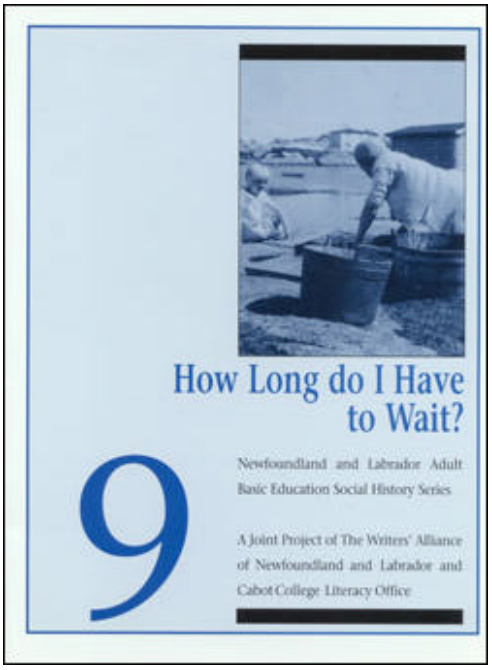

How Long do I Have to Wait?

Newfoundland and Labrador Adult Basic Education Social History Series

A Joint Project of
The Writers' Alliance of
Newfoundland and Labrador
and Cabot College Literacy Office

In This Series...

Book 1 - Timelines of Newfoundland and Labrador
Book 2 - Facing the New Economy
Book 3 - Learning About the Past
Book 4 - Desperate Measures *The Great Depression in Newfoundland and Labrador*
Book 5 - Health and Hard Time
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Book 7 - Surviving in Rural Newfoundland
Book 8 - The Struggle for Work in the Great Depression
Book 9 - How Long do I Have to Wait?
Book 10 - William Pender *The Story of a Cooper*

Book 9: How Long do I Have to Wait?

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Foreword

In 1994, the Writers' Alliance of Newfoundland and Labrador and Cabot College Literacy Office combined to produce a series of Newfoundland books on tape. Under the general title *Increasing Access to Newfoundland Literature,* the tapes and accompanying book *A Woman's Labour*, offered ABE Level 1 students and instructors, as well as the blind and the general public, an accessible and proven set of local literacy materials. The success of that project led to a second collaboration: the *Newfoundland and Labrador Adult Basic Education Social History Series*.

A major difference between the two projects is that while Newfoundland Books on Tape dealt with previously existing material, the essays in the *Social History Series* have been newly created by five professional writers. The prime objective, however, remains the same: to provide adult learners with meaningful literacy materials drawn from their own vibrant culture.

Topics in the series were chosen for their human and social interest and their importance in shaping who we are today. In addition to historical topics, current social and economic issues such as the closure of fish plants are also examined in an attempt to provide a contemporary perspective.

The five writers employed on the project carried out extensive research in public and university archives and libraries. Some also conducted personal interviews. Many of the essays contain new and fascinating historical research. Often the pieces deal with controversial subject matter: the Great Depression, Commission of Government, workfare, the erosion of social programs, poaching and the future of our rural communities. In an effort to dispel the notion that history is "dry and dull," the approach is fresh and provocative. The object is to inform, entertain and, in conjunction with the accompanying notes and questions, to effectively stimulate lively discussion among literacy students. Consequently, this series will also be of interest and practical use to the general public and, especially, to students.

The intended audience for the *Social History Series* is ABE Level 1 students. Because of the disparate subject matter, however, the essays are written in varying degrees of reading difficulty. In particular, students may need help with some of the quoted source material as this sometimes involves archaic syntax and vocabulary.

Acknowledgements

The essays and accompanying notes and questions in the *Newfoundland and Labrador Adult Basic Education Social History Series* were researched and written by Ed Kavanagh, Carmelita McGrath, Janet McNaughton, Kathryn Welbourn and Kathleen Winter. The series was edited by Marian Frances White.

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The coordinator of the project was Ed Kavanagh. Susan Hoddinott, Literacy Specialist at Cabot College, provided overall coordination.

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The *Newfoundland and Labrador Adult Basic Education Social History Series* is a joint project of the Cabot College Literacy Office and the Writers' Alliance of Newfoundland and Labrador.

How Long do I Have to Wait for Things to Get Better?

Building a Social Safety Net

by Carmelita McGrath

Credit: Child Welfare Association Photo, Centre for Newfoundland Studies Archives.

Women holding children

Staff and mothers show off healthy children at a Child Welfare Association Clinic, St. John's, 1926. An article with the photo said that the greatest threats to children's health were: sewage, houseflies, inadequate food and the lack of health care and social services. These threats were old ones, and remained long after Confederation.

> Mothers, Read This
> EVERY MOTHER in Newfoundland should vote for Confederation.
> Never mind what the **politicians** say. Never mind what the
> **newspapers** say. Never mind what the **men** say.
> If you have children YOU SHOULD VOTE FOR THEM.
> Once we get Confederation we know that NEVER AGAIN WILL
> THERE BE A HUNGRY CHILD IN NEWFOUNDLAND.[1]

The words you have just read came from a paper called *The Confederate*. It was put out by the group of people who wanted Newfoundland to join Canada. Their leader was Joseph R. Smallwood. In 1948, Newfoundland voters had to make an important choice. The choice was for Newfoundland to be a country on its own or a province of Canada. There would soon be a vote.

The message in *The Confederate* is what we call **propaganda.** It uses strong words to try to make people think and act a certain way. This propaganda was telling the mothers of Newfoundland: vote for us; we will give you the best deal.

The mothers of Newfoundland voted. They, and other voters, helped Confederation win by a small margin. The mothers would not forget the promise made by Smallwood. They would expect their children not to be hungry again.

The year 1948 is not so long ago. But the election promise seems strange. It seems odd that a group of people could build an election campaign on a promise to end child hunger. This tells us something about Newfoundland at the time. It tells us that there were hungry children. It tells us that these children lived in families who, at times, could not meet their needs.

The promise to end child hunger has never been fulfilled. There are still hungry children in Newfoundland and Labrador, and all over Canada. But there are many more services to help people today than there were in 1948.

The promise printed in *The Confederate* was part of a much larger promise. The promise was that, if Newfoundland joined Canada, people would get better social benefits. Social benefits are things like unemployment insurance (UI), medical care, social assistance, and pensions. We call all of these things the social safety net. We think of a net because these services are there to keep people safe when times are hard. The safety net stands between people and desperation. Its job is to catch them when they fall. We need a social safety net because people cannot always make a decent living. We also need it to protect children, the aged and others who cannot work.

Before Confederation, there was not much of a social safety net in Newfoundland. After Confederation, Newfoundlanders got some benefits just because they became citizens of Canada. Canada had been building a social safety net for some time. People could not wait to get the benefits from Canada.

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[1] *The Confederate*, May 31, 1948.

Demands from All Over

"NEED RELIEF LAID UP WITH BAD HAND"[2]

These words were in a telegram sent to Premier Smallwood just two weeks after Newfoundland joined Canada. We do not know much about the man who sent it. We know only that he had hurt his hand and could not work. Perhaps he hurt his hand at work. We do not know. What we can tell from the telegram is that the man must have been in need. There were no sick benefits or savings to depend on until his hand was better. So he needed public relief. This was the kind of social assistance people could get at that time.

Today, we may think it strange that the man wrote to the Premier. But it was a common thing in 1949. As soon as Newfoundland joined Canada, Smallwood's office was flooded with letters and telegrams. There were hundreds, from all over the province. Some asked for information. How could a person get the old age pension? How could a person get the family allowance from Canada? What forms did a person have to fill out?

Most of the people wrote asking for help. Some wanted to know when there would be jobs in their area. Others asked for relief. Relief at the time was $5.00 a month. People had to be destitute—very poor—to get it. Many requests to the Premier had the words "in starving condition" or "on verge of starvation" in them. People were used to having to show they were near starving before they got help. Sometimes, requests for help came from the Newfoundland Rangers, a police force. The Rangers did more than police work. Often they reported when people in an area were in need of government help. Sometimes, they acted as relief officers.

The great flood of letters and telegrams tells us two things. We can tell that people thought the Premier would do something. After all, he had promised that things would get better. We can also tell that the system in place to help people was a poor one. If the system worked, people would get help when and where they needed it. They would not have to wait until they were desperate, then send urgent messages to St. John's.

The system that was in place just after Confederation was an old one. There were "relieving officers" in regions of the province. They were not trained in social welfare. They came from many walks of life. It was their job to deal with requests for help from people who were destitute. People had to show they had nothing left. The amount of public relief itself was not decided by what a person or family needed. It was a set rate, and very low. It was not money, but a note. A person could take the note to a store and get food for it.

In the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s, Newfoundland's old welfare system went through many changes. But before these changes came about, the government had to use its old system to respond to emergencies. In 1949, this meant that Mr. Smallwood himself tried to answer many of the letters. Often, he sent the letters on to people who worked for the Department of Public Welfare. He would sometimes write a note saying, "Can anything be done about this?"[3] In this

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[2] Centre for Newfoundland Studies Archives, Smallwood Collection, Records of the Department of Public Welfare, 3.29.001. Telegram from a man in Davis Cove to J.R. Smallwood, April, 1949.

[3] This question went with many of the requests. The letters, telegrams and answers are in the Smallwood Collection, Records of the Department of Public Welfare, 3.29.001. That collection is in the archives of the Centre for Newfoundland Studies (CNS) at Memorial University.

way, each case was a special problem. There was no real method for dealing with the larger problems of poverty and need. Long-term problems were treated only when they became emergencies. The story that follows tells of what happens when problems are left until they become urgent.

Smallwood addressing the masses

J. R. Smallwood speaks in a Newfoundland community. Smallwood repeated his promises of better times in many speeches and election campaigns, but real positive changes were slow to come.

Credit: PANL

Message from Labrador, April, 1949[4]

On April 7, 1949, a nurse with the International Grenfell Association sent a message to the Premier. The telegram was about living conditions in St. Mary's River, Labrador.

> There is a very serious food shortage on this coast. To avert starvation of people food must be got here somehow. Babies are being fed on flour, water and molasses water, as there is no milk or rolled oats. At time of wiring only seven bags of flour left on the coast. No milk, meat, vegetables, butter, tea. Large numbers of babies and expectant mothers need help. They need food and all the drugs and codoil[5] in the world is useless without it. Appeal to you to use your influence to save fishermen and their families before it is too late. The ice is still very firm and only at midday covered with water.

Today, this situation would not happen for many reasons. Places are less isolated than they used to be. It is rare now for any place in Canada to run out of food. People also have access to more kinds of government assistance when in need. There is more planning. Pregnant women and babies have access to doctors and social workers. People feel they have a right to ask for help before things get so bad.

In 1949, it was left to the nurse to appeal for the people. Smallwood answered quickly. He tried to get a plane to bring the food to Labrador. But the weather was too bad. The plane could not make it. The Premier's office tried to find another pilot. When that did not work, Smallwood wrote to Colonel Selway at the American base in Fort Pepperell. He wanted the U.S. Air Force to fly the food in. The government would pay for the food.

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[4] CNS Archives, Smallwood Collection, Records of the Department of Public Welfare, 3.29.001.
[5] This is another name for cod liver oil. It was given out free to babies and children. It was meant to give vitamins and minerals to children who had poor diets.

On April 8, Colonel Selway got back to the Premier. The Royal Canadian Air Force would "handle the mission." The U.S Air Force would stand by to help if needed.

On April 9, landing conditions were poor. But the plane got in. On the plane was Dr. Gordon Thomas, who worked with the International Grenfell Association. He reported back to the Premier. He was upset that things had gotten so bad. In his message, he said:

> the tragic fact is the authorities knew of this condition developing last fall and nothing was done.

Dr. Thomas's words point to a larger problem. Where there are no good systems in place to help people, problems are not taken care of until almost too late. In this case, a problem that could have been solved in the fall became an Air Force mission.

Organizing and Confusing

The provincial government knew it had to change the way public relief was handled in Newfoundland. It had to have better plans and fewer emergencies.

It also had to have people working in public welfare who knew what they were doing. For a long time, people had not been happy with the old-style "relieving officers." People often wrote to complain about these people. Why did they give one person relief, and give none to someone else who was just as poor? Why didn't they explain things. better? Many people felt that the relieving officers had too much power.

In 1950, the government made the first changes to the old system. Relieving officers were replaced by "welfare officers" in regions. That same year, a "welfare training school" was set up. It would prepare the welfare officers to take on their duties.

This was the first time people in Newfoundland had to be trained to work in social welfare. It was hard to find anyone with training related to the job. So the government asked teachers, nurses and others who had worked with people to apply for the jobs. They also wanted to hire people who had served in the Second World War.[6]

He went on to say he did not think it was a good idea for the welfare officer to find jobs. People might try to get on relief so that the welfare officer would find them a job.

There were changes in staff. There were also changes in how to deal with people. One idea was that all people should be treated equally. Another idea was that people should be able to get help where they lived. District welfare offices were set up. At first, there were 22. By 1958, there were 52. Everyone would now follow the same rules, fill out the same forms. The welfare officers sent reports from their regions. Newfoundland was moving toward an organized social welfare system.

An organized approach to welfare would be a good thing. But it made new problems, too. As the new system grew, so did the piles of paper, the forms to fill out, and the waiting periods we

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[6] Stuart R. Godfrey discusses this in his book *Human Rights and Social Policy in Newfoundland, 1832- 1982.* He was involved in the changes to public welfare after 1949. He was Assistant Deputy Minister in the Department of Public Works.

know so well today. Not everyone was happy with this. The Canadian government also had forms to fill out. It had rules and waiting periods. Many people did not know what they could get, or how to get it. People were not used to two governments. One man wrote the Premier to ask when he could get his pension. He said that he had filled out three forms. Now he was starving, but he had not seen any pension yet.[7]

There were other people who found the new system hard to figure out. Welfare officers had a hard time too. What should they do? What should they not do? Should they find people jobs? This was one thing that was never clear. The story of one welfare officer shows what could happen when there were jobs to be had.

In July, 1961, the welfare officer in Glovertown wrote to the Deputy Minister of Public Welfare.[8] He had a problem. It had to do with jobs. The Newfoundland Light and Power Company was there. Here is what the welfare officer said:

> The job of digging holes and striking the light poles has caused trouble for me and in some cases made quite a few enemies.

Many men showed up looking for work. There were more men than jobs. The Light and Power foreman did not know what to do. He told the men that the welfare officer would handle the hiring. The welfare officer wrote:

> ...you can imagine the number of office and phone calls I received after the word got around. However, because I was forced into the thing I saw it through and the result was most of the relief recipients in Glovertown are now employed.

Making Work and Making Stamps

There was one good reason to help people get jobs. It saved money for the province. When Newfoundland joined Canada, people could get UI (unemployment insurance) from the government of Canada. A person on welfare who got a job could go on UI when the job ended. This shifted the cost of helping the unemployed from the province to the government of Canada.

People today know this system very well. It still goes on.

As soon as there was UI, there were make-work projects. Some people who applied for welfare would get jobs with the Department of Public Works instead. This met two demands—for work, and for better roads and other services.

It seems that there were plenty of people looking for this work. In January, 1950, there were 10,237 people on the government's relief work program. A month later, there were 9,000 of them. The others had "been taken off the lists." They were getting UI.[9]

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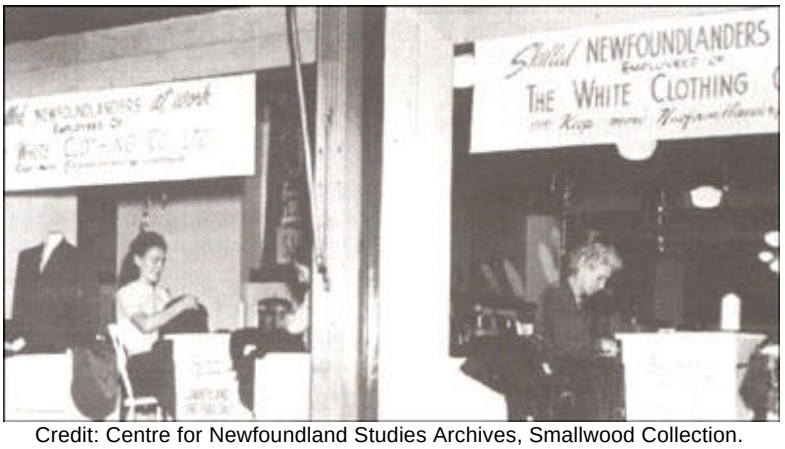
[7] CNS Archives, Smallwood Collection, Records of the Department of Public Welfare, 3.29.001.
[8] CNS Archives, Smallwood Collection, Records of the Department of Public Welfare, 3.29.004.
[9] Reported in *The Evening Telegram*, February 18, 1950, page 14.



Credit: Centre for Newfoundland Studies Archives, Smallwood Collection.

"Keep more Newfoundlanders employed." Garment workers in a living window display for a "Buy Newfoundland" campaign, 1950s. Then, as now, politicians urged people to buy local products to keep more people working.

The Working Poor

In the 1950s and 1960s in Newfoundland, there was one problem that is still with us today. It is an old problem. Many people could not make a living from their work. In the fishery, in the woods, in fish plants, and in other kinds of labour, people found that their incomes dropped from month to month. The income was not large to start with. In months when income dropped, workers could not feed their families. But they could not get welfare, either. This was only for people with no jobs or income at all. People who had jobs but little pay often had to get what they needed "on credit." In this way, they stayed poor. They were always working to catch up.

Smallwood and his government found that the problems of people in Newfoundland were complex. The welfare system did not solve them. People had lived on too little for too long.

Some of the poorest working people were fishermen. Many things could keep them from making a decent living. The price of fish could go down without warning. Summer storms could wreck gear and damage boats. Sometimes, what seems like a small thing stood between success and failure.

In the letters people wrote to Smallwood, there are some from fishermen in Labrador in 1958. This was a bad fishing season in most places. Sudden storms tore up cod traps and salmon nets. The men who wrote the government said they had "small voyages." This meant that they caught very little fish.

Their main problem now, they said, was the price of twine. They said twine was selling for $1.45 a pound in Labrador. One fisherman said he needed 100 pounds of it. How could a fisherman come up with so much money? Why was the price of twine so high? Could the government do something about it?

It may seem that the price of twine was not the government's problem. But, in a way, it was. The fishermen had a bad season. They might need relief in the winter. If they could not fix their gear, they would be out of the fishery the next summer. Without twine, they might soon depend on government help.

Women... And Others Who Had Been Left Out

The people who wrote the most letters to J.R. Smallwood were women. They wrote about how hard it was to feed their families. They wrote to ask questions about family allowances. They wrote about what things they needed to keep their homes in repair. They asked for better schools. They sent telegrams asking for a boat to come to take a sick child to the doctor. They told of what they thought were unequal situations-where one person got something, and another didn't. And they wrote to remind the Premier of his promises.

We the women of the outports put you in power...[10]

A woman wrote these words in a letter to Smallwood in 1959. She then asked him to answer a request. The woman was looking after an "old lady" who lived down the road from her. The older woman had no one else to take care of her. The letter writer wanted $20.00 to help her care for the woman. If she could get no money, could she get some bedding for the old woman? She wrote a list of the sheets and blankets the woman needed.

A woman works while children look on, Badger's Quay, Ca. 1939. The Family Allowance, or "baby bonus" was a benefit of Confederation that was welcomed by many Newfoundland mothers and their children.

Credit: PANL, Gustav Anderson Collection.

We cannot trace this request any farther. No letter or memo says what was done. Smallwood sent her letter on to the Department of Public Welfare.

The woman's request may seem strange today. But in 1959, there were no home care programs. The older woman might have had very little income. When her blankets wore out, perhaps she could not buy new ones. At that time, families were expected to look after older people.

The woman who wrote the letter took over a job that the family usually did. But she was not family. She thought she should get some government help for what she was doing. She probably thought that sending the letter with its list of bedding was the sensible thing. She saw that a service was needed. She would provide that service, with a little help. This kind of direct suggestion to government was not strange in the 1950s. When there was no system in place to solve problems, people often gave their own ideas about what to do.

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[10] CNS Archives, Smallwood Collection, Records of the Department of Public Welfare, 3.29.003.

Mothers' Allowances

Before Confederation, many women were heads of families. Many of these women could not work. There were few jobs for women. Besides, they had to look after their children. But only some of them could get an allowance. The only help for women who headed families was a widows' allowance. You could only get this if you had married, and your husband died.

The allowance for widows left out a lot of women. A woman with a husband in prison or in hospital got nothing. A woman with a husband who was disabled and could not work got nothing either. If a woman's husband left her, she could get no allowance. Single mothers could not get any help either. All of these women and their families had the same kinds of needs. But they were not treated equally.

There were many reasons for this. For years, governments had tried to keep spending down. There were other reasons. These had little to do with money, and more to do with how people thought. For a long time, people thought that there were some people who "deserved" help, and others who did not "deserve" it. Often, people were blamed for being poor. A woman could not help it if her husband died: *she* deserved help. But what about the others? For a long time, governments and the public did not think of them as deserving. "You made your bed. Now lie in it." This is an old saying. It is how many people thought about women who ended up as heads of families. This was very common if they had never married.

Up to this time, many women had to turn to their families for help. They had to live with their parents, and depend on them for support. Many women must have felt trapped. Unless you were married or a widow, you could get no help to live in a home of your own. Sometimes, the family would not help. Other times, the family could not afford to help the mother and her children. Then the woman had to apply for public relief. To get it, she had to prove she had no other way to survive.

The times were changing. The way people thought about public welfare was changing too. People began to think of human rights as part of welfare. People in the social welfare field were writing about this. People in governments thought about it too. This thinking helped change laws. When Newfoundland looked at other provinces, it could see the kinds of changes that were being made. It could see examples of things that could be done here.

One change that made a big difference for women was the Mothers' Allowances Act. It was passed in 1949. This took the place of the widows' allowances. Many more women could get the new mothers' allowances. Separated and divorced mothers could get them. Women with husbands who were sick or in prison could get them. Single mothers who had never been married could get them. Newfoundland was the first province in Canada to do this for unmarried mothers.

These were very important changes. Women and their children would not have to live with the old system that judged whether or not they deserved help. They could now apply for help based on their needs.

Some people did not agree with having the same rules for single mothers and widows. They were used to living with the idea that unmarried mothers were different from other mothers.[11] At this

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[11] To learn more, you can read the section "Attitude Towards Single Mothers" in Janet McNaughton's essay "More Sinned Against Than Sinning: Single Mothers and the Law in the Past," in book 5 of this series.

time, the children of married and unmarried women were put in different groups in reports and records.

We can see this in a report of the Child Welfare Association, a group that worked to improve the health of children. They ran clinics, visited homes, and gave advice on child care. They also told the public about what they did. In 1950, this group gave its report for the year in *The Evening Telegram*[12] This report lists how many babies were born in St. John's that year, and how many died. The list points out how many babies were "illegitimate"—born to single mothers. The report also has a whole section called "Illegitimate Births." It tells what happened to each of the 119 babies born to single women.[13]

There is no part of the report that tells what happened to married mothers and their children.

Up to that time, single mothers were in an odd position. On the one hand, people saw them as special cases who needed help. On the other hand, some people thought they should not get the *same* help as other mothers.

Family Allowances

There was other help for women. As soon as Newfoundland joined Canada, women with children got the family allowance. Many people called it "the baby bonus." Women were eager to get it. Many women found it very hard to find enough money to get clothes for children. Sometimes, children were kept home from school because they did not have clothes or shoes to wear. There was very little cash. Many people only made enough income to buy food.

The family allowance was sent to mothers. This was also new. It gave some women the first money they ever had. They could decide how to spend it. Many people today remember going to the post office to see if the baby bonus had come. The baby bonus bought clothes and shoes, winter boots and school books. It bought extra food, warm blankets and even toys. Some people say that when Newfoundland women voted for Confederation, they voted for the baby bonus.

By 1960, the family allowance for a child was $8.00 a month. This was a big help for many women and their children.

Dependents' Allowances

In the pile of letters sent to Smallwood in 1949, there is one from a mother asking for help for her son.[14] She said that the young man could not work. He had been born with disabilities. He could not go fishing with his father. He depended on his parents for everything. Was there any help he could get?

In 1949, the Newfoundland government brought in a special kind of allowance. It was meant for people like this young man. It was for adults who could not work because they were disabled. A doctor had to sign a form saying the person could not work because of a disability. It could be mental or physical.

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[12] The Evening Telegram, February 2, 1950, page 5.
[13] For more information, you can read "More Sinned Against Than Sinning: Single Mothers and the Law in the Past," by Janet McNaughton.
[14] CNS Archives, Smallwood Collection, Records of the Department of Public Welfare, 3.29.001.

There were many problems with this allowance. It was hard to decide who should get it. The government tried ways to make it work better. There were still people left out. No one knew how or where they fit into the social welfare system.

Mothers' and dependents' allowances were not around for very long. By 1955, they were part of a larger program.

When we look back on this time, we may wonder why the government tried so many things. It started programs, then changed them to other ones. It broke things into groups, then put them back together. There may be two reasons for this. One reason is simple: the government did not have any real answers about how to create a good program of social services. It tried things; if they didn't work, it tried something else.

There is another reason why so many things were done in such a hurry. Before Confederation, J.R. Smallwood had made many promises. Now he had to show people that his government was really changing things. He had to have "something to show" in order to get people to vote for him in the next election.

We can see the same thing happen today. Sometimes, the programs we get are not the best ones. Governments may not wait until they have the best programs they can put together. If they do wait, we might think they are doing nothing. We might vote them out of office.

"The Plight of the Province's Poor"

As the Newfoundland government made changes to public welfare, many people watched its progress. Some of these people were members of groups. They were members of unions. They were people in the social welfare field. They belonged to church or social groups.

One such group was the Newfoundland Federation of Labour. In 1964, it sent a paper to the Minister of Public Welfare.[15] The paper came out of a meeting. It talked about "the plight of the province's poor." The Federation said the main problem with welfare was that it only kept people alive. It did not give them a fair standard of living.

The paper said the amount of welfare payments had nothing to do with the cost of living. It also talked about how people were treated in the welfare system. They were not treated with dignity. They had to prove how poor they were before they got assistance. This is called a "means test." Going through it made people feel bad about themselves and their lives. Because people had to show they had nothing, they could never save or build security for themselves. They would always end up in the same position.

The Federation was also worried about "workfare." This is when people have to work for their social assistance. Governments had tried this before. Smallwood tried it in 1949. It did not work. The Federation called it "forced labour." It said that people should only have to work when they were paid decent wages.

The concerns of the Federation of Labour were old ones. Other people had said these things again and again, for many years. But these problems were deep ones. For at least 100 years, these problems stayed while other things changed.

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[15] CNS Archives, Smallwood Collection, Records of the Department of Public Welfare, 3.29.004.

Some of these problems and concerns are still with us today.

The Canada Assistance Plan, 1966

The year 1966 was "Come Home Year" in Newfoundland. All those who had gone away to work and live were invited to come back. The government spent time and money to tell people what a great place Newfoundland had become. The newspapers were filled with ads and articles. There were pictures of cars driving down the Trans Canada Highway. There were pictures of healthy, smiling children. There were pictures of fish plants and new places of work. Always, there were pictures of the Premier. He always seemed to be giving out good news and cutting ribbons.

The best piece of news in 1966 had little to do with Premier Smallwood's plans or success stories. That year, the Canada Assistance Plan was passed in Ottawa. It was a new plan to share the costs of social welfare. Each province would share costs with the federal government. This plan brought new and needed money to Newfoundland.

By this time, the Newfoundland government had spent all it could on social services. It had brought in many new services and types of assistance. Money was running out. It would be hard to keep funding the services that were in place. It would be even harder to bring in any new ones.

The province could use the Canada Assistance Plan funds for many things. They could be used for many kinds of social assistance. They could be used for child welfare. They could be used to pay the costs for homes for the aged, and for others who could not live on their own.

The Canada Assistance Plan also helped groups that worked for people with special needs. For example, volunteer groups that worked with disabled people could get funding under the new plan.

With the Canada Assistance Plan, the social safety net grew stronger. This happened in Newfoundland. It also happened in all the provinces in Canada. The Canada Assistance Plan also brought with it a new way of thinking. It said that people should get help and support based on their needs, not on their "means"—what they had. This meant that people should not have to prove they had nothing left before they got help. They should only have to show that what they had could not cover their needs.

What "needs" were was left open. Many things could be thought of as needs. For the first time, medical services, glasses, nursing care, home care and many other things could be paid for.

Newfoundland was still trying to join the modern age of social welfare. It was 1970 before the Newfoundland government made one important change. Up to this time, a person who got short-term social assistance got a "voucher." This was a kind of credit note. People could take it to a store and get food for it. It was part of the old way of doing things. It left people feeling like second- class citizens. In 1970, at last, people were paid by cheque.

The Social Safety Net

How does it hold up now?

Building a social safety net in Newfoundland is work that is never finished. This is also true for all of Canada. We can look back in time. We can compare one time with another. We can see things that got better. We can also see problems that never seem to go away. We can see that old

ideas are brought up again and again, and always some people think they are new. Or they think these ideas will work this time. Workfare is this kind of idea. It has been tried many times. It has never worked. Still, in 1995, the government of Ontario said it was time for workfare. Some people in Newfoundland also think this is a good idea.

The social safety net is a kind of puzzle. It was built of many pieces. These pieces came in many shapes and sizes. Some came from the province. Some came from Canada. Others were shared. Old pieces get taken away. New ones get added.

The social safety net is made up of things that seem to come from governments. But they really come from people. Taxes pay for them. People pressure governments for changes. They make choices when they vote. The services we have today are there because most people thought they were important.

Just as things can be built up over time, they can also be taken away. For many years, people fought to get a system of unemployment insurance that would protect the most people. But, in the 1990s, UI has been changed. Under new rules, fewer people are able to get it, for a shorter period of time.

Another change is to "universal" programs. These are programs for everyone. In the 1950s and 1960s, people thought it was important to have universal programs. The family allowance was one of them. It does not exist any more. Medicare is another universal program. Everybody gets it, no matter what they earn. But today some people think we cannot afford this.

In 1995, the federal government made changes to the Canada Assistance Plan. These changes may mean much less money for social programs in the future.

No one knows what other changes will come. But some people fear that the social safety net will come apart. And many people find that it does not meet their needs now. Here is what one woman has to say about her life over the last few years.

> They say you need education. They say you need training. So I go to school. I'm in training. I got the kids, the school, the homework. Meanwhile, I got nothing to show for it. I got nothing left over from one cheque to another. I can't buy anything. Forget treats. Then there's Christmas. You think you're getting along, and then comes Christmas. What am I supposed to do about Christmas? I mean, I'm trying. But some nights I feel like giving it all up. They say, keep at it, you'll get a job. I tell myself that. But it's hard to keep going when you got nothing to show for it. I mean, how long do I have to wait for things to get better? [16]

There are still many things that could be done to improve the social safety net. We know this because some people are always in danger of falling through it.

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[16] From a conversation with a woman in school and on social assistance, 1995.

Topics for Discussion

1. The social safety net: how it is built, and what its parts are.
2. What life is like with and without a solid social safety net.
3. How provincial and federal governments each play a part in building a social safety net.
4. How problems are dealt with over time: changes in thinking and ways of solving problems.
5. Unsolved problems: social security needs that are still not met today.
6. Human rights: the right to life, decent standards of living, human dignity.

Questions for Discussion

1. What is the "social safety net?" What are some things included in it?
2. When did Newfoundland join Canada? After this happened, why did so many people write to Premier Smallwood asking for help? What do their questions tell about Newfoundland at that time?
3. What was "public relief?" What were "relieving officers?" What do we have in place of public relief and relieving officers today?
4. For a long time, the Newfoundland government gave out cod liver oil free of charge to babies and children. Why did the government do this? What problem was it trying to deal with? Do you think this was a good way to deal with the problem?
5. Who are the "working poor?" Why do some people who work stay poor? What do you think could be done to solve this problem?
6. "Mothers' allowances" and "dependents' allowances" were new kinds of help available to people after Confederation. What did these allowances do? Why were they important?
7. It has been said that the promise of the "baby bonus" helped Newfoundland women vote for Confederation. What was the baby bonus? Why was it important to women? What do we have in its place today?
8. What was the Canada Assistance Plan? When did it begin? How did it help build the social safety net in Newfoundland, and in the other provinces of Canada?
9. What is a "universal" social program? Can you think of one that exists today? Do you think universal social programs are a good thing?
10. The woman quoted at the end of the essay says "... some nights I feel like giving it all up." Why do you think she feels this way?

Projects

Read over the words of the woman quoted at the end of the essay. What problems does she have that the social welfare system does not deal with? What programs or services could improve her life? Discuss and come up with a plan for her.

Make a list of the services and programs that make up the social safety net. Make another list of things you think should be included in it to make it stronger.

With your instructor, do some research into one of the following:

—recent changes to Employment Insurance, or
—the Canada Health and Social Transfer.

How does the change you have researched affect the social safety net? Do you think the change is a good or bad thing? Discuss.