

*Newfoundland*

to you, Mr. Speaker, and to the house. I should like to say just a few words in order to give to the house some of the ideas which have come to me as I listened to what in my opinion has been a most interesting debate.

The Minister of National Defence (Mr. Claxton) paid a well-deserved tribute to the Prime Minister (Mr. St. Laurent) for the manner in which he had piloted through this house the legislation relating to the union of Newfoundland with Canada. I will not add to the words used by the Minister of National Defence, except to say that his sentiments were shared at least by all on this side of the house.

Of the speeches in the debate on the motion and the amendment thereto, I was particularly impressed by the one made last evening by the Minister of Justice (Mr. Garson). I thought he was most impressive in making his point with respect to the procedure by which Newfoundland chose confederation with Canada as the form of government which would be adopted by their country in the future. I thought his statement that the choice was a fundamentally democratic and free one was of the utmost importance.

I should like to summarize the procedure which was followed in order that the people of Newfoundland might make this choice—so that there may be no question in the minds of hon. members, particularly of those who sit opposite, as to its fundamental nature.

The policy of the British government with respect to the future organization of the government in Newfoundland was announced in the British House of Commons by the Prime Minister of Great Britain on December 11, 1945. That policy can be briefly summarized as follows: that the time had come when the people of Newfoundland were to be given the opportunity of deciding what form of government would be adopted in their country in the future; that this question would be decided by a national referendum in which the people of Newfoundland would be given a free choice as to the form of government they desired to adopt, and that, preceding this national referendum, a national convention of elected delegates would be called together in order to permit of orderly discussion of the various types of government which might be suggested. This policy of the British government was duly promulgated in Newfoundland, and steps were taken to carry it into effect.

Newfoundland was divided into constituencies which followed closely the old divisions of constituencies when they had their own representative assembly. Nominations were called and an election was held. As a result of that election, forty-five representatives were chosen to form the national convention. This national convention was called together in St. John's, and at its opening sessions was

presided over by a justice of the Supreme Court of Newfoundland. The task of this convention under the policy laid down by the British government was to make recommendations to the British government as to the forms of government which would be put on the ballot upon which the people of Newfoundland would vote.

The first business of the convention was to adopt and enact rules to govern its own procedure. This was done by an appointed committee which drafted a set of rules and brought them back to the convention for adoption. They were adopted unanimously. One of the rules which the convention adopted for itself by unanimous vote was that each member of the convention would have the right to make known to the British government his own personal recommendations as to the kinds of government which should go on the ballot, on the same basis as the decision of the whole convention, whether it was by a large majority or by a small one only. Therefore the convention decided for itself that each member had full rights to make recommendations on the same basis as the whole convention itself.

It may be of interest to know that 130 individuals were nominated to contest the election which was held to choose the members who would form this national convention. Of these, 128 were nominated without having declared themselves to the electorate as to the kind of government which they favoured for Newfoundland. Two alone made public their opinions as to what the best form of government for Newfoundland in the future would be. One made it known to his people that he favoured confederation, and the other that he favoured the return of responsible government. I point this out to show that 43 of the 45 men who met in this national convention went there free of any undertaking previously made to the people who sent them there as to the kind of government which they would recommend.

The convention met for many months. It worked hard and discussed every aspect of the various proposals which were put before it. Delegations were sent both to Britain and to Ottawa. Their reports were received and thoroughly discussed. When these discussions were completed the convention voted unanimously to place upon the ballot the choice of continuation of commission of government. It also voted unanimously for the inclusion on the ballot of return of responsible government. The choice of confederation with Canada was put to the convention and defeated by a vote of 29 to 16. But remember that the unanimous wish of the convention was that each individual member would