

# **The Art of Regional Protest: The Political Cartoons of Donald McRitchie, 1904-1937**

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MARGARET CONRAD

## The Art of Regional Protest: The Political Cartoons of Donald McRitchie, 1904 - 1937

POLITICAL CARTOONS ARE AMONG the most democratic forms of humour in contemporary Canada. It is therefore surprising that this widely-appreciated expression of popular culture has received so little scholarly attention.<sup>1</sup> Despite an impressive roster of Canadian cartoonists, the work of Peter Desbarats and Terry Mosher stands alone as a historical survey of the genre, and there is only one book-length monograph on Canadian editorial cartoons.<sup>2</sup> Few Canadian cartoonists have attracted a serious biographer.<sup>3</sup> Nevertheless, as the career of Donald McRitchie demonstrates, political cartoons reflect and reinforce aspects of popular culture, and for this reason they deserve greater attention as a form of public art. Since cartoonists in the 20th century are successful only to the degree

- 1 Portions of this paper were presented as the W.S. MacNutt Memorial Lecture, University of New Brunswick, 15 and 16 November 1989. I am grateful to the MacNutt Lecture Committee for giving me the opportunity to explore my interest in Donald McRitchie's work and to Acadia University's committee established under Article 25.55 of the Eighth Collective Agreement for assistance in defraying the costs of reproducing the McRitchie cartoons.
- 2 Peter Desbarats and Terry Mosher, *The Hecklers: A History of Canadian Political Cartooning and a Cartoonists' History of Canada* (Toronto, 1979); Raymond N. Morris, *Behind the Jester's Mask: Canadian Editorial Cartoons about Dominant and Minority Groups, 1960-1979* (Toronto, 1989).
- 3 Notable exceptions include works on two Québécois cartoonists: Marius Barbeau, *Henri Julien* (Toronto, 1941) and Léon-A Robidoux, *Albéric Bourgeois, caricaturiste* (Montreal, 1978). Interest in collecting cartoons has a slightly better history. The National Archives of Canada has housed cartoon collections since 1906 and the International Salon of Cartoons and Caricature was founded in Montreal in the early 1960s. In 1989 a Canadian Centre for Caricature (recently rechristened the Museum of Caricature) was opened in Ottawa as one of the many activities of the National Archives. Catalogues from cartoon exhibitions that have been mounted in archives, galleries and museums are among the most useful sources for the student of political caricature. See, for instance, Art Gallery of Ontario, *Canadian Cartoon and Caricature* (Toronto, 1969); Roger Selby, *Canadian Political Cartoons* (Winnipeg, 1977); Hugh Dempsey, *Western Alienation in Perspective* (Calgary, 1981); Denis Castonguay, Deborah McNeill and Douglas Schoenherr, *Daily Smile: A Travelling Exhibition of Original Duncan Macpherson Cartoons...* (Ottawa, 1980); The Museum of Caricature, *La Palme* (Ottawa, 1990).

Margaret Conrad, "The Art of Regional Protest: The Political Cartoons of Donald McRitchie, 1904-1937", *Acadiensis*, XXI, 1 (Autumn 1991), pp. 5-29.

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that they tap the conscious and unconscious tensions of the majority, their work can profitably be studied for what it reveals about our collective institutions and values. Editorial cartoons, Raymond Morris reminds us, serve as vehicles for ordering seemingly random developments, orienting the viewer, legitimizing a perspective, and, within limits, criticizing political events. “They pack a punch, not only for the politician who is made to look foolish”, Morris concludes, “but also for the glancer who may swallow a hidden message along with the laugh”.<sup>4</sup>

Between 1919 and 1937 Donald McRitchie was employed as a cartoonist by the Halifax Herald Limited. McRitchie’s tenure at the *Herald* coincided with the agitation for “Maritime Rights”, a movement to a remarkable degree shaped by *Herald* owner and publisher W.H. Dennis. Although McRitchie produced cartoons on a variety of topics during his long career, his portrayal of regional alienation was one of the most consistent themes in his work. In this respect, he has much in common with Arch Dale who, as cartoonist for the *Grain-Growers Guide* and the *Winnipeg Free Press*, captured the spirit of regional discontent in Western Canada in the first half of the 20th century.<sup>5</sup> However, unlike Dale, McRitchie had difficulty adjusting to the new political alignments and cartooning styles of the 1930s. When the regional perspective forged in the 1920s was submerged in the emerging North American consensus that massive state intervention was necessary to preserve corporate capitalism, McRitchie failed to make a successful transition to the new political order. In 1937 he was replaced at the *Herald* by Robert Chambers, who was destined to become one of Canada’s most successful newspaper cartoonists.

Caricature is a child of the Renaissance and, like journalism, developed rapidly under the twin influences of secularization and technological innovation. When lithography, perfected in the 1790s, and wood engraving, revived in the early 1800s, were taken up by mass-circulation magazines, political cartoons came into their own. In the early 1830s Charles Philippon’s *La Caricature* introduced Honoré Daumier’s wicked graphic satire to delighted Parisians. Britain’s weekly magazine *Punch* published political cartoons in the 1840s as did the American journals *Harper’s Weekly* and *Vanity Fair* in the 1850s. British North Americans had their own cartoonist in John B. Walker whose bi-weekly magazine, *Punch in Canada*, appeared between 1849 and 1851. Although Canada’s *Punch* was short-lived, it marked the beginning of a rich political cartoon heritage which mushroomed spectacularly in the years immediately following Confederation.<sup>6</sup>

In the period before photographic reproductions became common, cartoons and other lithographic or wood-engraved illustrations helped to sell magazines.

4 Morris, *Behind the Jester’s Mask*, pp. 42-43, 170.

5 Desbarats and Mosher, *The Hecklers*, p. 235; Dempsey, *Western Alienation in Perspective*.

6 Simon Houfe, *The Dictionary of British Book Illustrators and Caricaturists, 1800-1914* (Woodbridge, Suffolk, 1978); Maurice Horn, ed., *The World Encyclopedia of Cartoons* (New York, 1980); Desbarats and Mosher, *The Hecklers*, pp. 21-31.

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Political cartoons in particular seemed to have wide appeal, lampooning as they did the rough and tumble of late-19th century democratic politics. Political caricature spiced the pages of the otherwise polite and polished *Canadian Illustrated News* and *L'Opinion Publique*, first published in 1869. When J. W. Bengough launched *Grip* in 1873, political cartoon satire quickly emerged as a singular feature of his journal, in part because the Pacific Scandal dominated events of that year.<sup>7</sup> Bengough drew his inspiration from Thomas Nast, the premier cartoonist of *Harper's Weekly*. Both men had an enormous influence on the way historians interpret the "Gilded Age". Indeed, most of us see John A. Macdonald as the mischievous, hiccupping politician of Bengough's cartoons rather than the stiff, formal gentleman of his Notman photographs. Although photographs had replaced art work for conventional news by the first decade of the 20th century, the political cartoon survived various technological revolutions to remain a popular feature of mass-circulation magazines and newspapers.

The continuing popularity of political cartoons is derived from both their simplicity and their complexity. In a few pen-strokes the gifted cartoonist can provide a depth of meaning seldom conveyed in a photographic image. A photograph captures the structure of life but only rarely conveys the contempt, outrage and distress characteristic of the best cartoons.<sup>8</sup> While sometimes subversive, popular political cartoonists in the 20th century have often pulled their punches. Publishers of mass-circulation magazines and newspapers have had no interest in alienating their readership and would not long tolerate a cartoonist who consistently expressed a minority political opinion. Nor was the cartoon the ideal vehicle for radical political action. Humour, as Beverly Rasporich has recently noted, is essentially conservative, designed to record and sustain, rather than destroy, cultural identity.<sup>9</sup> Thus, most Canadian cartoonists have heckled and embarrassed the objects of their satire rather than offered a sustained critique or a responsible alternative to the status quo.<sup>10</sup>

"There can be few other countries", Desbarats and Mosher maintain, "where the work of early political cartoonists has remained so relevant and vital because political and social preoccupations have remained so constant over such a long period of time".<sup>11</sup> One of Canada's most enduring preoccupations — and therefore

7 Stanley Paul Kutcher, "John Wilson Bengough: Artist of Righteousness", M.A. thesis, McMaster University, 1975; Ramsay Cook, "The Ragged Reformer — J.W. Bengough: The Caricaturist as Social Critic", in W.H. New, ed., *A Political Art: Essays and Images in Honour of George Woodcock* (Vancouver, 1978), pp. 53-81.

8 Richard Fitzgerald, *Art and Politics: Cartoonists of the Masses and Liberator* (Westport, Conn., 1973), p. 9.

9 Beverly Rasporich, "Canadian Humour and Culture: Regional and National Expressions", *Canadian Issues*, Vol. IX (1988), p. 100.

10 Morris, *Behind the Jester's Mask*, p. 26.

11 Desbarats and Mosher, *The Hecklers*, p. 12.

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an ongoing concern for cartoonists — has been regional discontent. In Atlantic Canada, regional protest goes back to Confederation and returns with striking regularity. Protest took the form of separatist movements in Nova Scotia in the 1860s and 1880s, agitation for fair treatment, especially in securing railway subsidies, in the first decade of the 20th century, the Maritime Rights Movement in the 1920s, and the Atlantic Revolution of the 1950s. In another context, Richard Fitzgerald has argued that any serious political movement must engage the interest of the artist.<sup>12</sup> It is therefore not surprising that recurrent movements of regional protest in Atlantic Canada have stimulated some of the best of Canadian cartoon art.<sup>13</sup>

Donald McRitchie was one of the most prolific of a second generation of Canadian political cartoonists who carved a niche for themselves in the daily newspapers of the early 20th century. Born in Englishtown, Cape Breton, on 2 June 1881, McRitchie moved to Glace Bay at an early age with his mother and sister following the death of his father.<sup>14</sup> Reputedly a brilliant student, he was employed in the offices of the Dominion Coal Company upon graduation from high school. He was subsequently transferred to the company's Boston office, where his natural talent for drawing soon manifested itself. By the winter of 1904, McRitchie was back in Cape Breton producing cartoons for the *Sydney Daily Post*. He continued to work as a cartoonist and illustrator until the late 1930s, his career broken only by service in the First World War.<sup>15</sup>

A self-taught artist, McRitchie seems to have emerged full-blown as a cartoonist in 1904. His early drawings have a deliberate look, and the distinctive lettering of his labels and speech bubbles often identify an unsigned McRitchie. Predictably, he was influenced by contemporary cartoonists throughout North America and the progressive politics which characterized the age.<sup>16</sup> In his early works, the forces of evil, represented by grasping politicians, unsavoury businessmen and

12 Fitzgerald, *Art and Politics*, p. 4.

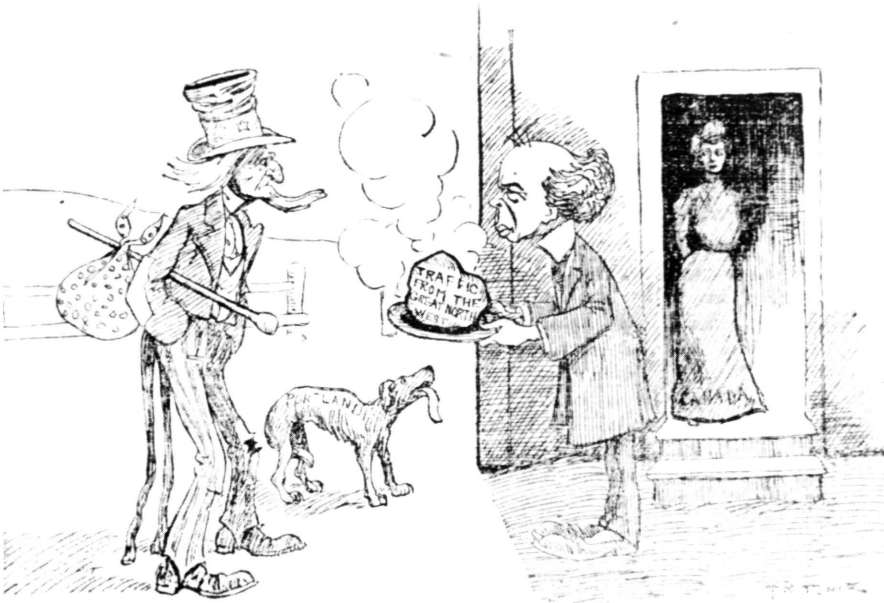
13 For a recent discussion of cartoons as an art form see Nicholas Garland, "Fine Art and Comic Art: Can you draw properly if you want to?" *RSA Journal*, Vol. CXXXVII, No. 5400 (November 1989), pp. 779-88. I am indebted to Professor Tom Condon for bringing this source to my attention.

14 Donald McRitchie, Senior, emigrated from Scotland, and was recorded in the 1881 manuscript census as a 48-year-old farmer. His Nova Scotia-born wife Catherine was 10 years younger. A daughter, Christy, was born in 1880. The McRitchies belonged to the Presbyterian Church. See "Nominal Return of the Living, District No. 5, Victoria County, English Town Polling District", Census of Canada, 1881, National Archives of Canada.

15 *Canadian Who's Who 1936-37*, p. 770; an obituary and editorial tribute can be found in the *Halifax Herald*, 30 November 1948. See also Desbarats and Mosher, *The Hecklers*, pp. 82, 245.

16 Stephen Hess and Milton Kaplan, *The Ungentlemanly Art: A History of American Political Cartoons* (New York, 1968); Nick Thorkelson, "Cartooning", *Radical America*, Vol. 13, No. 2 (March/April 1979), pp. 27-51. I am indebted to David Frank for the latter reference.

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1. *Sydney Daily Post*, 27 October 1904.

Uncle Sam are contrasted to their right-minded opponents.<sup>17</sup> The *Sydney Daily Post* was a Conservative Party organ and, inevitably, the Liberal Party became the object of much of McRitchie's satire. Since regional alienation was already a well-defined feature of Canadian political life, McRitchie's cartoons reflected its main currents. One effort from this period shows Prime Minister Wilfrid Laurier giving Uncle Sam and his hungry dog "Portland" a dinner of "traffic from the great North West", while Madame Canada pleads: "Oh! Wilfrid, please do not give our dinner away to that foreigner and his hungry dog. Have pity and keep the food for our own people".<sup>18</sup> (See Illustration 1). This cartoon nicely captures regional resentment of the fact that the eastern terminus for Canadian transcontinental railways was located in Maine rather than the Maritimes.

In the early 20th century cartoonists often had uncertain journalistic careers, working as itinerant and temporary employees. Technological breakthroughs such as the half-tone photographic process gradually eliminated the need for both the newspaper illustrator and photo-engraver, who often doubled as a political cartoonist. Even in the "good-old days" of lithography, penny-pinching publishers of small-circulation newspapers relied on syndicated cartoons, hiring

17 See, for instance, McRitchie cartoons in *Sydney Daily Post*, 12 July 1904, 20 October 1904.

18 *Sydney Daily Post*, 26 October 1904.

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local artists only during the short periods prior to elections. A highly-talented artist might sell cartoons through syndication, but only a few could make a living that way. Moreover, full-time cartoonists were expected to conform to the political leanings, and sometimes even the artistic preferences, of the newspaper's publisher. Subject to the vagaries of publishing technology, political passions and personal relations, the newspaper cartoonist often found his tenure brief and his prospects bleak.

McRitchie's employment with the *Sydney Daily Post* seems to have ended soon after the federal election of November 1904.<sup>19</sup> By the spring of 1905 he was turning out cartoons and illustrations of local events for Ottawa's *Evening Journal*. He also contributed portraits of Ottawa politicians and businessmen to the syndicated "Canucks by the Cartoonists" series, sponsored by the Newspaper Artists' and Cartoonists' Society of Canada.<sup>20</sup> Although based in Ottawa, McRitchie did not totally abandon his Maritime preoccupations. One of his cartoons for the *Evening Journal*, entitled "Working on a Good Model", portrays the recently-established Maritime Board of Trade as a blacksmith forging bonds of mutual interest among the Maritime Provinces.<sup>21</sup> (See Illustration 2).

Like many other Canadians of his day, McRitchie succumbed to the lure of opportunities in Western Canada. He apparently touched down briefly in Port Arthur before moving to Winnipeg in the fall of 1906. On 5 November a McRitchie cartoon in Winnipeg's *Morning Telegram* depicted Laurier "Cutting the Cake", dividing the Keewatin District among Ontario, Manitoba and Saskatchewan, each demanding a "square meal". Manitoba is portrayed as "The Lean One", with sensibilities similar to those expressed in the Maritimes. In June 1907 signed McRitchie cartoons began to appear in Bob Edwards' *Eye Opener*, based in Calgary. One biographical sketch indicates that he worked as a free-lance advertiser for much of the period between 1908 and 1911,<sup>22</sup> and his obituary suggests that he may even have tried his hand at ranching in Alberta.<sup>23</sup> Whatever his other activities while living in Western Canada, McRitchie continued to draw for the *Eye Opener*, producing his best cartoon work for this or any other period of his career. Spurred on by Edwards' pugnacious editorial style, McRitchie lampooned the Senate, the bench, women's suffrage and the so-called "free press", as well as the policies of Laurier's eastern-dominated Liberal government.<sup>24</sup> (See Illustration 3). The *Eye Opener* had many cartoon illustrators but few proved as prolific or as talented as Donald McRitchie.

19 McRitchie's last cartoon for the *Sydney Daily Post* appeared on 3 January 1905.

20 The only known original from this period, McRitchie's portrait of Robert Franklin Sutherland, Speaker of the House of Commons, can be found in the Museum of Caricature, National Archives of Canada, Ottawa. It was published in the *Evening Journal* (Ottawa), 30 May 1906.

21 *Evening Journal* (Ottawa), 21 August 1905.

22 *Canadian Who's Who, 1936-37*, p. 770.

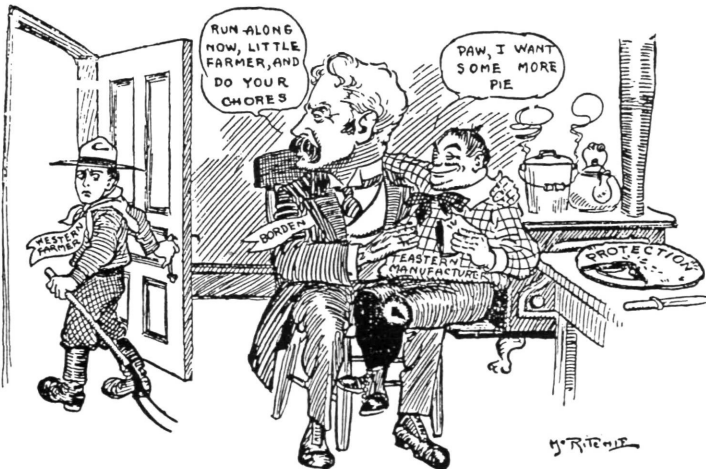
23 *Halifax Herald*, 30 November 1948.

24 See, for example, *Eye Opener*, 19 September 1908 (regionalism), 1 January 1910 (suffrage and

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2. "Working on a Good Model", *The Evening Journal* (Ottawa), 21 August 1905.



3. "Playing the Favourite", *Eye Opener* (Calgary), 25 April 1914.



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Although McRitchie cartoons continued to appear in the *Eye Opener* until March 1915, the artist himself moved to Montreal in 1911 to assume the position of advertising manager with Carrick Real Estate Limited. Reciprocity with the United States, which dominated political debate that year, may have had some bearing on McRitchie's decision. Free trade was a more popular policy option in the western than in the eastern provinces and McRitchie's Conservative Party sympathies may well have convinced him to locate in a more suitable political environment. As protected Canadian manufacturing interests lined up against primary producers in one of Canada's most hard-fought election campaigns, Montreal companies such as Redpath Sugar and Carrick Real Estate included anti-reciprocity cartoons in their newspaper advertisements.<sup>25</sup> A cartoonist of McRitchie's talent and political persuasion was much in demand. One of McRitchie's anti-reciprocity cartoons — in which a perplexed Uncle Sam finds his "reciprocity" engagement ring returned together with a "Dear Sam" note from Miss Canada — apparently brought him instant fame.<sup>26</sup> (See Illustration 4). His highly partisan efforts continued to add spice to Carrick's advertisements during the fall and winter of 1911-12.<sup>27</sup>

Following the outbreak of the First World War, McRitchie enlisted as a signaller in the 36th Battery. Returning to civilian life after the war, he found employment as cartoonist and manager of the engraving department of the Halifax Herald Limited.<sup>28</sup> McRitchie joined the *Herald* staff at a significant point in the company's history. Senator William Dennis, whose newspapers the *Herald*, *Evening Mail* and *Sunday Leader* boasted the largest circulation in the Maritime Provinces, would die within the year. Under his nephew, William Henry Dennis, the aggressive journalistic style begun by the Senator was continued and expanded. W.H. Dennis was willing, as William and his suffragist wife Agnes had been, to use his newspapers as instruments of progressive reform. With support from the Dennises, the *Herald* championed such causes as public ownership of utilities and the Rainbow Haven summer camps for underprivileged children. The Dennises were also enthusiastic promoters of regional development. In the 1920s W.H. Dennis' boosterism reached new heights when he donated the International Fisherman's Trophy for the Gloucester to Halifax

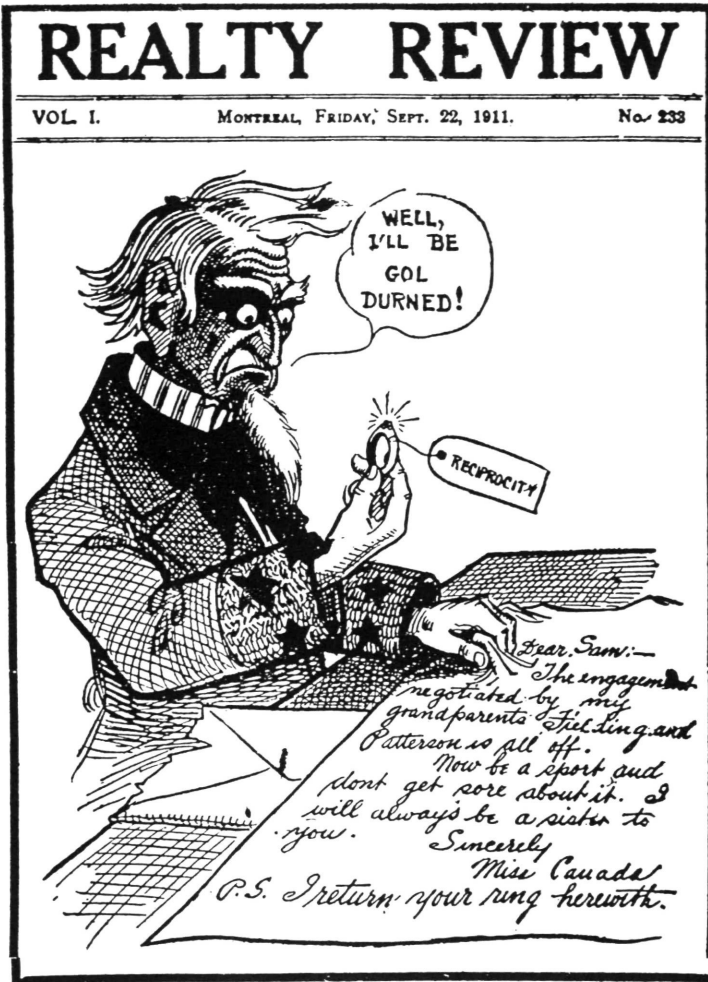
senate) and 18 June 1910 (press). A cartoon published 19 September 1908 portrays Laurier as Old Mother Hubbard going to an empty cupboard to get her poor dog "Western Canada" a bone. There was nothing there because, in the words of the caption, "the other canine descendants residing in the same house had nailed everything in sight".

25 *Montreal Daily Herald*, 27 May 1911.

26 *Halifax Herald*, 30 November 1948. The cartoon in question was in all likelihood the unsigned one which appeared in Montreal newspapers on election day and was re-published by popular demand the following day. See *Montreal Gazette*, 22 and 23 September 1911.

27 *Montreal Daily Herald*, 2 November 1911 to 20 February 1912.

28 The first identifiable McRitchie cartoon appeared in the *Halifax Herald*, 23 September 1919 and the last on 25 March 1937.



4. *The Gazette* (Montreal), 22 and 23 September 1911.

race, and sponsored the famous *Bluenose* to win it. As staunch supporters of the Conservative Party, the Dennises were influential in shaping party policy, both provincially and federally. Nowhere was this influence more obvious than during the Maritime Rights movement of the 1920s.<sup>29</sup>

29 Ernest R. Forbes, *The Maritime Rights Movement, 1919-1927* (Montreal, 1979), p. 124; William March, *Red Line: The Chronicle-Herald and Mail-Star, 1875-1954* (Halifax, 1986), Part III.

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Before hiring McRitchie, the Dennis newspapers had published syndicated cartoons, but no full-time cartoonist had ever been employed in the *Herald* offices. Whether this omission was due to financial considerations or simply to the absence of a worthy applicant is difficult to determine. Certainly the Dennises were conscious of the attention-getting qualities of cartoons and had taken the trouble of seconding cartoonist Newton McConnell from the Toronto *Daily News* for the month prior to the 1916 provincial election.<sup>30</sup> Following the war, W.H. Dennis may have felt that it was his patriotic duty to hire a returning veteran, an experienced cartoonist and advertising executive who might well exercise his talents in his native Nova Scotia rather than elsewhere. Furthermore, by 1919 the *Herald's* circulation was slipping in relation to its legendary rivals, the Halifax *Chronicle* and *Echo*, and a cartoonist might help to give the *Herald* an edge.<sup>31</sup> Finally, in May 1919 the *Herald* had called for a “maritime popular league” to promote regional interests.<sup>32</sup> Cartoons would be a useful vehicle for spreading the gospel of regional reform. Whatever his reasoning, Dennis had secured one of Canada’s best cartoonists at a time when Maritime politics were entering a phase of unprecedented turbulence.

During his early years with the *Herald*, McRitchie must have been extremely busy. In addition to supervising the engraving department (a job he held until 1931 when he became supervisor of the *Herald's* library), he churned out cartoons and line drawings of local events, sometimes producing two or more images a day. His topics ranged from international affairs to local hockey games. Prior to the 1950s few cartoonists had the luxury of expressing their opinion if it differed substantially from that of their employers. W.H. Dennis was opposed to both radical socialism and monopoly capitalism, and expected McRitchie’s cartoons to reflect this perspective. Although McRitchie made himself a propagandist for the “red scare” of 1919-20, he was careful not to offend organized labour, and treated the upstart Farmer and Labour parties in the 1920 provincial election with good humour in an effort to undermine Liberal support. He showed little inclination to poke fun at Conservative Prime Minister Arthur Meighen, but had free rein to caricature William Lyon Mackenzie King and Thomas Crerar, leaders respectively of the federal Liberal and Progressive parties. Despite the earnest support of the *Herald* and its talented cartoonist, there were few rewards at the polls for the Conservatives in the 1920 campaign. Third parties captured the protest vote provincially, while in the following year the Liberals won all 16 of Nova Scotia’s federal seats.

30 *Halifax Herald*, 20 May-20 June 1916.

31 The circulation of the *Herald's* three papers nearly doubled during the 1920s, rising from 25,835 in 1920 to 50,531 in 1930. The circulation of the *Chronicle* and *Echo (Star)* remained around 70 per cent of that of its chief rival in this period. See March, *Red Line*, Appendix IV, p. 396.

32 Forbes, *The Maritime Rights Movement*, p. 22.



5. "The Solid 16" figured prominently in McRitchie cartoons lampooning the provincial Liberal block in Ottawa following the 1921 federal election. (Original cartoon, Acadia University Archives)

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The Conservative Party and its chief propaganda organ offered a stronger challenge in the next round at the polls. Following the war, frustration in the Maritimes with federal policy was widely felt and easy to document. The Conservative Party, out of power provincially for four decades, re-organized around the slogan “Maritime Rights” and attacked the federal Liberals and their provincial offspring for the problems facing the region. Between 1921 and 1925 McRitchie’s cartoons reflected the increasingly strident tone of *Herald* editorials. He took issue repeatedly with the failure of Canadian railways to use Maritime ports, with tariff reductions which exposed the region’s coal and steel industries, and with the general lack of concern by the King administration for the region’s economic ills. A recurring image was that of Nova Scotia’s “Solid Sixteen” Liberal members in Ottawa sitting idly by as the region continued its descent into economic disaster. (See Illustration 5). By the spring of 1925 the *Herald*’s readers, bombarded with bold headlines and McRitchie’s cartoons, were thoroughly inculcated with the image and substance of “Maritime Rights”.<sup>33</sup>

Six weeks before the Nova Scotia election of 25 June 1925, the *Herald*’s aggressive campaign was launched by a McRitchie cartoon in which a determined “Nova Scotia” nailed a flag, emblazoned with the words “Justice for the Maritimes”, to a pole. The caption read “Let’s Keep it at the Masthead!”<sup>34</sup> On 8 June a full-page portrait of a grey-haired mother asking “Where’s My Boy?” made pointed reference to the crippling exodus of the provinces’s young people. The success of the Conservative Party — which captured 40 of the 43 seats in the provincial assembly — no doubt encouraged the use of the Maritime Rights theme in the ensuing federal campaign.<sup>35</sup> McRitchie hurled the opening salvo on 1 July with a cartoon labelled “Silenced”, lampooning the lethargic performance of the “Solid Sixteen”. Two days later, Captain King was told that it was “Time He Got His Wind Up” in view of the Maritime Rights storm brewing. In the two months prior to polling day, McRitchie pulled out all the stops, providing almost daily graphic reinforcement of the Maritime mood. One cartoon portrayed Central Canada and the West as “Hogging the Benefits”,<sup>36</sup> while another depicted King as an ardent suitor wiping his feet on the mat of Maritime Rights in his eagerness to woo the coy maiden of the West.<sup>37</sup> (See Illustration 6). McRitchie got considerable mileage out of King’s unguarded statement, “What are Maritime Rights anyway?” uttered in Kentville during the campaign.<sup>38</sup> (See Illustration 7). As all Maritime

33 The role of Dennis and his newspapers in the movement is skilfully documented by March, *Red Line*, Part III.

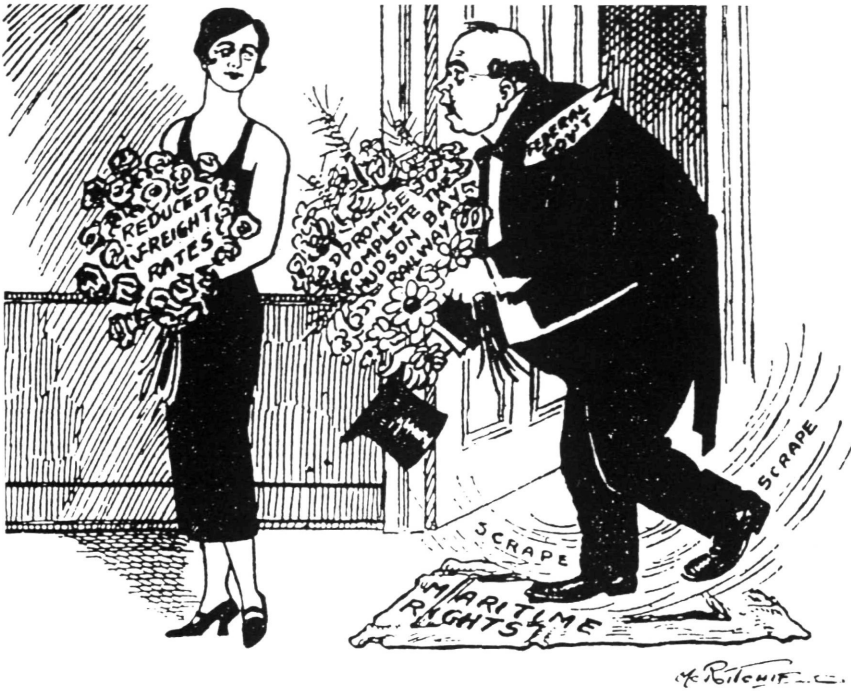
34 *Halifax Herald*, 2 May 1925.

35 The same cartoon appeared in the issue of 23 October 1925 and 2 September 1926.

36 *Halifax Herald*, 29 September 1925.

37 *Halifax Herald*, 3 October 1926.

38 *Halifax Herald*, 22, 26 September 1925.



6. "Wooing the West", *Halifax Herald*, 3 October 1925.



7. "What Are Maritime Rights", *Halifax Herald*, 22 September 1925.

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premiers climbed on board the Maritime Rights bandwagon, McRitchie portrayed Premier J.B.M. Baxter of New Brunswick, Premier J.D. Stewart of Prince Edward Island and Premier E.N. Rhodes of Nova Scotia as “The Three Musketeers” ready to take on Ottawa.<sup>39</sup> (See Illustration 8).

Voters in the Maritime Provinces responded to the message, sending a majority of Conservatives (23 out of 27) to Ottawa, although King, drawing support from Quebec and the West, managed to sustain another minority government. Throughout the fall and winter McRitchie picked away at the unsteady Liberal government, attacking the whale-like Canadian National Railway for swallowing the Intercolonial “Jonah”, decrying the fact that immigrants by-passed the resource-laden Maritimes for desolate western destinations, and highlighting the policies which permitted American corporations to exploit the region’s forest resources. (See Illustrations 9-10). When King’s shaky administration collapsed in 1926 and Meighen’s Conservatives proved unable to sustain support in the House, McRitchie recycled his Maritime Rights themes for a second federal contest.<sup>40</sup> A series of three cartoons published prior to the election on 14 September 1926 outlined contrasting alternatives facing voters and were simply labelled “Your vote on Tuesday will decide”. The choice, according to one caption, was “Whether we shall have a United Canada or abandon Nova Scotia to annexation and exploitation”.<sup>41</sup> Again, Maritimers supported the Conservative Party, but this time King won a majority. Conceding defeat, the *Herald* and McRitchie suggested that Nova Scotians avoid the partisan road leading to disaster and stick to the narrow path of Maritime Rights.<sup>42</sup> When the Duncan Royal Commission on Maritime Claims handed down its report soon after the election, McRitchie simply expressed optimism that the future would be brighter for the region, once its recommendations were implemented.<sup>43</sup>

Several cartoons in the 1926 campaign pointed to a new direction in the debate over public policy. They were designed to belittle King’s old age pension bill, forced upon his administration during the minority interlude of 1925-26. (See Illustration 11). Following the stock market crash of 1929, social policy issues became increasingly urgent. During the 1930 federal election Maritime Rights was down-played as a campaign slogan, and efforts were made to convince the Maritime electorate that Bennett would introduce a better old age pension bill than the feeble effort legislated by King.<sup>44</sup> Regional policy, as portrayed by McRitchie, consisted of implementing more of the Duncan Commission

39 *Halifax Herald*, 23 October 1925.

40 *Halifax Herald*, 2 September 1926.

41 *Halifax Herald*, 11 September 1926.

42 *Halifax Herald*, 17 September 1926.

43 *Halifax Herald*, 28 September 1926

44 *Halifax Herald*, 11 June 1930.

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8. "The Three Musketeers", *Halifax Herald*, 23 October 1925.



9. "And He Passes It By", *Halifax Herald*, 3 April 1926. (Original cartoon, Acadia University Archives)



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recommendations and electing a “native son” who presumably would have a better understanding of regional interests.<sup>45</sup> (See Illustration 12). An appeal was also made to the working people of Nova Scotia with cartoons sporting such labels as “Giving the Farmer a Chance”, and “Giving the Miner A Chance”.<sup>46</sup> With hindsight, it is clear that the Maritime Provinces, and the western world generally, were poised on the brink of a major shift in political perspective that would all but bury regionalism as the primary vehicle of economic reform.

During the 1930s McRitchie’s cartoons continued to lose their edge. With the Conservatives in office both provincially and federally, it became more difficult to deliver the partisan punch that had been the essence of his cartoon humour. McRitchie’s cartoons during the 1933 provincial campaign were heroic efforts, designed to support a dying administration that had become the victim of corrupt electoral practices and economic conditions. Although he kept up a spirited assault on Angus L. Macdonald’s administration in the year following the election, McRitchie eventually gave up the struggle. By the spring of 1935, the *Herald’s* “Staff Artist” was producing illustrations of disasters, court proceedings and sports events, while his cartoons were confined primarily to a weekly “strip” entitled “Events of the Week as seen by the Herald Cartoonist”. These typically included five or six inoffensive images which packed little punch, politically or otherwise.

Although the federal election of October 1935 inspired many political cartoonists in Canada, McRitchie virtually ignored the contest. No doubt he was encouraged to do so by his employer. W.H. Dennis, now a Senator, was distressed by the factionalism that seemed to be undermining the political order in general and the Conservative Party in particular. Since the last federal election, the Social Credit and Cooperative Commonwealth Federation parties had emerged virtually from nowhere to command voter attention. The members of Bennett’s cabinet were themselves divided on how best to proceed. Buffeted from all sides, Bennett, in the dying days of his administration, had endorsed a state-sponsored system of social security. Welfare state legislation was a controversial issue in the 1930s, and the prime minister’s conversion was widely perceived as the cynical act of a desperate man. In July 1935, Bennett’s former Minister of Trade and Commerce, H.H. Stevens, announced that he would promote his own brand of populist reform in his newly formed Reconstruction Party. Not surprisingly, many Conservatives were caught off-guard by these developments, and partisan editors and cartoonists lacked the confidence to produce their customary vigorous commentaries on public affairs.

While confusion in the ranks made it difficult for Dennis and McRitchie to fight the battles of old, the provincial Liberals showed a new sense of purpose.

45 *Halifax Herald*, 16, 25 26 July 1930.

46 *Halifax Herald*, 23, 24 July 1930.



10. "The People Follow Their Natural Resources", *Halifax Herald*, 16 April 1926. (Original Cartoon, Acadia University Archives)



11. "Protect Them From This Sort of Thing", *Halifax Herald*, 9 September 1926.

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By the fall of 1932 the *Chronicle* was publishing a series of hard-hitting cartoons by Robert Chambers, a young artist who had recently returned to his native province from the United States. Chambers produced elegantly crafted, cleverly conceived cartoons that drew enthusiastic public attention. His sense of caricature was highly developed and even the letters in his labels had a professional look. In comparison, McRitchie's efforts seemed outdated and even amateur.

Born and raised in the university town of Wolfville, Chambers had displayed an early interest in journalism. While still a student at Horton Academy, "Bobby" Chambers produced his own illustrated newspaper, *The Weekly Oriole*, which he apparently sold to the bemused faculty of Acadia University.<sup>47</sup> A 17-year-old Chambers published his first cartoon in the *Halifax Chronicle* on 2 May 1923. (See Illustration 13). In it he depicted Conservative MLA Howard Corning chopping Nova Scotia away from Canada, a comment on the Yarmouth politician's motion for a referendum on Nova Scotia's withdrawal from Confederation. Chambers had escaped the gathering political storm in his native province by moving to New York in 1924. There he studied briefly at the Arts Students' League, before taking a series of the many jobs open to a gifted illustrator in the American metropolis. Chambers drew animated cartoons for Paul Terry of Aesop Fables fame, and worked for the *New York Evening Graphic* with Broadway columnist Walter Winchell and sports editor Ed Sullivan. When the Depression descended he found himself out of work and survived briefly by illustrating the serialization of Erich Remarque's 1931 war novel "The Road Back" for United Features Syndicate. In 1932 Chambers himself took the road back to Nova Scotia, a victim of the rising tide of unemployment that turned New York into a nightmare for freelance artists.

Chambers quickly made his mark at the *Chronicle*, launching a sustained attack on the Bennett administration for its high tariff policies and seeming indifference to the plight of the unemployed. E.N. Rhodes, the once-lionized Maritime Rights premier and now Bennett's Minister of Finance, was singled out for particular attention. On 28 March, for instance, Rhodes was shown as a vicious schoolboy hurling a brick at "the boys back home" in the form of the federal government's tax on sugar.<sup>48</sup> A cartoon depicting Rhodes as responsible for depriving a widow and her six children of sugar prompted a *Herald* editorial

47 Details of Chambers' career can be found in Glen Hancock, "Robert Chambers: Dean of Cartoonists", *The Atlantic Advocate* (November 1981), pp. 42-46 and Andrew E. Marble, *Nova Scotians at Home and Abroad* (Windsor, N.S., 1977). Collections of original Chambers cartoons are housed at the Museum of Caricature, National Archives of Canada, Public Archives of Nova Scotia and the Acadia University Archives. Copies of *The Weekly Oriole* and early drawings by Chambers can be found, along with other biographical information and clippings of Chambers cartoons, in the Acadia University Archives, Vaughan Memorial Library, Acadia University, Wolfville, Nova Scotia.

48 *Halifax Chronicle*, 28 March 1933.



12. "Maritime Policies for Maritime People", *Halifax Herald*, 26 July 1930.



13. Chambers' first cartoon for the *Halifax Chronicle*, "Shades of the Old Leaders", appeared on 2 May 1923.

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calling for “moderation”.<sup>49</sup> But excess prevailed. As the date for the provincial election drew near, Chambers set his sights on the Harrington administration with such effect that even the premier was forced to publicly acknowledge the impact of the *Chronicle*’s “clever cartoonist”.<sup>50</sup> His cartoons made pointed reference to the gap between the promises of 1925 and the realities of 1933 (See Illustration 14), the franchise manipulation that characterized the campaign, and the link between the Conservatives and the Depression. In “A fact worth remembering”, published on 17 August, Chambers implied that vast sums of money were being wasted on expensive construction projects while mothers’ allowances continued to be rejected as a public policy priority. Recurring images included an oinking pig and a portly Mountie sporting the label “Halifax Herald”. The former was a reference to the government’s “assistance” programme to farmers that was announced conveniently close to the election, while the latter was a spoof on the Conservative newspaper and the unpopular Royal Canadian Mounted Police, who, as a cost-saving measure, had been hired to replace a provincially-sponsored police force. The Nova Scotia Liberal Association was so impressed with Chambers that they published a selection of his best pieces in comic book format under the title *Bound For Oblivion. The Harrington Government is on its way out. The Story in Pictures. The Eastern Chronicle*, a Liberal paper which also published cartoons by Chambers, boasted that Chambers had put it over McRitchie, “like a tent”.<sup>51</sup>

Despite the quality of his work, Chambers disappeared from the *Chronicle* abruptly after the election. Perhaps realizing their mistake, the managers of the *Chronicle* soon re-hired him as a photographer and occasional cartoonist. During the federal campaign of 1935, Chambers had a field-day with the faction-ridden Conservative Party. His portrayal of Bennett as an embattled warrior mounted on a broken steed, holding aloft a mutilated sword while all around him were in rout, nicely captured the spirit of contest.<sup>52</sup> Several of his cartoons cruelly satirized the millionaire Prime Minister. (See Illustration 15). Because Chambers was deemed to be so effective, Dennis tried everything within his power to lure him away from the rival newspaper. Chambers resisted all blandishments until the eve of the 1937 provincial election, when Dennis offered him a five-year contract at \$75.00 a week, \$30.00 more than he was making at the *Chronicle*. It was a princely sum for the Depression years and Chambers could

49 *Halifax Herald*, 29 March 1933.

50 Clipping, “Premier Lauds Staff Artist”, Chambers Scrapbook, Robert W. Chambers Collection, Acadia University Archives.

51 Scrapbook, Chambers Collection, Acadia University Archives.

52 *Halifax Chronicle*, 12 October 1935. See *Yarmouth Herald*, 24 September 1935, and *Sackville Tribune*, 17 October 1935, for editorial praise of Chambers.

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14. In the 1925 Maritime Rights campaign, McRitchie had drawn the face of a mother asking “Where’s My Boy?” Chambers portrayed Harrington in “Wait and See” as a cruel and posturing hypocrite in this cartoon published in the *Halifax Chronicle*, 12 June 1933.



15. In “The Asset” Chambers used his skills to satirize the prime minister in the 1935 election campaign, *Halifax Chronicle*, 7 October 1935 (Chambers Collection, Acadia University).

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not resist the financial security it promised.<sup>53</sup> The Halifax *Graphic* announced rumours of the coup on 6 May. Two weeks later, on 22 May 1937, a Chambers cartoon appeared in the *Herald*, showing Premier Angus L. Macdonald and his ministers peering into a crystal ball while the spectres of broken election promises hovered around them. Macdonald, who had given Chambers \$100.00 severance pay after the 1933 campaign, apparently refused thereafter to speak to him. An extraordinary feature of the 1937 provincial election was the publication of cartoons by Chambers in both the *Herald* and the *Chronicle*. The latter simply recycled the cartoons from the 1933 campaign, much to the embarrassment of the *Herald* and the Conservative Party generally. Notwithstanding this “complication”, it was clear that Chambers had won the “battle of the cartoonists”. Despite offers from outside the region,<sup>54</sup> he remained with the *Herald* until his retirement in 1977.

Suddenly a fifth wheel at the *Herald*, the 56-year-old McRitchie found work with his former employers in the real estate business, J.J. Carrick, this time in their Toronto offices. His days as a newspaper cartoonist had come to an end. There is no evidence that McRitchie left the *Herald* with hard feelings and it may be, as was suggested in the *Herald*'s obituary of McRitchie, that he was indeed a good-natured sort who “never made an enemy” and was “a philosopher to the end”.<sup>55</sup> Obviously, under the circumstances which prevailed in 1937, a philosophical approach was required. The *Herald* could not afford two cartoonists, especially with one as highly paid as Chambers. McRitchie did not remain long in his Toronto exile. Upon the outbreak of the Second World War, he returned to Halifax to administer the government's telephone censorship policy. When the war ended he was employed briefly with the Information Division of the Provincial Department of Trade and Industry. He died after a lengthy illness on 29 November 1948. Among his pall-bearers were colleagues from the *Herald*.<sup>56</sup>

McRitchie had retired from his cartoon career at a time when North American culture was experiencing a transformation that would greatly alter the style of newspaper cartoonists. Following the 1937 campaign, in which the Conservatives suffered yet another crushing defeat, Chambers produced a series of cartoons to accompany the *Herald*'s “Bill of Rights for Nova Scotia”. (See Illustration 16). Gone was the regional preoccupation of the 1920s and in its place was a platform advocating a system of social security and economic justice for Nova Scotians. The emphasis now was on the redistribution of wealth and the heroes of the hour

53 Details of the manoeuvring around Chambers' hiring can be found in March, *Red Line*, pp. 246, 260-61, and have been confirmed in letters from Robert Chambers to the author, 5 and 17 December 1989.

54 Hancock, “Robert Chambers: Dean of Cartoonists”, p. 45.

55 *Halifax Herald*, 30 November 1948.

56 *Halifax Herald*, 2 December 1948.



16. This illustration which appeared in the 1 July 1937 issue of the *Herald* kicked off Senator Dennis' Bill of Rights for Nova Scotia campaign. "The Halifax Herald", it was announced, "stands for a happy, contented and prosperous Nova Scotia within a united Canada".

were the working people of Nova Scotia. For 17 consecutive issues, readers of the *Herald* were treated to Chambers illustrations which called for everything from urban renewal and better highways to equal access to higher education and old age pensions. The imagery in these works was classic rather than comic in conception and bore little resemblance to the cartoon art that readers had come to expect from Chambers. The Second World War and the Cold War moved cartoonists further away from partisan venom. When newspapers amalgamated, as was the case with the *Herald* and *Chronicle* in 1948, the impetus for partisan cartoon battles was largely eliminated. Meanwhile, the embattled "little man", offering wry comment on the antics of government, business, bureaucracy and private life became a popular and enduring figure in Chambers' cartoons.

Chambers was not the only one to shift his political focus in this period. The triumph of corporate capitalism and consumer society encouraged a new approach to culture and ideology that influenced creative artists as well as newspaper editors and politicians throughout the western world.<sup>57</sup> While the Depression

57 Warren I. Susman, *Culture as History: The Transformation of American Society in the*



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drew attention to the problems of want in the midst of plenty, the Second World War served as the mid-wife to Canada's new welfare state. Postwar material prosperity and Cold War ideology consolidated the emerging consensus that a vigorous capitalist economy, individual initiative and bureaucratic state intervention within a democratic political framework would produce the best of all possible worlds. People in Atlantic Canada, like people elsewhere in North America, responded to this world view. It became the cartoonist's task to poke fun at, but never to seriously challenge, this mass consumer culture which, after all, provided newspapers with an increasing proportion of their revenues in the form of advertisements. When regionalism emerged as a vehicle for reform in Atlantic Canada in the mid-1950s, it did so within a new cultural context, and the cartoons of regional protest lacked the partisan punch typical of the Maritime Rights era.<sup>58</sup>

Until we have more case studies of early Canadian cartoonists, it will be difficult to make a final assessment of McRitchie's career. Nevertheless it is clear that, despite having produced cartoons that received favourable attention, McRitchie failed to establish a reputation that survived his dismissal from the *Herald*. During the early years of McRitchie's career, especially when he produced for the *Eye Opener*, his cartoons displayed a variety of styles and concerns, but once hired by the *Herald*, he was hobbled by an employer who determined not only the content but also the style — the Senator hated white spaces<sup>59</sup> — of cartoons published in his newspapers. The most successful collaboration of cartoonist and publisher developed around the issue of Maritime Rights. While McRitchie cartoons as artifacts reveal much about Nova Scotia society in the interwar years (international affairs, transportation, sports and the changing roles of women, for instance), any lasting reputation will surely rest on the cartoons he produced in the Maritime Rights campaign of 1925-26. The imagery in his cartoons produced at this time is sure-footed and the focus is clear. "Let's Keep it at the Masthead" was recycled for three elections and became something of a symbol of the regional cause. Although McRitchie never excelled at caricature, he managed in a number of clever cartoons to successfully lampoon Prime Minister King, depicting him as a pompous, ignorant and uncaring politician. That McRitchie could churn out inspired art work on Maritime Rights, sometimes at the rate of one a day, for over a year attests to the intensity of the movement which he sought to portray and to his own commitment to it.

*Twentieth Century* (New York, 1973); Lary May, ed., *Recasting America: Culture and Politics in the Age of the Cold War* (Chicago, 1989).

58 Margaret Conrad, "The Atlantic Revolution of the 1950s", in Berkeley Fleming, ed., *Beyond Anger and Longing: Community and Development in Atlantic Canada* (Fredericton, 1988), pp. 55-96.

59 March, *Red Line*, p. 260.

McRitchie's failure to embrace the cartooning possibilities of the 1930s almost certainly reflected the restraining influence of Senator Dennis as much as his flagging creativity. As Dennis' political and economic interests began to transcend partisan politics, the caricature and social criticism upon which successful cartoonists of the period thrived became blunted. Even Chambers admits to having had difficulty finding inspiration when he moved to the *Herald*.<sup>60</sup> That he managed to adapt to the changing circumstances is a tribute to his artistic talent and to his sense of professionalism. Chambers, more so than McRitchie, could draw, and he appealed to an audience which was increasingly charmed by the cartoon style — and content — of the Walt Disney Studios.

Notwithstanding changes in political and cultural sensibilities since the 1920s, McRitchie's regional preoccupations — underdevelopment, out-migration, railway policy and provincial subsidies, for example — are still with us. Most cartoonists in the region, including Robert Chambers and his successor at the *Chronicle-Herald*, Bruce MacKinnon, have passed judgment on matters regional and have sometimes resorted to the same metaphorical images that inspired McRitchie. Following the Second World War, regional alienation re-emerged as a potent cultural and political force that could serve new political interests as well as old political parties. E.R. Forbes has argued that a "sense of injustice, fuelled by new and recurring grievances, has been one of the most conspicuous aspects of a continuing Maritime regional consciousness".<sup>61</sup> The cartoon art of Donald McRitchie for the first time gave visual shape to this collective sense of alienation and can still bring a knowing smile to the lips of Maritime Canadians.

60 Letter from Robert Chambers to the author, 5 December 1989.

61 Forbes, *Maritime Rights*, p. 192.