Scotia in the House of Commons. The membership was made up of two, or perhaps three, groups. Firstly, there were the political hangers-on, i.e. 'independents', of various hues and descriptions who had survived the 1872 election and had used their place in the House of Commons to ensconce themselves in positions of power when the Conservatives resigned in the autumn of 1873. William Ross and Thomas Coffin were typical of this group. They used their political expertise to garner cabinet posts when the Reform ministry was formed in November of 1873.¹⁵ Unfortunately for the Reformers, it was a group almost devoid of administrative capacity and certainly incapable of offering substantial leadership to political forces within the province of Nova Scotia.

The second group represented in the House of Commons after 1874 were the returnees of the anti-Confederation movement of 1867. Jones, Power and Carmichael were all returned to the House of Commons in 1874. They were joined by several younger and sometimes quite aggressive representatives of the mercantile community. Their positions, *vis-à-vis* the affairs of the nation, had changed but little over the years. The central tenet of their political credo was still retrenchment. They were opposed to the national aspirations of Canada and continued, during the Mackenzie years, to oppose the involvement of the government in large-scale expenditures designed to promote the growth of the Dominion.¹⁶

The third group of Reformers elected in 1874 was a small number of younger and more idealistic men. These men had been thrown up by the scandal itself. Ultimately, it would be the core that would form the nucleus of the Reform Party in the post-1878 period. F. W. Borden and C. E. Church were the most typical members of this group in 1874.

They were at once more idealistic concerning the purity of government and less ideological on issues relating to trade and national development than the purely mercantile element in the party. The flexibility of their position in this regard would ultimately permit the Liberal Party in Nova Scotia to find a more acceptable alignment with their counterparts in the upper provinces, but not until some time after the Reformers lost office in 1878. The running conflicts among these three groups, on the one hand, and the provincial government on the other left plenty of scope for criticism by the Conservative opposition.

By the end of the Mackenzie years the Nova Scotia Reformers were a hopeless shambles as an organization. The Conservatives on the other hand, used their years in opposition to great advantage. The purge of 1874 had not been without its beneficial effects. It ridded the party of the erstwhile independents. By 1875 the hard core of the Conservative Party had established a strong party association, the Liberal-Conservative Association, and had also established an enormously potent party organ, the *Halifax Morning Herald*. That newspaper, founded in January of 1875, easily challenged the Reformers' *Morning Chronicle* for the leadership of the press of the province. The Liberal-Conservative Association and the *Morning Herald* established a strong line of criticism against the Mackenzie government and quickly re-espoused the cause of nation building with a verve unmatched anywhere in the Dominion.

This rebirth of the Liberal-Conservative Party was a great tribute to the political energy of Charles Tupper. Tupper had seemed to desert Nova Scotia politics following the 1873-74 debacle, when he moved his family and his medical practice to Toronto. But he was back in circulation in Nova Scotia within a year. Perhaps the healing benefits of a year in Toronto refurbished his spirit; or maybe a year is all any Nova Scotian can take of Toronto. Tupper, who with James Macdonald of Pictou, was the heart and soul of the Conservative Party in Nova Scotia during these years of opposition, was as committed to the National Policy as any other leader of the Conservative Party in Canada. In the *Herald* and on the hustings, he campaigned tirelessly on the issue of a 'National Policy' for Canada from late 1874 onward. One of the key elements in the discussion was the promised protection, under a national policy, for the coal industry of the eastern part of Nova Scotia and the promotion of the industrial potential of that area. For the Conservatives economic nationalism was the logical extension of the drive towards Confederation. Tupper himself had spoken of a

national policy as early as 1870, when he had given that policy real meaning for Nova Scotians by his insistence on the imposition of a tariff to protect Canadian, i.e. Nova Scotian, coal against unfair competition from the United States.

The Conservatives looked upon the Reform ministry's stay in power as a rather distasteful interruption of the logical national development of Canada promised at Confederation. The continuing economic depression offered them ample scope for criticism of the policies of the government. By 1876, virtually all other issues had disappeared from the public scene. The solution to the depressed situation of the economy became the central issue facing Canadians. It proved the occasion for a dramatic series of reaffirmations of policy for political groups in Nova Scotia. Tupper and his Conservative backers were tireless in their presentation of the case for economic nationalism. Led by Jones, Power, Carmichael and Killam, the Nova Scotia Reformers stood fast in their adherence to free trade and retrenchment. Their position in the Commons and before the public was one of unyielding determination to protect the low-tariff policies of the government.

The election of 1878 bore out the wisdom of the Conservative position. In that election 14 of the 21 seats in Nova Scotia went to the Conservative Party, including all nine with significant urban or industrial potential and all those in the northeastern sector of the province. In the rural areas, either fishing or farming oriented, it was an even split. The Reformers dominated the Roman Catholic counties of Antigonish and Inverness, while the Conservatives made significant inroads in the Annapolis Valley where the railroads seemed to play a decisive role. The 1878 election had featured the re-emergence of a dichotomy concerning the nature and role of government. The Conservatives had used their years in opposition to refine their position on the central question of government involvement in the national economy. The campaign in 1878 featured a constant and steady presentation of their position to the people of Nova Scotia, to the absence of all other political issues.

The Reformers must be given credit for standing on their principles. In spite of the continued depression they insisted that the government's role was not that of economic arbiter. Jones, Carmichael and the others insisted on attributing the commercial slump to the great world-wide depression. Their prescription for its cure was to leave the economy alone and allow it to come back into equilibrium. Their diagnosis had

been that the depression was caused by excessive tinkering on the part of the governments in Western Europe and in the United States. They felt that it was only a matter of time before those governments came back to their senses and re-instituted a policy of free trade which was more in line with the world situation as it had existed prior to Confederation. The ranks of these merchants were severely decimated in the election.

The 1878 election established a pattern which, with only a few minor variations, held true for the next three elections. There was, it must be recognized, a significant measure of turnover of seats in those elections. It tended, however, to be concentrated in peripheral areas rather than in the central regions. The urbanizing and industrializing counties of Halifax, Hants, Colchester, Cumberland, Pictou and Cape Breton were, with the exception of a single Halifax seat, in 1887, in the firm grip of the Tories for the whole of the period. Rural areas seemed to fluctuate from side to side. On the whole, the Liberals were strongest in those counties along the Atlantic shoreline, where fishing and shipping continued to hold absolute sway. The agricultural areas tended to be more evenly divided. This pattern held true in spite of the emotion surrounding the 'Repeal' campaign of 1887 and the great loyalty cry of the general election of 1891.¹⁷

Any firm understanding of the political behaviour of Nova Scotia during these years must be based upon an understanding of the growth and direction of the provincial economy. Reference was made earlier to the relationship between locus of industrial capital and potential and support for the Conservatives immediately prior to Confederation. Between 1871 and 1891 total capital investment in secondary industry more than trebled. (It was to double and redouble by 1901 and 1911.) With this expansion came an increasing concentration in the six counties of Halifax, Hants, Colchester, Cumberland, Pictou and Cape Breton. In 1871 they held 74% of the total. By 1911 they held 91%. The growth rate for those counties separate was equal to or higher than the national averages for the whole period.

This is doubly impressive when we recall that investments in coal mining are not included in these estimates, coal being listed as a primary industry. This investment was estimated at twelve millions of dollars in 1877. There are no figures for 1891, but by 1911 investment in coal mines was listed at forty-two millions of dollars. Production climbed to three million tons by 1900 and would surpass seven million tons per

annum during parts of the next decade. In addition, we must recall that a large proportion of this coal was sent to the Saint Lawrence market, with a concomitant development of an interdependency between the central Canadian and Nova Scotian economies.

The import of these figures is that Nova Scotia, for the first three decades of Confederation at least, enjoyed a respectable rate of economic growth and an appreciable degree of capital accumulation. That development was overwhelmingly concentrated in six counties. The six counties in question were devoted to the ideal of economic nationalism for Canada and expressed their support in loyalty to the Conservative Party, the party that promised the fulfillment of their aspirations. The nine seats they controlled were a solid block of Conservative strength between 1878 and 1891. It is important to remember that this trend had surfaced prior to Confederation and was clearly evident in 1863. It had re-emerged in 1872 only to be disrupted in 1874. The 1878 election was a reaffirmation of their faith in positivism.

The concomitant of this conclusion is that the main thrust of governmental activity in the immediate pre-Confederation period was transferred to the federal scene after 1867. The provincial level was left with very restricted capacity to effect change in the economic status of the province. The dramatic confrontation that burst into the political scene in 1886-87, when the Repeal movement had its hour, was simply a reflection of the bankrupt status arrived at by the Provincial Government. It was a confrontation that took place almost completely apart from the purely federal area of politics. Between 1891 and 1896 the provincial government made a dramatic turnabout. W. S. Fielding actively entered the federal field at the 1893 Liberal Convention and demonstrated his empathy with the industrial sector of the economy by his facilitation of the formation of the Dominion Coal Company. This, of course, mirrored the developments taking place at the national level of the Liberal Party.

In the 1896 election the Liberals made serious inroads into the strength of the Conservatives in the urban and industrial counties. By this time, however, the party was not the party of Jones, Carmichael and Killam but a new party, less rigid on issues of trade and retrenchment and much more accommodating towards the national aspirations of the Dominion. The Conservatives had ceased to be the only viable party for the central counties and a new political era was inaugurated.¹⁸

Another conclusion which may be drawn from the above is that the traditional explanation of Nova Scotia's electoral behaviour is insufficient. The province was not a smouldering hot-bed of anti-Confederation sentiment. Neither is it enough to say that the province slavishly offered its support to the party in power in expectation of political favours. Rather, the province offered its support to the contesting parties on the merits of their programs. Regions and interests supported one or the other of the parties as they saw those parties capable of advancing the interests of their particular region. The consistency of that support reflects the fact that there were significant elements in the province which felt that Confederation had something to offer Nova Scotia. The domination of federal politics by the Conservatives reflects the extent to which their policies conformed to the aspirations of the new Nova Scotians within the new nation of Canada.

NOTES

¹ In this connection, witness the title of Ch. I of D. G. Creighton's *The Old Chieftain*, (Toronto, 1957). "The Pacification of Nova Scotia", interestingly enough, takes up only the first few pages: the rest is devoted to Sir John A's personal family life and the grandeur of Confederation.

² A full analysis of the returns of the first six general election is given in Chart I.

³ The most prolific proponent of this thesis concerning "Nova Scotianess" has been D. C. Harvey. See his "The Age of Faith in Nova Scotia", *Transactions of the Royal Society of Canada*, XL, Section II (May, 1946), 1-20; and "The Spacious Days of Nova Scotia", *Dalhousie Review*, XIX, No. 2 (June, 1939), 133-142. The most recent interpretations are P. B. Waite, *The Life and Times of Confederation* (Toronto, 1962); W. L. Morton, *The Critical Years, 1857-1873* (Toronto, 1965); K. G. Pryke, "Nova Scotia and Confederation, 1864-1871", unpublished Ph.D. thesis, Duke University, 1962; and R. A. MacLean, "Joseph Howe and the Union of British North America", unpublished Ph.D. thesis, University of Toronto, 1967.

⁴ These attitudes were very forcefully brought to the fore in 1858 when the monopoly over coal production held by the General Mining Association was broken. From that year onward there was a flood of comment on the great potential of the coal resources. See T. F. Knight, *Nova Scotia and Her Resources*, Halifax, 1862. It would be a critical factor in the debate over Confederation.

⁵ See Chart II.

⁶ See Tupper to Lord Monck, 29 February 1868, P.A.C., Tupper Papers, Vol. 1 (draft) for a most articulate apology for the election results.

⁷ My use of the term 'deviating' is drawn from J. M. Beck's *Pendulum of Power* (Scarborough, 1968), 249. In this sense, a deviating election is one in which "the basic division of party loyalty is not seriously disturbed, but the influence of short-term forces on the vote is such that it brings about the defeat of the majority party." P. Converse, "The Concept of a Normal Vote," in Campbell, Converse, Miller and Stokes, *Elections and the Political Order*, (New York, 1966), p. 15. Quoted in *Ibid.*, 249.

⁸ See D. A. Muise, "The Federal Election of 1867 in Nova Scotia: An Economic Interpretation", *Nova Scotia Historical Society Collections*, XXXVI, 1968, 327-351.

⁹ See K. G. Pryke, "The Making of a Province: Nova Scotia and Confederation", Canadian Historical Association, *Historical Papers*, 1968, 35-48; and D. A. Muise, "Two Letters on the Pacification of Nova Scotia", *Nova Scotia Historical Quarterly*, I, No. 1 (Spring, 1971), 11-25.

¹⁰ Howe accepted office as President of the Privy Council on 30 January 1869; on November 30th he shifted to Secretary of State for the Provinces. Tupper entered the Cabinet on June 21st, 1870 as President of the Privy Council; on July 2nd, 1872 he became Minister of Inland Revenue.

¹¹ The most open co-operators with the reform group were A. G. Jones and Patrick Power of Halifax, J. W. Carmichael of Pictou and Thomas, and later Frank Killam of Yarmouth. All four were substantial merchants and shippers and formed the nucleus of the anti-Confederation group in the House of Commons after 1869, when they were present.

¹² Nova Scotia's representation in the Commons was increased by two members in 1872. This was accomplished by converting Pictou and Cape Breton to two-member constituencies.

¹³ Once again the regional divisions within the province are significant. Of the eleven firm Conservative members elected, eight were from the six counties of Halifax, Hants, Colchester, Cumberland, Pictou and Cape Breton. These were the six counties with impressive accumulations of industrial capital. In those areas the commitment to the policy formulations of the Conservative government was most strongly felt. These regions also produced some of the strongest voices in support of the government. James MacDonald of Pictou and William Macdonald of Cape Breton were the most impressive from this point of view.

¹⁴ An examination of the estimates for 1873 reveals a healthy expenditure on public works, both large and small, in Nova Scotia. More important, there were an enormous series of promises concerning future development of railways, canals, harbour facilities, etc. It completely demoralized the remaining reform support in Nova Scotia. See *Halifax Morning Chronicle*, 3 June 1873.

¹⁵ Ross, M.P. for Victoria, was named Minister of Militia on November 7, the day the Cabinet was formed. Thomas Coffin was named Receiver General. Mackenzie was unhappy with the necessity to choose them and quickly enlisted Jones' support in dismissing Ross. Ross was replaced the following September in favour of W. B. Vail, former Provincial Secretary and a relative by marriage of Jones.

¹⁶ For a particularly adept statement of this position see A. G. Jones to Alexander Mackenzie, 10 October, 1876. Mackenzie Papers (P.A.C. Microfilm) 1382-1383.

¹⁷ These two elections have been admirably treated in two M.A. theses. See C. Howell, "Repeal, Reciprocity and Commercial Union in Nova Scotia Politics, 1886-1887", unpublished M.A. thesis, Dalhousie University, 1967; and R. M. Deering, "The Federal Election of 1891 in Nova Scotia", unpublished M.A. thesis, Dalhousie University, 1967.

¹⁸ A most effective analysis of the 1896 election is K. M. MacLaughlin, "The Federal Election of 1896 in Nova Scotia", unpublished M.A. thesis, Dalhousie University, 1967.

CHART I

Nova Scotia Election Results, 1867-1896*

	Eligible Voters	% Turnout	% Cons.	% Reform	% Other	Seats Conservatives	Seats Reformers
1867	38,547	79 %	41 %	58 %	1 %	1	18
1872	39,218	79 %	51 %	49 %	—	15	6
1874	41,476	68 %	44 %	56 %	—	2	19
1878	62,042	76 %	52 %	45 %	3 %	14	7
1882	60,772	70 %	50.4%	47 %	2.5%	14	7
1887	78,998	81.3%	50 %	48 %	2 %	14	7
1891	90,045	79 %	54 %	46 %	—	16	5
1896	111,124	68 %	50 %	49 %	1 %	10	10
					Total Seats	86	79

* The 1867 results record all 18 anti-Confederates as Reformers. In 1872, party affiliation was arrived at by a combination of prior performances and the degree of support offered to the government in the 1873 sitting of the House of Commons. Nine members, five of whom are here classed as Reformers, called themselves independents. Six government supporters were elected by acclamation. All statistics are taken from official returns published by the Dominion Returning Officer.

CHART II
*A Biographical Profile of the Membership of the
 Legislative Assembly of Nova Scotia, 1863-1867*

a. <i>Ages of Members</i>		b. <i>Occupational Groups</i>			
	<i>Conservatives</i>	<i>Reformers</i>	<i>Conservatives</i>	<i>Reformers</i>	
30-40	5	4	Merchants and shippers	14	9
40-45	8	4	Professionals	14	5
45-50	11	3	Farmers	3	1
50-60	8	3	Others	8	2
over 60	7	3			

c. <i>Political Experience</i>		d. <i>Urban vs Rural Constituencies</i>			
	<i>Conservatives</i>	<i>Reformers</i>	<i>Conservatives</i>	<i>Reformers</i>	
One Assembly	12	6	Urban (industrial)	11	1
Two Assemblies	4	2	Rural (agricultural)	18	7
Three Assemblies	13	5	Urban (fishing and shipping)	3	3
Four or more Assemblies	10	4	Rural (fishing and shipping)	7	6

e. <i>Regional Distribution</i>		
	<i>Conservatives</i>	<i>Reformers</i>
Annapolis Valley and Digby County	9	1
Southern and Eastern Shores (including Halifax East and Richmond County)	10	10
Halifax West (City) and Hants County	6	0
Gulf Shore — Antigonish, Inverness and Victoria Counties	5	2
Northeastern Counties (including Cape Breton County)	9	4

CHART III

A Statistical Survey of Federal Elections in Nova Scotia, 1867-1896
By Geographic Regions

	1867	1872	1874	1878	1882	1887	1891	1896
	Libs. Cons.	Libs. Cons.	Libs. Cons.	Libs. Cons.	Libs. Cons.	Libs. Cons.	Libs. Cons.	Libs. Cons.
a. Atlantic Shore	6 - 0	2 - 4	6 - 0	3 - 3	4 - 2	5 - 1	3 - 3	3 - 2
b. Northeastern Counties (inc. Cape Breton County)	3 - 1	0 - 6	4 - 2	0 - 6	0 - 6	0 - 6	0 - 6	1 - 5
c. Annapolis Valley	3 - 0	1 - 2	3 - 0	1 - 0	1 - 2	0 - 3	0 - 3	2 - 1
d. Gulf Shore	3 - 0	2 - 1	3 - 0	3 - 3	0 - 3	1 - 2	0 - 3	2 - 1
e. Halifax-Hants	3 - 0	0 - 3	3 - 0	0 - 2	2 - 1	1 - 2	2 - 1	2 - 1

*By Function**

	1867	1872	1874	1878	1882	1887	1891	1896
	Libs. Cons.	Libs. Cons.	Libs. Cons.	Libs. Cons.	Libs. Cons.	Libs. Cons.	Libs. Cons.	Libs. Cons.
a. Urban	6 - 1	0 - 9	7 - 2	0 - 9	0 - 9	1 - 8	0 - 9	3 - 6
b. Rural-farming	6 - 0	3 - 3	6 - 0	4 - 2	3 - 3	1 - 5	2 - 4	4 - 2
c. Rural-fishing	6 - 0	2 - 4	6 - 0	3 - 3	4 - 2	5 - 1	3 - 3	3 - 2

* The urban classification includes the six counties of Halifax, Hants, Colchester, Cumberland, Pictou and Cape Breton. Rural-farming seats were the three Annapolis Valley seats plus Antigonish, Inverness and Victoria. The rural-fishing counties were Yarmouth, Shelburne, Queens, Lunenburg, Guysborough and Richmond.

