

Bond and for confederation,⁶ along with anticipated support from the Roman Catholic hierarchy and from some sections of the Protestant community, would be sufficient to carry the day for confederation if the issue were put to the people. The required luck was that Sir Edward Morris would break with Sir Robert Bond and lead the opposition to him in an election. Sir Edward was a Roman Catholic and was believed to be in favour of confederation.⁷ When the break between Bond and Morris finally came, Sir Edward disappointed his secret supporters in high places by hammering a No-Confederation plank into his platform. In the ensuing election of 1908, confederation loomed fairly large, not as an issue but, rightly or wrongly, as a stick with which to beat the opposition. The election resulted in a deadlock which was broken only by another election six months later.

It seems clear that Sir Wilfrid Laurier, who was Prime Minister of Canada at the time of these events, would have liked to bring about confederation with Newfoundland. At the same time, like later successors, he felt that any initiative should proceed from across the Cabot Strait. The closest he himself came to an initiative was inviting Sir Robert Bond to Ottawa to talk about the Labrador boundary toward the end of 1906. Perhaps rightly, Sir Robert interpreted this as a veiled invitation to discuss confederation and replied that he would talk about the boundary at the forthcoming Imperial Conference of 1907. In the event, Sir Robert arrived a week late at the conference and the Governor of Newfoundland reported that he did so because he was afraid that otherwise he would have been accused of discussing confederation with Sir Wilfrid Laurier while attending it.

The last flicker of Sir Wilfrid's hope for confederation was visible early in 1909 when he seems to have been intrigued by the efforts of yet another Canadian lobbyist, one Harry J. Crowe, a company promoter and timber speculator, to promote a plebiscite on confederation in Newfoundland; at first interested, Sir Wilfrid soon became sceptical. Apart from the fact that, in his notion of a plebiscite, Crowe was well ahead of his time, his effort to exploit the existing political deadlock in Newfoundland was singularly ill-conceived. Not only had confederation been in bad odour since 1895 but Crowe was operating at a time when Newfoundland's fortunes were at the flood. The Island was well governed and its economy relatively stable. It was during the ensuing two decades that its basic frailty, the impudence of the interests exploiting it and a sort of political desperation became apparent.

Once Newfoundland had passed through the ordeal of the First World War, which at the same time improved economic conditions at home, it entered upon the bleak and barren twenties which slowly sapped its financial strength. Other countries, Canada included, were also being slowly gutted into a weakened condi-

⁶ It seems likely that forty years later, when the chips were really down, Canadian financial interests actually played some part in helping to bring about confederation. However, as the documentation in this volume tends to suggest, hard evidence of this is hard to find.

⁷ The two governors formed their opinion partly with the help of a visit which the Governor General paid to Newfoundland under the guise of a holiday. A somewhat later visit he wished to pay was vetoed as inept. Compare with a visit by the Governor General in 1942 and the visit which his successor wished to pay in 1947, as described in Documents 19, 22 and 359.