

TOPIC 6.3

Smallwood's Social Policies

What services do governments provide today?

Are there other areas where government should be more involved?



6.48 The first provincial cabinet, April 1, 1949

Smallwood's government was tasked with fulfilling the promise that Confederation would bring a better standard of living to Newfoundlanders and Labradorians.

6.49 Hoop method of carrying water, Exploits, c. 1943

At the time of Confederation, many outport communities lacked basic amenities such as water and sewer systems.



A Time of Social Change

The Newfoundland which entered Confederation in 1949 was not a modern society by North American standards. While the Commission of Government had made considerable improvements to health care and education, many outport families involved in the fishery still operated under the old truck system, and basic amenities such as electricity, water and sewer, roads, and telecommunications were non-existent in many rural communities. The Second World War and the establishment of several American and Canadian military bases in Newfoundland and Labrador had brought a measure of prosperity to some areas as thousands of local men and women were hired to construct and run them. But when the construction boom ended, many of

these residents returned to the fishery, which was still the mainstay of the country's economy.

Confederation promised a better standard of living for the people of Newfoundland and Labrador. However, when Smallwood's newly elected Liberal government came to power in 1949, it realized that, even with help from the federal government, providing essential services across the province was going to be a major challenge. Improving health care and education, providing basic services like water and sewer, and building new roads and other **infrastructure** carried a hefty price tag, especially given that the outport or rural population was scattered along thousands of kilometres of coastline.



6.50 Constructing a sewer pipe

Smallwood tried to move the province in a new direction, away from the uncertainty and poverty then associated by some with pre-Confederation times. Fifteen years after Confederation, Smallwood wrote:

If you are a Newfoundlander of forty or more you know the miracle of Confederation in Newfoundland; you know it, and you marvel. You need to have lively recollections of what Newfoundland was like before if you are to understand. If you were fifteen or twenty when Confederation came you do not know, and never will ... What is the greatest feature of this miracle? ... The miracle is in our people; their new standard of living, their new confidence in themselves and in the future of their Island, their new pride in their own history, and above all in the astonishing achievements of their forefathers wrought in conditions of poverty and oppression.

To help fund these improvements, the Smallwood government developed an aggressive economic diversification plan. This economic growth brought about many social changes – some Newfoundlanders and Labradorians left the fisheries to get jobs in new industries, more women began to work outside the home, and more workers were paid in cash instead of credit.

Confederation also meant that Newfoundlanders and Labradorians had access to Canadian social welfare programs and benefits. Residents were eligible to receive family allowances, war veterans' allowances, unemployment insurance, and old age pensions. For



6.51 Filing clerks at work, Family Allowance Office, St. John's, 1949
Confederation brought Canadian social welfare programs to the province.

many, it was the first time they had supplementary income. These new payments, combined with wage employment in the frozen fish industry, helped families in smaller communities shift to a cash economy. Gone was the complete reliance on credit from merchants, as residents became independent, cash-earning consumers.

Additional social change occurred with the Smallwood government's policy of resettlement. The resettlement program encouraged and, in some instances, compelled families to move or relocate from comparatively isolated communities into designated "growth centres" where it was perceived there were better opportunities for education and regular employment, and access to basic social services. The resettlement program created major shifts in settlement patterns and the demographics of rural Newfoundland and Labrador, and had lasting impacts on the lifestyles of thousands of people.

This consisted of 932 telephone subscribers, scattered throughout remote areas of the province.

An Improved Infrastructure

Under Smallwood's government, major improvements were made in communications, electrical power, and transportation infrastructure. Although telephone communications were established in some communities before 1949, the Canadian National Telegraphs system (part of the Canadian National Railways), which took over government telegraph and phone operations after Confederation, and the privately owned Avalon Telephone Company greatly expanded their telephone systems in the 1950s and 1960s. While prior to Confederation there had been less than 20 000 phone service subscribers, by 1966 there were 82 000.

The availability of electricity to Newfoundlanders and Labradorians also increased dramatically after Confederation. While only half of the country's population was using electricity in 1949, by the time Smallwood left office in 1972, electrical service

was available to most residents. Some of this was achieved through the work of the Newfoundland Power Commission, which was established by the provincial government in 1954 to explore electricity generating options with a view to rural electrification. This included the development of Newfoundland and Labrador's first major publicly owned hydroelectric project in the mid-1960s at Bay d'Espoir. By 1970, the total generating power of Bay d'Espoir was 450 megawatts (one megawatt equals one million watts).

Improvements in air, water, and land transportation infrastructure also occurred after 1949. Newfoundland and Labrador's significance in air travel had been fully realized during the Second World War when existing airports were expanded and new ones built. After Confederation, the Newfoundland government subsidized local airlines to improve air service within



6.52 Bay d'Espoir powerhouse



6.53 The MV *Leif Eiriksson* was purchased by CN in 1966.



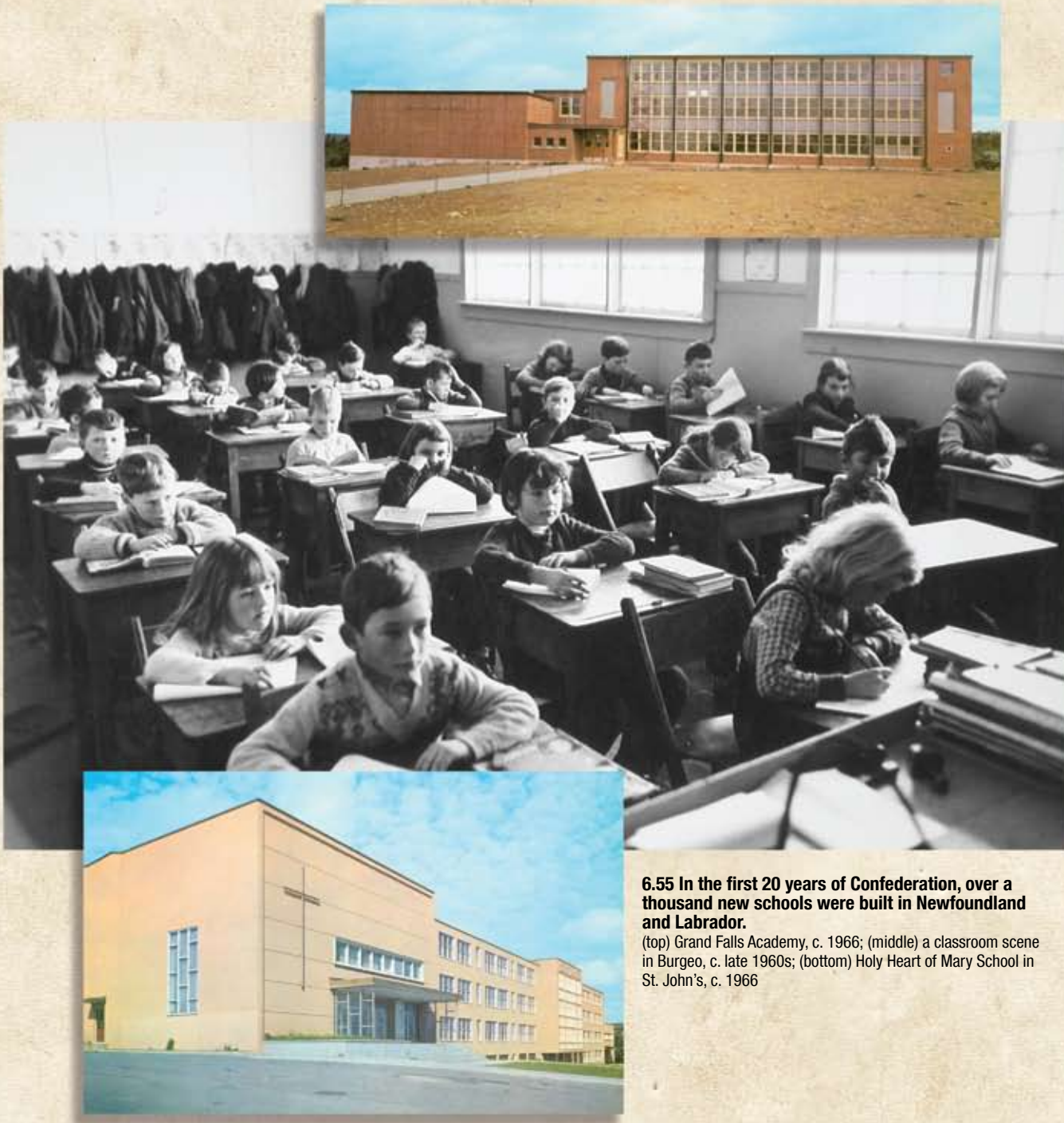
6.54 The Trans-Canada Highway under different phases of construction on the island of Newfoundland, c. 1963-65

the province. Prominent among these was Eastern Provincial Airways, which offered regular flights between Labrador and the island. The province also benefited from improved ferry service when, under the Terms of Union, Canadian National Railways (CN) assumed control of the province's coastal boats and Gulf ferry service between Port aux Basques and North Sydney, Nova Scotia.

Perhaps the biggest improvement in transportation infrastructure that occurred post-Confederation was the construction of the Trans-Canada Highway. Before Confederation there were only 195 kilometres (121 miles) of paved road. By 1965, the Trans-Canada Highway stretched across the island. It linked to a network of peninsular and regional highways that tied together

most of the island's older settled communities.

Road developments in the province were a joint venture between the provincial and federal governments. In 1966, a Government of Newfoundland publication stated that more than 3200 kilometres (2000 miles) of brand new roads have been built since 1949 and another 3200 kilometres (2000 miles) of old roads have been brought up to a good standard. It noted that "between 600 and 700 settlements that were, until the coming of Confederation, almost as isolated and remote as they had been a century before, have been linked up to the road system ... It is not too much to say that this great network of new roads is changing the whole social outlook of our people." A society once largely reliant on marine transportation had a car for every five people by 1970.



6.55 In the first 20 years of Confederation, over a thousand new schools were built in Newfoundland and Labrador.

(top) Grand Falls Academy, c. 1966; (middle) a classroom scene in Burgeo, c. late 1960s; (bottom) Holy Heart of Mary School in St. John's, c. 1966

Changes in Education and Health Care

Educational opportunities improved greatly after Confederation. The province built and equipped central and regional high schools and provided bus transportation for students in surrounding communities who formerly attended small all-grade schools. Financial incentives from the federal government also helped to increase school attendance. However, one thing remained constant from pre-Confederation days – the denominational school system, which was entrenched in the Terms of Union under which Newfoundland joined Canada.

Adult education was also improved. As one of his first acts, Smallwood elevated Memorial University College to the status of a degree-granting university, which soon led to larger enrolments, especially in education. Memorial University's Faculty of Education produced

large numbers of qualified teachers to staff the increasing number of schools, and faculty members in general were encouraged to promote the study of all aspects of the province's past, present, and future. In addition to establishing the university, a network of vocational schools was established, as well as the College of Fisheries, Navigation, Marine Engineering and Electronics in St. John's.

Confederation also brought advancements in health care to Newfoundland and Labrador. Many new hospitals were built across the province, including Western Memorial Hospital in Corner Brook, James Paton Memorial Hospital in Gander, and the Dr. Charles A. Janeway Children's Hospital in St. John's. To make health care more accessible to all, Smallwood's government introduced a progressive medical plan in

“We believe that this fine new University will do more than almost anything else to shape the future of Britain’s Oldest Colony, now Canada’s Newest Province.”

—Joey Smallwood, in *The Official Opening of the New Campus of Memorial University of Newfoundland, 1961*

6.56 Western Memorial Hospital in Corner Brook, c. 1966



6.57 The campus of the newly opened Memorial University of Newfoundland, St. John’s, 1961.

One of the earliest acts of the government after Confederation was to pass legislation raising the status of Memorial College (opened in 1925) to that of a university. Smallwood turned the sod at the site of the new university campus in May 1951 and helped officially open it in October 1961.

1957, which provided free hospital and medical coverage to all children under the age of 16. This was followed by the Hospital Insurance Act in 1958, which made hospital fees, nursing services, and various diagnostic procedures

more affordable. In 1968, another improvement occurred when the province joined the federal Medical Care Plan (MCP), allowing residents to receive a variety of free health care and hospital services.

Questions:

1. How did Confederation help some families in smaller communities shift to a cash economy?
2. Confederation promised a better standard of living for the people of this province. How successful were the Smallwood government’s initiatives to improve the standard of living?
3. What was the most significant improvement the Smallwood government made in each of the following areas? Explain.
 - a. communication, electricity, transportation
 - b. education
 - c. health care