

exhaustive study of local conditions, and calculated by the creation of and development of new sources of wealth, so to strengthen the economic structure of the Island as to prevent the recurrence ... of those periodical visitations of pauperism and distress to which it has hitherto been subject ....<sup>1</sup>

I ask you to contemplate just for a moment or two, just how far, and to what extent, subsequent events and history came up to such high hopes and sweeping promises.

That, Mr. Chairman, was 1934. I had a lack of understanding then. But to resume my case history. Failing a job that year, I got the opportunity of attending the Memorial College, and a new phase in the education of a Newfoundlander began. I studied economics and political science amongst other things, and for the first time in my 17 years I began to develop an interest in the history of my own country and the story of our people. I read books which I did not know had been written, and learned of men whom I did not know had existed, and of deeds and events I was not aware had ever occurred in the very city I had grown up in, and the many places that were familiar only on the map during the day's lesson in geography. And there grew in me, Mr. Chairman, a slow, impotent rage; to realise that what I witnessed and read of February 22, 1934, was not something that had occurred to meet an emergency of a moment, but was in actual historical fact the culmination of a process that covered centuries, and was as calculated and as ruthless as it could be, having regard to the various periods of history, and the sense of values that each generation of men and their governments had lived by.

Mr. Chairman, it would take all the time that is allotted to this entire debate, even to outline the cruel and bitter story of this island's history and its steadfast growth in the face of the most implacable obstacles that any white colonial people of the British Empire has had strewn in its way towards progress and fulfillment. "The visitors who came and went" says one authority,

like tides and winds, and who embodied the very spirit of mutability and anarchy, had the first century to themselves. Their being alternated with not-being; they lived like seals

and thought like geologists; to them Newfoundland was little more than a sunken fishing bank with a dry top here and there, and they left indelible traces of their genius on the place. During the next century a few small groups of settlers arrived who were imbued with the ideas of permanence, home and order, but they were overshadowed by the influences which were already there .... Time with its cradle and war with its winnowing-fan proved that the future belonged not to the annuals but to the perennials. The proof was given at the close of the second century, but the whole of the third century the visitors became so unimportant, and the settlers so numerous, that it was at last unanimously recognised that Newfoundland, instead of being half colony and half fishing bank, was a whole colony like other colonies, and with a destiny of its own. The final recognition of this fact ushered in the fourth century of Newfoundland. The wheels of the chariot of history moved very slowly as though tortoises were in the shafts, and it took three centuries to arrive at the starting point of other colonies' histories.<sup>2</sup>

There in a nutshell, in the words of J.D. Rogers, is the history of Newfoundland.

In the records the history of Newfoundland began in 1497, when the history of North America also began. But in the actual fact, the history of Newfoundland as a country beginning to go somewhere of its own, made its first feeble steps with the granting of representative government in 1832, and its first real strides after the granting of responsible government in 1855. It cannot be repeated too often, the condition of Newfoundland up to the 1850s — the middle of the last century, just about 100 years ago — because no man, woman or child can fully appreciate or realise what happened in 1934 without that knowledge. The island was a wilderness. It had no roads, no communications of any kind. Its population, just beginning to grow after centuries in which settlement was forbidden, had only reached a figure of some 70-80,000. It was only a little over 20 years since the first white man had crossed the island from east to west, and brought

<sup>1</sup>Mr. Harrington's emphases.

<sup>2</sup>J.D. Rogers, *A Historical Geography of the British Colonies: Vol. V-Part IV Newfoundland* (Oxford, 1911), p. 109.