

Newfoundland

In conclusion, I should like to plead with hon. members in all sections of the house to face up to the fact that there is a minority problem that will embarrass us for some considerable time. I am familiar with the comment made by a great many that in this point of view I am expressing the case of the wealthy people in the Avalon peninsula. I need not tell the house that my contacts were not with the millionaires in St. John's. I tried to find a fairly good cross section of opinion in Newfoundland, and we must try to recognize that an injustice has been done in the methods which have been adopted in the negotiations. I do not suggest for a moment that all the wrong is on one side and all the right on the other. I do not propose to take sides in what is really a Newfoundland domestic problem, but it does vitally affect Canada and it is the duty of all hon. members to admit frankly that there is a problem there and that together we must try to solve it.

I have no doubt that eventually the people of Newfoundland will be happy members of our larger Canadian family. I agree with the Minister of National Defence (Mr. Claxton), who suggested that marriages which take place between mature adults can result in a happy future for the participating parties. There are also adjustments which have to be made by people who marry late in life. The negotiating parties should have full information regarding all the details which have occurred in connection with the arrangements leading up to the marriage. I should like to express the hope that people in all parts of Canada will co-operate with our friends from Newfoundland, who will become a part of the country, and that we shall see to it that we can all work to establish a better Canada than we have ever known before.

Mr. G. H. Castleden (Yorkton): I wish to endorse what has been said by the hon. member for Mackenzie (Mr. Nicholson). I do not think that any hon. members will misunderstand the stand that we are taking in this particular situation. Most Canadians will welcome Newfoundland and the people of Newfoundland as a sister province of our great nation. Surely nature intended that the north half of the North American continent should be joined together economically and by blood. What has happened quite recently is the discovery of great material wealth in ore in Labrador. This seems to have had something to do, at any rate, with the sudden interest which we Canadians and Americans have taken in recent months in the development of that great area.

Mr. Adamson: Nicolet-Yamaska has been conceded to the Progressive Conservatives.

[Mr. Nicholson.]

Mr. Castleden: The reason we object to this resolution is based on the fact that we feel there has been some miscarriage—

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear.

Mr. Castleden:—of some of the basic principles of democracy. We are here as the representatives of the Canadian people, having before us an agreement the terms of which this government has entered into with a delegation from Newfoundland. The basis upon which we are making our decision is that we, for the Canadian people, believe that on the basis of these terms Canada should form an agreement and an alliance to go into confederation with Newfoundland. But the sad fact about this whole arrangement is that no similar legislature in Newfoundland, elected by the people, ever had any opportunity to discuss this matter.

In a few weeks, if this measure becomes law, the parliament of Great Britain will similarly be deciding the fate of Newfoundland on the basis of an agreement of confederation between it and Canada. I say there is a very serious lack here, when the people of Newfoundland are denied that right. Surely they are the people more concerned than any others.

Definitely, there should be an opportunity for the people of Newfoundland, through a legislative body democratically elected by the people of that country, to take the terms of the agreement, place them before their representatives, have those elected representatives discuss the matter and decide it in a proper democratic way, as should be done by a real parliament. Surely this should be done in any country among the democracies of the British commonwealth of nations.

But what have the people of Newfoundland had? They have had no responsible legislature for a number of years. A commission has been governing that country since 1934, I believe. This commission carried on its work, and suddenly it was decided that a convention should be held. Under the authority of the British government they sat in convention. In that convention there were some forty-five representatives who, under their terms of reference, were instructed, I believe, only to investigate the matter and make recommendations. But instead of that, they have gone ahead with some kind of referendum—a referendum which has not given a very large or clear majority. Even those people who voted for confederation did not represent one-half of the voters on the voters' list, though, it is true, they represent 52 per cent of the people who voted.

But what did they vote for? Did they vote for some agreement? No; the agreement was brought into being after the vote.