

INSTITUTE OF CURRENT WORLD AFFAIRS

SM-12

"Rock of Ages"

3 July 1990
Newfoundland

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Dear Peter,

From the moment I hit the brakes on the lower main deck of the Caribou, a 1200-passenger ferry docked at North Sydney, on Cape Breton Island (Nova Scotia), our fast-aging Toyota was transformed into a four-door time machine. Over the next three weeks, we would spill out onto ancient rocky headlands, clamber over granitic remnants of ice-age glaciers, tramp across bogs and boneyards to see what's left of iron-age settlements, and converse with Newfoundlanders from several generations about what they expect to happen to their beleaguered island economy in the years to come.

The second chamber of our rig was a stripped-down Coleman Patriot tent trailer, circa 1960. It would serve as galley, berth, research station, and refuge from that ancient dual curse of all the Canadas in summertime: tiny black flies and hungry mosquitoes. We were bound first for Port aux Basques, 160 kilometers across the Cabot Strait, on the island province often referred to by upstarts and old-timers alike as "the Rock." The names of places on and around Newfoundland would prove to be useful and sometimes amusing direction-finders in our traverse through time. Port aux Basques is a reminder that the earliest European adventurers to plunder the surrounding seas were Basque whalers, who arrived at the edge of North America (with Breton and Portuguese fishing fleets following in their wake) some 500 years before Columbus. John Cabot was a Venetian navigator who convinced the English Prince Henry to finance his search for a Northwest Passage to Cathay in 1497. He found the Rock instead, although it wasn't until 1583 that Sir Humphrey Gilbert claimed the island for England in order to gain competitive legitimacy in the exploitation of Newfoundland's then bountiful fishery.

About 2 hours into our crossing, after scouting out all four passenger decks and spotting several finback whales off the starboard bow, I made my first truly useful discovery, not about Newfoundland per se, but about a time-shortening way to get there. Take two Gravol (an over-the-counter motion sickness tablet) then go have a Black Horse beer in the on-board lounge, and just wait awhile. The fine print on the medicine wrapper warns

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Since 1925 the Institute of Current World Affairs (the Crane-Rogers Foundation) has provided long-term fellowships to enable outstanding young adults to live outside the United States and write about international areas and issues. Endowed by the late Charles R. Crane, the Institute is also supported by contributions from like-minded individuals and foundations.

against driving under its influence, and also suggests avoiding tasks requiring mental alertness, all for good reason. I was out for another two hours, but woke up with fresh sea legs and a surprising hunger. After a few gently biting comments about how exciting her traveling companion had proved to be so far, Alice agreed to split her order of fish and chips in the cafeteria at the stern. We spent the remaining several hours of smooth sailing delving into our respective briefs, hers a file folder full of photocopied journal pieces about Newfoundland's diverse geology and mine a 1972 biography by Richard Gwyn of Joey Smallwood, an "inquisitive but aggressive grasshopper" in youth who became "a thoughtful but aggressive owl" in middle age, during which time (1949-1972) he governed Newfoundland like an old mother hen with a Napoleon complex.



THE VIEW FROM CAPE BRETON: NEWFOUNDLAND IS BEYOND THE HORIZON.

It is hard to cover Newfoundland in a hurry. If memory serves correctly, this is the world's tenth largest island, comprising 156,000 square miles. Labrador, Newfoundland's territorial claim on the mainland, is roughly three times larger, and combined into one provincial jurisdiction Newfoundland and Labrador are bigger than the three Maritime provinces and the New England states combined. Having just left Prince Edward Island, which Smallwood once dismissed as an "itty bitty" province--"You could drop it in the middle of Newfoundland and need a good guide to find it"--we were taken aback by the length and breadth of the land. We were also removed, in a manner of speaking, several thousand years in an excursion to the far end of the northwest peninsula of the province from our first encampment, at Gros Morne National Park.

It was an 8-hour drive to L'Anse aux Meadows and back again. The road skirts the edge of the Gulf of St. Lawrence (an ocean by all appearances) for most of the way. We saw scores of buoys dotting the shallows offshore, marking the location of lobster traps and salmon nets that are tended from

open boats. Several of the coves and inlets along the way contained clusters of shacks where the fishermen and their wives spend the summer months. We stopped to examine the rusted remains of a wrecked ship from the age of steam, and encountered a group of all-too-familiar aliens who had managed to scrounge every beached bit of fishing gear worth saving. They were stacking their prizes on top of a behemoth motor home licensed in Florida when Alice pointed out a passage in the Park bulletin that the local fishing folk would be along to collect their damaged pots and nets as soon as they found the time. The scavengers took umbrage, of course. The surprise came when the squad commander revealed that he was a Newfoundlander who had worked hard enough to earn a comfortable retirement in the States and he had every right to this stuff. The incident made me recall the lamentations of Farley Mowat, an Ontario-born writer who fell in love with Newfoundland in a previous decade. The same people "who once partook of the primal strength of rock and ocean" had become dangerously infected with "compulsive consumerism," according to Mowat. He added, as do most Canadian men and women of letters, that said disease had drifted up from the south. The Americanized Newfoundlanders went to hide behind their RV, and we left the pull-out in a foul mood.

At Port au Choix, roughly halfway to the chilly end of the earth that was our destination, we stopped at a National Historical Site marking the few acres where some 4,000 years ago the Maritime Archaic Indians ventured across the strait from Labrador for no other apparent reason than to bury their dead. Nearby are the scant remains of a Dorset Eskimo camp from a century later. The Dorsets actually hunted and fished in the area, but they disappeared completely, and their seemingly rapid extinction remains an anthropological mystery. The Beothuk Indians, on the other hand, who inhabited the whole island when British settlers first arrived in the 16th century, were wiped out by a combination of imported diseases and the then shameless blood sport of shooting "Red men." (The Beothuks painted themselves with red ochre.) We were told by a student of history from Memorial University in St. John's that the Micmac Indians were brought onto the island from Labrador by the English for the express purpose of killing Beothuks, but this is a controversial interpretation of a scant documentary record. At any rate, and as would be further underscored by our visit to the 1000-year old Norse settlement at L'Anse au Meadows, this part of the New World was once a meeting place of aboriginal and European nations.

In spite such historical convergences, Newfoundland is today probably the most culturally homogeneous society in Canada. Nearly all the people come from southern Irish or West English stock. There is a tiny enclave of French-speaking people who maintain their traditions on the Port au Port peninsula, which is almost a small island unto itself north of Port aux Basques. These 3000 souls and the scattering of French names of villages and geographic features remind Newfoundlanders that in the 18th century much of the fishing along the west coast was conducted by French fleets, under a treaty arrangement with the British, but the francophone presence in modern Newfoundland is a dwindling one, easily forgotten by the powers that be. The Innu and Montagnais and Neskapi native groups who still fish and hunt in Labrador receive greater attention, as their greater numbers warrant, but also because they actively oppose some of the uses to which their lands are being put, including low-level training flights by Nato fighter-bombers.

L'Anse-au-Meadows (a bastardization of the French l'anse aux medues, "jellyfish cove") is now recognized as the first definite landing site in North America of Viking explorers. They were probably en route to more hospitable bays and coves farther south, in the "Vinland" of the Icelandic

sagas. (For a number of years, some wishful archaeologists considered Newfoundland to be Vinland, but much evidence, including the inconvenient fact that no kind of grape grows north of Pasaquomoddy Bay in Maine, suggests that the bountiful coast skirted by Leif Eriksson and his relatives was somewhere nearer present day New England). The Vikings at L'Anse au Meadows built sod houses, smelted bog iron, picked berries and fought off "skraelings" (a Norse word meaning wretches that was applied to Natives) in order to mend their ocean-going open boats. Life was simple and hard. One of the display units at the site speculates that "games, quarrels, boredom, chores and waiting for a break in the weather to send out hunting and fishing parties made up the daily routine." While the Norse didn't stay long enough to make a difference in Newfoundland's historical development, they endured many of the same hardships suffered by the later Anglo-Saxons who did.

On the way back toward Gros Morne, we sighted a blue-green anvil of ice, the remains of a once-towering iceberg, giving off an other-worldly glow in a sheltered bay. We passed dozens of makeshift garden patches on either side of the road. There is little if any good soil in or around the rocky inlets where people have built their homes, so a custom has evolved whereby families pick a loamy spot along the highway and return to it each year, to plant turnips and potatoes. They also go into the woods to cut firewood for the winter, and stack it neatly at various turn-outs in the road. As our excursion took place on a Sunday, we saw lots of locals taking field trips to do a bit of cultivation or wood collection. Everyone travelled by slow moving pick-up truck. I saw several truck cabs with a least five or six people in the front seat--old guys peering over the steering wheel, young adults with their elbows out the window, little kids squeezed in the middle. This was the first of several confirmations that Newfoundland families are commonly both extended and snugly stuck together.

With evening closing in and a hunger for something more nutritious than dill pickle flavor potato chips, we stopped in the town of St. Anthony, which is the commercial center for this sparsely populated region. Before tracking down a decent meal, we stopped at the Grenfell House Museum, an out-of-the-way place on a hill behind the local hospital. We had a little trouble finding it. Newfoundlanders have a funny way of placing signs. An intersection announced "300 meters" in advance, for example, is the one you just missed while reading the sign. In this instance, the directions were accurate, but droll. "Park your car down here!" We did. At the end of a steep dirt driveway, the next sign said "Go around to the other door," so we did that. At the other door, a smaller, barely legible sign said "Next one, please." Finally, we made it inside, and thereby crossed another threshold of time.

Sir Wilfred Grenfell was born in England in 1865 and died in Vermont in 1940. In between, he became a doctor, a missionary, an organizer of worker cooperatives, a prodigious fund-raiser, the author of numerous books, a husband and father, and the hands-on helper of hundreds of Labrador orphans. Everything in the museum that was once his home--the books and sketches and letters and photographs with famous people like Ramsay MacDonald and Woodrow Wilson, the memorial plaque to the three cherished sled dogs he had to kill to keep himself from freezing to death when trapped on an errant ice floe--all of this and more was presented in a simple, almost primitive fashion. The explanations were typewritten, the furniture time-worn, and there was no glitzy gift shop. Even before making it up to the second floor there was no doubt in either of our minds that this was the house of a great man who had earned his accolades from the Royal Geographical Society and his knighthood

in 1928 by being generously and unflinchingly practical. Grenfell was a Mother Theresa to the Labrador natives, and this modest monument to his memory made me sit down and take stock and feel like a big nothing.

It was getting dark when we left the museum. The informal attendant, a young woman who had been entertaining a frizzy-haired girlfriend and an Indian boy wearing Beatle boots in the parlor, warned us against getting nabbed by "ghost cars" (unmarked RCMP cruisers) on the long journey south. She needn't have bothered, as we were slowed to a snail's pace by a driving rainstorm. We listened on audio-cassette to Canadian-born Robert MacNeil (of MacNeil-Lehrer) read from the autobiographical account of his youth, *Wordstruck*, for the whole four hours. It was positively mesmerizing--a much better stimulant than the three cups of bad black coffee that had chased an even worse dinner of green olives on some shredded lettuce (we ordered the Greek salad) and some minestrone soup from a can.

We pulled into camp at midnight, and got to bed by one, but never went to sleep at all, on account of the weather. People on the western side of the island of Newfoundland have their own word, "tuckamore," for the stunted, scruffy, windblown and completely bent-out-of-shape stands of spruce and fir that huddle along the coastal plateau. That night a ferocious and erratic east wind tried to turn our tent trailer into tuckamore, and very nearly succeeded. Too exhausted to read or talk, we snacked on the remains of a squashberry pie, spitting out the heart-shaped seeds onto wilted paper plates, waiting for the tent walls to cave in, and for dawn to break.

Our next stop, a brief one, was at Gander. You would never guess that at the far end of this small town, out past a 14-kilometer moose-crossing zone, is an international airport that used to be the world's biggest and busiest. That was in the 1940s, during and just after World War Two. Because of its strategic and relatively fog-free location, Gander airport was the principal jumping-off point for American and Canadian transport planes carrying supplies to Britain. To a large degree, it was air base lease arrangements with the United States that brought Newfoundland out of the Great Depression and into the age of transoceanic aviation. In 1985, long after the leases had expired, America's Nato contingents were still entering and exiting Europe via Gander. That was the year that an Arrow Co. airliner crashed here, killing 248 soldiers and 8 crew members. A subsequent inquiry attributed the tragedy to ice on the wings, but a large number of local residents, in league with members of the victims' families, are pressing the U.S. and Canadian governments for further investigation, because they believe the crash may have been caused by a bomb, and that the incident was linked to the Reagan Administration's devilish relationships with Iran. Members of Congress and a Pittsburgh television station have filed suit to gain access to confidential government documents.

My main purpose in stopping at the airport was to catch a glimpse of Cuban and Bulgarian refugee claimants and see how they are handled by Canadian immigration officials. Already this year, over 2200 Aeroflot passengers have taken advantage of the Soviet airline's refueling stop at Gander to walk away from their citizenship in hopes of gaining a fresh one in Canada. The 150-kilometer stretch of the Trans-Canada Highway on either side of Gander has been dubbed "Refugee Road" by the news media, and I had seen several reports in previous months concerning the strain the new arrivals were placing on the area's visitor accommodations and on Newfoundlanders' much-lauded hospitality. But my timing was off. There was nothing doing at the airport--no flights on the schedule board, no cacophony of foreign tongues, no air of anxiety, no nothing. Even the

exhibit on Gander's historically important role in the development of commercial aviation was in mothballs. There was a temporary display on the first non-stop transatlantic flight, made by John Alcock and Arthur Brown in a Vickers "Vimy" in 1919, which started at this airport and ended in a crash landing in Ireland, but that was it.

I left the place disappointed, and would have thought the hour-long diversion a complete waste of time if we hadn't also had to stop in town for provisions. Alice went off to find peaches and a cauliflower, and I hit the jackpot at Canadian Tire. (This ubiquitous chain of hardware stores is a country-wide institution, providing a kind of unity so far utterly unfulfilled by the constitution.) I encountered two groups of lively Spanish speaking women checking the tire size charts in the auto parts section, and figured they just had to be from Cuba. On the way out of the store, I nearly bumped into a matronly woman with her arm around a teenage girl. They were both speaking a Slavic-sounding language that may well have been Bulgarian. My day was made. Alice didn't think that spotting a few foreigners was such a big deal. We got back on the TransCanada Highway, and I stepped on the gas, knowing she was right. Later that day, we found a story buried in the back pages of the *Globe and Mail* that the refugee flow into Gander had slowed to "a trickle," apparently the result of behind-the-scenes talks between Canadian and Soviet officials.

We spent the next few days at Terra Nova National Park, and took advantage of its location to get out onto the headlands and into the fjords of Newfoundland's north coast. We met Mark and Fraser Carpenter, a married couple who operate a Wildlife Tour Boat in the summer months. He comes from Nova Scotia, she from Britain. They quit a relatively profitable and carefree business venture in the Caribbean two years ago for a solid home and a tenuous livelihood on the Rock. Their house was up the road a little ways from the park, at a little village called Squid Tickle. As is reputedly the custom of Newfoundlanders, including Come From Aways, Mark and Fraser offered us a cup of tea about five minutes into our first conversation, one that quickly led to much consternation on Mark's part over Meech Lake.

This was the day after the day that the constitutional accord met its demise in a collision with a deadline. In a last ditch effort to keep the amendment package alive, Prime Minister Mulroney and his minions put mind-bending pressure on Newfoundland Premier Clyde Wells, who had promised the week before to do everything within his power to bring an agreement he did not believe in to some sort of decisive vote, either through a public referendum or a "free" vote in the legislature (where members would be instructed to vote their conscience and ignore party discipline) before June 23. Under such daunting time constraints, the preferred referendum option had to be set aside, and Newfoundland legislators found themselves alone in the hot seat, with many of the country's pro-Meech pundits ready to spill poison with their pens. Fast-paced pollsters said the vote would be close, and then, seemingly out of the blue, the feds announced they would ask the Supreme Court of Canada to rule whether the deadline could in fact be extended. This maneuver was in direct response to the actions of a single Native member of the Manitoba legislature, who had used complicated procedures rather brilliantly to forestall a vote in that province's assembly, the only other besides Newfoundland that had yet to ratify the Meech Lake Accord. Deferral to the court was made contingent on a favorable vote in Newfoundland; in other words, Mulroney would bend over backwards to accommodate Manitoba so long as Wells and his colleagues played along. This overtly manipulative strategy failed because Clyde Wells quit the game. He

cancelled the vote at the 11th hour. After so many months on artificial life support, Meech was finally dead.

The only satisfaction gained by the Conservative Prime Minister from Quebec would come from having made sure that a Liberal premier from a small and politically weak province would be the scapegoat. (Newfoundland and Labrador have 7 seats in the federal Parliament, Quebec has 75.) The country's anger and attention would be focused on Newfoundland rather than Manitoba natives, or himself, or Quebec.

This was what was troubling Mark Carpenter, who thought Wells should have swallowed his considerable pride and gone ahead with the vote. The premier had let the prime minister sucker him into appearing the spoiler, and Newfoundlanders would likely suffer the consequences. With one of every two dollars spent on the Rock coming directly from Ottawa, and with a major offshore oil development hostage to the Conservative-dominated House of Commons, Newfoundlanders can be made very easily to suffer for the political courage of their leader. Carpenter was the first island resident we heard speak critically of Wells, but with the next day's news carrying an announcement that legislation to commit federal funds to the Hibernia oilfields would be shelved for an undetermined number of months, it appeared that the next wave of pressure hurled against Newfoundlanders would be a punitive one. It will be interesting to see who suffers the most from the Meech Lake debacle, Clyde Wells or Brian Mulroney. The Carpenters spared us none of their antipathy for the smooth-talking Prime Minister, but they respected the amount of damage he could do to their adopted province in the years to come.

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Salvage is a small fishing village out on the rocky seaward approaches to Terra Nova. This "outport" has a small fish processing plant, one general store and about 20 houses, one of which has been turned into the Fisherman's Museum. Inside the latter structure we encountered a bald, potbellied man who was knitting together some strands of cotton fishnet with an archaic tool. I asked him how long the community had been in existence. He scratched his head a little, peered over thick glasses, said "1600, I think," and pointed me toward a typescript summary thumb-tacked to the wall near the entryway. He had the date right. I started to read on, but he beckoned me toward the cast iron stove he had parked his right foot on and proceeded to tell me his life story. About halfway through an interesting amalgam of family trees and fish tales, I was summoned outside by a man in work clothes and a hard hat who said I might want to move my car on account of the dynamite he was about to set off that "might just do a thing or two" to my doors and windows. I moved the time machine out of harm's way and hurried back to watch the pipe-laying crew proceed with their blasting operation.

An old geezer wearing one of those old-fashioned sleeveless undershirts that never quite cover a big belly lifted his oil-smudged baseball cap and beckoned me into the front entrance of his house. "You gotta watch out for them flyin' rock chips," he said. We were joined by a much shorter man with similar facial features and no shirt at all over his hairy torso and droopy stomach, and by a chubby-cheeked boy of six or seven sucking on an O Henry bar. I took this portly trio to be the representatives of three generations.

The charge went off under a heap of flayed tires that served as a damper. Nothing shattered except the designated strata. Afterward, expecting to be shown the door with a friendly wave, I was instead herded into the living room, and the old guy started to tell me HIS life story. His son sat silently in a chair, eyeing me warily and scratching behind his back. The grandson stood right next to me, looking straight up my nostrils. I started to worry that Alice might think I'd met up with some explosive mishap and I made my exit just when Heffern senior (the name was on the mailbox) was starting to backtrack and repeat himself. Returning to the museum, I found Alice and the loquacious curator exactly where I had left them, still talking about the bad old days in Salvage. He had shown her and explained every single item in the display cases, a potpourri ranging from straight razors to homemade snow goggles to a kerosene-burning clothes iron. He had also revealed the fact that he never went to school, sired six children (five of whom lived in Salvage, two still in his own house), had to quit fishing because of a bad back, and now worked at the museum for 10 weeks in the summer in order to qualify for 42 weeks worth of unemployment compensation. His surname was Heffern. Brothers! I hadn't thought to consider stomach profiles and long-windedness as clues to kinship.



A VIEW OF THE FISH PLANT AND 'OUTPORT' VILLAGE OF SALVAGE.

From what we could gather in books and articles about Newfoundland, Salvage is a typical outport. The population is made up of several extended families. Most of them eke a living out of fish-related activity and unemployment insurance. Many of the older people cannot read or write. Newfoundland currently registers a 44 percent rate of functional illiteracy, over twice the average for Canada as a whole. The name of the place is the result of a misspelling of selvage, the term used to describe the edge of cloth. It seems that a lack of education over the years has not stymied a poetic bent among the people, as evidenced in the names of other similar

communities such as Come-by-Chance, St. Jones Within, Cupid's, Little Heart's Ease, and Happy Adventure. These are the sorts of places that Joey Smallwood tried to subvert in the 1960s with the promise of a better life in the larger towns and a little cash to help pay for the move. "Burn your boat, boys," was a famous Smallwood slogan. He saw no future in the outports, just misery, ignorance and a complacent drift into welfare. At Salvage, his fears were very much in evidence, but so was a strong and simple determination to stay put, to make do, to keep the family together, and to not turn one's back on the sea.

In 1930, when Joey Smallwood was gathering a head of steam that would fuel his political ambitions for the next forty years, he wrote that a new wave of progressive change would place Newfoundland "within the front rank of great small nations of the world." He was dreaming. In the same year, interest on the British colony's accumulated debt equaled half of its entire annual revenue. Three years later, in the depths of the Depression, half the island's labor force was unemployed. By all accounts, the poverty of those years was appalling to those who witnessed it and staggering to those who survived it. Disease and malnutrition were rampant. Smallwood saw much of the misery as unnecessary. It was caused by an over-reliance on the export of salted fish, and an abject dependence on the coterie of merchants who controlled fishermen and their families by colluding to keep prices low and conniving to ensure that workers would always owe more to their suppliers than they could collect for their catches. Smallwood believed and proclaimed that Newfoundland "must develop or perish." He became a fervent crusader for confederation with Canada as a pathway out of penury. In 1949, after a close vote in a referendum, Britain's oldest colony became Canada's 10th province, and Smallwood its first premier.

The man who cleverly inspired his followers to call him "Joey" (so as to seem folksy and familiar) set Newfoundland on an ambitious and erratic course of industrialization over the next 20 years. He attempted to resettle the people of some 600 outport villages into 77 growth centers, most of them in the interior, where several mines and pulp mills were underway, and where a smattering of manufacturing concerns (including a machine gun factory and a condom plant) were struggling to get started with government assistance of all kinds. He used every incentive in the book to woo private investors and every tear-jerking sentiment in his vast oratorical repertoire to wrest federal aid from Ottawa. He hired shady characters, including a Latvian engineer and a close friend of Richard Nixon to drum up European and American interest, respectively, in Newfoundland's economic potential. Smallwood borrowed money from everywhere, including thin air, and pumped a lot of it into Memorial University in St. John's after hearing John Kenneth Galbraith proclaim that what developing nations need more than massive infusions of capital is "a massive infusion of education." For a brief period in the 1960s students were paid \$50-\$100 per month over and above tuition and expenses to attend university, a distinction which Memorial shared with only one other in the Western Hemisphere, Havana. Smallwood was a non-doctrinaire socialist totally consumed with Newfoundland's development; he borrowed ideas from Castro's Cuba at the same time he was trying to copy the blueprints for Operation Bootstrap in Puerto Rico. The man was a dynamo, but not quite equal to the task of remaking entirely an imbedded way of life on the Rock.

In St. John's, the capital, we arrived at the confusing juncture of past and present. This city bills itself as the oldest in North America. It was settled over 400 years ago. A strikingly beautiful place, set in a naturally safe but frequently foggy harbor on the northeastern face of the rocky

Avalon peninsula (a chunk of land, Alice informs me, that fossil evidence strongly suggests was once attached to northern Wales), St. John's was unusually quiet on this July 1, Canada Day. Newfoundlanders' ambivalence towards Canada goes well beyond their Meech Lake misery. The approximately 570,000 inhabitants of the Rock have been well served by the federation in many respects. There are old age pensions, family allowances, and unemployment insurance, all federally funded. There are thousands of kilometers of roads. There is a government financed shipyard, and a constitutional guarantee to maintain year-round ferry connections to the mainland. None of this was promised or available to Newfoundlanders before 1949. On the other hand, after 41 years as a province, Newfoundland has the highest unemployment rate (18 percent) in Canada. Family incomes in 1988 were \$10,000 below the Canadian average (\$46,000), and ranked next to last, just ahead of P.E.I. Fish plants are being closed, and thousands of jobs are being lost, partly because federal officials have overestimated cod stocks and partly because they have allowed foreign fleets to deplete the Grand Banks with giant draggers, trawlers, and freezer ships. Many young people see no future for themselves on the island, and will leave, some with bitter reluctance, to seek jobs in Toronto or someplace farther west. (There are already some half a million Newfoundland emigres living in southern Ontario.) One college student we met, clearly in love with the history of his home province, vowed that he will never live anyplace else in Canada; if the country fails Newfoundland, he will move to Britain or Australia.

Not everyone we met blames Ottawa for the island's economic troubles. Nobody responded favorably to questions about the viability of returning to the independent status the island experienced very briefly, between 1931 and 1934, before the Depression undercut everything and Newfoundland entered a limbo-like period of government by British-appointed Commission. There is a willingness, in some circles, to compare Newfoundland's prospects with those of small maritime countries, such as Iceland, but I did not encounter anyone who believed independence even a remote possibility. Most modern Newfoundlanders appear to be stubbornly loyal to Canada in the same way their forbears were staunch defenders of the Empire. Britain exploited the island for centuries, and never gave anything back, but Newfoundlanders were among the first and most eager of the King's subjects to sacrifice themselves on the battlefields of Europe. Canada has given much to Newfoundland, but it may also have destroyed its people's traditional self-reliance by taking command of offshore resources and control of political choices.

In the heat of the Meech Lake debate, a Quebec MP spat out the allegation on a radio program that Clyde Wells was "a mental case." Another suggested haughtily that Canadians would ultimately have to choose between Quebec and Newfoundland in order to achieve constitutional harmony. An outspoken Conservative backbencher (not from Quebec) told a large Ontario audience that the best thing to do with Newfoundland might be to tow it farther into the Atlantic and sink it. These remarks were followed by public apologies, but this is the kind of verbal abuse Newfoundlanders have had heaped upon them in recent months. It is a wonder, and probably a sign of good character, that these hardy souls don't bear a visible grudge against the rest of the country. They have a different way of fighting back that reveals a fatalistic attitude and a sense of humor. For example, the two Department of Fisheries and Oceans officials we met on a lonely outport dock told us flat out that the people in Ottawa "don't know a capelin from a codfish." (Capelin are small, silvery fish that islanders capture at spawning time in the early summer and sell in huge quantities to the Japanese, who consider the roe a delicacy. They are nothing, save for

having gills, like a cod.) Further, they explained, "those idiots have given half the offshore fishery to the damn Russians and Europeans!" This mixture of banter and vitriol continued for half an hour, then they motored off in their government launch, as DFO is a federal agency. Rather than biting the hand that feeds them, these guys just do their best to make their bosses look silly.

In our brief transit across the island of Newfoundland, we also traversed more than a thousand years of history. We talked with more people in one day than we had met in a month in modern, urbane Ontario. Our meanderings through the literature and the countryside brought us face to face with what Richard Gwyn calls "the brute art of endurance" on this island nation that is anchored to a British cultural heritage and tied to Canada's uncertain political future. Now, as always, Newfoundland is a challenging test case for economic determinists. Everything seems to hinge on the quantity and price of fish, the availability of foreign capital, the success of diversification schemes, the disposable income of Canadians and Americans on vacation. Smallwood's vision of a great small nation has repeatedly run aground on the shoals of debt--a malady only great big nations can pretend to ignore in this day and age. The people have to choose, as another of their elder statesman, Don Jamieson, once remarked, "between a way of life and a standard of living." Both are eroding fast.

I asked several provincial government officials whether they were optimistic about the future of Newfoundland. They all wanted to skip over the next 2-3 years, during which time Mulroney and others will likely continue to blame and punish the islanders for their defiant stand against Meech Lake. Beyond that time-frame, however, the hopes ran deep and long. Newfoundlanders live in their own time zone, 30 minutes later than their neighbors in the Maritime provinces. They are even further removed from the predictable mainstreams of life on the North American continent. As Gwyn put it, "if Newfoundland is not a haven for romantics, it is nothing but fog and cod and bog and rock." This was a hard place to leave.

Cheers,

Stephen Maly

Received in Hanover 7/16/90

