

## Constructing Community and Consumers: Joseph R. Smallwood's *Barrelman* Radio Programme

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### Article abstract

Under the name “The Barrelman” Joseph R. Smallwood exhibited a unique collection of oral tradition and historical anecdote in radio broadcasts that aired between 1937 and 1943. Smallwood's radio programme fostered Newfoundland nationalism, yet at the same time it undercut that nationalism by encouraging listeners to want a North American consumer lifestyle. As a commercial programme, it advertised the products of the show's sponsor, EM. O'Leary, and contained an underlying discourse that reconstructed listeners as consumers. Smallwood's nationalism was not unproblematic either. In the economic crisis of the Depression, Smallwood's tales of heroism and success were used to promote a self-reliant popular culture with the aim of creating a cultural change among Newfoundlanders that would improve their economic performance. Since the Newfoundland state was no longer democratic, his nationalist vision was decentred from the state and built upon a foundation of those qualities of the people that Smallwood wanted to encourage.

## Constructing Community and Consumers: Joseph R. Smallwood's *Barrelman* Radio Programme

JEFF A. WEBB

THIS ESSAY EXAMINES ONE RADIO PROGRAMME IN THE LATE 1930S WHICH SOUGHT to reconstruct listeners into members of an "imagined community" and into consumers. In July 1937, the journalist and author Joseph R. Smallwood began a *Daily News* column entitled "From the Masthead" by The Barrelman.<sup>1</sup> In September, Smallwood convinced the privately owned St. John's radio station VONF to begin broadcasting his column, marking the launch of an important cultural phenomenon in pre-Confederation Newfoundland. As Smallwood later described the programme:

It was a peculiar blend of Newfoundland history, geography, and economic information, with stories of courage, endurance, hardship, inventiveness, resourcefulness, physical strength and prowess, skill and courage in seamanship, and a hundred other aspects and distinctions of our Newfoundland story – all of them "making Newfoundland better known to Newfoundlanders" and intended to inspire them with faith in their country and in themselves, and to destroy what I continually denounced as our inferiority complex.<sup>2</sup>

Although it was a commercial programme, it continued to be broadcast on the state-owned Broadcasting Corporation of Newfoundland which was formed in 1939, and it lasted well after Smallwood left in 1943. The programme has received considerable attention. Smallwood's biographers have pointed to the role it played in making him a public figure.<sup>3</sup> It helped launch a political career that included his dominating the broadcasts of the National Convention, lead-

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I would like to thank David Frank for his comments on an earlier version of this essay.

- 1 On the newspaper column and its relationship to the broadcast, see Philip D. Hiscock, "The *Barrelman* Radio Programme, 1937-1943: The Mediation and Use of Folklore in Newfoundland," PhD thesis, Memorial University of Newfoundland, 1994.
- 2 Joseph R. Smallwood, *I Chose Canada: The Memoirs of the Honourable Joseph R. Smallwood* (Toronto, 1973), 206.
- 3 Richard Gwyn, *Smallwood: The Unlikely Revolutionary* (Toronto, 1968 and 1972), 53-6; Harold Horwood, *Joey: The Life and Times of Joey Smallwood* (Toronto, 1989), 63-7.



Centre for Newfoundland Studies Archives Coll-075.

Joseph R. Smallwood as the *Barrelman*.

ing the Confederate Party and serving as premier of the province between 1949 and 1972. Attention has been paid to the cultural content of the programme as well. Peter Narváez examined it as a repository of folklore, and argued that the programme validated aspects of Newfoundland culture by displaying them on the radio.<sup>4</sup> More recently, Philip Hiscock pointed out how Smallwood created a national ethos by selecting, interpreting and promoting certain aspects of Newfoundland folklore. Smallwood's populist appeal and skill in broadcasting served him well in his long and illustrious political career and, as Hiscock demonstrates, his programme promoted a common Newfoundland popular culture from local items.<sup>5</sup>

This essay argues that the programme strove to create a nationalist Newfoundland culture that was not non-ideological. While the programme validated some cultural elements, clearly Smallwood was selective in his borrowing from that culture. He chose the programme's content with a political agenda of fostering a rebirth of the Newfoundland spirit and creating a greater self-reliance among the Newfoundland people. As a commercial programme, it had another discourse imbedded in it – that of incorporating people into a North American consumer lifestyle. The programme's form was determined by the needs of commercial programming. The *Barrelman* programme created an audience for commercial programming and both effectively and unobtrusively advertised products. As such, the programme worked to incorporate Newfoundland into North American consumer culture at the same time that it fostered nationalism. Because Smallwood's nationalism was decentred from the state, a nationalist popular culture was possible while commercialism undercut the political independence of that nationalism. Smallwood constructed a programme that consisted in part of items submitted by listeners and as such assumed the form of a dialogue with Newfoundlanders. This enhanced the polemical potential of Smallwood's message since it had the illusion of coming from the Newfoundland community rather than from Smallwood himself.

Every radio programme is produced within a particular social and economic context and the late 1930s was a difficult time for Newfoundland. After struggling towards greater independence and self-government, Newfoundland faced the risk of insolvency during the Depression, an indignity avoided only by suspending responsible government. The British-appointed Commission Government ensured that the bondholders received their interest, but the poverty and the frustrations of the Depression continued. The lack of any mechanism for people to participate in public life encouraged Newfoundlanders to

4 Peter Narváez, "Joseph R. Smallwood, 'The Barrelman': The Broadcaster as Folklorist," in *Media Sense: The Folklore-Popular Culture Continuum*. Peter Narváez and Martin Laba, eds. (Bowling Green, 1987), 52.

5 Hiscock, "The *Barrelman* Radio Programme."

engage in cultural discourse as a surrogate for political discourse.<sup>6</sup> Two such people were the writer-broadcaster Joseph Smallwood and the Barrelman's sponsor, Francis M. O'Leary. More than any other person, Smallwood promoted a nationalistic Newfoundland culture. He was born to lower-middle-class parents in 1900, and as a boy in St. John's he developed a love of reading and boundless ambition. He dabbled in many things as a young man, most notably in journalism in Newfoundland, New York and London and trade unionism and politics at home. Smallwood engaged in socialist politics in the 1920s, but he had also worked for the Liberal Party in Newfoundland and had distanced himself from radical politics in such things as his 1927 radio broadcast, "Why I Oppose Communism."<sup>7</sup> Smallwood was a liberal who argued for a fairer deal for workers within capitalism, not radical change.<sup>8</sup> He also accepted the idea prevalent in the 1930s that the working class needed to develop greater self-sufficiency. Smallwood was intensely nationalistic, and had several nationalist cultural projects to his credit, which included writing *The New Newfoundland* (1931) and editing the two-volume *The Book of Newfoundland* (1937).<sup>9</sup> As with many people of his generation, Smallwood had political ambitions that were blocked by the suspension of democracy. For a man with ambition that outstripped his resources and standing in the community, a career in broadcasting allowed Smallwood the profile and influence that only a life in elected politics could otherwise have given him. While democratic government was suspended, Smallwood used broadcasting to engage in political discourse with the public.

During the second month that the programme was on the air, the "commission agent," F.M. O'Leary, agreed to sponsor the programme. O'Leary likely hoped to counter his business competitor Gerald S. Doyle's advertising when he first agreed to sponsor the Barrelman.<sup>10</sup> O'Leary and Doyle were both in the business of distributing consumer goods manufactured outside Newfoundland. Rural Newfoundlanders had traditionally earned the necessities of life by bartering the products of their labour to a local merchant with whom they had a social as well as economic relationship. Commission agents circumvented these economic and social bonds by retailing directly to 'consumers.' Both O'Leary and Doyle collected and promoted their own versions of folk cul-

6 For examples of people expressing their patriotism in cultural forms see Hiscock, "The Barrelman Programme," 263-7.

7 Centre for Newfoundland Studies [CNS(A)], Coll. 075, 7.02.001, J.R. Smallwood, "Why I Oppose Communism."

8 Jim Overton, "Economic Crisis and the End of Democracy: Politics in Newfoundland During the Great Depression," *Labour/Le Travail*, 26 (Fall 1990): 99-100.

9 J.R. Smallwood, *The New Newfoundland* (New York, 1931), and J.R. Smallwood, ed., *The Book of Newfoundland* (St. John's, 1937).

10 Narváez, "The Broadcaster as Folklorist," 48-50.

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ture through print and broadcast while advertising their merchandise. An advertising strategy aimed at simulating a sense of community while promoting the purchase of goods from an 'outsider' may have been effective. There is little doubt, however, that O'Leary's nationalism was genuine. In addition to his sponsorship of many cultural projects, he was a member of several nationalist organisations during the 1940s, such as the Newfoundland National Association, the Newfoundland Patriotic Association and the Responsible Government League of which he was the president.<sup>11</sup> While both O'Leary and Smallwood were nationalists, O'Leary was conservative in political and social outlook, yet he agreed with the Barrelman's emphasis on encouraging the working class to be more independent and self-reliant. Furthermore, as will be argued, their differing concepts of the Newfoundland nation placed them on opposite sides in Newfoundland's confederation debate in the late 1940s.

As with any commercial radio programme, Smallwood's primary task was to construct a listening audience that would consume the advertising content. The Barrelman programme began each evening, Monday to Saturday at 6.45 p.m. with Smallwood striking a ship's bell six times, followed by the announcement, "F.M. O'Leary Ltd . . . presenting the Barrelman in a programme of making Newfoundland better known to Newfoundlanders." The 15-minute programme consisted of brief entertaining stories interspersed with advertisements. The format was particularly effective as the advertising content fit more unobtrusively between the bits of "information" or "entertainment" than in a music or drama programme where the entertainment might have to stop in midstream for the sponsor's message. Advertising is also most effective when it has "the same qualities as the ostensibly non-advertising content: it must catch and hold audience attention and present its message in an entertaining way; that is it must tell an effective story of some kind."<sup>12</sup> The shift back and forth between entertainment and advertising in the Barrelman programme was unobtrusive, with both appearing to be information of interest to the listener. After reading each item, Smallwood struck a ship's bell once and went on to the text item. The listener would not know whether the following text would be another item about Newfoundland or an advertisement. To ease the transition from "cultural content" to "advertising content," he would sometimes introduce the advertisements in the same manner that he introduced his non-advertising copy. On some occasions, one cannot make a sharp distinction between the advertising copy and the text meant to hold listeners' attention between advertisements.<sup>13</sup>

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11 Jeff A. Webb, "The Responsible Government League and the Confederation Campaigns of 1948," *Newfoundland Studies* 6, 2 (Fall 1989): 203-20.

12 Dallas W. Smythe, *Dependency Road: Communications, Capitalism, Consciousness, and Canada* (Norwood, 1981), 15.

13 CNS(A), Coll. 028, 1.01.002, October 1937, p.72.

Commercial broadcasters in the 1930s had both to create an audience and to demonstrate to their sponsor that the audience existed. The primary technique used to measure audiences was to encourage listeners to write to the station. Smallwood asked listeners to write to O'Leary to show that the expense of the programme was justified, explicitly outlining the symbiotic relationship between himself and his listeners.<sup>14</sup> To gauge his audience's size, he asked listeners to let him know how many radio receivers were in their home towns, and encouraged people to write the station by offering free samples of his sponsor's products. The Barrelman also used the device of giving promotional products to those who sent in a proof of purchase.<sup>15</sup>

Correspondence from listeners not only demonstrated the existence of the audience, but also gave Smallwood raw material to be broadcast. He encouraged listeners to write in with stories, providing him with a potentially unlimited source of programming at next to no cost. Listeners responded with bits of oral tradition, accounts of things they had witnessed and people they knew, and occasionally poems of their own composition. Listeners not only submitted material, but also began asking the Barrelman questions. After one woman asked the value of an old postage stamp in her possession, Smallwood found himself giving out information on stamps and coins.<sup>16</sup> Since listeners had been submitting questions to him, Smallwood suggested that they ask him questions about Newfoundland. He promised a pound of Lyon's tea to any listener who submitted a question that he was unable to answer.<sup>17</sup> Most questions concerned trivia, but some listeners needed practical information. Smallwood wrote the script of both the questions and the answers, and sometimes gave tea to people whose questions he could have answered with a little research.

Advertising generated the money to pay Smallwood's salary and it also had its own political message. Advertising, Michael Schudson suggests, served the hegemonic function of selling capitalism, and converting workers into consumers.<sup>18</sup> Stuart Ewen concurs in seeing business leaders, whom he calls "captains of consciousness," serving a hegemonic function through advertising: "business hoped to create an 'individual' who could locate his needs and frustrations in terms of the consumption of goods rather than the quality and content of his life (work)."<sup>19</sup> Despite inequities in wealth, modern capitalism offered

14 CNS(A), Coll. 028, 1.01.004, 17 January 1938.

15 CNS(A), Coll. 028, 1.01.010, 4 July 1938, p.702.

16 CNS(A), Coll. 028, 1.01.005, February 1938, p.341; 2.02.003, Kay Lebis to Smallwood, 19 February 1935.

17 CNS(A), Coll. 028, 1.01.009, June 1938, pp.611-12.

18 Michael Schudson, *Advertising, The Uneasy Persuasion: Its Dubious Impact on American Society* (New York, 1984), 218.

19 Stuart Ewen, *Captains of Consciousness: Advertising and the Social Roots of the Consumer Culture* (New York, 1976), 42-3. See also Jackson Lears, *Fables of Abundance: A Cultural History of Advertising in America* (New York, 1994).

everyone with money the opportunity to purchase modern happiness. As Smallwood told the listeners, "One of the few things in this World in which there is no class distinction, and within reach of the rich and poor alike, is a comfortable shave."<sup>20</sup> Rich and poor alike, he said, both used Gillette razors. Such messages helped to sublimate class divisions as they incorporated Newfoundlanders into North American consumer capitalism. Not that Newfoundlanders had been living lives isolated from international capital, they were as much participants in it as other North Americans. But the social relations involved in purchasing international brands rather than local products had to be 'sold' to people habituated to bartering the product of their labour for the necessities of life. Furthermore, in the crisis of the Depression all people had to be constantly reconstructed as consumers if capitalism were to survive.

The advertising material was not the only thing that the programme produced. It also provided information and entertainment to keep the attention of the listeners. On occasion, Smallwood took on a role appropriate to a news or public affairs programme. A person wrote asking Smallwood to broadcast the details of a missing schooner. "Will anybody who knows anything about her present position please send word?" Smallwood asked.<sup>21</sup> On another programme he relayed a message to a woman in Conception Bay that her husband had arrived safely in St. John's.<sup>22</sup> O'Leary's competitor, Gerald S. Doyle, had been garnering an audience by sending personal messages over the air along with items of news in his own programme – the Doyle News Bulletin.<sup>23</sup> Some listeners also wrote Smallwood asking for help in securing work. A letter from Mike Kelly of Shoe Cove, for example, illustrates that he felt the Barrelman could secure him a berth to the seal hunt:

So far as I can judge you are the one, and only one who is known all over the Island, and I wonder if you could get me a birth [sic]. I do not care what one it is . . . if it is a decent one. Some how I am thinking you can do it, because the whole country know [sic] you and is very much interested in your work.<sup>24</sup>

Later in Smallwood's career he translated this fame and reputation as a dispenser of patronage into political capital.

20 CNS(A), Coll. 028, 17 March 1938, 1.01.006.

21 CNS(A), Coll. 028, 1.01.002, November 1937, p.126.

22 CNS(A), Coll. 028, 1.01.006, March 1938, p.440.

23 Philip Hiscock, "The Public Dispatch and the Doyle Bulletin: Two Early Newfoundland News Services," in *Beyond the Printed Word: The Evolution of Canada's Broadcast News Heritage*. R. Lochead, ed. (Kingston, 1991), 115-22.

24 CNS(A), Coll. 028, 2.02.018, Mike Kelly to Smallwood, 5 February 1939.



In his quest to entertain, Smallwood did not mind telling jokes, and he made no claims about their veracity.<sup>25</sup> More common on the *Barrelman* programme than jokes were tall tales.<sup>26</sup> Rural Newfoundlanders called tall tales "cuffers," although Smallwood did not use this word in his programme.<sup>27</sup> Cuffers were told among men who knew each other – in the intimate situations in which men gathered to socialise at their places of work. An ethnographic account of the cuffer suggests that for a person to successfully cuffer he (for it is described as an exclusively male phenomenon) must have a certain level of prestige among his peers.<sup>28</sup> This perspective raises interesting questions about the *Barrelman*. He was a stranger participating in a familiar activity through the new technology of radio, and when he solicited contributions he was allowing listeners to cuffer along with him in a new kind of social space. Smallwood provided an interesting anecdote that illustrates how the programme fit into existing social structures:

There's at least one other place in Newfoundland where there's only one radio, and where a crowd listens in every night and that[s] Lumsden, on the Strait Shore, Fogo District. The radio is owned by Mr. Howell, the merchant of the place. He has the radio in his house, and leading from the house out to the shop . . . he had a wire which connects with an additional loud-speaker in the shop, and every night at quarter to seven, Mr. Howell tells me, there are thirty or forty men on hand to hear the broadcast.<sup>29</sup>

This is a clear case of access to a radio being used to reinforce paternalistic social relations between a merchant and fishermen. One will also note how this radio broadcast fit into the traditional pattern of men gathering in a public place to share stories. Howell provided radio reception to the men of the community, but kept them separate from his family. They became dependent on the generosity of the merchant for access to the radio.

A programme that included a large number of tall tales posed a potential problem. If he told tall tales, how could he ensure that listeners would believe him when he described the merits of a product? Smallwood tried to keep his credibility intact by insisting that he only reported the facts to the best of his knowledge:

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25 For example see CNS(A), Coll. 028, 1.01.001, October 1937, p.55. For a discussion of verisimilitude in the programme, see Hiscock, "The *Barrelman* Radio Programme," 194-259.

26 Narváez, "The Broadcaster as Folklorist," 56.

27 A "cuffer" is a tale or yarn, a friendly chat, an exchange of reminiscences or a gathering for this purpose. See G.M. Story, W.J. Kirwin and J.D.A. Widdowson, *Dictionary of Newfoundland English* (Toronto, 1982), 128.

28 James Faris, *Cat Harbour: A Newfoundland Fishing Settlement* (St. John's, 1972), 141-51.

29 CNS(A), Coll. 028, 1.01.008, 28 May 1938, p.589.

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I can't help it if you refuse to believe the story I'm going to tell now. I'm told, as a matter of fact, that I'm beginning to get a frightful reputation as a liar. It seems that some listeners at least have found it hard to believe some of the stories I've told in these broadcasts. I can only say that on no occasion have I uttered a single word on these broadcasts that I didn't believe to be true. More than that: I've made every honest endeavor to check up on my information, and when even I was in doubt at all I indicated the fact quite plainly.<sup>30</sup>

Some listeners complained that tall tales spoiled the programming.<sup>31</sup> Few such complaints were received, however, and Smallwood later lowered his stated standards of veracity when dealing with tall tales. He defended the stories and came to his own defence simultaneously:

Now some people call them lies – why tell lies in these broadcasts they ask. I'm afraid I can't agree with that description of these tall tales – they're not lies. A lie is something that is meant to deceive you . . . if a man tells you something that he knows you won't believe, and he is not trying to deceive you, how can you call it a lie?<sup>32</sup>

Smallwood did not encourage tales that stretched the bounds of credibility. At one point he joked that he had brought in a couple of “Chicago gangsters” to “bump off” anyone who sent in a particular tall tale.<sup>33</sup> He maintained that he did not like tall tales, but could not “escape the conclusion that tall stories are liked by a great many people – there wouldn't be so many coming in if people weren't interest[ed] in them.”<sup>34</sup> Smallwood insisted that while he was responsible for the ultimate selection of material, he had to tell a tall tale from time to time “to meet popular demand.”<sup>35</sup> He broadcast tall tales, so his condemnation of them cannot be taken all that seriously, but he did not encourage the public perception of his programme as fiction.

While Smallwood maintained that his programme tried to “make Newfoundland better known to Newfoundlanders,” it served more to sell Newfoundland to Newfoundlanders. Smallwood's selection of material was not an impartial reflection of Newfoundland culture and society; instead, it reinforced his vision of what the ideal Newfoundlander should be. The Amulree Report had argued that Newfoundlanders had become too dependent on the government and were no longer self-sufficient. Smallwood denied this was the case in each of his

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30 CNS(A), Coll. 028, 1.01.002, November 1937, p.87.

31 For examples see CNS(A), Coll. 028, 2.02.003, Samuel Brace to Smallwood, 7 February 1938 and 2.02.005, Ethel Wheeler to Smallwood, 16 March 1937.

32 CNS(A), Coll. 028, 1.01.005, February 1938, p.297.

33 CNS(A), Coll. 028, 1.01.006, March 1938, p.402-3.

34 Ibid.

35 CNS(A), Coll. 028, 1.01.005, February 1938, p.297.

broadcasts, although one might conclude that he protested too much. One of the main themes of the *Barrelman* was how tough and resilient Newfoundlanders were in the face of harsh conditions. The death of a well-known Newfoundlander, for example, provided Smallwood an early opportunity to discuss resistance to a cruel environment:

It's just over a month ago that one of the sturdiest Newfoundlanders that ever lived passed to his final reward. It was Mr George Tuff, of Newtown, on the north side of Bonavista Bay. . . . He was in the *Greenland* Disaster, where forty-five lives were lost. He was in the *Newfoundland* Disaster when upwards of eighty lost their lives. In neither disaster did he ever get a touch of frost-burn. . . . Mr. Tuff's name was proverbial amongst the hardy fishermen and sealers of the north for grit and endurance and a man's got to have very special abilities in that line to stand out against a background where toughness and endurance are so common.<sup>36</sup>

The *Barrelman* argued that Newfoundlanders were able to endure and thrive despite the harsh environment. Each day he recounted stories of shipwrecks, storms and sealing disasters, all of which provided ample examples of heroism and strength.

Much of the entertainment of the programme seemed to be aimed at men, while the advertising had to be directed at women to be effective. Stories of the sea and hardship were well suited to reinforce characteristics associated with masculinity: courage, strength, endurance and stoicism. These were all characteristics that would make a man an effective 'breadwinner' and such stories might appeal to a man (who might have been assumed to be 'in charge' of the radio). The potential problem was that women were often in charge of purchasing the consumer goods that were being advertised. After one correspondent in St. John's wrote Smallwood to complain that he had been ignoring women, he made a point of telling stories that showed the courage and strength of Newfoundland women.<sup>37</sup> Smallwood hired a female announcer to read some of the advertising copy, perhaps thinking that listeners would be more convinced by the "Palmolive Girl!" extolling the virtues of the various products than his own male voice. His decision to bring in a female announcer may also have been a strategy to retain the credibility of the text of the advertisements while allowing himself free reign to engage in hyperbole when describing the attributes of Newfoundlanders.

During the early days of the programme, Smallwood particularly emphasised Newfoundlanders who had succeeded in endeavours in other parts of the world. "I love to come across stories of Newfoundlanders who have gone out

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36 CNS(A), Coll. 028, 1.01, October 1937, p.6.

37 CNS(A), Coll. 028, 1.01.002, November 1937, p.105

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and faced the world and conquered it," he said. "These cases prove my contention that Newfoundlanders have got what it takes, whenever they get the chance."<sup>38</sup> Any person born in Newfoundland who had a career in any way remarkable was fair game for a commentary. A common kind of story that fit in this genre were instances of Newfoundlanders who had invented things, both at home and abroad.<sup>39</sup> Again, the ingenuity and adaptability of the people were celebrated, proving that "in almost any field that you can mention Newfoundlanders have proven in open competition that they have the ability and brains to make good."<sup>40</sup> Smallwood not only praised Newfoundlanders who succeeded, but criticised those he thought had failed to be proud of their country.<sup>41</sup> During one broadcast, he objected to the insulting remarks about Newfoundlanders made by a character in a story published in the *Saturday Evening Post*. Smallwood used the opportunity to encourage unity in the face of the divisions in Newfoundland society:

I'm afraid we've had too much of purely local and purely sectional loyalty and patriotism – love of our own particular bay, or our own particular settlement, forgetting that Newfoundland is one country, that the Newfoundland people are one people, one and indivisible. To a man and to a woman we should be quick to resent, quick to show our resentment, too, at any attempt to divide our people into geographic divisions. East, north, south and west, we're one people, with common interests, with a common historical background – a background of struggle against the forces of nature, against oppression and injustice and intolerance and bigotry. . . . Whenever anybody here in Newfoundland tries to set the Newfoundland people against each other, one section or geographic division against another section or geographic division, let us be intelligent and patriotic enough to show by our frowns and our contempt that that sort of stuff won't go down in this country.<sup>42</sup>

In retrospect there is some irony in this. During the referenda campaigns of 1948 Smallwood and his allies did much to encourage sectarian and class divisions within Newfoundland for his own political advantage.

Newfoundland's past passionately interested Smallwood, and both oral tradition and written historical anecdotes were cheap and easy to collect. Much of Smallwood's programme material came from various Newfoundland publications, such as D.W. Prowse's *A History of Newfoundland* (1895) and from unpublished

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38 CNS(A), Coll. 028, 1.01.001, October 1937, p.19.

39 For an example see the discussion of the inventions of Reverend P.J. O'Brien, CNS(A), p.21.

40 *Ibid.*, p.22.

41 See for example: CNS(A), Coll. 028, 1.01.001, October 1937, p.34-35; 2.02.005, E.J. Withers of Trepassey to Smallwood, 11 November 1937.

42 The author of the story was Charles Rawlings, CNS(A), Coll. 028, 1.01.014, 9 December 1938.

historical records.<sup>43</sup> This provided a mine of anecdotes from the past which allowed him to set up a contrast between the rough conditions of Newfoundland's past and the relatively progressive society of his day. As he commented:

Just as the hands of a clock or watch move imperceptibly, so that it requires a long interval to notice that they have moved, so with the progress of a city or a country. It's only when you compare the present with the past that you begin to notice that progress has been made.<sup>44</sup>

It might mean that one had to search well into the past, but an episode could be found that made life in 1937 seem better.

Smallwood made clear that the predominance of historical items over contemporary items did not imply that he found the current generation lacking the positive qualities of their predecessors:

I sometimes think, as I tell you stories of Newfoundlanders in times gone by, that you may infer that I am not sold on the idea that Newfoundlanders of the present era measure up to the standards of other days. I'd be sorry if you inferred that. It's only natural that stories of past generations of Newfoundlanders should be easier to get, and that's why most of my anecdotes deal with the past.<sup>45</sup>

He later reported that one listener had written him arguing that Newfoundlanders were not as good as they had been in the past. Smallwood challenged listeners to send in stories of Newfoundlanders that proved the correspondent wrong:

No doubt you've often heard me make the claim – that the stock, the breed, that's in the Newfoundland people is too good, too sound, to wear out in one or two generations. . . . This listener disagrees violently with that view. . . . However, to prove which of us is right, my correspondent or I, I'm willing to let the listeners decide.<sup>46</sup>

Many listeners responded to Smallwood's appeal by submitting stories of elderly Newfoundlanders who were still performing prodigious feats of work. In Smallwood's view this proved that:

Things may be in the doldrums – there may not be the same opportunities in Newfoundland that there were forty or fifty years ago – everything in

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43 D.W. Prowse, *A History of Newfoundland* (London, 1895).

44 CNS(A), Coll. 028, 1.01.001, October 1937, p.34.

45 CNS(A), Coll. 028, 1.01.003, 13 December 1937, p.177.

46 CNS(A), Coll. 028, 1.01.005, 8 February 1938, p.315.

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Newfoundland and in the world may be topsy-turvey; but the fact stands out sharply that so far as industriousness and energy, and willingness to work, are concerned, the Newfoundlander is just as good a man as ever he was – and the Newfoundland woman too.<sup>47</sup>

In the tradition of the greatest Newfoundland boomers Smallwood accepted that Newfoundland had “vast undeveloped resources.”<sup>48</sup> The bulk of the blame for Newfoundland’s lack of development, in Smallwood’s view, lay with the British authorities who were responsible for “three whole centuries of misrule, of injustice, of suppression and oppression” before the granting of self-government. The irony that Newfoundland had lost self-government in 1934 must have been apparent to listeners, many of whom would have recognized that once more Newfoundlanders were subject to the rule or misrule of officials an ocean away. As with many Newfoundland nationalists, Smallwood walked a fine line between criticism of the imperial government and loyalty to Britain. A listener asked Smallwood to say something positive about the British, to which he responded that there was a distinction between the English people and the English government.<sup>49</sup> This expressed well the ambivalence many people in colonies felt towards Britain. The British officials could not live up to the romantic expectations held by Newfoundlanders raised on stories of the Empire.

In keeping with his view that the qualities of the people were more important than the form of government, Smallwood implied that the British government and the Commission could not solve Newfoundland’s problems. He argued that what was needed was a cultural change among Newfoundlanders:

It’s only a case of harnessing that spirit to the undeveloped wealth, and prosperity is bound to be the result. I must resist the temptation to preach in this programme, but this much I’ll allow myself to say . . . that if Newfoundland is to become a great country, if we’re to have a real and enduring prosperity, if this country is to be made fit to live in – it’s the people themselves who must do it. It’s their country, nobody else’s. It’s my conviction that the people of Newfoundland don’t begin to realize what a precious and what a powerful thing is this spirit of courage and determination and never say “die.” Once that spirit is fully aroused, we’re going to have a wonderful little country. It’s a long time coming, yes – but that’s because it’s not thoroughly aroused.<sup>50</sup>

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47 *Ibid.*, p.320.

48 CNS(A), Coll. 028, 1.01.018, 11 April 1939.

49 *Ibid.*, 20 April 1939.

50 CNS(A), Coll. 028, 1.01.005, February 1939, pp. 320-1.

Smallwood told his fellow Newfoundlanders that the Commission was not going to be the author of prosperity for the island, that the people had to remake their economy and society. To this end Smallwood bolstered nationalism whenever he could. Even when discussing antiquarian concerns he introduced items in ways that bolstered contemporary nationalism.

Despite Smallwood's nationalistic view of Newfoundland, not all the programme was unabashed boosterism. Smallwood admitted that among the many letters that came to him were occasional tales of "sadness and misfortune to remind us that many of our fellow countrymen are finding it anything but easy to make their way in the world." He rarely related these stories, and when he did he resisted the notion that the unemployed were to blame for the absence of work. Smallwood drew the lesson that "the ordinary, everyday courage of our people who, in spite of what a few may say, are just as anxious and just as eager today to earn an honest living, and to toil hard to earn it, as ever the people were in bygone days."<sup>51</sup> During one broadcast, Smallwood related a man's difficult walk to St. John's in search of work, and appealed for someone in the audience to give the man a job.<sup>52</sup>

The political discourse of the programme could also be used in a more direct way than fostering self-sufficiency among the public. A couple of listeners tried to engage in public criticism of the Commission government through the Barrelman programme. Walter Pike of Bristol's Hope, for example, wrote to complain about the low level of the relief payments.<sup>53</sup> A listener in St. John's criticised the Commission itself, which Smallwood included in a scripted interchange between fellow broadcaster Bob Macleod and himself. For a brief period in 1938 Macleod joined Smallwood for a few minutes each broadcast to ask the Barrelman the questions the listeners had submitted. Smallwood included the critique in his broadcast in the following manner:

Bob – The first one tonight is from George Hancock, Topsail Road. . . . "If," says Mr. Hancock, "the men governing us are merely Imperial Civil Service men, is it possible for them to have the necessary vision, acumen, business ability and daring required for the rehabilitation of Newfoundland? If they do not have these requirements, and are merely Civil Servants who retain their positions at the King's pleasure, what chance does Newfoundland have of ever regaining her lost independence – the right of franchise and self-government?" That's the question, Mr. Barrelman. What's your answer?

Barrelman – I'm afraid, Bob, there's going to be no answer to that question tonight. I'm glad you asked it gives me the opportunity to say to those listening in that it's useless to send me questions of a political character, as this one

51 CNS(A), Coll. 028, 1.01.011, 8 September 1938, pp.825-6.

52 CNS(A), Coll. 028, 1.01.006, March 1938, p.440-1.

53 CNS(A), Coll. 028, 2.02.008, Walter Pike to Smallwood, 23 June 1938.

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is. If the gentleman who sent it in had stopped to think a moment, he would have realized that I simply can't deal with questions of that sort. Political discussions are barred in this particular programme.<sup>54</sup>

Political discussions might be "barred," but Smallwood had just allowed a listener to criticise the Commission and appeal for the return of responsible government. The following excerpt may have been a ploy by a listener to hide a similar criticism of the Commission behind a historical quotation.

Mrs. Thomas St. John, of Riverhead, Harbour Grace, sends in a quotation, and asks if you can say who used those words in the first place. The quotation is as follows: "I see the taxes wrung from the sweat of the people, squandered in the payment of useless officials; the country after three centuries of British possession, in a great part, an impassable wilderness, its people depressed, its trade fettered, its mighty resources undeveloped – and all for what? To fatten up in idleness, by the creation of useless offices, exorbitantly paid, the members of a clique."<sup>55</sup>

Smallwood identified the author of the quotation as Bishop Mullock who had campaigned for responsible government in the middle of the 19th century. Considering the rising hostility toward the Commission, most listeners would have recognized the irony of the fact that one might have argued that many of the conditions the letter described existed again nearly a century later. In a broadcast that cut to the heart of the Commission's failure to support nationalism, Smallwood worried about Newfoundland's material cultural heritage being dissipated in the wake of the Commission government's closing of the Newfoundland Museum. He had used his *Daily News* column to explicitly condemn the Commission for closing the museum.<sup>56</sup> After relating the exploits of one Newfoundlander, Silas Loder, he wrote a commentary asking about the location of the photograph of Loder that had belonged to the museum.<sup>57</sup> Early in 1939 he launched a public campaign to raise money for the purchase of rare maps and charts of Newfoundland for the public library. When the money had been raised, and the Barrelman broadcast the ceremony by which "the only elected executive in the country," Mayor Andrew Carnell of St. John's officially handed the artifacts over to the library.<sup>58</sup>

Such examples show the need for a forum in which to discuss the public affairs of the country, and the position that Smallwood found himself in as a

54 CNS(A), Coll. 028, 1.01.009, June 1938, p.625.

55 CNS(A), Coll. 028, 1.01.010, July 1938, p.721.

56 Hiscock, "The *Barrelman* Radio Programme," 72-4.

57 CNS(A), Coll. 028, 1.01.003, December 1937, p.203.

58 CNS(A), Coll. 028, 1.01.019, 3 May 1939.



broadcaster. The fact that Smallwood did broadcast the letters may show that he had some sympathy with the authors, but wanted to distance himself from that view. These incidents also underline a difference between broadcasting and newspapers. Smallwood had a lot of experience with the partisan press and was not shy when it came to the rougher aspects of political rhetoric. Hiscock noted that Smallwood was much more explicitly political and critical of the Commission in his Masthead column than in the *Barrelman* programme.<sup>59</sup> This was probably the result of two factors. First, despite Smallwood's passion for politics, O'Leary's need to remain entertaining and the desire not to offend listeners or the government ensured that Smallwood would not publicly criticise the Commission on the government-owned station. More fundamentally, radio, as a medium that brought messages into the home for the whole family, was thought to be a technology that should take care to not offend. The press, on the other hand, had long engaged in unrestrained rhetoric. The press was clearly in the public sphere and did not need to maintain a genteel decorum. Those who objected to partisan fighting would not buy a newspaper allied to a political rival, while radio came into people's homes.

Discussions of historical events and foreign lands could be used to make contemporary political points without transgressing the boundaries of acceptable commentary on the BCN. On the occasion of the anniversary of a 1886 riot at the legislative building, he did not mention more contemporary riots. "Times were bad around then," he commented, "and a large number of men gathered in front of the building and created a riot for the purpose of compelling official action to relieve their distress."<sup>60</sup> Many listeners would have been aware of the similar riots in St. John's in 1932 and 1935. While domestic political questions were apparently taboo on Newfoundland radio, international political questions could be safely addressed. When the King and Queen visited Newfoundland as part of their June 1939 tour, Smallwood took the opportunity to contrast the despotic Germans, Italians and Russians with the democratic British. As the European situation deteriorated in June of 1939, Smallwood more often referred to the Nazi threat and German militarism.<sup>61</sup> He also asserted that there was a difference between his programme's nationalism and the nationalism of Nazism:

Very cleverly Hitler and his Nazi satellites have built up a terrific propaganda machine to ingermenate the German people, especially the German youth, with a false nationalism – well, we want none of that here in Newfoundland, none of it – to us the very thought is hateful; but there's all the difference in the world between a true, natural and genuine love of country and a false and partisan nationalism based on hate.<sup>62</sup>

59 Hiscock, "The *Barrelman* Radio Programme," 60.

60 CNS(A), Coll. 028, 1.01.017, 30 March 1939.

61 CNS(A), Coll. 028, 1.01.020, 27 June 1939.

62 CNS(A), Coll. 028, 1.01.021, 25 July 1939.

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While his programme hammered at the theme of pride and self-sufficiency, Smallwood denied its propagandistic nature. This was probably an effort to retain his credibility in light of the negative associations the word propaganda acquired in the late 1930s.

A listener in the city writes me as follows. Quote: "I noticed where it was said recently in a magazine that I was reading that the press and the radio, by preaching optimism, put old man fear on the spot. I suggest that you use your powers to inspire your listeners to quit old man worry and see the bright side as Newfoundland is definitely becoming a better place to live in. Show them optimistic facts and figures regarding the end of depression. Yours sincerely, The People's Friend." Unquote. I'd like to reply at some length to this letter but the short answer, of course, is that in this type of broadcast preaching optimism isn't any more in order than preaching pessimism – no preaching of any kind is suitable to a programme such as this. I don't think it's propaganda or preaching my listeners want, but entertainment, and much as I might be tempted sometimes to give 'em propaganda I wouldn't take the risk. So in reply to this listener I must decline to accede to his request – no preaching, *no propaganda* must continue to be our motto.<sup>63</sup>

In the light of the polemical undercurrent of much that Smallwood broadcast it seems that his protest was more designed to retain his credibility than it was an accurate assessment of his own programme.

In 1939, Smallwood found himself working on "public" radio when the Commission bought the privately owned VONF and created a state-owned broadcaster, the Broadcasting Corporation of Newfoundland.<sup>64</sup> The BCN continued to allow commercial programming, so O'Leary and Smallwood had no problem with the transition to the new owner. Smallwood praised the Commission's support for Newfoundland culture, and hoped that the new station would bring Newfoundlanders closer together:

It's going to provide a new medium to enable all the people of Newfoundland to get together, not just once in a while, but every day and every night throughout the year. From now on we're all going to be neighbors – all one big Newfoundland family – with the north bound together with the south, the east knit closely with the west. Our country for the first time has got a Voice: a voice that speaks the good old Newfoundland language, one that must make us clearly conscious of our common national heritage, conscious of all that we have in common, we Newfoundlanders – a common language, a common history, a common tradition, and a common destiny.

<sup>63</sup> CNS(A), Coll. 028, 1.01.008, 7 May 1938, p.534.

<sup>64</sup> Jeff A. Webb, "The Origins of Public Broadcasting: The Commission of Government and the Creation of the Broadcasting Corporation of Newfoundland," *Acadiensis* 24, 2 (Autumn 1994): 88- 106.

Smallwood had high hopes that radio broadcasting could overcome the difficulties of communication among a thinly spread population. When the Department of Education started a series of educational broadcasts, Smallwood expressed his belief in the role broadcasting could take in Newfoundland:

You know, I don't think there's been an item of news more fundamentally important to this country for a long time – for if ever there was a country in which radio broadcasting could and should be a godsend, it's Newfoundland, with its population so far-flung and so widely scattered over six thousand miles of coastline into more than thirteen hundred settlements. Of course I know that radio broadcasting shouldn't be turned into a dry and arid vehicle of dry-as-dust uplift and that sort of thing – I admit that perhaps the prime purpose of broadcasting should be that of providing entertainment: but what thoughtful Newfoundlander will fail to see that these two fine broadcast stations should also be used, at least in part, for the spread of information, the dissemination of knowledge, the formulation of a sound public opinion, and anything else that helps to form the type of enlightened, well-balanced character that will enable our Newfoundland people to overcome and vanquish the present difficulties which beset them.<sup>65</sup>

He could have been describing the goals he had for his own programme. Smallwood also hoped that the new public broadcasting station would provide a venue for Newfoundland culture, and thus foster nationalism:

I certainly hope that plays, sketches, poems and other forms of literature with the "stamp of Newfoundland" on them will begin to be written for frequent presentation on this powerful new transmitter that'll soon be covering the whole Island of Newfoundland. In that way more perhaps, can be done for Newfoundland patriotism than any other medium.<sup>66</sup>

He suggested that listeners write and submit verses and ballads on heroic episodes such as the defence of Carbonear Island from the French in 1696.<sup>67</sup> Smallwood recognized that Newfoundland lacked a large literature, and thus oral tradition would have to form the basis of Newfoundland's national culture.<sup>68</sup> His own programme aimed to create just such a culture rooted in Newfoundland's historical experience.

The *Barrelman* had expanded into a formidable cultural operation. In June 1938, O'Leary launched a free monthly magazine under the same name as the radio show. The *Barrelman* newspaper published a selection of the items that

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65 CNS(A), Coll. 028, 1.01.024, 2 November 1939.

66 CNS(A), Coll. 028, 1.01.017, 2 March 1939.

67 CNS(A), Coll. 028, 1.01.018, 4 April 1939.

68 CNS(A), Coll. 028, 1.01.013, 12 November 1938.

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had been broadcast, and a brief summary of local and international news. The magazine extended the Barreلمان's influence well beyond the listening audience. By April 1939, the 24-page paper boasted a circulation of 21,000 copies to all 1,328 communities in Newfoundland.<sup>69</sup> At the same time that the *Barreلمان* newspaper marked the expansion of the programme into homes that did not own radios, Smallwood, in a less-than-astute business move, sold all his rights to the trade name "Barreلمان" to O'Leary for one dollar. In exchange O'Leary hired Smallwood for one year at \$35 per week for the radio show and \$50 per month as editor of the newspaper.<sup>70</sup> This allowed O'Leary to continue the programme with Michael F. Harrington as host after Smallwood, who had a lifelong interest in farming, left in November 1943 to operate a pig farm in Gander.

Although radio broadcasting is a monologue in which one agent produces a message and many people receive it, the Barreلمان cultivated the appearance of a democratic medium in which the culture was produced by the community. On one occasion, a listener caught Smallwood in a minor factual error and suggested that Smallwood get his facts right before he "presumes to educate the people of Newfoundland."<sup>71</sup> In his defence, Smallwood claimed his programme was democratic:

If he thinks that I'm setting myself up to educate the people of Newfoundland, he's making a mistake, because I'm not. It's the other way about – the people of Newfoundland are educating me. Whose programme is this, anyway? Is there anybody so badly-informed that he thinks it's my programme? Does anybody really think that all the material and information I've been giving every night for nearly three years past came out of my head? Of course it didn't. It came from my listeners, from the people of Newfoundland.<sup>72</sup>

Despite his efforts to create the illusion that the programme was a forum for the expression of the Newfoundland people, Smallwood set the terms of discourse and the programme remained committed to his political agenda. In the new public space that the Barreلمان created, Smallwood promoted his view of an independent and self-reliant people. In a rhetorical device that was likely intended to make his message more persuasive, he presented it as coming from the Newfoundland people, rather than coming from himself.

O'Leary and Smallwood tried to remake Newfoundlanders' image of themselves as self-reliant, but the actual effect of the programme on the people is

69 CNS(A), Coll. 028, 1.01.009, 28 June 1938, pp.682-3.

70 CNS(A), Leo Moakler Collection, Box 6, File 10, Contracts between F.M. O'Leary Ltd. and J.R. Smallwood, 29 June 1938 and 30 June 1938.

71 CNS(A), Coll. 028, 1.01.025, 20 December 1939.

72 Ibid.

more difficult to address. A review of listeners' letters to Smallwood reveals that most correspondents approved of both the material that Smallwood used and his political agenda. But not all listeners approved of Smallwood's choice of programming, and one such listener wrote a scathing indictment:

After listening to parts of your programme I have been wondering if you think the intelligence of the people of this country has reached such a low ebb, as yours apparently have [sic] for broadcasting such nonsense and silliness. I wonder what the people of Canada or the U.S.A. would think if they were to hear such foolishness. This Country is well known for its illiteracy and undoubtedly you are doing your best to foster this belief. It is surprising that firms such as Bowerings and F.M. O'Leary would tolerate such trash on a programme that they were the sponsors of, surely it is not impossible to have someone on these programmes that could have something worth while for the Radio Audience. If you have no consideration for the intelligence of the people of this country at least you might remember that people from other parts might be listening to the rubbish that you broadcast.<sup>73</sup>

In essence, this listener seemed to feel that the trivial and folkloric material did not represent a positive contribution to people's culture. Another anonymous listener had a powerful critique of the programme, suggesting that fishermen and loggers did not need to be told how hardworking they were since the hardship of their daily lives was apparent to them. Rather than "bore" the people with "nonsense" this listener suggested that Smallwood tell people the truth about the economic opportunities available. Smallwood's critic also wanted an explanation of the poor condition of the economy and suggested that Smallwood tell people where the wealth of the country had gone.<sup>74</sup>

Radio simultaneously promoted a unique Newfoundland culture and undermined it by bringing in entertainment from Canada and the United States. The letters from listeners not only illustrate aspects of Newfoundlanders' indigenous culture but also indicate the extent of the penetration of North American popular culture. Many listeners received American stations, and Newfoundland stations rebroadcast American programming. There is no doubt that a great deal of American programming became part of the cultural corpus of Newfoundlanders. One letter to Smallwood provides an interesting example:

A concert was held at Lewisporte one time, and on the stage the committee set up an imitation radio receiving set on the table. [Lindy] Forward was hidden under the table before the curtain went up, and a man stood up beside the radio and twisted the imitation dials, in a pretense at picking up some foreign pro-

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73 CNS(A), Coll. 028, 2.02.020, Anonymous to Smallwood, 31 March 1938.

74 CNS(A), Coll. 028, 2.02.018, "A Listener" to Smallwood, 28 February 1939.

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gramme. Suddenly he picked up Amos and Andy – 'twas Lindy Forward under the table, of course – but so well did he imitate them that the audience were [sic] absolutely convinced that it was actually foreign reception on a genuine radio set, and there were many in the audience who had often heard the real Amos and Andy on their radios.<sup>75</sup>

This episode shows that both Forward and the majority of members of his audience were familiar enough with the Amos 'n' Andy show to find the imitation funny. Forward's other entertainment options included yodeling as well as cowboy and hillbilly songs, American variants of traditional music that spread throughout North America in part through radio.<sup>76</sup>

The Barrelman responded to the Depression and the loss of self-government by trying to remake Newfoundlanders' image of themselves. Smallwood was a nationalist advocate for Newfoundland from the 1920s to the 1980s and the Barrelman programme was consistent with his whole life's intellectual production. His cultural activities, and those of his sponsor, F.M. O'Leary, were sharpest during the period that Newfoundland lived under the distinction of having lost responsible government. The economic recovery spawned by the Second World War, and the public response to his programme, may have eased Smallwood's decision to relinquish control of the programme, which he had tired of anyway. Hiscock notes that, by 1943, Smallwood seems to have felt that Newfoundlanders no longer lacked national pride.<sup>77</sup> After the Second World War, Smallwood was one of the very first to enter the newly reopened political arena. His political career was launched by the high profile that the Barrelman programme had given him, and his effective use of populist appeals was rooted in his experience as the Barrelman. Following his election to the National Convention in September 1946, he led the successful confederate movement and his mastery of radio broadcasting served him well throughout the crucial confederation debates. Upon Newfoundland's union with Canada in 1949, Smallwood was appointed premier of the new province and dominated the political life of Newfoundland until 1972. Upon his retirement from politics, Smallwood returned to writing and publishing the same sort of nationalist cultural material that he had promoted as the Barrelman.

As an episode in the creation of nationalism, the Barrelman programme is revealing. At one level Smallwood fostered nationalism and independence, while encouraging Newfoundlanders to want a North American consumer lifestyle at another level. This desire for material goods may have encouraged some people to vote to join Canada. This argument must be approached with

<sup>75</sup> CNS(A), Coll. 028, 1.01.007, April 1938, p.453.

<sup>76</sup> Jeff A. Webb, "The Invention of Radio Broadcasting in Newfoundland and the Maritime Provinces, 1922-1939," PhD thesis, University of New Brunswick, 1995, 341-3.

<sup>77</sup> Hiscock, "The *Barrelman* Radio Programme," 298.

caution, however, in light of the fact that the Avalon Peninsula, the area with the highest level of radio ownership and the most reliable radio reception, voted overwhelmingly against Confederation. The prospect of Smallwood, the quintessential Newfoundland nationalist, leading a movement to make the island a part of another country might seem unlikely. This seems to be a contradiction, however, only if one holds the state to be the centre of the nation. Smallwood's Newfoundland nationalism was not based on 'traditional' political institutions such as responsible government, nor upon symbols, but on his perceptions of the qualities of the people. Newfoundland had the unpleasant distinction of being a nation that had voluntarily relinquished democracy. Since nationalism almost always crystallises around the state, Smallwood had to construct a popular nationalism without a democratic state. He went as far as to say that the form of government under which people lived did not matter in the struggle to make a great country, since governments were "artificial and superficial," and it was "the genius of the people that counts."<sup>78</sup> At a time when the Newfoundland nation state had been compromised by the existence of the British-appointed Commission government, a nationalist discourse that was not attached to the state was possible. This helps to explain how Smallwood, the unrepentant nationalist, could say "we are not a nation" during the debates of the National Convention.<sup>79</sup> He did not deny the viability of Newfoundlanders, only the viability of the Newfoundland state. This is in contrast to O'Leary's nationalism which focussed on the return of responsible government as its goal. O'Leary was a part of the St. John's Roman Catholic community for whom confederation was reminiscent of the union between Ireland and Britain, and responsible government was analogous to 'home rule.' O'Leary launched Smallwood as a populist figure and it was O'Leary whose commercial activities had encouraged Newfoundlanders to want to purchase Canadian consumer goods, but he remained committed to a politically independent state. As has been argued elsewhere, O'Leary and other members of the Responsible Government League attempted to use a nationalist discourse that failed to resonate with Newfoundlanders away from the Avalon Peninsula.<sup>80</sup> O'Leary's view of Newfoundland centred on the symbols and trappings of responsible government. Smallwood, however, could reconcile nationalism and union with Canada because he had decided that the form of government didn't matter as long as there was a cultural transformation of Newfoundland. The basis of this nationalist vision had been laid during the Barrelman programme.

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78 J.R. Smallwood, "Newfoundland To-day," in *The Book of Newfoundland: Volume One*. J.R. Smallwood, ed. (St. Johns, 1937), 3.

79 J.R. Smallwood in J.K. Hiller and M.F. Harrington, eds., *The Newfoundland National Convention, 1946-48: Debates, Papers and Reports Volume One* (St. John's, 1995), 95.

80 Webb, "The Responsible Government League," 217-18.