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Autore	Bassler Gerhard P. <1937->
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Sommario/riassunto

Alfred Valdmanis is best known in Canada for his infamous role in Premier Joey Smallwood's scheme to industrialize Newfoundland. A Latvian immigrant, he was appointed Director General of Economic Development in 1950 with the understanding that through his connections to Europe he could entice German and Baltic industrialists to the isolated, rural island. His influence was brought to an abrupt end when, in 1954, he was charged with defrauding the government. The media, latching on to his murky past and his possible affiliation with war criminals, made him the scapegoat of Newfoundland's problems, painting him as part comedian, part sinister villain. This was not the first time his name was connected with controversial issues. Valdmanis's wily political manoeuvring is more the stuff of fiction than history. Between 1938, at age 29, and his ironic downfall in the safe haven of Canada, he was a finance minister of pre-war Latvia, a government official during the Soviet invasion, a shrewd collaborator under the Nazi occupation, then, a friend to the Allies, a spokesman for Latvian POW and displaced persons, and an adviser to the government of Canada. In this first serious biography of Alfred Valdmanis historian Gerhard Bassler casts the story of this political manipulator and chameleon in new terms: the often tragic consequences of the will to survive.
