

September 19, 1946

[Requests for information were tabled by Mr. Starkes, Mr. Reddy, Mr. Fowler, Mr. Roberts, Mr. Hillier, Mr. Smallwood, Mr. Bailey, Mr. Figary and Mr. Fudge. Mr. Smallwood gave notice of motion to ask the government for a

statement of the gross national product]
[The Chairman announced that the Commissioner for Finance would address the Convention later in the day]

Report on the Financial and Economic Position of Newfoundland¹

Mr. Ashbourne I want first of all to congratulate most heartily Mr. Newell and Mr. Keough, two young men unknown to me until just recently, on their maiden speeches. In resuming the debate on this motion, I ask the earnest consideration of the members present for a few observations which I shall make. I wish it to be understood that I am regarding this report as a valuable one. We cannot be too fully informed on the financial and economic conditions of our land. I came to this Convention with an open mind, and with a firm desire to ascertain as well as I could, for myself and for the people who sent me here, a true picture of Newfoundland. Before my election I was asked what form of government I favoured. My reply was that I refused to have my hands tied. I realise, sir, that if I had my mind made up before I came I might as well come and cast my vote and then go home.... I would like to approach this important Convention with an unprejudiced mind. This is a view which I made clear to my district, and I feel that I lost some votes because of my association in former days as a member of responsible government; some of my constituents may have thought that I still favoured responsible government. I realise that in the north there is a very strong sentiment in favour of Commission government. The matter of selection of Commissioners has often been debated, some people preferring a form by which the people themselves would elect the Commissioners. I believe the fishermen and other producers in the country, have realised that there has been a certain stability and security evident for some years, particularly in the ordinary marketing of our staple products of the fisheries. It is perhaps true that in other sections of Newfoundland there may be decided preferences for some other form of government, or for responsible government. I have no doubt, sir, that the seeming indifference and apathy which was reflected, particularly in some outports, in the

small number of votes cast in the election in June, was perhaps because the people were not sufficiently informed about the matter. I had no public meetings. I got out a manifesto and distributed it. When it was my privilege to sit in the House of Assembly about 20 years ago I said I had no doubt but that half a dozen men could govern Newfoundland.

My first experience, sir, with this chamber, was as a boy when I stood in the gallery yonder and looked down upon this house. The one person that I remember was Sir Robert Bond, that great statesman that we remember with pride and affection, who represented the honourable and historic district of Twillingate, having as its chief town the metropolis of the north. This great leader in the political arena was one of the greatest statesmen Newfoundland ever produced, whose wise and stable leadership is a matter of history. I remember well Sir Robert, and, although I cannot at the moment recall his exact words, he talked about a bubble which would be made to expand and occupy such a large space, but which would utterly disappear when touched by such a small thing as a pin-point. When the people of Newfoundland decide that it is time to take up the duties of responsible government there should not be the shadow of a doubt about the ability of the people to carry on successfully the various tasks of government. It is no easy task to govern a country wisely and well. It is an easy matter, often times, to borrow money, and much easier to spend it, but we all know where that generally leads. We have suffered in the past in Newfoundland, and I believe it is largely because of a lack of education. I believe that we need here in the city of St. John's a university, and we need in our city, and also in our outports, the very best teachers that we can procure. The monies now being spent on education will, I hope, bring rich rewards in the future. I have no doubt in my mind whatever, Mr. Chairman, about the honouring of

¹Volume II:16.