

Newfoundland

compulsory attendance at the schools, as we have in the other provinces, of children of certain ages to be taught under that curriculum? If these things are not to be done, it is possible that much latent talent in Newfoundland will not be developed to the point where the people concerned may make their full contribution to Canadian life.

Again I come back to the position I took before. It does not seem to me that Canada should be a party to an agreement which will sew things up in statute law for all time. I do not oppose the entry of Newfoundland into the confederation, because I believe it is a necessary thing; but I do believe that our government, the future government of Newfoundland, and the British government, all of whom are concerned or should be concerned, should be consulted with a view to changing this section so that the children of Newfoundland will have the same educational opportunities that are available in the other provinces of Canada.

Mr. St. Laurent: So that there may be no misunderstanding abroad I think I should correct the misapprehension under which the hon. member seems to be labouring. If he will read section 17 he will find that there are none of the dangers that he seemed to be deploring. The control over education is left completely in the hands of the legislature of Newfoundland, the legislature which exists at the present time and the legislatures which may come into being in the future. The only restriction on their power to legislate is that their legislation shall not discriminate against the denominational schools. At the present time the curricula for the schools in Newfoundland are prescribed by their department of education. I do not know whether that is its exact name, but they have a department of the commission of government, and before that they had a department of government responsible to the legislature, which has the administration of the schools. The system in Newfoundland differs from that existing in the older Canadian provinces, inasmuch as there is very little municipal organization. The schools are directly administered by the central government. The restriction provided here is not that that government, or the legislature to which it will be responsible, could not set up other schools. Under this provision it would have the right to set up any other kinds of schools that it saw fit to set up. The only provision is that if that happens the grants made for education will be distributed in such a way as not to discriminate against the denominational schools.

Mr. Bentley: If other schools were set up by the legislature, would the denominational

schools have to follow the same curriculum as that laid down for those other schools?

Mr. St. Laurent: I think that would depend upon the laws and regulations made by the department of education. At the present time the department of government which has control of the schools prescribes the curricula for all schools. I see nothing in this section which would prevent that from being done, unless they attempted to prescribe a curriculum that would exclude religious instruction. If they did that, they would probably be doing something prejudicial to the denominational schools as they exist at the present time; because if they are denominational schools I would imagine, though I have not examined the curricula, that there would be some provision for religious instruction.

Mr. Bentley: The Prime Minister says that the legislature should not do anything that would prevent religious education from being given in any school. Suppose in a community in which there was a particular religious denomination a school was in operation, and within that community a child or a few children of some other denomination would have to attend that school because it was the only one in the community; must they be subjected to religious education that might be abhorrent to their fathers and mothers, and eventually to themselves?

Mr. St. Laurent: I do not know what happens at the present time. We were informed that no trouble whatsoever is being experienced at the present time. I do not know whether under the regulations all the children attending the school are compelled to take all the courses or lessons which are given in that school. The information we have is that they have never had any trouble in that regard, and that they merely wished to continue to have the right to have denominational schools and to get their fair share of any moneys that were distributed for the maintenance of schools; but the legislature should have the right to set up other schools if it was felt by the members of the legislature that it was desirable to do so.

The hon. member referred to compulsory attendance. There is nothing in this section which to my mind can be considered as prejudicing the rights of any religious denomination to see that all children must attend school. It may very well be that in Newfoundland such a provision would be difficult to apply. I understand that outside of St. John's and Corner Brook, where there is concentrated a substantial proportion of the population, the population is distributed in more than 1,300 small hamlets. They have schools, as many as the government felt it