*Joseph G. Jabbra and Ronald G. Landes*

## Support for Maritime Union Among Nova Scotian Adolescents

> Take a Nova Scotian to Ottawa, away above tidewater, freeze him up for five months, where he cannot view the Atlantic, smell salt water, or see the sail of a ship, and the man will pine and die.[1]

With these words Joseph Howe tried to summarize the segmented nature of Canadian society characterized by very strong political, social, commercial, and geographic cleavages. It was natural for him to see how this accentuated fragmentation could lead to the attachment of different groups of people to the locality in which they lived. As a result of these divisions and attachments the political structure produced by Confederation was in Arthur Lower's words, "carpentered together not smeltered".[2] Its end result was a political system based on the reconciliation of regional differences and the achievement of "unity in diversity".[3] In other words, the political system created by Confederation resulted in a political structure which guaranteed the possibility of maintaining the regional and provincial identities already evident in the Canadian system.

This fragmented nature of the political system has continued to be a main theme, if not at all times the primary one, of Canadian politics. Canadian scholars have long recognized regionalism as a major influence in shaping some aspects of the Canadian political system (i.e. Cabinet representation at the federal level). However, it has only been on the basis of survey research conducted primarily within the past decade that the extent and significance of regionalism at the mass level (i.e. voting behaviour) has become well documented.[4] More specifically, recent interpretations have stressed the relationship between provincial political boundaries and regional identities.[5] For example, John Wilson argues that "there must be at least one political culture for every

independent political system, even if in many cases the similarities are so great as to make any distinction between them irrelevant".[6]

However, among those scholars who argue that each province may have a distinctive political culture we find a tendency to refer to the eastern provinces, because of their often-noted similarities, as a single region.[7] We should note, however, that little, if any, behavioral data exist to document whether or not the people themselves perceive a common bond which would justify grouping these provinces together as a single region. Most of these studies have relied instead on the historical approach as the rationale for such a classification.

Without going into a detailed study of the history of Maritime Union, which has already been ably documented by Professor J. Murray Beck,[8] it is important to note that its historical justification did vary. Thus, for example, the advocates of Maritime Union have generally viewed it from two perspectives: as either a prelude and basis for seceding from Confederation or as a basis for greater power for this area within Confederation.[9] Despite the frequent historical recurrence of the concept of Maritime Union, Professor Beck noted that "unless the situation has changed in the 1960's, popular support of Maritime Union has been virtually non-existent".[10] In another study a different conclusion was reached pointing to a favorable popular support for a complete union of the three provinces of Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, and Prince Edward Island.[11]

As part of a larger project investigating the development of political orientations among adolescents in Nova Scotia, we included a series of questions intended to detect any perception by our sample of a common identity among Maritimers. If such a common bond was recognized by our students, we were interested in assessing the degree of its translation into support for the idea of a Maritime Union. Note that our study was conducted in the Fall of 1974, five years after the publication of the opinion survey sponsored by the Maritime Union Study. Our sample was a province-wide group of adolescents in grades 7 through 12 in the schools of rural and urban Nova Scotia.[12]

### Perception of Maritime Identity

Given the segmented nature of the Canadian political system, premised on the existence of a number of distinct regions within the national framework, we would expect different identities to emerge

along regional or provincial boundaries. Thus, for example, Canadians living in the Maritime region, while conscious of their similarities, would be expected to perceive themselves as separate from other Canadians living in other parts of the country. This assertion was supported by the students' responses to the following question: "Some people think that the people who live in the Maritime Provinces (Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, and Prince Edward Island) are very much alike, while others think they are very different. What would you say?" Approximately 80 percent at each grade level perceived Maritimers as being alike in most ways, while only 12 percent perceived a difference. Moreover, it is important to note the early establishment of this pattern of perception among the youngest students in grade seven, as well as its stability across the grade span.

In an attempt to specify the nature of these similarities among Maritimers and any possible differences between one Maritime province (i.e., Nova Scotia) and Ontario, the students were asked to judge the similarities and differences in relation to three indicators (friendliness to strangers, amount of money people have, and their kind of government). A great similarity perceived among Maritimers, paralleled by a great dissimilarity between Nova Scotia and Ontario, with respect to the three indicators would, in our judgement, support the hypothesis stressing regional identifications in Canada.

As a methodological note Ontario was chosen because it does constitute one of the two key central provinces in Canada, what Professor Smiley refers to as the "central heartland",[13] and it, along with Nova Scotia, was one of the original members of Confederation. In addition Nova Scotians still perceive and refer to residents of Ontario as "Upper Canadians", an anecdotal example which illustrates the historical continuity of regional identifications in the Canadian system.

Turning to our data for our first indicator of friendliness (Table One), we see that over the grade span the children's rating of Maritimers as being definitely alike increases from 48 percent in grade seven to 74 percent in grade twelve. In contrast the perception of Nova Scotia and Ontario on this indicator of being definitely alike begins lower (34 percent) in grade seven and declines over the grade span to 24 percent in grade twelve. Thus by the grade twelve level 74 percent of the children view Maritimers as definitely alike in terms of friendliness to strangers, while only 24 percent rate Nova Scotia and Ontario as being

similar on this characteristic, a difference of almost 50 percent on this perceptual indicator.

On an economic indicator of the amount of money people have, we see in Table Two a noticeable increase over the grade span from 19 percent in grade seven to 41 percent in grade twelve who see Maritimers as definitely alike on this characteristic. In addition note that the perceived differences remain stable throughout these grade levels. By contrast the same table indicates that the perceived similarities between Nova Scotia and Ontario on this indicator start very low (10 percent in grade seven) and continue to decrease to 6 percent in grade twelve. The perceived degree of difference on this characteristic increases steadily over the grade span from 55 percent in grade seven to 76 percent in grade twelve. Thus the perceived degree of similarity among Maritimers on this indicator increased with the students' degree of maturity, and the perceived difference between Nova Scotia and Ontario started quite low and decreased over the grade span.

With respect to the final indicator of the kind of government people have, Table Three shows, in contrast to our first two tables, an increase in perceived similarity across the grade span for both sets of comparisons. It is, however, important to realize that the increase in the perceived similarity among Maritimers is greater (reaching 62 percent by grade twelve) than the increase in the perceived similarities between Nova Scotia and Ontario (reaching 50 percent in grade twelve). Thus even on an objective indicator in which the points of comparison in terms of the structure of government are basically similar, we still find differences in perception which increase the similarity among the Maritime provinces and tend to disregard such objective similarities between Nova Scotia and Ontario.

In relation to all three of the above presented indicators, we find that as the students mature the degree of perceived similarity among Maritimers increases. In marked contrast these students in Nova Scotia perceive growing differences between themselves and people in Ontario on two of our three indicators. On the final indicator of the kind of government, an objective indicator of structural characteristics which are primarily the same between Nova Scotia and Ontario, we found a degree of misperception or at least a willingness to evaluate even the structures of government as differing between these two provinces.

Pending further research our data so far tend to indicate that Nova Scotian adolescents perceived greater similarities among Maritimers than between Nova Scotians and other Canadians living in other regions of the country. These preliminary findings tend to support the assumption already advanced by a number of scholars that a given physical region (i.e. the Maritimes) tends to produce a separate regional consciousness which ties together people living within that region. In the remaining portion of the paper we will attempt to see to what extent this regional consciousness manifests itself in support for the concept of Maritime Union.

### *Support for Maritime Union*

In order to test the familiarity of the students with the issue of Maritime Union, they were simply asked whether they had ever heard of the expression. We should mention that this item and the responses to it did not test for an accurate understanding of the concept but merely its recognition by the students. Thus the students' answers indicate that while 44 percent of the total sample have heard of Maritime Union, a very sizeable minority of 39 percent have not heard of it. Furthermore, as expected a developmental pattern is evident in that older students have a much higher level of recognition of the concept than younger students. By the grade twelve level 62 percent of the Nova Scotian adolescents have recognized the concept, a figure which is lower than that of the adult population (73 percent) found in the Maritime Union Study.[14] While the level of recognition by the grade twelve level is a fairly high percentage, it is not overwhelmingly so, considering that approximately 27 percent, more than a quarter of the sample, still have not heard of this issue at their point of entry into the political system. The higher level of recognition in the adult sample, while showing a difference of 13 percent when compared to our grade twelve level, might be explained by a number of factors, chief among them the fact that public enquiries about Maritime Union were being held when the study was conducted.

Another question followed which was intended to find out to what extent the students favored a Maritime Union. As can be seen in section one of Table Four, an increasing percentage of students across the grade levels reject the notion of Maritime Union. Thus we see the "no"

category increasing from 14 percent in grade seven to 35 percent in grade twelve. While the "yes" category remains relatively stable across the grade span, it is of interest that among the older students in grade twelve the negative response has received a slight edge. If we compare the results of our adolescent sample to the adult sample of the Maritime Union Study, we find that a higher percentage in the adult study was in favor of a complete union (62 percent of the Nova Scotian respondents), while only approximately 29 percent in our total sample were so inclined.[15] It is equally important to realize that a higher percentage in the adult study (31 percent) were opposed to Maritime Union, whereas only 22 percent of our total sample were thus disposed. Let us note, however, that only in grade twelve in our sample do we receive a slightly higher percentage of negative responses than that of the adult sample.

Thus the major contrast between our study of adolescents and the Maritime Union Study is the large difference in the "yes" category. We speculate that this discrepancy may be due to differences in the time period when each study was conducted and also to the fact that we included a "not sure" category as a possible response. Thus in Table Four (section one) we see that the "not sure" category is chosen more often than either the "yes" or "no" response. This pattern is probably a reflection of the number of children who do not understand the concept of Maritime Union and also perhaps a reflection of a certain ambivalence by the students toward such a union. Given these qualifications in comparing the two studies, we still feel it is important to remember that those persons definitely in favor of Maritime Union are only half as numerous among the adolescents in Nova Scotia when compared to the adult population studied previously. Thus, the relatively stable and lower level of favorable response in comparison to the earlier Maritime Union Study, combined with a sharp increase in the negative views of Maritime Union over the grade span, would seem to demonstrate that a perception by the students of a common identity among Maritimers is not readily converted into support for Maritime Union.

The student's ambivalence towards a Maritime Union expressed in section one of Table Four is paralleled by their overwhelming uncertainty about or their lack of awareness of their government's position respecting such a union. For example, in section two of Table

Four, we see that between two-thirds and three-quarters of the students at all grade levels are not sure of their government's position on this issue. However, it is interesting to see that while the "yes" response is low and relatively stable, the "no" category increases significantly from 10 to 23 percent over the grade span. This high degree of uncertainty, as seen in the high "not sure" category, might be a reflection of the students' unawareness of their government's position.

Despite the noted level of the student's ambivalence towards a Maritime Union, a clear manifestation of lococentrism was indicated by the overwhelming majority of our sample when the students were asked to pick from a variety of Maritime cities the seat for the government if a Maritime Union were to take place. Thus, for example, we found that among all the cities Halifax was the overwhelming preference of 69 percent of the students in our total sample. Furthermore, this accentuated majority in favor of Halifax was stable across the grade span. The next closest preference was bestowed by our total sample upon the city of Moncton (7 percent) and Charlottetown (6 percent). This emphasized pattern of lococentrism expressed by our adolescent sample is in full agreement with the results of the Maritime Union Study in which 69 percent of the Nova Scotian adults interviewed selected Halifax as the seat of government for a possible Maritime Union.[16] Thus the degree of ambivalence towards a Maritime Union in which the geographic boundaries of Nova Scotia might be engulfed in the wider regional scope of a Maritime Union, coupled by an overwhelming preference for Halifax as the seat of government if such a union were to take place, might be an indication of the students' attachment to their separate identity in the first case, and in the second of their concern to keep the locus of power and influence within the boundaries of Nova Scotia.

Given what might appear to be an existing sketch, however blurred, of a distinctive Nova Scotian identity as indicated in the above analysis, it must be mentioned that an independent territorial support is not a *sine qua non* for its survival. In other words, especially with respect to the English-Canadian context, nationalism and regionalism need not be mutually exclusive concepts. For example, Professor Rawlyk, in his analysis of the effect that the secession of Quebec would have on the Maritime region, notes that even with strong provincial loyalties and traditions "the option of independence as a separate political entity is considered folly".[17] This argument is supported by the results of

section three in Table Four. Asked whether they would vote for or against the separation of the Maritime Provinces from Canada, an overwhelming majority of 80 percent of our total sample stated they would vote against such a separation. Although our question did not deal specifically with the separation of Nova Scotia from Canada we might be safe to infer in this particular case that what applies to the Maritime Provinces in general does also apply to Nova Scotia in particular.

In considering the developmental pattern of learning on this issue, section three in Table Four also shows a strong increase over the grade span from 66 to 89 percent of the students who would vote against separation. This figure at the grade twelve level is almost identical to the 87 percent of the adults in the Maritime Union Study who also answered this question with a negative response.[18]

## Conclusion

Using a province-wide sample of Nova Scotian adolescents in grades seven through twelve, we have attempted to investigate in this article two major themes: first, the sense of identity among Maritimers as perceived by Nova Scotian adolescents and secondly, whether such an identity, if it exists, is translated into support for a common political unit (i.e. Maritime Union). In relation to our first theme we have presented some initial data which we feel points to the possible existence of a distinct Maritime identity. However, we have also seen that this identity is not converted into strong support for Maritime Union. While not wishing to separate from Canada, these students, as they mature, show an increasingly negative level of support for the idea of Maritime Union.[19]

In conclusion we might add that the results of our data do not indicate an overwhelming support for a Maritime Union. For example in section one of Table Four we have shown that 26 percent of the students at the grade twelve level would support a Maritime Union, while a larger percentage (35 percent) indicated an unfavorable view. It is clear that the enthusiasm for a Maritime Union found by the Maritime Union Study five years before the administration of our questionnaire is not evident in our data. Furthermore, as the students mature, whatever support there is, is counterbalanced by an increasing number of students who would vote against such a union. This less than

enthusiastic support for a Maritime Union among Nova Scotia adolescents leads us to conclude with Professor J. Murray Beck, who recognized the virtually non-existent popular support for such a union, that before any serious attempt at such a merger is undertaken "...it is essential to demonstrate that substantial positive good is likely to result from Maritime Union before incurring the wastage through ill will and conflict that will inevitably follow any attempt to effect it".[20]

## TABLE ONE
## MARITIME IDENTITY ON THE "FRIENDLINESS" INDICATOR
### (percent by grade level)

|  | MARITIMERS | | | NOVA SCOTIA VS. ONTARIO | | |
| GRADE | DEFINITELY ALIKE | DEFINITELY DIFFERENT | NOT SURE | DEFINITELY ALIKE | DEFINITELY DIFFERENT | NOT SURE |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| 7 | 48 | 17 | 28 | 34 | 29 | 28 |
| 8 | 62 | 18 | 16 | 37 | 32 | 24 |
| 9 | 65 | 15 | 17 | 32 | 35 | 28 |
| 10 | 70 | 16 | 12 | 29 | 46 | 21 |
| 11 | 70 | 15 | 12 | 25 | 49 | 24 |
| 12 | 74 | 14 | 8 | 24 | 49 | 21 |

### TABLE TWO
### MARITIME IDENTITY: AMOUNT OF MONEY PEOPLE HAVE
(percent by grade level)

| GRADE | MARITIMERS | | | NOVA SCOTIA VS. ONTARIO | | |
| | DEFINITELY ALIKE | DEFINITELY DIFFERENT | NOT SURE | DEFINITELY ALIKE | DEFINITELY DIFFERENT | NOT SURE |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 7 | 19 | 40 | 29 | 10 | 55 | 25 |
| 8 | 24 | 44 | 26 | 10 | 60 | 22 |
| 9 | 27 | 40 | 27 | 10 | 62 | 21 |
| 10 | 32 | 40 | 23 | 8 | 70 | 17 |
| 11 | 43 | 36 | 16 | 7 | 75 | 14 |
| 12 | 41 | 40 | 15 | 6 | 76 | 12 |

## TABLE THREE
## MARITIME IDENTITY: KIND OF GOVERNMENT
(percent by grade level)

|  | MARITIMERS | | | NOVA SCOTIA VS. ONTARIO | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| GRADE | DEFINITELY ALIKE | DEFINITELY DIFFERENT | NOT SURE | DEFINITELY ALIKE | DEFINITELY DIFFERENT | NOT SURE |
| 7 | 36 | 18 | 34 | 28 | 27 | 34 |
| 8 | 45 | 21 | 28 | 36 | 27 | 30 |
| 9 | 52 | 13 | 30 | 41 | 17 | 36 |
| 10 | 57 | 17 | 22 | 44 | 26 | 26 |
| 11 | 63 | 16 | 16 | 46 | 23 | 28 |
| 12 | 62 | 14 | 17 | 50 | 20 | 24 |

TABLE FOUR: VARIOUS OPTIONS REGARDING MARITIME UNION (percent by grade)

| GRADE | Section One: Vote in Favor of Maritime Union | | | Section Two: Government of Nova Scotia in Favor of Maritime Union | | | Section Three: Vote in Favor of Separating from Canada | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Yes | No | Not Sure | Yes | No | Not Sure | For | Against | Not Sure |
| 7 | 28 | 14 | 55 | 14 | 10 | 75 | 8 | 66 | 22 |
| 8 | 30 | 15 | 54 | 14 | 10 | 74 | 7 | 75 | 14 |
| 9 | 32 | 18 | 48 | 12 | 14 | 73 | 5 | 80 | 13 |
| 10 | 26 | 27 | 46 | 12 | 16 | 70 | 6 | 84 | 9 |
| 11 | 29 | 27 | 42 | 10 | 17 | 71 | 3 | 89 | 7 |
| 12 | 26 | 35 | 38 | 12 | 23 | 63 | 3 | 89 | 7 |

## Footnotes

1. J. Murray Beck, *Joseph Howe, Anti-Confederate* (Ottawa, 1956), 15, quoted in J.R. Miller, "Unity/Diversity: The Canadian Experience," *Dalhousie Review,* LV (Spring, 1975), 63.
2. A.R.M. Lower, *Canadians in the Making* (Don Mills, 1958), 289, quoted in Miller, "Unity/Diversity," 65.
3. Miller, "Unity/Diversity," 63-65.
4. See for example John Meisel, *Working Papers on Canadian Politics* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1972); Mildred A. Schwartz, *Politics and Territory: The Sociology of Regional Persistence in Canada* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1974); Richard Simeon and David J. Elkins, "Regional Political Cultures in Canada," *Canadian Journal of Political Science,* VII (September, 1974), 397-437.
5. Schwartz, *Politics and Territory,* 5.
6. John Wilson, "The Canadian Political Cultures: Towards a Redefinition of the Nature of the Canadian Political System," *Canadian Journal of Political Science,* VII (September, 1974), 440.
7. Schwartz, *Politics and Territory,* 6; Wilson, "The Canadian Political Cultures," 474.
8. J. Murray Beck, *The History of Maritime Union: A Study in Frustration* (Fredericton, New Brunswick: Maritime Union Study, 1969).
9. *Ibid.,* 23.
10. *Ibid.,* 45.
11. Market Facts of Canada, *The Maritimes and Maritime Union: An Opinion Study* (Frederiction, New Brunswick: Maritime Union Study, 1970), 1.
12. The total sample size was 3036 adolescents or approximately 500 for each grade level. The cities included in the study were Amherst, Annapolis Royal, Antigonish, Bridgewater, Halifax-Dartmouth, Musquodoboit Harbour, New Germany, Reserve Mines, Sheet Harbour, Sydney, Truro, Wolfville, and Yarmouth.
13. Donald V. Smiley, *Canada in Question: Federalism in the Seventies* (Toronto: McGraw-Hill Ryerson Limited, 1972), 178.
14. Market Facts of Canada, *The Maritimes and Maritime Union,* 5-6.
15. *Ibid.,* 27-31.
16. *Ibid.,* 46.
17. G.A. Rawlyk, "The Maritimes and the Problem of the Secession of Quebec 1967-1969," in *One Country or Two?,* ed. by R.M. Burns (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1971), 228.
18. Market Facts of Canada, *The Maritimes and Maritime Union,* 76-77.
19. The introduction of control variables for the questions regarding voting in favor of Maritime Union or voting in favor of separating from Canada does not alter our conclusions in any way. The variables for party identification, religion, sex, and rural-urban differences show no significant impact. The social class variable has a modest effect, but since the results are in agreement with the findings of the Maritime Union Study, we have not reported them in analysis.
20. Beck, *The History of Maritime Union,* 46.