

selves — organisations such as co-operative societies, agricultural societies, regional library boards, Jubilee Guilds, adult education study groups and all the rest of it. And as a direct result of the Commission's specific policy of encouraging local government a score or more communities have taken upon themselves the status of municipalities, formally incorporated. All this has naturally strengthened the competency and increased the capacity of Newfoundlanders for the political, and when again politicians take up the telling of their fairy tales where they left off 15 years ago, they will find themselves up against this increased capacity for the political. The historic assumption that the electorate was too green to burn will have to be revised. It is no longer quite so green.

Of course, the relative merits of the Commission's worth must ever remain a matter of dispute. The Commission has been in office during two abnormal periods of our history, an abnormal period of depression and an abnormal period of what some have been pleased to call prosperity. It has not been in office during what might be termed a normal period. In consequence it is difficult to make comparisons, and therefore difficult to judge of the absolute value of its work. That is not a good and sufficient reason for withholding credit where it is due, and in many matters the Commission did act with advantage to this island and to its people, and I think that a fair verdict is that we have had good value from the Commission, and I think that will be the verdict of history.

It has been suggested to me that aside from the fact that Commission is government without representation, that there is a further reason why this Convention should not recommend Commission for referendum purposes. The Commission system carries with it the guarantee of Britain to meet our deficits, but for seven years now we have been able to balance our budget and have something over and to spare. It is contended therefore that it would be perhaps immoral of us, and certainly would not be honourable, to seek a continuation of the Commission system and thereby hold Britain to a promise given in altogether different circumstances. To put it bluntly, it is held that we should be without honour to forego self-government merely to have the assurance that somebody else would pay our debts,

when there are reasonable hopes of being able to pay our own way in the future.

The validity of that argument any fair man must admit, and I have to commend it to the conscience of the people for their consideration at the time of the referendum. But it is a matter for the conscience of the people, it is not a matter of honour with us. We have no choice but to let the people have a choice among other forms of government — Commission. True, the thing was loaded upon our people in the beginning without consultation, but they did accept it. Not only does silence give consent, but so too does acquiescence. Indeed, nobody doubts now but had the people been consulted during those grim Gethsemane days of 1933, that they would have accepted Commission. In fact it was welcomed on every hand with open arms, and there is no doubt that most of our people have found it good. In any case, if we are going to give the people a choice of anything, we must surely ask them if they want to keep what they already have. To propose alternatives you must begin with what you already have. A great many people believe that the specific term of years for which Commission is to be retained, if it is to be retained, should be decided in advance. They argue that any retention of Commission that may materialise from the referendum should be conditional upon review of the whole position at the end of five or ten years. I really cannot see much point in making such a proviso. If the Newfoundland people decide to retain the Commission system, and at the end of a term of years want to examine the situation, they will have merely to take the necessary steps to bring about such review; if there is no popular feeling and agitation for re-opening the question, then the people should not find themselves committed to such a procedure.

Obviously we have to recommend as a referendum alternative responsible government as it existed in Newfoundland prior to its suspension in 1934, in form that is, if not in substance. Not to would be to seek an abridgement of the undertaking given by the British Parliament to restore responsible government at the request of our people. But I do hope that if we come to see responsible government restored, it will not get to be a matter of the same old story all over again. If in the past responsible government was not always all that it should have been, I think that