

Letters to the Editor

Sir,

In your last issue you published a review by J.W. Pickersgill of my *Canada-Newfoundland Documents, Volume 2*. The collection, which is a chronicle of Newfoundland's movement into Canada, shows Pickersgill intervening at two stages — in 1943, in a memorandum advocating an effort to make Canada better known in Newfoundland; and in 1948, in the rationale he provided Mackenzie King for inviting Newfoundland to join Canada on the basis of a 52.3% vote of its people.

In view of the interest which Pickersgill (Deputy Head of the Prime Minister's Office during the war and Head of it for many years thereafter) had taken in the Newfoundland question in the 1946-49 period (see his *My Part in Newfoundland's Confederation* in *The Book of Newfoundland, Volume III*), I had been puzzled, when preparing my collection, by the absence of further documentation of his role. I knew that his interventions had been behind the scenes but I thought that they would have left more trace.

They did. Recent research has uncovered memoranda on Newfoundland which Pickersgill addressed to Mackenzie King at two critical junctures — the first in November, 1946, when officials were trying to interest the government in thinking in positive terms about Newfoundland as a tenth province; the second in April, 1947, when the government was preparing to receive a delegation from the Newfoundland National Convention.

In historical terms, both memoranda are worth more than a passing glance, for they present confederation in terms of Canada's broad national interest as well as in terms of King's own place in history. In a significant sense these considerations constituted the positive element in King's thinking about Newfoundland; the negative element was his strangely persistent and pessimistic concern about the effect on the Maritime provinces of Newfoundland's entry on terms that would satisfy it. Confederation happened partly because a majority of Newfoundlanders felt it would be in their interest and partly because a way of reconciling the above opposing considerations was ultimately found.

The documents, the second of which carries the additional interest of King's handwritten comments, follow.

Paul Bridle
Ottawa

20.X.46

Secret and Personal
Prime Minister

I have lately been giving a good deal of thought to the *Newfoundland question*. As you probably know, I have thought for many years that it is bound sooner or later to be the "touchstone" of our nationhood and place in the world. If we let ourselves get shut off from the Atlantic as we largely were from the Pacific by the Alaska award, our inevitable fate is to be a weak and irresponsible satellite of the U.S.A. With Newfoundland in Confederation and the responsibilities and opportunities it brings we continue our

course as a responsible neighbour and junior partner of the U.S.A. — a course set by yourself and one of the great achievements of your career, as I see it.

With the Newfoundland Convention in session it is almost certain some kind of overture will be made before many weeks pass. With statesmanship, I believe the union could be effected this time and I should greatly like to see it numbered among your achievements. Having exceeded the length of service of Sir John Macdonald, and in far more difficult times, it would be fitting for you to complete the structure of Confederation which he began. Please excuse this hasty handwritten note done at home on a Sunday evening.

J.W.P.

Editor's note: The following memorandum bears a number of marginal comments in MacKenzie King's handwriting. These are presented in italics within square brackets more or less where they appear in the original. King also underlined a number of passages. These are italicized.

Secret and Personal

For the Prime Minister

Re: Newfoundland

April 25, 1947.

During your absence, I have reflected a good deal on the observations you made to Gibson and me on the subject of Newfoundland the day before your departure. I do not for a moment question the gravity of the difficulties you foresee in effecting and consolidating Newfoundland's entry into Confederation. They are clearly very formidable. But what I have come to feel is that the overwhelming fatigue from which you were then suffering may have had the effect of magnifying the difficulties, not absolutely, but in relation to the advantages of bringing in Newfoundland. It is because I feel deeply that *the whole future of Canada depends on the fate of Newfoundland*, [?] and because I am so very anxious that the bringing of Newfoundland into Confederation may be the crowning triumph of your unparalleled career, that I venture to send this note.

I do not intend to discuss the more immediate and obvious advantages of union: they are to be found in the official papers on the subject. What concerns me most is *the effect on our national outlook and national psychology*. In this, I assume that if we do not take the responsibility for Newfoundland, the United States sooner or later will. [Not much likelihood for some time; these are not the alternatives.]

I admit, at once that the idea of having the Americans guarding our front door (as they do our back door from Alaska) has a certain attraction. It would probably reduce our outlay for national defence; it would reduce our exposure to external attack; and conceivably (though this I doubt) it might reduce our liabilities in the event of another war.