

Book Review

Smallwood biography fair, frank

By J.L. GRANATSTEIN

Newfoundland has all the attributes of nationhood in a fashion that no other province but Quebec has. Separate from Canada for more than eight decades after the Confederation of 1867, the great Squid-Jigging Ground in the North Atlantic developed its own legends and lore. Then came Joseph R. Smallwood, the last living Father of Confederation, whose story has been told once more in Harold Horwood's Joey (Stoddart, \$29.95, 348 pages). It was Joey who linked Newfoundland to Canada as the 10th province - and it was Joey who ruled the provincial roost for almost a quarter-century.

The story is a familiar one. Smallwood grew up in relative poverty and received little formal education. But he was quicksilver bright, and both socialist doctrine and the press attracted him. For a time, he worked in New York as a reporter on a socialist newspaper; then he returned home and got into union organizing and backroom politics. Never did he make much money; never did his restlessness ebb.

His opportunity finally came at the end of the Second World War. Britain had taken over the island's affairs at the bottom of the Depression, but London, its own finances left in ruins by the costs of war, wanted out. A great convention was called to decide on Newfoundland's future, and Joey Smallwood was a delegate. The choices were responsible government, a continuation of the British-controlled Commission of Government, union with the United States or Confederation with Canada. Joey was for Canada and, although he initially had little support at the convention, his radio broadcasts of the convention's daily events soon reached virtually every citizen.

Horwood, who was at Smallwood's side throughout this struggle, is at his best here, offering a shrewd and brilliant insight on the campaign for Canada. Finally, by dint of his prodigious speaking ability, his quick wit and his innate skill at parliamentary procedure, Smallwood won the convention's agreement that a delegation could go to Ottawa to discuss possible terms with the Canadian government.

DIFFICULT

These negotiations were lengthy and difficult, but the deal ultimately offered was a good one: all the rights of social security enjoyed by Canadians; guarantees that Labrador belonged to Newfoundland; additional millions of dollars each year to raise the island's standards, then still very low, to the national level; and more, much more.

But good as the offer was, Smallwood still faced the opposition of the Water Street merchants, the Catholic church and others. The first referendum in June, 1948, saw a small plurality opt for Responsible Government, with Confederation close behind. A second vote saw Smallwood, Newfoundland and Canada the victors. It was Joey's triumph - and the best thing that had ever happened to Newfoundland. Confederation took place on March 31, 1949.

Then it was Premier Joey at the head of huge Liberal majorities, election after election. Smallwood's first priority was economic development and his zeal led him into perpetual problems. The province's treasury was ripped off by rogues of every description, year after year. "Everything he touched was a financial fiasco," Horwood says of Smallwood's personal finances, but the comment applies just as

well to his economic efforts as premier. But what he did do brilliantly was to improve the lot of the average Newfoundlander. Gone was starvation, substandard housing and the isolation of the outports. Shrewdly milking the federal treasury by his ability to deliver votes to the Liberal party and through his friendship with Jack Pickersgill, his personal choice as Newfoundland's cabinet minister in Ottawa, Smallwood got roads, help for fisheries and every benefit that was going. They were the people's rights, and he delivered.

Inevitably, hubris set in, as it usually does. Joey became convinced that he had done everything himself, that he was always right and that he was the indispensable man.

In 1971, he finally was driven from office amidst charges, counter-charges and farcical events. The smell of scandal lingered over the departing administration and Smallwood went through years of travail. Today, he survives still, though with his speech affected by a stroke.

Horwood's account is that of an insider, a friend turned foe. He is nonetheless fair and frank, admiring of Joey's great virtues and understanding of his equally giant flaws. The book reads well, though the research and accuracy are unfortunately less than perfect. Joe Smallwood deserved better than this, to be sure, but most great men never receive even this much of their due.

Prof. J.L. Granatstein, author of more than 25 books on Canadian history and politics, teaches Canadian history at York University, Toronto.

OUR LANGUAGE

by Jeffrey McQuain

In psychiatry, neurosis refers to a personality problem or disorder. Remember that the plural is neuroses, and you'll wind up with roses.

Sonic relates to sound or to sound waves. This adjective is used so often these days that we seem to be having a sonic boom.

Q. What's wrong with "I've spoke to the neighbors"? A friend told me not to use it.

A. The problem involves using spoke as the past participle of speak. The verb's past tense is spoke ("I spoke to the neighbors" is fine), but its past participle is spoken. At one time, spoke was acceptable in place of spoken, but such usage is now considered archaic or "non-standard," so to speak.

Do you have a question or comment about our language? Please write to Jeffrey McQuain, in care of this paper.

THE BAHÁ'Í FAITH

巴哈伊信仰

- 人類是一家。
- 神是唯一的。
- 個人需獨立尋求真理。
- 各主要宗教之本質同源。
- 宗教與科學當携手並進。
- 男女有如飛鳥雙翼，當平等相待。
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