

2,500. It has happened before, and it might well happen again, that the successful party would poll less than half the number of votes cast. Thus would the majority of the people — the will of the majority — be completely defeated by a minority vote.

And let me ask this further simple question: why is it suggested that forms of government should be split up in this unreasonable fashion — two to be submitted to the people for their choice at the referendum, and a third to be held back and subsequently thrown into the confusion and chaos of a general election? Three forms of government are on men's lips today. Why should one of them be put to such a disadvantage? It is noteworthy, sir, that the suggestion comes not from those who want our people to have a free choice, but rather from those who would force responsible government down the people's throats like a dose of evil-tasting medicine. I ask you to remember that it is the anticonfederates, the responsible government champions, who would thus prevent the people from giving their verdict upon a form of government laid before them by this Convention itself as a result of Britain's complete good faith — who would force the people to vote, not for what they want, but for what they don't want in order to get what they want.

And finally, does it not occur to these anticonfederates that the referendum is the proper, the only just method of deciding the issue of forms of government? It is the people, and not political parties, who will be subject to the new government, whatever that new government may be. Who, then, should directly, and without the meddling of any political party, decide the matter? Is anyone going to tell me that the people are not fit to make that decision? Is anyone going to say that the people should not be trusted to decide the type of government by which they shall be ruled? And yet these anticonfederates would say, they do say, to the people, "No! You shall not choose from these three forms. We don't believe in one of them, therefore it must be postponed. You must accept first the one which we want. When you have done that, perhaps you will get a chance to vote for the other. Even though you don't want our form, you must vote for it. You must vote for what you don't want in order to get what you

want. You shall not vote for confederation unless you vote for responsible government first."

Only once in our history has the question of confederation been submitted to our people. That was in 1869, two years after the then four British colonies on the mainland were united to form Canada. The Canadian union was then in its experimental stage, and there was no certainty that it would succeed or even survive. It lacked financial strength, the prairies were unpopulated, the transcontinental railway not even contemplated, and the country's economy almost entirely agricultural. Here in Newfoundland our people were uneducated. Few ever saw a newspaper. There was no radio. The whole question of confederation was deliberately turned into a political squabble. The anticonfederate party was led by a great merchant who spared no expense to win. An army of party hacks were sent around the Island to poison the people's minds against confederation. These henchmen traded on the people's ignorance and assured them that their property would be taxed — their homes, their furniture, their gardens, boats, flakes, stages, fishing gear, their poultry and animals, the very panes of glass in their homes. A horde of Canadian tax-gatherers would swarm over the land, the anticonfederates declared, and woe betide the unfortunates who didn't have the hard cash to pay up, for the hungry tax collectors would seize their property, put them on the street. Canada would seize their young men to fight her wars, and their bones would be left to bleach on the desert sands of Canada. Their very babies would be used as gun-wads in the Canadian cannon. Sir, if you cannot credit these statements, you have only to turn to Prowse's *History of Newfoundland*. There was no secret ballot in those days. There was no manhood suffrage. There was no woman's vote at all. The unfortunate voter had to declare his vote aloud in the presence of the party agent — often the employee of the local merchant, and it was a bold man who would brave the anger of his supplier in those semi-feudal days. As we look back upon that story of 1869, it is difficult to believe that any men voted for confederation; but thousands did, and it is of tremendous significance that out of 30 members elected to the House of Assembly, ten were confederates.¹

¹The actual result was: Anticonfederates, 21; Confederates, 9.