

*Newfoundland*

then Secretary of State for Commonwealth Affairs, expressed himself 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 the country was again self-supporting, responsible government on request from the people of Newfoundland would be restored. Our whole policy is governed by this undertaking.

In 1945, in violation of this agreement—since it actually was an agreement between the Newfoundland legislature and the British parliament—the commonwealth relations office, through the government commission, decided to call a national convention.

Members of this convention were elected during the summer of 1946 and on February 8, 1947, the convention decided to send a delegation to Ottawa to examine the conditions under which Newfoundland might possibly enter confederation.

After the lengthy discussions with which we are familiar, proposals were submitted by Canada and there occurred at this stage a rather important development: the proposals made by Canada to the Newfoundland national convention that had been called in the summer of 1946 were implicitly rejected, since it was decided to submit to the people two questions only:

First, were the electors in favour of responsible government and second did they favour a commission of government.

This means that the national convention, having been apprized of the proposals made by Canada, had decided to ask the people of Newfoundland, by means of a referendum, if they wished to return to their pre-1933 type of administration or whether they were content to keep the system which had been in force since that date.

What happened then?

The British government, without consulting anybody in Newfoundland, without the approval of anyone there, or, at any rate without the approval of any legally constituted body, decided to put three questions to the people of Newfoundland, in spite of what had been formerly decided upon by the national convention. This is how the first referendum came about.

Now, evidently, the only legally organized body which at the time could speak on behalf of the people of Newfoundland was this national convention, and that is why, contrary to the wishes and decisions of that convention, the British government resolved to put three questions to the people of Newfoundland in the referendum of June 1948.

I submit that this decision by the British government was irregular, even illegal and

[Mr. Dorion.]

unjustified. In my opinion, it would be interesting to know what interests were then at stake, what lobbying took place about which no report has reached us. Why did British interests decide to put the third question to the people of Newfoundland so that they could answer whether or not they favoured the entry of the island into confederation?

It would surely be interesting to know what must have taken place at the time, about which we have not been told anything.

And so on June 3, 1948, when the first referendum took place, there were 22,311 votes cast for the commission government, 64,066 for confederation with Canada and 69,400 for responsible government. Here I ask myself this question: On what grounds, under what statute, legislation or authority was the result of the first referendum disregarded and a second one held?

If the result of the first referendum, in which responsible government received a majority, had been complied with, conditions would have become again as they were before 1933. The government of Canada could then have dealt with the established responsible government according to the rules set forth in the British North America Act.

Why was the result of that vote disregarded? On what grounds? Under what authority? We do not know. All we know is that the second referendum took place on July 22, 1948. At that time 78,323 votes were cast for confederation with Canada and 71,334 for responsible government, a majority for confederation with Canada of 7,000 votes.

But it must be noted that only 78,323 votes favoured the entry of Newfoundland into confederation and the electoral list comprised 176,297 electors. Therefore if the first result had not been satisfactory because there had not been an absolute majority, the same principle could have applied to the second referendum, and the latter might conceivably have been rejected, in view of the fact that the results were far from expressing the will of an absolute majority of the electors. It must also be noted how the appeal was made to the electors in favour of the entry of Newfoundland into confederation.

I have here an article written by Mr. Camille l'Heureux in *Le Droit* of November 10, 1948. I wish to quote the following paragraph: