

Economic Nationalism and Confederation: A Case Study in Cape Breton

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Volume 2, Number 1, Autumn 1972

URI: https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/acad2_1art03

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Publisher(s)

The Department of History of the University of New Brunswick

ISSN

0044-5851 (print)

1712-7432 (digital)

[Explore this journal](#)

Cite this article

Tennyson, B. D. (1972). Economic Nationalism and Confederation:: A Case Study in Cape Breton. *Acadiensis*, 2(1), 39–53.

BRIAN D. TENNYSON

Economic Nationalism and Confederation: A Case Study in Cape Breton

Although Confederation has received considerable attention from historians, relatively little study has been done of the internal struggle in the Maritime colonies in the 1860's. In 1942, D. G. Creighton propounded the theory that the main motive force behind Confederation was economic nationalism¹. In a paper presented to the Nova Scotia Historical Society twenty-five years later, Delphin A. Muise attempted to apply this view specifically to Nova Scotia. Noting the considerable growth of the coal mining industry in the 1860's, he argued that it made an important contribution to the province's 'golden age,' along with fishing, lumbering, ship-building and shipping. Further, "the interests spawned by the growth of the coal mining industry began to challenge the old line interests for the attention of the government"² and politics began to polarize between these two interest groups. Thus, Muise saw Confederation as essentially an economic issue in Nova Scotia, arguing that in the 1867 federal election "both sides were catering to economic interests within the Province" and it was "the economic issues that finally swayed the electorate."³ This thesis seems to offer an important interpretation to the hitherto confused picture of the Confederation struggle in Nova Scotia. The question, of course, is whether it is valid. This paper attempts to examine the policy of John George Bourinot, Cape Breton county's representative in the Assembly, in an attempt to assess to what extent his actions in the union struggle were determined by the ambitions of this predominantly coal-mining region to become the industrial heartland of a new continental empire.

Sporadic coal mining had taken place in Nova Scotia since the French regime, but from 1827 it was carried on by the General Mining Association of London, which enjoyed a monopoly lease. After some years of mounting criti-

1 D. G. Creighton, "Economic Nationalism and Confederation," *Canadian Historical Association Annual Report*, 1942, pp. 44-51.

2 Delphin A. Muise, "The Federal Election of 1867 in Nova Scotia: an Economic Interpretation," *Collections of the Nova Scotia Historical Society*, XXXVI (1968), p. 330.

3 *Ibid.*, p. 328.

cism, the Association surrendered its monopoly to the provincial government on 1 January 1858, in return for reduced coal royalties and leases to 1866 on several properties.⁴ The government then offered leases to all interested parties and the following decade witnessed a tremendous outburst of exploration and speculation, accompanied by a dramatic increase in coal production. Most of the “New Mines”, as they were called, were on Cape Breton Island, primarily in the Glace Bay-Cow Bay (Port Morien) area. By 1865, there were fourteen mines operating on the Island, and the New Mines were raising considerably more coal than the Association’s Island collieries. The Inspector of Mines reported to the government in December 1865 that all the New Mines

show a product of Coal largely in excess of that for the last preceding twelve months. Several of them have doubled the quantity, while some of the newer mines have even trebled it. From the Block House Colliery, at Cow Bay, more coal has been raised and sold during the year than from any other in the Province, except the Albion Mine, at Pictou, and operations in all the others are characterized by great activity and rapid progress⁵

Obviously, coal mining was a major industry in the Sydney-Glace Bay region by the 1860’s. According to the Inspector of Mines, there were 3,043 men and boys employed at the collieries throughout the province in 1866. Of these, the largest number, 716, worked at the Albion Mines, the chief operation of the G.M.A. The major Cape Breton mines were the Sydney and Lingan collieries of the Association, and the Block House, Glace Bay and Gowrie collieries, which employed, respectively, 549, 205, 376, 188 and 221 men and boys in 1866, for a total of 1,539. There were, in addition, other smaller and less important mines⁶

In addition to providing jobs for miners and others directly connected with the collieries, the coal mines contributed significantly to the lumbering, ship-building and shipping industries, by providing a major cargo. The *Sydney News* reported in August 1864 that

a large fleet of good sized vessels are [sic] lying at the North Bar awaiting their turn to load . . . at the Block House Mines, Cow Bay, there are some thirty vessels now ready to take coals to New York. The shipping of Little Glace Bay is also numerous. . . .⁷

The *Pictou Standard* reported in the same month that from 11 May, when the shipping season opened, to 15 August, 512 ships arrived at Pictou to load coal,

4. C. Ochiltree Macdonald, *The Coal and Iron Industries of Nova Scotia* (Halifax, 1909), p. 139.

5. Annual Report in Nova Scotia, *Journal and Proceedings of the House of Assembly* (hereafter cited as *J.H.A.*), 1866, Appendix no. 3, p. 6.

6. *Ibid.*, 1867, Appendix no. 12, p. 55.

7. Quoted in *The Morning Chronicle*, 25 August 1864.

and "this . . . does not include several steamers that have also coaled at the loading ground!"⁸ As early as 1860, Sydney harbour was visited eighteen times by French, British and American warships and 48 times by other steamships, loading coal.⁹ The *Sydney News* reported on 20 August 1866 that there were 7,000 tons of registered shipping in Cow Bay and coal was being loaded at the rate of 800 tons per day.¹⁰

The prosperity of the Cape Breton coal trade was, of course, part of a larger picture. The Nova Scotian economy was generally prosperous in the 1850's and 1860's, and much of this prosperity was the result of a tremendous growth in trade with the nearby New England states.¹¹ Coal exports to the United States comprised an important part of that growth; by 1865, coal accounted for over 30% of Nova Scotia's total exports, and more than 80% of all coal lifted during this period went to the United States.¹² Coal exports to the United States rose from 87,542 tons in 1852 to 139,125 tons in 1854, 149,289 tons in 1860, and 404,352 tons in 1864.¹³ As C. Ochiltree Macdonald, himself the operator of a coal mine at Glace Bay some years later, recalled of this period:

Our coal was sold as far south as Washington, and there was scarcely a port from New York east into which it did not penetrate. This was the harvest time for our new collieries, particularly for the gas coal producers . . . and the demand exceeded the supply. The net result to the mine was a clear profit of at least one dollar per ton, and they prospered.¹⁴

A variety of circumstances combined to make this a tremendous period of growth in the coal mining industry. S. A. Saunders has shown that

during the period of the Reciprocity Treaty sales of Nova Scotia coal to the United States increased appreciably, owing to the opening of new mines, the demand in New England for gas coal, and the fact that the American railways had not then gone very far in granting commodity rates on low grade freights. The pressure of the war years delayed the extension of Ameri-

8 *Ibid.*, 18 August 1864.

9 Annual Report of the Inspector of Mines for 1860, in *J.H.A.*, 1861, Appendix no. 12, p. 1.

10 Cited in *The Eastern Chronicle*, 6 September 1866.

11 S. A. Saunders, "The Maritime Provinces and the Reciprocity Treaty," *The Dalhousie Review* (1934), p. 359. According to a table published by Saunders, the value of Nova Scotian imports from the United States rose from £47,000 in 1852 to £808,000 in 1866, while the value of exports to the United States rose from £266,000 to £645,000 in the same years.

12 Muise, *op. cit.*, p. 329.

13 Figures calculated from the annual reports of the Inspector of Mines in *J.H.A.*, selected years. For similar but slightly conflicting figures, see Eugene Forsey, *Economic and Social Aspects of the Nova Scotia Coal Industry* (Toronto, 1926), p. 118.

14 Macdonald, *op. cit.*, p. 23.

42 *Acadiensis*

can railways, and the opening of American mines, with the result that the demands of the industrial areas in New England raised the price of coal to \$8.00 per ton in Boston, about 1864.¹⁵

This probably helps to explain the fact that American interests invested heavily in Nova Scotian coal mines during the early 1860's, especially in Cape Breton. Many of the New Mines were financed in this way, notably the Block House, which was the largest coal producer on the Island, excluding the Association's collieries, and which sold virtually all of its coal to the American market.¹⁶

The end of the American Civil War, followed by abrogation of the reciprocity treaty, caused considerable apprehension within the Nova Scotian coal mining industry. In January 1866, New Glasgow's *Eastern Chronicle* was optimistic that Nova Scotian coal could compete with Pennsylvanian coal in New England even with the tariff, for it argued that the supply of gas coal in the United States was very limited, whereas the Nova Scotian product was "peculiarly adapted to the manufacture of gas" and the demand for such coal was "considerable."¹⁷ By July 1867, however, the *Eastern Chronicle* was more pessimistic:

Our coal trade this season is very dull, and the effects of such a calamity are more far-reaching than people at a distance imagine. We fear that unless a change takes place for the better at an early day, material hardship and distress will inevitably be the lot of our laboring and mining population.¹⁸

Although P. B. Waite has claimed that the reciprocity treaty "benefited Canada rather than the Maritimes,"¹⁹ it was widely believed at the time and subsequently

15 Saunders, *op. cit.*, pp. 366-67.

16 The Glace Bay, Caledonia, International, Acadia and Nova Scotia coal companies, all founded in the 1860's, were financed at least partly by American money. See Macdonald, *op. cit.*, pp. 21, 24, 26, 148-49. The Block House mine shipped 7,377 tons of coal to the United States in 1861 and none to the other British North American colonies; it shipped 15,532 tons to the United States in 1863 and only 110 tons to the other colonies; in its peak year, 1865, it shipped 101,968 tons to the United States and none to the other colonies. (Figures calculated from the annual reports of the Inspector of Mines.) The dependence of the Cape Breton mines generally on the American market is illustrated by the fact that in the spring shipping season of 1866 (April-June), 87 vessels cleared Cow Bay carrying coal, 78 of them bound for the United States and only five for Canada. In the quarter ending 31 December 1866, 18,042 tons of coal were exported from Cow Bay to the United States and only 1,438 tons to other markets. In the quarter ending 30 June 1867, 78 vessels cleared Cow Bay carrying coal, 50 of them bound for the United States. (Data from *The Eastern Chronicle*, 19 July 1866, 23 January 1867 and 20 July 1867.)

17 *The Eastern Chronicle*, 25 January 1866.

18 *Ibid.*, 3 July 1867.

19 P. B. Waite, *The Life and Times of Confederation* (Toronto, 1964), p. 216.

for many years, that “the Maritime Provinces felt severely the loss of a free market for their fish and coal.”²⁰ As Eugene Forsey put it in 1926, “the abrupt ending of the Treaty in 1866 was followed by catastrophe.”²¹ While it now appears that the prosperity of the British American provinces was not as dependent on the treaty as was previously thought, popular feeling in Nova Scotia at the time certainly held that the treaty must be renewed or an alternative market found, if the coal mining industry were not to collapse. Richard Brown, former manager of the G.M.A.’s operations in Nova Scotia, argued in 1871 that sales to the United States would increase considerably if free trade were restored and the Nova Scotian coal operators, faced with the depression which followed abrogation and not considering renewal probable in the near future, supported union of the provinces with a view to the adoption of a protective tariff on coal sufficient to allow them to capture the Canadian market.²²

One of the members of the Nova Scotia House of Assembly who sought to promote the interests of the coal mining industry was, not surprisingly, the representative of Cape Breton county—John George Bourinot. Unfortunately, although he spent twenty-three years in public life, rather little is known about Bourinot. He was born at Grouville on the Channel Island of Jersey, on 15 March 1814. Although British since the eleventh century, Jersey is located only twelve miles off the coast of Normandy and French continued to be the predominant language until the middle of the nineteenth century, so that Bourinot was fluently bilingual and spoke English with a distinct accent. His family, originally Norman, was Huguenot and perhaps fled following the revocation of the Edict of Nantes, to Jersey, where for centuries they held a position of influence.²³ Bourinot was educated at Caen in France, although to what level is not known. Neither is it known when or why he emigrated to Nova Scotia. The *Halifax Morning Herald* stated at the time of his death that he came out to the province “early in boyhood” and settled in Sydney, “where he afterwards conducted a large business.”²⁴ The *North Sydney Herald*, which might have been better informed due to proximity, stated on the same occasion that “he came to Nova Scotia when comparatively a young man, and

20 U. S. Tariff Commission, *Reciprocity and Commercial Treaties* (Washington, 1919), p. 88, quoted in Saunders, *op. cit.*, p. 366.

21 Forsey, *op. cit.*, p. 5.

22 Richard Brown, *The Coal Fields and Coal Trade of the Island of Cape Breton* (London, 1871). In the end, the Macdonald government adopted a coal tariff of fifty cents per ton in 1870, only to abandon it in 1871 under pressure from Ontario and Quebec interests. Nova Scotian Members of Parliament, including Newton McKay, the representative of Cape Breton county from 1872 to 1878, raised the question repeatedly in the 1870’s but the Mackenzie government refused to act and it was not until the adoption of the National Policy in 1879 that the agitation triumphed.

23 G. M. Adam, *Prominent Men of Canada* (Toronto, 1892), p. 148.

24 *The Morning Herald*, 22 January 1884.

44 *Acadiensis*

engaged for some years in business in Sydney.”²⁵ The earliest date that can be placed on his presence in Cape Breton is 1835, for in September of that year he married Margaret Jane Marshall in Arichat.

S. A. Saunders refers to the fact that “following the conquest by the English, some Jersey and Guernsey merchants set up fishery establishments on both shores [of the St. Lawrence], from the Strait of Belle Isle on the north and Cape Breton on the south to Gaspé [sic] in the west.”²⁶ Certainly, such businesses existed in the Arichat area in the early nineteenth century, and it seems likely that Bourinot came over in connection with one of them. In 1836, he listed himself as a Sydney merchant. *Lovell’s Province of Nova Scotia Directory* for 1871 does not cite any occupation for Bourinot, but does list his son Arthur as a Sydney storekeeper, and it seems likely that he was carrying on the business established by his father a generation earlier.²⁷ Whatever his business, he seems to have achieved considerable prominence in Sydney by the 1830s, for he married extremely well. His wife was the grand-daughter of Captain Joseph Marshall, a Loyalist who came to Nova Scotia in 1784 and received 1,050 acres of land at Country Harbour in what was then Sydney county. He represented the county in the Assembly, 1799-1811, and retired to a judgeship. Her father, John George Marshall, represented Sydney county in the Assembly, 1811-18 and 1820-23, and served as Chief Justice of the Court of Common Pleas for the Island of Cape Breton from 1823 to 1841. One of her cousins was John Joseph Marshall, a Manchester merchant who was Liberal-Conservative member of the Assembly for Guysborough county in 1840-47, 1848-59 and 1867-70, and Speaker of the Assembly from 1868 to 1870.

By the 1850s, when he made his first appearance on the political scene, Bourinot clearly was one of the most prominent residents of Sydney. He had been a Justice of the Peace since the 1840s, and was Surveyor of Shipping at Sydney in the 1850s. He was also the French Vice Consul at Sydney, a post which he held for many years and which was of some importance, as the French Atlantic fleet called in regularly from St. Pierre for mail, coal and other supplies. He also became the Lloyd’s agent at Sydney in 1863, a position he held for the rest of his life.²⁸ Lieutenant (later Lieutenant-Colonel) B. W. A. Sleight, who visited Sydney in 1846, mentioned Bourinot among the prominent local citizens whom he met and Rev. R. J. Uniacke, rector of St. George’s Anglican church in the town, referred to Bourinot’s harbour-side home as “amongst the most conspicuous private dwellings of the place.”²⁹

25 *The North Sydney Herald*, 23 January 1884.

26 S. A. Saunders, *The Economic History of the Maritime Provinces* (Ottawa, 1939), p. 9.

27 John Lovell, *Lovell’s Province of Nova Scotia Directory for 1871* (Montreal, 1871), p. 370.

28 Bourinot Biographical File, Public Archives of Nova Scotia; *The Royal Gazette*, 22 June 1859; *The British Colonist*, 10 November 1863.

29 Cited in C. Bruce Fergusson, ed., *Uniacke’s Sketches of Cape Breton and Other Papers Relating to Cape Breton Island* (Halifax, 1958), pp. 79 and 157.

Bourinot's first known public appearance took place in February 1851, when he was one of several Sydney citizens who signed a petition calling on the sheriff to summon a public meeting

for the purpose of taking into consideration the best means of developing the great natural resources of the island; and more particularly to point out the capabilities and advantages of the Harbour of Sydney, as one of the *termini* of the projected "European and North American Railway" across the Provinces of Nova Scotia and New Brunswick.³⁰

This meeting was duly held, on 27 February 1851, and Bourinot was appointed to a committee charged with carrying out the resolutions adopted.³¹ Nothing, of course, resulted, but the occasion of this first known public appearance is significant, for if Bourinot's rather mediocre political career had any sense of purpose, it lay in his devotion to Cape Breton's economic development, particularly the exploitation of Cape Breton county's coal and the promotion of Sydney and Louisbourg harbours as Atlantic shipping ports.

Bourinot entered politics in the 1859 election, when he and Thomas Caldwell won Cape Breton county for the Conservative party. He was returned by acclamation in the 1863 election, in which he issued a circular assuring the electorate that "I shall never support any government which shall refuse to do that justice in reference to these grants which the county of Cape Breton is entitled to, when we consider either her population or wealth of resources."³² Bourinot's attitude towards Confederation was essentially determined by this desire to promote the interests of Cape Breton. He supported Joseph Howe's 1861 resolution calling for consideration of a union of the British American colonies or of the Maritime colonies, asserting that colonial union "should have formed the chief feature of the session." Specifically, he argued that only through such a union "can we claim rank among the favoured nations of the earth Linked with it is the often proposed great Intercolonial Railway, which I shall always advocate. By all these now neglected measures can we become prosperous."³³ In the 1864 session, when Tupper moved his resolution authorizing the government to send delegates to a conference to discuss maritime union, the resolution was carried without a dissentient voice, after only a short debate. Bourinot did not speak in the debate but he made his position clear in the prolonged discussion which later took place on the Pictou railway bill. He again supported the projected intercolonial railway, of which the Pictou

30 *Sydney News*, 1 March 1851.

31 *Ibid.*

32 J. G. Bourinot, "To the Electors of the County of Cape Breton," *The Halifax Reporter*, 9 May 1863.

33 Quoted by Bourinot during his speech to the Assembly on March 1867. See *The Halifax Reporter*, 19 March 1867.

line would form a part, arguing that it would lead to British American union, which he thought every colonist wished to see accomplished. "But before that union can be realized, we must build this Intercolonial Railway—without it, union cannot be a real fact."³⁴

By the time the Assembly met in February 1865, the Charlottetown and Quebec Conferences had taken place, and Nova Scotians were hotly debating the Quebec Resolutions, which had been made public in November 1864. Opposition was widespread and was growing, and included many Conservatives. At least one minister, John McKinnon of Antigonish, was prepared to resign if the Quebec Resolutions became official policy.³⁵ The government, not surprisingly, avoided the issue for as long as possible. It soon became apparent that Bourinot was among those who had initially supported the general idea of union, but who now opposed the scheme proposed to them. On 7 March, he demanded that the government state its position on the Quebec Resolutions, and that a precise date be announced for debate to take place on them. This elicited only an evasive response from Tupper, but two weeks later, the provincial secretary tabled a resolution which described immediate union of the British American colonies as "impracticable" and called for renewed negotiations to bring about "a legislative Union of the Maritime Provinces . . . in accordance with the resolution introduced at the last Session of the Legislature."³⁶ This resolution was merely tabled, and debate did not actually take place for another month.

Finally debate began, and on 2 May, Bourinot rose to explain why he now opposed Confederation, despite his earlier espousal of the scheme. If there was to be a union, he preferred a legislative union to the federal system, as the provincial legislatures would be insignificant bodies. He objected to Confederation itself, however, because it would lead to increased taxation to pay for the defences of Canada, the enlargement of Canadian canals, and the development of the Northwest territory. He rejected the argument that union would benefit Nova Scotia economically, pointing out that the province exported fish and coal to the United States under reciprocity and that Canada could not provide an alternative market for these products. Besides, a uniform tariff and currency could be achieved without political union. He also rejected the claim that union was necessary for military reasons. Britain would never leave her colonies undefended; besides, there was no American threat. "Already Americans are largely identified with us, and are interested (more especially in my county, where they shall always receive a cordial welcome,) in preserving peaceful and commercial relations with us."³⁷

34 Nova Scotia, *Debates and Proceedings of the House of Assembly* (hereafter cited as *Debates*), 1864, p. 110.

35 Kenneth G. Pryke, "Nova Scotia and Confederation, 1864-70" (Unpublished Ph.D. thesis, Duke University, 1962), p. 43.

36 *Debates*, 1865, pp. 67 and 115.

37 *Ibid.*, pp. 266-68.

Significantly, Bourinot's comments were laced with references to Cape Breton, which when put together indicate a strong parochial opposition to union. He complained that no representative of Cape Breton had been included in Nova Scotia's delegations to Charlottetown and Quebec, commenting that "the feeling was very widely extended in the section I represent, for Cape Breton, as in many other cases, was entirely blotted out!"³⁸ He warned the Assembly that Nova Scotia's position in Confederation would be similar to that of Cape Breton since its union with the province in 1820. While no other principle would have been acceptable as a basis of representation than population, he pointed out that the small number Nova Scotia would have in proportion to the Canadas meant that she would be treated just as Cape Breton had been for years past. He admitted that Cape Breton now received fairer treatment than formerly, but reminded his fellow legislators that "no member for Cape Breton could for years raise his voice on behalf of that island without being met with sneers, if indeed he was heard at all." In fact,

at first I was inclined to rather favour the scheme of Union for this reason; I felt it was better to be an appendage to Canada than to Nova Scotia, as we might then obtain more justice than we had received in the past from Nova Scotia.³⁹

Finally, Bourinot insisted that the Tupper government had no mandate to alter the constitution, and demanded that an election be held on the issue.⁴⁰

In the end, the government's resolution carried, of course, but Tupper had fairly boxed himself in. He sought to take Nova Scotia into Confederation but had succeeded only in passing a resolution endorsing Maritime Union. Thus, it was necessary for him to await events, and to manoeuvre as events dictated. External events during late 1865 and early 1866, such as the change of government in New Brunswick and the mounting Fenian threat which culminated in the panic of March 1866, in addition to cancellation of the reciprocity treaty, all helped to change the attitudes of some Nova Scotians. So too did the growing pressure applied by the British government, and doubtless Tupper's skilful distribution of patronage was helpful as well. As J. W. Longley put it some years later, "suffice it to say that his vigilance never ceased, that every influence which it was possible to exert was exerted without stint or reserve . . . Tupper never made pretence of nice scruples."⁴¹

As a result, the 1866 session took place in an entirely different environment from that which had prevailed only a year earlier. Indeed, the New Brunswick election and the Fenian scare changed the situation even during the session.

38 *Ibid.*, p. 265.

39 *Ibid.*, p. 266.

40 *Ibid.*, pp. 265, 266, 268.

41 J. W. Longley, *Sir Charles Tupper* (London, 1926), p. 85.

The debate over Confederation took a new turn when William Miller, the independent member for Richmond who had opposed union in 1865, rose in the Assembly and told the government that he would support the scheme if changes could be made in the Quebec resolutions. Samuel MacDonnell (Conservative, Inverness) followed with a similar announcement. Not surprisingly, Tupper replied that changes could — and would — be made in London; he thereupon introduced a union resolution which called for the appointment of delegates to attend the London Conference. In the lengthy debate that followed, which eventually resulted in adoption of Tupper's resolution, Bourinot did not participate. In the vote, however, he reversed his 1865 position and supported Confederation. Even more startlingly, he voted against an opposition amendment calling for the issue to be referred to the people.⁴² This was an amazing about-face, and it seems incredible that Bourinot should accomplish it without offering any explanation, either to the Assembly or to his constituents. Yet, such was the case.

Although Bourinot did not speak in the Confederation debate of 1866, he did speak a week later on the subject of extending coal mining leases in the province beyond 1886. Typically, most of his speech dealt with the importance of Cape Breton's coal deposits, the value of Sydney and Louisbourg harbours, and the importance of the projected Sydney and Louisbourg railway. He predicted that Canada would become a major outlet for Cape Breton coal and that Louisbourg would soon emerge as one of the greatest commercial cities of British North America. Thus, Cape Breton, "would soon become . . . the great highway to Canada. Her great mineral and other resources must make Cape Breton an important commercial country . . . It was far better [for Cape Breton] to form part of the great Confederation than [to] remain as she was now, an insignificant appendage of Nova Scotia."⁴³

Not until the 1867 session of the Assembly opened did Bourinot really offer an explanation for his decision to support Confederation in 1866. Significantly, he was chosen to move adoption of the address in reply to the throne speech, and he took this occasion to justify his behaviour. He claimed that he had gone to Halifax for the 1866 session undecided as to whether or not he should support Confederation, and that his decision was influenced "in the first place" by the fact that "the most intelligent men in England . . . the organs of the various religious denominations . . . and . . . the leading men of every political

42 *The Morning Chronicle*, 8 May 1866. The resolution passed in the Assembly at 2:00 a.m. on 19 April, by a vote of 31 to 19. James MacDonald (Conservative, Pictou), the Financial Secretary, did not vote because he was paired with Anti-Confederate — and former minister — Isaac LeVesconte (Conservative, Richmond), who was in Jamaica. Thomas Caldwell (Conservative, Cape Breton) and Ezra Churchill (Conservative, Hants North) were absent for the vote, although the *British Colonist* stated that both favoured Confederation. Tupper to S. L. Tilley, 18 [sic] April 1866, telegram, Tilley Family Papers, Provincial Archives of New Brunswick; *The British Colonist*, 19 April 1866.

43 *Debates*, 1866, p. 305.

creed" supported union. The desire of the British government to see Confederation achieved, the abrogation of the reciprocity treaty, and the apparent danger of invasion finally convinced him "that I should support Confederation, in order that we might be prepared to meet the emergencies that were approaching." Bourinot rejected the charge that he was being inconsistent and denied that he had been influenced "by any desire for office. It is well known that I have never held office, and that I do not desire any either under the general or local government." He had supported union only on the understanding that the Quebec scheme would be modified and now argued that the changes made in London were substantial and satisfactory. Finally, and most importantly, he referred to the potential Canadian market for Cape Breton coal and urged the development of Louisbourg as a major Atlantic port for British North America. Louisbourg, he predicted,

will at no very distant day be a city not even second to Halifax, if to any in British America. It is one of those places that under Confederation will receive a large measure of attention, and I may say here that one of the reasons why I supported that measure was that under the Nova Scotia Government Cape Breton never received ample justice; — under Confederation we will be treated as an important integral part of the nationality.⁴⁴

Part of the explanation for Bourinot's reversal of policy doubtless lies in the fact that opposition to Confederation in Cape Breton County was not strongly expressed, if it was strongly felt. According to the *Morning Chronicle*, "long before they left their County" for the 1865 session, Bourinot and Caldwell

acquainted a few personal friends with their determination to oppose every measure resulting in a Union with Canada, and that they considered, in any case, that the question could not be decided on by the House before an appeal to the people first had been made.

It concluded that "the Members for Cape Breton will not be lukewarm opponents of the scheme."⁴⁵ Bourinot stated in 1865 that "at first, much indifference was felt on the question; but as the discussion proceeded, a strong feeling of dissatisfaction at the scheme exhibited itself among all classes of the people."⁴⁶ In March 1867, however, he boasted that "I have the honour to represent the largest constituency in the province, with the exception of Halifax . . . and I feel it gratifying to be able to say that I never presented a petition against Confederation, and that no public meetings against it have been held in the

44 *Debates*, 1867, p. 3.

45 *The Morning Chronicle*, 18 February 1865.

46 *Debates*, 1865, p. 266.

county.”⁴⁷ Indeed, of the 184 petitions regarding Confederation which were presented to the Assembly in 1865, all but one of which either opposed the scheme or called for an appeal to the people, only one came from Cape Breton county.⁴⁸ This petition, presented to the Assembly on 22 February 1865 by Thomas Caldwell, described as “a petition from inhabitants of Cape Breton, against the Federation scheme,” carried only 167 signatures.⁴⁹ In view of the fact that Cape Breton county contained a population of 6,202 adult males according to the 1871 census, and that Sydney alone had a population of some 700 persons in 1862, the number of signatures on this petition is not impressive.⁵⁰ In addition, while Howe toured the western part of the province rallying the Anti-Confederate movement, he did not visit Cape Breton Island. This may have reflected his realization that Anti-Confederate strength was concentrated in the western counties, although no documentary evidence exists to reveal his thinking on the matter. Moreover, there were 98 petitions presented to the Legislative Council in 1865 and another 134 to the Assembly in 1866, all against Confederation, but none came from Cape Breton county.⁵¹

According to the *Sydney News*, an Anti-Confederate newspaper, there was a second petition but it reached Bourinot too late to affect his 1866 vote. This petition, which was “numerously signed, and containing the names of persons of influence and position,” called on Cape Breton county’s representatives to “decline to vote in favour of Confederation until all the details of the measure should first be submitted to the people of the Legislature of this Province,” but it was not forwarded to Halifax until 20 April, by which time the vote had already taken place in the Assembly.⁵² Bourinot admitted in the 1867 session that he had received this petition, saying that it was “signed by a few persons, whom I highly esteem,” but that it had reached his hands after the vote had taken place. At any rate, on this one occasion in his career, he adopted a Burkeian stance, stating that “even had I received it before the division my

47 *Ibid.*, 1867, p. 4.

48 R. H. Campbell, “Confederation in Nova Scotia to 1870” (Unpublished M.A. thesis, Dalhousie University, 1939), p. 234.

49 *Ibid.*, p. 235. See *The Morning Chronicle*, 23 February 1865.

50 Figures from Campbell, *op. cit.*, p. 238 and Fergusson, *Uniacke’s Sketches*, p. 80.

51 Campbell, *op. cit.*, p. 243. The ambivalence of popular feeling in Cape Breton county is reflected in the election by acclamation of James McKeagney in the 1867 federal contest. Both sides claimed him initially, and though he eventually was listed by most among the Antis, the *British Colonist* insisted that McKeagney had been elected “to give the Union a fair trial.” See *The Morning Chronicle*, 13 and 26 September 1867; *The Eastern Chronicle*, 21 August and 20 September 1867; *The Halifax Reporter*, 19 September 1867; and *The British Colonist*, 12 and 21 September 1867, 21 January 1868 and 25 January 1868. Certainly, once he got to Ottawa, McKeagney took the position that he had been elected to give Confederation “a fair trial” and he took no part in the repeal movement. The foregoing comments apply also to Stewart Campbell, elected by acclamation in Guysborough county.

52 *Sydney News*, quoted in *The Morning Chronicle*, 26 April 1866.

action would not have been different, for I feel that I represent the whole of Nova Scotia, and must regard the interests of all its people, rather than the wishes of the few individuals to whom I refer."⁵³ The *Morning Chronicle* declared: "the people of Cape Breton were too late. Before their 'remonstrance' reached here, the work was done, and their county sold."⁵⁴

Bourinot may also have been influenced by his two sons, as one of them had substantial economic interests which favoured the union and the other was among the most ardent advocates of Confederation. Marshall Bourinot, according to the *Morning Chronicle*, "was the first person in the Province to take out a licence to work coal mines after the settlement between the Mining Association and the Province" in 1858.⁵⁵ The mine which he developed under this licence, granted on 10 January 1859, became known as the Block House and immediately became the largest coal producer on Cape Breton Island with the exception of the G.M.A.'s properties. This mine was largely financed by Robert Belloni of New York, and it seems likely that Marshall's main contribution lay in his knowledge of the area, his ability to manage the operation in its initial stages, and perhaps, his father's influence in the Assembly. Marshall sold his share of the Block House to Belloni in the spring of 1863, and Belloni then moved to Sydney to manage the property personally.⁵⁶ Employing the funds thus obtained, Marshall Bourinot occupied the remainder of the decade in mining speculation, acquiring several valuable coal claims in Cape Breton and Richmond counties.⁵⁷ Although no evidence survives, it seems reasonable to suggest that he, along with others engaged in coal mining, feared for the future of his investments following abrogation of the reciprocity treaty in 1865, and may have helped to influence his father's decision to support Confederation.

The other son was John, who later became Sir John, clerk of the House of Commons, a leading authority on parliamentary procedure, a prominent literary figure, and one of the founders of the Royal Society of Canada. In 1862, he assumed control, with Joseph C. Crosskill, of the *Halifax Reporter*, a newspaper founded in 1860 "with the idea of a Union as the very best thing for these Provinces."⁵⁸ The *Reporter* was undoubtedly the most ardently Confederate newspaper in Nova Scotia, arguing long before the issue became prominent that colonial union would be advantageous and "would be most acceptable to a majority" of the people.⁵⁹ Significantly, the reasons which it offered

53 *Debates*, 1867, p. 4.

54 *The Morning Chronicle*, 27 April 1866.

55 *Ibid.*, 15 March 1864. See *The British Colonist*, 17 March 1864, and *The Halifax Reporter*, 13 August 1864.

56 Annual Report of the Inspector of Mines, in *J.H.A.*, 1864, Appendix no. 18, p. 16.

57 *The Morning Chronicle*, 15 March 1864; *The British Colonist*, 17 March 1864.

58 *The Halifax Reporter*, 25 July 1867.

59 *Ibid.*, 29 May 1862.

throughout the 1860s were essentially economic. The *Reporter* believed that political and economic union would result in the creation of a great, trans-continental empire which would rival the United States, in which Nova Scotia — due to its geographical position and natural resources, especially coal — would form the industrial heartland.⁶⁰ In view of the *Reporter's* strong Confederate stance throughout the decade, and also bearing in mind the fact that John Junior was a founder of the Union League, it seems reasonable to argue that Bourinot was influenced by the views of his son. Certainly, no breach occurred between them on the union issue for Bourinot arranged his son's appointment as parliamentary reporter for the new Senate in 1867.

Anti-Confederates claimed, of course, that the votes of men like Bourinot who changed sides had been purchased — an assertion which seemed to gain weight when Bourinot's name appeared on the list of Nova Scotia Senators in May 1867. In fact, three of Tupper's senatorial appointments were members of the Assembly who switched their vote on Confederation: Bourinot, William Miller (Independent Liberal, Richmond), and Caleb Bill (Conservative, King's North). In Joseph Howe's opinion, Tupper had appointed three men "who were open and avowed anti-confederates; who ratted, sold themselves, and were purchased by the distinction."⁶¹ The *Morning Chronicle* repeated this assertion on 23 May, claiming that "the very mention of the names is enough to disgust all who have the slightest regard for the future welfare of the Province."⁶² As for Bourinot, he "talked French, and that was his sole excellence, unless we add that he was cordially despised and hated by the members of the Administration."⁶³

Certainly, it seems likely that Bourinot was not very popular with the Tupper ministry. He had been critical of its treatment of Cape Breton and he had initially opposed union in 1865, although nominally a Conservative. The fact is that Bourinot had been returned to the Assembly in 1863 by acclamation and he tended to regard himself as the representative of Cape Breton, not just of the Conservative interests there. Throughout his speeches it can be seen that he viewed himself as a regional leader or ambassador, negotiating with a foreign power in Halifax. Thus, he saw his role as essentially non-partisan and whenever he rose in the Assembly, or later in the Senate, it was to speak for his county and his island; he never participated in a debate on a national issue or in a partisan way.

It is difficult, therefore, to conclude simply that Bourinot sold his vote in 1866 for a seat in the Senate. What documentary evidence survives suggests that he was not one of Tupper's original choices, and Tupper actually admit-

60 See editorials in *ibid.*, 1 May 1862, 3 June 1862, 28 July 1864, 3 December 1864.

61 Speech in Dartmouth, 22 May 1867, quoted in J. A. Chisholm, ed., *The Speeches and Public Letters of Joseph Howe* (Halifax, 1909), II, p. 519.

62 *The Morning Chronicle*, 23 May 1867.

63 *Ibid.*, 25 June 1867.

ted this in a public meeting at Margaret's Bay in May 1867.⁶⁴ While Tupper may certainly have offered Bourinot the appointment in an attempt to influence his vote, it seems likely that Bourinot accepted it more because he wanted Cape Breton to be well represented in Ottawa.⁶⁵ There is also some evidence to show that he was not offered the appointment until May 1867, by which time, of course, there was no need to bribe him. The *Sydney News*, a Liberal, Anti-Confederate newspaper, reported in April 1867 that Bourinot had "signified his intention to offer as representative for the County of Cape Breton in the House of Commons of the new Confederacy."⁶⁶ Obviously, if this were the case, he had not yet been offered — or at any rate, had not yet accepted — the senatorial appointment.

Finally, we return to the thesis postulated generally by Creighton and applied specifically to Nova Scotia by Muise. Did Bourinot support Confederation because he represented a county that was tied to the new economy? Despite his initial opposition to the scheme in 1865, the evidence seems clearly to support a qualified affirmative response. Clearly, his desire to develop Cape Breton economically, concentrating on the coal mines and Louisbourg harbour as a shipping outlet for British North America, was the major factor in his decision to overlook minor flaws in the scheme. At the same time, Bourinot's support of Confederation must be seen, at least to some extent, as an expression of regional discontent, an attempt to repudiate the 1820 union of Cape Breton with Nova Scotia and an attempt to join the island to a larger unit with a more dynamic economic and political future.

64 See H. G. Pineo to Tupper, 10 April 1867; A. Patterson to Tupper, 10 April 1867; John Creighton to Tupper, 11 April 1867; A. Keith to Tupper, 11 April 1867; R. M. Cutler to Tupper, 15 April 1867; all declining senatorial appointments. Sir Charles Tupper Papers, vol. III, Public Archives of Canada. See also *The Morning Chronicle*, 23 May 1867.

65 With Senate seats going also to T. D. Archibald of North Sydney and William Miller of Arichat, Cape Breton obtained strong representation indeed, with three of Nova Scotia's twelve Senate seats.

66 Quoted in *The British Colonist*, 4 April 1867.