

We delegates have been appointed by the men and women of Newfoundland to meet here to review our past, study our present and, as far as humanly possible, to plan for our future. It is a great task, a great responsibility, but at the same time, let us ever remember, it is also a great privilege. To us has been given the sacred and solemn duty of performing a truly patriotic service — helping to shape the destinies of our country for possibly 100 years. It should then be unnecessary for me to stress the importance of our approaching the task in a proper spirit — prepared to face all the facts, however disagreeable, and to get these facts, no matter how deep we may have to dig. We must not hesitate to stand solidly behind what is just and right, and be equally ready to condemn whatever is wrong, regardless of the source from which that wrong emanates, and no matter whom the wrong-doers may be. Newfoundlanders have always been noted for their courage and love of justice. Let us then show to the country and to the outside world that we, in this time of crisis, are not lacking these same qualities.

As regards this Convention itself, I should like to repeat what I have so often said in the past, that I am not and have never been a supporter of this whole set-up which is absolutely contrary to the pledge made to this country by the British government in December, 1933. Everyone present knows that under the terms of that agreement we were specifically and categorically promised the return of responsible government upon our becoming self-supporting, which state we reached, according to the Dominions Secretary himself, in the year 1941. No one has yet come forward to give us the reason why this pledge was ignored, and why we were offered this Convention as a substitute. We know that in that international pact, there is no mention of conventions or plebiscites and the introduction of these foreign issues is wholly contrary to the spirit and letter of that agreement. How can I, how can any thinking Newfoundlander, honestly and conscientiously give his moral support and endorsement to a thing which is not alone illegal, but even ethically improper? Therefore, Mr. Chairman, if we are to view this Convention in its right perspective, we must accept the fact of its fundamental illegality. And in reference to this point, permit me to give you some extracts

from a speech delivered by Prime Minister Attlee in the British House of Commons on December 11, 1945. Replying to questions asked by the late James Maxton, Independent Labour Party, and Sir Alan Herbert, Independent, Mr. Attlee says, "It is important that a series of reconstruction measures which the Commission government already have in hand or are planning to introduce should proceed without interruption and these will be pushed forward as rapidly as possible. The Commission have a full programme to meet very pressing requirements on the island during the next two or three years."

Now, Mr. Chairman, is not this a most extraordinary statement for Mr. Attlee to make. On the one hand, he talks about letting Newfoundland hold a Convention to decide what form of government the people want, and in the next breath coolly telling the world that regardless of what the people of Newfoundland may want, regardless of any political aspirations they may have or what the findings of this Convention may be, he intends to enforce Commission rule on Newfoundland for another three years and during that time to carry out his own special plans with regard to our country. If this is so, what is the sense of our being here at all, going through these legislative gestures? Why not save ourselves and the country all this trouble and expense and wait until Mr. Attlee has completed whatever schemes he has in mind for our country, in the working out of which, apparently, no Newfoundlander shall have part? Does it not simply bear out what I have said time and time again, that this whole convention and plebiscite scheme dressed up in the trappings of democracy is nothing more or less than a glorified stall. I have no doubt that in drawing up his three-year programme Mr. Attlee has been influenced and enthusiastically abetted by the local commissioners, who must have stressed the necessity of retaining their indispensable services. I should like to make it clear I am not speaking with any idea of making political capital, or placing unnecessary obstacles in the pathway of this assembly. I am prepared and eager to assist in anything which has for its object the genuine welfare of our country or our people. But even at the risk of creating a discordant note in this Convention, I am not prepared to deny the truth of things as I see them. If I did, I would be false