

Mr. Job's motion, harmless as it may have appeared on the surface, had too many far-reaching implications, besides being at odds with my conception of the duties of the National Convention, for me to support it. Furthermore, believing what I do about the Commission of Government, I could not find it in my heart to ask their advice on something of so essential a nature. Apart from the matter contained in the motion, the method of presentation was above reproach and befitting an elder statesman, and there was no need for controversy.

The bar of history, Mr. Chairman, is a figure of speech that has been quoted from time to time in this chamber by several delegates in recent months, and I believe they were aware of its import. But if I were to say I am less aware of the meaning of that phrase on this occasion, I would not be correct. In my speech at the opening of this Convention,¹ in support of Hon. Mr. Job moving an address of loyalty, I said that few men who make history realise at the time they are making it. I, sir, am trying to realise that; trying to keep in mind the fact that this is an epochal assembly — without precedent — and what I say and do now at this crossroads in our island's story is more important to me than anything I know. Time may prove me wrong. I will take that chance. After my speech in opposition to the motion to send a delegation to Ottawa, I was termed naive because I was honest; politically immature because I let the cat out of the bag. I would rather be naive and immature and a poor politician then, and now and anytime, than be lumped with the quislings in the years ahead, in the event that out of this Convention this island loses its sovereignty, and loses it by absorption into a union that is not the best union that might be secured.

Major Cashin has condemned this Convention, accusing the British government of lack of faith in substituting it in place of the 1933 agreement. He believes responsible government should be restored without any Convention. Mr. Smallwood thinks the Convention the summit of political and democratic brilliance, principally because he means to use it, and has used it in every way to further his pet cause: to wage a complete campaign for confederation with Canada from almost the opening day. I agree with

Major Cashin up to a point, which I will explain later. I disagree with Mr. Smallwood completely.

My interpretation of the functions, duties and scope of this National Convention lies somewhere in between both their more or less extreme views. It is to my mind the only interpretation that this Convention should have allowed itself. The terms of reference which outlined the work of the delegates said in part that they were "to consider and discuss among themselves, the financial and economic condition of the country ... and to recommend forms of government which might be put before the people as a basis for a national referendum...." Actually there was no need for this Convention. The British government knew the island was self-supporting and could have arranged a referendum on the basis of this reasoning: "The island is self-supporting, we intend to carry out the 1933 agreement, we will give you a referendum in which you will be asked to choose between Commission of Government and responsible government. If you by a majority select responsible government, that will be restored." That could have been done. If it had been, I doubt if anyone would or could have questioned it.

However, the British government may have argued that there were many people in between both forms of government, who wanted the outside control that Commission represented with the satisfaction of at least electing a lower house. In accordance with the 1933 agreement they could not put representative government on the referendum, so they evolved the National Convention to consider and discuss among themselves and recommend forms of government for a referendum which could, if the Convention saw fit, include representative government. If that is what they had in mind, I do not think the Convention is a stall or a red herring. Like Mr. Hollett, I see nothing and can read nothing in the terms of reference that would permit us to recommend to the people a form of government (i.e. confederation) which might jeopardise the sovereignty of Newfoundland and perhaps result in the loss of that sovereignty without proper consideration of such an unalterable decision under a sovereign government responsible to the people.

That is one interpretation of the reason for the National Convention. There is another. The

¹September 12, 1946, p.6.