

Revisiting the Politics of Maritime Rights: Bourgeois Saint John and Regional Protest in the 1920s

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RESEARCH NOTE

Revisiting the Politics of Maritime Rights: Bourgeois Saint John and Regional Protest in the 1920s

IN FEBRUARY 1926 F. MACLURE SCLANDERS, commissioner of the Saint John Board of Trade, reported to Prime Minister William Lyon Mackenzie King that the local United States consul had collected \$40,000 in head taxes from people leaving Saint John for the United States over the previous 12 months. The regional nature of the economic crisis in the Maritimes, which had begun as part of a larger international crisis in 1920, had become patently obvious by mid-decade. In this context, Sclanders warned King of a “rapidly growing spirit of bitterness and even hatred toward Central Canada” that was beginning to take root in the Maritimes.¹ Much of this regional bitterness was articulated under the banner of the Maritime Rights movement, which, as E.R. Forbes observes, focused upon “the severe injustices inflicted upon the Maritimes by the federal government.”² It was no anomaly that Sclanders, a representative of Saint John’s business community, claimed to speak on behalf of the region in his correspondence with Mackenzie King as wealthy Saint John residents played a leading role in articulating the discourse of Maritime Rights.

Scholars have long-acknowledged the leadership role of Maritime elites in the Maritime Rights movement. The significance of the movement’s elite leadership, however, has been interpreted in various ways. In a think-piece written nearly four decades ago, George Rawlyk drew upon Richard Hofstadter’s concept of “the paranoid style” in American politics to argue that anti-Upper Canadian and anti-Confederation attitudes had coalesced to produce a paranoid style in Nova Scotia regionalism, which resulted in a brand of politics that deflected criticism away from the local establishment and safely funneled the anger of farmers, workers, and fishers towards Ottawa.³ Differing from the conspiratorial connotations of Rawlyk’s interpretation, a decade later E.R. Forbes located Maritime Rights within the progressivism of the early 20th century in his *Maritime Rights Movement* and thus countered the earlier scholarly convention of dismissing the region as a bastion of conservatism as expressed in Frank Underhill’s now-infamous assertion that “nothing ever happens down there.”⁴ The *Maritime Rights Movement* emphasizes the theme of regional solidarity, presenting the movement’s business and professional leadership as a “natural,” organic phenomenon; thus, according to Forbes, Maritime Rights was a broad-based movement that articulated the deeply held concerns of ordinary

1 F. Maclure Sclanders to W.L. King, 12 August 1926, King Papers, MG 26, J1, vol. 162, 117226-7, Library and Archives Canada (LAC). The author would like to thank the anonymous referees and the editors of *Acadiensis* for their comments as well as the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council for assistance in financing this research.

2 Ernest R. Forbes, *The Maritime Rights Movement, 1919-1927* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1979), p. 191.

3 G.A. Rawlyk, “Nova Scotia’s Regional Protest, 1867-1967,” *Queen’s Quarterly*, 75 (Spring 1968), pp. 105-23.

4 Frank H. Underhill, *The Image of Confederation* (Toronto: Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, 1964), p. 63.

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Maritimers for economic and social justice.⁵ Later scholarship viewed Maritime Rights within the broader regional context of shifting class relations. During the 1990s David Frank pointed to the close alignment between the interests and outlook of regional business leaders and the political objectives of Maritime Rights while Ian McKay and Suzanne Morton used Gramsci's concept of hegemony to explain the movement's political ascendancy.⁶ More recently, and along similar lines, Sean Cadigan has observed the continued centrality of class in Canadian regionalism, noting that "the regional politics of Confederation have become largely the mediation of competing capitalist interests for the sake of legitimizing capitalism overall."⁷

What is most striking about the scholarship on Maritime Rights is the durability of Forbes's interpretation. In spite of numerous scholarly statements that have pointed to the movement's ideological and class biases, Forbes's view has remained authoritative. Political scientist Donald Savoie, for example, draws upon Forbes's interpretation of Maritime Rights in his recent book on Maritime economic development as if no other interpretation existed.⁸ Savoie's selectivity was no doubt a product of his own theoretical inclinations; one must, however, acknowledge that there is no richly documented alternative explanation to the Forbes thesis. David Frank discussed Maritime Rights in a synthetic piece on the Maritimes during the 1920s, McKay and Morton examined the movement within the context of a broader essay on the region's place in the post-First World War labour revolt, and other works such as McKay's *The Quest of the Folk* and Janine Brodie's *The Political Economy of Canadian Regionalism* are sprinkled with interesting statements on aspects of the movement. Although these are examples of fine scholarship, they do not examine the Maritime Rights movement in any great detail nor do they set out to do so.⁹ This essay offers a case study of the economic elite's involvement in the Maritime Rights movement that focuses on the urban bourgeoisie of Saint John, New Brunswick. It argues that prominent Saint John residents articulated a discourse of regional protest that, by politicizing the crisis and

5 Forbes, *Maritime Rights Movement*, pp. vii-x. For similar treatments of Maritime Rights that are largely uncritical of the role of the business class in the movement, see Michael Hatfield, "J.B.M. Baxter and the Maritime Rights Movement" (honours thesis, Mount Allison University, 1970); Kenneth G. Jones, "Response to Regional Disparity in the Maritime Provinces, 1926-1942: A Study in Canadian Intergovernmental Relations" (master's thesis, University of New Brunswick, 1980); and Paul B. Wear, "The Business of Regional Protest: Chapters in the Early History of the Atlantic Provinces Transportation Commission, 1925-1951" (master's thesis, University of New Brunswick, 1996). While this scholarship has been useful in adding to our understanding of regionalist politics and the federal government's responses to regional protest, it has largely overlooked the internal class dynamics of Maritime society during this period.

6 David Frank, "The 1920s: Class and Region, Resistance and Accommodation," in E.R. Forbes and D.A. Muise, eds., *The Atlantic Provinces in Confederation* (Toronto and Fredericton: University of Toronto Press and Acadiensis Press, 1993), pp. 233-71; Ian McKay and Suzanne Morton, "The Maritimes: Expanding the Circle of Resistance," in Craig Heron, ed., *The Workers' Revolt in Canada, 1917-1925* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1998), pp. 43-86.

7 Sean Cadigan, "Regional Politics are Class Politics: A Newfoundland and Labrador Perspective on Regions," *Acadiensis*, XXXV, 2 (Spring 2006), p. 168.

8 Donald Savoie, *Visiting Grandchildren: Economic Development in the Maritimes* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2006), pp. 35-6.

9 Ian McKay, *The Quest of the Folk: Antimodernism and Cultural Selection in Twentieth-Century Nova Scotia* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1994); Janine Brodie, *The Political Economy of Canadian Regionalism* (Toronto: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1990).

locating its origins within the realm of parliamentary politics, shored up their own political and economic leadership in a time of regional economic crisis. Enduring liberal notions surrounding the sanctity of the contract and the benefits of private enterprise structured this regionalist discourse of capital-rich Saint John residents and helped construct their political and economic leadership as “commonsense,” which effaced the class-conscious nature of their behaviour as well as the contested nature of their power. Viewed from the local context of Saint John, then, Maritime Rights assumes considerable importance as a self-legitimizing movement of the local elite.

Saint John’s economic elite operated within the context of a well-established urban setting rooted in a much longer history. Settled in 1783 by Loyalists fleeing the American Revolution, Saint John had by the mid-19th century become a centre of the international timber and lumber trade, a significant shipbuilding centre, and home to a plethora of related mercantile and manufacturing activities.¹⁰ During the 19th century sectors of Saint John’s economy had been taken down the “revolutionary path” to industrial production by individuals such as Thomas McAvity; apprenticed as an ironmonger and the owner of a hardware store in the first half of the 19th century, McAvity, along with his sons, built a family enterprise that centred upon a large brass foundry in the second half of the century.¹¹ Confederation and the National Policy did even more to speed Saint John’s transition towards industrial capitalism.¹² The growth and optimism of the 1880s, however, waned somewhat as the 20th century approached. The tentacles of Montreal’s economic dominance had begun to exert a stronger hold on the urban economy of Saint John and, while local capitalists sought to keep the city’s cotton mills in local hands, capital-rich residents generally encouraged tighter integration with Central Canada as evidenced by the attempts of city boosters during the 1890s to establish Saint John as “Canada’s Winter Port.”¹³

In spite of the city’s growing economic dependency, Saint John maintained considerable economic and political clout within New Brunswick and the Maritimes during the early 20th century. Before the First World War, Saint John’s business community remained optimistic about their city’s industrial potential if less sure about their own abilities to forge ahead without the help of outside capital.¹⁴ The city’s

10 T.W. Acheson, *Saint John: The Making of a Colonial Urban Community* (Toronto: University of Toronto, 1985); T.W. Acheson, “The Great Merchant and Economic Development in St. John, 1820-1850,” *Acadiensis*, VIII, 2 (Spring 1979), pp. 3-27.

11 Kathryn Wilson, “James Hendricks McAvity,” *Dictionary of Canadian Biography, Volume 13* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1994), pp. 610-11.

12 T.W. Acheson, “The National Policy and the Industrialization of the Maritimes, 1880-1910,” *Acadiensis*, I, 2 (Spring 1972), pp. 3-4, 8.

13 Acheson, “National Policy,” pp. 17-18; Paula Chegwiddden Felt and Lawrence F. Felt, “Capital Accumulation and Industrial Development in Nineteenth Century New Brunswick: Some Preliminary Comments,” in Lewis Fischer and Eric Sager, eds., *The Enterprising Canadians: Entrepreneurs and Economic Development in Eastern Canada, 1820-1914* (St. John’s: Memorial University, 1979), pp. 62-3; Elizabeth McGahan, *The Port of Saint John: From Confederation to Nationalization, 1867-1927* (Saint John: National Harbours Board, 1982), p. 160; C.M. Wallace, “Saint John, New Brunswick (1800-1900),” *Urban History Review*, 1 (1975), p. 14; Robert H. Babcock, “Economic Development in Portland (Me.) and Saint John (N.B.) During the Age of Iron and Steam, 1850-1914,” *American Review of Canadian Studies*, 9, 1 (Spring 1977), p. 29.

14 Don Nerbas, “The Changing World of the Bourgeoisie in Saint John, New Brunswick in the 1920s” (master’s thesis, University of New Brunswick, 2006), pp. 16-17.

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workers, too, subscribed to the dominant assumption that industrial development would be a permanent condition.¹⁵ Within this context, class interests often trumped the ideal of community solidarity. Indeed, Saint John was the most strike-plagued city in the region during the period from 1901 to 1914, causing local capitalists to worry more about the effectiveness of their paternalism than the place of the Maritimes within Confederation.¹⁶ By the time Sclanders arrived on the scene in the mid-1920s, the priorities of the local bourgeoisie had changed considerably. The transformations that underwrote these changing priorities, though, had not occurred by the end of the First World War when an expansive, powerful labour movement fundamentally shaped local politics. Thus, bourgeois regional protest must be viewed in light of changing class relations in the post-war decade.

Anti-labour tactics entailed considerable political risk in the period immediately following the war. This was especially apparent on 30 December 1918, when Commissioner of Public Safety Harry R. McClellan and Commissioner of Sewer and Water E.J. Hilyard were defeated decisively in a recall vote. The recall drive had been initiated in September by the Saint John Trades and Labour Council in response to the city's lockout of the local police. Designed to stamp out the attempts of Saint John policemen to affiliate with the Trades and Labour Congress of Canada (TLC), the lockout failed. Labour candidates were elected and a conciliation board found in favour of the policemen in February 1919.¹⁷ The Saint John *Globe* concluded that while it was thought that the recall vote "would array the mercantile and business classes on one side and the working classes on the other side . . . the vote tells a different story and makes clear that opposition to Commissioners McLellan and Hilyard was not confined to any particular class."¹⁸ With apparent support from some middle-class elements, labour was not a force that could be easily opposed.¹⁹ Realizing this, local wholesaler E. Allen Schofield distanced himself from the oppositional tactics of McClellan and Hilyard, arguing that "the labor organizations can do a whole lot more trouble than appears on the surface, and it is better to avoid trouble."²⁰ By the post-war era, organized labour exercised considerable power in

15 Ian McKay, "The 1910s: The Stillborn Triumph of Progressive Reform," in Forbes and Muise, *Atlantic Provinces in Confederation*, pp. 192-202.

16 Ian McKay, "Strikes in the Maritimes, 1901-1914," *Acadiensis*, XIII, 1 (Autumn 1983), p. 14. McKay does not make such a statement in plain terms, but it seems more than implicit in this article. He starts the article by discussing the astonishment and anger of Saint John nail manufacturer James Pender when his workers go on strike in 1912, and he goes on to mention that the paradox of the period was how the loss of economic control by indigenous capitalists created the temporary conditions for more coherent class and regional traditions to emerge.

17 *Standard* (Saint John), 27 February 1919, p. 10.

18 *Globe* (Saint John), 31 December 1918, p. 4.

19 Robert Babcock has suggested that labour enjoyed support from a diverse cross-section of the community, including elements of the middle class, during the street railway strike in Saint John in 1914. See Robert H. Babcock, "The Saint John Street Railwaymen's Strike and Riot, 1914," *Acadiensis*, XI, 2 (Spring 1982), pp. 25-26 (n.62). Also of note is Robert D. Johnston's *The Radical Middle Class: Populist Democracy and the Question of Capitalism in Progressive-Era Portland, Oregon* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003), a work that demonstrates that middle-class politics could be overtly anti-capitalist and open to working-class alliances in early 20th-century America.

20 *Globe*, 1 October 1918, p. 8.

Saint John; bourgeois Saint Johners could not avoid that reality in their political calculations.

With an expanding local population estimated at 60,000 in 1918, and impressive growth in trade and manufacturing through the war, the Saint John Board of Trade heartily approved of the action of its president, A.H. Wetmore, when he telegraphed 18 Canadian cities the message “Forward Canada!” – a message that proclaimed in part: “Let this be the watchword from ocean to ocean.”²¹ The following year Wetmore argued that co-operation, together with “faith, confidence, [and] activity,” were key ingredients in the making of an assuredly bright economic future.²² The industrialists and merchants who shaped the politics of the Saint John Board of Trade also embraced the progressive belief that capital and labour could join hands in the forward march of capitalist development. Issues such as port development and public power development served to unify local business and labour leaders while local businessmen such as merchant W. Frank Hatheway and broom and brush manufacturer Lewis Simms also advocated progressive labour legislation.²³ In the period immediately following the war, however, this vision was not embraced by the entire business community. In particular, the finance capitalists interested in the New Brunswick Power Company opposed the brand of progressivism that the city’s community-minded merchants and manufacturers espoused, especially as it related to public power development. Debate raged in the daily press over this issue, pitting the pro-public power Liberal dailies against the Conservative *Standard*, which defended the position of the local capitalists who owned the power system.²⁴ Re-organized in 1916 by local financier Howard P. Robinson, the New Brunswick Power Company owned and operated the city’s power and street railway systems.²⁵ Local capitalists interested in the street railway system had already proven themselves quite willing to face down workers in the 1914 street railway strike and riot; representatives of the

21 Minutes, Saint John Board of Trade, 29 November 1918, S 229, file 136, New Brunswick Museum (NBM).

22 *Canada Year Book, 1920* (Ottawa: Dominion Bureau of Statistics, 1921), p. 572; Minutes, Saint John Board of Trade, 3 February 1919, S 229, file 136, NBM.

23 For biographical material on Hatheway see Peter J. Mitham, “Warren Franklin Hatheway,” *Dictionary of Canadian Biography, Volume 15* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2005), pp. 460-1 and J.K. Chapman, *Hair from a Black Stallion’s Tail* (Fredericton: J.K. Chapman, 1982). For more on his politics see George Henry Allaby, “New Brunswick’s Prophets of Radicalism, 1880-1914” (master’s thesis, University of New Brunswick, 1972), chapter 3 and Janice Cook, “Child Labour in Saint John, New Brunswick and the Campaign for Factory Legislation, 1880-1905” (master’s thesis, University of New Brunswick, 1994), chapter 2. For a discussion of Simms’s “community-minded” entrepreneurship see Nerbas, “Changing World of the Bourgeoisie”, pp. 27-9 while Simms’s position on workmen’s compensation is documented in William Y. Smith, Jr., “Axis of Administration: Saint John Reformers and Bureaucratic Centralization in New Brunswick, 1911-1925” (master’s thesis, University of New Brunswick, 1978), chapter 3.

24 For a discussion of the public power debate in Saint John see Smith, “Axis of Administration,” chapter 2. Finance capitalists were capitalists whose accumulation strategies centred on financial activities (promoters and stock brokers) and/or who were linked to financial institutions. This was a fairly small group in Saint John. Howard Robinson was the most active and important finance capitalist in Saint John in the 1920s.

25 *Globe*, 16 January 1919, p. 5; *Globe*, 13 January 1919, p. 6.

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New Brunswick Power Company were to prove themselves just as militantly anti-labour in the early 1920s.²⁶

When Saint John emerged as the focal point of Maritime Rights in the mid-1920s, the local strength of labour had been greatly diminished. As Ian McKay and Suzanne Morton observe, for instance, by 1920-21 the post-war strength of labour in Saint John was coming to an end.²⁷ In 1921 and 1922, there were six labour disputes in the city, all of which had been initiated by employers' demands for increased workplace control, wage cuts, and/or increased hours.²⁸ In 1921, for example, Stanley Elkin, managing director of the Maritime Nail Works, responded to the unwillingness of workers to accept wage cuts of 25 to 40 per cent by locking them out; by the middle of the decade Elkin had transferred his business activities to Montreal.²⁹ That year New Brunswick Power sparked a major labour dispute with its employees by introducing the controversial "one-man car," promulgating wage cuts, and insisting on dealing with its employees as individuals.³⁰ New Brunswick Power aimed to do nothing less than break the union. The company's manager, Percy W. Thomson, announced that "one would

26 For the 1914 strike see Babcock, "The Saint John Street Railwaymen's Strike and Riot, 1914," *Acadiensis*, XI, 2 (Spring 1982), pp. 3-27. The line between industrial and finance capitalists was permeable. The president of the company in 1914 had been Hugh H. McLean, corporate lawyer, financier, and future lieutenant governor. So in both the pre- and post-war period one could say that the company was being led by the same sort of businessmen. Babcock describes Hugh H. McLean as an industrialist, but that observation is rooted in a misapplication of Gutman's paradigm from his studies of 19th-century American communities, where small merchants showed support for workers against big industrialists. There were no industrialists, in fact, on the company's board of directors in 1914. This is apparent from Babcock's own evidence (p. 9). See also Hubert G. Gutman, "Class, Status, and Community Power in Nineteenth-Century American Industrial Cities," in Gutman, *Work, Culture, and Society in Industrializing America* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1976), pp. 234-92.

27 McKay and Morton, "Expanding the Circle of Resistance," p. 67.

28 *Labour Gazette*, March 1922, pp. 300, 303-4; *Labour Gazette*, March 1923, p. 251.

29 Strikes and Lockouts File, *Ottawa Journal*, 3 January 1921, RG 27, vol. 324, file 30, LAC; B.M. Greene, ed., *Who's Who in Canada, 1925-26* (Toronto: International Press, 1925), p. 1717; E.R. Forbes, "Misguided Symmetry: The Destruction of Regional Transportation Policy for the Maritimes," in David Jay Bercuson, ed., *Canada and the Burden of Unity* (Toronto: Macmillan of Canada, 1977), p. 70.

30 Strikes and Lockouts File, *Manitoba Free Press*, 17 May 1921, RG 27, vol. 327, file 161, LAC; *Standard*, 25 May 1921, LAC. In July 1920, a strike of street railway employees had been narrowly avoided; the strike bid was due to New Brunswick Power's attempt to implement the use of the "one-man car" or street railway cars manned by only one person as opposed to the standard cars operated by two workers. The union claimed that the "one-man car" was unsafe. On 12 July, in the office of Mayor E. Allan Schofield, the president of the company L.R. Ross met with Fred A. Campbell, president of the Saint John Trades and Labour Council and representatives for the street railway workers. The two sides reached a compromise: the workers would receive a ten-cent-per-hour increase and the company would not change to the contentious "one-man car" although it would be allowed to use those that it had already begun to construct on a trial basis, subject to future negotiations. If no resolution could be reached over the issue of one-man cars, the company and union agreed that they would submit their dispute to conciliation under the Lemieux Act. In spite of this agreement, merely four days later the threat of strike again loomed when the company tested the "one-man car." Fred A. Campbell threatened a general walkout of New Brunswick Power Company employees "if the one-man car again makes its appearance in the streets." No strike materialized that time. See Strikes and Lockouts File, *Standard*, 12 July 1921; *Montreal Gazette*, 13 July 1920; *Globe*, 13 July 1921; *Halifax Chronicle*, 14 July 1921; *Standard*, 17 July 1920; and *Montreal Gazette*, 26 July 1920, vol. 327, file 161, LAC.

think from the attitude adopted by the union representatives that there was a shortage of labor, whereas, as a matter of fact, the Power Company can fill its ranks many times over with people who want to work, and for less wages than what it has indicated it may pay its old employees.” He concluded that “the time is past when a public utility must take orders from its employees.”³¹ Summarily rejecting the recommendations of a conciliation board in June, the directors of New Brunswick Power concluded “that the company must have control of its employees.”³² New Brunswick Power won the ensuing struggle with the union, with the help of crucial assistance by the state. The Royal Canadian Mounted Police, for instance, was called into Saint John to protect the company’s property in late June (although in July, when street railway services were resumed with scab labour, company property was destroyed in a number of separate incidents).³³ In addition, the union’s attempt to run a competing jitney service, begun 20 July with the establishment of the Union Bus Company, was stifled later in the year by an unsympathetic municipal government.³⁴ Ira Ferris, president of the street and electric railway workers’ union local, claimed that “the city was responsible for cutting out the bus service, as council had enacted a by-law which practically fenced in the car tracks, so far as the buses were concerned, and had put such a burden on the bus company in fines that the company was unable to meet its other obligations.”³⁵ The expansive labour movement of the immediate post-war period had been dealt a decisive blow. Speaking to a national audience in the wake of Canada’s post-war labour revolt, stove manufacturer W. Shives Fisher proclaimed victory for bourgeois “commonsense” in his New Year’s message to the Canadian Manufacturers’ Association (CMA) in 1922: “Many ideals were built up which are now being shattered, and people generally are beginning to realize that only by hard work and close application with a willingness to give the best they have whether in labor or materials, can they hope to prosper.”³⁶ Economic crisis had eroded the power of labour and moved employers to embrace overtly anti-labour tactics with considerably less fear of undesirable outcomes.

Having beaten back the labour movement in 1921 and 1922, the Saint John business community began to address regional issues. This is not to say that this business community was uninterested in regional issues before Maritime Rights hit its highpoint in the mid-1920s. Bourgeois Saint John, indeed, played a leading role in formulating regional demands and mobilizing regional business immediately after the First World War. In February 1919 the Saint John Board of Trade passed a resolution “favoring the continuance of Moncton as one of the chief departmental centres of the Canadian National Railways System” in response to the policy of national centralization that the government-owned railway had recently adopted.³⁷ During the following month, Saint

31 Strikes and Lockouts File, *Telegraph*, 10 June 1921, RG 27, vol. 327, file 161, LAC.

32 Strikes and Lockouts File, *Globe*, 28 June 1921, vol. 327, file 161, LAC; *Standard*, 28 June 1921.

33 Strikes and Lockouts File, *Toronto Globe*, 1 July 1921, RG 27, vol. 327, file 161, LAC; *Halifax Herald*, 1 July 1921; *Telegraph*, 2 July 1921; *Telegraph*, 11 July 1921; *Halifax Chronicle*, 12 July 1921.

34 Strikes and Lockouts File, *Amherst News*, 20 July 1921, RG 27, vol. 327, file 161, LAC.

35 Strikes and Lockouts File, newspaper clipping [n.d.] enclosed with correspondence (W.H. Coates ? to C.W. Bolton), 13 December 1921, RG 27, vol. 327, file 161, LAC.

36 *Industrial Canada*, January 1922, p. 118.

37 Minutes, Saint John Board of Trade, 28 February 1919, S 229, file 136, NBM.

John merchants J. Hunter White and M.E. Agar spoke in favour of reviving the Maritime Board of Trade, which had not met since 1915.³⁸ Reconvening that September in Moncton, the meeting of the Maritime Board of Trade was characterized by a spirit of regional co-operation, a general condemnation of the Canadian National Railway's (CNR) managerial policy, and demands for greater Maritime port development. R.E. Armstrong, secretary of the Saint John Board of Trade, drew upon nationalist rhetoric in arguing for increased port development: "We have our National Railways system but let me ask the meeting 'What good would they be without our national ports?'"³⁹ R.B. Emerson, partner of industrialist W. Shives Fisher in the hardware firm Emerson & Fisher, argued that the interests of the various Maritime provinces were "practically the same" and "could be much better looked after acting as a unit."⁴⁰ Unity was also stressed earlier in the year at the annual meeting of the Maritime section of the CMA in May, which was attended by numerous important Saint John industrialists including G. Clifford McAvity. The *Busy East* reported that the meeting's "dominant note was a desire for keener co-operation that manufacturing in the Maritime Provinces might be developed to the fullest extent in order that the Lower Provinces might no longer hold a subordinate place in Canadian Confederation."⁴¹ Meanwhile, W. Frank Hatheway wrote in the *Globe* about the right of the Maritime Provinces to compensation for Dominion land that had been handed over to central and western Canadian provinces following Confederation.⁴²

The plant closures, bankruptcies, and widespread outmigration that plagued the region's economy in the early 1920s imbued regional protest with an increased urgency and new significance. The once bright hope of National Policy industrialization died as the region's 46,004 workers employed in manufacturing in 1919 shrank to a mere 27,855 only two years later.⁴³ As this crisis descended upon the regional economy in 1920, wealthy Saint John residents targeted the CNR as the major contributing factor.⁴⁴ In August 1920, the Saint John Board of Trade claimed

38 Minutes, Saint John Board of Trade, 14 March 1919, S 229, file 136, NBM.

39 *Busy East*, September 1919, p. 29.

40 *Busy East*, September 1919, p. 37.

41 *Busy East*, May 1919, p. 23.

42 *Globe*, 16 December 1918, p. 13. This issue is discussed in Forbes, *Maritime Rights Movement*, pp. 17-22.

43 Forbes, *Maritime Rights Movement*, p. 63.

44 The extent to which the policies of the CNR contributed to the region's decline has been debated by E.R. Forbes and Ken Cruikshank. Forbes has argued in "Misguided Symmetry" that the old Intercolonial had been a central factor in Maritime industrialization and that the freight rate revisions that had been imposed in the period immediately before and after the nationalization of the railway – between 1915 and 1921 – contributed significantly to the region's economic woes. Cruikshank, on the other hand, has argued that the railway was not central to the region's industrial economy and that the freight-rate revisions followed broad trends of north-eastern North American freight rates and thus were not arbitrary impositions being set by the federal government. For the exchange between Forbes and Cruikshank, see Ernest R. Forbes, "The Intercolonial Railway and the Decline of the Maritime Provinces Revisited," *Acadiensis*, XXIV, 1 (Autumn 1994), pp. 3-26 and Ken Cruikshank, "With Apologies to James: A Response to E.R. Forbes," *Acadiensis*, XXIV, 1 (Autumn 1994), pp. 26-34. This debate was sparked by Ken Cruikshank's "The Intercolonial Railway, Freight Rates and the Maritime Economy," *Acadiensis*, XXII, 1 (Autumn 1992), pp. 87-110, which sought to revise Forbes's earlier interpretation of the significance of the Intercolonial in Maritime economic development. As well, Cruikshank had earlier tried to debunk some of the myths surrounding the

that “in order to restore the manufacturing of the Maritime Provinces to the position which they previously enjoyed,” pre-war freight rates needed to be restored.⁴⁵ In May 1921, W. Shives Fisher, president of the CMA at the time, spearheaded a resolution within the Saint John Board of Trade that spoke to the difficulties of Maritime manufacturers under the revised freight rate structure and urged a return to the 1915 freight rates. The resolution also stated “that a delegation should be sent to Ottawa from this city to co-operate with representatives from the governments of New Brunswick and Nova Scotia in the presentation of this matter to the federal cabinet.”⁴⁶

The following month, Fisher traveled with a delegation of Maritime businessmen and politicians to Ottawa to present their case to the Dominion government. The delegation argued that the Intercolonial Railway was an integral component of the Confederation pact and that the railway was established – in section 145 of the British North America Act – with the understanding that its main purpose was to unify the Maritimes with Quebec and Ontario, both economically and politically. The application of strict business imperatives upon the railway, maintained the delegates, represented a breach of the Confederation agreement. One delegate complained: “The road was built for the purpose of cementing together a nation, not for the isolation of one of the most important sections, which is rapidly becoming a fact due to the incomprehensible stupidity or ignorance of a Board of Directors wholly unable to judge of a situation [*sic*] peculiar local elements and factors.”⁴⁷

A strident rhetoric of regional protest was developing throughout the Maritimes. In September 1921, Hance J. Logan of Amherst delivered the president’s address to the Maritime Board of Trade in Charlottetown. Logan spoke of Confederation and how the Confederation agreement was being violated by the CNR’s management of the old Intercolonial. He pressed the need for Maritime unity and the dissolution of partisan politics, and concluded: “Let us with determination, in this the cradle of Confederation

Intercolonial’s supposed role as a vehicle of regional development in his “The People’s Railway: The Intercolonial Railway and the Canadian Public Enterprise Experience,” *Acadiensis*, XVI, 1 (Autumn 1986), pp. 78-100, where he made the case that the management of the Intercolonial had always been bureaucratic and characterized by a broad concern for profitability. The interpretation developed in this piece maintains that the emphasis that was placed upon the CNR’s role in undermining Maritime economic interests was an ideological response to the regional economic crisis – a response that was a “commonsense” matter for members of Saint John’s economic elite. The extent to which freight rates levied by the CNR helped to accentuate Maritime economic woes is, to some extent, beside the question. The broader trend of national integration had been facilitating the transfer of capital outside the region for decades as well as subordinating the region within the nation’s industrial structure. See, for example, James D. Frost, “The ‘Nationalization’ of the Bank of Nova Scotia, 1880-1910,” *Acadiensis*, XII, 1 (Autumn 1982), pp. 3-38. Many bourgeois Saint Johners had participated and continued to participate in this process in the 1920s. See Nerbas, “Changing World of the Bourgeoisie,” chapter 1. The extent to which the local bourgeoisie blamed the federal government for causing the economic crisis was an ideological response. Indeed, in spite of the fact that bourgeois Saint Johners such as W.F. Burditt and Lewis Simms acknowledged that problems of the Maritime economy were related to the centralization of manufacturing in Central Canada, both men continued to focus most of their criticism upon federal government policies. See J. Castell Hopkins, *The Canadian Annual Review of Public Affairs, 1928-9* (Toronto: The Canadian Review Co. Ltd., 1930), p. 724 and *Telegraph-Journal* (Saint John), 5 November 1925, pp. 2, 9.

45 Minutes, Saint John Board of Trade, 5 August 1920, S 229, file 137, NBM.

46 Minutes, Saint John Board of Trade, 9 May 1921, S 229, file 137, NBM.

47 *Busy East*, June 1921, pp. 3-4.

adopt the motto ‘Maritime Rights’ within the union. Let us stand by what we believe were the terms and conditions of that union and that unless we are lured upon the rocks by ‘false lights on the shore’ we must eventually succeed because we have a just cause.” Some Saint John figures sought to qualify this increasingly strident version of regional protest, which drew upon the myth of a pre-Confederation golden age and invoked the language of contractual obligation. Saint John representative W.F. Burditt warned: “We need cooperation not alone between these three Maritime Provinces but between the different sections of this vast country . . . the very geographical conditions which tend to create diversity of commercial and political interests.” Burditt went on to argue that instead of looking back to pre-Confederation promises, it would be best to focus on present-day conditions.⁴⁸ Similarly, two years earlier M.E. Agar rejected the simplified formulations of regional protest. Pointing to how Maritime banks had migrated to Central Canada, Agar stated: “We must be entirely frank with ourselves and not place the blame entirely upon the central provinces.”⁴⁹ However, the simplifying language of contractual obligation and the mythologizing notion of a pre-Confederation golden age would ultimately dominate bourgeois regional protest by mid-decade – as would finance capital in the economic life of Saint John’s bourgeoisie.

Unfortunately, the scholarship on Maritime Rights has said little about how the movement was shaped by internal changes within the region’s business and political leadership and this is a significant lacuna in the historiography. Bourgeois Saint John changed in significant ways during the 1920s. Industrial capital had continued to play a major role in setting the tone of local business life in the city following the First World War. Committed to the old political economy of local industrialization, which had grown up in Saint John alongside the National Policy, local industrialists and merchants formed a politically articulate bloc that included the McAvity family of T. McAvity & Sons Ltd., manufacturers of fire hydrants, brass fittings, and various other brass and iron products; W. Shives Fisher, president of the Enterprise Foundry Company of Sackville; Lewis Connors, president of the Black’s Harbour sardine-canning business Connors Brothers; Lewis Simms, president of T.S. Simms & Co. Ltd.; and Fabian merchant W. Frank Hatheway. During the 1920s this political bloc fell apart to a considerable extent. Local finance capitalists, Howard P. Robinson among them, gained control of Lewis Connors’s sardine-canning business; Hatheway died in 1923; Simms presided over a beleaguered Board of Trade; and Fisher and the McAvity family, once proponents of public power, accommodated their interests with finance capital by taking up seats on the board of directors of the New Brunswick Power Company by mid-decade. The leading ideologue of Maritime Rights by the middle of the decade, Saint John merchant A.P. Paterson, also became a director of New Brunswick Power.⁵⁰

48 *Busy East*, October 1921, pp. 8, 37.

49 *Busy East*, September 1919, p. 11.

50 *Industrial Canada*, December 1923, p. 63; “W. Frank Hatheway,” obituary, 30 October 1923, Vertical File, NBM; *Annual Financial Review*, July 1924, p. 724. Hatheway’s intellectual influences are well summarized by Janice Cook: “A practicing Anglican, Hatheway was well-versed in the Old and New Testaments. In particular, the reformer was drawn to the writings of Charles Kingsley, Henry George, Edward Bellamy and Thomas Carlyle. From his reading and personal experiences, Hatheway came to

Howard P. Robinson personified the growing dominance of finance capital in the local economy during the 1920s. Having gained control of the city's Conservative daily the *Standard* in the early 1920s, renaming it the *Journal*, Robinson went on in 1923 to acquire the Liberal *Telegraph*, formerly owned by manufacturer George McAvity and lumberman John E. Moore. Richard O'Leary of Richibucto, one of the original investors in the newly created *Telegraph-Journal*, reported in private correspondence that Robinson's acquisition of the *Telegraph* had been designed to silence the paper's criticism of New Brunswick Power.⁵¹ In 1927, the other Liberal daily, the *Globe*, fell under the control of the Robinson syndicate, resulting in the extinction of one of the main sources of local partisanship – the party paper.⁵² Indeed, Robinson himself moved beyond the world of partisan politics during the 1920s, assuming the role of silent powerbroker by the end of the decade.⁵³

Robinson's rise within bourgeois Saint John was in step with the emergence of a new political economy of tourism and resource development that was fundamentally dependent upon large, outside capital and securing the cooperation of the state. By the middle of the decade, wealthy Saint John residents had largely given up on the old political economy of urban industrialization and the related notion that Saint John was destined to become a significant industrial player in the national economy; this view was voiced quite plainly by Saint John Mayor W.W. White and Premier J.B.M. Baxter before the Royal Commission on Maritime Claims in 1926. Attracting outside capital came to be seen as a fundamental step towards economic rehabilitation, evidenced by the developing opinion within the Saint John Board of Trade that "very little progress could be anticipated" without attracting outside capital.⁵⁴ The victory of J.B.M. Baxter's Conservatives in the 1925 provincial election reflected the growing dominance of this new political economy. Historian W.Y. Smith, Jr., maintains that this victory in the 1925 New Brunswick election had stifled Saint John's metropolitan aspirations – namely the city's prospect of becoming the administrative centre of a provincial power system.⁵⁵ Baxter's words and actions seem to justify, at least in part, Smith's assertion; arguing that "capital has a right to expect good faith and fair dealing on the part of the government and its people," Baxter ceded to the International Paper Company of New York a privileged role in the provincial

agree with George and Carlyle that the capitalist system caused poverty and unhappiness and with Kingsley and Bellamy that the enlightened were obliged to improve the condition of the labouring classes." See Cook, "Child Labour in Saint John," p. 137.

- 51 R. O'Leary to Angus McLean, 11 October 1924, Arthur Meighen Papers, MG 26 I, vol. 118, 669143, LAC.
- 52 For more details on the *Globe* acquisition see Nerbas, "Changing World of the Bourgeoisie," pp. 56-7 (n.77).
- 53 Robinson had been aligned with the Conservative Party earlier in the decade, but in 1930 Mackenzie King reported in his diary that A.P. Paterson "suggested my getting Howard Robinson here for a talk. That is the worst feature of all this work – sending for individuals who want to be courted as it were. However it is a proper part of the work & I certainly do as much of it as I should." See William Lyon Mackenzie King Diaries, 12 May 1930, 5721, LAC.
- 54 Evidence, Maritime Claims Commission, Saint John, 2 August 1926, pp. 857, 920, RG 33, 73, vol. 3, LAC; Minutes, Saint John Board of Trade, 10 June 1927, S 299, file 144, NBM. See also Nerbas, "Changing World of the Bourgeoisie," chapter 1.
- 55 Smith, "Axis of Administration," p. 115.

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economy.⁵⁶ Baxter was also an important figure in the Maritime Rights movement, combining regionalism with an accommodating attitude towards the interests of big capital.⁵⁷ Moreover, earlier in the decade, Baxter had encouraged the business community to assume a stronger leadership role in political life. In 1922 he stated to businessmen gathered at the Maritime Board of Trade that they had support in the political realm: "If you say what you want you will find plenty of politicians ready to follow the trail you blaze."⁵⁸ Baxter was also hopeful about the "possibility of a tremendous drive launched by our business men which will sweep all political parties and shades of opinion before it."⁵⁹ Bourgeois regionalism in Saint John came to represent such a drive.

Merely three years after Baxter's words of encouragement, Saint John's business community had placed itself at the vanguard of regional protest. By early 1925, as Forbes has observed, the centre of Maritime Rights agitation "shifted to Saint John under the leadership of J.D. McKenna," who was the president of the *Telegraph-Journal*.⁶⁰ Other leading lights of the movement in Saint John included A.M. Belding, editor of the *Telegraph-Journal*, Saint John Board of Trade commissioner F. Maclure Sclanders, who was recruited from the Border Cities Chamber of Commerce in Windsor, Ontario, and A.P. Paterson, the prolific spokesman of Maritime Rights. Collectively these individuals, along with other wealthy Saint John residents, articulated a hegemonic discourse of regional protest in that it contained elements of populist, anti-big business rhetoric that appealed to a broader base of support within the business community and beyond. W.F.B. Paterson, president of the Paterson Printing and Publishing Company, condemned the way in which big business drained money out of communities in the Maritimes. "A prosperous country is not made by the centralization of its industries," argued Paterson, "which tend only to build up one section, but by a fairly even distribution, scattering the payrolls from one end to the other." His answer to the problem was increased patronage of local industries.⁶¹ This message was propagated in Paterson's journal, *The Business Review and Maritime Retailer*, and Paterson was also involved in the "Buy at Home and Maritime Made" campaign, which began in early 1923. Endorsed by the Saint John Board of Trade, the campaign was led by a committee that included merchant and former premier W.E. Foster, former mayor and boot and shoe wholesaler R.T. Hayes, local department store mogul Walter C. Allison, financier J.M. Robinson, and furniture merchant R.A. MacAulay, who was appointed as field organizer.⁶² The political economy of locally supported industrialization that was rooted in the experience of the National Policy

56 Quoted in Bill Parenteau, "The Woods Transformed: The Emergence of the Pulp and Paper Industry in New Brunswick, 1918-1931," *Acadiensis*, XXII, 1 (Autumn 1992), p. 5. A contemporary description of Baxter, centering on his political career, can be found in Louis Arthur Cunningham, "Baxter, of Saint John: An Intimate Sketch of the Man Who Sits in New Brunswick's Seat of Power," *Maclean's*, 1 May 1929, pp. 8, 49-50.

57 For a detailed account of Baxter's role in the Maritime Rights movement see Hatfield, "J.B.M. Baxter and the Maritime Rights Movement."

58 *Evening Times-Star* (Saint John), 7 September 1922, p. 4.

59 *Busy East*, October 1922, p. 17.

60 Forbes, *Maritime Rights Movement*, p. 112.

61 *Busy East*, August 1924, p. 20.

62 *Industrial Canada*, January 1926, p. 150.

period, however, continued to erode during the decade; wealthy Saint John residents, conceding that their city could no longer grow as an industrial competitor to Central Canada, looked for other development strategies such as tourism.⁶³ Still, the rhetoric of competitive capitalism retained its resonance. A.P. Paterson, for example, condemned the predatory business strategies of monopoly capitalists in his own regionalist language in 1926, arguing that “Central Canadian manufacturers” had “deliberately strangled Maritime industrial life.”⁶⁴

The hegemonic potential of Maritime Rights was realized in Saint John with the absorption of labour support. The expansive labour movement and class conflict of the immediate post-war period had reflected the weakened state of bourgeois hegemony, but that hegemony was re-established and tacitly renegotiated under the rubric of Maritime Rights. James E. Tighe, union leader for Saint John longshoremen, gravitated to the cause of the Maritime Rights movement by mid-decade – no doubt encouraged by the movement’s focus upon port development.⁶⁵ In March 1925, as president of the New Brunswick Federation of Labour, Tighe “spoke of the poor conditions of employment and the number of industries that had been closed down” and “suggested that the Federation should co-operate with any movement for the improvement of conditions not only in the province but throughout the Maritime Provinces.”⁶⁶ On 25 February 1925, Tighe joined Maritime business leaders and politicians as a member of the “Great Delegation” on its trip to Ottawa, where members of the delegation presented the region’s case to the federal government. “Capital and Labor have joined hands”, claimed the *Telegraph-Journal*.⁶⁷ The “Great Delegation” was dominated by Saint John figures; its presentation to the Dominion government, perhaps not surprisingly, revolved around the demand for greater traffic through the port of Saint John.⁶⁸

Originally conceived within the Saint John Board of Trade as a plan to have a Saint John delegation travel to Ottawa to press the needs of the city’s port, the “Great Delegation” emerged from the urgings of Howard Robinson, J.D. McKenna, and merchant T.H. Estabrooks for a broader approach. As Estabrooks explained: “Instead of the Port Committee asking for something for St. John at the present time, we should ask for something National.” The Board of Trade concluded that a delegation representing all the Maritimes should be sent to Ottawa.⁶⁹ Thus emerged the “Great Delegation” – a testament to the Saint John bourgeoisie’s hegemonic role in Maritime Rights; they organized protests, formulated demands, and transformed those demands into regional “rights.”

63 Nerbas, “Changing World of the Bourgeoisie,” pp. 35-7.

64 Alexander P. Paterson, “Maritime Memorandum,” 1 March 1926, p. 21, Alexander P. Paterson Papers, S 70, file 65, NBM.

65 Port development was an issue upon which labour could unite with capital in voicing regional grievance. In 1928, for example, the International Longshoremen’s Association joined the Saint John Board of Trade in protesting increased wharfage rates on grain. See James Steen (president, International Longshoremen’s Local 1039) to the Saint John Board of Trade, 8 November 1928, King Papers, MG 26, J1, vol. 187, 133508, LAC.

66 *Labour Gazette*, July 1925, p. 691.

67 *Telegraph-Journal*, 26 February 1925, p. 1.

68 Frank, “The 1920s,” in Forbes and Muise, *Atlantic Provinces in Confederation*, p. 256.

69 Minutes, Saint John Board of Trade, 10 February 1925, S 229, file 141, NBM (emphasis in original).

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Bourgeois Saint John played a similar role in presenting the claims of the Maritimes at the Dominion Conference of Boards of Trade held in Winnipeg (16-18 November), described by A.M. Belding as one of the “most significant conferences since Confederation.” At the conference J.D. McKenna led the way in presenting Maritime demands while Belding, Lewis Simms, W. Shives Fisher, and F. Maclure Sclanders were also in attendance.⁷⁰ The demands presented at the conference had been distilled into eight resolutions, passed earlier in the year at a meeting of the Maritime Board of Trade in Charlottetown (where Saint John figures had played a leading role in setting the agenda).⁷¹ The resolutions revolved around the improvement of regional business conditions: increased immigration; freight rate revisions; port development; reductions in rates to the nearest seaport; development of fisheries; an increase in the number of trade commissioners to promote foreign trade; legislation allowing for the wider marketing of Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, and Alberta coal; and improved ferry services to Prince Edward Island.⁷² A vague resolution urging federal government aid to the Maritimes was unanimously passed at the Winnipeg conference.⁷³

This activism had an effect. The pressure exerted by Saint John’s economic elite and other regional activists contributed to Prime Minister King’s decision to establish the Royal Commission on Maritime Claims in 1926, better known as the Duncan Commission after its chairman Sir Andrew Rae Duncan.⁷⁴ Of course King’s decision to establish the commission was not solely a response to bourgeois regional protest; it was also an attempt to shore up Liberal support in the region, which had voted heavily Conservative in the 1925 federal election.⁷⁵ In either case, the Saint John business community was delighted as the Saint John Board of Trade had earlier suggested the appointment of such a commission.⁷⁶ Cause for further rejoicing among Saint John’s economic elite was given when F. Maclure Sclanders was appointed as the commission’s secretary, giving bourgeois Saint John something of an inside man on the commission.

The Duncan Commission served as a platform through which the Saint John bourgeoisie spoke. In August 1926, when the commission arrived in Saint John to collect testimony, the ubiquitous role of the bourgeoisie in the hearings quickly became apparent. Speaking before the commission, Lewis Simms said that F. Maclure Sclanders could provide evidence to corroborate his testimony; Duncan had to remind Simms that, as the commission’s secretary, Sclanders could not submit evidence. In Saint John the commission’s hearings served less as an actual investigation than as a

70 *Busy East*, October 1925, p. 18; McGahan, *Port of Saint John*, p. 235.

71 See *Busy East*, October 1925, pp. 5-23, for an account of the Maritime Board of Trade meeting at Charlottetown.

72 “Resolutions Passed at Charlottetown Conference of Maritime Board of Trade, 4th and 5th November 1925,” King Papers, MG 26, J1, vol. 130, 97585-6, LAC.

73 The presentation of the Maritime delegates at the conference had been accidentally cut short by the chairman, and nearly resulted in the departure of the Maritime delegation, who were later convinced to stay when they were informed that the conference chairman had not known that he had cut the presentation short. See Forbes, *Maritime Rights Movement*, pp. 117-18, for an account of that episode.

74 For a discussion of Duncan’s connections with the Maritime business community see David Frank, *J.B. McLaughlan: A Biography* (Toronto: James Lorimer & Co., 1999), p. 400.

75 Forbes, *Maritime Rights Movement*, pp. 147-56.

76 Minutes, Saint John Board of Trade, 29 April 1926, S 229, file 142, NBM.

forum for the local bourgeoisie to express their grievances and offer an explanation for the region's economic woes. The list of those who appeared before the commission is telling. There were three manufacturers (W. Shives Fisher, A. Neil McLean, and Lewis Simms), a merchant (Walter Leonard, a wholesale fish dealer), a newspaper president (J.D. McKenna), the provincial premier (J.B.M. Baxter), and the mayor of Saint John (W.W. White), who was also a director of the Toronto-centred Bank of Nova Scotia.⁷⁷

The testimony before the Duncan Commission in Saint John, while involving various economic demands, revolved around a single basic discourse: Confederation and the Dominion government had undermined Maritime economic development. W.W. White testified that prior to Confederation Saint John was a content, prosperous city – “and then came Confederation.” J.D. McKenna, speaking on behalf of the Saint John Board of Trade, delivered a long presentation that dealt extensively with the nature of the Confederation agreement. Arguing that Confederation was a partnership between the provinces and not a federal legislative union, McKenna asserted that the Maritimes had not received its fair share in the partnership. To his mind, if the Fathers of Confederation were “to return to the Maritime Provinces . . . they would be struck with the contrast, because the Maritime Provinces have suffered through the agreement which was finally consummated at London.” Lewis Simms complained: “We have been very much handicapped in the past and our industries have practically become eliminated to a great extent.” And, referring to the CNR, W. Shives Fisher lamented: “We were promised times of great prosperity, but that prosperity is being taken away from us by the system which has been adopted by our own railway.”⁷⁸ The testimony before the Duncan Commission in Saint John was representative of the discourse that had crystallized during the 1920s.

Over the course of the decade Saint John's bourgeoisie increasingly politicized the region's economic woes, placing more and more importance upon the political “rights” of the region and the historical injustices that had been committed against the region in Confederation. They turned Confederation itself into a political issue of contemporary significance. The need to educate the public regarding Confederation was discussed at the Maritime Board of Trade in September 1923, and the following month W. Shives Fisher introduced a resolution at the Saint John Board of Trade that suggested an appeal be made to the British Government regarding the relationship between the Maritimes and the rest of Canada (A.P. Paterson seconded the resolution).⁷⁹ Four years later the Saint John Board of Trade established a “Special Committee on the Canadian Constitution,” which included former New Brunswick Power Company director Fred R. Taylor, Lewis Simms, J.D. McKenna, hardware merchant J.G. Harrison, and A.P. Paterson.⁸⁰ By that year, Simms had taken the position that the political question was of the greatest importance – arguing that more should be done towards “the clear establishment of Maritime constitutional rights that had either

77 Evidence, Maritime Claims Commission, 2 August 1926, *passim*, RG 33, 73, vol. 3, LAC.

78 Evidence, Maritime Claims Commission, 2 August 1926, pp. 900, 947, 1193-4, and 1068, RG 33, 73, vol. 3, LAC.

79 Minutes, Saint John Board of Trade, 20 September 1923 and 25 October 1923, S 229, file 139, NBM.

80 Minutes, Saint John Board of Trade, 27 December 1927, S 229, file 146, NBM.

been forgotten or ignored.”⁸¹ At a general meeting of the Board of Trade the following year, Fred R. Taylor delivered an address on “Maritime Constitutional Rights” in which he argued that “Maritime economic languish” [*sic*] resulted from the neglect of the region’s constitutional rights.⁸²

A.P. Paterson did more than any Saint John figure to politicize the region’s economic decline during the 1920s. In 1926, his short treatise *The True Story of Confederation* was published under the authority of J.B.M. Baxter’s provincial government and distributed by the Saint John Board of Trade. Anticipating the release of the Duncan Commission’s report in late 1926, the New Brunswick government financed a second printing of 5,000 copies of Paterson’s book while the Saint John Board of Trade circulated the book “very widely . . . in the best quarters” of Canada and Great Britain. Members of the Saint John Board of Trade thought it important that before the Duncan Commission’s report was released the public should learn the truth about Confederation, which, according to them, was contained in the pages of Paterson’s book.⁸³

The True Story of Confederation reflected a new orthodoxy. “The three Maritime Provinces,” wrote Paterson, “were self-governing Crown Colonies. Economically they were sound and prosperous.” Paterson claimed that before Confederation the Maritimes “basked in the sunshine of substantial prosperity” while Quebec and Ontario were neither sound nor prosperous. Following Confederation, the people of the Maritimes suffered at the hands of “Central Canadian financial and commercial interests” and were denied the prosperity that had once been theirs. In Paterson’s view, the Maritimes would undeniably be better off economically if they were not part of Canada. He wrote: “The people of the Maritimes feel that they are being deprived of their rights under Confederation. They know that, separated from Canada, and as a Maritime Dominion under its own Government, their position in the British Empire would be very important.”⁸⁴

In *The True Story of Confederation* Paterson constructed a dichotomy between Central Canada and the Maritimes. According to his reading of history, “partisan politics ha[d] incessantly intruded its sinister and selfish hand in matters of the most fundamental National importance” to the benefit of Central Canada and the detriment of the Maritimes.⁸⁵ In this discourse, sinister political forces had intervened to undermine Maritime development after the region had been prodded into Confederation. W.C. Keirstead, professor of philosophy and economics at the University of New Brunswick and trained in political economy as a doctoral student at the University of Chicago, disagreed with Paterson.⁸⁶ Keirstead argued that

81 Minutes, Saint John Board of Trade, 15 December 1927, S 229, file 146, NBM.

82 Minutes, Saint John Board of Trade, 19 March 1928, S 229, file 147, NBM.

83 Minutes, Saint John Board of Trade, 11 November 1926 and 16 December 1926, S 229, file 143, NBM.

84 Alexander P. Paterson, *The True Story of Confederation*, 2nd ed. (Saint John, NB: n.p., c.1926), pp. 5, 9, 37.

85 Paterson, *True Story of Confederation*, p. 14.

86 Barry Ferguson, *Remaking Liberalism: The Intellectual Legacy of Adam Shortt, O.D. Skelton, W.C. Clark, and W.A. Mackintosh, 1890-1925* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1993), p. 11.

Confederation had resulted from the desire to obtain “a certain dignity as a nation” and that the region’s economic troubles were largely due to western expansion and the emergence of “great cities” – developments that were “fundamentally of a geographical and economic nature” and not political.⁸⁷ Paterson’s response crassly dismissed the academic’s opinion and questioned his regional loyalty:

Dr. Kierstead’s [*sic*] opinion is one which any anti-Maritimer might be expected to give to the public. The author’s [Paterson’s] conclusions are not based upon theories but upon knowledge acquired through intimate relations with commercial and industrial and, to a considerable degree, other Maritime interests. Having in one breath swept away the federal rights of the Maritimes provided for in the London Agreement and in the statements of the authorized representatives of the provinces defining the intentions of the agreement, Dr. Kierstead [*sic*] proceeds to deal with the effects and to rehash central Canadian propaganda which has been used against these provinces for years.

. . . Dr. Kierstead [*sic*] expresses the hope that the increased subsidy recommended by the Duncan Commission will [be] finally settled on a satisfactory basis. How inconsistent! If Dr. Kierstead’s [*sic*] opening statements are correct, what justification have the Maritimes for demanding increased subsidies?

Does Dr. Kierstead [*sic*] realize that his statements will assist the Central Canadian propagandists who are endeavoring to convince people of all Canada that the Maritimes are asking for charity?

. . . It is unfortunate that there should be even one man within the borders of the Maritimes who, by making public statements which may be used in opposition to this patriotic effort of the Maritimes, places himself in the position where his loyalty to the Maritimes and his patriotism to Canada can be questioned.⁸⁸

Paterson claimed, essentially, that contesting the idea that Maritime decline resulted from central Canadian political machinations was indicative of regional disloyalty. Patriotic Maritimers, he believed, needed to follow his lead, as a businessman knowledgeable in the workings of industrial and commercial life.⁸⁹ Most importantly, however, Paterson hung regional demands upon the lynchpin of classical liberalism: the sanctity of the contract. In Paterson’s view, without a contractual obligation (which he believed was embodied in Confederation) or an indictment of central Canadian political meddling, the Maritimes had no basis for demanding

87 *Telegraph-Journal*, 26 January 1927, p. 2.

88 *Telegraph-Journal*, 27 January 1927, p. 9.

89 Also interesting is the way in which Paterson presents his knowledge as a businessman – “acquired through intimate relations with commercial and industrial and . . . other Maritime interests” – as superior to the knowledge of an academic, which he portrays as flowing from mere “theories.”

anything from the Dominion government. Fundamentally, Paterson's regionalism was rooted in a *laissez-faire* liberal assumption that capitalism was a progressive system, where the industrious prospered and the lazy floundered, a crudely articulated political philosophy that gained prominence in the regional protest of bourgeois Saint John during the 1920s. Paterson based his regional protest on the assumption that outside forces had illegitimately intervened and stifled regional development, maintaining a belief that the "natural" path of capitalism was towards uniform prosperity.⁹⁰ It was central to his argument that the Maritimes were not asking for charity, but insisting on the fulfillment of contractual obligations.⁹¹

Saint John's economic elite insisted that they were merely demanding fair treatment for the region. Paterson claimed that "in order that the Maritimes may regain the commercial and economic position which their geographical location and natural resources warrant, they must have British fair-play."⁹² J.B.M. Baxter explained to the Duncan Commission that "the Maritime Provinces want fair play from the other parts of Canada."⁹³ When F. Maclure Sclanders wrote to Mackenzie King to protest increased harbour charges levied on Saint John's port, it was the same: "Fair-play is all we expect."⁹⁴ Earlier in the decade Premier W.E. Foster had engaged in a similar discourse, demanding "Justice for the Maritimes" in an article that appeared in the July 1921 issue of *Maclean's*, which was reprinted the following month in the *Busy East*.⁹⁵ Paterson, Baxter, Sclanders, and Foster demanded that the fetters placed upon Maritime capitalism be removed, expressing the need for a "fairness" that was deeply rooted in the logic of liberal capitalism. The language of "fair-play," "justice," and "rights" distinguished bourgeois regional protest from the pejorative connotations that the bourgeoisie associated with demands for special assistance or, worse, charity. Thus, in their testimony before the Duncan Commission, J.D. McKenna and W.W. White both made sure to state that they were not asking for charity; both men insisted that they were arguing only for the fair treatment of the Maritimes.⁹⁶

Bourgeois regional protest was also conditioned by contemporary assumptions regarding race. As a member of the "Great Delegation" in 1925, Saint John furniture dealer R.A. MacAulay identified Maritimers as "white British subjects" whose "natural" path towards prosperity had been blocked:

90 Paterson continued to staunchly adhere to the view that the federal government had illegitimately intervened in Maritime economic development after the onset of the Great Depression. In a speech before the Saint John Board of Trade in 1930, he described the depressed economic conditions of the Maritimes as "unnatural" and concluded that such conditions could only "exist through unjust governmental policies and transportation regulations." See Alexander P. Paterson, *The Problems of the Maritime Provinces Within Confederation* (Saint John: Saint John Board of Trade, 1930), p. 22.

91 According to Paterson, the protective tariff, too, was primarily for the benefit of Central Canada. See Paterson, *True Story of Confederation*, p. 21.

92 Alexander P. Paterson, "Maritime Memorandum," 25 February 1925, p. 3, Paterson Papers, S 70, file 65, NBM.

93 Evidence, Maritime Claims Commission, 2 August 1926, p. 866, RG 33, 73, vol. 3, LAC.

94 F. Maclure Sclanders to W.L. King, 28 December 1928, King Papers, MG 26, J1, vol. 187, 133490, LAC.

95 *Busy East*, August 1921, pp. 9-12.

96 Evidence, Maritime Claims Commission, 2 August 1926, pp. 913, 948, and 956, RG 33, 73, vol. 3, LAC.

Today we find ourselves in the humiliating position of being substantially the only community of white British subjects who have failed to make marked economic progress. Yet our people possess the same characteristics, attributes, and ability as any other British people, and this is proved by the numerous successes obtained by those who were forced to migrate, thus demonstrating beyond doubt that our stagnation is due, not to our lack of capacity, but to the conditions under which we labour.⁹⁷

The implications of MacAulay's statement are readily apparent: while the economic stagnation of non-white peoples in the British Empire could be attributed to some innate failing, the fact that white British subjects in the Maritimes, who "possess the same characteristics, attributes, and ability as any other British people," were suffering economically was evidence that some injustice was holding the region back. The historical injustices committed by the Dominion government were the root of Maritime problems: "Confederation has been for the Maritimes one of the worst commercial disasters ever experienced by an Anglo-Saxon country," wrote A. P. Paterson, expressing the sentiment that the region's economic difficulties were especially peculiar given the racial makeup of its population.⁹⁸ Earlier in the decade J.B.M. Baxter had also used racial essentialism in framing Maritime grievances, although in a different manner; in 1922 Baxter charged the Dominion government with the responsibility for promoting immigration, attributing the exodus from the Maritimes to the supposedly innate tendency among "Anglo-Saxons to keep moving."⁹⁹ Here, again, racial stereotyping obscured the structural nature of the crisis – the fact that people were being driven from the region in search of work and not due to any peculiar drive "to keep moving."

Regional protest represented the emergence of a new "commonsense" for bourgeois Saint John. Before the Valley Board of Trade in Wolfville, Nova Scotia, in January 1927, Lewis Simms articulated it in these terms: "The Upper Canadian Provinces . . . have placed us in our present position."¹⁰⁰ Before the Montreal Advertising Club the following month, Simms stressed that the recently published recommendations of the Duncan Commission, which included, to the delight of bourgeois Saint John, a 20 per cent reduction in freight rates and the nationalization of Saint John's port, represented a fulfillment of the "Confederation compact." Tracing Maritime economic decline to Confederation, however, Simms explained that while the report's recommendations did not compensate "the Maritimes for their losses since 1867" it did provide "the foundation upon which a renaissance of the Maritimes can be hopefully built."¹⁰¹ What is interesting about Simms's discourse, however, is the extent to which it contradicted his own experience. His broom and brush manufacturing company had been established by his father in the 1870s and had grown with the National Policy; personally, he could hardly have claimed to be a

97 *Telegraph-Journal*, 27 February 1925, p. 2.

98 Paterson, *True Story of Confederation*, p. 18.

99 *Evening Times-Star*, 7 September 1922, p. 1.

100 *Telegraph-Journal*, 22 January 1927, p. 1.

101 *Telegraph-Journal*, 24 February 1927, pp. 1, 5.

victim of Confederation or the Dominion government.¹⁰² Moreover, before the 1920s, few bourgeois Saint Johners argued that a fundamental injustice had been done to the Maritimes. They had imagined an expanding economy and greater prosperity for, as Ian McKay observes, the previous decade was “the region’s last years of abundant hope.”¹⁰³ With that abundant hope sapped by regional economic crisis in the 1920s, bourgeois Saint Johners developed a discourse of regional protest that served to shore up their own power and explain the new circumstances. The hegemony that this discourse would assume is evidenced by the fact that in the 1970s historian T.W. Acheson would have to “rediscover” the optimism and industrial growth of Maritime society under the National Policy.¹⁰⁴

According to E.R. Forbes, the Maritime Rights movement lost momentum as some of its proponents became placated by Mackenzie King’s politically savvy gestures and concessions. The potential of Maritime Rights was, according to this view, stifled by the divide-and-conquer strategy emanating from Ottawa.¹⁰⁵ Yet even though the Saint John Board of Trade complained to Mackenzie King in 1930 that he had not implemented the recommendations of the Duncan Commission, we should be careful about claiming that the efforts of Saint John’s bourgeoisie failed in terms of promoting Maritime Rights.¹⁰⁶ The experience of bourgeois Saint John demonstrates that regional protest blossomed out of a complex economic and political context, and not just the economic crisis of the 1920s and a Dominion government that was disinterested in Maritime concerns. In Saint John, the movement emerged from the contraction of the local labour movement, the decline of the political economy of urban industrialization and the erosion of the political bloc that supported it, and the growing dominance of finance capital and the attendant reconfiguration of bourgeois Saint John. These transformations shaped bourgeois regional protest, making an individual such as Howard Robinson an important supporter of Maritime Rights. As a director of New Brunswick Power, Robinson had supported an unbending anti-labour stance that provoked substantial protest from the community in the early 1920s; by the middle of the decade he had become an important supporter of a movement that disseminated a discourse of regional and community solidarity. This apparent contradiction was harmonized by an ideology that assumed the interests of capital and those of the community to be one and the same. Bourgeois regional protest, especially as articulated by A.P. Paterson, centred upon injustice within the realm of parliamentary politics, with its moral authority resting upon the classical liberal notion of contractual obligation. The other parties in Confederation had not lived up to their end of the agreement, so the rhetoric ran, and therefore the Maritimes were entitled to redress. Calls for state intervention could thus be made in the name of contractual obligation, which allowed bourgeois Saint Johners to make demands upon the Dominion government while simultaneously rejecting the principle of the

102 See Elizabeth W. McGahan, “Thomas Stockwell Simms,” *Dictionary of Canadian Biography* 13 (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1994), pp. 953-4.

103 See McKay, “The 1910s,” in Forbes and Muise, *Atlantic Provinces in Confederation*, p. 229.

104 See Acheson, “National Policy.”

105 Forbes, *Maritime Rights Movement*, pp. 158-81.

106 “Memorandum Showing Present Standing of the Duncan Recommendations,” 10 April 1930, King Papers, MG 26, J1, vol. 181, 154226-154246, LAC.

redistributive role of state intervention.

Looking back at an imagined pre-Confederation golden age, bourgeois Saint Johners fortified their faith in capitalism. By asserting that outside political meddling had been responsible for the region's economic woes, wealthy Saint John residents were also providing an argument for their continued entitlement to political and economic power, even though their investment decisions and treatment of workers often fell far short of their own regionalist discourse. Having beaten back organized labour in the early 1920s and having come largely to accept big, outside capital as a necessary ingredient in economic development by mid-decade, bourgeois Saint Johners could uphold the banner of Maritime Rights while simultaneously promoting the continued transfer of economic power to outside capitalists. In this respect, Maritime Rights represented an important political and ideological victory for a transformed local bourgeoisie in Saint John.

DON NERBAS