

## SECTION I

### HISTORICAL INTRODUCTION

Union of Newfoundland with Canada has been long in maturing. Representatives of Newfoundland participated in the great conference in Quebec in 1864 when the framework for a federal union of the British North American colonies was drafted. No decision was taken by Newfoundland at the time, but the British North America Act, 1867, made provision for the entry later of Newfoundland, as well as of British Columbia and Prince Edward Island, on such terms and conditions as might be mutually agreed upon. In 1869 the issue of Confederation eventually came before the people of Newfoundland in a general election, but the party supporting Confederation was decisively defeated and the question of Confederation was shelved for the time being.

Confederation again became an issue in 1895, following a financial collapse in the Island. The Newfoundland Government, unable to secure financial assistance on acceptable terms from the Imperial authorities, decided to explore the possibility of Confederation, and a delegation was sent to Ottawa. Negotiations failed, however, largely over financial terms.

During the depression of the 1930's Newfoundland again found itself in very serious economic and financial difficulties. At the request of the Newfoundland Government and Legislature, a Royal Commission of Enquiry was appointed to investigate the Island's economic and financial position. The Commission recommended, among other things, that responsible government should be suspended and that government should be entrusted to an appointed commission until such time as the Island should again become self-supporting, it being understood that on the request of the people of Newfoundland responsible government would then be restored. This recommendation was approved by the Government and Legislature of Newfoundland; the constitution was accordingly suspended by Act of the United Kingdom Parliament, and a Commission of Government appointed under new Letters Patent. The Commission of Government took office in 1934.

Marked improvement in Newfoundland's financial position began about 1941 and continued thereafter. The United Kingdom Government, however, announced that the question of constitutional change should be postponed until after the close of the war in Europe. On December 11, 1945, Prime Minister Attlee announced that, "to enable the people of the Island to come to a free and informed decision as to their future form of government", a National Convention would be elected to enquire into the financial and economic position of the Island and to make recommendations to His Majesty's Government regarding possible future forms of government for submission to the people at a national referendum. The Convention began its sittings in September, 1946.

On February 8, 1947, the National Convention resolved to send a delegation to Ottawa "to ascertain from the Government of Canada what fair and equitable basis may exist for federal union of Newfoundland and Canada". On enquiry as to whether the Canadian Government would be prepared to receive such a delegation, the Canadian Government replied, through the High Commissioner for Canada in Newfoundland, that it would be happy to do so (Appendix 1).

The delegation, under the Chairmanship of Mr. F. G. Bradley, K.C., the Chairman of the National Convention, came to Ottawa and began meetings with the Committee of the Canadian Cabinet on June 25, 1947, sessions con-