

Newfoundland

the world. The Canadians, British and Americans made large expenditures in Newfoundland, and by 1941 it seemed as if the economic position had improved to the point that the island might consider getting responsible government. In 1943 the then secretary of commonwealth affairs went on record as follows:

The arrangements made in 1933 included a pledge by His Majesty's government that as soon as the island's difficulties had been overcome and that country was again self-supporting, responsible government, on request of the people of Newfoundland, would be restored. Our whole policy is governed by this undertaking.

Mr. Diefenbaker: What date was that?

Mr. Nicholson: That was December 2, 1943, in 1946 the commission of government passed the Convention Act, which was referred to this afternoon, and this national convention was in session for about a year. I believe the Prime Minister reported this afternoon that the convention sent a delegation to London, to Ottawa and to Washington. My information was that a proposal was made to send a delegation to Washington to consider the question of linking up with the United States but that the proposal was defeated. Delegations went, however, to London and to Ottawa. While the delegation was in London, I am informed, the question of the type of plebiscite to be presented to the people was discussed with Lord Addison, who was then secretary of state for commonwealth affairs, and he was asked this question: If three forms of government were recommended to be put on the ballot by the convention, would all three go on? His reply was:

If you recommend it, I should think so; but I should be bound to be advised by the convention.

Later he said:

If a substantial majority of the convention said "we would like these questions put to the people," I feel pretty sure I should be most anxious to give effect to their wishes.

As was mentioned this afternoon, there was a proposal that, in addition to putting on the ballot the question of the continuation of commission government and the question of restoring responsible government, public opinion should be tested on the question of confederation with Canada. That proposal was defeated, 29 to 16. I have been interested in reading the information which was tabled this afternoon by the Secretary of State for External Affairs (Mr. Pearson). At page 10 of the document I find the following:

The national convention, before concluding its sessions, resolved by unanimous vote to recommend that two questions, restoration of responsible government and continuation of commission of government, should be included on the referendum ballot; but by a vote of 29 to 16 declined to recommend that confederation with Canada should also be included. The United Kingdom government concluded, how-

ever, that "it would not be right that the people of Newfoundland should be deprived of an opportunity of considering the issue at the referendum," since the terms offered by the Canadian government had been the result of long discussions with a body of Newfoundlanders elected to the convention . . .

Then later on in this report, at page 71, there is a copy of a letter from the commonwealth relations office discussing this question, and I am not at all convinced by the reasoning. Mr. Noel-Baker, in paragraph 4, says:

His Majesty's government in the United Kingdom appreciate that there has been a feeling amongst some members of the convention that the entry of Newfoundland into a confederation with Canada should only be arranged after direct negotiations between a local responsible government and the Canadian government. The terms offered by the Canadian government represent, however, the result of long discussions with a body of Newfoundlanders who were elected to the convention, and the issues involved appear to have been sufficiently clarified to enable the people of Newfoundland to express an opinion as to whether confederation with Canada would commend itself to them. In these circumstances, and having regard to the number of members of the convention who supported the inclusion of confederation with Canada in the ballot paper, His Majesty's government have come to the conclusion that it would not be right that the people of Newfoundland should be deprived of an opportunity of considering the issue at the referendum and they have, therefore, decided that confederation with Canada should be included as a third choice on the referendum paper.

I think it is unfortunate, Mr. Speaker, in view of the clear decision in the first vote of 29 to 16, and later on after a unanimous vote by the convention, that the British government decided to disregard the considered opinion of the convention. I submit that this is a grievance that will be remembered in Newfoundland for a great many years. As an impartial observer, I cannot see any good reason why the people of Newfoundland should not have had the first opportunity to decide whether or not they wanted a continuation of the commission government or wanted to have responsible government. I refer to the large number, 71,334, who voted for responsible government as compared with 78,323 who voted for confederation. I am well aware of the argument that in the first referendum there was quite a small vote for the continuation of the commission government namely 22,311. But let me remind you, Mr. Speaker, that of those voting, the largest number voted for responsible government. There were 69,400 votes for responsible government and 64,066 for confederation.

In the interval between the two votes, a great deal of propaganda was put out by those who wanted responsible government and by those who wanted confederation. When I was in Newfoundland I was given a copy of a "memorandum to the common-

[Mr. Nicholson.]