

R. A. MacKay

SMALLWOOD'S VISIT TO OTTAWA, 1946

I FIRST MET MR. SMALLWOOD when he visited Ottawa in August, 1946, to sound out the possibilities of union and to meet some Canadian political leaders. Although I am writing from recollection rather than from any written record, the impression Smallwood made on me was so vivid that I think that even after more than twenty years my recollection is reasonably accurate.

At that time I was "desk officer" on Newfoundland in the Department of External Affairs, and Smallwood came first to me to help him on his quest. Over lunch, we had a long and rather academic discussion on how Newfoundland might fit into the Canadian federal system. I found that he had already done his homework and was quite familiar with the federal system. This was typical of the man: he usually knew what he was talking about, and if he didn't he asked penetrating and sometimes disturbing questions.

The conversation became more embarrassing for me when Smallwood asked for assistance in meeting the Prime Minister and other Ministers who might be influential. The politicians had shown little interest in union. Prime Minister King had made sympathetic noises in Parliament some months earlier when asked a question by the Opposition, but he had been emphatic that Newfoundlanders must decide the issue themselves. Other Ministers, and especially Mr. Ilsley, the Minister of Finance, who had been sounded out discreetly, were less than lukewarm towards union. The Canadian public was also indifferent, and I recall a meeting about this time in the office of the Under Secretary of the Department, the late Norman Robertson. In all, there were five of us present, and Norman's comment was "I suppose we have here all the people in Canada interested in having Newfoundland join Canada."

The main difficulty to anyone who examined the problem was financial: it was clear that Newfoundland would need proportionately much more financial assistance than any existing province, and if this were granted it might touch off demands from other provinces, and especially the Maritimes, for "better terms".

Furthermore, there was no indication that any political leader wanted to meet Smallwood, who—although elected to the Constitutional Convention

as an avowed confederate—had no party or political organization behind him and apparently no funds to build one. Nor had he ever held public office. The Prime Minister and his colleagues were apprehensive of appearing to back a probable loser. I was therefore instructed to resort to what the British Civil Service used to label M.A.D. tactics—maximum administrative delay—in passing Smallwood on to higher authority. Accordingly, I explained to him how busy the Prime Minister and his Ministers were, how difficult it was to arrange interviews on short notice, how I would do the best I could, but could not promise, and so on, and so on. Smallwood, of course, saw through the façade, and went his own way. With sure political instinct, he turned to the politicians rather than to the bureaucrats.

Two or three days after our first meeting, he again called me for lunch. He said he had had a very satisfactory visit and was leaving for Newfoundland that afternoon. He had approached an old acquaintance—Senator McLean, I think it was—who had introduced him around to other politicians. He had discovered that the Prime Minister had an office in the House of Commons to which he normally returned after the question period in the House. Smallwood had seen the door open, walked in and introduced himself to Jack Pickersgill, then Secretary to the Prime Minister. The Prime Minister came in shortly, and Pickersgill introduced him as Mr. Smallwood from Newfoundland. “Come in Mr. Smallwood, I am so glad to meet you”—or words to that effect—said the Prime Minister, and in they went to the Prime Minister’s inner sanctum where they spent a half-hour or more. Whether the Prime Minister had been alerted by the Senator, I don’t know, but I suspect he had. In any case, Smallwood met him, and through the Prime Minister’s office or the Senator he found other political doors open including that of C. D. Howe, whom Smallwood found to be really interested in union. Among leaders of other political parties he met Mr. Coldwell of the C.C.F., whom he found a kindred Socialist spirit.

Two developments followed from the visit. In the first place, Smallwood went back to Newfoundland convinced that Canada would accept Newfoundland on satisfactory terms, if the people of Newfoundland made it clear they wanted to come in. Smallwood had no doubt about his ability to convince Newfoundlanders to decide the right way.

Secondly, Smallwood’s vivid personality, his self assurance, his firm belief that Newfoundlanders could be converted to union, had created a favour-

able impression on the Canadian political leaders, including both the Prime Minister and the prospective Prime Minister, Mr. St. Laurent. Neither Newfoundland nor Smallwood were any longer unknown politically in Ottawa. Henceforth, when memos or dispatches about Newfoundland matters were sent up to our political masters they were more likely to be read.

Smallwood was more than satisfied with his visit; he was elated. Before we finished lunch on the day of his departure, he was already planning the politics of the post-union era. Bradley would be an excellent appointment as Newfoundland's Minister in the Federal Cabinet. At least six senators would have to be appointed; so-and-so and so-and-so would be good appointments if they proved helpful to the cause of Confederation. He, himself, would be satisfied with the more onerous job of Premier of the province. I hastened to explain that I was only a civil servant and that political appointments were after all part of the Prime Minister's job, not mine. But I sometimes asked myself whether, if Smallwood had taken my polite "No" for an answer and had not ignored me and gone directly to pound on political doors, union would have been possible. As I look back I am compelled to ask myself "Who else could have done it but Joe Smallwood?"

THE HAUNTING

Willis Eberman

Not in remembrance only, not there alone
 on its isolated bluff bounded by ocean,
 is that broad and splendid house . . . but real,
 real, as though I were there, I hear
 the west wind in those eaves; and walk again
 those glass-walled rooms, seeing the waves
 spray on the rocks far down: O splendid home
 abandoned forever now, those sunsets entering
 the mind's eternity. . . .

Away from you,
 yet strangely there, I walk, a ghost always. . . .
 Not in remembrance only; but where love
 remains, the searching heart will haunt forever.