

***The Orthodoxy Unchallenged. Canadians at Last: Canada Integrates Newfoundland as a Province.* Raymond B. Blake.**

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Volume 11, Number 1, Spring 1995

URI: [https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/nflds11\\_1re01](https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/nflds11_1re01)

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Publisher(s)

Faculty of Arts, Memorial University

ISSN

1198-8614 (print)

1715-1430 (digital)

[Explore this journal](#)

Cite this article

Fitzgerald, J. E. (1995). *The Orthodoxy Unchallenged. Canadians at Last: Canada Integrates Newfoundland as a Province.* Raymond B. Blake. *Newfoundland Studies*, 11(1), 127–144.

## REVIEW ARTICLES

### The Orthodoxy Unchallenged

*Canadians at Last: Canada Integrates Newfoundland as a Province.* Raymond B. Blake. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1994. Pp. x, 252, illus. \$55.00 cloth, \$19.95 paper.

JOHN EDWARD FITZGERALD

FEW EVENTS in Newfoundland history are as central to Newfoundlanders as confederation. And few subjects are as complex. *Canadians at Last* is a revision of Raymond Blake's Ph.D. thesis (York University, 1991) which documents the bureaucratic arrangements leading to confederation. The analysis begins with the referenda of June and July 1948, and ends in 1957, the year by which, it is argued, Newfoundland was finally functioning in administration and government "like its sister provinces". The book is a collection of five chapters arranged thematically instead of chronologically, and it adds importantly to our historiography: it is the first scholarly critical examination of how the terms of union were negotiated, and it begins a long-overdue debate over the success of the terms. Blake makes plain the devastating impact of the removal of tariff barriers on Newfoundland's manufacturing industry, and the death of the salt cod fishery. *Canadians at Last* could not be more relevant to Newfoundlanders today, trying to understand the origins of the economic and social morass in which we find ourselves. But a striking inconsistency softens the book's strong impact: while it purveys a stunning catalogue of confederation's failures, it still whiggishly interprets confederation as

Newfoundland's eventual, inevitable destiny. Praise is heaped on certain items in the confederate agenda, such as resettlement for the sake of "modernizing" the Newfoundland fishery, and the book approves bringing Newfoundland "kicking and screaming into the twentieth century". That this internal conflict in *Canadians at Last* remains unresolved is a good measure of how the book shies away from challenging, and in fact supports, what James K. Hiller first identified as the confederate "orthodoxy", the official explanations of how confederation came about, as established by Smallwood and others.

The most important findings of *Canadians at Last* are that the negotiations of the terms of union were seriously flawed, and that a set of terms quite detrimental to Newfoundland was produced. After the second referendum of 22 July 1948, Governor Gordon Macdonald appointed a Newfoundland delegation to negotiate terms at Ottawa. Its members were J.R. Smallwood, F. Gordon Bradley, John B. McEvoy, Philip Gruchy, and Ches Crosbie, and Albert Walsh, who was chairman. In St. John's during the late summer and early fall of 1948, they prepared a forty-one-point memorandum, responding to an earlier set of Canadian proposals, and brought it to Ottawa in October. (It might have more clearly stated to readers that terms of union already substantially existed, having been negotiated by the National Convention delegation in Ottawa during the long hot summer of 1947: Canada sent its proposed terms — the "Grey Book" — in November 1947 to the National Convention.) During the delegation's preparations in St. John's and while it was in Ottawa, the overriding concern became the debt which would accrue to Newfoundland as a result of the increased level of expenditure required to provide services at the level of a Canadian province. It is here that ironies start to abound. While Smallwood "emerged" as the delegate most knowledgeable about the Canadian terms (Blake seems surprised here), and while Smallwood "possessed remarkable insight into how Canadians — bureaucrats and politicians alike — would view the various proposals that the delegation contemplated during its preparations" (pp. 25-6), Blake concludes that the Newfoundland memorandum was a poor basis on which to begin discussions, and it crippled and doomed the negotiations from the start:

What was missing from the Newfoundland agenda is also quite revealing: that matters pertaining to the future economic development of the province were absent was a terrible blunder. In fact, the broader picture of Newfoundland's economic development was discussed neither by the delegation before it left St. John's nor with the Canadians in Ottawa (p. 27).

As if the Ottawa delegation's sins of omission were not enough, delegate Ches Crosbie refused to sign the terms on 11 December 1948, afterwards claiming that they proposed to use Newfoundland's accumulated surplus to cover its budgetary deficit, that they neglected secondary industries after confederation, and that they

would play havoc with the finances, economy, and employment levels of Newfoundland.<sup>1</sup> Again Blake is unequivocal:

Time has proven Crosbie accurate in his assessment of the inadequacies of the terms. That they did not provide for Newfoundland's financial security was equally clear to Smallwood and the other members, but they believed that the terms were not etched in stone and that Ottawa would prove responsive later on if the province encountered financial difficulty....The delegation failed to realize, however, that governments change; and as the events of 1958 were to show, the Conservative government of John Diefenbaker was not as responsive to the financial needs of the province as the Liberal Government of 1948 (p. 37).

These findings — which ring today as the most objective vindication of the Responsible Government League's warnings of 1948 — were even substantiated in late 1994 in the published memoirs of two of the Canadians who arranged confederation: Mitchell Sharp, the head of the Interdepartmental Committee which negotiated with the Newfoundland delegates, and Jack Pickersgill, the head of the Prime Minister's Office. Sharp admitted that term 29 (which provided for a review of the suitability of the financial terms within eight years of union) was created by himself, F. Gordon Bradley, and Dr. Robert A. MacKay of External Affairs in order to provide for Newfoundland precisely because of the inadequacy of the financial terms.<sup>2</sup> Pickersgill admitted that the financial terms given Newfoundland were inadequate to provide for levels of public service similar to those found in the Maritime provinces when he related that "the fear was that Newfoundland would require so much federal financial support that it would upset the tax-rental agreements with the seven provinces that had been concluded in 1947 after so much stress."<sup>3</sup> In other words, with confederation Newfoundland could not be seen by the other provinces to be getting any more from the federal Liberals than the others got, especially since the St. Laurent government, which had come to power in the fall of 1948, was heading towards a federal election. Together, these overriding concerns effectively prevented Newfoundland's financial terms from being adequate, and crippled the new province. *Canadians at Last* might have profitably examined the term 29 fiasco in more depth, extending the analysis to 1958. On the other hand, by 1958 the deed had been long done.

With the dirge for the terrible inadequacy of the Newfoundland delegation's demands of Ottawa ringing in our ears, we also encounter the first of two *leitmotifs* which recur throughout *Canadians at Last*. One is the idea of "blame", first encountered in the dual claims that "Newfoundland's politicians must share the blame with Ottawa" for poor terms, and that they did not push back at Ottawa when Ottawa pushed at them:

...in fact, the delegation did not know what it wanted for secondary manufacturers.... By placing the issue in the hands of a Canadian committee, without any Newfound-

land representation, the delegation effectively removed the issue from the Ottawa discussions. Later, when Walsh mentioned the subject, the Canadians refused to discuss it, claiming that they had to wait until their team of experts had presented its report. The delegation was caught in a web of its own making (pp. 96-97).

Unfortunately, the "blame-the-delegation" *leitmotif*, as accurate as it might be, is out of tune with the "greatness-of-Confederation" logic presented in the rest of *Canadians at Last*. How could the Newfoundland delegation *push* for better terms? It was not elected, but appointed by the Dominions Office's own appointee, Governor Gordon Macdonald. It did not represent the National Convention,<sup>4</sup> which had been dissolved in January 1948. Apart from the ability to threaten not to sign, or to resign from the delegation, the delegation's members had little control over the final terms obtained. Gordon Winter recently remarked that the delegation was given a set of terms by the Government of Canada, and told to "take them or leave them."<sup>5</sup> Mitchell Sharp, of the Canadian Department of Finance in 1948, admitted that the Canadian government simply presented its financial terms to the Newfoundland delegation, to whom it was conveniently left to "decide whether they were justified in recommending union."<sup>6</sup> The Ottawa delegation in the fall of 1948 therefore carried no legislative or political clout with which to back up any threats it might make. It was also composed entirely of confederates, not just three, as Blake contends (p. 100). Smallwood, Bradley, and Phil Gruchy were the obvious ones, but McEvoy, Walsh, and Winter were also confederates. Even Ches Crosbie had seen the light and "converted" by early August 1948 from leading the party for economic union with the United States to supporting confederation. While the Newfoundland delegation, with no say in the matter, were caught in a web, it was not at all one of their own making. At no point during the referenda campaigns did Smallwood ever campaign on the proposed terms of union presented to the National Convention by Canada during the fall of 1947. It simply would have been poor politics to present such a dusty, dry, and legalistic document to the Newfoundland electorate, which seems to have had more of an appetite in July 1948 for sectarianism than it did for terms of union. The jury must therefore still be out on the responsibility to be borne by the delegation for what the terms did to Newfoundland. In light of Blake's evidence, though, perhaps it is time to call back a jury to reconsider the connections between Newfoundland's loss of sovereignty and its economic decline.

*Canadians at Last* is a little fuzzy on what exactly the referenda accomplished, and on the significance of their legal standing. In an imprecise characterization of the issues raised in the referenda campaigns, we learn that one of the questions Newfoundlanders were asked to decide upon in the referenda was "should they choose the uncertainties of independence and nationhood that came with a return to responsible government?" (p. 4). This ignores the fact that Newfoundland nationhood did not come back into existence with the return of responsible government. Regardless of their country's constitutional status, New-

foundlanders were already citizens of a nation and a country, right down to their passports, and described themselves as such in contemporary writing. *Canadians at Last* registers an "amazement" that the celebrations usually associated with great constitutional events "simply did not occur in Newfoundland, a fact all the more amazing considering that the dominion's constitutional status had been settled by a narrow margin in two bitterly fought referenda" (p. 7). Again, a factual error. While the referenda provided public political justification for the dealings which were to follow, the instruments which settled Newfoundland's constitutional status were not the referenda, but the negotiations in Ottawa, the acts of the Parliaments of Great Britain and Canada, and the terms of union of Newfoundland with Canada. And once the Newfoundland delegation negotiated the terms of union with the Canadian delegation, readers are told that "appropriate British, Canadian, and Newfoundland legislation to make union possible received royal assent" (p.4). No legislation was ever considered or "passed" by the Commission of Government, and none ever received royal assent.<sup>7</sup> With Newfoundland's dominion status in legal limbo, and its self-government suspended, Britain had always possessed the legal right to legislate Newfoundland into confederation, which was exactly what it did after the legitimizing stamp of public approval, the referenda, were held.<sup>8</sup> And another questionable claim is made: "Although the Canadians and the British could limit and influence the choices to be made in the long summer of 1948, Newfoundlanders alone decided their constitutional future" (p. 9). If they did, then they were helped by eight years of Canadian planning, and several hundred thousand dollars of Canadian funding of the confederate campaign.

Other chapters in *Canadians at Last* explore the disastrous effects of confederation on Newfoundland's manufacturing industries, concentrating on how the removal of tariffs on imports and competition with Canadian suppliers ripped through the Newfoundland economy, and how the federal and new provincial governments stood by while thousands were thrown out of work. But again, the blame *leitmotif* arises, when Blake notes that the federal government blamed this on the Newfoundland government. The Canadian Minister of Reconstruction and Supply, Clarence Decatur Howe, apparently said it best when he reminded Prime Minister Louis St. Laurent, as the negotiations were winding down, that "the welfare of industries in that province is the primary concern of the provincial government" (p. 97). In February 1949, in a statement bearing an uncanny resemblance to Viscount Addison's 1947 refusal of British financial assistance to Newfoundland, Howe told the St. John's Board of Trade that

The federal government cannot help those who will not help themselves, but it can be of assistance to those willing and anxious to hold and improve their position in a territory and amongst a population with which they have the advantage of past contacts and goodwill. We appreciate that there will be problems of adjustment, and the most sympathetic and careful consideration will be given to all special circumstances (p. 102).

As it turned out, no special consideration of the effects of dropping tariffs was ever given by Ottawa, and when unemployment rose among displaced Newfoundland workers, Ottawa only addressed symptoms and not causes. In the most astounding passage in the book, *Canadians at Last* places blame on the fishermen: "In the first decade of union the problem of Newfoundland was the ten or twelve thousand workers who continued in the salt fishery (sic) as their forefathers had done. They could not develop and maintain even the most simple institutions and services...." And then, oblivious to the freight carried in the verbiage, Blake sides with the governments' solutions to their own mismanagement: "The objective of both governments continued to be the elimination of the small, remote settlements in favour of selected 'growth areas' where a *modern* community might develop an *acceptable* [italics mine] standard of living" (p. 173). Modern and acceptable, but compared to what? In another blame-placing episode, in one of the most damning indictments of the federal government, Blake notes that Ottawa did nothing after it recognized that Smallwood himself turned his back on the workers, and "showed no concern at all for the fact that from one-third to one quarter of existing industry would probably go out of business, leaving unemployment of over one thousand people" (p. 112). Similarly, there is superb documentation of the absolute lack of commitment by the federal government, during the negotiations of the terms, and of both the Canadian and Newfoundland governments after confederation, to properly manage Newfoundland's saltfish industry. After 31 March 1949, when the federal government assumed control of Newfoundland's fisheries, it blatantly ignored and mismanaged them. Readers are told that the fisheries were less modern and had to compete with Quebec fish and the self-supporting Nova Scotia fish industry, both of which would have cried foul if Newfoundland were to receive any special federal financial assistance (p. 164). Smallwood stood by and permitted the Newfoundland Associated Fish Exporters Limited (NAFEL) to be absorbed by the federal government, and eventually to disappear, and he waited until the 1960s to turn his attentions to the inshore fishery. But in 1955, in a telling exchange with an editor of the *Toronto Star*, he criticized federal government policy toward Newfoundland fishermen:

The whole policy of the Department of Fisheries of Canada, insofar as there appears to be a policy for Newfoundland, is to drive fishermen away from fishing. The present Minister of Fisheries told one very prominent Newfoundlander that it wouldn't matter if the Newfoundland fishermen had to leave the fisheries, because they could always find work in some other part of Canada (p. 172).

In other words, it was too little, too late. And remarkably, while forty years have passed, things seem to have changed very little. One of Smallwood's and R.A. MacKay's contacts in 1948 was the political scientist Henry B. Mayo, who told me in 1993 of his beliefs that Newfoundland "always was an *ersatz* culture, and Newfoundlanders should all be resettled to other parts of Canada."<sup>9</sup> As I write, the

*Globe and Mail* continues the same line: "...the fishery is gone, and people will either have to find new ways of making a living, or go elsewhere, as many sensibly chose to do."<sup>10</sup> Sensibly, indeed. We can always be more rational, and easily pull-up-stakes and move, just to suit those who live and write near the base of the CN Tower and do not have to move. The contents of *Canadians at Last* raise a central political issue which, unfortunately, the book does not address: is it inherent in the very nature of confederation — in the politics of conflicting interests between provinces, and in the special concerns of the partial politicians involved — not to be able to cure the afflictions caused by confederation, but only to be able to prescribe salves for its symptoms?

Other interpretational questions arise in *Canadians at Last*. Some of these relate to the book's propensity to de-politicize events which were primarily political, and because of its drive to find Canadian instead of Newfoundland causation. The Progressive Conservative party which was created in Newfoundland after confederation was not simply "taking part in a Canadian tradition of Ottawa bashing". Newfoundland Tories had their own history as anti-confederates, a history which had more to do with the Responsible Government League and a St. John's-based Newfoundland nationalism than it ever had to do with Sir John A. Macdonald. Similarly, Smallwood's Liberals were *his* Liberals, who bore much more personal allegiance to him than ever they did to the Canadian Liberal Party. According to *Canadians at Last*, after 1949 Ottawa develops a "Newfoundland problem," perhaps not unlike England's "Irish problem." The reader also learns precious little about how Smallwood re-established a new political élite after confederation in order to confer legitimacy on his new regime. This subject in itself is large enough to be addressed in its own book, given the general extent of opposition to confederation in Newfoundland in 1949, and the subsequent celerity with which it evaporated among the political classes. If Canada "integrated" Newfoundland ("integrated" was the word used by Ottawa mandarins, even though the reader is not explicitly told this), how were Newfoundlanders induced to be integrated? Only a few oblique explanations are proffered. Buried in the endnotes at the back of the book is the important point that former anti-confederate and advocate of Economic Union with the United States, Don Jamieson, opened up a consulting firm in St. John's to help Canadians get established in Newfoundland within two weeks after the second referendum, (p. 188, note 48) and in 1949 he got the "Buy Newfoundland" advertising campaign from Smallwood. But there is no questioning of whether Jamieson got this concession as a reward for conversion.

In places in *Canadians at Last*, assertions do not follow logically from one another, and ambiguities are born of awkward prose. If the Commission of Government's 1944 reconstruction plan calling for the expenditure of \$100 million was a strategy which "reflected considerable planning and insight into the social and economic development of Newfoundland," and if the Commission of Government was a British government-appointed body, preparing a plan mandated by the



coalition Churchill-Attlee government, how could the plan show "very clearly that *Newfoundlanders* were looking ahead in 1948 [*italics mine*]" (p. 27)? Furthermore, during the referenda campaigns of 1948, the Commission's \$100 million reconstruction plan was never a major campaign issue, and its niceties were not appreciated by voters or politicians. In 1947, when the first Newfoundland delegation to Ottawa arrived in that city, Prime Minister King had already discussed the possibilities for union with British Prime Minister Attlee and American President Franklin D. Roosevelt (p. 16), but in 1947, Harry Truman was the American President, not Roosevelt. Was union also discussed with Truman? Candidates for the National Convention had to reside in their districts not for one (p. 15) but for two years prior to their election to the Convention.<sup>11</sup> Occasionally, *Canadians at Last* sees certain realities clearly but does not acknowledge their implications. In 1947, C.D. Howe "thought that Canadian access to the untapped deposits of high-grade iron ores on the Newfoundland side of the Quebec-Labrador boundary would more than compensate for the initial problems of incorporating the province into the federal system" (p. 17). Yet *Canadians at Last* does not tell us that much of the money obtained by Senators Gordon Fogo and A.N. McLean, and cabinet minister C.D. Howe for the confederate campaigns came from Hartland Molson (later Senator), who along with Jules R. Timmins, was a principal shareholder of the Labrador Mining Company of Canada.<sup>12</sup> After evidence of how confederation damaged Newfoundland's economic viability, one would expect to find a discussion of the impact of the loss of autonomy, the attack on cultural identity, and the evaporation of sovereignty. Instead, one reads the repeated claims of how great confederation was, how zealous Canadian civil servants were to ensure the arrangements worked, and how they had to be warned against patronizing Newfoundlanders with the ethnic slur "Newfies".

If Ottawa had been less anthropomorphized in *Canadians at Last*, and more civil servants and bureaucrats had been named, the politics of the confederation settlement would have been made more plain. "Ottawa" was not a faceless, impenetrable wall, but a closely-knit coterie of civil servants and politicians in an age when non-partisan civil servants were rare, and when civil servants and Mackenzie King-Liberal politicians closely shared political goals.<sup>13</sup> Rather than Smallwood simply "falling out of favour" with "Canadian Liberals," we would have learned that by August 1948 there was a "dump Smallwood" campaign in high gear in Ottawa among Lester B. Pearson, Mitchell Sharp, R.B. Bryce, and R.A. MacKay, who had sworn among themselves that Smallwood would never become premier. It was only with Louis St. Laurent's and Jack Pickersgill's help that Smallwood won the day. Why? It has been claimed that in October 1948, Smallwood quietly blackmailed his enemies in Ottawa, threatening that either they make him the first and interim Premier of Newfoundland, with control of the purse strings and patronage of government, or else the unsettled Newfoundland public would be told of Canadian Liberal involvement with the Confederates during the

referenda campaigns, and that C.D. Howe, and Senators MacLean and Fogo arranged the funding,<sup>14</sup> a charge Smallwood denied until his dying day. Blake suggests but does not explain this when he notes that Smallwood demanded that he and Bradley get control of the Newfoundland Liberal Party or else the Federal Liberals would lose every seat in the next election (p. 53), but he stops short of calling it blackmail. So how did the feds respond? Pickersgill had St. Laurent defer Sir Leonard Outerbridge's appointment as Lieutenant-Governor, because Outerbridge refused to appoint Smallwood. Instead, St. Laurent made Sir Albert Walsh Newfoundland's first Lieutenant-Governor, because he agreed to appoint Smallwood. In the years following confederation, the "dump Joe" campaign continued in Ottawa, when the federal Liberals cut off party funds to Smallwood. The "dump Joe" campaign reached its apotheosis when, as Smallwood charged, C.D. Howe supplied him with the Latvian Alfred Valdmantis as director of economic development, in an attempt to bankrupt and discredit Smallwood's Newfoundland Liberal Party.<sup>15</sup> With federal help such as this, Newfoundland was launched on its Smallwoodian course of *develop or perish*.

In *Canadians at Last* I sensed a certain moralizing, an inherent bias against the Newfoundland pre-industrial rural resource-based and industrial manufacturing economy which existed before confederation, in favour of the superior importance of "modernizing with Canada." *Canadians at Last* proceeds on the unstated assumption that Canada was naturally better at everything than Newfoundland — in a way, not unlike the claim, in Susan Houston's and Alison Prentice's *Schooling and Scholars in Nineteenth-Century Ontario*, that Ontario was possessed of the conviction that it "should be the model for the rest of Canada."<sup>16</sup> Where the reader might have been shown a glass half-full, a small but viable nation with its own dynamic, he instead is shown a picture of a glass half-empty, a set of economic impossibilities, and an awkward, backward people, the "less-fortunate cousin" of Canada (p. 178) whose greatest historical moment was its union with Canada. This brings us to the book's infelicitous title. "Integrating" Newfoundland was certainly how some Ottawa mandarins described confederation. Others believed the process was better described as "infiltrating" Newfoundland,<sup>17</sup> and still others used the word "annexation". The transitive verb "integrates" carries considerable sociological baggage (more on this a little later), and is an awkward choice for celebration in a title. "Integrate" may be defined as "the process of making something whole," and geographically, this was what was done when Canada was more fully made a country *a mari usque ad mari*. There is nothing wrong with this if one's perspective is from Toronto or Ottawa. But *Canadians at Last* proclaims confederation as a "benevolent and paternalistic act" (p. 178) by Canada, instantly performed for (or upon?) what is portrayed as a lesser, socially and economically challenged, impoverished, developmentally-delayed, less-than-whole entity, Newfoundland. With its content focused on bureaucracy, *Canadians at Last* certainly implies that Newfoundlanders themselves seem to have taken little part in the process, prefer-

ring to be passively "integrated." From the mass of documentation in Ottawa and London, it is certainly clear that confederation was a British and Canadian project. But the book's title implies that Newfoundland's sole purpose for existing through the centuries before 1949 was to wait in eager anticipation, like the chick in an egg waiting to hatch, waiting for that wonderful, magnificent moment to burst forth "just before the expiration of 31 March 1949" (as term 50 went) and complete the grand and ancient designs of the Fathers of Confederation, hatched in 1864. From reading *Canadians at Last*, who in Etobicoke would ever know that the 48 per cent of Newfoundlanders who voted against union prompted the British satirist A.P. Herbert to describe confederation as "Dominion Murder?" If central Canadians wish to understand Newfoundland's sense of separateness and the zeal with which we cling to this rock, they would do well to note that like Québec, we remember.

The second great *leitmotif* in *Canadians at Last* is the claim that at the time of confederation, Newfoundland was in need of a "transformation" because of its poverty. That this claim is again made is not surprising. It is often made in the *Globe and Mail*, and, accompanied by much hand-wringing, it gets dunned into every political science and economics student in Canada. But the ambiguity of Blake's definition of that poverty is vexing. After the referenda, Blake tells us, Canadian civil servants arrived in Newfoundland to find "desperate conditions" (p. 89). Dr. L.B. Pett arrived in August 1948 and conducted a nutrition survey, finding that aid to Newfoundland had to "begin at a rock-bottom level." To his credit, Blake describes this conclusion as paternalistic. But then the reader learns that Pett found nutritious foods like "evaporated or dried milk, canned tomatoes or tomato juice, canned orange or grapefruit juices, and rolled oats or oatmeal" to be "readily available." So were Newfoundlanders poor or rich? By the end of the book, we must content ourselves with wondering whether the opportunity was lost "to transform Newfoundland's economy because the Ottawa delegation failed to have the province's uniqueness better recognized?" (p. 181). That this is even asked is surprising, since elsewhere *Canadians at Last* is superb at parsing Newfoundland's value to Canada:

Confederation...brought greater security to Canada. It removed the threat that the United States would secure territory on the east coast as it had done earlier with the acquisition of Alaska on the west coast. Ottawa need not worry any more that an independent Newfoundland would drive a hard bargain over matters of civil aviation or defence, matters very important to Canada in the dangerous world of the period. After 31 March 1949, the federal government had a free hand in those areas. Gone, too, was the fear that Newfoundland might strike a deal that would earn its fish a special place in the American market at the expense of frozen fish from the Maritime provinces. Canadian exporters could breathe easier knowing that their Newfoundland markets were secure and should expand the union. Ottawa also rejoiced in the fact that the vast iron-ore deposits in Labrador were now assured for Canadian use (p. 178).

Elsewhere, the reader discovers that "the Newfoundland airport [Gander] was [Lester B. Pearson's] main bargaining chip in negotiations for the Canada-United States Civil Aviation Agreement" (p. 127), and that Goose Bay was "the most important all-around strategic air base in the western hemisphere" (p. 137). It was therefore in Canada's direct interests, from the moment it became aware that Newfoundland had the wealth of Labrador, and international airports, and iron ore, to pursue their acquisition. That Canada did pursue it because Newfoundland possessed wealth is also perfectly clear. Was Newfoundland poor, or was it rich? Were Newfoundlanders poor, or rich? And specifically, whether the people were poor or rich, did the state have resources which could have been used to improve the lot of the people? To this *Canadians at Last* suggests a Canadian nationalist "no," claiming that before confederation "Newfoundlanders lived under primitive and wretched conditions" (pp. 146-7). But compared to what? During the 1930s, Newfoundland had enough dried saltfish to send some to the primitive, wretched, starving, huddled masses of Alberta. (No matter that they were used, according to once source, as snowshoes.) Throughout the 1940s, Newfoundland's economic recovery was substantial, due to vast defense expenditures, and the growth of peacetime industries, and the economy was projected to be stable for the foreseeable future.<sup>18</sup> But in 1948, J.R. Smallwood and the confederates specifically justified Newfoundland's entry into confederation on the basis of the existence of the utter poverty of the Newfoundland people during the depression *and* the supposed ongoing poverty of the Newfoundland state. Smallwood later claimed that both had been a liability to Britain, and that Canada, a generous "British" nation, "took Newfoundland in." So whether or not they were true, the ideas of Newfoundland's poverty and of Newfoundland engaging in a "British Union" with the "British" nation of Canada were made part of the orthodoxy about Newfoundland's entry into confederation, the official explanation promulgated by Smallwood and the confederates about how and why Newfoundland became a part of Canada. One must look to this orthodoxy in order to understand the political history of post-confederate Newfoundland.

Orthodox explanations of who took part in confederation, and how and why it happened are based on a series of epic articles with biblical-sounding titles, written by the self-styled "victor," J.R. Smallwood, for his *The Book of Newfoundland*, volume three, published in the Canadian centennial year, 1967. Supplemented by articles contributed to *The Book* by his friends and confederate supporters, the orthodoxy was reinforced in 1968 by Richard Gwyn's *Smallwood the unlikely revolutionary*, in 1973 and in 1975 by the first and second printings of Smallwood's memoirs, *I Chose Canada*, and subsequently, by every other account of confederation written by (or about) Smallwood. Most of these heroic accounts were written before original documentary sources became available to professional researchers. So when Smallwood's writings are cross-examined against the ever-growing mass of original documents in various archives, with private correspondence, and with

oral history interviews of confederates and anti-confederates, it becomes clear that his version of history does not always agree with what other, less self-interested sources say happened. A striking disparity emerges, and this disparity is important because of its implications for how Newfoundlanders perceive confederation and Newfoundland. The disparity has become so profound that it can no longer be ignored.

Among amateur Newfoundland historians, and Canadians in general, the confederate orthodoxy has supplanted historical fact. It has been unconsciously accepted by everyone from well-meaning academics, to politicians eager to bask in the glow of Canadian nationalism, to many of the 2.5-million-strong Newfoundland diaspora who live elsewhere in Canada and celebrate the invented traditions and imagined community of "Newfie"ness, summoned forth by *The Downhomer* and that fortuitous distillation, Screech. The orthodoxy has prevented us from asking tough and uncomfortable questions about how Newfoundland got to be in the mess it is in today. Explanations about how Smallwood "won" confederation became new founding myths for the former nation of Newfoundland, explaining that Newfoundlanders were messianically led by the "Only Living Father" to choose the "far greater" confederation because they were "poor," "destitute," and "resourceless" and because they did not want to go back to a "merchant-dominated government." Confederation won, as a "British Union" of Britain's oldest colony with another British country (obviously Smallwood did not consult the Québécois, the Acadians, the Franco-Ontarians, the Métis, the Innu, or Inuit about this). Two myths in particular — "British Union" and the poverty of Newfoundland — deserve our examination. Once they were established in Smallwood's orthodoxy, they provided the ideological framework for his decision making and policy crafting, from which he could justify "develop or perish" schemes for Newfoundland, tighten his grasp on the reins of power, and stay enthroned as the "King of Cost-Plus." The orthodoxy also provided a useful ideological framework for the exclusion of challenges to that history. If Newfoundland's collaborating political élite, or its writers and critics agreed with his version of history, they were taken care of, or accommodated. If they did not, then God help them. It was indeed "develop or perish," the Smallwood way: accept the orthodoxy, or perish.

The central founding myth for the new province of Newfoundland in 1949 became "British Union." It dates from the pre-referenda period and contains several elements. The first is that when Jack Pickersgill first suggested it to Smallwood during the 1948 referenda campaigns, it was to be the political glue, a sectarian concept of Newfoundlanders as a "British" people, which could be used to coalesce outport Protestant votes around confederation in the second referendum, and then afterwards serve as a healing balm, a rallying point for all Newfoundlanders, who regardless of English or Irish ancestry, or class, generally exhibited a pro-imperial streak. During the second referendum campaign, in order to convert to confederation the pro-British Commission of Government voters on the North-east coast of

the island of Newfoundland, Smallwood used a "British Union" campaign, replete with Union Jacks, marching bands, Orange Letters, and Orange Lodge overtones. After it became clear that Archbishop Roche, the Pink, White, and Green flag, St. John's Catholics, and Water Street merchants had lost the fight against confederation, Smallwood made sure that everyone knew it. "British Union" became the new founding myth of the "official" culture of Newfoundland, and remained so throughout the Smallwood era.<sup>19</sup> The Union Jack was unofficially but immediately adopted as the provincial flag. Smallwood had BRINCO (the British Newfoundland Corporation) begin the development of a hydroelectric installation at Hamilton Falls, with financial help from the British house of Rothschild (and quietly from the government of Québec). In the 1960s, Hamilton River and Falls in Labrador were renamed "Churchill" after the legendary Winston. Even unofficially, Anglophilia became official. In the twenty-five years after Memorial University College became the Memorial University of Newfoundland in 1949, Lord Rothermere, Lord Thomson, and Lord Taylor appeared. Many new professors arrived from Britain, and were unfairly but comically disparaged by mainland academics as the "British Mafia." Newfoundland students at Memorial with outport accents were sent to remedial English language courses, in order to replace the Outport with the Oxbridge. One can still attend a Memorial convocation and see the academic gowns of the University of Oxford, hear the organist of the Anglican Cathedral play Elgar's *Crown Imperial*, and listen to Oxford D.Phil.s begin their orations with the rounded tones of a "Mistah Chauncellah...." As a signal measure of how even the Newfoundland Irish were Anglicized after confederation, one with an Anglo-Irish accent was recently named University Orator. (The appointment, however, was well received.)

The second myth, the claim of the poverty of Newfoundland has its origins not in the immediate post-referenda era, or in the Confederate propaganda during the referenda campaigns, or in Smallwood's speeches in the National Convention, but from the picture of Newfoundland's economy and polity found in the *Newfoundland Royal Commission 1933 Report* (the Amulree Report), largely written by the commission's secretary, British civil servant Peter Alexander Clutterbuck. By 1948, Clutterbuck had become the British High Commissioner to Canada in Ottawa, and was working closely with R.A. MacKay and Lester B. Pearson to achieve Newfoundland's confederation. Had *Canadians at Last* begun its analysis in 1946, with the first sessions of the National Convention, or even in 1948 with the referenda campaigns, we would have observed Smallwood in full flight, claiming even before confederation that Newfoundland would become an economic shambles again if self-government returned without confederation. Repeated enough times, it damned the Water Street merchants and their Responsible Government League whose members had allowed Newfoundland to be "brought to her knees" in 1933, and consequently helped to sell Newfoundlanders on the security of the Canadian social welfare state. The idea of the "poverty" of New-

foundland became an accepted truth, whether it was true or not. Its subsequent reincarnation in the confederate historiography saw the whole of Newfoundland history before confederation thus described, not just the period beginning in 1933. The idea grew into myth, and has been accepted as true ever since. Certainly in 1933, Amulree notwithstanding, Newfoundland had no monopoly on poverty or hardship. For all Newfoundland's difficulties, it was not necessarily better or worse than Alberta. It was just *different*. So how do the orthodoxy's (and Blake's) claims of the pre-confederate poverty of Newfoundland measure up to how the government of Canada actually perceived Newfoundland's economic state?

By the mid-1940s there was no indication at all — especially to the Canadians to whom it mattered greatly — that Newfoundland would ever slip back into the doldrums of 1933 in the near future. On the contrary, the world had changed and Newfoundland was seen to have a superb infrastructure capable of adequately sustaining its economy. On 17 October 1946, J.S. Macdonald, the Canadian High Commissioner in Newfoundland, wrote Under-Secretary of State for External Affairs Norman Robertson and informed him that

...the country is richer by the investment of at least \$100,000,000 by Canada and at least \$300,000,000 by the United States primarily for defence but much of which was spent on roads, wharfs, telephone lines, warehouses and similar buildings, radio ranges, airfields, the training of Newfoundlanders in various technical jobs, etc., and has redounded to the general development of the country.<sup>20</sup>

Furthermore, the Macdonald-Currie Report, a cost-benefit analysis of confederation prepared in May 1948 for the Corner Brook newspaper *The Western Star*, found that by the end of that fiscal year (and the date of union), 31 March 1949, Newfoundland would have an accumulated surplus of \$43 million, not counting interest-free loans totalling \$12 million made to Great Britain during the previous five years. As well, Newfoundland had declared a surplus on current account for nine of the ten years preceding confederation. In May 1948, Newfoundland's per capita debt was \$160 Cdn; on 1 April 1949 it was projected to jump to \$1340 Cdn.<sup>21</sup> When Scott Macdonald wrote Robertson, four thousand Newfoundlanders were working on American military bases in Newfoundland for good living wages. The economy was booming so much that the Bowater pulp and paper mill in Corner Brook — the largest integrated pulp and paper mill in the world — was in production 24 hours a day, and had to refuse contracts because it could not find enough lumbermen to hire and supply wood. And even the fishing season of the previous year had been excellent. So while the Newfoundland people could be found in varying states of health and wealth throughout the 1940s, their state was rich. Another way of arriving at this conclusion, even without the benefit of Blake's parsing of the value of Newfoundland to Canada, would be to ask, if Newfoundland was such a "basket case" at the time of Confederation, why did Canada "take it in?" Either Canada was one of the most altruistic nations in history, or Canada

wanted Newfoundland for its rich resources. *Canadians at Last* delivers incongruous platitudes about how great confederation was, instead of exploring whether Canada took advantage of a sterling opportunity to strip the rings from the fingers and the gold from the teeth of the corpse of the Newfoundland state. And how was this done? At a practical level, like every other politician who has ever walked the Earth, Smallwood used patronage to buy support from the very élites which had previously opposed him: from the Water Street merchants, and from others with the financial or educational means to enter the political class. As the economic historian David Alexander often remarked, any critical failure of the Newfoundland state in the early years of confederation is perhaps due to the ease with which Smallwood could neutralize his opposition, and it becomes clear that the modern Newfoundland state was founded on the premise that everyone had his price. Even more than by the administrative fiats documented in *Canadians at Last*, this must help explain how Newfoundland's confederation took place.

In recent times, intellectuals like Benedict Anderson, Eric Hobsbawm, and Michael Ignatieff have given researchers much to think about when trying to understand the concept of nationalism. It is a construct, an idea of a community which we imagine to exist, one which shares our goals and ideals, and one by which we define ourselves. In actuality, though, this sharing is not complete, and nationalism is often based on invented symbols, traditions, and myths which serve the purposes of manipulative political élites. In the present day, and especially on anniversaries, we are periodically reminded by the few remaining die-hard old-time confederates that Newfoundland nationalism was drummed up and used by the anti-confederates in 1948. But it is virtually forgotten that Canadian nationalism was created and used by Smallwood for the same purposes after 1948. What the confederation debate needs now is for the post-confederate Canadian nationalist orthodoxy to be deconstructed, in order that we might "get over" the confederate orthodoxy as the defining conceptualization of the history and possibilities of life in Newfoundland. Professional historians write history according to what they know, or grew up with, and their writings are informed as much by their own backgrounds and experiences as they are informed by their research. Historians of ethnicity and migration have long realized this. The use of the word "ethnic" seems appropriate in dealing with Newfoundland, because historians, sociologists, folklorists linguists, anthropologists, and literary critics have long examined elements of Newfoundland ethnicity: language with dialects, history, architecture, dress, foodways, writing, a striking cultural homogeneity, and even a brand of ethnic jokes.<sup>22</sup> What has not been addressed is the question of whether being a Newfoundlander in 1949 meant being a person of definable ethnicity. That question is worth asking in reply to Blake's claim that Newfoundland was integrated, because ethnic groups get integrated, or integrate others. The question is also worth asking in response to the confederate argument — an argument which has surprising currency among the present crop of Newfoundland politicians — that Newfoundland



gained a far greater national and cultural identity when it became part of Canada. Unfortunately, the back cover of *Canadians at Last* proclaims the book's wish to challenge the "old shibboleths of conspiracy and local nationalism". This betrays an aggressive superiority which denigrates non-confederate, Newfoundland-based historical interpretations of confederation, and misses the historical fact that confederation involved the replacement of one nationalism by another, and one set of priorities by another, and created a whole raft of social and cultural implications which still remain unexplored. Just as unfortunately, this Ontario-centric agenda unintentionally dovetails perfectly with and supports Smallwood's confederate orthodoxy. Considering what is now known about confederation from the ever-growing mass of documentation and historiographic interpretation, perhaps it is time to reconsider the cultural imperialism of the orthodoxy.

If young Newfoundlanders, especially those of the present diaspora from these shores, lack a historical sense of who their ancestors were and what they thought and did before 1949, it is probably due in good measure to our society's tacit acceptance of the confederate orthodoxy, and to the unwillingness of historians to challenge it. One lay reviewer of Blake's book remarked that in 1949, "What we did not know, nor cared to know, was that the ease with which we moved from being Newfoundlanders to being Canadians was the result of a huge effort mounted by various departments of the Canadian government."<sup>23</sup> This may have been true for some, but it also precisely indicates the problem: Newfoundlanders didn't know what they had lost. And as long as we still don't know, the classic question of the orthodoxy can continue to be asked: "Where would we be without Confederation?" I was once asked that by Gordon Winter, now the last living signatory to the terms of union, but at the time I lacked the temerity to answer. Today my response would be, "We'd probably still be here, Newfoundlanders first." Despite my deliberate spinning of a pro-responsible government counter-claim to the confederate orthodoxy, *Canadians at Last* makes good and provocative reading, and it deserves to be carefully read and thought about. The negotiations of the terms of union were a disaster, and Ottawa clearly believed that it benefited more from the terms than did Newfoundland (simply because it reserved to itself the right to derive the economic benefits inherent in Newfoundland's former sovereignty). *Canadians at Last* provides strong evidence that Newfoundland's problems are just as political as they are economic. If anything, confederation created Newfoundland's "Canadian question": is confederation, in the long run, sustainable for Newfoundland?

Now there's a question for a "Newfoundlander first"!

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> A member of the Canadian delegation who did not wish to be identified told me that Crosbie was several days late in joining the delegation in Ottawa in the fall of 1948, and arrived with his arm in a sling. During his stay in Ottawa, he was quite often observed by the Canadians to have been "under the weather," and when the time neared to sign the terms,

he had reservations about signing, citing the aforementioned reasons. For advice, he summoned to Ottawa from St. John's his personal lawyer, Phil Lewis, Q.C., who advised him not to sign.

<sup>2</sup>Mitchell Sharp, *Which Reminds Me: A Memoir* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1994), p. 33-4.

<sup>3</sup>J.W. Pickersgill, *Seeing Canada Whole: A Memoir* (Markham, Ont.: Fitzhenry & Whiteside, 1994), p. 319.

<sup>4</sup>The preamble to the terms of union noted that a delegation from the Convention had sought terms during the summer of 1947, but the preamble was made to neatly circumvent the thorny issue of who the fall 1948 Ottawa delegation represented by including a clause stating that the final terms had been negotiated between "authorized representatives of Canada and authorized representatives of Newfoundland."

<sup>5</sup>Gordon Winter to the author, 17 January 1992.

<sup>6</sup>Sharp, *Seeing Canada Whole*, p. 33.

<sup>7</sup>It is interesting to note that the British North America Act, 1949, of the Westminster Parliament is bound into the volume *Acts of the Honourable Commission of Government 1949* (St. John's: King's Printer, 1949) and is often mistaken for an act of the Commission. Acts of the Westminster Parliament were differentiated from act of the Commission of Government by the wording of the enacting clause.

<sup>8</sup>On the legalities of Newfoundland's constitutional status see William C. Gilmore, *Newfoundland and Dominion Status: the External Affairs Competence and International Law Status of Newfoundland, 1855-1934* (Toronto: University of Toronto, 1988). While Command paper 4480, the *Newfoundland Royal Commission 1933 Report* (the Amulree Report) recommended the suspension of self-government, it also explicitly stated that Newfoundland was a Dominion (see paragraph 47).

<sup>9</sup>Mayo was a Newfoundlander who submitted a D.Phil. Thesis on confederation at Oxford in 1948 entitled *Newfoundland and Canada: The Case for Union Examined*. While David Alexander in *The Decay of Trade* (St. John's: Memorial University, 1977), p.13 believed it conferred on confederation a certain intellectual respectability, the thesis closely outlined details of the arrangements for confederation before they actually happened. Considering the completion date of the thesis, and that it had to have been researched and written before the end of 1948, it is a significant document.

<sup>10</sup>*The Globe and Mail*, Thursday, 5 September 1995, p. A-20.

<sup>11</sup>The National Convention Act, *Acts of the Honourable Commission of Government 1946* (St. John's: King's Printer, 1946), p. 120.

<sup>12</sup>Gregory J. Power to the author, 27 March 1989 and 27 January 1992.

<sup>13</sup>Especially see chapter six of Doug Owram, *The Government Generation: Canadian Intellectuals and the State, 1900-1945* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1986).

<sup>14</sup>James J. Halley, Q.C., to the author, 11 and 20 May 1992. Halley noted that the late Hon. William J. Browne explained this episode to him in the 1950s, having heard it in Ottawa.

<sup>15</sup>*Ibid.*, and J.R. Smallwood, *I Chose Canada* (Toronto: Macmillan, 1973), p. 346.

<sup>16</sup>Susan Houston and Alison Prentice, *Schooling and Scholars in Nineteenth-Century Ontario* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1988), p.vii.

<sup>17</sup>MG 30 E 159 (R.A. MacKay Papers), Public Archives of Canada, Ottawa. Volume 2, file: "I.C.C.N.R. [Interdepartmental Committee on Canada-Newfoundland Relations], General Correspondence and Departmental Memoranda, Part III, March-April 1947,"

Memorandum entitled "Canada-Newfoundland Relations," enclosed in J.C. Britton, Canadian Trade Commissioner, St. John's, to R.A. MacKay at Halifax, Special Advisor on Newfoundland, Interdepartmental Committee on Canada-Newfoundland Relations (ICCNr), 26 April 1947.

<sup>18</sup>Several committees of the Newfoundland National Convention 1946-1949, and one command paper prepared for that body examined the fiscal position of Newfoundland, and its prospects for the future. The Committee on the financial and Economic Position of Newfoundland reported in October 1946 that a great portion of the revenue of the country was coming from the growth of the country's main industries, which were "wholly peace industries" which were "not dependent for their prosperity on war conditions. It is clear therefore," the committee concluded, "that we can properly regard our present revenues as being anything but a result of war boom." Similarly, in April 1947, the Mining Committee concluded that "The iron ore deposits of Labrador ... will be a great factor in the future economy of the country," and that Newfoundland had "a great future in mining."

<sup>19</sup>As a counterpoint to the "official" culture of "British Union," Newfoundland popular culture, especially as found in music, seems to have undergone a sort of celtification since the Smallwood era. In 1995, significant numbers of Newfoundlanders listen to the music of bands named Figgy Duff, the Irish Descendents, Rawlins Cross, Connemara, Great Big Sea, and to an Irish-Newfoundland radio show.

<sup>20</sup>*Documents on Relations Between Canada and Newfoundland*, Vol. II, Part I, ed. Paul Bridle (Ottawa: Department of External Affairs, 1984), p. 297.

<sup>21</sup>*The Western Star*, 21 May 1948.

<sup>22</sup>Here, "ethnicity" is taken to mean a group which shares common cultural traits and values; for definitions of ethnicity and culture in a volume which fails to include Newfoundlanders as an ethnicity (but which is otherwise quite useful) see J.W. Berry and J.A. Laponce, "Evaluating Research on Canada's Multethnic and Multicultural Society: An Introduction," in *Ethnicity and Culture in Canada: The Research Landscape*, eds. Berry and Laponce (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1994), p. 5.

<sup>23</sup>C.B. Dewling, "Fit for a bedlamer boy," *Evening Telegram*, 4 September 1994.