

## Redressing the Balance — the Prairie West, Atlantic Canada and the Historiography of Canadian Regionalism

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opportunity. But it is Lemon's conviction that the eighteenth-century blessings of the free market's "hidden hand" have turned into a twentieth-century curse. We must, therefore, foster new communities and develop a new sense of place if we are to shake free of the historical realities which still control us.

All the world is not Pennsylvania, but Lemon's is still an essay to ponder. To reflect upon it is to reflect upon American society. In this age of instantaneous, world-wide communication, the ubiquity of (American) television culture, and the diffusion of everything from expressways to electric toothbrushes across the western world, that, in turn, is to consider our own circumstances. Thus to weigh the argument of Lemon's article is, in some degree, to come to know ourselves. That, of course, is Lemon's intention. His essay is, therefore, a fitting final chapter in honour and memory of Andrew Hill Clark. It reveals more clearly than almost anything that Clark wrote — though not more clearly than he recognized — the essentially humanistic nature of the subfield that he worked so hard to create and did so much to defend. Here, more explicitly than in most historical geographical writing, we recognize something of the fate of being North Americans. Not all will wish to follow Lemon down the road of relevance, but the potential for a vital, challenging historical geography that addresses questions central to understanding the experience of Europeans in North America is clear. Of course, other disciplines claim a similar final goal. As part of the humanities, so they should; knowledge is not to be confined by disciplinary labels. Yet historical geography does provide a distinctive perspective on these important issues. With its interest in man and land, properly conceived it would seem to offer a rich potential of suggestive insight into the distinctive quality of life as it has been lived in the novel circumstances of North America.

GRAEME WYNN

### Redressing the Balance — the Prairie West, Atlantic Canada and the Historiography of Canadian Regionalism

One of the most encouraging features of recent Canadian historiography has been the emergence of a talented group of scholars whose field is the history of the Atlantic region. Writing in the *Journal of Canadian Studies* in the fall of 1978, George Rawlyk pointed out that Carl Berger in *The Writing of Canadian History* pays "remarkably little attention" to Maritime historians and does not even include any index reference to the Maritimes. Rawlyk suggests that because the Canadian historical tradition has been preoccupied by the themes of French-English conflict and the western thrust of central Canada,

. . . the Maritimes are often automatically pushed to the periphery and

regarded as a kind of anachronistic backwater. By-passed by events of national importance, transformed by economic and political realities into a have-not region, the rich historical heritage of the Maritimes, for some, has also been transformed into a "have-not" void . . . . Because the region and its past cannot be readily fitted into the mainstream of Canadian development and scholarship, New Brunswick, Nova Scotia and Prince Edward Island have been unceremoniously shoved into a dark corner of relative inconsequence.<sup>1</sup>

Even as George Rawlyk penned these lines, an historiographical revolution was gaining momentum which seems likely to end forever the situation they described. In addition to the stimulus to Atlantic Canada historiography provided by *Acadiensis*, a journal which to an envious Ontarian seems, arguably, the best historical periodical in the country, the region is blessed by an active and stimulating group of mostly younger historians. The work of T.W. Acheson, Colin Howell, Eric Sager, David Alexander, Judith Fingard and Ernie Forbes, to name only a few, is of such promise that it may well create for Atlantic Canada a regional historiography second to none in this country. And Ernie Forbes' fine volume, *The Maritime Rights Movement, 1919-1927: A Study in Canadian Regionalism* (Montreal, McGill-Queen's University Press, 1979) will take its place as a major work in the field, one which, among other things, explains for the first time how profoundly Maritime sensibilities were affected by the rapid increase in early twentieth-century Canada of Western influence in Confederation.

In contrast to the underdevelopment of Maritime historiography noted by George Rawlyk, Western Canada from the day of the Canadian Frontiers of Settlement Series and the volumes studying Social Credit in Alberta has received an all but disproportionate amount of attention from historians. For this reason, John Herd Thompson's task in *The Harvests of War: The Prairie West, 1914-1918* (Toronto, McClelland and Stewart, 1978) was a difficult one. Unlike Ernie Forbes, who was traversing almost virgin territory, Professor Thompson was looking again at such familiar subjects as Prairie labour radicalism, ethnic tensions, Union Government and the 1917 election. Among the most interesting chapters in this much and rightly praised book are studies of the shifting Western attitude to the war, of the war's impact on the regional economy, and of the relation between the war and social reform. Drawing on significant research of his own and effectively synthesizing previous efforts, he is able in 172 pages of succinct text to offer a finely crafted study which presents several provocative arguments about Western society in wartime. Unfortunately, Professor Thompson deals with great and complex matters far too briefly

<sup>1</sup> G.A. Rawlyk, "J.B. Brebner and *The Writing of Canadian History*", *Journal of Canadian Studies*, 13 (Fall, 1978), p. 87.

at times and although he succeeds in raising important interpretive issues, his treatment in places seems so cursory and his evidence so incomplete that the reader will want to reserve judgment with respect to some of his conclusions.

For example, there is the question of the war and social reform. After asserting that reformers were building on values shaped before the war by the social gospel, Thompson argues, as have others, that the war produced a transformation in attitudes to reform, bringing a sense of urgency and a new impulse to change. Yet his own discussion of social reform restricts itself largely to prohibition and women's suffrage because these benefitted most directly from war conditions. This treatment seems to me to look too much to the social gospel past and to neglect the powerful secular impulses to change which at this time were affecting most North American and European communities and whose impact on Canadian society has been documented by scholars such as Neil Sutherland and Terence Morrison. As urban needs burgeoned and scientific knowledge advanced, the Great War itself interacted powerfully with pre-1914 reform drives to effect profound changes in such fields as public health and welfare systems, education and generally the relationship between the citizen and new bureaucracies of business, labour and the state. *The Harvests of War* has all too little to say of the accelerating pace of change in wartime in all these areas.

Yet if one wishes that Professor Thompson had broadened his scope and dwelled longer on some topics, that is because he does write so ably and with so much interest on several major historiographic themes. Arguing that the Great War must be studied as a phenomenon in its own right and not as a precursor to the dramatic postwar unrest which so altered the Prairie landscape, he engages in the difficult exercise of analyzing major events and movements with that end in view. Thus because prohibition could be presented as essential to the war effort, it achieved a success it would not otherwise have attained. Ethnic tensions, on the other hand, were already so deeply rooted in Prairie soil that the war merely exacerbated a situation that had long existed. Now an analysis of this type can be very useful in the sense that it forces the historian to think more analytically than is sometimes his wont and to develop methods adequate to his analytic purposes. Although Professor Thompson perhaps underestimates the difficulties inherent in such an exercise and for the most part fails to turn to other social sciences for methodological assistance, he uses the historian's traditional apparatus with skill and good judgment and his conclusions are generally convincing so far as they go.

As part of a second major theme, the author argues that the West of 1914 "was unique, as unlike Ontario or Quebec as these provinces were unlike each other" and because of this regional distinctiveness "the Great War left an imprint upon the West different from the one it left upon Canada as a whole" (p. 10). He illustrates this thesis in a valuable discussion of the Prairie economy which demonstrates how high wartime grain prices induced Western farmers to engage in foolish speculations and poor farming practices while the West as a

whole became more rural than it had been before the War. In the cities, overly dependent on the farming sector, depressed conditions dating from railway and construction cutbacks in 1913 were not entirely overcome and several communities suspended interest payments on their bonded indebtedness. As for wartime defence expenditures, Thompson indicates that the Prairie residents believed they did not receive their fair share of these and blamed their economic problems on "the malevolent greed" of Central Canadian interests. And he himself concludes that Westerners never have had more cause to complain of the bias of Dominion policy than during the Great War. Although Thompson's analysis of the Western wartime economy is revealing and stimulating, his evidence seems too slight to sustain such conclusions. It seems more logical to conclude that Western farmers in a free economy naturally grew the crops which fetched the highest prices; so too munition manufacturers and other producers of war materials made equally rational decisions which reflected economic realities. If bias truly existed to the extent that Thompson claims it did, the case remains to be proven by fuller analysis and harder evidence.

Interestingly, in pursuit of the theme of Prairie distinctiveness Thompson points out that Western farmers, their economic grievances notwithstanding, did not react to the imposition of conscription with the violence of their Ontario counterparts; and Western groups generally were at least as supportive of the war effort as those in Ontario. He notes, for example, that in the period before the war militia groups were as popular in the West as in the rest of the country, while the imposition of conscription brought little resistance and the percentage of defaulters was lower than in any other region. Such comparisons are revealing but what I found most striking was not the distinctiveness the author found in the Western response but the extent of the similarities with Ontario. In both regions, there was the same initial enthusiasm, the same gradual realization of the horror of it all, and the same determination to see it through to the end, and for most of the same reasons. In each case hostility to ethnic minorities and a growing demand for English-only schools developed in the guise of a thrust at once patriotic and reformist. In each region the war brought with it a deepened commitment to social reform with more than a touch of utopianism; the same support for Union Government as representing the attainment of higher and nonpartisan political ideals; and finally the same growing sense of disillusionment which manifested itself in sweeping post-war political unrest. Perhaps, after all, the Prairie West in the War years still carried many of the marks of its Ontario heritage. For all its many merits, *The Harvests of War* is often less than convincing as a study of the roots of Western discontent and of deepening regional distinctiveness.

Ernie Forbes, on the other hand, offers a study of regional conflict which in many ways is fresher and more persuasive than *The Harvests of War*. Although Forbes bases his work on the traditional sources of political history, newspapers and manuscript collections, and although he is less bold and sweeping in his

judgments than Professor Thompson, his careful and painstaking research and the care with which he marshalls his evidence result in a brisk and authoritative account of Maritime protest in the 1920s. To those who have viewed regional conflict in Canada in terms of the power of Central Canadian political and economic interests pitted against the West and the Maritimes — inner Canada versus outer Canada — Professor Forbes' analysis may prove surprising. There is evidence here, to be sure, that Maritimers in the 1920s retained their old resentments against Upper Canada and the occasional ugly Ontarian (J.D. Reid is a case in point) puts in an appearance. Yet this traditional resentment was diluted in this period by a growing awareness that the increasingly powerful Prairie voice in national affairs was often inimical to the interests of Atlantic Canada. As Forbes puts it, it was Western regional myths, often borrowed from the United States, which "had come to define the Canadian nation" and for the most part these "tended to exclude the Maritime provinces" (p. 35).

In carefully structured chapters, Professor Forbes argues that during the Laurier boom and through the war years, the Maritimes experienced economic growth but a steady loss of political power and he demonstrates convincingly that it was in the very early 1920s, before the postwar depression had its full impact, that a powerful regional protest movement appeared to defend Maritime interests. This movement, he suggests, because it was born during an era of relative prosperity when reform currents were increasingly ascendant, drew a good deal on the methods and spirit of North American progressivism. Utilizing as did Progressives elsewhere the organizational force inherent in Boards of Trade, citizens groups and labour, educational and farmer organizations, the organizers of Maritime regional protest worked alternately through Farmer-Labour, Liberal and Conservative parties to attain their goals. Although they succeeded in building a strong and determined movement which aroused Maritimers to a heightened regional consciousness and an impassioned defence of their interests, Professor Forbes suggests that they were finally defeated by the greater power of other regions. The Duncan Commission recommendations, despite Mackenzie King's claim that his government had implemented them "virtually in their entirety", were ignored in large part and Professor Forbes concludes that the federal cabinet transformed Duncan's plan for Maritime rehabilitation into a limited scheme of political pacification to be carried out with the fewest possible concessions. Ironically, Maritimers themselves, anxious to cast off the image of a depressed area which they had used to win federal concessions, found it politic in the late 1920s to proclaim a new era of prosperity; and the protest movement which had been built up with such effort tended to evaporate in a growing mood of cynicism and political indifference. The Maritime region, it seems, had been unable despite its best efforts to find the political and economic strength to protect its former position in the Canadian Confederation; and about all that remained of the Maritime Rights Movement was a heightened but largely ineffectual sense of regional self-

consciousness.

This is an important story and Professor Forbes tells it well. He builds his case chapter by chapter, eschewing polemic and emotion, searching not for villains but for an understanding of what he regards as a complex process of Maritime decline. Firstly, he establishes that in the period between 1900 and 1920 capital investment in the region expanded dramatically and Maritime manufacturers, aided by favourable freight rates on the Intercolonial Railway, competed successfully in other parts of the country. The area's coal producers captured a substantial part of the Quebec market, the iron and steel industry experienced a spectacular development and other sectors of a diverse and apparently healthy economy did equally well. Yet there were political weaknesses, including the failure of Maritimers, faced with a relative decline in population, to prevent the loss of representation in the House of Commons, the repeated failure to redress a Dominion subsidy system which undeniably favoured the Prairie Provinces and, most significant of all, the inability to protect the Intercolonial as a regional line. The freight rates of the Intercolonial, sanctified by the passage of time, constituted a tacit political bargain, one which enabled Maritimers to compete in the rest of the country. When the Railway Act was amended in 1919 to bring all government lines under a unified management, Maritime interests suffered severely and all protests fell on deaf ears. This, however, was the logical consequence of the new political reality which allowed the Union Government to exist for a ten month period in 1920 with not a single Maritimer in the Cabinet.

The rest of Professor Forbes' book is a well argued account of how Maritimers sought to remedy this state of affairs. After indicating how Maritime particularism prevented the area from speaking with a single strong voice, as the Prairies often did to such effect, he demonstrates how the economic slide of the early 1920s moved even diverse social, cultural and economic groups to band together in a decade-long search for an effective voice. Inevitably, in a region of such diversity, with free traders challenging protectionists, farmers looking askance at struggling manufacturing interests, a labour movement in the process of finding its feet, and every little fishing village seeking its own solutions, there were grave political barriers facing the advocates of Maritime Rights. Professor Forbes does not gloss over these difficulties and in explaining the complex evolution of events he presents the political historian with a fascinating new cast of characters, including Halifax publisher W.H. Dennis, who provided impassioned press support for the movement, Hance J. Logan of Amherst, politician and president of the Maritime Board of Trade, and H.S. Congdon, the editor of *Maritime Rights* and tireless publicist for the cause. Among the most interesting of these figures was the movement's "radical", F.B. McCurdy, a former federal Tory Cabinet minister and Halifax financier who was convinced that the Maritimes could never receive fair treatment from within the Canadian tariff structure. Breaking with his own party, McCurdy called for a restructured

federalism which would give Nova Scotia the power to set its own tariff and he argued generally that Maritimers must look to their provincial governments for leadership because the national political system could never effectively serve the interests of the weaker regions.

Ernie Forbes is at his best in setting out the growth of the Maritime rights movement in its political dimensions and in demonstrating the reasons for its successes as well as for what he regards as its ultimate failure. Ultimately, it seems, the power just did not exist, whether in economic or political terms, for a fundamental restructuring which was necessary to provide more adequate protection for regional interests. Forbes is very careful when it comes to assessing blame and indeed seems a little reluctant to engage in such an enterprise at all. Certainly he avoids the violently polemical tone and largely unsubstantiated rhetoric which characterized David Jay Bercuson's introduction to *Canada and the Burden of Unity*; and one must sympathize with the harsh words Lovell Clark offered about that introduction in a review published in the *Journal of Canadian Studies*.<sup>2</sup> If we are ever to understand the burden of unity and the nature of regionalism, it will be through the kind of mature and objective scholarship Professor Forbes offers here.

Certainly Professor Forbes is cautious, perhaps too cautious, in his judgments. In places he seems to agree with F.B. McCurdy that the Maritime region could not expect to receive justice at the hands of stronger parts of the country. In an early chapter he demonstrates how Prairie interests contributed to the collapse of the Farmer movement in the Maritimes by seeking to manipulate it to entirely Western needs. Elsewhere he indicates that Central Canadians seemed unable to comprehend how broad national goals required that justice be done to the Maritime cause. And finally he suggests that Maritimers were too quick to lose confidence in the Maritime Rights slogan and allowed their protest movement to die before really significant gains had been registered. No doubt all these elements were there and it is refreshing to find an analysis which seems less interested in seeking out villains than in understanding the basic structural elements which underlay the economic decline of the 1920s. But Professor Forbes is hindered in his effort to arrive at conclusions by the somewhat one-dimensional nature of his account. What he offers is finally a political story based on traditional sources, and those sources are perhaps too largely Maritime in origin. In a situation in which basic decisions with great implications for regional economies were being made by federally-appointed bodies such as the Board of Railway Commissioners and the Tariff Advisory Board, it is clear that if we are to achieve a fuller understanding of regional economic systems, we must have full and systematic studies of these agencies

2 See D.J. Bercuson, ed., *Canada and the Burden of Unity* (Toronto, 1977), pp. 1-18 and Lovell Clark, "Regionalism? or Irrationalism?", *Journal of Canadian Studies*, 13 (Summer, 1978), pp. 119-24.



and of their decision-making processes. Similarly, although Forbes provides some invaluable data on the Maritime economy, this is done in an essentially descriptive kind of way and is meant to provide the context for a story which is told in primarily political terms.

However important the political account may be, it represents only part of the evidence and we need as well the kinds of insights that can be offered by the economic historian. To what extent, for example, were events finally determined by those like the Kemps, the Flavelles and National Trust, who do appear in this account from time to time? Is it possible that the political events which created the Maritime Rights Movement were of little long-run significance? Equally, the historian of ideas has much to offer to our understanding of Canadian regionalism, and Ernie Forbes' conclusion that Maritime protest declined because people had lost confidence in their own slogans points to the need for further work along those lines. In any case, this study provides an excellent foundation for those who will undertake further analysis of the Maritime region in the early twentieth century; and I hope it will stimulate other scholars, and of course Forbes himself, to move in that direction.

PETER OLIVER

### The Brief Rise And Early Decline Of Regional Development

In the 1960s Canadians still enjoyed the widespread happy belief, born in the 1940s and reaching its peak of credibility in the first half of the 50s, that the world was right for Canada; we saw ourselves flourishing in the good earth of social content and political stability with a unique northern vigour for fertilizer; the predominant assumption — of outsiders quite as much as of Canadians themselves — was that under wise management from Ottawa the Canadian economy would enjoy diversification and growth second to few if any others. In this environment, problems were seen essentially as exceptions. Even the strongest economic growth could not, of course, be uniform. But while there were declining areas and slow-growth regions, in the conventional wisdom of the Ottawa of 1950 this did not call for regional policies. The need for a little oil at squeaky points was accepted as a political necessity; some under-utilized wharves and trains and ferries and the like were a small price to pay for sticking to sound policies to expand the gross national product. For the most part, people in slow-growth regions could surely be expected to appreciate the blessing of having opportunities to move to elsewhere in Canada. Mobility as the price of economic efficiency appealed to the puritanical streak in Ottawa mandarins.

As more people began to take prosperity, actual or at least attainable, for granted, mandarin views became, by the later 1950s, politically unacceptable. Regional discontents coalesced. In the 1960s it became the emerging political