

Newfoundland

land is quite able to take care of herself and looks like being able to do so for a long time to come."

I might remind the committee of the opinion expressed by Mr. Lodge, who was a member of the commission of government which was established in Newfoundland by the British government in 1934. When he returned to Great Britain in 1939, he said:

After five years of commission government, Newfoundland is economically poorer than she was before its advent. Notwithstanding all the optimistic utterances of the secretary of state the commission has failed to make any definite progress towards rehabilitation.

Then in chapter 1 he said:

At the end of 1933 two governments of His Majesty, theoretically equal in status, agreed together that one should surrender to the other not merely independent dominion status but the whole of the political freedom of its people.

And later on:

It was the negation of political liberty and the repudiation of all those principles of democracy on which British statesmen affirm—and believe, at any rate when they are making after-dinner speeches—that the empire has been built up and will always rest.

Again it mentions:

It is quite possible that, had the problem been posed at a point of time either a year earlier or a year later, the decision might have been quite other . . .

On the other hand, before the end of 1934, Great Britain had elaborated the comforting doctrine that, however reprehensible debt repudiation may be when practised by other countries, default ceases to be really default when the defaulter is the British government.

It seems to me that the fact of having been in financial difficulties in those early thirties should not have been a situation which imposed a penalty which deprived the people of this important part of the world of their democratic rights for such a long period. Now, regardless of the terms of the British North America Act, notwithstanding that 78,000 voted in favour of union with Canada, we cannot overlook the fact that 71,000 registered their opinion that before we could proceed with the terms of union the commitment given by the British government should be fulfilled and the people should have a chance to go to the polls and elect their own government.

I cannot press this further, because I know that legally the Prime Minister is quite within his rights in saying this is not primarily a Canadian problem. But I should like to tell the members of this committee that during my lifetime we are going to have a great deal of bitterness because of the method that has been followed; not because the people of Newfoundland cannot be happy as a part of Canada, but because the government of Canada has approved the treatment that has been given to Newfoundland in depriving

[Mr. Nicholson.]

those people of responsible government for this long period and is completing negotiations without having given them a fair chance to have their own elected representatives carry on their negotiations for them.

Mr. Claxton: I do not want to reply at length to the hon. member for Mackenzie, because the points he raised have been covered already. But the hon. member speaks about thwarting the will of the people. I ask him whether in these circumstances it would be better for Canada, for the union and for the people of Newfoundland to thwart the will of the majority, as expressed in a plebiscite, or to thwart the will of a minority as expressed in the same way.

Mr. Nicholson: I pointed out last night that, at the first democratic opportunity the people of Newfoundland were given, a proposal was made that the question of confederation be placed on the plebiscite, and that was rejected by 29 to 16. Then the democratically elected representatives of Newfoundland decided unanimously that at that stage they would not confuse the issue by pressing the question of confederation with Canada; they would ask the people the two straightforward questions: are you in favour of continuing commission of government, or are you in favour of responsible government? In spite of that unanimous decision by the Newfoundland convention the British government disregarded this expression of opinion and the people were obliged to express themselves on the three questions. I know that in the first referendum there was not a clear majority. In the second referendum there was a small majority; but the charge is made that a large amount of money from outside Newfoundland was used to influence opinion.

Mr. Case: That is just a suspicion.

Mr. Nicholson: It is a charge that has been made.

Mr. MacNicol: By whom?

Mr. Nicholson: By those in the minority, who I think should be given a chance to prove their claim. Certainly there is a great deal of bitterness in Newfoundland because of the feeling that funds from outside that country were used in order to obtain a majority decision in favour of confederation. Whether we like it or not, Canadians are going to be held responsible for the bitterness that now exists and will continue to exist.

Section agreed to.

On section 4—*Representation in parliament.*

Mr. Fleming: A number of hon. members have expressed concern about the right of the