

Silver Donald Cameron

# Real development begins with people

We asked Cape Breton freelancer Silver Donald Cameron to contribute to *Atlantic Issues*, and found him racing to finish a book. "But I've already said my piece about development," he remarked, "in a little essay I did for a similar supplement of *The Scotia Sun* in Port Hawkesbury, back in 1974. The details of it are a little dated now — John Shaheen is evidently out of business, and Premier Regan is distinctly less bullish about the joys of heavy industry. But I think the general view of development I outlined there is at least as apt in 1977 as it was three years ago."

Perhaps Cameron's essay will remind our readers that these issues don't go away. They bedevilled Nova Scotians twenty years ago, and they will probably face us twenty years into the future, too.

by Donald Cameron

On a chilly, sunny day last October I stood on the end of a rotting dock on the Lennox Passage side of Janvrin's Island, and looked around me at the flaring reds, burning yellows and incandescent greens on Rabbit Island, Strawberry Point and the far shore of Inhabitants Bay. The sea rolled past, slate-grey with flecks of white; a nippy breeze pushed the odd puff of cloud across the sky. Behind me were two houses, one falling into ruins, the other neatly painted. Aside from those two houses I could see no sign of man and his works.

I suppose I am wrong to think that such places and such occasions are good for the soul. No doubt the imagination of a man like John Shaheen would be fired by the knowledge that over along Inhabitants Bay that slate-grey sea concealed depths of sixty or seventy sheltered feet within a few yards of the shore, that a stone's throw from the end of my rotting pier of water is forty feet deep. Gerry Regan, who is proud that the population of Nova Scotia has finally nudged over 800,000, would frown in concern to see all that territory unoccupied; Regan may be the only politician left alive who is still in favour of the population explosion. John Buchanan would alight from a helicopter with a big smile like the one he recently conferred on the ponies of Sable Island, and vow that he could do everything Regan could do, but faster.

## Quiet Please!

If they would all just be quiet, we could hear the sound of the keening wind, the whoosh of the little waves, the cry of a single seagull. You can't hear that in Boston, in New York, in Baltimore. In cities like those, the people are going crazy, raping and mugging and killing one another. It's true even in staid old Canada: a week in Toronto is enough to give you heartburn, a quick tour of Montreal reveals a fetid river filled with garbage, a clutch of oil refineries, an Olympic extravaganza siphoning hundreds of millions of dollars while the people crouch in crumbling warrens, bombing mailboxes and strangling cabinet ministers every now and then in a desperate bid for attention.

I haven't been back to my rotting dock on Lennox Passage this spring, but I gather the view has changed; on the far shore they are ripping up trees and bulldozing the ground for a

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Dow Chemical salt plant. From the other side of Janvrin's Island you can see the spreading scar, like a giant cancer, that marks the clearing for John Shaheen's new refinery, to be built by an Italian contractor using British equipment, so that oil from Kuwait and Iran can be refined into jet fuel and heating oil for the markets of Europe and the United States. The tankers will no doubt be registered somewhere like Liberia, where taxes and inspection standards are loose.

Nova Scotians, of course, are not entirely forgotten. We get to guarantee \$40 million in loans, and we built a \$30 million dock. Our real

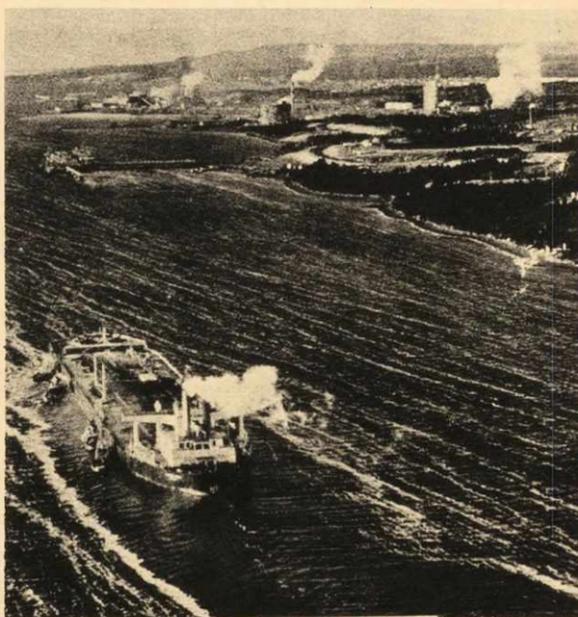
reward, though, is jobs -- clearing the land, for instance, our land. A friend of mine recently thought of working on the project. He discovered that a gang of six men would be paid so much per acre -- and had to walk in to the site on their own time. The pay would be decent only if they worked outrageous hours. He decided not to bother. The refinery, incidentally, will cost \$250 million or so, and Shaheen's people expect that money back within five years or so. They are worried about the productivity of Nova Scotia labour, they say.

Think about that for a moment. They expect to make something like \$50 million a year on that refinery, and they bitch because Nova Scotians won't sweat their guts out to build it for them for peanuts.

Cape Breton labour, they say, is volatile, unpredictable, unreliable: but hardly anyone asks why. If anyone did ask, he'd quickly find

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out that Cape Breton has a history of abuse at the hands of giant international corporations -- like the British Empire Steel and Coal Corporation (BESCO) and its successor, Dominion Steel and Coal (DOSCO). Ask any old miner in Glace Bay about the "labour troubles" of the Twenties, and he'll tell you why they might better be described as "company troubles". BESCO would cut wages by 40 per cent or so, and then, when the miners went on strike, cut off their credit at the company stores, set goons on them with iron bars and revolvers, cut off the water and power to their homes, and if necessary call in the army.



Port Hawkesbury

Today's companies aren't like that, we're told -- and certainly the modern corporation is more refined. Today the companies use the courts rather than the army, but ask the fishermen of Canso, Mulgrave and Petit de Grat whether Booth and Acadia Fisheries showed any different attitude during the 1970-71 trawlermen's strike. And if the new industrial jobs are so glorious, why does Michelin still have to spend exorbitant amounts of money advertising for workers at its Granton and Bridgewater plants? Why is the labour movement so hostile to Michelin, and why is Michelin so firmly opposed to unions in its plants?

## The Industrial Leopard

The industrial leopard hasn't changed his spots. He purrs, but he's no tabbycat; he's still a leopard. All the new plants either in place or proposed for the Strait are multinational corporations devoted to making a profit for their owners. They didn't come to give us jobs: they came because they think plants here can make money, and for no other reason. The American war planes that fricasseed the villagers of Vietnam ran on Gulf jet fuel and dropped napalm from Dow Chemicals. There's money in

war. Aristotle Onassis left his mark on the Strait in 1970, when the ARROW -- which he owned, through a string of companies -- dumped 17,000 tons of Bunker C here. He didn't pay to clean it up; the taxpayers of Canada paid. There's no money in cleaning up your messes. Now we are told that Onassis, hallelujah, may build a whole refinery here. Surely Canada should present him with a \$3 million cleaning bill before we even allow him to bring ships in here again, let alone a whole refinery.

## Sarnia: The Urban Model

But we are governed, it seems, by fools and rascals, by men committed to the idea that it's fair for public resources to be used for private profit. Our leaders, it appears, have an idea of what our community should look like a generation from now: it should look like Sarnia or Pittsburg, places from which people are fleeing to buy property in Nova Scotia. So one huge plant after another is slapped down on the shores of the Strait, and the politicians crow about development.

This isn't development; this is indecent assault. Real development would start with people. Real development would ask who the people of the Strait are, and what they like to do, and what they do well. My own fingertip feeling is that people down here don't like to be regulated, that we respond to the weather and the seasons more than to the time clock. My friends and neighbours will work like mules all day for nothing, to help a friend; they will fish and hunt and garden with ferocious concentration; they will do their own carpentry, plumbing, heating and wiring. They are almost never idle.

## Industrial Evil

They will also call in sick or strike or go on the poge when they don't feel like working; they will cheerfully put off till tomorrow what might have been done yesterday; and they will often consider everything else secondary to a good party. Personally, I think these are splendid qualities, and anything calling itself "development" should build on them rather than fight with them. Life is not basically a matter of

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mortgages and promotions and payrolls and responsibilities; it's a once-only trip through a magnificent world, and the only reason to spend your time working hard is because you love the work you're doing. Work you don't love is drudgery that cuts into the time you have for real living; nobody in his senses would spend more than a minimum of his time at drudgery.

Yet what does the modern industrial plant offer us except drudgery, for the most part? I spent a couple of summers working in a paper mill in British Columbia; I met some marvellous people there. They built hot rods and motor boats, read poetry and philosophy, played the saxophone, collected antique guns and sang Scottish folk music. They were creative, vital people -- but not during working hours. They considered their jobs a kind of necessary evil, and they went through the working day in a kind of trance. Only when the shift changed and they went home did they become human.

Threescore years and ten: none of us has time to waste. I sat on the end of the rotten old wharf and listened to the gulls and the waves, grateful that I was no longer wasting time putting in a shift in a mill. Then I came home and sat down at my typewriter and worked like a son of Cape Breton, for love and money both. Through the window of my workroom I could see Charlie next door working in his garden, and some children running across my field to the beach.

The people I meet in rural Nova Scotia seem to know in their bones that life doesn't have to mean imprisonment in a mill followed by a play period at home. They reckon it's possible to be human all the time. The real trouble with this bogus "development" which progressively uglifies the Strait is that it doesn't respect the humanity of the people it claims it will serve.