

Newfoundland

Mr. Gibson (Comox-Alberni): They knew it would be fair.

Mr. Castleden: I do not think it is our problem. I do not think there is any question that the people of Canada would be fair with the people of Newfoundland; that is not the question at all.

Mr. Gibson (Comox-Alberni): They trusted us.

Mr. Castleden: It is their legislation. It is the right of a people in a democratic country, through their legislature, to have some say about the terms of an agreement which they are to enter into. That, it seems to me, is not right, and Canada's parliament should not be a party to an agreement under which such fundamental, basic, democratic rights are denied to a people who some day will be welcomed, as I know they will be, if they decide to come in. Let Newfoundland feel that we have stood here and fought for her democratic rights. Let her feel that we welcome her as a sister in a great dominion. Let her be convinced of our belief that fundamentally her people should have the full and proper democratic right, the basic right, to some say as to whether or not they accept the terms of agreement.

I hope I have made our position clear. We certainly would welcome Newfoundland, if she could come in. I think we could do it more wholeheartedly if we felt that all the people of Newfoundland and of Labrador had had a proper democratic part in making the decision and in drawing up the agreement.

Mr. Clarence Gillis (Cape Breton South): Mr. Speaker, I did not intend to take part in this debate, because I thought this afternoon that the hon. member for Rosetown-Biggart (Mr. Coldwell) stated very clearly the case for members of this group. But after listening to the last two speeches I have felt that members of the House of Commons, or the public generally, may think that there is a division in this group over the entry of Newfoundland into confederation.

Mr. Rowe: Better have a caucus.

Mr. Gillis: Such is not the case. This afternoon the Prime Minister (Mr. St. Laurent), the leader of the opposition (Mr. Drew) and the hon. member for Rosetown-Biggart did an excellent job in placing the facts of the matter before the house. Moreover, they gave, I believe, a comprehensive historical background, and the reasons why Newfoundland should enter confederation.

I rise at this time to say that I know something about Newfoundland and its problems. From where I have made my home for a good many years it is only ninety-six miles across

the gulf. I have known many Newfoundlanders, and there are perhaps more of them in my constituency than in any other constituency in Canada.

Mr. MacNicol: There are over a thousand in mine.

Mr. Gillis: I believe the step now being taken to bring Newfoundland into confederation is one which should have been taken many years ago. My understanding is that Newfoundlanders are now being emancipated from a small group of fish merchants who have exploited them for the past three hundred years. As I said before, this is a step in the right direction.

Let me now say something which has not been said before. For many years the people of Newfoundland were allowed to enter Canada freely and to take employment here. During the winter months when they were not able to fish—and that is about the only industry on the island—hundreds of Newfoundlanders would come to Cape Breton island to work in the coal mines. They would find employment there during the winter months, and then return to their fishing industry when the season opened.

Since about 1931 that has not been permitted. The coal mining regulations in Nova Scotia were amended so as to preclude them from going into the mines and taking employment as coal miners. Consequently our immigration laws were amended so as to prohibit the entry of Newfoundlanders into Canada. They were treated almost as Europeans, or others coming from foreign countries. I thought that was a great disservice to the people in my part of the country because, as has been suggested by one hon. member, they are good workers and good citizens. Not many of them are to be found on relief, and they can turn their hand to almost anything. They have had to develop that technique because of the conditions under which they have lived in their own country. They had to be jacks of all trades.

Having said that, let me add that I am not quarreling with what happened in Newfoundland. I believe that those who argue along the lines of responsible government are dealing with a misnomer. It is not responsible government they are looking for, because that is exactly what they are getting now.

Mr. Gibson (Comox-Alberni): They never had it before.

Mr. Gillis: Arguments were made for the setting-up of a national government, and remaining out of confederation. In the last fifty years they have had governments of that