

Report of the Finance Committee: Economic Report¹
Committee of the Whole

Mr. Bradley This discussion is a debate upon the economic position of Newfoundland, and in view of its irregular and somewhat wandering development, it may be well to remind ourselves of what it is not, as well as of its true and only useful purpose.

It would seem clear it is in no way concerned with forms of government, or with the merits or demerits of any such form, for these things lie in the future. At the referendum our people will have to select some form of government to apply to our economy. They will need all the information obtainable about that economy to reach a sound decision. Surely then, our first and only duty in this discussion is to ascertain what that economy is, how it has developed, whether it is satisfactory or not, and what degree of stability it possesses. Equally certain it is that efforts to advance the cause of any form of future government to which we may be partial, or to abuse a form which we dislike, are not only highly improper, but tend to confuse the real issue, and render the whole issue completely worthless. Anger, and a display of party spirit, exclude calm analysis and destroy sound judgement. Smart jibes and sly innuendoes shot into the debate in an effort to secure a hit against some form of government which we dislike, and made in the face of the Chairman's ruling, cause the whole discussion to degenerate into a partisan contention. When such a situation arises, and we cannot deny it has done so on more than one occasion, the Convention departs entirely from the only purpose for which it exists, and for which the people sent us here. The thing becomes a gathering of warring political partisans, each bent upon advancing the cause dearest to his own heart, and completely incapable of forming any sound judgement on questions which may arise. In a battle between the mind and the heart, sir, particularly when opposition intensifies enthusiasm, often to the point of antagonism, the mind never wins. To that impasse I fear this Convention has, on more than one occasion, deteriorated. We have lost sight of our duty to discover and inform the people of cold facts, and have developed into standard-bearers of one or other particular form of future government.

On every such occasion we have prostituted our true and only purpose and duty and, with that involuntary dishonesty which so often accompanies elevated enthusiasm and political partisanship, we cease to be analysts of things that are, and become crusaders of things to be. We have ceased to be one body in search of truth, and have broken up into factions, each following a faith. I have no desire to go into details of such derelictions of clear duty just now; perhaps they are already too well known. That much of our activity, both in and out of this chamber, has not tended to foster public confidence, must surely be abundantly clear to every one of us by this time. On the contrary, it has brought upon us much justified criticism from John Citizen who is in search of truth, and confidence in us has failed. As a body there remain to us but a few short weeks of existence. Only in one way can we hope to recover that confidence, to be of any real value to the people who sent us here. Only by leaving our faiths and our factions, our shibboleths and predilections, our prejudices and passions on the outside every time we enter this chamber to discuss matters such as lie before us today, can we hope to reinstate ourselves in public esteem and leave a creditable record on the pages of history. We are not here to espouse any cause or to fight for any faith. We are neither St. Georges nor Sir Galahads; we are investigators of facts and seekers of truth. And it is in this spirit only that we should come to a consideration of this report which purports to portray the economic position of Newfoundland.

It is a remarkable document in many ways — remarkable for its too casual analysis of figures; its too ready acceptance of comforting conclusions drawn from such figures; the avidity with which it translates possibilities for the future into probabilities and even into certainties; and the superlative assurance with which it predicts progress and plenty for Newfoundland and Newfoundlanders in the days to come. In a word, sir, it is remarkable for the rosy hues in which it paints the utopia of our past, and the blithe optimism with which it envisions a New Jerusalem for our future. It is full of fair figures and happy hopes.

¹Volume II:425.