

*Newfoundland*

in answering questions put by the hon. member for Lake Centre I said our position was that we felt we should not attempt to interfere with the discharge of the responsibilities of the government of the United Kingdom or the government of Newfoundland, and that we would scrupulously endeavour to avoid doing anything which might be construed as an attempt on our part to dictate to our good friends of the island.

The situation which presented itself to us was that the government of the United Kingdom had requested the election of a national convention; that this national convention had passed a resolution requesting the governor of Newfoundland to inquire whether the Canadian government would be prepared to receive a delegation and to explore with that delegation whether or not there were satisfactory terms which could govern the union of Newfoundland with Canada. The reply given was that we would welcome that delegation. The delegation came. We worked with them for over three months, and afterward submitted what we then considered would appear to be fair terms upon which the union could be consummated.

We did nothing beyond that at that time. The matter came before the national convention; and after discussing the terms a majority of the national convention voted against including in the referendum a question as to whether or not the people would wish to unite with Canada. I can give this house the assurance that we expressed no views as to whether that question should or should not be included in the ballot. The government of the United Kingdom decided that, in view of the number who had voted for its inclusion in the ballot, and in view of what we were told, that there were petitions signed by great numbers in Newfoundland asking that it should be included, they would submit the question.

During the whole of that period we were maintaining an attitude of the strictest neutrality, because personally I think many of us felt that by doing so we would favour the prospects of union to a greater degree than if we attempted to say or do anything which could be construed on the island as showing a desire to influence their decision in the matter.

The question was submitted, with the result that has been referred to already in the course of the debate. After the first referendum a statement was made by my predecessor, the Prime Minister at that time, that if on the second ballot the people of Newfoundland indicated in a clear and unmistakable way that they wished to join Canada on substantially the terms of the proposal that had been submitted, the Canadian government

would co-operate with their representatives in giving final form to those terms. If I remember correctly the hon. gentleman, or some hon. gentleman on the other side, asked what would be considered a clear and unmistakable decision of the people of Newfoundland. Speaking for myself—because we had not discussed the matter in council—I said I thought it would be the usual democratic process; that if there was a majority, that majority would be apt to be considered as the expression of the views that should prevail, but that after all it was not our responsibility to count the ballots or decide the sufficiency or insufficiency of the vote. If the government of the United Kingdom and the government of Newfoundland, after counting the ballots, stated to us on their responsibility that there had been a majority for union with Canada, I said I thought it would be very difficult for us to refuse to recognize the validity of that statement; and they did state to us that there had been a clear majority expressing a desire to unite with Canada, and that the governor was appointing a delegation to come and discuss the final terms of union.

That delegation came. The situation was discussed, I think, in a manner that did credit to both the Canadian and the Newfoundland delegations. I believe the view that prevailed was that it was not a time to try to get this or that particular advantage but that it was in the interests of all, if there was to be union, to have such terms determined as could be accepted by the majority of the reasonably-minded people in Canada and Newfoundland as being fair and apt to promote the welfare of the enlarged Canadian nation.

On the day those terms were to be signed there arrived from St. John's a telegram addressed to me, which in compliance with the request made by the hon. member for Lake Centre I shall table. It is signed by Mr. Fred W. Marshall, chairman of the responsible government league. Perhaps I should read the telegram so that its contents may be available to all hon. members in the house. It was in the form of a night letter, dispatched from St. John's, Newfoundland, on December 10, and which reached us here on the morning of December 11. It is addressed to the Right Hon. Louis St. Laurent, K.C., Prime Minister of Canada; report delivery Ottawa, Ontario.

Following memorial passed unanimously at mass meeting of citizens held tonight "this vast gathering of citizens of Newfoundland meeting at St. John's in the dominion of Newfoundland the 10th day of December, 1948, places on record its strong objection and protests most emphatically against the manner in which Newfoundland is being forced into confederation with Canada.

It affirms that the only manner in which terms of confederation can be negotiated with Canada is by a duly representative legislature of Newfoundland.