

Newfoundland

representatives of the government of Newfoundland, rather than with those appointed to represent a responsible government in Newfoundland, must take into account the fact that first it was the British government which decided to put the question as to whether they wished to enter confederation on the plebiscite which was put before the people of Newfoundland; and, secondly, that at the time, when a majority of the people answered yes, they had these terms before them, and those terms had been explained by representatives of the people, including the members of the convention who had sent representatives to discuss the terms here.

That having been done, I submit this government had no choice but to proceed to meet the representatives of the government of Newfoundland. Once there was a plebiscite on whether or not Newfoundland should enter confederation, once the people with the terms before them had decided in favour of entering confederation, then this government could not do other than express its willingness to entertain negotiations and to discuss the terms of union with the representatives of the Newfoundland government. It really is as simple as that. Once the British government had allowed the question of joining confederation to be put before the people, then this government had no choice whatsoever in the subsequent course it followed. In consequence, the government of Newfoundland, acting through the commission of government, appointed the seven gentlemen, whose names were given by the Prime Minister (Mr. St. Laurent), to come here to enter into negotiations.

They arrived and were met; and I should like to tell the house something of the course of those negotiations. We recognize that this is an historic occasion, and it may be useful for our own people, yes, and perhaps for future generations, to have a note placed on *Hansard* as to the way in which negotiations were carried on. As a member of the cabinet committee, I had something to do with those negotiations and as deputy chairman, when the Prime Minister could not attend, it was my responsibility to preside at the conference, and to do a good deal of the work of preparation and discussion at all stages.

My experience in conferences includes the dominion-provincial conferences of 1941, 1945 and 1946, and conferences with representatives of the provinces dealing with different matters at different times, as well as conferences with other nations dealing with various aspects of international affairs. Thus far, no conference at which it has been my privilege to represent the government or the country has been conducted with closer attention to the sole interests and welfare of the people

concerned—in this instance, the people of Canada and the people of Newfoundland than was this conference.

I should like to pay tribute to the delegation representing Newfoundland, under the chairmanship of a most distinguished lawyer, citizen and statesman, in the person of Sir Albert J. Walsh, K.C. As chairman of the Newfoundland delegation he showed great capacity—and tenacity, too—in explaining the position and rights of the people of Newfoundland. He put forward those views he felt it his duty to express, and did so with a courtesy and fairness as well as a frankness which inspired the whole proceedings.

That was the atmosphere in which the work was carried on. There was no bickering; there was no backbiting; there were no recriminations; there were no leaks, either accidental or inspired; there were no occasions when there was a lack of frankness; there were no charges. There was the steady and competent effort by well-meaning people to see if they could not arrive at a fair and equitable basis upon which our two countries could enter into union and partnership.

At six o'clock the house took recess.

AFTER RECESS

The house resumed at eight o'clock.

Mr. Claxton: The conference began to meet on the 6th of October of last year, and was continuously in session until the terms of union were settled. The conference had its final plenary session in the Senate chamber, as it did its opening session, on the 11th December. Thus some two months were occupied in arriving at the terms. In addition to the plenary sessions of the conference, a number of subcommittees were set up. They are enumerated on page 81 of the report and documents which the Secretary of State for External Affairs (Mr. Pearson) tabled today. They included subcommittees on drafting, finance, fisheries, transport and veterans affairs, which met in practically continuous session from the beginning to the end.

The subcommittee on drafting, in addition to considering the form which the terms of union and the bill should take, also considered the Canadian statutes and the Newfoundland statutes that might be affected, as well as the procedure that might be adopted in making a submission to the parliament at Westminster. Altogether the subcommittee on drafting produced not less than fourteen drafts of the terms of union after they had begun to be submitted to the plenary conference, and also a number before. This work, as I say, continued night and day throughout