

Confederation and Conspiracy

An Extended Essay on Greg Malone's *Don't Tell the Newfoundlanders*

Raymond B. Blake

Volume 29, numéro 2, fall 2014

URI : https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/nflds29_2re01

[Aller au sommaire du numéro](#)

Éditeur(s)

Faculty of Arts, Memorial University

ISSN

1719-1726 (imprimé)

1715-1430 (numérique)

[Découvrir la revue](#)

Citer ce compte rendu

Blake, R. B. (2014). Compte rendu de [Confederation and Conspiracy: An Extended Essay on Greg Malone's *Don't Tell the Newfoundlanders*]. *Newfoundland and Labrador Studies*, 29(2), 303–317.

REVIEW ESSAY

**Confederation and Conspiracy:
An Extended Essay on Greg Malone's
*Don't Tell the Newfoundlanders***

RAYMOND B. BLAKE

Greg Malone. *Don't Tell the Newfoundlanders: The True Story of Newfoundland's Confederation with Canada*. Toronto: Knopf Canada, 2012.

ISBN 978-0307401335

The contemporary award-winning British folk band Mumford & Sons poses an important question for all those who venture into history searching for an absolute truth. They poignantly ask in one of their popular lyrics, "How can you say that your truth is better than ours?" The true story is an elusive commodity in the retelling of the past, and perhaps the best we can hope for is some version of a truth. Not so with Greg Malone, a noted Newfoundland entertainer, comic, and political activist who has demonstrated moments of thoughtfulness, notably in his well-received 2010 memoir, *You Better Watch Out*,¹ and nearly won a St. John's seat for the federal NDP in 2000. In his new book, *Don't Tell the Newfoundlanders: The True Story of Newfoundland's Confederation with Canada*, he believes he has finally uncovered the absolute truth about the union between Newfoundland and Canada in 1949 that historians have long missed. Malone might have turned his back on comedy, but he has not been able to shake the hyperbole that marked his early forays into the world of entertainment when CODCO, the Newfoundland theatrical group, was launched in Toronto in 1973.

Anyone venturing seriously into the subject of Newfoundland's union with Canada will quickly discover that those who had opposed Confederation had cried within days of Canada accepting the results of a second referendum vote on 22 July 1948 that Newfoundland had been the victim of a conspiracy. Peter Cashin, a long-time Newfoundland politician, wrote to Newfoundland Governor Sir Gordon Macdonald just days after the final vote, accusing the British of bringing "about the illegal and unconstitutional result of the July 22 referendum election," and he later made a similar allegation to Canadian Prime Minister Louis St. Laurent.² Others followed over the years, including Phillip McCann, who read a paper to the Newfoundland Historical Society in 1983 alleging that Britain used Newfoundland and Labrador as "pawns in a deal with the Canadians,"³ and John FitzGerald⁴, who served as the province's representative in the Newfoundland and Labrador Office of Federal-Provincial Relations in Ottawa. In 1992 Ed Riche's film *Secret Nation* took up the theme in a story about a graduate student who stumbled across evidence that the British and Canadians had worked together to rig the referendum and pass Newfoundland off to the Canadians. Malone is merely the latest in a long list to have convinced himself that the British and the Canadians conspired to railroad Newfoundland into Canada and that Britain fixed the vote or, at least, fudged the result to get the outcome it wanted. They all agree, too, that if the process had been fair, Newfoundland, surely, would never have voted to join Canada. People would have embraced dominion status and would have lived happily thereafter as one of most prosperous and contented nations in the world.

Malone wants us to see him as an expert above the fray while, in fact, he is the exact opposite. Anyone who has read his many interviews or listened to his conversation with CBC's Shelagh Rogers in September 2013 — as well as read his book closely — will find that claim highly suspect.⁵ Malone is trapped in the notion of conspiracy, and the evidence he selects confirms for him that Newfoundland in 1948 was, yet again, a victim as it had been throughout much of its history. Newfoundland, Malone suggests, has been without agency because of the intervention — often secretly — of outsiders. He clearly believes that Newfoundland was a self-governing prosperous nation with unbound potential, and he cannot accept that his fellow citizens traded that for — in his view — simply becoming a province of Canada. His book is an attempt to fulfill the psychological need to make sense of a past that many cannot now accept even if the evidence suggests that Newfoundland entered Confederation after considerable debate and two fair votes. Modern nationalists like Malone are attempting to create a narrative to explain why Newfoundlanders

would turn their backs on nationhood. For them, the answer is simple: they were tricked and deceived by Britain and Canada. As Jeff Webb and others have suggested, many of the neo-nationalists in Newfoundland are the right-wing heirs of the Responsible Government League. They denigrate the arrival of social programs, such as unemployment insurance and family allowances, which came with Confederation, for creating a dependency among Newfoundlanders. The better choice, they believe, would have been the “independence” of responsible government. Yet, as Webb reminds us, the paternalistic ideology of the anti-confederates was out of touch with the lives of most Newfoundlanders in the pre-Confederation period.⁶

Even if we accept Malone’s insistence that he is merely the conduit for the late James Halley (a prominent St. John’s lawyer who harboured a lifetime of resentment against Newfoundland’s entry into Confederation) and that his intention in his new book is to generate debate around what could arguably be the most significant event in Newfoundland history, he is wading into a contentious issue of very long standing. The debate around the whole question of the “imperial or British” versus the “local or Newfoundland” control of its affairs has considerable durability in Newfoundland writing. Professor Jerry Bannister, a graduate of Memorial University now teaching at Dalhousie University and one of Canada’s leading historians, has explored the relationship between nationalism and the writing of Newfoundland history. The first histories of Newfoundland, including D.W. Prowse’s *History of Newfoundland*, which was published in 1895, celebrated the country’s triumph despite great adversaries. Bannister notes a marked change in Newfoundland writers beginning in the 1970s, when rather than seeing the country “triumph over their history of oppression,” they were “haunted” by it: “We are not free from our past,” he writes, “but trapped by it, forced to endure seemingly endless cycles of economic failure and social misery.”⁷ Those notions remain, and for Malone and others the source of the conspiracy in the late 1940s was to be found in Ottawa and in London. The British undoubtedly exerted influence in the 1940s, as they had in 1869. In 1869 voters said no to Confederation, but in 1948 they said yes; Malone — and Halley, apparently — never accepted the people’s democratic decision. Malone writes that his dream is to see Newfoundland and Labrador “determine its own destiny ... [and] one day soon the diaspora will return, our sons and daughters will remain at home and ... Newfoundland and Labrador will be an independent country once again, unfettered and free of the attitudes of alien nations off her shores” (240).

Malone attempts to convince his readers that he is redrawing the contours

of Newfoundland history. He is affirming what he sees as the integrity of Newfoundland despite its dastardly treatment by outsiders — in this case, the British and Canadian governments — that interrupted its natural progression from colony to a great and prosperous land. He struggles to convince his readers that those who have researched and written about Newfoundland's history have failed to see the obvious. He offers a simple analytical framework based on what he implies is the only scientific research done on the subject. His scientific rigour, he asserts, is apolitical, and he is merely a reluctant storyteller. After all, he only agreed to write his account after an elderly and fading James Halley “extracted” from him a promise to expose “the great injustice” done to Newfoundland in 1949 (xi–xii). Halley clearly had bees in his bonnet and apparently convinced Malone that Smallwood was a Canadian agent doing Canada's bidding in the early 1940s. The only evidence that Malone is able to offer for this allegation is a 2008 interview with Halley, who fancifully contended that the Canadian High Commissioner (HC) in Newfoundland alerted Smallwood in 1943 to a residency requirement for elections to a National Convention that might be called for 1945. “We saw him going in and out [of the HC's office] all the time,” Halley recalls. The HC purportedly arranged with the Canadian and British military brass to have Joseph R. Smallwood leave St. John's for Gander to establish a pig farm so that he would meet the residency requirement (that representatives to the Convention from districts throughout Newfoundland be resident in the districts they represented) for election to the National Convention and lead the fight for Confederation (92–93). Malone fails to find anything in the “top secret” documents to substantiate Halley's allegations, perhaps because the British did not make a decision on residency requirements until after Smallwood had moved to Gander.

The commercial success of Malone's book is evidence that many readers remain interested in tales of conspiracy about Newfoundland's union with Canada. A conspiracy theorist finds enough “proof” for a rational explanation to satisfy his (and a group's) emotional suspicions; their revelations produce a confirmation of their personal view of a particular historical event. This happens most frequently when the conspiracy writer acts as gatekeeper of the evidence, and skilfully and selectively marshals only that which supposedly proves a particular assertion and filters out all that contradicts his position. The conspiracy gains added credibility and poignancy if the writer convinces her or his audience that a stash of “secret” documents and other previously undisclosed evidence actually exists but lay hidden somewhere in the bowels of governments and had been kept from public scrutiny for years. The real

intentions of nefarious government schemers only come to light when an intrepid outsider finally gets to read all those secret letters and reports that had long concealed the true story of what really happened.

Such is the case here, even though Malone ignores one basic fact: there was never anything secret about Canada's interest in Newfoundland or Newfoundland's interest in Confederation either in the 1860s or the 1940s. In the mid-1860s and early 1870s, when all the British colonies in North America came together to create Canada, Newfoundland participated in the discussions. Neither Britain nor Canada made any secret of the fact in 1869 that they wanted Newfoundland to be a part of Confederation. Large segments of the Newfoundland population wanted the same outcome, and after an 80-year relationship — if not courtship — it should come as no surprise that in the 1940s both Canada and Britain still wanted Newfoundland to join Confederation. Canadian Prime Minister Mackenzie King made no secret that he would cherish the day when Newfoundland elected to join Canada. In June 1943, when Newfoundland-born CCF member of Parliament, J.W. Noseworthy, asked if King had given any consideration to Canada's relationship with Newfoundland after the end of the war, he was straightforward and direct: "If the people of Newfoundland should ever decide that they wish to enter the Canadian federation and should make that decision clear beyond all possibility, Canada would give most sympathetic consideration to the proposal."⁸

Malone has mined the wonderful and well-researched history of Newfoundland and Labrador written by academic historians in recent years to uncover evidence to support his suppositions. He does that job exceedingly well because Peter Neary, Sean Cadigan, Jeff Webb, and David MacKenzie, among others, have already researched the story of Newfoundland's Confederation.⁹ All of them have spent considerable time researching the documents from the period in Newfoundland, Canadian, American, and British archives. They have spent countless hours studying the archival record, and their publications are based on sound and judicious analysis. For someone who is so terribly interested in the truth (and has claimed to have done tons of research himself), it is simply amazing that Malone does not seem to have followed their paths into the archives and to have spent time himself with the voluminous primary documents — or the top-secret records, as he calls them. As his endnotes demonstrate, his book appears to be based on the extensive research and superb scholarship of others, plus the documents on union collected by a former diplomat. He borrows extensively from Professor Neary, for instance, who had earlier found that no conspiracy was orchestrated by either Britain or Canada

in the 1940s to bring Newfoundland into Confederation, a view supported by Jeff Webb.¹⁰ The two countries had worked together to advance the cause of Confederation but had done so within the framework of democratic consent. Neary's book is meticulously researched, and Malone digs deeply and selectively into it to find "evidence" of a conspiracy. With the judicious selection of quotations from Neary's book, Malone begins to find his conspiracy. He relies more extensively on a 1984 publication from the Department of External Affairs edited by Paul Bridle, a former acting Canadian High Commissioner to Newfoundland. Bridle's *Documents on Relations between Canada and Newfoundland* is a two-part tome of selected letters, reports, and correspondence published by the Government of Canada. It contains a mere fraction of the documents available on Confederation, and it is surprising that Malone chose to rely on Bridle's judgement rather than doing the spade work that one would have expected — even demanded — of a writer driven as Malone is to seek out the truth. Bridle's publication is not a complete record of what happened.

In the chapter titled "Problem Child: The 1945 Deal," for instance, Malone has 28 endnotes, all of which came from Bridle's collection of documents and Neary's book. The first duty of those seeking truth, I would contend, is to immerse themselves in the archival documents and to use the materials found there to engage with others and their interpretations. Yet, the citations provided in Malone's book are from what others have already uncovered, and there is little indication in his endnotes that he read the original government documents themselves. If he had, it is most peculiar that he chose to cite Bridle and Neary, rather than the actual documents he would have uncovered in his own archival research. That approach to writing history, while acceptable for a senior undergraduate paper, is not good enough for a researcher who wants to be taken seriously. If Malone had seen the documents in the archives, surely he would have made that clear in his endnotes. One is left wondering that if he had laboriously waded through the boxes of documents in the National Archives in London, in Library and Archives Canada in Ottawa, and in The Rooms in St. John's, then he might have had a fuller and even different understanding of the whole context of union.

There are so many problems with Malone's book that it is hard to know where to begin. I suggest first that anyone interested in understanding the complex history of Newfoundland's 80-year road to union with Canada begin by reading Neary's *Newfoundland in the North Atlantic World, 1929–1949*, David MacKenzie's *Inside the North Atlantic Triangle*, and Sean Cadigan's *A History of Newfoundland*, the articles that have appeared in the pages of this journal,

especially those by Jeff Webb, and perhaps my own work on the Canada-Newfoundland relationship.¹¹ For those interested in a detailed response to Malone's book, they should also read Webb's recent review, "Confederation as Conspiracy."¹²

I will focus here on three aspects of Malone's book. First, let's consider the choice of photograph for the book's dust jacket. It is a clear indication that Malone wants readers to accept a particular narrative; he wants them to believe that as early as 1941 the leaders of the free world were up to no good and that Newfoundland was becoming a victim of the geopolitical game played by the Allied powers. Early 1941 was a period of great fear and trepidation for the Allies fighting Nazi Germany. Several months earlier, France had fallen to Hitler, and Canada, the United States, and Newfoundland, too, were extremely worried that Britain would similarly succumb to the Germans. When US President Franklin D. Roosevelt and British Prime Minister Winston Churchill met in Placentia Bay in August 1941, it was not to plot and scheme on how to manoeuvre Newfoundland into Canada. The Atlantic Charter gave hope during a dark period of human history, and the image of Roosevelt and Churchill leaning towards each other while perhaps whispering some secret about Newfoundland had nothing to do with Confederation. The picture is used to suggest to readers that a conspiracy is being concocted. As the caption to the image inside the book notes, the Atlantic Charter was to proclaim the "right of all people to self-determination ... except for the Newfoundlanders" (photographs following page 78). The use of the photo and accompanying caption is not only misleading, it is dishonest. As Hitler looked primed to overrun all of Europe in 1941 and establish tyranny throughout that continent, Roosevelt and Churchill did not meet in Placentia Bay to conspire on Newfoundland's constitutional future. That is the intent of the photo and caption, however: why else would an image of Roosevelt and Churchill taken in Placentia be selected when the book makes only passing reference to each? It was British Prime Minister Clement Attlee who made the key decisions concerning Newfoundland, not Churchill. If Malone wanted a British PM on the cover, it should have been Attlee.

Second, Malone uses the words "secret" and "top secret" so frequently throughout the book to insinuate that something was being kept from the Newfoundlanders. But even the most uninitiated in diplomatic parlance should know that those two words were used so frequently in diplomatic correspondence that they might be virtually meaningless. If Malone had looked at the vast collection of archival documents from the Department of External Affairs that are available in Library and Archives Canada in Ottawa, he would

have noticed that hundreds, even thousands, of documents sent by government officials and politicians within the Canadian government were marked “secret” or “top secret.” Some documents were also marked “confidential.” By constantly reminding readers that many of the documents included in the Bridle collection were designated as secret or top secret, Malone wants the reader to believe that the British and the Canadians were attempting to hide something — hence the title, *Don't Tell the Newfoundlanders*. As Malone surely understands, the various reports and correspondence generated within the state bureaucracy were never intended for public distribution; that was the case in the 1940s and remains so today. The documents to which he refers were not given the security designation — secret or top secret — in an attempt to keep Newfoundlanders in the dark. Yet, his constant reminder of the security designations is a ploy to convince readers that, if the records created in government were not so marked, they would have been open to the public and all Newfoundlanders would have been able to read them if they were so inclined. That is simply not the case: documents created within the world of state diplomacy — and indeed throughout the institutions of government — are not intended to be released to the public at the time they are created. That does not mean that all documents given a security designation are hiding something from the people or that governments are engaged in a conspiracy. The security classification is given by the one writing the document, and it usually refers to how the document is distributed and stored. A security designation sets the boundaries for who can read a particular document; it is not given to hide the truth from “the people.”

Let us examine two documents from Bridle's collection that are used in Malone's book to illustrate this point and show how the security designation does not work as Malone seems to suggest. The first is a report prepared for the British government by P.A. Clutterbuck, the British Assistant to Under-Secretary of State for Dominion Affairs, who visited Ottawa in 1945 to seek out Canada's interest in Newfoundland (68–73).¹³ It is also one of the most important documents in the whole process of union, but it is marked neither secret nor top secret. Clutterbuck's report to his political masters said that Ottawa was interested in fulfilling the vision of the original Fathers of Confederation, but Prime Minister Mackenzie King told Clutterbuck that the decision on Confederation was one for Newfoundlanders alone to decide, a position he maintained throughout the whole process.¹⁴ As a result of Clutterbuck's 1945 visit, Malone concludes, “the deal was done — without any representation from the people of Newfoundland” (74). It wasn't, of course, because the National Convention

and two votes had yet to occur. Malone also suggests, without evidence, that Clutterbuck's knighthood in 1946 was a reward for his part in the Confederation conspiracy.

A second document, this time from Norman Robertson, the Canadian Under-Secretary of State for External Affairs, to King includes a copy of a statement the British government was about to make in the British House of Commons on setting up the National Convention in Newfoundland (Malone, 77, Bridle, 192). Robertson gave the document the security designation "top secret," not because the information was to be kept from the public (it wasn't; it was fully disclosed within a few days in the British Parliament), but because he did not want the information to become public before the British Prime Minister made his statement in the House. The security designation was given to avoid a potentially embarrassing situation for the British government: Robertson did not want the document leaked to the press and marked it "top secret" because it would then be read only by those within government with the proper security clearance to maintain its secrecy. Marking a document "top secret" set the rules for how the document would be distributed within government. In the case of the two documents cited here, the one containing the sensitive material was not marked "secret" or "top secret," and the content of the one marked "top secret" was revealed to the public a few days later. Such were the vagaries of security designations.

Similarly, Malone places great faith in a document Lord Beaverbrook prepared for Churchill's cabinet in November 1943 as the British government began to plan for the post-war period. Although Beaverbrook was a member of the war cabinet, he held the ceremonial post of Lord Privy Seal (akin to a minister without portfolio in Canada) by 1943 and, according to A.J.P. Taylor, Beaverbrook "had no political following. He commanded no wide popularity in parliament or in the country. He was in his own words, a court favourite, who owed his position to Churchill's friendship."¹⁵ His voice in the cabinet had been marginalized by 1943, and his report on Newfoundland did not create a "dramatic split in the War Cabinet," as Malone claims (44). Malone creates the impression that Beaverbrook's report mattered greatly: it did not, and the British cabinet dismissed it. Clement Attlee, the deputy Prime Minister, who had visited Newfoundland earlier, refuted in the cabinet discussion most of Beaverbrook's claims, including his assertion that Newfoundland was self-sufficient and would be able to stick-handle the uncertain post-war period. It was true, Attlee reminded Beaverbrook, that Newfoundland had accumulated a wartime surplus of \$11 million; however, between 1933 and 1940, "the Island required

considerable financial assistance from this country [UK].”¹⁶ There was considerable uncertainty about the future for Newfoundland and Britain after the war, too, and he reminded other ministers that no decision should be based on the extraordinary circumstances of wartime. He also dismissed Beaverbrook’s claims that there was a clamouring in Newfoundland for a return to responsible government. Even so, Malone sees great import in Beaverbrook’s document and writes: “This controversial and highly sensitive document was released by the UK government only in the winter of 2010,” ostensibly because of its damning contents (44). Yet, Malone reproduces large sections of Beaverbrook’s report that he discovered in Paul Bridle’s collection of documents, which had been published nearly three decades before Malone claims the British released the secret and sensitive document. Malone seems to misunderstand both its secrecy and its importance.¹⁷ What seems to be clear from the Beaverbrook report is that he was worried about the crumbling British Empire and wanted to strengthen Britain’s position in Newfoundland as a bulwark against the Canadian and American presence there. It is not clear that Beaverbrook was a great friend of Newfoundland.

The third problem is Malone’s disregard for the decision that the voters of Newfoundland and Labrador made in the 1948 referenda. He suggests that the ballots may have been tampered with or the final tally fudged to get the results the British wanted. He cites a number of incidents retold over the years by people who reportedly heard “stories” of how the second referendum was fixed, but he does not provide a shred of evidence to support his allegations. If the British had wanted to fix the results, why did they risk running two referenda when democracy and voting can be such messy and unpredictable affairs? Why not do it with the first, if they had such disregard for the ballot box? Newfoundlanders all had the opportunity to vote, and by any standard the turnout in the two referenda was impressive. More than 80 per cent of eligible voters went to the polls, and when Malone suggests that democratic rights were “steamrolled over” — as he told CBC’s Shelagh Rogers — it is simply not true. Newfoundlanders voted twice on the question in 1948, and in the second 52.3 per cent expressed their wish for union with Canada. It might be interesting to note that during the most recent Quebec referendum in 1995, a mere 50.5 per cent voted to remain in the Canadian Confederation, suggesting that the margins in hotly contested referenda are often close.

Malone’s fondness for the urban elite is reflected in his disregard of, even enmity for, rural Newfoundlanders, a view he seems to share with some in the Responsible Government League (RGL). P.E. Outerbridge, a prominent Water

Street merchant and virulently anti-confederate RGL member, saw rural Newfoundlanders as “ignorant and avaricious outporters” because of their support for union with Canada.¹⁸ Malone’s view is evident, first, in his criticism of British Prime Minister Attlee’s decision to impose a residency restriction on candidates for the National Convention. Malone seems to forget that Attlee was, foremost, a social democrat, though Malone would have his readers believe that Attlee was merely intent on silencing the anti-confederate forces in Newfoundland. Before joining Churchill’s coalition government from the British Labour Party, Attlee had been active at the London School of Economics with socialist Sidney Webb and in the left-wing Fabian movement, which believed that capitalism had created an unjust and inefficient society. He had been a major proponent for improved social welfare measures and for using the power of the state to improve conditions for Britons. A strong proponent of the influential 1942 Beveridge Report (prepared by Sir William Beveridge) that provided a set of principles necessary to banish poverty from Britain, Attlee laid the intellectual foundation for a system of social security in the post-war period that was partially implemented in many countries, including Canada. He had created the National Health Service and launched the welfare state that sought to provide “cradle to the grave” care for British citizens. Attlee was a social reformer who believed, rightly or wrongly, that if vested interests controlled the National Convention, social reform would not come to Newfoundland. He was worried that business interests and elites, especially those of St. John’s, might control the process unless some safeguards were established to ensure that *bona fide* residents in the districts stood as candidates and represented the views of all sections of the country. His residency requirement was not to deny anti-confederates control of the Convention, as Malone contends (85), but to facilitate the participation of a wide representation from throughout the country that might lead to an improvement in social conditions in Newfoundland, as Attlee had sought for the people of Britain. (As an aside, it is most peculiar that Malone casts the social democrat Attlee as the enemy of Newfoundland, and Lord Beaverbrook, the business tycoon and imperialist, as its friend.)

In his attempt to highlight further the purported failure of democracy in Newfoundland, Malone chooses to valorize one episode in the process and to ignore a well-known second. He attempts to make the case — unsuccessfully — that it was a dastardly (and undemocratic) decision for the British government not to heed the advice of the Law Society of Newfoundland, given in a 32-signature petition to the British government, that the referendum should include only the recommendations of the National Convention and leave

Confederation with Canada off the ballot. The Law Society, he insists, represented “the cream of the country’s legal community” (151); how dare the British dismiss such an august group.

Malone chooses not to mention in his account a second petition in Newfoundland that rendered the 32 signatures on the one from the Law Society inconsequential. As all Newfoundlanders know, when the National Convention voted 29–16 against putting Confederation with Canada on the referendum ballot, Smallwood and other Confederates charged that the 29 “dictators” in the Convention had denied Newfoundlanders the right to make a decision about Confederation themselves. Smallwood asked people to express their anger in petitions to the Governor and demand the right to vote on union with Canada. More than 50,000 Newfoundlanders mobilized and requested in petitions that Confederation be placed on the referendum ballot. They insisted on *their* democratic right to make a decision on union with Canada.

How could Malone fail to mention this well-known fact when he so vehemently criticizes the British for ignoring 32 lawyers in a similar petition? Was it because the 50,000 represented fishers, loggers, shopkeepers, and others whose conception of Newfoundland did not fit with his view of Newfoundland history? Were they the ones he believes had let Newfoundland down in 1948? Did Malone simply dismiss those 50,000 petitioners because they did not represent his portrait of the “cream” of Newfoundland society, as the lawyers had? Many of the 50,000 might have been poorly educated compared to the lawyers, but they were leaders in their communities and the *sine qua non* of Newfoundland and Labrador society. They had listened intently to the radio broadcasts of debates in the National Convention and had their own view of what the future for their country should be. They were, above all, democrats.

By signing the petition asking for the opportunity to make up their own minds about Confederation, they were telling the British government and their representatives who had sat in the National Convention that they wanted more choices about their constitutional future. They were not automatically willing to give their country back to those who had governed Newfoundland for the better part of a century. They realized, too, that union with Canada would not only revive their democratic institution but also give them the promise of a better standard of living. Through Confederation with Canada, they would be assured of a standard of living higher than what they had endured since the end of World War I. Malone’s dismissal of that petition shows that it is not historical truth that he seeks but condemnation of a process whose outcome he does not like. As Professor Neary has suggested, the British government

had decided before the massive petition arrived that Newfoundlanders should have the democratic opportunity to express their views on union with Canada in their national referendum. In the final analysis, the people of Newfoundland made the decision on Confederation with Canada. Britain might have set the question, but as Neary and Webb have argued, the election was popular and fair and, in 1948, Newfoundlanders made their own choice.

My criticisms aside, Malone has clearly tapped into a particular mindset in Newfoundland and Labrador that has considerable resiliency. He offers a particular view of the events of 1948–49 that is dripping with the nationalist passion and emotion that scholars such as Cadigan and Bannister have uncovered and criticized in much of the recent history of Newfoundland and Labrador. If the reported sales of Malone's book are any indication, that nationalist view of Newfoundland's history and its entry into Confederation continues to generate considerable interest. Readers remain drawn to propaganda, myth, half-truths, the selective use of evidence, and conspiracy theories. Political leaders such as Brian Peckford, Clyde Wells, and Danny Williams have all challenged Ottawa with the enthusiastic support of voters in the province, even though they each had quite different reasons for doing so; Newfoundland voters seem to take pride in their leaders who confront outsiders. Wells was the only Premier to remind Newfoundlanders that the source of their economic problems rested inside the province. Revenues from oil and minerals and the province's recent status as a "have" province have prompted many in the province to forget the economic and financial difficulties that have long plagued Newfoundland and Labrador.

Much of the media coverage of Malone's book has also contributed to propagating the notions of conspiracy orchestrated by the British and Canadians. In the interview in mid-September 2013 on the CBC radio program *The Next Chapter*, which happened to be broadcast from Woody Point, Shelagh Rogers never challenged a single allegation that Malone made. Granted, Rogers is no Eleanor Wachtel (of *Writers and Company*), but for her not to raise an eyebrow when Malone said, among other things, that Smallwood was an agent of the Canadian government in the mid-1940s, that Newfoundlanders did not vote for union, that union with Canada was an international crime akin to the Soviet Union's takeover of Poland, and that Canada had no interest in Newfoundland until the Americans established bases there during World War II, is simply astonishing. Worse than that, her failure to raise even one little question, or to challenge even one of the outrageous statements, shows how the mainstream media have become complicit in validating a particular

version of the past that is based on emotion and wishful thinking, rather than on credible evidence. Malone's call at the end of the book for a history that will "free" Newfoundland and "liberate" it from "alien nations" is over the top. As Ernest Renan¹⁹ cautioned, nationalists, sentimentalists, and conspiracy theorists often get history wrong, but how long can they continue getting Newfoundland history wrong before they are called to account?

NOTES

- 1 Greg Malone, *You Better Watch Out* (Toronto: Vintage Canada, 2010).
- 2 Paul Bridle, ed., *Documents on Relations between Canada and Newfoundland, Volume II: Confederation, Part 2* (Ottawa: Minister of Supply and Services Canada, 1984), 1363.
- 3 Phillip McCann, "British Policy and Confederation," *Newfoundland Studies* 14, 2 (1998): 155–68.
- 4 John FitzGerald, "'The Difficult Little Island' That 'Must Be Taken In:' Canadian Interests In Newfoundland During World War Two," *Newfoundland Quarterly* (Spring 2001): 21–8.
- 5 See Shelagh Rogers, *The Next Chapter*, CBC Radio, 23 September 2013, at: <tinyurl.com/n8ujgdf>.
- 6 Jeff A. Webb, "Confederation, Conspiracy and Choice: A Discussion," *Newfoundland Studies* 14, 2 (1998): 169–87.
- 7 Jerry Bannister, "Making History: Cultural Memory in Twentieth-Century Newfoundland," *Newfoundland Studies* 18, 2 (2002): 175–94; Jerry Bannister, "The Politics of Cultural Memory: Themes in the History of Newfoundland and Labrador in Canada, 1972–2003," in *Royal Commission on Renewing and Strengthening Our Place in Canada* (St. John's: Government of Newfoundland and Labrador, 2003), at: <tinyurl.com/n7djts5>.
- 8 *Debates*, House of Commons (12 July 1943), 4683–84; Raymond B. Blake, "WLMK's Attitude towards Newfoundland's Entry into Confederation," *Newfoundland Quarterly* 82, 4 (Spring 1987): 26–37.
- 9 Peter Neary, *Newfoundland in the North Atlantic World, 1929–1949* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1988); Webb, "Confederation, Conspiracy and Choice"; David Mackenzie, *Inside the Atlantic Triangle: Canada and the Entrance of Newfoundland into Confederation, 1939–1949* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1986); Sean Cadigan, *Newfoundland: A History* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2009).
- 10 Webb, "Confederation, Conspiracy and Choice."
- 11 Raymond B. Blake, *Canadians At Last: Canada Integrates Newfoundland as a Province* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1994 and 2004).
- 12 Jeff Webb, "Confederation as Conspiracy," *Literary Review of Canada* (Mar. 2013).
- 13 Paul Bridle, ed., *Documents on Relations between Canada and Newfoundland, Volume II: Confederation, Part 1* (Ottawa: Minister of Supply and Services Canada, 1984), 173–78.

- 14 Ibid.
- 15 A.J.P Taylor, *English History 1914–1945* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 543–44.
- 16 Bridle, *Documents on Relations*, 83.
- 17 Ibid., 80–95.
- 18 Quoted in Jeff Webb, “The Responsible Government League and the Campaigns of 1948,” *Newfoundland Studies* 5, 2 (1989): 214.
- 19 Ernest Renan, “What Is a Nation,” in *Becoming National: A Reader*, eds. Geoff Ely and Ronald G. Sunny (New York: Oxford University Press, 1966), 41–55