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The Newfoundlander.

3,644.

St. John's, Monday, March 6, 1865.

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LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL.

TUESDAY, February 14th.

(Continued)

Hon. E. Morris did not agree with the insinuation of the hon gentleman (Mr. Kent) that the fishermen and sealing masters are ignorant of the bearings of this question; neither did he admit the implied inference that this house knew as little about it as the people outside doors, whom the hon gentleman says he was so fully instructed at the Market-house the other day. In a general way he agreed with the opinion that haste should not be used in dealing with the question, and that ample time should be afforded for information, but he felt how impossible it was to give a satisfactory idea of the probable future results of the proposed confederation by any facts or figures we can bring to bear upon it. It may perhaps be shown that so far as pecuniary results are concerned there is nothing to induce our participation in the union, that no appreciable consequences would attend it in the present day. But he insisted that in legislating on so vast a question as this, the pecuniary view should be made subordinate to the great fact that we would be legislating for generations yet unborn. He would admit that comparatively little advantage is probable from a confederation of the provinces for those now living. Nations are not built up in a day, nor in a year, nor can we imagine the great future that is in store for those Colonies, when, united together under a salutary and powerful government and progressive institutions, the now disjointed territories extending from the Atlantic on the East to the Pacific on the West shall form a nation inferior to few of the great countries of the earth. The Provinces now proposed to be united extend over a vast region of space. They contain within themselves all the elements of national prosperity, but waiting for development. Their populations are increasing in amazing proportions year after year, even in a greater ratio than that of the United States, from which, even now, a steady stream of migration is flowing to seek in Canada a relief from those dangers to which they are liable in the unsettled condition of their own country. Statesmen have not been blind to the future consequences of these circumstances, and what they will likely lead to at no distant day. Was it a consideration of no value that these provinces should form an union for defence, a matter of absolute necessity in view of the present prospect of the political world? Were they to be left to their isolated weakness, a ready prey for the rapacity of any power, depending solely upon the protection of a government two thousand miles removed from them? Will it be contended that that was our natural and proper position? He firmly believed that a prouder fate was in store for them,—that it would be our province one day to preserve the balance of power on this continent and keep in check the turbulence and aggression of the American States of America, which threatened to embroil the whole world in dissension, were we not ashamed to enter thoroughly into the spirit of confederation, because he looked at it in its broadest and most important aspect apart from figures and taxation, and to the effect it was sure to produce hereafter. But even considering those branches of the subject, he did not think they warranted the apprehension that hon gentlemen appear to entertain upon them. We are told by its opponents that the Confederacy must be furnished with men and money, and that Newfoundland will be compelled to contribute her proportion; but let it be understood, though the fact is ignored by those who oppose the question, that it is not with Canada we are treating, but with the General Confederation of all the Provinces. We are plausibly asked, where is all the money to come from, to build up all the public works that are to be undertaken? Canada has no money, they say, to meet her own wants,—and how can she do these things without means? It was to be supposed, then, that the pecuniary position of Newfoundland was so prosperous that we can supply Canada with all she requires. Newfoundland will, he presumed, furnish means to construct railroads, canals, &c., because she can well afford to do so; but Canada cannot. This was the inference of the arguments of those opposed to the question, and he would just ask was it not rather absurd when they came to reflect for a moment upon it? We are to find all the money for public works,—all the men for the organization of an army and navy,—we are to lose our lives in defence of the frontiers,—in fact, to bear the whole expense and protection of the whole Confederacy! When did Newfoundland become so wealthy and populous as to afford this? What a fortunate and enviable position for it, to be able to sustain the whole Confederacy! Much stress has been laid on the anticipated application of the Canadian tariff to our imports; and this was a point that touched the mercantile interest and was disapproved of on that account; but he (Mr. M.) contend that that argument was incorrectly and unfairly applied against the question. The tariff of the different Provinces would be regulated and drawn up in a fair and impartial manner, not by Canada but by the General Government, and in such a way as to operate fairly and equitably upon all. All the provinces will have a voice in its adjustment, and could it be supposed possibly that the influence of Canada would be so powerful in the General Parliament as to enable it to impose an injurious tariff upon the lower provinces, whose interest would be common in resisting it? Was it not unjust to imagine that there would exist the dispute to make so dishonestly an attempt to set up on the lesser members of the Confederacy? This matter would be arranged by them in a spirit of fair play and honor and economy, and instead of resulting in increased taxation the government would be enabled to reduce it. The tariff of Canada is now 20 per cent., and ours is represented at 11 1/2 per cent.; but in reality it amounts to 13 1/2, and when the tariff of Canada would be reduced to 15 per cent., as we are assured it would be by that able financier, Mr. Galt, and would be the average rate for the whole confederation, there would not be so very considerable a difference as to create any serious alarm. Besides that, many articles now paying duty would come in free. Another objection urged is, that the fisheries are to be ceded to the Canadians, and the whole regulation of them handed over to Canada. Hon. gentlemen seem to forget that at the present time the fishermen of the neighbouring provinces have an equal right to participate in the

fisheries of this country as we have; and when the union would be effected, they would legislate for them, having a regard for the interests of the whole. It is not to Canada but to the General Government that this right to regulate the fisheries is proposed to be granted, and that government will have means at its disposal to afford them efficient protection to establish proper fishery police and marine regulations, and remove those causes of quarrel that have of late years interrupted the harmony that should exist between the fishermen of the different provinces; and we should hail with satisfaction the opportunity of having our fisheries regulated in such a manner as will give new development to them and make them far more profitable to us than we have ever been capable of doing. It must be remembered, also, that we would have a concurrent jurisdiction with the Central Government upon this matter. Then, again, we frequently hear the senseless cry that our mines and minerals and all our lands are to be taken away from us,—an idea that was cleverly replied to by a writer, a short time since, who said he supposed it was intended that the Canadians would come down with their ships and their men, with pickaxes and shovels, and carry off all the land and all the minerals in the country! This was the narrow and ridiculous spirit in which this question is approached by many who ought to be expected to give something like reasonable objections to it. Our lands will remain as available as they ever were to our own people, who may choose to take grants and settle on them. Your mines would be still open to them also, did they require to take out licenses to work them. They will be legislated for, no doubt, by the General Government in a much more efficient manner than we could, and be developed to an extent that the means of this colony could never warrant. Nevertheless, they would be as available to our capitalists as to any others, and who but the people of this country would be employed to work them? Then we would receive \$15,000 dollars a year for the mere concession of the right to legislate for them. It was a bright idea upon the part of those able statesmen, Messrs Galt and Brown, to hit upon this mode of making up Newfoundland the deficiency, to defray her general expenses, that would otherwise be her portion on entering the Union. We will capitalize your mineral and Crown lands, said they, and thus place you in equal position with the other Colonies to carry on your affairs. He agreed with Mr. Frazer, that this question is generally discussed as if we were treating with natural enemies in the Canadians; and to show the inconsistency of the reasoning of the hon members, he would ask, —how, if as they contend, we give up everything of value that we possess to the Canadians; can this colony then build up all those railroads and canals and public works, which it is implied it would be obliged to do? If we give up everything, surely there will be nothing left to dispose of! The view of the Imperial government has been allured to here, and there can be little doubt that that view is highly favourable to the projected union, and makes it a question of Imperial policy; as we are, an insignificant, helpless colony, going to turn upon our heads, and say, 'No we won't enter the Confederation!' It will be remembered that a few years since, when a request was made of this colony by the British government to contribute towards the support of the troops stationed here, we declined to do so, urging as a reason that our means could not afford it. Suppose we now stubbornly reject the union and oppose her desire, my he not renew the demand to support her troops, or withdraw them from the colony, leaving us helpless prey to the rapacity of any power that may think it worth while to secure it. Would such course exhibit our loyalty and that gratitude we owe for past protection,—or the vast expenditure of means which the mother country banished upon colony? Perhaps it may not be understood generally, that even the small garrison stationed here at the present time involved in its sustainment an expenditure of so ne £35,000 a year to the British Government,—the greater portion of which finds circulation in this community, adding no small item to the business property of the city. He did not agree with the idea that we should be forced into confederation, but he believed that if we stubbornly stand in the way of Imperial policy, we will be forced to the alternative of supporting the troops or doing without them. Do hon. gentlemen recollect the event of the year '57, when our dearest interests were imperilled, and the whole country were agitated by the celebrated French convention? What action were we enabled to oppose to it, poor, weak and isolated as we were?—or what impression could we, unaided, have made upon the Imperial government?—What would have been the consequence if its resistance rested solely upon our feeble opposition? Did we not in that time of danger turn with tearful eyes to those Provinces we are now accusing of such unfairness, and such improper designs, and ask them, as brother-comorts and fellow-subjects, to make cause with us in defeating the machinations of a crafty foreign power, which were pregnant with our destruction? Canada, Nova Scotia, New Brunswick and Prince Edward Island received our delegates in an unstinted manner, and united their voice and their influences with ours in one strong appeal against the attempted spoliation of our rights, and it left harmless to the ground. There was a most powerful example of the necessity for a close bond of union between these colonies. How soon may not another convention be attempted or the old one revived; and assuming that we hold aloof from confederation, what resistance could we oppose to it in our isolation? The other colonies cannot, then, be calculated upon to aid us, because we rejected their offers of protection! and we also opposed ourselves to the wishes of the imperial government, and could expect, as we would deserve, little sympathy or consideration from it. This was a position we should seriously consider in deliberating upon this question. He believed that confederation would be of advantage to no country. It required some stimulating process to preserve it from dwindling down to that poverty and insignificance of which he was yearly witness, without hope of prevention. His enemies are failing and unable to support the population; we have no means to develop other resources. Our legislation has proved unequal to the task of opening up new pursuits, and promoting our prosperity; nor has it helped in any way to arrest our downward progress. What prospect was there that it will accomplish in the future what it has failed to effect in the past? There was none that he could see, and the probability was, we should continue to go on invariably in the old course of poverty and retrogression, unless some radical and vigorous remedy be applied to our condition;—that remedy has been placed within our reach. Confederation will attract a proportionate share of that wealth upon us. He had faith in it,—he believed that all the provinces would benefit largely by a combination of means and interests and populations, and it was not too much to anticipate that from their union would hereafter emerge a mighty nation, peopled by the descendants of the old lands, of the energetic Celt and the industrious Saxon, whose influence has pervaded all the countries of the earth.

That its power would increase in proportion with its territory and its undoubted capabilities, and that it would be able to extend the arm of protection and defense to all outlying portions of the British possessions on this side of the Atlantic.—In conclusion, he would say that he was favourable to the prayer of the petition, for it would not be advisable to determine so important a question without indecorous haste. Hon. R. J. PINSENT said he deemed it appropriate to offer a few observations upon a petition of so important a nature, emanating as it did from so influential a body as the Commercial Society of St. John's—gentlemen who have the deepest stake and interest in the Colony; it merited the most respectful consideration from this house. It has been improperly contended that there was a great diversity of interest between the fishermen and the merchants, but he openly asserted that there was an indissoluble community of interests between the merchants and the planters, and the fishermen of this country, and when the well-being of one is injuriously affected they must all of necessity suffer. It was not a matter for surprise, then, to find such a memorial coming to the legislature, requesting delay upon a question that proposes to revolutionize the political condition of the country. Nothing could be more moderate than the prayer of that petition, for in view of what was believed to be the general feeling of the people, a much stronger dissentient opinion might have been expected from them. He (Mr. P.) had given notice of some resolutions a day or two ago, with the intention of submitting to the house the desirability of giving expression to its opinion upon the matter to which this petition refers, and in the remarks he was now about to make he was not to be interpreted as receding from the spirit of those resolutions, though in deference to the opinions of others he had not proceeded with them. The hon. gentleman opposite (Mr. Morris) has deemed it sufficient to discuss so important a subject in general terms; and nothing could afford a more suitable opportunity for the exercise of that hon. gentleman's fine base voice and florid oratory and powerful imagination than this grand question of Confederation! He thought, however, that those advocates who had to discover the advantages to be derived from the present scheme of confederation, in the benefits that would be felt by generalities yet unborn, and who could point to no material blessing for those immediately concerned, must be sensible to the weakness of his cause, and it was a course certainly calculated to leave an impression in the minds of others. It was not that practical view that was likely to recommend itself to those who had to deal with the question; it was not by generalities that a matter affecting the dearest interests of every individual in the colony was to be viewed. We must discuss it in express definite terms; for it is in such terms that the resolutions of the conference are dictated and agreed to by the delegates appointed by the executive government of the colony. He fully agreed with the hon. gentleman, who said the people of country could never permit their rights and privileges to be sacrificed without an equivalent, as they would be under the terms that are offered to us,—that they could never consent to enter the confederation until more favorable provisions are made for our admission.—He considered it perfectly useless to go to the country on those conditions;—the general voice is known to be, and under no circumstances could be otherwise than determinedly opposed not to confederation in the abstract, but to confederation upon the conditions proposed to us, because it contains salient objections which are insuperable, and which prevent its being entertained in its present shape by this colony. It was to point out those exceptional features that he had intended to bring forward the resolutions he had referred to, to elicit the opinion of this house expressly on those points, that the imperial government might be informed upon them in time, and that the country might be enabled to take up the question upon certain definite issues. He believed the course adopted by the representatives of the people, who were immediately interested in the result of an appeal to the country, was a delay of action, and we have no course left but to wait their decision, so far as positive legislation was concerned;—in the meantime expressing our views upon it, the occasion to do so being now fittingly presented by the petition before the house. The only way in which, he imagined, the objectionable terms of the report of the convention could be averted, was by the convocation of a new conference, or by such assumptions as might be suggested by delegates to the imperial government, preparatory to the passing of the Imperial Act affixing the Union of the Colonies. If those terms be not adapted to meet the interests of this colony, let better for it to hold aloof. The hon. gentleman (Mr. Morris) who has come out a strong advocate of confederation, at all hazards, says it matters little to us or the next generation what the result will be,—that posterity will reap the beneficial consequences of so grand an undertaking. He speaks of the blessings to be derived by ages yet unborn, in language and style truly unprecedented; a pretty picture indeed, but possessing little consolation for the living matter-of-fact man of to-day. So far as the interests of Newfoundland were concerned, we should eschew from their consideration such speculative imagery, and look to our present condition, bad enough as it is, but much worse if we accepted the proposed confederation. He could not find what advantage we were to derive from union on its present basis. Despite all that its advocates have urged in its defense, and no matter how often the country might be appealed to upon such a prospectus, it must result in nothing but a negative. The hon. gentleman (Mr. Tessier) has stated, the whole amount of revenue we are to receive for the surrender of our Customs duties, our light dues, and the control and management of all our affairs, will not exceed £12,000 a year, no matter how largely the population of the country, or the extent of its resources and its proportionate necessities and contribution, may to the general revenue increase. We are to do this, by the advocates of confederation that increased taxation to any serious extent is not seriously contemplated. Has Canada, then, so large a revenue that she can afford to establish the great public works, which the confederation contemplates, out of her own means which have hitherto been roundly inadequate for her own purposes? It is not admitted that those means are not sufficient to meet her immediate expenditure?—and how could those public objects be produced without recourse to taxation? If, as has been argued, there will be a surplus in the federal treasury after defraying the national expenses, whence must that surplus be derived, unless from the excess over and above their several allowances, that will remain from the subsidies of the maritime Colonies? What is the proposal with regard to that point? The chief movers in the scheme deliberately state that it is the intention to raise the maritime taxation, and to reduce the Canadian tariff. Far better for us if we had in our own hands the expenditure of the surplus that will be raised and appropriated to objects from which we should receive no benefit. For all we are called upon to yield up to the confederation, its advocates insist that we must receive an equivalent in the construction of public works which will indirectly benefit us; but he (Mr. P.) contended that owing to our position we could have but very little interest in them, and the only way in which we could be adequately indemnified would be by granting to us an efficient coastal, intercolonial and transatlantic Steam service. There was no guarantee to this effect, and while provision is made in the resolutions of the conference to connect the North-west territory with the general settlement, there is none as regards Newfoundland. He considered that even if the exceptional provisions, otherwise concerning this colony, were favourably altered, still it would be most injudicious to adopt it without the insertion of stipulations to secure to us these necessary objects, and any report without it should be considered unacceptable. We were equally entitled to a guarantee of intercolonial communication as the North-west territory, and should not trust to promises or to the condescension of the General government. He anticipated great advantage from extending its channels of communication and those means of intercourse which a readily overcome the difficulties of time and space. This, the chief blessing to be derived from closer political connection with our neighbors, was left unprovided for. We know, as in the human, so in the national body, circulation must be less active and vigorous at the extremities than at and near the great centre. Newfoundland represented one of the extremities in the great federal union, and therefore in the most healthful condition of the body corporate we should be placed at a physical disadvantage, and the perfections we thus labour under we were bound to obviate and correct, as far as possible by provident arrangements. It has been shown that by the application of the Canadian tariff to our imports £50,000 a year in excess of our usual revenue would be extracted from us, for what, without definite guarantee, might be practically Canadian purposes, through the admission of some articles of merchandise free of duty, it is contended, and he was disposed to believe, might reduce that amount to a considerable extent. Still, however, it is not denied there would be a large surplus drawn from us without equivalent. Out of the fixed sum of £12,000, that is proposed to be given to us, it must be remembered that our Governor's salary, judicial and general local expenditure must be defrayed. Gentlemen who had preceded him had disproved the boasted benefits to us of the intercolonial railroad, as a means of commercial traffic. They have shown that it would not shorten or facilitate the course of trade, and that additional charges would prevent its being availed of to the extent anticipated by the unionists. The hon. gentleman (Mr. Fraser) asserts that the opponents of confederation approach the question as if they were treating with enemies, as if Canada would be in legislation only influenced by a desire to injure us. He believed that no such feeling existed as to the sentiments of Canada towards us; but the hon. gentleman could hardly be blind to the fact that there was not that identity of interest which could afford to leave the only objects that would be of advantage to us open to doubt or uncertainty. There was no analogy whatever between our position as regards entrance into the confederation and the case put by that hon. gentleman or a junior partner in a mercantile firm. In that case the partners enter into an agreement upon proportionately equal terms