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INSTITUTE OF CURRENT WORLD AFFAIRS

"A Profusion of Loyalties"

3 June 1990
Prince Edward Island

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Dear Peter,

To whom and to what do we owe our foremost loyalty? Would you abandon your home and livelihood for the sake of an idea about governance? Can you see yourself living in exile, or emigrating to another country? Can you imagine being faced with a choice between exile and penury? Can you hear yourself taking an oath of allegiance to something other than the American Constitution? Do you ever wonder which side you would find yourself on in a genuine revolution?

These are the kinds of questions I ask myself while roaming around the Maritime provinces in a season of profound discontent. They are all pertinent to an understanding of what makes living in this region politically dramatic, and for me the self-examination is a way of sparking sensitivity to the constancy of separate cultures in this region. There are many things about North American history that I never learned or just plain forgot, and what I do not know is turning out to be what I must know about the Loyalist heritage and the Acadian French. But first let me say a few words about the weather and its effects on cognition.

Here it is June and leaves are just now blossoming from wind-battered buds. We have endured nearly two solid weeks of cold, driving rain, after suffering an interminable winter. People are upset. You can't plant potatoes in the mud. Lobster prices are way down--good news for fromaways; bad news for fishermen and their families. Nobody knows for sure why buyers are offering less than $2.00 per pound at the docks, but nearly everyone on Prince Edward Island is suspicious that all the wrong people are making all the money. As usual, Islanders cry out for federal assistance, and get some, but it's never enough. In New Brunswick, pulp mill workers have returned to work after a wildcat strike, but they are not really satisfied with the outcome of their bargaining with the bosses. In Nova Scotia, fish processing plants are idle because fish quotas have been cut. Cod and other deep water fish stocks have been overestimated by government scientists and depleted by domestic and foreign fleets. It's a crisis. Worse yet, at least

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for the moment, liquor commission employees just walked off the job without warning, leaving the entire province without access to beer and rum and whatever else people might fancy at home on the first weekend without a gale in the forecast.

In the news, the wrangling and doomsaying over the Meech Lake Accord is relentless. The deadline is just weeks away. The fate of the country appears to rest on the outcome of a Sunday night gathering at 24 Sussex Drive, the Prime Minister's residence in Ottawa. Brian Mulroney has invited the ten provincial premiers to dinner. If it goes down well--meaning yet another ambiguous compromise spills out with the wine--a full-scale First Ministers Conference (where the P.M. presides as "first among equals") will follow; if not, a lot of Canadians will throw up their hands and feel quite sick about the future. Either way, political dithering will continue as the economy weakens. This is not a happy country.

Much of this will be passe in no time at all. The mood may have turned sunny before this newsletter reaches its destinations, but I doubt it. The swirling tide of fast-breaking events keeps dredging up sediments of the past, making Canada's economic and constitutional problems seem timeless in the same sense as original sin: all the structural defects and fundamental dishonesties are coming to light. People's loyalties are being questioned. I will attempt to explain how and why, as briefly as possible, in a regional and historical perspective.

ABANDONED LOBSTER BOAT - P.E.I.

petit Canada

Think of New Brunswick as a miniature Canada, without a Northwest Territory and without an international reputation for anything save good trout and salmon fishing. Picture Canada's coast-to-coast expanse going through the imaginary equivalent of an industrial auto crusher. The resulting 52,000 square mile lump (less than 1 percent of the country's total land mass) contains most of the essential elements of Canada's social and political identity. About 65 percent of New Brunswick's 710,000 people speak English and venerate their British ancestors. Most of the rest speak French at home and work and English when they have to, which is often. The remainder are Micmac and Malecite Indians who keep pretty much to themselves, and speak the language of poverty.

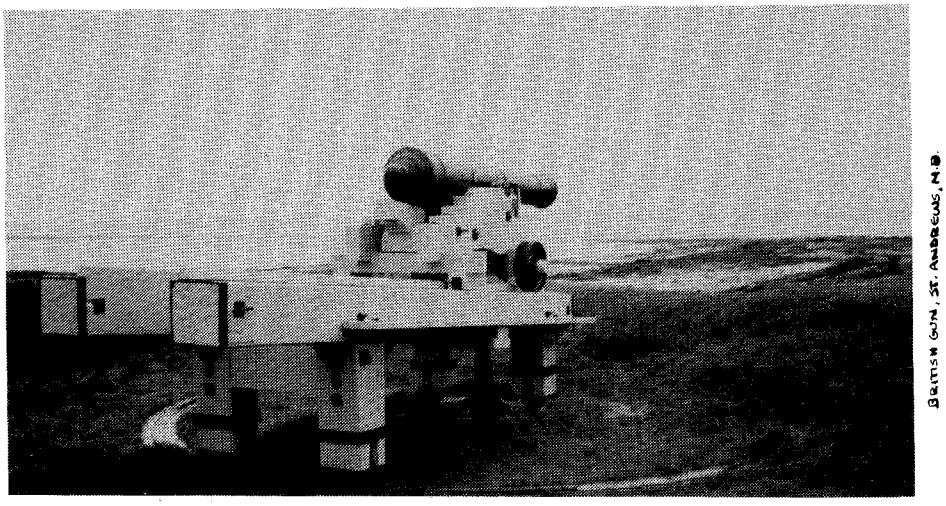
The province is officially bilingual. Unofficially there are, in some quarters, unabashed bigots. The Association for the Preservation of English

(APEC) has a large following in New Brunswick. This country-wide organization bases itself on the principle that "ONE LANGUAGE UNITES, TWO LANGUAGES DIVIDE." It opposes "the creation by governments of an artificial need for the use of the French language at the federal, provincial and municipal levels," among other things respectful of minority rights. In the abstract, there is nothing particularly offensive to logic or common sense in the APEC position, but in the context of Canadian history and New Brunswick's linguistic duality, the message is clearly discriminatory: assimilate, or just go away. The Confederation of Regions Party (COR), recently imported from alienated sections of the West, takes a similar view. The party's Atlantic region VP recently said that English-speaking Canadians who died in the war deserve better than to have the country taken over by French "grabs." Her eloquence deteriorated further in a public statement that "every one of our war dead is entitled to rest in the land of his father's toil and mother's love, not a land disintegrating in the mouldy waters of Meech Lake."

Like Canada as a whole, New Brunswick seems rural but is actually highly urbanized. There is a lot of unpeopled and untrammeled space between the several cities that compete for power, prestige, and the federal government's shrinking largesse. Fredericton, the capital, has fostered some world-famous benefactors, such as Lord Beaverbrook, a scion of Fleet Street in the forties and fifties, who donated amazing things to his modest home province, including an art collection boasting a 17th century Gobelin tapestry, two Botticellis and Salvador Dali's incredible canvas entitled **Santiago El Grande.** St. John, the commercial port on the Bay of Fundy, is home to an infamous tycoon, K.C. Irving. I say "infamous" not in judgment of this publicity-shy multibillionaire but only in deference to his family's reputation for hard-nosed business practices in the Atlantic region. Irving, whom I mentioned last time, has a refinery in St. John, a gas station in every village and truckstop, and a large grasping hand in the food industry. His forest products companies have left clearcut scars all over the province. In addition to having a firm grip on much of the Maritimes' traditional sources of wealth (which are also Canada's), Irving also owns television stations, and thus holds a thoroughly modern seat of power. The McCains, another enterprising clan, grow vegetables in the St. John River valley for most of Canada's home freezers. They also supply MacDonalds with french fries. (Imagine the richness of that contract.) These family fiefdoms exemplify the extraordinarily high levels of economic concentration in Canada, something that is rarely talked about.

Moncton, in real life an unassuming city in the southeast corner of the province, is a would-be Montreal in reverse gear when one construes New Brunswick as Little Canada. As a visitor, you wouldn't know that nearly half the people are French. At Champlain Place, the largest shopping complex in the area, and where the clientele are predominantly francophone, a French-language sign is a rarity. The first time a French-language film was shown in a downtown theatre--at the 7 p.m. viewing only--was in 1988. If you stop to take a closer look, a system of dual cohabitation becomes evident: an English hospital and a French hospital; an English school system and a French one; different teachers' associations, insurance companies, and savings institutions. Last week, there was a brief bit of public furor over flags. Some Anglo-Monctonians protested the use of the Acadian (French) banner alongside federal and provincial flags honoring the city's 100th anniversary by hoisting the Union Jack. Picture Montreal a quarter century ago, shrunk down to a small fraction of its economic might and stripped of its architectural splendor, fighting for the fealty of its two founding communities. That's Moncton.

New Brunswick has just about everything short of the Rocky Mountains that one would expect to find in Canada: big rivers, high tides, a foggy coast, huge expanses of uninhabited woodlands, moose crossing signs, buckled roads, muffins in every donut shop, monuments to the boys who died for the Empire at Dieppe and in Flanders Field, and a long border with the United States. If you go there, you will discover people whose loyalties are divided, not only between British- and French-Canadian accounts of history, but also between province and region, region and country, linguistic heritage and the "national" interest. You might even encounter someone who has already given up on Canada, and speaks favorably, albeit in hushed tones, about sliding a little further into the American orbit.



Remnant Nations

How to make a durable whole cloth from the frayed remnants of a crazy-quilt past when the connecting threads are in short supply? This region is the gathering place of losers whose only authentic common bond is the historical memory of persecution and the contemporary experience of economic adversity. Many of the English-speaking inhabitants trace their roots back to the 70,000 Loyalists hounded out of the American colonies between 1776 and 1783. The francophone Acadians are descended from 50-odd families who settled in the area shortly after Samuel Champlain claimed it for France in 1604. They were deported by the British **en masse** in 1755, after enduring 40-odd years of compulsory allegiance to one or the other European Crown as political control of the area switched at least seven times. Let me give you a bare bones summary of each group's origins and evolution before expounding on their joint significance in contemporary Canada.

The Loyalists, as you know, are what we Americans usually remember as "Tories." They sided with King George III and suffered the consequences: heavy fines, onerous taxes, violent evictions, tarring and feathering, banishment, imprisonment and death. For a good number of them--the lawyers and doctors and civil servants and other upper crust gentry--forced departure from the rebellious colonies for loyal Nova Scotia entailed a great leap of faith out of the lap of luxury and into a frigid and unforgiving wilderness. For others, including artisans and commoners of all sorts as well as whole regiments of loyal troops and their families,

starting life over again as farmers and shipbuilders was a much better prospect than trusting life and limb to the mobs of patriots who liked to burn things and ask questions later. In 1783, the single largest mass migration ever seen in the New World commenced in New York harbor. One year later, the Loyalist colony of New Brunswich was carved out of greater Nova Scotia to reduce administrative pressures on the government in Halifax and better meet the needs of the newcomers.

What I am just now beginning to appreciate is the extent to which "our" revolution was a civil war. William Franklin, for example, son of Ben and colonial governor of New Jersey was just one of thousands of Americans imprisoned in the dank and fetid mine shafts 40 feet underground at Simsbury in Connecticut. It is easy to forget that an indifferent loyalism was the normal condition in most of the colonies, that a hyperactive minority called the shots. In modern parlance, the Loyalists were subjected to severe and systematic abuses of human rights. The Treaty of Paris, which brought a formal end to hostilities between Britain and America, included a provision for the restitution of confiscated properties. It was routinely ignored by the still separate state governments. Theft, cruelty, murder, families torn apart by divergent loyalties: there is more than enough suffering and intrigue in the Loyalist saga to supply a surfeit of mini-series for Masterpiece Theatre.

Familiarity with this perspective on the Revolution takes one a long way toward understanding the roots of anti-American sentiment in Canada. In many respects, Canada as a country and not just New Brunswick is a Loyalist creation. Connie Shanks, writing in the May issue of **Atlantic Advocate** magazine, says that the Loyalist refugees brought with them a "simmering hatred for their former compatriots and a strong pro-British stance that would be passed on from generation to generation...They brought to Canada in general and to the Maritimes in particular an enduring element of basic conservatism, a sense of tradition, and a faith in the British system of government that is still a significant part of the Maritime mosaic."

What the good and true Loyalists tried in vain to uphold were these basic principles: the supremacy of Parliament; the historic rights of Englishmen; self-government of the colonies through their own legislatures within the British Empire. They did not believe a violent revolution was necessary. To an important extent, these are the values that distinguished Canadian from American thinking until very recently. Even today, unless one is describing internal squabbles focused on linguistic differences, the phrase "British Canada" is a more revealing sobriquet than "English Canada", especially in the Maritimes.

The Acadians constitute the French Fact in this part of Canada. Approximately 300,000 in number, the Acadians are spread most thickly across seven counties in New Brunswick and continue to inhabit certain pockets of Nova Scotia, Prince Edward Island, and Newfoundland. About 2.5 million people of Acadian ancestry are scattered across the globe. The dean of the Law school at the **Universite de Moncton** told me he recently ran across some long lost relatives in the Seychelles, of the east coast of Africa. The largest concentrations of Acadians outside the Maritime provinces are in the United States and Quebec.

Acadians are not Quebeckers. They have a different history, a different dialect, a somewhat different set of priorities. A dense, thousand-mile swath of forest minimized contact between Quebec and l'**Acadie** in the 17th and 18th centuries. Links with France were always tenuous and Quebec was always in a superior trading position given its wealth of resources and the access provided to them by the St. Lawrence River. The relative isolation of Acadian communities on the Fundy shore and in Minas Basin provided these pastoral people a sense of self-reliance that is evident even now. Most of the 5,000 Acadians who live on Prince Edward Island have never even been to Quebec.

The Acadians comprise a cultural nation without a specific territory or a political jurisdiction they can call their own. "**L'Acadie**" is as much a mental concept as a geographic expression, according to British scholar Catriona Dinwoodie. During his 1524 voyage of discovery along the Atlantic coast, Giovanni da Verrazzano called the area around Chesapeake Bay "Archadia" after the poet Virgil's description of the ideal landscape. Champlain referred to what is now Nova Scotia as "**la coste d'Acadie**" in his journal, so somewhere in-between the "r" was lost and several degrees of latitute were gained. "Cadi" is a Micmac word for dwelling place, and this may figure in the early story of this melancholic place name.

Despite their small and diffuse population, the Acadians possess many of the trappings of nationhood: a flag (French tricolor with a yellow star, signifying the Virgin Mary), an anthem (Ave Stella Marie), a university (at Moncton), schools, teacher training institutions, professional associations, credit unions, newspapers etc. Much of this cultural ground has been fought for incrementally over the past century. Before that, the Acadian people had not yet recongealed into a cohesive group after the Deportation in 1755 (also known as the Great Disruption, the Expulsion, the Upheaval), which scattered nearly 10,000 French families throughout the still British American colonies. (Many of these refugees made their way to the Mississippi Delta region, from whence the term "Cajun.") This tragedy, now the core of Acadian history, was first brought to the world's attention via the poem **Evangeline** by Henry Wadsworth Longfellow. A more recent rendition is the prize-winning novel **Pelagie**, by Antonine Maillet, who is today perhaps the best-known and most articulate exponent of the Acadian cultural identity.

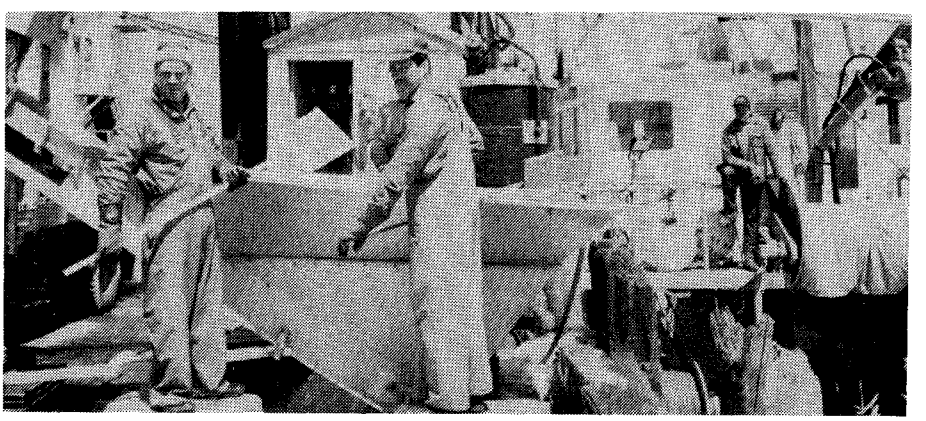
The ostensible crime for which the 18th century Acadians paid so dearly with their land, livestock, homes and dignity was to refuse to sign an oath of allegiance to the British Crown. While there is some evidence that a few Acadian traders may have fired a shot or two at British warships in the Bay of Fundy, the vast majority wished to remain neutral in the incessant warring between France and Britain, and they behaved accordingly, selling provisions to both sides and taking up arms with neither. There is a lesson in this much abbreviated account of regional history about the price of neutrality in a strategic space and/or turbulent times.

The Acadians are a little like the Jews in having lived in diaspora and a little like the Poles for being predominantly Catholic and having come back from a geopolitical death. They are a lot like North American Indians, in having lived off the land long before the Brits arrived and in never giving up the struggle to exist as a collective entity, no matter the odds. The Parks Canada official at Grand Pre (site of the first expulsion) likened the plight of the Acadians to the Nisei in the U.S. and Canada during World War II: their loyalties were suspect. It is also tempting to compare Acadians with the Basques and Catalans of Spain, but that conjures images of

terrorist violence and industrial dynamism and a cosmopolitan outlook, each of which is wholly inappropriate to the French of New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, and P.E.I. Moncton will never be ranked with Bilbao or Barcelona. The Acadian struggle has always been non-violent; its aim is equality, not independence.

The Acadian agenda is a modest one. Their foremost political objective is the entrenchment of their language rights in the Canadian constitution. There is already a New Brunswick statute (Bill 8) guaranteeing the provision of government services (including education and health care) in both official languages, but the law has been weakly implemented and not well enforced. Acadians are justifiably concerned that a future, less sympathetic provincial regime will simply rescind the act. The other major well-established goals are to encourage administrative decentralization of government ministries and a greater degree of institutional duality, that is, more positions for bilingual officials where numbers warrant and at least token francophone representation in all departments. In the former

instance, the Acadians, numerically dominant in the fisheries sector, believe that too many decisions concerning their livelihood are made by and for anglophones in St. John. Another example of apparent inequity is the placement of specialized health care facilities in St. John instead of someplace nearer the demographic center of the province, like Fredericton. The current situation requires heart disease patients in the north have to be transported over 250 miles, at great cost as well as great risk.



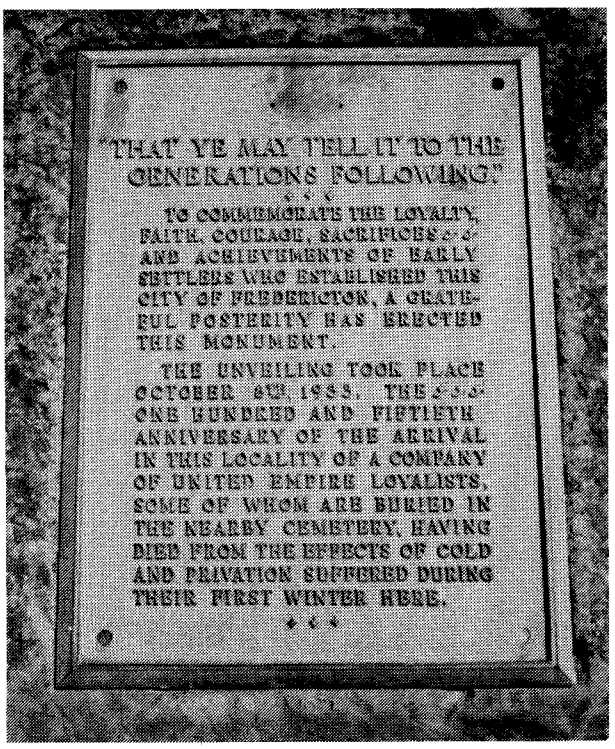
FISH PLANT WORKERS CARAQUET

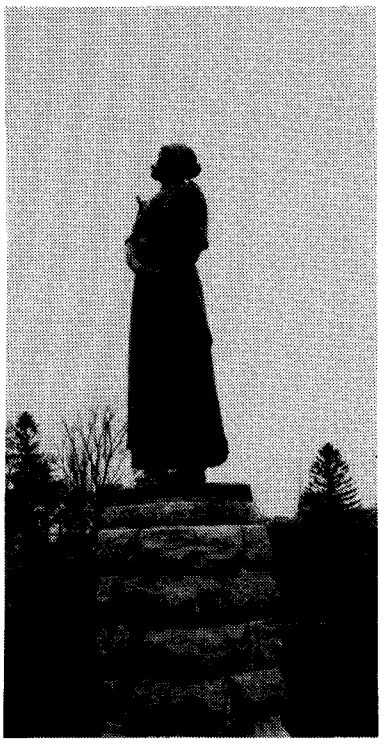
This is the way Acadians generally think about politics: with a focus on practical necessities rather than ideological concepts. Theirs is a minimalist and prosaic approach to nationhood. I drove up to Petit Rocher, northwest of Caraquet, to meet with the President and Director General of the **Societe des Acadiens et Acadiennes du Nouveau Brunswick** (SAANB). Real Gervais and Norbert Roy are utterly unpretentious and hardworking men in early middle age. Roy's office was roomy but spartan. We fished around in a back kitchen area for some clean coffee cups before getting down to business. We agreed that I would query in English and they would respond in French. (This was fun, and it helped the only one of us not fluently

bilingual--**moi**--to avoid grammatical shame.) My first question, from a list I'd prepared at a Pizza Delite in Bathurst the night before, was a real toughie: "What form of political and economic sovereignty is required to sustain Acadian culture over the next 25-50 years?"

These guys with gentle eyes smiled in unison, settled a little deeper in their chairs, and proceeded to coax me away from a silly beginning and toward real life. They complained that auto insurance premiums are inordinately high in the northeast quadrant of the province (known as the Acadian peninsula) because the roads are so full of potholes. They lamented the fact that so many of their elders and accident victims have suffered the torment of being rushed to hospitals where no one on duty--despite Bill 8--can speak French. They talked about cable television, and funding for schools. They said they want equal access to economic opportunity for Acadians in the province, a more difficult desire to fulfill given the dominance of the Irving and McCain empires and the government's history of doling out generous incentives to multinational corporations interested in natural resource development. Without adequate representation in Fredericton, without ownership of mines and forests, without any control over communications media, Acadian "sovereignty" is a null set.

All of Acadians' wishes and demands are reminiscent of Quebeckers' a quarter century ago, but there is little likelihood that a nation of less than half a million without comparable political clout will ever attain more than legal equality in their home province. Moreover, the dual threat of cultural assimilation and economic stagnation is always more severe for Acadians than for Quebec.





MONUMENT TO "EVANGELINE" - GRAND PRÉ, N.S.

Options and Infidelities

Assuming that constitutional issues will remain deadlocked and Quebec makes its move toward independence, and that the rest of the country starts to break up into regional power clusters (e.g. Ontario, the Prairie

Provinces, British Columbia), what will become of the Maritimes? A number of possibilities spring to mind. None of them are politically palatable at the moment, at least not in a public sense, but privately, as is always the case, individuals are trying to think ahead. Since the status quo is NOT an option--something has to give--contemplating the various choices is unavoidable. Here are some examples of what kinds of ideas have emerged thus far, and how they have been received.

On April 18, in an interview with a Canadian Press correspondent, Nova Scotia Premier John Buchanan had this to say about the prospect of a Canada without Meech Lake and hence without Quebec:

> "What are we going to do? Form our own country? That's absurd. Stay a fractured part of Canada? A good possibility, but that's all. Or be part of the United States? There's no choice."

The premier went on to muse that "we'd really be the rump of Canada" if Quebec separated and the Western provinces, resolutely unwilling to live at the mercy of Ontario, went their own way too. He predicted that under such circumstances the Maritimes would opt for U.S. statehood within a decade.

Critics went bonkers over this. Members of the Liberal opposition took his "no choice" finale to mean that joining the U.S. was the only real option. They considered Buchanan's remarks disloyal, and demanded his resignation. Other partisan-minded commentators castigated the premier for using scare tactics in an effort to bolster support for Meech Lake and the prime minister, a fellow Conservative. Buchanan and his supporters argued that his remarks had been twisted out of context--at worst ill-advised. Nobody was happy to learn shortly thereafter that **Washington Times** columnist Pat Buchanan had caught wind of the brouhaha and proceeded to write a piece about how Americans should welcome the prospect of a continental union by the turn of the century. The issue has blown over, but it will not be forgotten.

In the same month, at a Liberal Party leadership candidates forum in Halifax, last place contender John Nunziata said that the separatists in Quebec were traitors to Canada. He also likened them to racists and bigots. Many Canadians were horrified and offended by this outburst of narrow-minded patriotism. Nunziata was raked over the coals by his colleagues in Parliament. They chastised him for defaming a legitimate and democratic political party (the **Parti Quebecois**), but what they were really steamed about was the brash MP's adding fuel to the fires of Quebec nationalism at such a critical period in the Meech Lake process. Nunziata remains unrepentent, reasonably self-assured, no doubt, of being offered a position in the next Liberal cabinet since he has redirected the loyalty of his followers to Jean Chretien, the all-but-crowned victor in the leadership race. For all the scorn heaped on Nunziata for his egregious political **faux pas**, his passion will probably pay off in the end, and I will never forget the underreported spontaneous thunder of applause that followed his condemnation of those treacherous **pequistes**.

More recently, as the Meech Lake deadline has drawn nearer and has cast an ominous shadow over Parliament Hill, the loyalties of several Conservative MPs have been stretched beyond the limit. Having determined that Quebec's bid to reconfirm its membership in the constitutional fold will be defeated, two members of the Tory caucus have resigned their seats in the House of Commons, effectively placing their loyalty to kith, kin and

province-nation ahead of what they feel they owe to Brian Mulroney and the rest of Canada.

A third betrayal of underlying allegiance caused a greater stir. Lucien Bouchard, Mulroney's foremost Quebec lieutenant and also Environment Minister, presaged HIS resignation from the Cabinet with a congratulatory letter to the **Parti Quebecois** on the occasion of the tenth anniversary of the Referendum on sovereignty-association. Bouchard had been a separatist and a close colleague of Rene Levesque in the 1970s; his subsequent rise to power as a federalist within the Conservative Party appeared to mark a turning point in Quebec attitudes as well as his own career. Bouchard's most recent reversal was not sudden--pundits had seen it coming for months, and promptly declared it calculated--but in addition to undermining Mulroney's last-ditch efforts to save Meech Lake the minister's resignation raises all sorts of unfair questions about the sincerity of Quebeckers' commitment to Canada in general and legitimate ones about the magnitude of Bouchard's personal ambition. Some well-positioned observers figure he will try to wrest power from Premier Robert Bourassa if Meech Lake passes or from PQ leader Jacques Parizeau if it does not. Is it wrong to be loyal, especially in such a confused and volatile time, to oneself?

What about the Acadians? In 1972, Rene Levesque gave a speech at the University of New Brunswick, in Fredericton. "If Quebec becomes a going concern," he remarked, "young Acadians could become our privileged immigrants of the future. It is apparent that the French minority in areas of Canada away from Quebec are a lost cause." Notwithstanding the fact that the newly-formed (now defunct) **Parti Acadien** was at that time gathering momentum behind the idea of forming a separate francophone province, the notion of the French of New Brunswick leaving their historic homeland for an unfamiliar and patroninzing Quebec struck a dissonant chord among Acadian leaders. A man named Claude Bourque was sufficiently moved to write this (translated) rebuttal in St. John **Telegraph-Journal:**

> "...The Acadian people has a soul, has a destiny and had its dreams. If the past has failed to destroy the Acadians, no Rene Levesque is going to order the Acadians to fade away and blend into the people of Quebec, not even if Quebec should become independent. Acadians have chosen New Brunswick as their home--twice. [Before and After the Deportation] We have every intention to stay here, to grow and flourish here."

Indeed, the final declaration of an Acadian convention in 1979 was "**On est venus, c'est pour rester**"--We came to stay. Today's Acadians are no more enamored with Quebec than Bourque and others were in the 1970s, but they are less sanguine about their chances of cultural survival in a province that would certainly become less economically stable and quite probably less respectful of the francophone minority if Quebec were to quit Canada.

The Acadians have a huge stake in Canada's sticking together and an enormously difficult task ahead of them. Internal loyalties are already strained. Many Acadian youth have left for the United States and other parts of Canada in order to find some upward mobility. The more radical Acadians who stay put will demand more power from Fredericton or, failing that, a separate mini-state of their own. Moderates in the middle face a continued slow slog toward enforceable equality with Anglo-New Brunswickers or reluctant annexation to Quebec. Acadians who are understandably fatigued

from all their past efforts and apprehensive about the future may simply give up for awhile, just to live their modest lives away from the changing winds of nationalism. This in itself will be difficult.

The external pressures on this community are formidable. Without financial support from the federal government, their organizations will have to be sustained by grassroots funding, always an iffy proposition in an uncertain and underprivileged economic environment. (At present, a little over 90 percent of the **SAANB**'s budget comes from the Secretary of State's office in Ottawa.) Without hefty Quebec representation in the federal Parliament, their rights as francophone Canadians would surely diminish. The Acadians, even more than other French-speaking minority enclaves outside Quebec, will likely suffer the backlash of resentment from the English-speaking majority in the Maritimes should the Meech Lake impasse cause a country-wide political shakeup.

The Acadians' current strategy is to try to make incremental progress on all fronts (see above), and to gain as much international recognition as possible, by securing invitations to participate in the 40-member association of French-speaking nation (**La Francophonie**) and by signing cultural exchange agreements with sovereign countries, notably France and Belgium, as well as with kindred spirits, such as the **conseil pour le developpement du francais en Louisiane** (CODIFIL).

If not for the undeniable fact that these people have had nearly 400 years of practice at staying alive as a small nation within an adverse state of circumstances then the challenge of cultural survival would appear insurmountable. Pluck is not power, but it seems to be just enough to keep the Acadians from losing all hope. "Why do you persist?" I asked several prominent Acadians. Each said essentially the same thing, in slightly different words, a composite of which is simply, "I cannot NOT continue my commitment to the Acadian people. It is who I am."

. . . . . .

What about the Maritimes as a whole? Could the three provinces not band together and form a single political entity? Could they not pool their human and physical resources, eliminate the high cost of duplication in maintaining separate bureaucracies, and reorient their diffuse priorities toward a common purpose befitting an regional economic environment dominated by the sea? Wouldn't Maritime Canadians be better off on their own, without having to kowtow to Ontario, genuflect to Ottawa, and fuss or fume about Quebec? If the countries of Europe which have been fighting each other for centuries can talk and act seriously about political union, why can't three relatively puny provinces get their act together and at least form a competitive team?

Alas, the fun and easy questions are always the most difficult to answer. Discussions of a Maritime Union have been going on for over a century, all to no avail. It was at a convocation in Charlottetown to deliberate this issue in 1867 that Canada was born, after delegations from Ontario and Quebec convinced Maritimers that what they really needed was to be part of a larger confederation of British colonies. But the Maritimes remain a divided lot. In a commissioned analysis of the regional integration idea's genesis and development, aptly subtitled "A Study in Frustration," J. Murray Beck writes

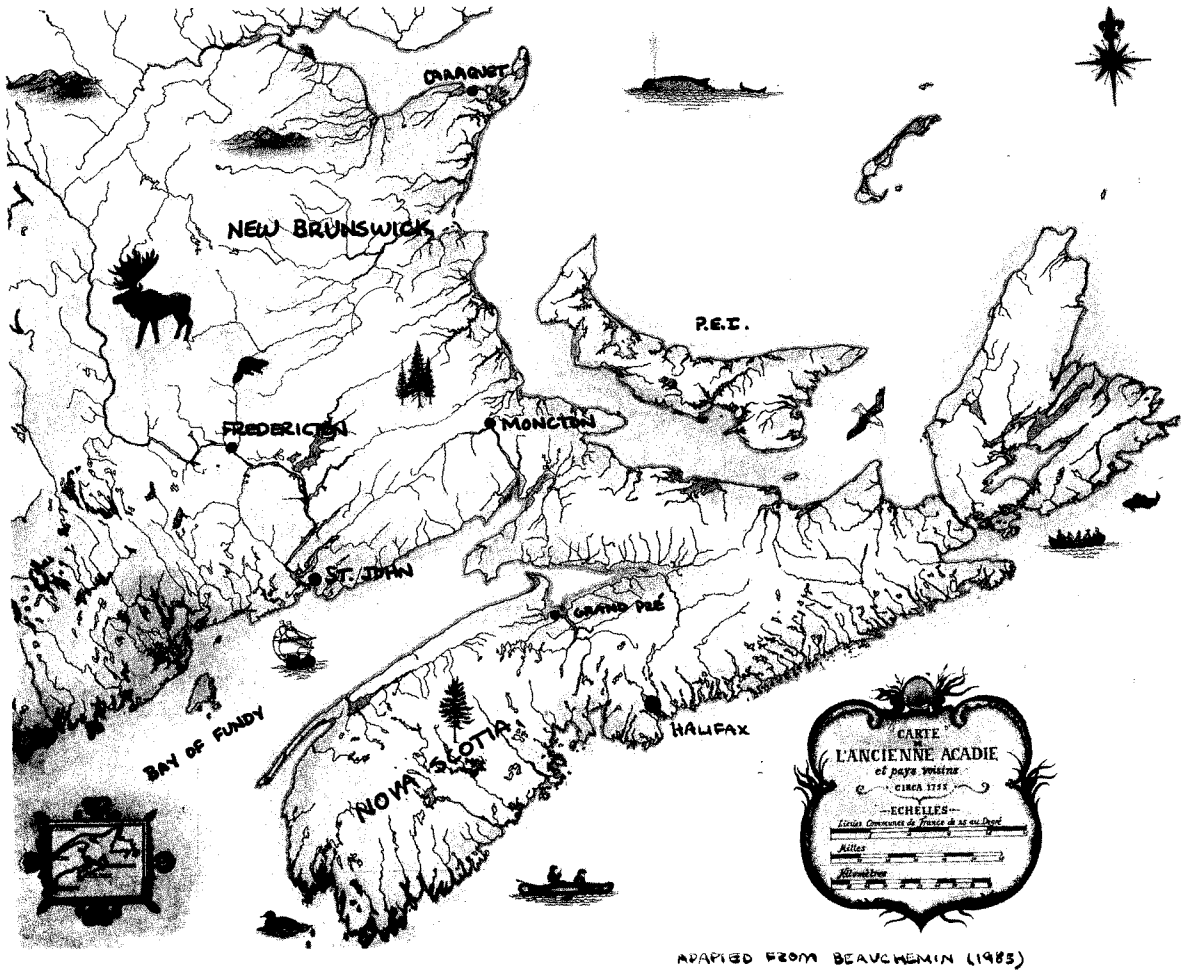
> "The history of Maritime Union serves to confirm the accepted view that the political culture of

this region--the intangible complex of beliefs, emotions, and values that are relevant to politics--is such as to induce conservatism and caution, or, more specifically, a tendency to cling to the things of the past, even if undesirable."

An economics professor at the University of New Brunswick says in the May issue of the province's **Business Journal** that Atlantic Canada could survive on its own, but only if half the people left the region. He laments the general despoilation of the area's natural resources, and argues that there is only enough export potential left to supply sufficient earnings for only about a million people, not the nearly two million current inhabitants. The unspoken alternative is for the existing population to suffer a 50 percent decline in living standards. It's not a happy thought.

I am keeping my ears open but my mouth shut about such things. The last thing an Empire Loyalist wants to hear is an American thinking out loud about how to solve Canada's political problems. The Acadians aren't looking for American advice either, as it is always unavoidably tainted with the melting pot virus. Most Maritimers, because they are loyal, would throw buckets of cold salt water at any suggestion that they might join the United States. At dinner the other night, our Canadian host jokingly asked whether Yanks would welcome the Maritimes if promised a lobster in every pot.

Stephen Maly



ADAPTED FROM BEAUCHEMIN (1985)

Received in Hanover 6/11/90