

Letters to the Editor

But what I feel is that these gains would be bought at a great price. *With Newfoundland in American hands; [?] our international importance would be greatly reduced; our responsibilities in world affairs would inevitably decline; and, with that decline, our voice in determining our national destiny. [The question is what about our own provincial situation at this time. It is a matter of timing and of terms.]*

Obviously, it would be national suicide for us to pursue a policy opposed to that of the United States; to that extent power and geography limit our independence. But, within that limit, there are two courses open to us. The first is to bear our full share of international responsibility and thereby to maintain the right (and the will) to exert a large measure of influence on American policy. *[This ignores the effect of action of the provinces upon Canada at this time.]* The second is to say we cannot be independent of the Americans anyway, therefore let them take as much of the burden and responsibility as possible and let us keep our responsibilities to a minimum. *[No thought of this.]*

It seems to me that our attitude to Newfoundland is the touchstone. If we accept the responsibility for Newfoundland, that means we are going to continue to play an adult role as far as we can; *[We are playing the role of quarrelling children at present.]* if we shirk it, that means we are seeking a position of dependency.

Moreover, I fear the effect of the latter course on our own domestic situation. In the last seven years we have witnessed a great growth of national unity despite the stresses and strains of war; we have since 1945 also seen the resurgence of divisive forces as soon as the external responsibility slackened. *What I would anticipate, if we seek shelter within the outstretched and seemingly protecting arms of the United States [Aside from the question.]* and thereby avoid most of our external responsibilities, is that Canada would become a mere collection of quarrelling and ultimately divided provinces and communities without national will or national purpose. On the other hand, the very difficulties of bringing Newfoundland into the national structure would be national problems and a national responsibility. The admission of Newfoundland would, above all, be conclusive evidence that Canada was as serious and as purposeful in world affairs in peace-time as we undoubtedly are in war.

Believing this, I feel that the handling of the Newfoundland question may well be largely decisive in determining the verdict of history on the careers of the public men who have to face that issue. During my illness I have been reading a good deal about Sir John A. Macdonald. For nothing was he assailed more bitterly than for his alleged lack of prudence in bringing British Columbia into Confederation on the terms to which he agreed. And the arguments against including B.C. in 1870 were far stronger than any which can be advanced against Newfoundland's entry in 1947. Yet without Macdonald's vision, courage and apparent lack of prudence in 1870 and 1871, Canada would not exist today. [?]

Similarly Seward was reviled in 1867 for begging the United States by paying Russia five millions for Alaska. I doubt if Alaska has ever paid a money return to the United States, but it is not pleasant to think where North America would be, strategically, today, if the Russians had retained their sovereignty of Alaska. *[True.]*

It has been my great privilege to be associated in a humble way with your career for nearly ten of the twenty years you have been Prime Minister. I cannot begin to express my pride in your achievements or my gratitude that, at times, I have had a little share in them. Feeling as I do that our whole destiny as a nation is bound up with this question of Newfoundland, I am sure you will understand why I am so eager to have it settled while you are Prime Minister. To me it seems that if your service to Canada which is already unique not only in years, but in so many other ways, could be rounded out by the completion of our national structure, no career could begin to rival yours at any time in the future.

I know, of course, we must not seem too eager, and that delicate management will be needed if union is to be achieved. But there is no one whose experience or skill in these matters begins to approach yours — and that is an additional reason why I feel so anxious that you personally should have a part in seeking to bring about the completion of Confederation.

As Prime Minister of Canada, you have been unrivalled both in peace and in war: nothing can compare with your record of social and humanitarian legislation; and the achievement of receiving a national vote of confidence for your guidance of the nation through the greatest war in history is unique in the world. Perhaps you should not be expected to add to those achievements, but I trust you will forgive me for hoping and desiring to see you numbered among the "Fathers of Confederation" as the one who completed the labours others had begun. That must be my excuse for this long note.

J.W.P.

[My observations related wholly to the matter of timing — our internal difficulties with the provinces and adding to them, unless we could settle them first. (2) The effect (word undecipherable) on the government of any agreement including more in the way of financial obligation unless we secure in advance agreement of leading parties in Parliament and agreement by provinces (not formally but in a general way.)

Perhaps we can secure a conference of Dominion and Provinces: which would settle our affairs and lay the ground for the other. I believe we could but for elements in the Cabinet opposed to any conference. If we can't we shall be adding to our difficulties.

It is an issue large enough for a general election.]

Paul Bridle is a retired Canadian diplomat who worked on the Newfoundland question between 1945 and 1949 and who was Acting High Commissioner for Canada in St. John's when Newfoundland joined Canada. In the November/December 1983 issue of International Perspectives he contributed an article on US attitudes to Newfoundland's joining Canada, in supplement to his two-volume study for the Department of External Affairs, Documents on Relations between Canada and Newfoundland, Vol.2, 1940-49, which was reviewed by J.W. Pickersgill in the July/August 1984, issue of International Perspectives.