

# "I Like The Maritimes"



by don cameron

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*Many problematic studies of the under-development and under-inflation of the Maritimes are appearing regularly in the News media. Most articles tend to forget the positive aspects of our condition, that of being economically and socially retarded. Dr. Cameron has his own sense of priorities and a different opinion of what prosperity symbols should be. Reprinted from the Telegraph-Journal and a CBC Radio Show.*

Since I went to Ottawa to speak to Senator Davey's committee on the mass media, I've been getting letters. The ones that come directly to me run about two to one in support of what I said, and often contain subscriptions to The Mysterious East. The ones against me, however, generally say what one anonymous note put very succinctly? "You're a nice bastard (omitted from Telegraph-Journal) to be teaching our youth. G'wan back west."

Now I do come from Vancouver — though I haven't been there for six years — so I understand that impulse. When Torontonians used to come out to Vancouver and make superior remarks, we used to

get very angry and I think rightly so. Maritimers quite correctly value this region, but they're defensive about it, and when a Maritimer tells me that I should go back home if I don't like it here, I think I know pretty well how he feels.

The problem is, as I told the Senate Committee in a remark that didn't get reported, that I don't feel any sense of exile: oddly enough, I feel at home in the Maritimes as I never did in Vancouver. And I suspect the Maritimes are the new land of opportunity, so I've chosen to live here — chosen to, you understand. I've been offered jobs out west for more salary, and I've turned them down. Just like the native Maritimer, I'd rather live here even if it costs me more money.

I like the Maritimes — I like the people I meet here; I like the wonderful old houses and the coast and the farms; I think Halifax is one of the very few really human cities I know and I'm delighted that I can be out picking apples about 15 minutes after I leave my home in Fredericton. I like the English department I work in. I think the Atlantic Symphony is splendid and I admire the Confederation Centre, and the gusty enterprise of setting up theatre companies all over the place. Fredericton, for heaven's sake, Fredericton has a professional repertory theatre. Toronto doesn't.

## MILK AND APPLES GROW IN PLASTIC BAGS

But these are comparatively minor problems. I've lived in

Vancouver, London and San Francisco, and I certainly don't know how you'd even begin to tackle their problems. I suspect you'd have to write off New York altogether and start again from scratch. I grew up in a province governed by one of New Brunswick's less happy exports, a chap from Hampton by the name of Bennett. He goes in for things like strip mining, hydro developments that ruin incredibly lovely valleys, superports with supply routes which rupture the farmland of the Fraser Delta, and so on. Vancouver is prosperous, and in many ways I'm still fond of it, but I don't want to live there any more.

Here in the Maritimes, however, we haven't made some of those mistakes. People like me coming into the Atlantic Provinces, are increasingly going to be refugees from cities like Montreal and Toronto and Boston and Chicago, where the air is toxic, people are faceless and anonymous, the police constitute a minor army and historical landmarks go down like ninepins leaving the place a polythene replica of every other North American city. The city chokes on its own traffic and children grow up thinking milk and apples grow in plastic bags. This is progress? Keep it. I'll live down east.

## PRESERVE THE MARITIME TRADITIONS

At this point we come to something important which we ought to criticize. We worry about Maritime underdevelopment, and that's reasonable enough. But what kind of

development do we want? Do we really want to make Sydney into another Detroit? Hell, nobody wants to live in the original Detroit. Should Saint John become another spaghetti-like tangle of freeways a la Los Angeles? That's the kind of thing "development" has meant elsewhere. That's also the kind of development most of our politicians and businessmen seem to be talking about most of the time. And here I think the immigrant to the region is uniquely useful, because he's seem all this before, tried to live with and famied. He knows that kind of development is disastrous. And often he wants us to think about it again, to see if we can't work out some alternative patterns that will keep us from going down that same hideous road that has already turned most of North America into a desert of concrete and iron dead waterways.

What an irony if in our rush to achieve prosperity we destroy the very things that make the Maritimes unique and valuable! We've got to start thinking of our own systems of development, discovering ways of ordering our society that will preserve the best of the Maritime traditions, ways of being modern and reasonably prosperous and humane all at once. And we're in one of the few places in North America where we still have a chance to do it — if we can reject this Texan biggest-is-best attitude.

## EXTREMES OF WEALTH ADD POVERTY

This question of attitudes to

progress and development is, finally, the reason our media are so important. I wouldn't bother attacking the job they do if we didn't have such a tremendous meed for intelligence and adventure in our newspapers and broadcasting. Where are we going to debate our future if not through the media? What except the media will make us aware of the kinds of alternatives that are open to us? Who else can give us a place to talk to each other as a community? Our newspapers say they're doing the best they can, and maybe that's true. But I don't believe it; I think they haven't yet really grasped how much we need them to be a stimulus, a probe, a reminder of our origins and possibilities.

There are lots of things to be done. We have real extremes of wealth and poverty here for instance, and they bother many native Maritimers and newcomers alike. We're all Canadians, and as long as some of our fellow citizens can't live in reasonable dignity and security, our citizenship is flawed. But that's not too big a problem to tackle; none of our problems are beyond our capacities. And because our problems are manageable, we may be able to show the rest of the continent just what a healthy and human community looks like. Even now, despite the many genuine problems, the Maritime Provinces look awfully good to me. The goal of criticism, when you come right down to it is to see whether we can't make them into an absolutely superb environment for people. A home, if you want. There isn't any other place on this continent that feels more like home.