

November 4, 1946

Motion to send a Delegation to Ottawa¹

Mr. Bradley I had no intention of delivering any lengthy or prepared speech upon this resolution. It seemed so clearly the right thing to do that the bitter opposition which it has encountered appeared impossible. But, unfortunately, the debate has wandered far afield. It has been made the occasion of confessions of political faith and expressions of antagonism to this and that form of government. It has even degenerated into an orgy of indecent imputation, low insinuations, sour invective and what may perhaps be charitably described as plain misrepresentation.

Some months ago, in a broadcast to the people of this country, I offered the opinion that this Convention was a bench of judges rather than a body of partisans. I am more confirmed today that my interpretation of its function was and is still right. There is something incongruous in the association of either eloquence or tub-thumping with matters and problems of finance and economics, of addition and subtraction, multiplication and division. Figures do at times speak eloquently, but they speak quietly. We are concerned principally with figures. We have to ascertain the financial and economic position and prospects of this country, and whether under the tutelage of Britain, as an autonomous state, or in partnership with the provinces of Canada, lies the greatest probability of relegating the six cent dole of pre-war days into the realm of unpleasant and eventually traditional memories. In the welter of irrelevant and dubious eloquence the real issues have sometimes been wholly submerged. Can we not forget these confusing side-issues and confine ourselves strictly to the question upon which we have shortly to vote, bearing in mind that we must vote as judges, coolly, impartially, and calmly, and not as partisans in heat and in passion?

What is this question? Briefly, it is a proposal that a delegation be sent to learn the terms and conditions of the confederation of Newfoundland with Canada. Obviously it is not a discussion of the merits or demerits of confederation; and yet we have been told of the allowance offered by Canada in respect of our public debt in 1895, and of a computation of what we should get in the

same connection today. The amount mentioned was some \$300 million. Again, we were informed of fabulous prices obtained for fishery products in Canada. Were these gentlemen unconsciously advocating confederation?

Again it has been suggested that the delegation might explore the question of tariffs and other matters affecting the general relations between Canada and an independent Newfoundland. Surely it is clear that such investigations are wholly without the jurisdiction of this Convention and obviously beyond the scope of any delegation's activities. None of these things has anything to do with the resolution before the Chair. The proposal is simply that this delegation endeavour to obtain facts, the terms or conditions of union which would be acceptable to the Government of Canada, if the people of Newfoundland approved of such union.

It is true that in the course of these explorations and inquiries much further, and valuable, information would be obtained — the normal functioning of the Canadian system, the actual relations existing between the federal and provincial authorities, and other matters of which I know little or nothing as yet. Nor is the delegation in any sense entitled or empowered to negotiate an agreement or in any way to bind even its own members, much less the Convention, and least of all, the people of Newfoundland.

Today I am neither Commissionite nor anti-Commissionite, neither friend nor foe of responsible government, neither confederate nor anti-confederate. I have not the facts upon which I may arrive at any reasoned and reasonable conclusion. The facts of one of these forms of government can only be obtained by sending a delegation to discuss the matter with the Canadian government. I want those facts. I demand them. I refuse to offer any opinion on any form of government till I get them. And even more important is that the people of Newfoundland should have them. The people must within the next few months decide their destinies at the polls. Any recommendation we may make is but advisory. Their decision is final and ir-

¹See p. 93, 104, 120.