

= Newfoundland referendums , 1948 =

The Newfoundland Referendums of 1948 were a series of two referendums to decide the political future of the Dominion of Newfoundland . Before the referendums , Newfoundland was in debt and went through several delegations to determine whether the country would join Canada , remain under British rule or regain independence . The voting for the referendums occurred on June 3 and July 22 , 1948 . The eventual result was for Newfoundland to enter Canadian Confederation .

= = Background = =

Newfoundland is the oldest settled region in what would become Canada but was the last to obtain either a local representative government or responsible government . In 1832 , it received local representative government in the form of a locally elected body of officials overseen by a governor . The British granted responsible government , in which the government is responsible to the legislature and elected officials occupy ministerial jobs , only in 1855 .

Newfoundland did not send any delegates to the 1864 Charlottetown Conference , which was to discuss a union of Maritime colonies . Later that year , Newfoundland attended the Quebec Conference , called by John A. Macdonald to discuss a greater British North America union . The two Newfoundland delegates , Frederick Carter and Ambrose Shea , returned in favour of a union with Canada . However , Confederation was highly unpopular with the Newfoundland public , and the Government of Newfoundland did not send representatives to the London Conference of 1866 , in which the British government and the colonies agreed to the terms the British North America Act . Opponents of Confederation decisively won the Newfoundland general election , 1869 .

By the 1920s and the 1930s , Newfoundland was almost \$ 40 million in debt , and on the verge of economic collapse . A commission recommended Newfoundland to be " given a rest from party politics " and to be administered by a special Commission of Government . Chaired by the governor , it would consist of three people from Newfoundland and three from the United Kingdom . Backing the recommendation was the United Kingdom , which agreed to take on Newfoundland 's debts . The Commission of Government began on February 16 , 1934 , governing the island until it entered Canada in 1949 .

Prosperity returned when the Americans were invited to the island by Britain to set up military bases in 1941 to 1945 . The American Bases Act became law in Newfoundland on June 11 , 1941 . As Earle (1998) finds , Newfoundland girls married American personnel by the thousands . In 1948 there was a short @-@ lived but growing movement for some sort of economic union with the United States .

The British government , keen to cut expenditure after World War II , hoped that Newfoundland would decide to join the Canadian Confederation and end the rule by commission . Newfoundland first asked Canada for help in a return to responsible government , however . The response from the Canadian government was that it was not interested in helping Newfoundland economically unless Newfoundland joined the Canadian Confederation .

The British did not want their colony to become an American possession , and the Canadian government , despite convinced that absorbing Newfoundland would not benefit Canada economically , thought that the annexation would be the lesser of two evils when compared to the prospect of the country being almost completely surrounded by American territory .

Seeking a union with the United States was not a referendum option , despite the idea having some currency amongst locals . With the Cold War looming , U.S. interest in Newfoundland were centered primarily on its strategic importance to the defence of North America . The Americans ' ability to maintain bases on the island satisfied those concerns - after receiving assurances that the Canadian government would honour the leases for bases on Newfoundland , the U.S. State department had no further interest in the political future of Newfoundland . President Harry S. Truman 's administration had little incentive to pursue annexation . With respect to foreign policy , such a territorial ambition would have only served to antagonize two key allies . With respect to domestic policy , the administration would not likely have been able to convince Congress to offer

statehood to Newfoundland due to its small population and geographical isolation from the then @-@ 48 existing states , and would not likely have been able to convince Newfoundlanders to accept territorial status as an alternative to admission as a U.S. state .

= = The National Convention = =

The British government decided to let Newfoundlanders deliberate and choose their own future by calling a National Convention in 1946 . Chaired by Judge Cyril J. Fox , it consisted of 45 elected members one of whom was the future first premier of Newfoundland , Joey Smallwood .

The Convention set up committees to study where Newfoundland 's future lay . Many members assumed that the final decision was due near the end of their deliberations , but the timeline was upset when Smallwood moved that the Convention should send a delegation to Ottawa to discuss a union in October 1946 . His motion was defeated , as it only received the support of 17 members , although the Convention later decided to send delegations to both London and Ottawa .

= = = The London Delegation = = =

The London delegation , made up of so @-@ called anti @-@ confederates , preferred that Newfoundland become independent rather than join Canada . The group left Newfoundland on April 25 , 1947 , and met with a British delegation headed by the Dominions Secretary , Viscount Addison . The British response to the delegation was that it would give no economic help to Newfoundland if it returned to responsible government . The leader of the delegation from Newfoundland , Peter Cashin , gave an angry speech to the Convention on May 19 claiming , " A conspiracy existed to sell this country to the Dominion of Canada " .

= = = The Ottawa Delegation = = =

The Ottawa delegation , dominated by pro @-@ confederates including Smallwood , preferred a union with Canada to independence . The talks between them and Ottawa began on June 24 , 1947 with the goal being to stay in Ottawa as long as needed to negotiate good terms for Newfoundland 's entry . Ottawa was reluctant at first because they felt that the delegation was not an official representation of the Dominion of Newfoundland , but the Federal Cabinet finally decided to begin negotiations on July 18 . By mid @-@ August , the agreement of draft terms was nearly complete . However , with the death of Frank Bridges , Prime Minister William Lyon Mackenzie King 's minister from New Brunswick , negotiations effectively ended . King refused further discussions until New Brunswick had representation , and so the delegation headed back to St. John 's .

= = = Back in St. John 's = = =

The Convention reconvened on October 10 and Smallwood presented his delegations report , infuriating the anti @-@ confederates . Just as the Convention decided to debate the delegation 's report , the draft terms from Ottawa arrived . Ottawa offered to assume most of the debt , negotiate a tax agreement , and outlined which services would remain in the jurisdiction of the province .

= = Referendums = =

Newfoundland recommended that the British Government hold a referendum on Newfoundland 's future . London agreed that a referendum was a good idea , and left it up to the Convention to decide what was to be on the ballot . Originally , the Convention decided that only two choices were to be on the ballot : restoration of responsible government and the continuation of the Commission of Government .

Smallwood moved on January 23 , 1948 to add Confederation with Canada to the choices . The debate ended at 5 : 30 in the morning on January 28 , with the motion being defeated 29 @-@ 16 .

The British government intervened in March and overruled the Convention , deciding that Confederation with Canada would indeed be on the ballot . They did this after having concluding , " It would not be right that the people of Newfoundland should be deprived of an opportunity of considering the issue at the referendum " .

= = = The factions = = =

Three main factions actively campaigned during the lead up to the referendums . One faction , led by Smallwood , was the Confederate Association (CA) advocating union with the Canadian Confederation . They campaigned through a newspaper known as The Confederate . The Responsible Government League (RGL) , led by Peter Cashin , advocated an independent Newfoundland with a return to responsible government . They also had their own newspaper The Independent . A third smaller Economic Union Party (EUP) , led by Chesley Crosbie , advocated closer economic ties with the United States .

= = = The first referendum = = =

The first referendum took place on June 3 , 1948 . The votes were as follows :

= = = The second referendum = = =

Since none of the choices had gained over 50 % , a second referendum with only the two most popular choices was scheduled for July 22 , 1948 . Both sides recognized that more people had voted against responsible government than for it , which encouraged the CA and discouraged its opponents , although the RGL and EUP now became allies . The confederates widely publicized the Roman Catholic Archbishop E. P. Roche 's strong opposition to confederation , and persuaded the Loyal Orange Association to advise Protestants to resist Catholic influence . The CA also denounced anti @-@ confederates as anti @-@ British and pro @-@ republican , and called confederation with Canada " British Union " . Anti @-@ confederates responded that " Confederation Means British Union With French Canada " .

The results of the second referendum were :

= = = Results map = = =

The Avalon Peninsula , the location of St. John 's , supported responsible government in both referendums , while the rest of Newfoundland supported confederation . A majority of districts with mostly Catholic voters supported responsible government .

= = Reaction to the referendums = =

As the results of the binding referendum were to join Canada , Newfoundland began to negotiate with Canada to enter into Confederation . After negotiations were completed , the British Government received the terms and the British North America Act 1949 was subsequently passed by the British Parliament and given Royal Assent . Newfoundland officially joined Canada at midnight , March 31 , 1949 . At the elections for the Newfoundland House of Assembly two months later , Smallwood 's Liberal Party won and controlled the provincial government until the 1970s . Reactions to Confederation were mixed .

Newfoundland as a province secured some significant guarantees as a part of the union . As ruled by the Judicial Committee of the Privy Council in 1927 , Canada agreed to put Labrador under the jurisdiction of Newfoundland , after some consideration . Such commitments carried over to other areas as well , such as a ferry between Port aux Basques and North Sydney , and a guarantee that Newfoundland would be able to continue to manufacture and sell margarine , a very controversial product at the time .

Canada welcomed Newfoundland into confederation , as seen in an editorial in the The Globe and Mail on April 1 , 1949 :

Union with Newfoundland , as everyone knows , rounds out the dream of the Fathers of Confederation . This newspaper is certain that Canadians welcome their new fellow @-@ countrymen with full hearts . May the union be forever a blessing for Canada and to the island which is yielding its ancient independence , but not its identity , to belong to a larger fraternity .

An editorial from the Montreal Gazette also welcomed Newfoundland , saying :

For Canadians tomorrow will be a day of welcome . For this is the day when a tenth province is added to the Dominion of Canada . There will be a greater meaning than ever to the Canadian motto , chosen by Sir Leonard Tilley from the words of Isaiah which describes the dominion that reaches ' from sea to sea ' .

The Vancouver Sun also reflected on the results , saying :

Today a dream of greatness , present in the minds of the Fathers of Confederation more than 80 years ago , comes true . Newfoundland at long last is part of Canada .