

The Maritime Background:

A Contest of Parochialism

By W. S. MacNUTT

THE broken geographical features of the region of the Maritime provinces have often created comparison with that of ancient Greece. The seas which divide the four land-masses, the forest and wilderness belts which still comprise great areas of the two larger provinces and the self-sufficient economies of our early communities led to the development of stubborn local loyalties. Like that of the Greeks, our prosperity was once based upon individualist efforts, principally at sea. And again, like the Greeks, we have resisted the trends which have been adverse to us in an individualist and divided way. Our formative years showed little of a spirit of interdependence and co-operation. In the modern world has not this ingrained sectionalist outlook, nurtured on difficult soils and turbulent seas, proved to be a major obstacle to progress which elsewhere has been associated with mergers and federations?

The Partition

These particularist characteristics go deeply to the roots of our history. It is of the nature of pioneer communities to be a law unto themselves and to resist the authority of a central government, no matter how well disposed it may be—and there was a great deal of this pioneer spirit exemplified in the partitioning of the old province of Nova Scotia in 1784 and in other activity which continued and maintained this work of disintegration. The story of the first British government in the Maritimes, that at Halifax, is largely one of ineffective attempts to enforce the law at the out-ports and to establish uniform municipal institutions among newly established settlements from which it was geographically remote. New Brunswick was created

partly by reason of a series of wrangles between the newly-arrived Loyalists and the Nova Scotian officials. The peculiar nature of the land problem on Prince Edward Island supplied a separatist tendency in addition to that of geographical insularity. The reannexation of Cape Breton to Nova Scotia in 1820 provoked the most bitter protests from the inhabitants and produced an agitation which was to last for thirty years—for autonomy. The political breakdown had come about partly because of imperial considerations but principally because of the difficulties of communication and the sectionalist points of view of the people of the newly constituted provinces.

Other Separatist Factors

In addition to the political divisions there have been others, chiefly based on economic and geographical factors. From the beginnings of the timber trade the North Shore of New Brunswick has operated its own little economy quite outside the orbit of the older and more heavily populated south. The Yarmouth shore of Nova Scotia and the townships of the Annapolis Valley were throughout the nineteenth century oriented upon Boston and the New England states. The so-called republic of Madawaska, at least from some points of view, has acquired what would seem to be a way of life separate from that of the rest of New Brunswick. In general cultural and economic influences radiating from provincial capitals have been weak ones. Almost inevitably they have encountered local particularisms which have been the stronger. The historic inference would seem to be a plain one. The sea-lanes opened to the first colonists markets of greater attraction than did the tortuous routes to the provincial capitals. Only in our own time have we seen provincial governments undertake a coordination of economic and educational effort which has been really effective.

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To establish a common bond among the thousands of colonists of diverse origins, most of whom lived with the sea before them and the forest behind, the British government had proposed to establish the Church of England as a political and cultural, as well as a religious, instrument. But the first missionaries were confronted by sects which seemingly had sprung from the soil. From the first it was certain that the effort, even if it had been more than half-hearted, was destined to failure. Just as an authoritarian government could be confronted by parochial forces which were indigenous and stubborn, so was an authoritarian church restrained from exercising a moral suasion towards cultural unity. There can be no doubt of the intensity of the rivalries between Protestant sects in the early history of the Maritimes—and these were factors which weakened any unifying influences in the cultural sphere. Particularly in the field of higher education have they been most prominent. Almost all our universities owe their origins to religious denominations and have hardily maintained their identities in spite of the obvious advantages of federation. This bare fact alone is eloquent testimony of how, in the Maritimes, parochialism has survived in contrast to the work of integration which took place elsewhere.

The Politicians

These centrifugal tendencies were reflected by the colonial politicians of the Maritime Provinces who were nearly all men of material instincts and limited horizons. Men like Howe and Lemuel Allen Wilmot were perhaps not so remarkable for anything they did as for their ability to tower above their contemporaries in the understanding of abstract things and to view their little provinces with the whole world as a background. In 1840 when Charles Poulett Thompson came to Nova Scotia he wrote that the great majority of members of the Assembly were unconcerned with the strug-

gle for Responsible Government, that they were engrossed in servicing the needs of their respective constituencies for material improvements. In Prince Edward Island all political and commercial prospects were clouded by the land agitation. Speeches in the New Brunswick House of Assembly show the same sectionalist perspective. Five years after the Canadian rebellion senior politicians vied with one another in declaring that they could not understand what Responsible Government meant. What concerned them most was the division of the provincial revenue among the constituencies—and there was current a “help one another” system which rapidly depleted the Treasury and plunged the province into debt. They avoided the extension of a system of municipalities because most of the business they did themselves was municipal in nature. The practical politician of the day was one who strove to secure the patronage for the building of a bridge or to influence the appointment of county officials. Things which were provincial or inter-provincial in their consequence seldom came within his interest or understanding. This is an opinion endorsed by that able Nova Scotian, George E. Fenety, who came to Fredericton to become a pioneer in the liberal journalism of New Brunswick. And we have the despairing statement of Wilmot, when he compared the abounding enterprise and activity of the United States with the industrial stagnation within the limited range of his own province, that “little countries make little mechanics and little politicians.”

Political Conditions

Electorates came into the same category and for this the large degree of illiteracy, combined with the unwillingness of governments to take decisive measures to alleviate it, was fundamentally to blame. Owing to the preoccupation of the settlers in the task of winning a bare living and to their indifference to all but the material factors which affected their welfare there was very little public

opinion which could be considered informed. A few enterprising and perhaps overbearing men could manufacture public opinion if such could be required; and constituencies were so small that every vote counted. Corruption was therefore deep-seated at election time; and violence was not an unknown factor in some of the more remote constituencies. While entertaining the members of a newly-elected legislature at his residence in Fredericton, the lieutenant-governor, Hon. Arthur Gordon, was horrified to overhear those successful politicians endeavouring to outdo each other in giving accounts of their election expenses. Legislatures, too, were so small that two or three members could form a bloc of considerable consequence and, by the familiar process known as log-rolling, force a government to accede to its demands. It is no wonder that upon the larger issues of the mid-century, such as Responsible Government, the building of railways and political union of the provinces, Maritime opinion seems confused and inarticulate. Upon the railway question, especially, the sectionalist forces appeared as obvious deterrents to doing anything at all. Not only were there disagreements among the provinces but a section of one province could bitterly oppose railway building in another section. Why did Wilmot and the representatives of the Upper St. John River constituencies oppose the construction of a St. John-Shediac railway? And why did the representatives of the Northern and eastern parts of the province oppose a line from St. John to St. Andrew's? Both of these propositions were defeated in the New Brunswick legislature on votes which were conducted on sectionalist lines.

The Plan of Sir Edmund Head

This situation was the principal burden of the complaint of Sir Edmund Head, one of the ablest of the lieutenant-governors of New Brunswick, who in 1857 presented to the British government a plan for the political union of the three provinces.

Size, he argued, is a necessary condition of success in the working of parliamentary government on the English model. Enlarge the area and decrease the number of politicians, he declared, and the whole tone of public life would be elevated. Colonial governors would then no longer find difficulty in securing competent and educated men to serve in their ministries. As the capital of a united province, Head could visualize a city appearing on the isthmus of Chignecto, in a position accessible to all portions of it, where the ablest men of all three former provinces could inject new vitality into the government and economic life of the entire Maritime region. Amherst and Dorchester were both mentioned as possible sites.

But no political integration was to come about and no new Athens was to arise on the salt marshes of Chignecto to give leadership to a region which later in the century was to be so decisively in need of wise and firm guidance. For the same disintegrating forces were to destroy the prospect of Maritime Union when, for a fleeting period in 1864, it became a matter of practical politics. Shortly before the calling of the conference at Charlottetown Hon. Arthur Gordon had written to the Colonial Office in London to say that, having consulted with political leaders of all three provinces, he was certain that the union could become a fact. But when the leaders of the governments had gathered at the Island capital these fair professions were shown to have no firm foundation of mutual desire. The chips were down but the game was not played out. In the light of what little evidence there remains of these closeted discussions who can say what was the ultimate reason for the failure to take action and the eventual fading away of the prospect of union? When the Canadians had gone and when the Maritime politicians sat down to consider a legislative union preliminary to entering Confederation no agreement resulted. One factor, stated by Sir Charles Tupper, was the insistence of the Prince Edward

Island delegation upon having the capital of the new province on the Island. But this can be taken as only one of several competing particularisms any one of which might have wrecked the conference. Later in the same year, at Quebec, Nova Scotia and New Brunswick fought the claims of "the Island" to special consideration with more tenacity than did the Canadas.

Economic Balkanization

The Maritimes, therefore, entered Confederation not as one strong province but as three weak ones. Eighteen sixty-seven, the year of Confederation, was also the year in which vessels of the Cunard Line stopped calling at Halifax because there was not sufficient cargo for big ships. No longer now did the seaplanes beckon our little communities on the way to prosperity. Railway connection with Montreal and Boston firmly entangled us in the continental drag-net and we became, so to speak, a back-door annex of the central provinces whose chief interests were westward. A prolonged period of depression was the result. Our manufacturing industries which earlier in the century had become prosperous by the efforts of "the small man" remained small-man industries and nearly all of them perished after being driven from their own local markets by the mass-produced goods of Central Canada and the United States. In facing the full force of the unfavourable economic trends we retained our political divisions, our localized biases and our old industrial techniques and marketing methods. This was balkanization.

Integration Elsewhere

But elsewhere a new age had dawned. New York had become the focal point for the economic activities of the entire eastern seaboard of the United States, a financial centre where capital could be mobilized and directed, a sounding-board for the leaders of industry where the requirements of the time could readily be ascertained. The integration of the

St. Lawrence Valley was accomplished at Montreal by the centralization of capital and business enterprise. There the entire trade of the western region and even of the northwest was organized and controlled and this was accomplished in spite of a racial cleavage which might have rent the provinces of British America permanently asunder. In the vital decade of the fifties the bankers and industrialists of Montreal, by forging strong commercial bonds between the Canadas, partially anticipated the work of the politicians of ten years later.

No focal point of political and economic activity appeared in the Maritimes. Instead of developing a single economy we have numerous competing little economies. Continued disintegration rather than integration has been the rule. St. John and Halifax have quarreled for their shares of the winter export trade. No political union and no strong single government to increase our influence at Ottawa have appeared. Our politicians have completely submerged themselves in the national parties and seldom have regional interests burst the bonds of party loyalty and discipline. Our trade declined and our people emigrated. There has been a flight of both capital and labour. No strong bank, controlled by regional interests, has survived to finance our industries, many of which have been forced to the wall because they could not sell on credit. In short there has been very little coordination, politically or economically. Our educational systems still fail to function with uniformity and recalcitrant school boards can still, by political methods, defy the departments. Our proudest boast is the large number of able men we have sent to enrich the life of other countries.

Mr. Toynbee's Judgment

Mr. Arnold Toynbee in his monumental study of civilizations describes our Maritime area as one in which the physical environment offers too great a challenge to human energy. Therefore, he continues, the Maritimes are the least pro-

gressive of the provinces of Canada. This is a grim judgement, but it is, perhaps, one which should impel us to realize that careful planning and organization are necessary if we are to keep our rightful place upon the Canadian scene. When the war-time boom has exhausted itself we shall perhaps find ourselves faced with the apparently chronic conditions of depression which have been so familiar since Confederation. Again we shall be compelled to buy in a protected market and to sell our products in world markets against formidable competition. Not only are there the problems of the physical environment but those of an artificially maintained national economy.

Reassuring Factors

But in the past twenty years much progress has been made in the Maritimes. Out of the years in which we have been chastened by adversity there has perhaps come a conscience that the old individualist methods no longer have a place in the modern world. Boards of trade and shippers' organizations have adopted

common policies to great advantage. Co-operative societies have materially raised standards of living in areas which formerly were barely above subsistence level. Industries which produce highly processed goods from farm, forest and sea have drawn together to realize that in the world market, upon which they depend, co-operation in the development of new techniques and pooling of resources is indispensable. Co-operation among the three provincial governments in dealing with Ottawa has been said to be all that could be desired upon occasions, though this is not a condition upon which we can permanently count.

The history of Canada has been said to be largely of parochialisms, the legacies of the pioneers who founded the frail industries and communities of a century and a half ago. The history of the Maritimes shows them to be startlingly abundant, survivals of the attitudes and perspectives of our forbears, with a degree of persistency and resistance to change which is probably unequalled elsewhere.

An Economic Review of Nova Scotia for 1946

By KELD CHRISTENSEN

IN 1946 ended the first year of peace following the greatest holocaust of war the world has ever known. It represented a period during which transitional economic processes were to set the pattern of things to be expected. The difficulties of reconverting economies from a war-time tempo to peace-time stability in Canada and in the United States became dramatically apparent early in 1946. These sensationalized impediments to a smooth management of affairs were not without their counterparts in Nova Scotia. Nearly every economic event in the other eight provinces of Canada and in the United States

had a similar and corresponding incident in Nova Scotia, whether it be unemployment, reconversion of heavy industry, strikes, long and difficult wage negotiations, marketing difficulties, or other threats to economic equilibrium. The major industries of Nova Scotia, coal, steel, lumbering, fishing, agriculture, and light manufacturing, as well as organized labor, dealt with numerous problems having a variety of intensity.

Trade With the Public

Retail and wholesale trade in Nova Scotia maintained itself at a high level throughout the year due primarily, as elsewhere, to a pent up demand and substantial purchasing power in the hands of the general public from war-time savings