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Center for International Studies
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An Alternative to Canada? A Comparative Analysis
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3. Migration, Spatial Change and the Globalisation of Cultures
4. International Politics and Culture

**An Alternative to Canada?
A Comparative Analysis of the Development of Regionalism in Scotland
and the Atlantic Provinces of Canada.¹**

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The ongoing debate on globalisation, transnationalism and the assumed effect on the continued existence of the nation state as the principal way of organising the world has once again brought up issues such as nationalism, regionalism and separatism. Some of the nation states that seem to have been influenced the most by new developments in the areas of communication, economic co-operation etc., and which have therefore come into the searchlight of scholars in pursuit of these ‘-isms’ or movements, are Canada and Great Britain. This paper is a contribution to the understanding of the effects of the developments that these nation states are going through.

Whether economic and cultural globalisation is a supporter or a destroyer of nation states and national identities as we know them is presently the subject of much scholarly debate. As this paper focuses more specifically on some of the consequences of current developments for certain societies it will not include a theoretical discussion about the effects of globalisation in general. Suffice it here to say that if one assumes, as two premises in a logical line of argument, that both the amount of power and the amount of loyalty towards collective, social, imagined communities are constants, clearly the old idea of the nation state seems to be losing out in favour of the supra-national entity (above) and the region/local community (below). Or, at least, finding itself in a process of becoming a much less sacred, more questioned idea than it used to be. That conclusion may of course be based on false premises. This line of argument will not have a direct effect on the analysis or the conclusions drawn in the following, but it may be worth keeping in mind.²

¹ This article is based on a paper presented at the Nordic Association for Canadian Studies annual conference, Aarhus University, 8 November 1997.

² For a full account of the debate on the impact of globalisation up until now, see Ulf Hedetoft: *The Nation State Meets the World: National Identities in the Context of Transnationality and Cultural Globalisation*, Discussion Paper No.2/97, SPIRIT/Center for International Studies, Aalborg 1997, and

The case of Scottish nationalism, which has equally become a popular subject of study, will be the point of departure in this paper, the object of which will be regionalism in the Atlantic Provinces of Canada (Newfoundland, Prince Edward Island, Nova Scotia and New Brunswick).

It seems that whenever the unity crisis in Canada is debated, the recurring topic is almost always Quebec separatism. Since British Columbia senator Pat Carney made her rather controversial remarks about British Columbia's possibility of using for its own advantage the threat of separatism in negotiating decentralisation with the federal Canadian government, there has also been a renewed focus on separatism in the Western Provinces.³ In the unity debate, however, the Atlantic Provinces are usually just touched very briefly. For some reason in-depth analyses of possible Atlantic Canadian responses to Canadian national unity are hardly ever offered.⁴ One cannot help wonder why: perhaps the political regionalism that used to be so strong in the 1920s with the Maritime Rights Movement was actually the last indication that this region wanted an increased say in its own affairs? This paper sets out to investigate the Atlantic region and its apparent 'lack' of present-day regionalism.

DEFINING THE CONCEPTS

Usually, a prerequisite of analysing and discussing regionalism and nationalism is defining these very concepts. Too often these concepts are confused and used interchangeably with little consideration given to the conceptual misunderstandings that this may cause. 'Nationalism', however, will be mentioned only in passing, meaning that an account of the

Linda Weiss: *Globalisation and the Myth of the Powerless State*, in: *New Left Review*, no.225, Sept./Oct. 1997.

³ Inter Alia 'Carney's musings on B.C. searation embarrass Tories', *The Halifax Herald Limited*, 26.

⁴ Exceptions do exist, though. They would include Robert Finbow: *Atlantic Canada: Forgotten Periphery in an Endangered Confederation?* In: Kenneth McRoberts (ed.): *Beyond Quebec, Taking Stock of Canada*. McGill-Queens University Press, Montreal 1995; P.G. Cornell: *The Maritimes and The Atlantic Region* both in: William Kilbourn (ed.): *Canada – Unity in Diversity*. Holt, Rhinhart and Winston of Canada, Limited, Toronto, 1967; K.A. MacKirdy, J.S. Moir and Y.F. Zoltvany: *Changing Perspectives in Canadian History. Selected Problems* (rev. ed.). J.M. Dent & Sons (Canada) Limited, Toronto, 1971; Ralph R. Kruger: *A Geographical Perspective: The Setting and the Settlement* in: William Metcalfe (ed.): *Understanding Canada. A Multidisciplinary Introduction to Canadian Studies*. New York University Press, New York and London, 1982.

uses (and misuses) of the concept will be beyond the scope of this paper, and therefore will not be provided⁵

In the following, the recurring concept will be 'regionalism', hence an account of the use of it. In order to clarify the use of 'regionalism' in this context, first a definition of 'region' is needed: at least three different types of geographical/territorial regions exist: regions *of* states (e.g. Eastern Europe, the Balkans), regions *between* states (e.g. *Euroregion Schleswig*, the Alps) and regions *within* states (e.g. Western Australia, the Bihar Province of India). This paper will deal mainly with the last understanding of the concept – placing Scotland as one region within Great Britain, and the Atlantic Provinces as one region within Canada.

With the latter definition of region as a point of departure, an imperfect but still useful definition of 'regionalism' would be: The active political attempts on the part of a region to obtain a decentralisation of powers from the state to the region.

With the risk of offending readers with a Scottish national consciousness, in the following, when such political attempts are dealt with – in Atlantic Canada *and* Scotland – they will be referred to as regionalism. This is mainly for the sake of comparison and the standardisation of the concepts used. A standardisation of the concepts has been chosen in order not to confuse different concepts (such as nation state and nation). Such a decision can be easily defended if one accepts that regionalism is to be found – in different more or less radical versions – between two poles on a scale: cultural sub-nationalism⁶ at one end and full-blown separatist nationalism at the other. In this case, any Scottish nationalist will be able to define his '-ism' as both a nationalist and a regionalist phenomenon, accepting, at least theoretically, that his/her nation is also a region (within the British state).

In order to explain properly the development that seems to have characterised the relationship between regions and the state in which they find themselves in this new era of globalisation, and an attendant new phenomenon closely related to regionalism as defined above, it is necessary to introduce a new concept. This new phenomenon is not confined to a few societies; in the post-cold war, post-modern era, there seems to be a general tendency towards nation states losing their sacredness and a tendency towards political and socio-economic considerations laying the ground for new loyalties towards either supra-

⁵ For further reading on the subject is referred to John Hutchinson and A.D. Smith's contribution to the Oxford Readers series: Nationalism. Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1994.

⁶ As defined by Tom Nairn (Nairn, 1977:155).

national entities (such as the EU) or regions. I suggest that in relation to loyalty towards the region, the result of this development be labelled 'pragmatic regionalism'. Such pragmatic regionalisms need not, as is the case with 'orthodox' nationalisms (at least in a Gellnerian definition of it), have as their final goal the total independence of the region, the complete congruence between region and state.⁷ The wishes of pragmatic regionalists would be slightly less radical – usually an improved say in the internal affairs of the region, combined with an accept of the existence of and diminished role played by the present or an alternative state – but with the option and possibility of developing separatist demands if this is deemed necessary.

ATLANTIC CANADA AND SCOTLAND – WHY DO A COMPARATIVE?

When social, economic and cultural characteristics of the Atlantic Provinces of Canada are considered, it soon becomes apparent how much Atlantic Canada resembles another region in the North Atlantic: Scotland.⁸ A list of major common characteristics would include: socio-economic reasons for joining the unions they are now part of,⁹ the existence of cultural sub-nationalism at some points in the history of the region, the re-invention of tradition, a traditional industry which is in decline, a popular preoccupation with the standard of social welfare, dependence on state subsidies and the recent development of new industries partially changing the focus from the primary to the secondary and tertiary sectors. At a more subjective level of argumentation, it could be asserted that both regions constitutionally, politically, economically and socially have been 'in bed with an elephant'.¹⁰ In other words, both regions have suffered from being the smaller partner trying to co-operate with a larger, not always responsive, one. The following is a brief presentation of each of these common characteristics.

⁷ Gellner, 1993:1.

⁸ If one considers the political, economic, social and cultural characteristics of Greenland, Iceland, the Faroes, Scotland and Atlantic Canada, it becomes clear that there is a high degree of similarity between these societies – it actually makes sense to speak of a 'North Atlantic Crescent' of regions which resemble each other closely.

⁹ Canada and Great Britain are of course two different types of union – Canada a federal state, Great Britain a constitutional monarchy. Still, in a not too strictly constitutional meaning, it still makes sense to refer to both as a union of smaller entities – be they defined as provinces, nations or regions. Therefore, again for the sake of comparison, both Canada and Great Britain will be referred to as unions.

¹⁰ The title of a pamphlet published by the Saltire Society of Scotland, 1985 in which P.H. Scott argues that Scotland has gained very little from being part of the United Kingdom of Great Britain (Scott, 1985).

These societies were all brought into their respective unions (Scotland 1707, Nova Scotia and New Brunswick 1867, Prince Edward Island 1873 and Newfoundland 1949) by a political and economic elite who had an eye to the economic advantages that membership of the union would bring to the region and to themselves. Also, these societies had accumulated huge debts that the new union offered to assume. Thus, these unions were marriages of convenience – not love. Therefore, in most cases the result was that large parts of the population were demonstrating against this unification and popular movements were trying to have the acts of union repealed. Another probable reason for the popular discontent might be the fact that, with the exception of Newfoundland politicians, the elites saw no need to ask the people about this decision through referendums or other democratic measures.

In investigating the history of Scotland and Atlantic Canada, one also finds that both regions developed what Tom Nairn in the now famous The Break-Up of Britain (1977) in the case of Scotland refers to as 'cultural sub-nationalism'.¹¹ Because Scotland soon came to prosper from being part of the British Empire, the political and economic elite fought hard to prevent a mature political nationalism from coming into existence – they simply could not afford a separatist movement. But, at the same time Scotland and the Scottish elite could not help being affected by the general ideas prevailing during the 'Age of Nationalism', in fact they contributed many of them; so, according to Nairn, a 'stunted, caricatural version' of nationalism was produced - one which was safe and harmless from a unionist's point of view but repressive and destructive from a nationalist's point of view.¹² In Scotland this was done mainly by romantic-minded literati such as James Macpherson and Walter Scott who invented and re-invented, respectively, the romantic and sentimental image of Scotland as populated by red-bearded, Claymore-wielding, kilted, noble Highland savages.

This process has been matched in Atlantic Canada. Ian McKay in his controversial and highly fascinating book The Quest of the Folk (1994) sets out to debunk the re-invention of the idea of the folk and the impact of antimodernism on culture in Atlantic Canada generally and in Nova Scotia specifically. McKay's main point is that in the early part of the 20th century a certain primitive culture and a simple way of life was elevated from being scorned and disgusted to being celebrated as romantic life *par excellence* – thereby creating stereotypes and symbols that have only a vague resemblance to real life, but which serve

¹¹ Nairn, 1977:155-156.

¹² Nairn, 1977:156. This is supported by, among others, Christopher Harvie who describes the process of creating this harmless nationalism as a 'strategy of noisy inaction' (Harvie, 1994:20).

(d/s) the purpose of a well-to-do, status quo-nurturing elite.¹³ A process which is very similar to what was seen in Scotland in the late 18th and early 19th centuries: Highland culture, which was Gaelic and Catholic, was destroyed only to be re-invented as Lowland (and Scottish) Presbyterian culture. The purpose, in Atlantic Canada and Scotland, was the construction of a 'harmless' cultural sub-nationalism. To the ruling classes (and probably even for the lower classes) there was no better alternative to union/confederation, and thus no need for political nationalism. Even in times of crisis Atlantic Canadians and Scots were always *relatively* well-off and could not afford to jeopardise that by nurturing what would in the eyes of most have seemed an irrational and dangerous striving for self-determination. For a period of about 80 years, the Maritime Provinces needed just look North to be assured that they were better off socio-economically being part of the Canadian federation than Newfoundland was, not being part of it.

So much for cultural sub-nationalism and the re-invention of tradition. There are other, more tangible, similarities between Scotland and Atlantic Canada: in both regions one finds primary and secondary sectors of industry that used to be very prosperous (fisheries, steel production, mining, ship-building) but which are now in decline. As a consequence of this, one would usually find in both regions high unemployment rates compared to other parts of the union. As for Atlantic Canada, according to Finkel, Conrad and Strong-Boag in History of the Canadian Peoples, 1867 to the Present (1993), 'Unemployment rates remained 50 to 100 percent higher [...] than elsewhere in the nation'.¹⁴ Recent figures from Statistics Canada show that today the situation is the same: in December 1997 unemployment in Newfoundland dropped to 17.5 per cent (down 2.8 per cent from 1996). The average unemployment rate in the Atlantic Provinces was 14 per cent whereas the average in the rest of Canada was 7.25 per cent.¹⁵

In the case of Scotland, however, the situation now seems to be changing: since 1992 unemployment rates in Scotland have closely resembled the average of Great Britain (even if certain parts of England can still display unemployment rates that are 1-2 per cent below the Scottish rate).¹⁶ Nevertheless, the recollection of a not too distant past characterised by industrial decline and massive redundancy keeps the Scots focusing along Keynesian lines

¹³ McKay, 1994.

¹⁴ Finkel et al, 1993:535-36.

¹⁵ 'Unemployment rate dips to seven-year low' in *The Globe and Mail*, 10 January 1998.

¹⁶ Brown et al, 1996:83.

on social welfare and the creation of jobs as very important issues that ought to be dealt with.¹⁷

In Atlantic Canada, where socio-economic conditions do not seem likely to change for the better in the next few years, people generally value social welfare and the creation of jobs highly. In a *Maclean's*/CBC News survey conducted by the end of 1996, 37 per cent of Atlantic Canadians felt that unemployment was the most important issue facing Canada (compared to an average of 25 per cent for the rest of Canada). Second in importance to Atlantic Canadians (but only 5th to Canadians generally) one finds health care: 11 per cent of Atlantic Canadians considered health care to be the most important issue facing Canada; only 6.5 per cent of Canadians outside the Atlantic Provinces agreed.¹⁸

Despite of the fact that oil and gas has been discovered and is now being extracted in both regions, both Scotland and Atlantic Canada have become deeply dependent on state subsidies and grants. Hence, in the 1997-98 fiscal year, the block grant received by Scotland will be around £14 billion, and, according to Finkel et al, in the 1980s, half of Atlantic Canada's income derived from federal transfer payments.¹⁹ Still, there is new hope in both regions of becoming self-supporting through the development of electronic industries, tourism, and a larger share of revenues from the extraction of natural resources (oil, gas, nickel).

PRAGMATIC REGIONALISM IN SCOTLAND

Now it has been established that the two regions resemble each other in many respects, both socially, economically, culturally and, to a certain extent, constitutionally. However, in this analysis the fact that these regions are so much alike only really becomes interesting when one starts considering if the demand for further autonomy that can be seen in Scotland today is likely to be mirrored in the Atlantic Provinces as well. To be able to answer this question, it is necessary once more to turn to Scotland to sketch out some recent mental/ideological developments there. Since the late 1960s, Scotland has experienced a

¹⁷ See, among others: Brown et al, 1996:21-24 and Mitchell, 1996:99-101.

¹⁸ The *Maclean's*/CBC News year-end poll, *Maclean's* Magazine, 30 December 1996. Decline in the quality of social welfare and the high levels of unemployment are issues that also keep occupying Atlantic Canadian provincial politicians, who frequently refer to these problems in local media (See e.g. 'Nova Scotia still a health care have-not province - Smith', in *The Daily News*, 27 February 1998).

¹⁹ The Scottish Office, 1997:4 and Finkel et al, 1993:503.

rise in regionalism with political demands – some (including most Scots) would probably refer to this as nationalism. It seems the Scots are now committed to abandoning the just mentioned ‘cultural sub-nationalism’ in favour of a more active role in and attitude towards Scottish affairs. A strong indication that this is actually so would be the fact that the Scots 11 September 1997 voted massively in favour of establishing a Scottish parliament. Also, surveys carried out for the Mail on Sunday show that only 13 per cent of the Scots are in favour of the constitutional status quo, 40 per cent support devolution/home rule within the UK and 47 per cent back independence combined with membership of the European Union. In addition, 62 per cent believe that Scotland will become independent within 15 years.²⁰

What has made the Scots leave the beaten track and choose a different path from the one they used to take? It seems the main reasons should be found in two developments: failure on the part of changing British governments to fulfil Scotland’s needs, combined with a generally new approach to the idea of the nation-state. 19 years of conservative government, Thatcherism, privatisation, poll tax, cuts in the social security budget and, until recently, a non-representative British government, characterised by the so-called ‘Doomsday Scenario’ (a popular phrase used to refer to the fact that for almost 20 years Scots have kept voting Labour (and SNP) and still getting Conservative governments).²¹ All this made the Scots painfully aware that the prosperous days as part of the United Kingdom of Great Britain would not last forever, indeed, might already have ended. Very important to Scottish nationalist claims has been the discovery of oil in the North Sea off the north-east coast of Scotland in the early 1970s, and the fact that most of oil revenues leave Scotland (since the discovery of oil, the UK exchequer has received £127 billion from this source).²² Calculations presented by the Scottish National Party argue that the balance between state subsidies and the revenues of what is claimed to be ‘Scotland’s Oil!’²³ has for the last 20 years been in favour of the Scots. Meaning: if an independent Scotland had had the legal say over its own natural resources, Scotland would have a surplus of £80-90 billion and would have been fully self-sustaining.²⁴ Or in nationalist terms: Scotland does not need Britain, she needs to be in control of her own territory.

²⁰ *The Mail on Sunday*/MORI poll, 29 March 1998.

²¹ Since the 1979 General Election, the number of Conservative MPs elected in Scotland has been: 21 (1983), 10 (1987), 11 (1992) and 0 (1997) out of a total number of 72 Scottish MPs.

²² Heald & Geaghan, 1996:170.

²³ Last part of an SNP catch phrase: ‘It’s Scotland’s Oil’, developed for the two very successful general election campaigns in 1974 (7 MPs elected for the SNP in the first general election, 11 in the second).

²⁴ <http://www.snp.org.uk/library/tr961018.html>.

That, combined with a much more pragmatic view of Scotland in a changing, globalising world (with e.g. a *Europe of the Regions*), may very well have been decisive in maturing the Scots for political demands for an increased say in own affairs and the serious consideration of alternatives to the UK that is now the order of the day – for pragmatic regionalism.

As indicated in the above definition of pragmatic regionalism, the purpose of this is not to argue that the Scots generally go for full independence – in fact most Scots would probably oppose that. But indications are strong that the Scots have found a new self, freed from old ‘safe’ images of the cultural sub-nationalism. Instead, there is a new and much more pragmatic conception of what Scotland will have to put up with from Westminster, and of the alternatives to the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland if this state fails to provide. The alternative, of course, being another supra-regional entity (which happens also to be a supra-national entity): the European Union.²⁵ Perhaps the best proof that the Scots have really begun thinking of alternatives to the British union is the fact that the New Labour government, in the words of Tony Blair, has to give the Scots their own parliament for ‘the Union [to] be strengthened and the threat of separatism removed’.²⁶

PRECONDITIONS FOR PRAGMATIC REGIONALISM IN ATLANTIC CANADA

Let us turn now to Atlantic Canada in an attempt to extend the previous cultural, social, economic and constitutional comparisons and see if similar preconditions for the development of mental/ideological processes resembling those in Scotland can be traced in the Atlantic Provinces. Some of them, it shows, actually can: In Atlantic Canada one sees a rising unemployment rate, and yet a government that keeps imposing tougher restrictions on unemployment insurance benefits. Atlantic Canada also has its own Domsday Scenario: as used to be the case in Scotland, the Atlantic Provinces are poorly represented in government - after the federal election in June 1997, Canada is run by the Liberals who won only 1/3 of the seats in the Atlantic Provinces. There is a continuing crisis in the social infrastructure of the Atlantic Provinces, and even a Canadian equivalent to the much-hated poll tax imposed on the Scots: the Blended Sales Tax (BST). The BST, a 15-per-cent sales

²⁵ The catch-phrase of the Scottish National Party: *Independence in Europe*, indicates that even Scottish nationalists do not see full independence and the acquisition of a sovereign state in the Westphalian sense as a likely future prospect for Scotland. Membership of the European Union, on the other hand, with an increased say in internal affairs, compared to UK membership, seems a much more likely outcome.

²⁶ ‘Real Power will stay with MPs in England, Blair tells Scotland’, *The Scotsman*, 4 April 1997.

tax which took effect 1 April 1997, is generally opposed by Atlantic Canadians because they, as the Canadians with the lowest average income, have been particularly hurt by it.²⁷

As in Scotland, there is a sense of not being given a fair deal on oil and gas revenues from the extensive Hibernia and Terra Nova (Newfoundland) oil fields and the Sable (Nova Scotia) gas field in the Atlantic ocean off the coast of Atlantic Canada. In Nova Scotia it was recently revealed that 70 per cent of the Sable gas revenues will be transferred back to Ottawa as payment for previous grants to the province.²⁸ In Newfoundland, dissatisfaction with the efforts of the current government to increase the province's revenues from natural resources has led to the creation of a new political party, the Newfoundland and Labrador Party, the aim of which is to bring all Newfoundland and Labrador natural resources under the control of the province itself.²⁹

25 February 1998, Finance Minister Paul Martin and the Liberal federal government presented its anxiously awaited 1998 budget, including a distribution of the fiscal dividend, that Canada experiences for the first time in twenty years, to different government programs and initiatives. Even if the budget includes tax relieves for low-income families and increased spending on education at all levels (both would benefit most Atlantic Canadians), it was not particularly well-received in Atlantic Canada. The reasons vary: it has been argued that the tax relieves provided are merely the removal of taxes introduced to fight the deficit in the first place. Neither was there any mention of increased spending on health care. But most importantly, none of the fiscal surplus is to be used for increased spending on unemployment programs and the creation of jobs. The introduction of a successor to The Atlantic Groundfish Strategy (TAGS), due to expire this summer, was anxiously awaited - mainly in Newfoundland where 24,000 people rely heavily upon the continued existence of this or a similar program - but none was offered.³⁰

²⁷ 'NDP says it would ditch BST', *The Daily News*, 18 February 1998.

²⁸ 'Deal ups Sable royalties', *The Halifax Herald Limited*, 17 December 1997.

²⁹ 'Time is now to turn things around, warns leader of new political party', *The Evening Telegram*, 2 January 1998.

³⁰ 'TAGS follow in the works', *The Evening Telegram*, 27 February 1998; 'Just not enough', *The Evening Telegram*, 27 February 1998; 'Mixed Atlantic reviews for budget', *The Evening Telegram*, 27 February 1998; 'The Federal Budget', *The Globe and Mail*, 25 February 1998.

Attempts made by the federal government to better socio-economic conditions and the quality of life in Atlantic Canada

Serious attempts at reviving Atlantic Canadian industry and at attracting investment to that less fortunate region of Canada *have* previously been launched by most federal governments in co-operation with Atlantic Canadian provincial governments. Both in the form of locally managed forums for the discussion of possible solutions and future areas of investment, and in the form of federally managed economic support programs. Some have been fairly successful, some have failed miserably and some have still to prove their value.

During the Diefenbaker administration, initiatives such as the Atlantic Provinces Adjustment Grants and the Atlantic Development Board indicated a renewed concern for economic development in the easternmost part of Canada.³¹ Today the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency (ACOA), a federal Crown corporation the goal of which is to improve the economy in Atlantic Canada generally through the development of business and job opportunities by *inter alia* marketing the Atlantic Provinces internationally and through distributing grants and loans, has been fairly successful but nevertheless seems inadequate to cope with the extensive economic problems facing Atlantic Canada.³²

In 1969, during the Trudeau government, the Department of Regional Economic Expansion (DREE) was established to co-ordinate all the existing regional development programs. The goal was through subsidies to have companies invest and start new production in low development areas. After a period of relative success, the following lack of results led to the abolition of the department.³³

The Atlantic Groundfish Strategy (TAGS) - a program introduced in 1992 to help fishers cope with the socio-economic consequences of over-fishing, when groundfish stocks collapsed and a moratorium on cod fishing was announced - should, according to the Canadian Auditor General, Denis Desautels, be considered a failure. After \$2 billion have been spent, fishing fleets are still too large, and what should have been a program for

³¹ Finkel et al, 1993:534.

³² <http://www.acoa.ca/>.

³³ Finkel et al, 1993:534; Krueger, 1982:76-7.

restructuring the fishing industry and re-educating fishers and processing workers has become 'an income support program'.³⁴

Atlantic Canada is very dependent on money transfers from Ottawa to sustain a certain standard of living, however low. This has already been established in the above. Even if new industries may slowly be starting to pay off, a time when the region becomes self-sustaining seems to be in a remote future. Just as Scottish pragmatic regionalists rely on the European Union, oil, the IT and tourism industries - using these as arguments why Scotland should and even could have a larger say in own affairs and perhaps even one day leave the UK - any Atlantic Canadian pragmatic regionalists would need to have a serious alternative to the present geopolitical situation.

Any alternatives?

In the – still quite unimaginable - case of full-blown Atlantic Canadian separatism, where should the Atlantic Provinces go? Even together, as one 'Atlantic Union', they would not be able to make a voice for themselves in the global economy. So are there any alternative prospects? It would appear that there is at least one: the United States of America. This is an alternative which has not so far proved really attractive to the Atlantic Provinces. The main reason may well be that Canada was always perceived to be the more socially responsible state – and to a region with as many social problems as Atlantic Canada that is worth a lot. But because of federal Canadian economic cutbacks in the 1980s and 1990s affecting education, Medicare, unemployment insurance benefits, old age security payments etc.,³⁵ it seems that the gap between the American and Canadian social systems is narrowing. In addition, it seems there is a widespread feeling in Atlantic Canada that the success of the Liberal Party in defeating Canada's deficit is mainly achieved by destroying the social infrastructure of Atlantic Canada.³⁶ Hence, it appears that the main socio-economic incitement to stay within the Canadian federation is gradually being removed, making annexation to the U.S. a much less dreaded alternative.

³⁴ 'Watchdog calls TAGS lifeline a \$2-billion flop', *The Halifax Herald Limited*, 8 October 1997, and <http://www.gov.nf.ca/publica/tags/>.

³⁵ Finkel et al, 1993:572-579.

³⁶ 'MPs blasted for social cuts', *The Daily News*, 22 October 1997; 'How we'd spend our federal surplus', *The Globe and Mail*, 7 February 1998; 'The Globe and Mail/Angus Reid Poll', *The Globe and Mail*, 1 November 1997.

It should also be taken into consideration that the Atlantic Provinces are already in close economic and political co-operation with the New England states – through e.g., the Annual Conference of the New England Governors and Eastern Canadian Premiers - and that for historical and geographical reasons Atlantic Canadians may have much more in common, culturally, with people from Maine or New Hampshire than they have with e.g. British Columbians.

A second alternative could be argued to exist: the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), the membership of which could be imagined to make up for the loss of federal Canadian money transfers.

From a different point of view, what might appear to be the only two serious alternatives to Canada for the Atlantic Provinces - the USA and the NAFTA – may not really be alternatives. Firstly, the USA would have no economic interest whatsoever in letting in four provinces with a combined population of 2 million people and severe economic and social problems. Secondly, the NAFTA is a completely different ‘union’ from both federal Canada and the European Union, not focussing on social and political co-operation. Even if the Atlantic Provinces would only be needing the economic benefits that membership of the NAFTA would bring and no political unit apart from, say, an Atlantic union of some kind, they should not, in the first place, rely too heavily on becoming members of the NAFTA. Previously, both American and Canadian administrations have told Quebec nationalists that in the event of Quebec secession, the former province of Canada should not expect to be admitted to the NAFTA. It is difficult to imagine the Atlantic Provinces getting a better deal.

PRAGMATIC REGIONALISM IN ATLANTIC CANADA?

In 1968, in an address to the Atlantic Conference, the then Minister of the DREE, Jean Marchand, said:

‘If the underdevelopment of the Atlantic Provinces is not corrected – not by charity or subsidies but by helping them become areas of economic growth – then the unity of the country is almost as surely destroyed as it would be by the French-English confrontation’.³⁷

³⁷ As quoted in *The Atlantic Economy*, Fifth Annual Review, Atlantic Provinces Economic Council, 1971 p.15 (Kruger, 1982:73).

The underdevelopment of the Atlantic Provinces referred to by Marchand clearly has not been adequately dealt with. In the following, first arguments in favour of, then arguments against the change in Atlantic Canadian mentality and attitude towards the Federal Canadian State that Marchand predicted in 1968, will be presented.

Arguments in favour of the existence or imminent development of pragmatic regionalism

First of all, the federal election in June 1997 indicated a radical change in attitude towards federal political parties. In the 1993 federal election, the Liberals swept the Atlantic Provinces, loosing just one seat to the Progressive Conservatives. In the 1997 federal election they only got 11 seats out of 32. Traditionally, 3rd parties have not had any support at all in Atlantic Canada, now suddenly the New Democratic Party (NDP) got 8 seats.³⁸ If nothing else, this is an expression of the determination to effect political changes among Atlantic Canadian voters who, in the words of Finkel, Conrad and Strong-Boag, used to be 'the most cynical of Canadian voters'.³⁹ Finkel et al continue: 'They neither expected their politicians to represent them effectively, nor did they believe in their own ability to effect change through the political process. In the face of such cynicism, Atlantic Canadians were less likely to throw their energies into political reform'.⁴⁰ In other words, the fact that there has been a change in the voting patterns in the Atlantic Provinces might indicate that there is a new belief in the possibility of changing the current political and socio-economic situation. And maybe, as a consequence, a determination towards bettering the current socio-economic situation through radical change. Pragmatic regionalism would fulfil such a wish for radical change without jeopardising the state of things entirely.

Another indication that the Atlantic Provinces could be turning towards pragmatic regionalism may be found in polls conducted for Maclean's Magazine. One of the questions put to Canadians in the 1990 and 1994 polls was: '*Do you think of yourself as a Canadian first, or as a resident of a particular region or province?*'⁴¹

³⁸ 'Election 97, How the parties fared', *The Globe and Mail*, 4 June 1997.

³⁹ Finkel et al, 1993:572.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ It should be mentioned that the question was phrased slightly different in the 1990 poll ('*Do you think of yourself as a Canadian first, or as a citizen of your province?*' and that the figures in it are rounded percentages. Nevertheless the question carried the same meaning and the results thus still provides a valid result for comparison.

Table 1

<i>Percentage who identify with their own province:</i>			<i>Percentage who identify themselves as 'Canadian':</i>		
	<i>1990</i>	<i>1994</i>		<i>1990</i>	<i>1994</i>
<i>Quebec</i>	55	49	<i>Quebec</i>	44	45
<i>Newfoundl.</i>	53	57	<i>Newfoundl.</i>	47	39
<i>P. E. Island</i>	43	44	<i>P. E. Island</i>	57	50
<i>Nova Scotia</i>	37	27	<i>Nova Scotia</i>	63	69
<i>New Brunsw.</i>	25	26	<i>New Brunsw.</i>	75	64
<i>Alberta</i>	24	16	<i>Alberta</i>	74	74
<i>Br. Columbia</i>	17	17	<i>Br. Columbia</i>	83	76
<i>Saskatch.</i>	16	7	<i>Saskatch.</i>	83	82
<i>Manitoba</i>	15	11	<i>Manitoba</i>	84	77
<i>Ontario</i>	9	9	<i>Ontario</i>	90	90

Sources: Maclean's 1 January, 1990,⁴² and Maclean's 3 January, 1994.⁴³

It is obvious from the results reproduced in table 1 that respondents from Atlantic Canada along with respondents from Quebec are those who identify the least as Canadians. It is equally obvious that in the space of time between the two polls Nova Scotia has been heading in the opposite direction of the rest of the Maritime Provinces. That is, whereas people in Prince Edward Island, New Brunswick and Newfoundland define themselves increasingly in relation to their province (up 1, 1 and 4 per cent, respectively) and less as Canadians (down 7, 11 and 8 per cent respectively), Nova Scotians define themselves increasingly as Canadians (up 6 per cent) – less as Nova Scotians (down 10 per cent).

Thus, the results seem to oppose the idea of a renewed sense of regional identity in Atlantic Canada - even if the phrase 'region' in the question asked by Maclean's Magazine never receives any proper consideration in the reproduction of the results of the survey. Regional identity may in fact prove the really interesting part of such a poll. Opposing this conclusion based on what is apparently the ever less regional identity of Nova Scotians, however, is the assumption that a renewed sense of region among Atlantic Canadians may be

⁴² 'An Uncertain Nation', Maclean's Magazine 1 January 1990.

⁴³ 'How we differ', Maclean's Magazine 1 January 1994.

strengthened by the increased political and economic co-operation between the Atlantic Provinces.

Frank McKenna, until recently the premier of New Brunswick, has been arguing in favour of a Maritime common market, and APEC (Atlantic Provinces Economic Council – organised by private enterprise) and CMP (Council of Maritime Premiers) are already well-established institutions.⁴⁴ In this respect it is worth keeping in mind that it was as recently as 1964 that the then premier of New Brunswick, Louis Robichaud addressed the Charlottetown conference this way:

'The New Brunswick delegation came to Charlottetown in 1864 for the ostensible purpose of fabricating a Maritime Union, in concert with the then colonies of Nova Scotia and Prince Edward Island. Unfortunately (and I use the word advisedly), they were not resolute in their purpose. I am persuaded that, had such a political or legislative union been consummated at the time, our contribution to the strength of and our benefits from nationhood would have multiplied manifold [...] Perhaps [...] Premiers Stansfield [Nova Scotia], Smallwood [Newfoundland] and Shaw [Prince Edward Island] and I may get together today and [...] decide to reduce the number of Canadian provinces from ten to seven. Should that occur, the focal point of progress and activity in the nation would unquestionably and rapidly take a marked shift to the east'.⁴⁵

At a recent meeting between Atlantic Canadian premiers, a similar question was debated. It was argued by business groups that too much administration burdens Atlantic Canada (four provincial governments for about two million people) and that some kind of economic union might be the best solution to the problem.⁴⁶ All premiers rejected the idea in the form presented because it would involve a political as well as an economic union. Nevertheless, it seems the idea of an Atlantic Union of some kind is back on the agenda.

Apart from poor representation, the BST, a renewed sense of region etc., there are other external developments that may pull the Atlantic Provinces in a regionalist or perhaps even separatist direction: One is the unrest created by Quebec and Western Canada rattling the separatist sabre. What may be disturbing Atlantic Canadians the most in this respect is the

⁻⁴⁴ Feehan, 1993:133-144.

⁻⁴⁵ MacKirdy et al, 1971:206.

⁻⁴⁶ 'Economic freedom sought', *The Halifax Herald Limited*, 6 October 1997, and 'Atlantic vision clouded by differing views', *The Daily News*, 10 October 1997.

fact that if Quebec secedes, Atlantic Canada will be physically isolated from the rest of Anglophone Canada. A second external factor is, as mentioned, the mental consequences of globalisation. If nation states are actually starting to lose their sacredness and pragmatic regionalism is becoming the order of the day, this will not work in favour of Canadian national unity either.

Arguments against the existence or imminent development of pragmatic regionalism

First of all, no united Atlantic Canadian regional identity seems to exist. There would be some reason in referring to a Maritime culture, but not to a Maritime identity (the two should not be confused). Furthermore, Newfoundland and Labrador (which only joined Canada in 1949) has a different heritage, culture and, indeed, identity than the rest of Atlantic Canada. This would present a main obstacle to the development of anything beyond an economic union between the Atlantic Provinces - at least in a nearby future.

Secondly, Atlantic Canadian politicians appear to be too committed to federalism to assist in the creation of any pragmatic regionalism. Provincial government web-sites on the Internet testify to this: Nova Scotia, Newfoundland and New Brunswick all have a certain site dedicated to the promotion of national unity.⁴⁷

Also, Atlantic Canadians have traditionally supported the multicultural idea of Canada (indicated e.g. by the support for the Meech Lake Accord, the Charlottetown Accord, and now the Calgary Declaration).⁴⁸ The very same figures from Maclean's, which in the above were argued to indicate a growing dis-identification with Canada, still show that approximately half the Atlantic Canadians identify themselves as Canadian first. Thus, the polls conducted for the Maclean's Magazine prove to be anything but unambiguous. These figures provide no certain indication that Atlantic Canadians are turning their backs on the Canadian federation in favour of their own region – indeed, the figures for Nova Scotia may point to the exact opposite conclusion. From its very beginning, one of the main ideas of Canadian federation was multiculturalism (a 'mosaic' compared to the American 'melting pot'). Canadians were never expected to identify first and foremost as Canadian nationals.

⁴⁷ NS: <http://gov.ns.ca/legi/unite/whycare.htm>, NF: <http://public.gov.nf.ca/currentevents/unity/-unityqa-.htm>, NB: <http://www.gov.nb.ca/unite/index.htm>.

⁴⁸ In a national poll, the Angus Reid Group found that 79 per cent of Atlantic Canadians support the Calgary Declaration (opposed to 62 per cent in Quebec and an average of 72 per cent for the rest of the provinces) ('Premiers' unity packet backed', *The Globe and Mail*, 1 October, 1997.)

The point is that even if people do not identify *as* Canadians, they may still identify *with the idea of* Canada.

In the 1997 federal election, Atlantic Canadians used their democratic right to oust the Liberals, sending a signal saying 'change'. The fact that Atlantic Canadians chose to protest this way could indicate - as is done in the above - that Atlantic Canadians are ready for radical changes to take place, both mentally and politically. But at the same time this could also indicate that the 'cynicism' that Finkel, Conrad and Strong-Boag refer to is no longer part of Atlantic Canadian mentality. This then would indicate that what was interpreted above as Atlantic Canadian determinism in relation to increased pragmatic regionalism might also be interpreted as Atlantic Canadian determinism in relation to what could then be termed 'pragmatic federalism' - a stake on the present political and economical structures, but with different federal politicians in control of them.

As mentioned above, there is widespread support for the Calgary declaration on national unity in all the Atlantic Provinces. Still, according to the Maclean's poll, compared to other regions in Canada, one still finds the lowest levels of identification with Canada in the Atlantic Provinces; it would appear there is a paradox involved in this: Atlantic Canadians are both the ones who favour national unity the most and the ones who identify the least as Canadians. Again, one explanation could be that pragmatic federalism, not pragmatic regionalism, is what characterises Atlantic Canada. In other words: even if Atlantic Canadians may not feel particularly 'Canadian', they still opt for the economic and social security found within a strong Canadian federation, as opposed to the less safe prospects offered by pragmatic regionalism.

CONCLUSION AND COMMENTS

These were the arguments in favour of and the arguments against the existence of the imminent development of pragmatic regionalism in Atlantic Canada. Judging from these arguments, has cultural sub-nationalism in Atlantic Canada been replaced by pragmatic regionalism, then? Hardly. The sum of the above arguments would seem to indicate that Atlantic Canada does not at this point possess a very developed regional identity; more likely pragmatic federalism than pragmatic regionalism exists here.

The next point of interest then is the direction that the Atlantic Provinces may now be heading in. One can imagine four possible paths for the Atlantic Canadians to follow from here: a) to become increasingly 'Canadian', developing a Canadian nationalism, b) keep

being pragmatic federalists, c) turn pragmatic regionalists or d) become separatists opting for Atlantic Canadian secession.

For obvious reasons neither Canadian nationalism nor secession seem even remotely plausible directions for Atlantic Canadians to be heading in at this point. However, if one accepts the existence of such a continuum - from Canadian nationalism over pragmatic federalism, over pragmatic regionalism to secession - using socio-economics as a guideline, the most likely direction for Atlantic Canadians to go (perhaps excluding Nova Scotia) is towards pragmatic regionalism. In the above, Atlantic Canada has been proven to be the socio-economic laggard of Canada without much hope of changing this position. The well-tried, but obviously not very successful pragmatic federalism, does not appear to be the logical outcome for people in that position.

The figures in table 1 can be seen as supporting this; the figures still seem to indicate that discontent in the Atlantic region is increasing and that Atlantic Canadians (with the exception of Nova Scotians) define themselves as ever less Canadian. It can not be incidental that Quebec (where approximately 50 per cent of the population support Quebec independence)⁴⁹ and the Atlantic provinces divide the 'top five'-positions among them. The process from pragmatic federalism over pragmatic regionalism to Atlantic Canadian secession (however unlikely at this moment) is a journey which Atlantic Canada could very soon be starting upon and one which federal Canada would not want to be encouraging.

Returning to Scotland for possible answers, we find that in the 1960s no one thought Scotland would ever let go of the 'safe' cultural sub-nationalism that had characterised Scottish culture/mentality for more than 200 years. Ten years later pragmatic regionalism flourished because circumstances had changed. Then again in the aftermath of the 1979 referendum Scottish pragmatic regionalism seemed all but disappeared and (pragmatic) unionism the way of the future. Nevertheless, today after almost 20 years of neglect almost 50 per cent of all Scots are in favour of independence. The case of Scotland thus proves that the mental change from cultural sub-nationalism and pragmatic unionism/federalism to pragmatic regionalism or even separatism may occur within a very short span of time if certain crucial demands are not met.

Pragmatic regionalism because of its nature (of not focusing on emotional matters such as images of self and myths to the same degree as do e.g. most nationalisms) can easily be

⁴⁹ In the referendum 30 November 1995, 49.4 per cent of the Quebecois voted in favor of an independent Quebec ('Dagen, der rystede Canada', *Morgenavisen Jyllands-Posten*, 1 November 1995).

nipped in the bud. In the case of Atlantic Canada, it would appear that the federal 'scissors' should be economic development resulting in generally improved socio-economic conditions.⁵⁰

With what seems a generally changing idea of the sacredness of the nation-state in mind, it seems a good idea that the Canadian federal government and Finance Minister Paul Martin, who should now be considering what to do with next year's fiscal dividend, should decide on spending some of the federal economic surplus in re-developing the social infrastructure in the four have-not provinces of Canada and in creating Atlantic Canadian jobs. Especially since official Canada has always had a hard time creating the sacredness that nations and nation-states have had 'by nature' because of the relative cultural homogeneity of their nationals, and which has been (at least partly) achieved by other multicultural federations - such as e.g. the USA.

The opposing argument goes: multiculturalism itself is the 'Canadian Way' or the 'Idea of Canada', the shared socio-cultural identity and what Canadians have always taken pride in. Still, today a renewed focus on ethnicity is breaking up old multicultural states (examples would be former USSR, former Yugoslavia), leaving others tottering. In Canada specifically, the Quebec question indicates that multiculturalism may not be every Canadian's idea of the perfect society. But most importantly: It becomes almost impossible to maintain the illusion of a shared socio-cultural identity when there is an obvious uneven spread of both culture (different myths and practices) and social standards. Canada is one of the richest states in the world, but fails to deal with the fact that wealth in Canada is unevenly distributed. Atlantic Canada has been - and appears to continue to be - lagging behind in almost every area of socio-economics compared to the rest of Canada.

It is certainly true, as Ulf Hedetoft recently stated, that 'National identity as a horizontal

⁵⁰ It may seem that by characterising the ongoing development as it is done in the above, one must also attribute to Scots and Atlantic Canadians cynical motives and attitudes. But these motives should not be perceived as particularly cynical. As mentioned, 'pragmatic' covers much better the new approach to nation state, region and self. The world perhaps should not be naturally divided into nation states, and regions not condemned for trying to cut a better deal for themselves. After all, the currently dominating idea of the nation and of nation states is not very old. At best it was invented during the European Enlightenment and developed during the Romantic period. Therefore, referring to Scottish and perhaps Atlantic pragmatic regionalism as cynical, would be to agree with a primordialist view of nations and nation states as the only true way of organising the world. Still, it should be pointed out that in spite of the new and generally more pragmatic attitude towards the nation-state which is developing, some nation-states do and should in fact continue to play a very important role. Hence, in the case of Scotland, cultural sub-nationalism might have remained the only indication of a different culture and a sense of imagined community in the Northern part of Britain. But mainly because of indifference on the part of Conservative British governments to regional problems, it didn't.

“imagined community” [...] to the ideal-type national citizen goes well beyond pragmatic arrangements that can be replaced at will’.⁵¹ The question that must be put though is: are Atlantic Canadians ‘ideal-type national citizens’? Where states are culturally homogeneous, social inequality may be accepted if not too extreme. The existence of the ‘imagined community’⁵² is still possible because ‘have-not’ regions know they are (or believe themselves to be) sharing what is perceived to be the most important elements of all with the ‘have’ regions: beliefs, myths, culture. There is a faith in the common destiny of the society.

But some states (including Canada) do not have the benefit, not even the illusion, of a single unifying culture – using Friedrich Meinecke’s terminology, Canada would be a ‘Staatsnation’, but not a ‘Kulturnation’⁵³ – and thus the ‘have-not’ regions within these states much sooner start questioning the reason in accepting inequality. This argument was advanced already in 1968 by the former Prime Minister of Canada, L. B. Pearson:

‘The economic prospects of Canadians of certain regions remain more limited than those of people in other regions [...] Only through [a] sense of equality – equality in the opportunities open to all Canadians [...] can we give a purpose to Canada that will meet the proper expectations of our people. And only through measures that will carry this conviction – that we intend to make equality of opportunity an achievement as well as a goal – can we preserve the unity of the country’.⁵⁴

The leader of the NDP, Alexa McDonough, who is a centralist but also an Atlantic Canadian, seems to be viewing unity as secondary to socio-economics. Being very pragmatic about this, she said in an interview on 11 September (inspired perhaps by the Scottish referendum which was scheduled for the same day): ‘You can’t force, through a Constitution, to make people want to be part of a country [...] People want to be part of a country that has a healthy economy’.⁵⁵

⁵¹ Hedetoft, 1997:6.

⁵² As defined by Benedict Anderson (Anderson, 1983:6).

⁵³ Smith, 1991:8.

⁵⁴ As quoted in *The Atlantic Economy*, Fifth Annual Review, Atlantic Provinces Economic Council, 1971, p.15 (Krueger, 1982:72).

⁵⁵ ‘Jobs first, McDonough says’, *The Daily News* 12 September 1997. By ‘healthy economy’ McDonough is clearly referring to the subject of the interview: jobs and social programs.

Up until this point, the idea of a Canadian imagined community - the multicultural nation - has provided Atlantic Canadians with their most important focus for identification. In fact, this may be the point on which Scotland and Atlantic Canada differ mentally and ideologically, and the reason why the two regions may end up following different paths. Since Enlightenment thinkers gave up on the idea of Scotland as North Britain,⁵⁶ there have been only brief periods (during the World Wars and, perhaps, the Falkland Crisis) when the United Kingdom of Great Britain was perceived as one nation with one national identity. Contrary to the situation in Great Britain, today there is still reason in arguing that there is in fact one shared Canadian national identity.

At least as things stand now, it looks as if Atlantic Canadians generally are willing to renew their social 'contract' with the Canadian federation and to keep investing their allegiance with the Canadian state. But the 'Idea of Canada' will only pull so far. Unless supported by tangible efforts, things may start to change. Thus, it is easily predicted that unless the federal Canadian government manages to deal with the socio-economic problems of the Atlantic region in a proper manner - not simply through increased grants which will inevitably bring increased dependence on Ottawa, but more likely in the form of increased devolution of political power and thus a higher degree of autonomy in economic matters - it may be difficult in the future to convince Atlantic Canadians that they need not look for an alternative to Canada.

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