

NEWFOUNDLAND AND CANADA: TERMS OF UNION SIGNED

IN the Senate Chamber, Ottawa, on December 11, 1948, representatives of Newfoundland and Canada signed terms of union.

Assuming approval of the terms by the Canadian Parliament and the Newfoundland Commission of Government and confirmation by the United Kingdom Parliament, it is anticipated that union will take place on March 31, 1949.

Issue Not New

The question of union is not a new issue in Canada or Newfoundland. Delegates from Newfoundland participated in the conference at Quebec in 1864 when the broad outlines of Confederation were laid, but Newfoundland declined to enter union some five years later when the Confederation Party was defeated at the polls. The door, however, always remained open, section 146 of the British North America Act, 1867, providing for the entry at any time of Newfoundland, as well as of Prince Edward Island and British Columbia, on such terms and conditions as might mutually be agreed. Canadian policy throughout the years has been, however, that the first move must come from Newfoundland. Following a financial collapse in 1894, overtures for union were made by Newfoundland, but negotiations broke down over financial terms, and no further formal moves towards union were made till 1947.

In 1934, following a financial collapse, Newfoundland had given up responsible government in return for government by an appointed commission and a financial guarantee by the United Kingdom Government, until such time as the Island again became self-supporting, and restoration of responsible government was requested by the people. Although financial recovery set in strongly in the early years of the recent war, consideration of constitutional change was postponed until the close of hostilities. In 1946, a National Convention was elected to examine the economic and financial position of the Island and to make recommendations regarding possible forms of future government for submission to referendum by the people.

On March 20, 1947, the Governor of Newfoundland, on behalf of the Newfoundland National Convention, asked the Government of Canada whether it would receive a delegation to ascertain what fair and equitable basis might exist for the federal union of Newfoundland with Canada. The Canadian Government agreed and in June 1947 a delegation from the Convention came to Ottawa. Meetings with a Committee of the Cabinet continued till September. On October 29, 1947, the Prime Minister of Canada sent to the Governor of Newfoundland, for transmission to the National Convention, a statement of terms believed to constitute a fair and equitable basis of union, should the people of Newfoundland desire to enter into Confederation.

Approved by Referendum

The statement of terms submitted by the Canadian Government was debated at length in the Newfoundland National Convention and during the campaigns for the two referenda which followed.