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## Article abstract

During ten days in August 1971 Prince Edward Island farmers, led by the local chapter of the National Farmers Union, staged high-profile public protests against the provincial government's neglect of family farm issues and its promotion of economic rationalization and modernization as exemplified in the government's 1969 Comprehensive Development Plan. While these protests did not stop the trend towards farm abandonment, they did manage to put the concerns of small farmers on the political agenda and dampen the government's enthusiasm for development planning that ignored small producers. The result was a consultation process between the government and small farmers and the government's 1972 Family Farm Development Policy.

# Agrarian Protest and Provincial Politics: Prince Edward Island and the 1971 National Farmers Union Highway Demonstration

RYAN O'CONNOR

*En août 1971, les cultivateurs de l'Île-du-Prince-Édouard, dirigés par la section locale du Syndicat national des cultivateurs, organisèrent des manifestations publiques pendant 10 jours, pour protester contre la négligence du gouvernement provincial dans les dossiers touchant les fermes familiales et contre sa promotion de la rationalisation économique et de la modernisation, comme l'illustre son Comprehensive Development Plan (plan de développement global) de 1969. Bien que ces manifestations n'aient pas mis fin à la tendance à l'abandon des fermes, elles réussirent à inscrire les préoccupations des petits cultivateurs à l'ordre du jour politique et à refroidir l'enthousiasme du gouvernement pour une planification du développement qui faisait fi des petits producteurs. Il en résulta un processus de consultation entre le gouvernement et les petits cultivateurs, et l'adoption en 1972 de la politique du gouvernement sur le développement des fermes familiales.*

*During ten days in August 1971 Prince Edward Island farmers, led by the local chapter of the National Farmers Union, staged high-profile public protests against the provincial government's neglect of family farm issues and its promotion of economic rationalization and modernization as exemplified in the government's 1969 Comprehensive Development Plan. While these protests did not stop the trend towards farm abandonment, they did manage to put the concerns of small farmers on the political agenda and dampen the government's enthusiasm for development planning that ignored small producers. The result was a consultation process between the government and small farmers and the government's 1972 Family Farm Development Policy.*

ON THE MORNING OF 12 AUGUST 1971 the residents of Prince Edward Island and the tourists who had come to soak in the bucolic charms of the "Garden of the Gulf" awoke to an unusual site. In unison, hundreds of farmers had driven their agricultural vehicles onto the Island's highways and disrupted the normal flow of traffic. The tractor demonstration, a new phenomenon on Prince Edward Island, was organized under the leadership of the National Farmers Union (NFU); it marked the beginning of a ten-day protest designed to secure government action to mitigate the declining fortunes of small-scale farmers. The wave of protest reached its climax with a tense stand off between the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) and NFU members who formed a human chain and blocked the Trans-Canada Highway near Borden, the major ferry terminus for travel to and from the Island.

As is the case with many protests, the actions in the summer of 1971 were a

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product of events and relationships fixed within a narrowly defined time and place. Farmers in the province faced the prospect of yet another year of falling commodity prices in 1971. In an effort to offset the low returns on their crops an increasing number of producers turned to the National Farmers Union, a relative newcomer to the Island that was quickly gaining wider appeal for its willingness to take more decisive action than the province's traditional farm leadership. On behalf of Island farmers, who were long accustomed to wielding considerable political influence both within and outside of the legislature, the NFU entered into a dialogue with the provincial government to gain financial concessions. Growing frustration with government inaction in the winter of 1971 was exacerbated by the passage of a bill in the legislature that empowered the provincial government to limit public gatherings. Although designed to halt the planning for a rock and roll concert, NFU supporters felt that the law might also be used as a tool to prevent members of the organization from exercising their right of free assembly. In response the NFU organized a 1200-member protest march on the legislature in early April. Thereafter, talks between the government and the NFU continued; however, suspicion and distrust of the government grew. When farmers' demands for specific forms of minor relief were denied in the summer a vote was held, which resulted in the late-August protests.

The rise of the NFU on Prince Edward Island and the events of August 1971 were also rooted in transformations in the natural resource sector in Atlantic Canada and changes in state policy in the decades after the Second World War. The forest industries, fisheries, and agriculture all underwent restructuring after the war, the most important characteristics of which were a consolidation of primary production and secondary processing in the hands of large, often multi-national corporations. It was a process that was actively encouraged by the provincial and federal governments, which were bent on modernizing rural Canada through the introduction of technology and the rationalization of primary production.<sup>1</sup> On Prince Edward Island these policies came together forcefully in the 1969 Comprehensive Development Plan (CDP), a \$722.7 million scheme co-funded by the federal and provincial governments that, in part, aimed to move people off of small family farms. The implications of this long-

1 A note of clarification is in order regarding the use of the term "modernization." Within the pages of this study the term is a reference to "modernization theory" as discussed by Miriam Wright in *A Fishery For Modern Times: The State and the Industrialization of the Newfoundland Fishery, 1934-1968*. This theory, which was popular among policy-makers and politicians throughout the Western world during the 1940s, 1950s, and 1960s, espoused that a traditional society, characterized by a backward citizenry and a poorly developed, labour-intensive economy, could be transformed into its antithesis, a modern society, through the infusion of "capital, technology, entrepreneurship, and modern attitudes." Initially the West focused its modernization schemes on poor countries due to "fears of political instability in 'Third World' nations and the need to secure economic resources." As such, it originated as a means to defend the integrity of capitalism from external threats. By the late-1950s, however, the modernization ethos had been adopted by the Canadian government for use domestically in economically disadvantaged areas, giving rise to the plethora of development programmes that marked the 1960s. See Miriam Wright, *A Fishery For Modern Times: The State and the Industrialization of the Newfoundland Fishery, 1934-1968* (Don Mills, ON: Oxford University Press, 2001), p. 7. The author wishes to thank those who read and commented upon this article in its various stages, particularly Peter Campbell, Ian Ross Robertson, George O'Connor, the *Acadiensis* editorial staff, and the anonymous reviewers. Appreciation is also extended to Simon Lloyd and Jill MacMicken-Wilson for their help locating sources, and Edward MacDonald for the many insightful discussions over the years.

term process, as elsewhere, were farm abandonment and, ultimately, acute anxiety concerning the future of rural communities and the lack of power over selling prices. The ever-declining contingent of family farmers on the Island were caught in the same cost-price squeeze that was driving small independent commodity producers out of the fisheries, forest industries, and agriculture throughout the region and beyond. In short, the price paid for cod, pulpwood, potatoes, and many other products did not keep pace with the cost of fishing gear, logging skidders, fertilizers, and other necessary inputs. By the end of the 1960s primary producers throughout Atlantic Canada had begun to join new organizations and employ more direct political action in an attempt to address their mounting problems.

Clearly, the protest by NFU members did manage to reverse somewhat the processes that had been gaining momentum since the 1940s. Farm abandonment continued apace, and the relationship between farmers and the large processing companies that had come to dominate agriculture on the Island was not significantly altered. The NFU protests were successful, however, in dampening the unrestrained enthusiasm of the provincial Liberal government for the modernization ethos embodied in the CDP. This shift in emphasis was abundantly evident at the level of political rhetoric, but it was also manifest in such legislation as the Family Farm Development Policy initiated by the Alex Campbell government in 1972.

The emergence of farmers as the dominant political constituency on the Island was the result of converging factors in the latter part of the 19th century. Throughout the 1800s, three issues had come to dominate Island politics: the Land Question, the relationship with Canada, and the place of religion in schools. The Land Question, based on the tenant farmers' grievance that the land they worked was owned by absentee landlords, came to the forefront of Island politics in the 1830s. Beginning with the Escheat movement, which took control of the Island House of Assembly in 1838 before collapsing under the twin weights of high expectations and the colony's limited self-governing powers, and continuing with the Tenant League's acts of civil disobedience between 1864 and 1867, these mass movements of Island agrarians successfully convinced the colonial administrators that their concerns must be addressed.<sup>2</sup> Union with Canada emerged as an issue at the Charlottetown Conference in 1864. By 1873 it had been put to rest as Prince Edward Island joined Canada as its seventh province.<sup>3</sup> The terms of union with Canada also resolved the Land Question, as it provided for the purchase of those lands still held by non-resident owners. Debate regarding the place of religion in the school system, which split Islanders along denominational lines, lasted between 1856 and 1876. After the election of 1876, which the opposing parties publicly agreed would be the last contested on the issue,

2 For information on the Land Question see Rusty Bitterman, *Rural Protest on Prince Edward Island: From British Colonization to the Escheat Movement* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2006) and Ian Ross Robertson, *The Tenant League of Prince Edward Island, 1864-1867: Leasehold Tenure in the New World* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1996).

3 By the time Prince Edward Island entered Confederation, a series of buy-outs had redistributed two-thirds of the land from absentee landlords to local farmers. See David Weale and Harry Baglole, *The Island and Confederation: The End of an Era* (Summerside: Williams & Crue, 1973), p. 64. For further information on the Island's negotiations with Canada, see Francis W.P. Bolger, *Prince Edward Island and Confederation, 1863-1873* (Charlottetown: St. Dunstan's University Press, 1964).

the practice of rallying the Protestant majority against the Catholic minority was abandoned. These three developments in the mid-to-late 19th century ushered in what Frank MacKinnon calls “the beginning of the modern period in Island politics.” As he explains: “The issues of land, religion, and union had abated, and party strategy replaced factional intrigue. The electorate was composed of many elements, and the parties now adjusted themselves so as to reflect as many of them as possible.”<sup>4</sup> At the same time, the franchise was gradually expanded. By 1893 practically all males over the age of 21 were eligible to cast a ballot. Farmers, now the largest interest group within the province, suddenly found the Liberals and Conservatives vying for their support.<sup>5</sup>

The close connection of Island politics and agriculture was epitomized by Walter Jones, Liberal premier from 1943 to 1953. The agricultural pedigree of “Farmer Jones,” as he was widely known, was impeccable. Having taught at the Hampton Agriculture Institute in Virginia and served as the superintendent of the American government’s Experimental Farm at Arlington, Virginia, he won numerous awards for his application of scientific knowledge to the breeding of cattle.<sup>6</sup> Chosen as successor to retiring Premier Thane Campbell in 1943, Jones’s agrarian bias is exemplified by his address to the delegates of the Maritime Board of Trade in 1949, in which he said, in part, that “the heart of the province [is] . . . in its rural districts and that the cities [are] . . . only a place where people can meet and do their business. If the farmers all go foolish like the people in the towns, good-bye Prince Edward Island.”<sup>7</sup>

Given his agrarian bias, it is little surprise that the local press once accused Jones of inciting “class warfare in this Province.” However, as David Milne points out, this “criticism did not deter Jones from making a virtual equation of Prince Edward Island with the rural farm interest on every available occasion.”<sup>8</sup> In 1948 the federal

4 Frank MacKinnon, *The Government of Prince Edward Island* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1951), pp. 243-4; Ian Ross Robertson, “Religion, Politics, and Education in Prince Edward Island from 1856 to 1877,” (master’s thesis, McGill University, 1968); Ryan O’Connor, “. . . you can beat us in the House of Assembly, but you can’t beat us in the street’: The Symbolic Value of Charlottetown’s Orange Lodge Riot, 1877,” *Historical Studies*, 72 (2006), pp. 71-94.

5 MacKinnon, *The Government of Prince Edward Island*, pp. 53, 215. In 1931, the first year the provincial agricultural population was recorded, approximately two-thirds of the 88,038 Island inhabitants lived on a farm. See Statistics Canada, “Table 14 – Farm and non-farm populations, 1921-2001”, <http://www.statcan.ca/english/freepub/95F0303XIE/tables/html/agpop14.htm> (accessed 17 May 2005).

6 Jones’s accolades included recognition as a Master Breeder from the Holstein-Friesian Association in 1931 and a 1935 King’s Silver Jubilee Medal for his “outstanding contributions to agriculture.” See Wayne MacKinnon, “The Farmer Premier: J. Walter Jones and His Vision of Prince Edward Island,” *Island Magazine*, 35 (Spring-Summer 1994), p. 4. Jones’s awards continued posthumously, as he was inducted into the Canadian Agricultural Hall of Fame in 1962.

7 Quoted in David Milne, “Politics in a Beleaguered Garden,” in Verner Smitheram, David Milne, and Satadal Dasgupta, eds., *The Garden Transformed: Prince Edward Island, 1945-1980* (Charlottetown: Ragweed Press, 1982), p. 43. Despite the political domination of Prince Edward Island by the farming interests, the first farmer to serve as premier in the post-Confederation era was Walter Lea, who held the position from 1930-1931 and again from 1935-1936. Prior to Lea, most premiers had been lawyers. This did not present a problem to the farming population for two major reasons. First, government during this period had a more limited role, and rarely intruded into the life of the citizenry. Second, the premier needed to cater to the rural voters in order to maintain power.

8 Milne, “Politics in a Beleaguered Garden,” in Smitheram, Milne, and Dasgupta, *The Garden Transformed*, p. 43.

government rescinded its marketplace ban of margarine, a product perceived to be a threat to the national dairy industry. Jones responded by prohibiting its sale on Prince Edward Island. Pressured by urban workers to introduce daylight savings time, he sided with rural inhabitants, most of whom were farmers, who opposed it. Confronted by schoolteachers upset with their low pay, he informed them: “Until the farmers’ incomes go up, yours won’t.”<sup>9</sup> Even the timing of his elections was known to be considerate of farmers’ needs, occurring in the slower season between “haying and harvest.”<sup>10</sup>

Yet all of these examples of bias pale in comparison to Jones’s actions in the summer of 1947. On 11 September of that year, 70 employees at Charlottetown’s Canada Packers plant joined their United Packinghouse Workers of America counterparts in a nationwide strike for higher wages. Pressured by hog producers anxious to bring their animals to market, Jones intervened and offered the workers a 50 cent bonus for each hog slaughtered. When the workers rejected this solution, the Island government promptly seized control of the factory, hired non-union labour, and passed legislation proclaiming the strike illegal. Refusing to return control of the plant to its owners until they guaranteed the strikebreakers permanent positions, Jones then passed the short-lived Labour Act of 1948, which banned all unions with national and international affiliations.<sup>11</sup> It is noteworthy that Jones’s draconian measures did not seem to faze the public. Two months later a provincial election was held. Despite being bemoaned by labour leaders and the press – even the partisan Liberal *Patriot* newspaper decried his harsh actions in Charlottetown – the premier’s pro-farmer stance improved his party standings in the 30-member legislature from 20 to 24 seats.<sup>12</sup>

Despite the efforts of Walter Jones, though, the traditional family farm began a long and precipitous decline in the mid-1900s. This is most clear when one examines the provincial farm population. In 1931, the first year that such records were kept, there was a farm population of 55,478, which accounted for nearly two-thirds of the province’s total population of 88,038. The farm population fell below one-half of the total population by 1951, with 46,855 out of a total population of 98,429. By 1961 the farm population was 34,800, which accounted for one-third of the total population of 104,600. This figure continued to drop; in 1971 the total farm population was 21,300 (approximately one-fifth of the total population of 111,600).<sup>13</sup> This decline in farm population coincided with the disappearance of farms from the Island countryside. While the number of farms in 1921 – 13,701 – was a mere 48 fewer than 20 years prior, by 1941 the number of Island farms had declined to 12,230. Dropping to 10,137 in 1951, the number of farms fell to 7,335 in 1961 and, by 1971, this number was

9 Quoted in Edward MacDonald, *If You’re Stronghearted: Prince Edward Island in the Twentieth Century* (Charlottetown: Prince Edward Island Museum and Heritage Foundation, 2000), p. 234.

10 MacKinnon, “The Farmer Premier,” p. 8.

11 Discretionary powers for union licensing were provided to the provincial secretary, effectively meaning the government could ban any unions it wanted. See MacDonald, *If You’re Stronghearted*, p. 234.

12 As Edward MacDonald notes, “If anything, rural Islanders applauded the way their Premier had put unions in their place.” See MacDonald, *If You’re Stronghearted*, p. 235.

13 Statistics Canada, “Table 14 – Farm and non-farm populations, 1921-2001”; William Janssen, “Agriculture in Transition,” Table 1, in Smitheram, Milne, and Dasgupta, *The Garden Transformed*, p. 116.



down to 4,543 – just one-third of the number that existed a half-century earlier.<sup>14</sup>

The main reason for this decline was the low income that many farm families received, which provided little more than a subsistence lifestyle. In 1941 the per capita income of Island farm residents was \$89, or 17 per cent of the Canadian national average. By 1945, as a result of wartime contracts, subsidies, and price controls, the per capita income of Island farm residents had increased to \$197 – 26 per cent of the national average of \$770. Per capita incomes of Island farm residents continued to rise, peaking at \$528 or 41 per cent of the national per capita income in 1952. Such heights were followed by a rapid descent, with farm residents earning a meagre \$251 each – 19 per cent of the national average – the following year.<sup>15</sup>

Jones's ten years in office – marked by the government's best intentions and a wartime boom in agricultural prices – saw the Island farm population decline by 4,800. Trying to stem this tide became the central focus of the subsequent premier, Alexander Matheson, who took office in 1953. He proposed making country life more comfortable by introducing electricity, a luxury until then enjoyed primarily by the province's urban population. Not only would this allow farmers to implement labour-saving technologies, Matheson reasoned, but it would also allow rural inhabitants to enjoy entertainment options such as television. Likewise, he began a programme to pave roads in rural communities. While there is no doubt that these actions made rural living more appealing, the Island farm population declined a further 7,400 during Matheson's six-year premiership.<sup>16</sup>

Matheson also recognized that the presence of more job opportunities in rural communities would help ease the trend towards urban migration. As such, the first concerted government effort to industrialize Prince Edward Island began. Seeking industries that would be complementary to the existing agricultural situation, the government began offering financial incentives to private enterprises willing to establish processing plants across the province. As Donald Nemetz notes, this was a revolutionary approach towards economic development for the Island government: "The idea of government intervening to guide or manage economic and social development was alien to Prince Edward Island. The provincial government had always been conservative in this regard, and it had not asked the federal government to play such a role, beyond providing a good transportation link with the mainland."<sup>17</sup>

Government intervention in the Island economy escalated under Matheson's successor Walter Shaw. A career bureaucrat who had served as the provincial deputy minister of agriculture for 20 years, his Progressive Conservatives swept into office

14 Andrew Hill Clark, *Three Centuries and the Island: A Historical Geography of Settlement and Agriculture in Prince Edward Island, Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1959), Table IX, p. 134; Elizabeth Campbell, *An Economic Profile of the Agricultural Industry of Prince Edward Island* (Charlottetown: Economics, Marketing & Statistics, Department of Agriculture & Forestry, August 1977), Table 2, p. 7, PEI Collection, Robertson Library, University of Prince Edward Island (RLUPEI).

15 G.E. Britnell and V.C. Fowke, *Canadian Agriculture in War and Peace, 1935-1950* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1962), pp. 107-17; Janssen, "Agriculture in Transition," Table 1, p. 116.

16 Milne, "Politics in a Beleaguered Garden," in Smitheram, Milne, and Dasgupta, *The Garden Transformed*, p. 44; Janssen, "Agriculture in Transition," Table 1, in Smitheram, Milne, and Dasgupta, *The Garden Transformed*, p. 116.

17 Donald Nemetz, "Managing Development," in Smitheram, Milne, and Dasgupta, *The Garden Transformed*, p. 155.

in 1959. Unimpressed with the *ad hoc* form of development attempted by the previous administration, Shaw, who “brought to government the confidence of the rational planner and civil servant,” attempted to instil a more organized approach. Soon the Island was inundated with government planners and surveyors studying the most efficient manner to capitalize on its natural resources. By 1965 no fewer than eight complete surveys of the province had been conducted.<sup>18</sup>

The evolution of development planning on Prince Edward Island reflected the grander patterns that emerged in Canada during this period. The “espousal of Keynesian economics following the Second World War,” maintains Donald J. Savoie, “led to the attempt by governments to deal with economic disparity by promoting new economic opportunities in disadvantaged regions.”<sup>19</sup> These efforts began with the various piecemeal provincial programmes of the late-1950s, which were designed to attract industry. The federal government became involved in the 1960s, implementing a wide variety of development initiatives. As Philip Mathias notes: “During the decade [the 1960s], billions of dollars of capital was spent by federal and provincial governments to persuade anyone, from major international corporations to penniless promoters, to build large industrial plants in places in which they would not normally locate.”<sup>20</sup> The federal initiatives began in 1961 with the Agricultural Rehabilitation and Development Act, a programme designed to boost marginal farmers’ incomes by improving their land and increasing their outputs. It was followed one year later by the Atlantic Development Board (ADB). This region-specific body was responsible for the \$186 million Atlantic Development Fund, which was designed to improve the economic infrastructure of the Atlantic Provinces. In 1963 the Area Development Agency was established and the Area Development Incentives Act passed, both of which aimed to “enlist the private sector in stimulating growth in economically depressed regions . . . by enriching existing tax incentives and by introducing capital grants in designated areas.”<sup>21</sup>

Millions of dollars were invested in Prince Edward Island under these programmes. The ADB alone, notes Edward MacDonald, directed \$14.6 million to the province in its first six years.<sup>22</sup> Nonetheless, the provincial economy continued to falter. Seasonal unemployment rates consistently hovered between 15 and 20 per cent, and the per capita income was approximately two-thirds the national average.<sup>23</sup> Perhaps most disappointing was the fact that, despite increased production and a ten-fold increase in spending by the Department of Agriculture, the province’s 6,357 farms were earning by 1966 an average of only \$2,370 real income each; this meant that the per capita net income of the Island’s 31,000 farm residents was \$568 – one quarter the national average.<sup>24</sup>

18 Milne, “Politics in a Beleaguered Garden,” in Smitheram, Milne, and Dasgupta, *The Garden Transformed*, p. 45.

19 Donald J. Savoie, *Visiting Grandchildren: Economic Development in the Maritimes* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2006), p. 4.

20 Philip Mathias, *Forced Growth: Five Studies of Government Involvement in the Development of Canada* (Toronto: James Lewis & Samuel, 1971), p. 1.

21 Savoie, *Visiting Grandchildren*, p. 84.

22 MacDonald, *If You’re Stronghearted*, p. 267.

23 Department of Regional Economic Expansion (DREE), *Agreement Covering Development Plan For Prince Edward Island* (Ottawa: Queen’s Printer, 1970), p. 23.

24 MacDonald, *If You’re Stronghearted*, p. 296; Campbell, *An Economic Profile of the Agricultural Industry of Prince Edward Island*, Table 2, p. 7; Janssen, “Agriculture in Transition,” Table 1, in Smitheram, Milne, and Dasgupta, *The Garden Transformed*, p. 116.



Prince Edward Island's failure to experience significant economic improvement was hardly an anomaly. A realization that development efforts nationwide were failing to meet expectations led the federal bureaucrats responsible to reconsider their approach. Their conclusion was that a more systematic method was required. In 1966 the Fund for Rural Economic Development designated five areas of chronic unemployment – Quebec's Gaspé Peninsula, the Interlake region of Manitoba, New Brunswick's Mactaquac and northeastern regions, and the whole of Prince Edward Island – for special, integrated development planning.<sup>25</sup> In order to “adopt, prepare and implement” a plan for Prince Edward Island, the Economic Improvement Corporation (EIC) was established the following year.<sup>26</sup> Staffed by a legion of planners “from away,” the group hastily began the process of assessing where the province stood, where it must reach, and the means by which it could arrive there. By 1968 there was an agreement in principle, but it would take another year and 13 draft revisions to sort out the minutia – most notably the federal-provincial cost-sharing agreement.<sup>27</sup>

The EIC's wide-ranging studies and surveys culminated in the 7 March 1969 signing of the Comprehensive Development Plan. Valued at \$722.7 million, the CDP was a 15-year strategy “to further the social, economic and instructional improvement” of the province.<sup>28</sup> A clear articulation of the modernization ethos that was guiding development planning, the CDP touched on all aspects of life in the province, including the arts, education, and social services. Its impact was most pronounced, however, in its aims for the provincial economy. Proclaiming that its goal was “to create conditions in which the people of Prince Edward Island can create viable economic enterprises for themselves,” the CDP attempted to diversify the Island economy away from its traditional industries of farming and fishing.<sup>29</sup> Increased attention was also devoted to the burgeoning tourism industry, and industrial parks were established to create non-traditional goods on the peripheries of Charlottetown and Summerside.

Perhaps the most dramatic changes were those slated for the province's primary industries. Rationalization became the keyword, and plans to reduce the workforce in each sector prevailed. Fishers, through a series of port closures and license buyouts, were encouraged to leave the industry. Likewise, in a move consistent with the Federal Task Force on Agriculture's goal of reducing the number of Canadian farm operations by two-thirds in the 1970s, an attempt was made under the CDP to establish 2,500 commercial farming units, specialized and highly mechanized to maximize yields, instead of the 6,357 farms that had existed in 1966. According to the

25 Savoie, *Visiting Grandchildren*, p. 83.

26 Prince Edward Island Legislative Assembly, “An Act Respecting The Economic Improvement Corporation,” 1967, C12, PEI Collection, RLUPEI.

27 MacDonald, *If You're Stronghearted*, p. 297.

28 DREE, *Agreement Covering Development Plan For Prince Edward Island*, p. 7. According to the arrangement signed on 7 March 1969, the federal government's contribution to the plan was supposed to be \$225 million, with the remaining \$500 million raised by the province. In reality, the federal government ended up pumping in \$301 million compared to the province's \$186 million. See MacDonald, *If You're Stronghearted*, p. 342.

29 DREE, *Agreement Covering Development Plan For Prince Edward Island*, p. 24

social planners at the CDP's helm, those who left their traditional industries would easily find employment in the emerging tourism and manufacturing industries.<sup>30</sup>

The premier responsible for overseeing the CDP was Alex Campbell. Charismatic and youthful – he was first elected premier in 1966 at the age of 32 – Campbell represented the modernization of Prince Edward Island. Contrasting himself with the “horse and buggy boys” that preceded him, he was unequivocal in his belief that the province required wide-scale change immediately or else risk becoming a permanent ward of Ottawa. Unlike many of his predecessors, Campbell lacked a romanticized notion of the family farm. As such, he was unafraid to denounce the poverty that afflicted many within this segment of Island society. This approach is no doubt attributable in part to Campbell's background. The son of Thane Campbell, premier from 1936-43, the younger Campbell followed in his father's footsteps and attained a post-secondary education off-Island before establishing a legal practice in Summerside. As he noted in an interview, the problems afflicting agriculture were largely the result of a failure to adapt to the modern scales of economy:

Prince Edward Island, in fact, was probably twenty years behind Ontario, and still clung to the notion that the family farm, however you describe it, was the essential engine for the economy of Prince Edward Island. But we were, as I said, probably twenty years behind. When the government began assisting the dairy industry to move to bulk milk, the grants were used to buy the smaller Ontario bulk tanks. . . . Ontario had gone [to] the next generation of bulk tanks, into larger operations, but we were still trying to save that five acre potato farm and the six cow dairy operation. And the great difficulty we had was that agriculture was so important to the province that if it didn't succeed, the province wouldn't succeed. . . . The whole farming scene was modernizing and mechanizing, yet no one was really attempting to define that ideal farm situation that had a chance of survival.<sup>31</sup>

The shift towards a modernized Prince Edward Island, as represented by the ascent of Campbell and the various industrialization schemes, also had a dramatic impact on the makeup of the provincial legislature. As David Milne states: “In House membership, farmers have slipped from a position near or exceeding one-half of total members in the 1920-1950 period until in the 1970s they comprised roughly one-quarter of the members. In the cabinet, their strength on average has been halved from the 1940 to the 1970 administrations. Their places have been taken by representatives from the professional, managerial, and service sectors.”<sup>32</sup>

Coinciding with the decline of the family farm on Prince Edward Island was a growing discontent with the existing farm leadership. The Prince Edward Island

30 DREE, *Agreement Covering Development Plan For Prince Edward Island*, p. 33; Campbell, *An Economic Profile of the Agricultural Industry of Prince Edward Island*, Table 2, p. 7.

31 Alex Campbell, interview by author, tape recording, Stanley Bridge, PEI, 25 September 2003 (tape recording in possession of author).

32 Milne, “Politics in a Beleaguered Garden,” in Smitheram, Milne, and Dasgupta, *The Garden Transformed*, p. 67.

Federation of Agriculture, the local affiliate of the Canadian Federation of Agriculture, had fallen into disfavour. Peaking in 1950 with a membership of 5,000, within 12 years its membership had fallen to 1,750.<sup>33</sup> A committee named to investigate this decline reported that the drop was caused by newfound competition for the farmers' money at dairy plants. Whereas federation dues had traditionally been the only deduction from farmers' accounts, the committee reasoned that the advent of automatic deductions for hospital insurance premiums had made farmers less willing to see further deductions taken.<sup>34</sup> Diedrich Dyck's 1961 *Socio-Economic Study of Rural Areas of Prince Edward Island*, however, reveals deeper problems. As part of Dyck's research, fifty-four members of the federation were interviewed. Asked whether they believed the organization had benefited their home communities, thirty-five said yes, seven said no, eight were undecided, and two indicated that the federation no longer held meetings in their area.<sup>35</sup> With such a sizeable minority of the organization's membership expressing dissatisfaction or ambivalence, one can only speculate how widespread discontent about the federation was among those who did not count themselves among the rapidly dwindling ranks.

Further proof of division within the agricultural community can be seen in local efforts to create a provincial farmers' union akin to those in Ontario and western Canada. As Neil A. Matheson noted in his 29 June 1962 farming issues column for the Charlottetown *Guardian*, talk of establishing a rival farming organization was first raised at a gathering of livestock producers in May 1962. Such sentiments were apparently widespread, for as Matheson noted: "Opposition to the federation exists in many parts of the province. I've found that it crops up here and there in talks I've had with farmers in various parts of the province."<sup>36</sup>

What was the cause of increasing dissatisfaction towards the federation within the agricultural community? At its roots lay a perception that the organization was no longer concerned with the interests of the common Island farmer. Rather, it was widely perceived that the federation had become too closely associated with industry and the provincial government. Andy Wells, the long-time principal secretary to Premier Alex Campbell, provided a damning indictment to this effect in a recent interview. Wells recalls the federation playing a vocal role in protesting undesirable government policies during the 1950s. However, a dramatic transformation had overtaken the organization in the 1960s, at which point it became "a staid organization" run by "soft-spoken and diffident" leaders: "They were almost an arm of the Department of Agriculture. The federation was seen, and it was in fact, I think, just a puppet of government."<sup>37</sup>

33 John Angus Weir, "Rural Reconstruction In Prince Edward Island: An Evaluation" (PhD diss., Queen's University, 1964), pp. 114-15.

34 "Membership Fees Boosted By Federation Directors," *Guardian*, 24 January 1961, pp. 1-2.

35 Two did not answer the question. See Diedrich Dyck, *A Socio-economic Study of Rural Areas of Prince Edward Island* (Charlottetown: Canada Department of Agriculture and Prince Edward Island Department of Agriculture, 1961), p. 55, PEI Collection, RLUPEI.

36 Neil A. Matheson, "Farmers Union Plans Are Laid," *Guardian*, 29 June 1962, p. 14.

37 Andy Wells, interview by author, tape recording, Hazel Grove, PEI, 10 September 2003 (tape recording in possession of author). Leo MacIsaac, a former official with the federation, provides a different interpretation of how the Island became "open" to the rival organization in the following passage from his *Our Island Farm Scene: Now and Back Awhile* (Charlottetown: PEI Federation of

Despite de facto recognition from the federal government as the nation's primary representative of farmers' interests,<sup>38</sup> the Canadian Federation of Agriculture's position did not go uncontested. In the years surrounding the Second World War a variety of strong provincial farmers' unions emerged in Ontario, Manitoba, Saskatchewan, Alberta, and British Columbia. Rejecting the federation's "organization of organizations" structure, the unions were composed exclusively of family memberships. Freed from the influence of commodity boards and business interests, the unions developed a more aggressive agenda based on the advocacy of progressive economic principles, such as collective bargaining and guaranteed prices for producers, and the utilization of confrontational tactics that included marches, tractor demonstrations, and economic boycotts.<sup>39</sup>

These provincial farmers unions quickly recognized that they were at a disadvantage when dealing with the federal government. In order to coordinate their efforts, in 1944 they established a loose federation consisting of the various provincial executives.<sup>40</sup> Called the Interprovincial Farm Union Council, this organization "existed largely only in name" insofar as it did not maintain an independent office or staff.<sup>41</sup> Renamed the National Farmers Union in 1960, it soon became clear that it needed to develop into a more integrated, national organization based on direct membership. Passing a constitution for the new organization in 1968, the decision was made to merge the existing provincial unions into a new National Farmers Union at a founding convention in July 1969.<sup>42</sup>

It was during the period preceding the launch of the reconfigured NFU that the organization first came to Prince Edward Island. Two local clergymen concerned with

Agriculture, 1988): "In the late 1960's, the Island Federation was operating in slow gear. . . . Lincoln Dewar was spending a lot of time in Ottawa on federal committees where he excelled and was making a great contribution. Many farmers were having financial problems. They could not wait for longer term solutions. They wanted action and they wanted it now" (pp. 141-2).

38 This recognition was a hard-fought victory on the part of the federation. Ignored by the federal government, despite numerous attempts to gain an audience with the cabinet, in 1941 the Canadian Federation of Agriculture secured Minister of Agriculture J.G. Gardiner as guest speaker at the Ontario Federation's annual convention in London. In what has become known as the Battle of London, President H.H. Hannam lambasted the minister, and refused to let him exit until he promised to represent their interests in cabinet. Two weeks later the federation was granted its first meeting with the whole cabinet present, which translated into a tradition of annual presentations. See Helen Ingrid Jones, *Canadian Federation of Agriculture* (master's thesis, Queen's University, 1954), pp. 18-21.

39 James Rusk, "Farmers' unions turn rugged individualists into co-operators," *Globe and Mail*, 12 May 1967, p. B5; *National Farmers Union Founding Convention* (Winnipeg, MB: National Farmers Union, 1969), pp. 4-5.

40 When dealing with Canadian agrarian organizations, the dates often fluctuate. Jones, in her *Canadian Federation of Agriculture* (p. 9), states the federation of provincial farming unions was first established in 1947. I cite *National Farmers Union Founding Convention*, p. 5, which claims the date was 1944.

41 *National Farmers Union Founding Convention*, p. 5.

42 Douglas Sagi, "What If The Farmers Went On Strike?," *Canadian Magazine*, 1 July 1972, p. 2; *National Farmers Union Founding Convention*, pp. 4-5. In his introduction to the 1975 edition of Louis Aubrey Wood's classic *History of Farmers' Movements in Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1975), Foster J.K. Griezic notes the difference between the Canadian Federation of Agriculture (CFA) and the NFU: "The NFU is more critical than the CFA of government agricultural policies and advocates more radical proposals, such as collective bargaining and the check-off system

the plight of Island farmers, Reverend Ted Butler and Reverend Donald McLennan, contacted the NFU president's office and Alfred Nieforth, a Nova Scotian in charge of organizing Atlantic Canada, was promptly dispatched to the province. Holding a series of meetings in small communities throughout the early months of 1968, the NFU drew considerable interest with its promises of action and change. Between January and April 1969 three locals – one for each county – were chartered.<sup>43</sup> The creation of these locals predated the founding convention of the reconfigured NFU, which was held 30 and 31 July at The Highlander Curling Club in Winnipeg. This event was attended by an estimated 2,000 farmers from 8 provinces, including a delegation of 20 Islanders.

The Island NFU maintained a low public profile in the months following the 1969 founding convention. The organization provided little indication that it would soon adopt a radical course of action, as its activities were confined to monthly local and bi-monthly district meetings. This all changed on 31 March 1971. A sense of militancy was in the air as the membership assembled at the North River Fire Hall for the annual District 1 meeting. Speaker after speaker condemned the current farm situation, alleging that a combination of low prices and spiralling costs of production were forcing farmers off the land. Resolutions passed in favour of a floor price for the farmers' products were followed by a strongly worded resolution that "unless we receive some action from the Provincial Government with respect to lower fees for farm trucks and be allowed to use marked gasoline in farm trucks, unless we see some form of recognition from the Government in the months ahead, then the District Board is authorized to stage some form of protest or action."<sup>44</sup>

The NFU's escalation of rhetoric was the product of numerous considerations. Farmers were in the midst of their worst season on record; the net income of the province's farmers in 1971 was \$4,829,000, less than one-third the previous year's total. Among a farm population of 21,300 this amounted to a per head share of \$227, a mere 7 per cent of the average personal income of Canadians.<sup>45</sup> Asserting itself in a leadership role in this crisis situation, the NFU attempted to distinguish itself from the rival Federation of Agriculture, which was widely perceived not to be acting on behalf of the farmers. The NFU had also attracted much of its membership by promising to

for all marketing agreements. The NFU also submits formal recommendations to the government of agricultural policy. Unlike the CFA, the NFU endorses direct confrontation by strikes, pickets, tractor parades, marches, boycotts, and the free distribution of produce to advertise [*sic*] their grievances to governments and the public (pp. xix-xx).

- 43 Charter presidents of these locals were Urban Laughlin, J.P. Hendricken, and Peter Sauer. See Urban Laughlin, "The Canadian Farm Movement: More than 100 Years And More To Come," *NFU 32nd National Convention* (Regina, SK: National Farmers Union, 2001), p. 4, private collection of Urban Laughlin.
- 44 Neil Matheson, "Militant Suggestions Voiced At District Meeting of NFU," *Guardian*, 1 April 1971, pp. 1, 3; quoted in Urban Laughlin, "NFU in PEI, Its Finest Hour," *Broad-Axe*, 1 October 1971, p. 16. "Marked gasoline" is gasoline, in this case, designated for use in farm vehicles and that is tax-free.
- 45 Janssen, "Agriculture in Transition," Table 1, in Smitheram, Milne, and Dasgupta, *The Garden Transformed*, p. 116. It should be noted that farmers were experiencing difficulties nationwide during this period. As Grace Skogstad states: "Beginning in the late 1960s and increasingly thereafter, farmers were confronted with an economic context that jeopardized net incomes to an extent not experienced since the Depression and that hinted that instability was to be a permanent hazard for them. Two features of the Canadian agricultural economy of the 1970s were significant: first, markets

stick up for farmers' interests in a way that the more deferential Federation of Agriculture refused. By threatening to take drastic action, the NFU legitimized its very existence. More significantly, Island NFU officials claim that their militant rhetoric was the result of a deteriorating relationship between the organization and the provincial government. According to their accounts, the NFU enjoyed a healthy relationship with the provincial government early on, meeting frequently with the government agriculture committee, Premier Alex Campbell, and Minister of Agriculture Daniel MacDonald. This, however, came to a sudden stop in the months prior to the 31 March 1971 district convention. As Marie Hendricken notes: "I guess he [Campbell] just felt that there was nothing he was going to do, or nothing he could do at that point. . . . I think he had dug in his heels and said 'No, this is it'." This recollection, however, does not match that of Alex Campbell, who maintains that such a relationship had not been fostered.<sup>46</sup> A search of the premier's papers at the Prince Edward Island Public Archives indicates that the two sides were in contact no later than 29 March 1971, when Campbell accepted an invitation to join the NFU platform party and deliver a ten-minute speech at the district convention held two days later. Neither the NFU's invitation, signed by District 1 Director Urban Laughlin, or the premier's acceptance provides insight into the state of their relationship.<sup>47</sup>

Eight days later the NFU acted upon its threat, orchestrating a 1,200-person march on the provincial legislature in Charlottetown. The spark for this first demonstration of the organization's strength on the Island, curiously enough, was not an agriculture-related concern; it was the government's passage of a bill designed to prevent a forthcoming rock festival in Parkdale, a suburb of Charlottetown. "Junction '71," scheduled to occur on 10 and 11 April, had lined up popular Canadian acts Edward Bear, Ocean, and Bruce Cockburn as well as a number of lesser-known regional performers. While this was family-friendly fare by today's standards, with Woodstock and the summer of love fresh in the public's mind many Islanders felt differently. Consequently, a variety of organizations, including the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP), the Prince Edward Island Medical Society, the Parkdale village commission, and an ad hoc committee of 16 prominent clergymen, voiced concern that the music festival would spark an influx of hippies – a group notoriously associated with rampant drug use and sexual improprieties. Having gone on the record stating that "it is our belief that such a form of entertainment is highly conducive to

were unusually turbulent as the international demand for some products became extremely variable, and second, many farmers experienced a serious cost-price squeeze as the costs of purchased inputs increased rapidly. Both factors intensified the income vulnerability to which Canadian farmers were already prone owing to inevitable fluctuations in their volume of production and the prices of their commodities." See Skogstad, *The Politics of Agricultural Policy-Making in Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1987), p. 28.

46 Marie Hendricken, interview by author, tape recording, Pisquid, PEI, 6 December 2003 (tape recording in possession of author). This is the version of events remembered by the NFU leadership. See also Campbell, interview by author, 25 September 2003.

47 Urban Laughlin to Alex Campbell, 22 March 1971, Alex Campbell Files, 1971, box 2, item 1078, Public Archives and Records Office of Prince Edward Island (PARO); Alex Campbell to Urban Laughlin, 29 March 1971, Alex Campbell Files, 1971, box 2, item 1078, PARO.



the creation of an atmosphere which can lead to side effects detrimental to the society as a whole,” on 6 April Justice Minister Gordon Bennett pushed through the legislature the “Act to Provide for the Prohibition of Certain Public Gatherings.” The act, which was introduced and passed in a span of 90 minutes, granted the justice minister the unilateral ability to block any event “which in his opinion may contribute to the disruption of public order.”<sup>48</sup>

Why was the NFU so concerned with a piece of legislation designed to block an upcoming rock festival? Essentially, the NFU rallied against the Public Gatherings Act because it was viewed as a threat to the organization’s interests. Interviews conducted with members of the District 1 executive indicate that there was a widespread belief that the legislation was implemented with the NFU’s threats of mass demonstrations in mind. As Urban Laughlin notes: “We could see trouble with that act. You know, they try to say it’s to stamp out a rock festival, but it would include us too. And I think it was made for us as well as the rock festival. . . . I think they were going to get the two birds with one stone was their intent. They figured something was coming.”<sup>49</sup> Premier Campbell, who admits that “Bill 55 was a major, major blunder on the part of government,” rejects the NFU’s contention. Noting that the act was squarely focused on Junction ’71, Campbell rationalizes that “we would not need that legislation to deal with the nature of the protest, the tractor demonstrations. There were plenty of laws on the books of Prince Edward Island and every other province that make it illegal to block the public thoroughfares.”<sup>50</sup> Facing mounting criticism over the act, the government repealed Bill 55 in the fall of 1971.<sup>51</sup>

Having captured the Island government’s attention with their show of force, the NFU secured a meeting with the provincial cabinet for 14 April. Noting that “never have the farmers been so determined to change things,” the NFU announced that it would immediately commence picketing government buildings in Charlottetown in an effort to maintain public visibility. With four picketers assuming a position outside the Provincial Administration Building at 9:00 am, the NFU delegation went inside to meet with the provincial cabinet. Represented by 15 farmers, which included the District 1 Board, the Regional Advisory Committee, Regional Coordinator Jack Brooks, and the National Junior President Stuart Affleck, the NFU delegation met

48 *An Act To Provide For The Prohibition Of Certain Public Gatherings, Acts of the General Assembly of Prince Edward Island 1971*, c. 36, p. 283, PEI Collection, RLUPEI.

49 Urban Laughlin, interview by author, tape recording, Sherbrooke, PEI, 11 September 2003 (tape recording in possession of author).

50 Campbell, interview by author, 25 September 2003. Campbell’s long-time principal secretary, Andy Wells, echoed this point. When informed of the NFU’s perception, he expressed the following opinion: “There’d be a touch of paranoia there, I think. The Public Gatherings Act had one purpose only, and that was to prevent what some people in government and the law enforcement arm felt was going to be another [Woodstock].” See Wells, interview by author, 10 September 2003.

51 Greg Marquis, “Uptight Little Island: The Junction ’71 Affair,” *The Island Magazine*, 52 (Fall-Winter 2002), p. 13. While much criticism was levelled against the Island government from media outlets countrywide, opposition also arose close to home. Andy Wells worked with well-known Islanders Jim MacNeill, Jack MacAndrew, and David Milne in opposing Bill 55. While the others organized public opposition, Wells’s task was to use his privileged relationship with the premier to convince him to rescind the legislation. See Wells, interview by author, 10 September 2003.

with the entire cabinet except for the holidaying Gordon Bennett. Meeting from 2:15 pm until 5:00 pm, the NFU submitted a ten-point brief that discussed a variety of ways to ease the farm crisis.<sup>52</sup> Among these ten points, the NFU emphasized two key requests: marked gasoline and lower registration fees for farm trucks. “The reason we zeroed in on these two requests,” Urban Laughlin later noted in *The Broad-Axe* newspaper, “was to make it possible for the Government to move quickly in recognizing the short term needs of farmers, and it was a test of the Government’s interest in servicing simple N.F.U. requests.”<sup>53</sup> Having received a “respectable hearing” from the cabinet, they were cautiously optimistic that Daniel MacDonald’s willingness to study their requests would result in positive action. As a sign of good faith, all future plans for picketing government buildings were abandoned.<sup>54</sup>

On 18 May the NFU District 1 Board held a private meeting with MacDonald. Re-emphasizing the concerns of the farmers, as well as their willingness to partake in drastic action if deemed necessary, the meeting was followed by a 2 July memo from MacDonald, which stated in part: “Regarding your inquiry about lower truck registration fees and marked gasoline for farm trucks, I am sending the documentation to Treasury Board today along with our recommendation for a reduction in farm truck licenses and for permission to use marked gasoline in farm trucks. You have indicated that you would like to know the Government’s intention by July 1971. I feel quite certain that I will have an answer to this request before too long.”<sup>55</sup> Having forced themselves onto the government agenda, and now awaiting a response to their demands, even the most cynical NFU member had a guarded sense of optimism.<sup>56</sup>

All illusions of improved relations came crashing down on 30 July when it was announced that Treasury Board had rejected the NFU’s request. The fact that their two requests were rejected was all the evidence the farmers needed that the government was uninterested in their concerns.<sup>57</sup> What followed was a flurry of activity. Highly indignant and “clamouring for action,” the membership bombarded their elected officials with phone calls. On 3 August the district board assembled to discuss their options. Recalling their threat of massed demonstrations made at the 31 March annual meeting, it was decided to bring the question of potential action to the members. On 7 August an all-members meeting was held at the Basilica Recreation Centre in Charlottetown. Each member in attendance was handed a pink inventory sheet, with 14 questions, aimed at gauging the farmers’ level of discontent. Of these questions, two stood out in importance:

52 “NFU Picketing To Begin Today,” *Guardian*, 14 April 1971, p. 2; “National Farmers Union, Region 1, District 1, Submission To The Government Of Prince Edward Island,” Alex Campbell Files, 1971, box 2, item 1078, PARO.

53 Urban Laughlin, “NFU in PEI, Its Finest Hour,” *Broad-Axe*, 1 October 1971, p. 16.

54 “NFU Picketing Discontinued,” *Guardian*, 15 April 1971, p. 3.

55 Correspondence quoted in Laughlin, “NFU in PEI, Its Finest Hour,” *Broad-Axe*, 1 October 1971, p. 16.

56 Laughlin, interview by author, 11 September 2003; Hendricken, interview by author, 6 December 2003.

57 Laughlin, interview by author, 11 September 2003; Hendricken, interview by author, 6 December 2003.

5. Do you favor a tractor demonstration on the highway:  
 Yes  No

5. [*sic*] If the answer to Question 5 is Yes, Are you prepared to drive  
 your tractor in a tractor demonstration:  
 Yes  No<sup>58</sup>

Given the drastic implications of the questions, the farmers were told to go home and mull over their options. When they reassembled two days later, and their responses were tabulated, it was revealed that over 90 per cent were in favour of the proposed tractor demonstration.<sup>59</sup>

The idea of holding a tractor demonstration was new to Prince Edward Island farmers. However, it was a practice National Farmers Union officials were familiar with during the period. As founding NFU president Roy Atkinson notes, the idea of holding tractor demonstrations was imported from France, where radicalized farmers employed the tactic in protest of President Charles de Gaulle's agricultural policies. As the authors of *Social Change in France* note, an "appeal for a tractor invasion of north-west provincial centres [in February 1960] led to a serious clash at Amiens between riot police and 30,000 angry farmers."<sup>60</sup> The practice made its first recorded appearance across the Atlantic in September 1965, when members of Quebec's *Union catholique des cultivateurs* took to the highways in the Saguenay-Lac-Saint-Jean region.<sup>61</sup> The following year 300 members of the Ontario Farmers' Union drove their tractors to Queen's Park to demand higher milk prices.<sup>62</sup> Likewise, during Pierre Trudeau's mid-July 1969 visit to Saskatoon and Regina, thousands of Saskatchewan Farmers Union members drew attention to low prices and poor sales by driving their tractors through the cities.<sup>63</sup>

The goal of the aforementioned tractor demonstrations was to attract attention through economic disruption. With much of the economy hinging on the timely delivery of goods and services, any delay had the potential to wreak financial havoc. Prince Edward Island was an ideal locale for such a tactic. With the railway accounting for a minimal amount of traffic since passenger service was abandoned in 1969, the Island economy was closely tied to its highway system.<sup>64</sup> With only two major highways – the Trans-Canada Highway and Route 2 – accounting for the majority of intraprovincial movement, the Island was particularly susceptible to traffic obstruction.

58 Laughlin, "NFU in PEI, Its Finest Hour," *Broad-Axe*, 1 October 1971, p. 16.

59 Urban Laughlin, "The NFU in P.E.I.," *Union Farmer Monthly* (October-November 2001), p. 6.

60 Michalina Vaughan, Martin Kolinsky, and Peta Sheriff, *Social Change in France* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1980), p. 143.

61 "Farmers may mount Quebec-style roadblock," *Globe and Mail*, 13 April 1966, p. B1.

62 Rusk, "Farmers unions turn rugged individualists into co-operators," *Globe and Mail*, 12 May 1967, B5; Ryan O'Connor, "Agrarian Protest in Post-Progressive Ontario: The Story of the Ontario Farmers' Union" (paper presented at *Bruce McCaffrey Memorial Graduate Seminar Series*, London, Ontario, 5 October 2006).

63 Murray Goldblatt, "Wheat farmers jeer at Trudeau, PM refuses to endorse demands," *Globe and Mail*, 17 July 1969, pp. 1, 3.

64 MacDonald, *If You're Stronghearted*, p. 276.

That the tractor demonstration was scheduled for August – peak tourism season – is significant for two reasons. With thousands of tourists travelling the Island’s roads, the impact of the farmers’ demonstration would be that much greater. Furthermore, many farmers viewed the tourism industry with disdain. There was a general feeling among Island farmers that the province’s traditional industries were propping up the burgeoning tourism sector while their own concerns were being downplayed by the government. This attitude was articulated by a demonstrator who informed *The Guardian* that “we are sick and tired of the government using the farmers [*sic*] taxes to subsidize the tourist industry.”<sup>65</sup>

Demonstrations commenced the morning of Thursday, 12 August. An estimated 150 tractors, travelling at approximately 15 miles per hour, appeared on major stretches of the highway outside Kinkora, Hunter River, Brudenell, North River, East Royalty, and Mount Mellick.<sup>66</sup> Stymying traffic, this tactic set the standard for the first seven days of the farmers’ campaign. It quickly became apparent that the NFU would not end its demonstration until a meeting was secured with the premier. For his part, Premier Campbell insisted that the organization deal with the minister of agriculture, who had previously stated his willingness to meet with the NFU at their convenience. Issuing his first statement in regards to the demonstration on Sunday, 15 August, Campbell characterized further meetings between himself and the NFU as pointless: “I have met on several occasions with the National Farmers Union to discuss their representations. As far as can be determined the representations they are making today are unchanged from those presented to government in the past.” Noting that he refused to cave in to their “meet or else” attitude, he attacked the union’s tactics, citing “the very real danger this type of action poses on the motoring public.” He concluded his statement by questioning the NFU’s motives: “Should the NFU refuse to meet with Mr. MacDonald as he has proposed later this week and choose to resume their disruptive and dangerous demonstrations with tractors, it can only be concluded that the leadership of the NFU is more interested in demonstrating than in finding practical solutions to the problems of our Island farmers.”<sup>67</sup>

Campbell’s condemnation of the farmers’ actions resulted in a renewed vigour among the demonstrators. It also led to a shift in tactics. Noting that the premier was scheduled to make an appearance at the Summerside Town Hall alongside Jean Marchand, the federal minister of regional economic expansion, on Tuesday, 17 August, the farmers opted to force a confrontation. With their national president, Roy Atkinson, and national women’s president, Evelyn Potter, in attendance, approximately 500 Island farmers held a march from the Prince County Vocational High School to the town hall, where they awaited the politicians’ arrival. After three hours they were informed that Campbell and Marchand had cancelled their visit. This cancellation proved particularly galling to the farmers, Atkinson noted in a speech to those gathered, because the pair had, earlier in the day, visited Seabrook Farm, a vertically integrated operation that received millions of Comprehensive Development

65 Gary MacDougall, “NFU Gathering Stalls Traffic In Borden Area,” *Guardian*, 19 August 1971, p. 1.

66 This is the number of tractors listed in Laughlin’s “The NFU in PEI,” *Union Farmer Monthly*, p. 7. Bill Moffatt’s “Tractors Cause Congestion On Roads; Protest Farm Policies,” *Journal-Pioneer*, 12 August 1971, p. 1, lists the number of tractors involved in the first day of demonstrations at 300.

67 “Premier Rejects NFU Request For Meeting,” *Guardian*, 16 August 1971, p. 1.

Plan-financed subsidies. For the NFU, which had a stated goal of preserving family farms, the government's willingness to visit the corporate body but not the comparatively small-scale farmers furthered their suspicion that the government's priority had shifted away from them.<sup>68</sup>

The pinnacle of the NFU demonstration occurred on Friday, 20 August. Determined to flex their muscles, the farmers decided to blockade traffic near the Borden ferry terminal. Obstructing the Trans-Canada Highway near the Route 10 intersection with a mixture of cars, trucks, tractors, and a combine, the ferries were unable to off-load their passengers and were forced to abandon operations. Traffic, at its summer peak, would shortly thereafter back up three miles behind the Borden blockade.<sup>69</sup> On the New Brunswick side, cars were backed-up a similar distance, with an additional 400 cars stuck in the ferry terminal parking lot.<sup>70</sup> The RCMP and NFU immediately entered into harried discussions. After a short time it was decided to allow a set number of vehicles – 300 per half hour – to proceed until traffic was cleared. With emotions running high, some opposed even this simple gesture.<sup>71</sup>

As night set, the RCMP and NFU struck a deal. With an agreement that neither side would attempt any further action that night, the majority of demonstrators returned home to tend to farm chores. Only a skeleton crew was left to watch the farm machinery, and at 7:30 pm this crew was approached by a group of approximately 35 members of the RCMP. Their guns, ties, and hats placed in their car trunks, these officers were backed by a busload of reinforcements and a road grader, which was intended to be used to clear the farm machinery off the highway.<sup>72</sup> Instructed to disperse, those in attendance held an impromptu meeting and voted to remove themselves from the scene.<sup>73</sup> As Atkinson noted with a touch of bravado: "The one thing I knew [was that] we could beat them the first time, but we couldn't beat them the second because they'd just bring in reinforcements."<sup>74</sup> Entering into another round of negotiations, the farmers were granted permission to park their machinery overnight at the Borden RCMP detachment, where the officers promised to keep an eye on the equipment.<sup>75</sup>

The NFU held a general meeting the following morning inside a Carleton Siding potato warehouse. Attended by 500 farmers, there was a general sense that the

68 The NFU disputed the police estimate that 500 attended this demonstration, claiming the number was closer to 1,200-1,500. See Gary MacDougall, "Summerside Scene Of Protest Rally," *Guardian*, 18 August 1971, p. 1 and "NFU Farmers Angry When Campbell And Marchand Fail To Appear," *Journal-Pioneer*, 18 August 1971, p. 3.

69 Walter MacIntyre, "Pandemonium Caused As Highway Sealed Off," *Guardian*, 21 August 1971, pp. 1-2.

70 "RCMP Break NFU Blocade [*sic*] Of Borden; Traffic Seriously Hindered," *Journal-Pioneer*, 21 August 1971, p. 1.

71 Laughlin, "NFU in PEI, Its Finest Hour," *Broad-Axe*, 1 October 1971, p. 15.

72 The RCMP backup, according to Atkinson, was actually soldiers from the nearby CFB Summerside in RCMP uniforms. See Roy Atkinson, telephone interview by author, 26 March 2004 (tape recording in possession of author).

73 MacIntyre, "Pandemonium Caused As Highway Sealed Off," *Guardian*, 21 August 1971, p. 1; "RCMP Break NFU Blocade [*sic*] Of Borden; Traffic Seriously Hindered," *Journal-Pioneer*, 21 August 1971, p. 1; Laughlin, interview by author, 11 September 2003.

74 Atkinson, interview by author, 26 March 2004.

75 Atkinson, interview by author, 26 March 2004; Laughlin, interview by author, 11 September 2003.

demonstration was on its last legs, as they felt they were running out of ways to garner attention for their cause. Furthermore, there was pressure to resolve the demonstration as the farmers desperately needed to return to their farm chores. Given the RCMP's show of force the night prior, there also was a feeling that arrests were likely to be made. Noting that a transfer to the courts would be their best bet to further their cause, Roy Atkinson volunteered to be arrested.<sup>76</sup> With this in mind, at noon a group of high-profile NFU members including Atkinson, Potter, Laughlin, Affleck, and Jim Mayne of the Region 1 Youth Advisory Board, linked hands and formed a human chain across the highway where the blockade had occurred one day prior. The police, who were lined up on the side of the highway in anticipation, were quick to pounce on the situation. "Well, in comes Elliott and Pantry and a couple of young officers," recalls Atkinson. "So Elliott says to me, 'Who gave the order?' 'Well, I did.' And he looked at me and the sweat broke on his face. He said, 'What did you say?' 'I said I did, Sir.' He said, 'I have to arrest you.' [laughs] And I said, 'Well, I guess you'll have to do what you have to do.' So I was arrested." Handcuffed and guided to a nearby police cruiser, Atkinson informed his fellow NFU members that they were to go home.<sup>77</sup> The farmers dispersed, and the NFU highway demonstration of 1971 was over.

Atkinson was released on bail shortly after his incarceration at the Prince County Jail, and later stood trial on a charge of conspiracy "for the unlawful purpose of obstructing a highway in Carleton, and thereby inconveniencing the public."<sup>78</sup> The case was ultimately thrown out on 15 October, when the magistrate announced that he could not conceive of the accused being found guilty on the evidence presented. With the case against Atkinson dismissed, attempts to kick-start discussions between the NFU and the provincial government began in earnest.<sup>79</sup> The following morning a meeting was held at Campbell's Summerside home, with Atkinson, Potter, and Laughlin representing the NFU.<sup>80</sup> Receiving their long-awaited, face-to-face meeting with the premier, they were surprised by their reception. According to Potter: "I thought he was quite sensitive to what the farmers were asking for, but he just was scared to set a precedent or something like that . . . probably because he was scared that he wouldn't be elected again if he made a move. I don't know, but that meeting was quite emotional – highly emotional."<sup>81</sup> Likewise, Campbell subsequently recalled the constructive nature of the discussions, explaining that there was "a genuine interest in getting beyond the bushwhacking."<sup>82</sup>

Having emerged from the most contentious period of his tenure, the premier was anxious to reverse mounting criticism that his government was aloof from the concerns and priorities of the common Islander. On 18 October Campbell announced

76 Laughlin, "NFU in PEI, Its Finest Hour," *Broad-Axe*, 1 October 1971, p. 14; Laughlin, interview by author, 11 September 2003; Stuart Affleck, interview by author, tape recording, Summerside, PEI, 24 October 2003 (tape recording in possession of author); Atkinson, interview by author, 26 March 2004.

77 Atkinson, interview by author, 26 March 2004.

78 "Date Set For Atkinson Hearing," *Journal-Pioneer*, 31 August 1971, p. 1.

79 Laughlin, "NFU in PEI, Its Finest Hour," *Broad-Axe*, 1 October 1971, p. 14.

80 "NFU Finally Gets Meeting With Premier Campbell," *Journal-Pioneer*, 16 October 1971, p. 1.

81 Evelyn Potter, telephone interview by author, 28 February 2004 (tape recording in possession of author).

82 Campbell, interview by author, 25 September 2003.



that he would spend the next two weeks travelling the Island in an effort “to see the changes and to hear the views of as many citizens as possible on whether we are moving in the directions they desire.”<sup>83</sup> On 3 November Campbell held another news conference to discuss his findings. Describing the past two weeks as “a refreshing and stimulating experience,” his comments focused on agriculture. After pledging government support for the family farm – “whether it is 100 acres or 1,000 acres in size” – as the backbone of the industry, he noted that the “real issue in Prince Edward Island is to determine what constitutes an economic and viable enterprise and what measures can be taken by Government to maintain stability in the industry.” In order to accomplish this, he announced the creation of a Farmers’ Committee on Agriculture. Comprised entirely of farmers, this committee would be asked “to make an exhaustive examination of the agricultural industry on Prince Edward Island” and to report their “practical recommendations on the kind and extent of federal and provincial government assistance to support the industry in its efforts.” Noting that such a study would take many months, he announced that funding to cover its research and activities would be provided by the province and that government staff resources would be available for their utilization.<sup>84</sup>

The new farmers’ committee proceeded with monthly meetings in the boardroom of the Charlottetown Experimental Farm. With upwards of 20 interested parties gathered around the table, including representatives from the NFU and the Federation of Agriculture, as well as the provincial and federal agricultural departments, Alex Campbell notes that they “would try to hash things over and hammer out policy.” Most impressively, partisan posturing was noticeably absent at these meetings, a fact the premier attributes to the gathered parties’ genuine desire to effect positive change. While cynics might denigrate the value of these meetings, those involved in them understood the magnitude of their undertakings for, as Campbell matter-of-factly explains, “We must all have felt the exercise was worthwhile [be]cause we continued meeting for some time.”<sup>85</sup>

The truest measure of the farmers’ committee’s impact can be seen in the provincial government’s Speech from the Throne, delivered on 2 March 1972. Claiming that the “iron thread of permanence and stability is made up of our family farms and the agricultural community made possible by the family farm,”<sup>86</sup> this speech was a significant departure for the government. Whereas the Speech from the Throne is typically viewed as the government’s opportunity to outline its comprehensive vision for an upcoming legislative session, the speech delivered by Lieutenant-Governor J. George MacKay “was unprecedented in that it dealt only with

83 News release, 18 October 1971, Alex Campbell Files, 1971, box 5, item 1097, PARO.

84 News release, 3 November 1971, Alex Campbell Files, 1971, box 5, item 1097, , PARO.

85 Campbell, interview by author, 25 September 2003. Wallace Wood, then-president of the PEI Federation of Agriculture, wrote positively of the meetings. As he noted to the organization’s membership, he was “optimistic that a spirit of co-operation has been created with the farm community through the Farm Policy Committee which could bring brighter days for the future of P.E.I. farmers.” See “The President Says,” *Federation of Agriculture Newsletter*, II, 7 (July 1972), p. 1.

86 *Speech from the Throne 1972* (Charlottetown: Queen’s Printer, 1972), p. 1, PEI Collection, RLUPEI.

agriculture.”<sup>87</sup> This change in format, meant as a reflection of the Liberal government’s “very real concern for the future of agriculture in this province,” was marked by its new Family Farm Development Policy.<sup>88</sup> As noted in the *Canadian Annual Review of Politics and Public Affairs 1972*, there were several components to this policy: “The family farm programme, which went into effect on July 24, provided capital grants for 50 per cent of the cost of improvements. Qualifying farmers would be eligible for grants of up to \$6000 of which no more than \$3000 would be paid in any one year. Other provisions would assist farmers to improve herds, provide extra pasture land, expand crop insurance, assist commodity marketing boards, and set up a farm vacation programme under which farmers who wished to supplement their incomes might take in vacationing urban dwellers.”<sup>89</sup> By early 1973, the programme had disbursed \$865,000 to 1,200 applicants.<sup>90</sup>

Further evidence of the provincial government’s renewed focus on agriculture came in the summer of 1972. Daniel MacDonald, citing a desire to run federally in the upcoming election, announced that he was resigning his seat in the provincial legislature. Premier Alex Campbell subsequently assumed his ministry. As Campbell recalls:

When Dan MacDonald was elected to Ottawa the portfolio of agriculture had to be assigned. There were several of us [who] felt that it would be advantageous, politically and in every respect, if I were to take this portfolio on as a clear demonstration of the government’s desire and willingness to do what could be done in the interests of agriculture here in Prince Edward Island. It wasn’t an easy decision because there’s one hell of a lot of farm meetings that they expect the minister to be at, and it was a tough couple of years. But we seemed to be able to bring it around to some extent.<sup>91</sup>

Premier Campbell’s taking over of MacDonald’s former ministry, in conjunction with the introduction of the Family Farm Development Policy, created an environment wholly different than that faced by Island farmers one summer prior. Campbell himself best sums up this monumental shift: “Within a year [of the August 1971 demonstration] I was Minister of Agriculture. Within a year the Family Farm Programme was launched with grants of \$6,000 for farm development. Within a year we had the Federation of Agriculture and the National Farmers Union meeting with me every month discussing policy developments. Things began to happen, and I

87 Frank MacKinnon, “Prince Edward Island,” in John Saywell, ed., *Canadian Annual Review of Politics and Public Affairs 1972* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1974), p. 209.

88 *Speech from the Throne 1972*, p. 12.

89 MacKinnon, “Prince Edward Island,” *Canadian Annual Review of Politics and Public Affairs 1972*, pp. 209-10.

90 MacDonald, *If You’re Stronghearted*, p. 311. As MacKinnon notes, the federal government provided three-quarters of the programme’s funding. See MacKinnon, “Prince Edward Island,” *Canadian Annual Review of Politics and Public Affairs 1972*, p. 210.

91 Campbell, interview by author, 25 September 2003.

credit, to some extent, the NFU for generating the dynamics that made this possible.”<sup>92</sup>

The 1971 NFU demonstration resulted in a notable shift within Prince Edward Island’s farming community. Up until the time of the NFU demonstration, the Federation of Agriculture, even though it had been viewed with varying degrees of scepticism and cynicism due to its quiescent ways, remained the dominant farm organization on Prince Edward Island. The NFU, for its part, had been viewed with distrust as a small but vocal organization composed of “radical militants” and “whiners.”<sup>93</sup> Following the 1971 demonstration, however, the NFU’s support on the Island immediately skyrocketed. Its willingness to act upon the membership’s frustrations helped transform local perceptions of the NFU as a western Canadian organization to that of a national organization attuned to its grassroots. Upon proving its devotion to local issues, as witnessed by the incidents of 1971, the NFU’s local membership on the Island rapidly increased.<sup>94</sup>

The NFU’s practice of not disclosing its membership numbers has made it difficult to measure exactly how profound was this shift in allegiance.<sup>95</sup> Nonetheless, one may gauge the NFU’s rise in relation to the coinciding decline of the Federation of Agriculture. As Wallace Wood, president of the federation in 1972 and 1973 recalls, the aftermath of the NFU demonstration was an extremely trying period: “We struggled financially, and we went through a period of time where the government gave us some direct grants just to keep the organization in place.”<sup>96</sup> Despite the

92 Campbell, interview by author, 25 September 2003.

93 Wayne MacKinnon, interview by author, Charlottetown, PEI, 19 November 2003 (tape recording in possession of author).

94 A measure of the NFU’s growing influence over the agricultural sector in Prince Edward Island can be seen in its efforts to pass its Potato Marketing Plan, which would have made the NFU the sole marketing agent for all of the province’s potatoes. A plebiscite on this proposal, co-ordinated by the PEI Department of Agriculture, was held in October 1972. Despite fierce opposition from the PEI Federation of Agriculture, 64 per cent of ballots cast were in favour. The provincial government subsequently rendered this vote invalid on the grounds that the number of ballots in support of the measure, 415, amounted to less than one-half of the 950 potato farmers registered to vote. A follow-up plebiscite was held in 1973, and the motion was defeated. This failure was attributed to a general increase of farm receipts in 1973, which saw the net income of Island farmers rise from 38 per cent of the national average in 1972 to 87 per cent one year later. See “64 Per Cent Of Voters Favor Proposals By NFU,” *Guardian*, 19 October 1972, p. 1; Allison Ellis, interview by author, tape recording, West Cape, PEI, 30 November 2003 (tape recording in possession of author); and Janssen, “Agriculture in Transition,” Table 2, in Smitheram, Milne, and Dasgupta, *The Garden Transformed*, p. 119. The growth of the NFU on Prince Edward Island was matched by an increase in the province’s influence within the organization at a national level. This can be seen in the election of two Islanders to the position of national president: Jim Mayne (1978-1980) and Wayne Easter (1982-1992). For insight into the political evolution of Easter, who rose to the rank of Solicitor General in the dying days of Jean Chretien’s Liberal government, see Lorraine Begley’s “The Education of Wayne Easter,” *New Maritimes*, VIII, 6 (July-August 1990), pp. 5-7.

95 As Roy Atkinson noted about the policy of not disclosing membership numbers: “In the beginning it was a psychological [ploy], from an internal point of view. Everybody wants to know what your membership is. Well, we had a family membership, so we didn’t [know the exact figure]. . . . People would ask their membership and they said ‘Well, why do you want to know? None of your damn business.’ I wouldn’t want to defend it [the policy] on an intellectual basis [laughs].” See Atkinson, interview by author, 26 March 2004.

96 Wallace Wood, interview by author, tape recording, Marshfield, PEI, 19 November 2003 (tape recording in possession of author).

government assistance, the organization was forced to reduce its office staff.<sup>97</sup>

As the NFU's legitimacy with Island farmers increased, so too did its political leverage. Describing the demonstration as their "coming of age," Urban Laughlin notes that "after that we had no more trouble arranging meetings with any government since."<sup>98</sup> This matches the opinion of Campbell's long-time principal secretary, Andy Wells: "I think that it certainly raised its profile – there's no question about that – and I think it probably sustained it for a number of years. The way people responded, whether it was the private sector or government, to the NFU . . . changed quite dramatically after this public demonstration. They were taken much more seriously – they couldn't be just set aside as an organization that was there for a while and [would] go away."<sup>99</sup>

The NFU's emergence is particularly important given the political context of the time. In 1971 Premier Alex Campbell was in the midst of his second mandate, which saw the election of twenty-seven Liberals and just five Conservatives one year prior. This one-sided result was almost equalled in 1974, when twenty-six Liberals and six Conservatives were returned.<sup>100</sup> The Conservatives offered little policy alternative to the governing Liberals, while the New Democratic Party, which entered the provincial theatre in 1972, received only a negligible percentage of the vote.<sup>101</sup> As such, "non-partisan, *ad hoc* community groups" emerged as a political force during this period and, as David Milne observed in 1982, they "voiced the real political opposition during the most recent decade, outmanoeuvring the opposition parties, using the electronic media to make their case to Islanders, and sometimes dealing directly in negotiations with the executive."<sup>102</sup> It was within this environment that the NFU emerged as Prince Edward Island's dominant lobby group, a position it retained for many years.<sup>103</sup>

97 In 1973 the PEI Federation of Agriculture received a base grant of \$10,000 to continue operations. Nonetheless, there was considerable fear expressed that the organization would have to discontinue its monthly newsletter as the provincial government scrapped the existing newsletter grant. See "Last Federation Newsletter?" *Federation of Agriculture Newsletter*, II, 16 (June 1973), p. 2. It appears that this fear was realized, as the author was unable to locate newsletters for the months following.

98 Laughlin, interview by author, 11 September 2003.

99 Wells, interview by author, 10 September 2003.

100 Blair Weeks, ed., *Minding the House: A Biographical Guide to Prince Edward Island MLAs, 1873-1993* (Charlottetown: The Acorn Press, 2002), p. 209.

101 In 1970 and 1974 the Conservatives campaigned, not against the CDP, but on the grounds that they could facilitate it better than the Liberals. It was not until Angus MacLean ran as leader of the provincial Conservatives in 1978 that the party offered a distinct vision of the province. See Ryan O'Connor, "Angus MacLean and the 'Rural Renaissance': Shadow or Substance?" (honours paper, University of Prince Edward Island, 2002) and Robb, "Third Party Experience on the Island," pp. 92-5.

102 Milne, "Politics in a Beleaguered Garden," in Smitheram, Milne, and Dasgupta, *The Garden Transformed*, p. 63.

103 The NFU on the Island has been accused of living off of the success of the 1971 demonstration. In the early 1980s local activist Marie Burge did just this: "To believe that the tractor demonstration was the high point in the N.F.U. action-history is a bit of a myth. Many forces were at work in the late 60's and 70's which made those types of actions possible. That doesn't make it any less worthwhile, but neither does it make it the moment of highest glory. A lot of romantic re-telling of the events rather than giving new courage to take appropriate and decisive action today tends to deflate the members." See Marie Burge, "The National Farmers Union Future Directions," submission to NFU District 1 Board, n.d. [1983?], p. 13 (in possession of author).

The NFU has engaged in many demonstrations across Canada since its 1969 inception. While some of these events involved thousands of protestors, it is significant that the relatively small-scale events on Prince Edward Island in 1971 are regarded by Roy Atkinson and Evelyn Potter as the organization's most effective show of force. Both attribute this success, in part, to the scale of life on Prince Edward Island. As Potter maintains: "At the time PEI really was receptive because it's . . . such a small area, and everybody is everybody's neighbour . . . and the politicians are your neighbours."<sup>104</sup>

Regardless of the reason, the immediate success of the 1971 demonstration is indisputable. Concerned with the provincial government's apparent disinterest in addressing the decline of the family farm, the NFU forced the government to focus its attention on this issue. The result – the 1972 Family Farm Development Policy – was a political landmark. As Edward MacDonald notes, Alex Campbell's premiership was marked by two distinct phases. The first, highlighted by the Comprehensive Development Plan, was based on the premise that the province's future prosperity hinged on the increase of scale. "No one had ever actually declared that 'bigger is better' in the Development Plan," explains MacDonald, "but the premise lurked in its every crevice." Consolidation and increased efficiency were the keywords of the day, whether in relation to schools, the government bureaucracy, or production on Island farms. However, as the first phase of the CDP came to a close, "there was an audible shift in the Premier's rhetoric. . . . Now Campbell began reminding people that 'Small Is Beautiful,' the title phrase from E.F. Schumacher's influential book arguing for appropriate development instead of economic gigantism."<sup>105</sup> Andy Wells also maintains that there was a dramatic shift at the time: "Looking back on it [the CDP], it of course was a planner's dream. It just simply did not suit the PEI situation at all, and in fact there was an about-face, almost a complete turnaround in government policy, within a year or two of the Plan being signed."<sup>106</sup> The first evidence of this transition was the Family Farm Development Policy.<sup>107</sup>

Just as the NFU managed to affect the governmental attitude towards the family farm, they also succeeded in influencing the general public. Despite the flood of farm families off the land, Islanders had remained blissfully ignorant of its decline. To awaken Islanders to this venerable institution's decline required a major shock to the system. This shock was aptly administered by the disruption of the 1971 highway demonstration. As Marie Hendriksen states: "I think the impact was that for the first time what was happening to people in agriculture . . . came to the forefront of people's lives."<sup>108</sup> Forced to acknowledge the deterioration of the beloved institution, Islanders reacted with sympathy and a sense of loss.

Despite the newfound focus on agricultural issues, the decline of Prince Edward Island's family farms continued unabated. As of 2006 there were 1,700 farming

104 Potter, interview by author, 28 February 2004.

105 MacDonald, *If You're Stronghearted*, p. 340.

106 Wells, interview by author, 10 September 2003.

107 The second phase of Campbell's premiership also featured a remarkable commitment to renewable energy research. For more information on this, see Alan MacEachern, *The Institute of Man and Resources: An Environmental Fable* (Charlottetown: Island Studies Press, 2003).

108 Hendriksen, interview by author, 6 December 2003.

operations in the province – down from 6,357 in 1966.<sup>109</sup> To characterize the 1971 highway demonstration as a failure, however, would be misguided. Previously, the impact of the modernization drive went unchallenged and unquestioned by Islanders. In the aftermath of the demonstration, this blind acceptance was abandoned. As Prince Edward Islanders awakened to the changes occurring as a result of the CDP, a new generation of activists emerged. In 1973 the Brothers and Sisters of Cornelius Howatt (BSCH) burst upon the scene. Media darlings due to their entertaining antics, the BSCH took issue with the concept that planners “from away” should determine that Prince Edward Island required wholesale societal restructuring. Challenging the very fundamentals of the modernization ethos, the BSCH argued that Islanders must take charge of their own destiny. Consequently, they emphasized the importance of the province’s pre-Confederation history, during which time the Island was a self-governing jurisdiction, as well as the need to promote rural communities and restrict non-resident land ownership. The intellectual core of the BSCH, David Weale and Harry Baglole, would go on to mastermind the 1978 and 1979 “Rural Renaissance” provincial election campaigns for the Angus MacLean-led Progressive Conservatives as well as the anti-fixed link lobby group The Friends of the Island. Weale and Baglole’s antimodernist vision of the province, which eventually gained the sobriquet of “the Island way of life,” continues to drive debate regarding Island affairs. It was, however, the NFU’s 1971 highway demonstration that laid the groundwork in significant ways for the discussion of this way of life.<sup>110</sup> As such, the legacy of the 1971 NFU highway demonstration continues to shape policy deliberations in the province to this day.

109 Campbell, *An Economic Profile of the Agricultural Industry of Prince Edward Island*, Table 2, p. 7; Government of Prince Edward Island, “Table 1 – Selected Census Data Prince Edward Island,” [http://www.gov.pe.ca/photos/original/af\\_stat06\\_Tab1.pdf](http://www.gov.pe.ca/photos/original/af_stat06_Tab1.pdf) (accessed 25 August 2007).

110 Ryan O’Connor, “The Brothers and Sisters of Cornelius Howatt: Protest, ‘Progress,’ and the Island Way of Life” (paper presented at *Islands of the World VII: New Horizons in Island Studies*, Charlottetown, 28 June 2002); O’Connor, “Angus MacLean and the ‘Rural Renaissance’.”