

Newfoundland

convention, elected by the people of Newfoundland, to consider the form of their future government.

That convention was elected. After it had investigated the financial situation and so forth its findings were made public. Then the government of Newfoundland said: We will ask the people themselves whether they want responsible government, a continuation of the commission of government, or confederation with Canada. In view of the fact that three questions were to be submitted, they said, if there is not an absolute majority in favour of any one there will have to be a second referendum. There was a vote but there was no absolute majority in favour of any of the three questions, and a second referendum was held.

On that second occasion the people of Newfoundland, instead of saying that they wanted responsible government restored, decided against it. In the first referendum some of them had wanted responsible government restored, but they were not a majority of those who voted. In the second referendum the majority said: No, we do not want responsible government restored; we want union with Canada.

Twenty-five members of the convention voted against the submission of the proposal of the convention and I am rather surprised at the attitude taken by the hon. member for Charlevoix-Saguenay that there was no justification for putting the question to the people of Newfoundland. The national convention was merely a convention to inquire into the situation and to make recommendations; it was not even a legislative body.

In the absence of any legislative body other than the commission of government, which was not representative, and a referendum having been submitted to the people, it seems to me that the result of that referendum was a democratic expression of what the people of Newfoundland wanted.

I shall deal with the other questions at eight o'clock. I appreciate that the hon. member for Lake Centre is as desirous as any of us here to have union accomplished under such terms as will leave the least possible resentment in the minds of the new Canadians who are joining our nation.

Mr. Diefenbaker: That was the purpose of the questions.

Mr. St. Laurent: I shall endeavour to give as full answers as possible, because I think the hon. member feels that the more light we can throw on the fact the greater help will be given to dispelling resentment.

Mr. Diefenbaker: That was the purpose of the questions.

[Mr. St. Laurent.]

Mr. St. Laurent: That was as I understood them.

At six o'clock the committee took recess.

AFTER RECESS

The committee resumed at eight o'clock.

Mr. St. Laurent: When the committee rose at the dinner hour I was proceeding to deal with the questions suggested by the hon. member for Lake Centre, and I believe I said I appreciated that he was putting these questions for the purpose of having the facts upon the record in the hope that it might dissolve some of the resentment felt by those who believe some other procedure to achieve confederation should have been followed.

If I understood the hon. member correctly his first question was why, in view of the terms of the Newfoundland act of 1933—which provided that on request of the people of Newfoundland, when their financial situation had been restored, they would get back responsible government—the procedure to bring about union had not been that contemplated in section 146 of the British North America Act. That section, as hon. members will recall, provided that her majesty, on the advice of her most honourable privy council, might on the joint addresses of the houses of the Canadian parliament and the houses of the legislature of Newfoundland or Prince Edward Island, admit those colonies into union.

I think I have dealt with the first part. We did not consider it would be proper for us to express any views in respect to the manner in which the government of the United Kingdom and the government of Newfoundland should carry out the provisions that had been made in 1933. We constantly maintained the position that we felt the Canadian people would be glad to welcome the entry of Newfoundland into confederation, but that we should not do anything to influence her decision or course of action in the matter. To be quite frank, I may say we felt that this would probably be the most helpful attitude for us to maintain in order to bring about a desire to join Canada. We felt that the people of Newfoundland, naturally proud of their history and the control over their own affairs which they had up to 1933, would resent any action by the Canadian government or the Canadian people which might be construed as expressing an opinion as to what they should do.

The hon. member for Lake Centre will remember that we had some exchanges in that regard at the end of the session of 1948. He referred to the *Hansard* report of Saturday, June 19, 1948. I will not take time to read the exchanges that took place then, but