"Like stepping back": Newfoundland in 1939

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WHEN THE FATEFUL YEAR 1939 began, Newfoundlanders were approaching the end of their fifth year under a form of administration known as Commission of Government.[1] This was a constitutional arrangement that was unique in the history of the British Empire, having been forced on Newfoundland by the events of the Great Depression.

These events had dealt Newfoundland, which in 1935 (including Labrador) had a population of 289,588, a shattering blow. Constitutionally a self-governing British dominion when the Depression struck, Newfoundland was economically very vulnerable. Thus the country depended on the sale abroad of the products of three basic and to some extent interconnected industries: fishing, forestry, and mining. After 1929, as the Depression took hold, Newfoundland exporters soon found themselves facing declining prices and contracting markets. The result was large scale unemployment, widespread destitution and a sudden crisis in public finance. Since the income of the government of Newfoundland came mainly from customs receipts, public revenue fell off drastically as trade declined. In short order the authorities in St. John's were faced with a stark choice: to feed the poor and maintain at least minimal public services, or to continue to make the interest payments owed the country's bondholders, mainly abroad, based on fixed price contracts negotiated in better times. Initially, Newfoundland tried to keep going by borrowing more money from private lenders, but this source of funds soon dried up. The country then stumbled on from interest payment to interest payment with the assistance of the British and Canadian governments. The price of this assistance was high: Newfoundland had to enforce, at great cost in human misery, rigid economies in public expenditure and agree to the supervision of her accounts by a Treasury representative from London. In effect, the country passed into a form of receivership.

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In June, 1932, the conservative United Newfoundland Party came to power in the country, led by Frederick Alderdice, a Northern Ireland-born St. John's businessman and ardent imperialist. Alderdice personified orthodox business values. Nonetheless, so desperate was the financial and social situation facing him that he contemplated a rescheduling of Newfoundland's debt payments to lessen the burden of interest on the country. This notion, however, was categorically rejected in London. Newfoundland, it was argued, would have difficulty ever borrowing again and would disgrace the good name of the British Empire. Dominions did not wriggle out of contracts. Alderdice conceded the point and at the end of 1932, in return for more Anglo-Canadian financial help, agreed to the appointment by London of a Royal Commission, to include British, Canadian and Newfoundland members, to look into Newfoundland's problems and to recommend a long-term solution to them.

In the summer of 1933, while this Commission was going about its business chaired by Lord Amulree, a Scottish Labour peer, Canada refused to help out with Newfoundland's mid-year interest payments and in effect abandoned her neighbour. This put the British in the position of having to go it alone in Newfoundland, and they gave careful consideration to what this would entail. The terms on which they would continue to prop up Newfoundland were ultimately specified in the report of the Amulree Royal Commission. This carefully composed document recommended that the United Kingdom guarantee Newfoundland's debt and provide her with annual grants-in-aid to balance her budget. For her part, Newfoundland would temporarily give up parliamentary self-government in favour of Commission of Government. Under this arrangement, which was devised to take account of Newfoundland's Dominion status, there would be a governor and six commissioners, three from Newfoundland and three from the United Kingdom; all would be appointed by the British. The Commission of Government would be responsible to the Parliament of the United Kingdom through the secretary of state for dominion affairs. After Newfoundland had requested that self-government be suspended on the terms offered and the British Parliament had passed the Newfoundland Act, 1933, the Commission of Government was inaugurated in St. John's on 16 February 1934. Under the terms of the legislation, self-government would be restored to Newfoundland when she was again self-supporting and upon the request of her people. This, to say the least, was a vague formulation. It was also one that would work very much to British advantage.

The thinking behind the report of the Amulree Royal Commission and the Commission of Government experiment typified one conservative response to the Great Depression. Newfoundland's troubles, it was argued, were essentially of her own making. Democratic party politics and fiscal irresponsibility had gone hand in hand in Newfoundland. Governments there had dissipated natural resources and invested foolishly in grandiose schemes. Party men had kept themselves in office by bribing the electorate with its own money. What was needed, therefore, was "a

rest from politics," that is to say an administration free from party and electoral constraints and conducted with only the public interest in mind.[2] At root, the Commission of Government signified a tory vision of how the government of men might be replaced by the administration of things.

How did the change work out? The short answer is with decidedly mixed results. The Commission brought to Newfoundland the practices of the British civil service: the country had never had a government that moved paper so efficiently. The Commission also made some useful and ameliorative social and economic changes. It established the Newfoundland Ranger force to improve contact between the central administration and the rural population; reformed the magistracy; created a system of cottage hospitals and promoted health care generally; raised standards in education; assisted variously both individual fishermen and the fish trade; enquired into the hard conditions of life in the country's logging camps; started up land settlements and encouraged resettlement; and marginally improved the unfortunate lot of Newfoundland's thousands of relief recipients. Early on, however, the limits of Commission rule were indicated when the government retreated in the face of opposition from important vested interests. In education, for example, the Roman Catholic Church and the Church of England were able to confine the government to change that did not disturb the denominational principle underlying the school system of the country. The two foreign owned pulp and paper companies operating on the island demonstrated that they too had interests which could not be trampled on.

In its 1934 and 1935 published annual reports, the Commission highlighted its achievements and expressed cautious optimism that Newfoundland was on the road to economic recovery. But even though the world depression had reached its nadir in 1933, very bad times persisted in Newfoundland. Accordingly, towards the end of 1936, with relief and unemployment figures still at appalling heights, the Commission set a new course. At London's request a long-term plan of reconstruction was devised which played down the relocation of people in land settlements in favour of rural revival based on known local economic possibilities, a nostrum that would be rediscovered in Newfoundland in the 1980s. The 1936 plan acknowledged that the task of bringing Newfoundland out of the economic doldrums would be long and difficult. Nevertheless, with the promise of reconstruction funding from London, the Commission made a fresh start. Unfortunately, it had hardly begun to carry out its plans when the country was dealt another body blow by the Roosevelt Recession of 1937-38. So great was the effect of this downturn in the North American economy that, with the threat of public disorder in Newfoundland never very far away, the Commissioners and their Dominions Office masters were forced into consideration of a more sweeping and therefore politically more dangerous programme of reform.

In the spring of 1938, J.H. Gorvin, an official of the British Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries and an expert on rural rehabilitation, was sent to New-

foundland to advise the Commission on its development plans. Gorvin was clearly shocked by what he found and recommended the adoption of a complex scheme whereby relief funds would be administered regionally by new public bodies and used to put unemployed fishermen back to work. Gorvin believed that "the worst kind of contribution" a government could make towards reconstruction was "to pay out money without any parallel effort to impel the people to stand on their own feet." Doles caused "people to neglect the development of their resources," created "nothing permanent" and were "destructive of the greatest values in a nation" because of their tendency "to destroy moral fibre." Thus, while governments had a responsibility towards the unemployed, they must devise means to cultivate in them "the spirit of co-operative independence."[3] The long-term objective of the plan Gorvin advocated for Newfoundland was a fishing industry and rural society organized along cooperative and democratic lines. By definition, this was a goal sure to anger many vested interests within the existing framework of individualism and free enterprise. They could be expected to fight back hard. Gorvin's plans were unquestionably risky, but the dangers inherent in the *status quo* were also undeniable. By force of circumstance, the Commission had been brought at the beginning of 1939 to a fundamental choice about the future of Newfoundland.

In the first days of January, however, the most pressing immediate item of business on the agenda of the Commission involved an agreement it had signed with the Newfoundland subsidiary of the Bowater-Lloyd company of the United Kingdom on 29 November 1938.[4] The development of the timber resources of the Gander area had been a longstanding objective of Newfoundland governments and the Commission, hungry for jobs, had also pursued it energetically. In 1937, the government had reached an agreement with Bowaters for the building of a pulp sulphite mill in the area, but this deal had fallen through when the company had bought out the Corner Brook operations of the International Power and Paper Company of New York. The deal signed in 1938 gave Bowaters sweeping rights over the timber of the Gander but for expanded productive capacity at Corner Brook rather than the construction of a new mill. This arrangement touched off an angry protest by the Newfoundland Board of Trade, the voice of St. John's business. Too much, it was claimed, had been given away for too little. For short-term employment gains, the government had sabotaged the long-term best interest of the country. For its part the Commission defended the agreement on the grounds that it was fair, that no other developer was available for the Gander limits, and that the pressing needs of the country's unemployed demanded immediate action. This argument prevailed.

The whole episode, however, left a bitter aftertaste and was indicative of an uneasy relationship that had developed by 1939 between the government and Water Street, the headquarters of St. John's business. The capital's businessmen had been to the fore in pushing for Commission of Government, but in practice the new regime had been a great disappointment to many of them. It had kept organized

business at arm's length and had failed to deliver prosperity. From its inception, the Commission kept a wary eye through the police on the unemployed for signs of disaffection, but as time passed it had also to worry about political attitudes within an increasingly resentful local establishment. In sum, by 1939 the government was walking a fine line between poverty and privilege and had reason to fear trouble at every turn.

While it was quelling the business uprising touched off by the Bowaters agreement, the Commission was also considering what to do about Gorvin's proposed root and branch programme of reform. His radical approach divided the commissioners, but they eventually decided to test a modified version of his scheme on an experimental basis in Placentia Bay. If things went well there, the changes envisaged would then be made in the rest of the country. In keeping with this decision, Gorvin was appointed to the Commission in May 1939, and in July was sworn in as Commissioner for Natural Resources. In July it was reported that organizers from the Co-operative Division of the Department of Rural Reconstruction were busy at work in Placentia Bay and that study clubs had been formed in a number of settlements. William Trucksis, "a co-operative expert from Ohio," was on the scene and the organizing team was to be joined shortly by Jules Gottschalk, a handicraft expert from St. Louis.[5]

Gorvin's appointment and the energy with which he threw himself into his job brought new hope to Newfoundlanders. It was desperately needed. After ten years of economic adversity and deprivation, the country had developed a malaise which no public relations campaign could overcome. The mood of 1939 was indeed sombre, and there were many signs of a people and government close to the breaking point. Certainly that was the clear impression of Morley Richards, a staff reporter for the London *Daily Express*, who completed a seven week visit to the island in March, 1939, and reported on its condition and affairs in a series of five articles. His language was harsh and his findings constituted a savage indictment of the British record in Newfoundland since 1934. Newfoundland, he wrote, was "sunk in misery with half its 300,000 people living on the starvation line." More than 70,000 people, 18,000 more than in the previous year, lived on a miserable dole which even the government admitted was "not enough alone to keep body and soul together." At the same time about 50,000 people were just above the dole level and malnutrition was "widespread and increasing." By contrast two thousand civil servants were paid "nearly half as much again as the sum granted to the 70,000 people on the dole." To go to Newfoundland was "like stepping back into the Middle Ages."[6] The condition of the country was "a disgrace to the Empire" and a crash programme of action was needed to redeem the United Kingdom's good name.[7] Should Commission of Government fail, and this was a present possibility, the outcome would "bring discredit to British administration throughout the world."[8]

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At the request of the Dominions Office, a detailed commentary on Richards' articles was prepared in St. John's. This work was undertaken by a committee of two commissioners, who produced a lengthy memorandum which disputed the reporter's charges one by one. Richards, it was asserted, had ignored a number of important matters: the extent to which existing conditions were "attributable to the present form of Government"; whether a responsible government "would have been more successful"; and whether the Commission had "contributed anything substantial to meet the conditions depicted." Richards had stated the true cash value of the dole, but the amount could not be raised without putting it "above the level of remuneration of a great number of the employed people, e.g., the fishermen." To do this would make "relief almost universal," remove "nearly all incentive to work" and precipitate "an economic and social disaster...comparable with conditions in England immediately before the Poor Law Act of 1834." Richards' claims about the extent of malnutrition were likewise misleading. It was "no more widespread" than thirty years before and the "once prevalent" beri-beri had been "stamped out." By the same token, Richards' figure on the number of civil servants was incorrect and his comparison of the total of civil service salaries and the amount paid out in dole was "absurd."[9]

Similar ideas were expressed in a note written at the Dominions Office by P.A. Clutterbuck, who had been secretary of the Amulree Royal Commission and a key decision-maker on Newfoundland ever since. Clutterbuck's figures showed, as of May 1939, a relief population of 80,684 men, women and children, including the able-bodied, sick, aged and infirm. The figure for the same month in 1938 had been 57,100, while in 1934 the May total had been 72,691. Clutterbuck's figures also showed that the highest monthly relief total under the Commission had been registered in March, 1934, when the government had 85,050 dependents. Yet the figure of 84,659 recorded in April 1939, was not far behind the record. This total, moreover, represented a considerable setback from the 1938 monthly high of 63,995, also recorded in April. Nevertheless, Clutterbuck disputed Morley Richards' inference from the cash value of relief payments, namely that "those in receipt of public relief" were "in a condition bordering on starvation." Relief in Newfoundland, Clutterbuck argued, was "intended primarily not as a full living allowance but as a supplementary allowance enabling recipients to provide themselves with such necessities of life" as they could not "grow or produce themselves." In failing to take account of this, Richards had exaggerated the plight of those on the dole:

> With all these natural advantages there is no real comparison between unemployment conditions in Newfoundland and in England, and it is scarcely surprising that the scale on which relief is granted in Newfoundland should be lower than that at home. In Newfoundland the items on which the dole orders are mostly expended are flour, sugar, tea and salt-pork: these items added to home-grown produce and the resources available from the sea and the country-side, provide the man in receipt of relief with

> an adequate basis for subsistence. (It is indeed the view of the Commission that people can subsist without impairment to their health even on the dole rations alone; but the point is one which it would perhaps be as well not to make, since (a) it is qualified by the proviso that such people would not be able to undertake any hard work or expose themselves to severe winter conditions (b) it does not...apply to the South West coast, the most depressed area in the Island)...It cannot be denied that in certain individual cases, and sometimes in the whole of a small settlement where there is no local leadership and no initiative, the people have failed to take advantage of the natural resources available to them, with the result that their condition is altogether deplorable; but these are extreme cases and Mr. Morley Richards appears to have taken some of these and presented them as typical, thereby giving a distorted and misleading picture. His further allegation that those on relief are in many cases without sufficient clothing is also exaggerated. It is true that in the case of the able-bodied the dole orders provide food and household necessities only and not clothing; but nearly all able-bodied men receive opportunities for earning during the summer months and the clothing of themselves and their families is replenished from their earnings during those months. This applies both to those (the great majority) who go on relief only during the off season, as well as to the small minority who are in receipt of relief all the year round. Further, in cases of genuine distress, e.g. where children have not sufficiently warm clothing or suitable footwear to enable them to go to school in the winter, special issues are made by the Department of Public Health and Welfare. The allegation that shortage of clothing is shown by the number of cases in which sacking is worn is also misleading: flour sacking can be made into a very good coat or skirt for rough wear and is quite often worn in place of overalls (which with long rubber boots, are the common wear in Newfoundland).[10]

From this self-interested, chilling analysis, Clutterbuck next surveyed what had been achieved in Newfoundland since 1934. This in turn led him to the claim that the Commission had to be judged not only by what it had done but by what it had prevented:

> Had trade conditions remained reasonably stable, the improvements made under the Commission in all these directions would have had a cumulative effect, the result of which would have been seen not only in a higher standard of living and improved social conditions but also in a steady decrease in the number of those seeking public relief. But, unfortunately, the tide of recovery started by the Commission was abruptly checked last year by the opposing tide of trade recession. Had Newfoundland been left to her own resources, this opposing tide would have engulfed the Island: as matters stood, a virtual deadlock resulted. To point out in these circumstances that the unemployment figures today are as high as they were five years ago is no proof that the Commission have failed. On the contrary, the true question is what would be the state of the Island now if the Commission had not been there to stand between it and disaster.[11]

Whatever the debating merits of this historical speculation, it is indicative of just how much by 1939 the British in Newfoundland had been thrown on the defensive.

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Clutterbuck's detached logic is jarring when placed beside the anguished tone of contemporary documents emanating from rural Newfoundland. From the stiff collar world of Whitehall and the flour sack shirt world of the outport, very different messages were now being sent. In August, 1939, for example, resolutions were adopted at Harbour Grace, Conception Bay, and forwarded to the Commission of Government. These made the case that the working people of the country, having "suffered through ten years of near idleness" and with "their resources...worn threadbare," now had "nothing facing them but slow starvation." Conditions among the local unemployed had "become desperate," and with another winter approaching and promising still greater hardship, the time had come to take "a determined stand."[12] Specifically, the government was asked to increase the dole and to put people to work building roads and wharves in the area. Less politely, Harris Hill, the secretary of an Unemployed Ex-Servicemen's Association, had warned earlier in the year that out of work veterans were being "driven to desperation" and that "in any other country a solution would have been found, if not by those responsible, then by these outlawed men themselves."[13] Unquestionably, J.H. Gorvin was a man of energy and imagination, but as he plunged into his labours there was good reason to believe that he must produce significant results quickly. Considering the scope of the transformation he was seeking to effect, this was a tall order.

Not even a cameo appearance in the country by the King and Queen at the end of their celebrated North American tour was enough to dispel the prevailing gloom. Newfoundlanders were told early in January that the royal couple would visit them on 17 June.[14] Much was subsequently made in the local press of this unprecedented event, and the triumphant progress of the King and Queen through Canada and the United States was followed closely and with great anticipation. When Newfoundland's turn finally came, a busy programme was efficiently carried out in the St. John's area. But both privately and publicly a good many sour notes were sounded. The government feared demonstrations among the unemployed and worried over the security arrangements for their majesties. In a published letter, L.E. Emerson, the commissioner for justice, defended the employment of "permanent Special Constables" on the grounds that a reigning sovereign had never visited Newfoundland before and that those in charge of the forces of law and order had therefore to take account of "entirely new" contingencies. It was not enough to rely on the unquestioned "loyalty of Newfoundlanders." Indeed — and here is a statement perhaps best read between the lines — "to substitute loyalty for efficiency would be the height of absurdity." Accordingly, the government had rejected representations from the Newfoundland Board of Trade and the St. John's Municipal Council that the programme be revised to allow the King and Queen to pass through Bowring Park, a diversion that would have taken all of an extra ten minutes. There was "no portion of the route," Emerson ventured, "which would call for more professional units than this particular area. The trees, the shrubs, the winding paths, all of which go to make for its beauty cause the most alarm in my mind, for reasons

I do not need to elaborate."[15] By the same token and at royal request, the government a few days later passed legislation to prohibit the indiscriminate firing of guns, a customary Newfoundland form of greeting, by way of salute to the King and Queen.[16]

In the wake of the royal visit, one correspondent of the local press noted "the lack of cheering and of visible enthusiasm, the silence that was observed at times in the crowds that lined the route along which their Majesties passed."[17] The commentator attributed this to the fact that by nature the Newfoundlander did not "wear...his heart upon his sleeve."[18] But another observer blamed the apparently cool reception on the way the royal couple were transported from place to place — at high speed and in a car specially imported for the occasion that afforded only a glimpse of them as they were whisked by. This had led to "disappointment too deep to be understood by any who did not witness it."[19] Nor did Newfoundlanders hear much from the King himself, although it must be remembered that he stuttered and that public speaking was a great ordeal for him. In any event, the speech which he broadcast ran to only five brief paragraphs. He noted the "severe economic stress" of recent years, but forecast that their "qualities of courage and endurance" would enable Newfoundlanders "once more to surmount their difficulties."[20] With this attempt at inspirational words, his speechwriter had perhaps made the best of an awkward subject.

If there was a sign of hope in the Newfoundland of the first half of 1939, apart from Gorvin's appointment, it was to be found in advances in communication and transportation, which were drawing the country closer to the world family of nations. In January a radio telephone link was established between Newfoundland and Canada through the cooperation of the Canadian Marconi Company and the Avalon Telephone Company. This gave Newfoundlanders for the first time direct voice communication not only with the neighbouring dominion but through Canada with many other countries of the world. The new service was inaugurated with an elaborate ceremony broadcast by the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation and featuring an exchange of greetings between Governor Sir Humphrey Walwyn of Newfoundland and Lord Tweedsmuir, the governor general of Canada.[21] Just over two months later radio station VONF (Voice of Newfoundland) of the Broadcasting Corporation of Newfoundland, itself a recent creation of the Commission of Government, came on the air in a ceremony carried not only on the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation but by the British Broadcasting Corporation as well.[22]

Then in June regularly scheduled transatlantic airmail service was inaugurated between New York and Southhampton via a seaplane base at Botwood.[23] The Botwood base and a landing field at nearby Hattie's Camp on the plateau above Gander Lake had been opened up as a result of a 1935 agreement between the United Kingdom, Canada, the Irish Free State and Newfoundland to cooperate in a programme of experimental flights across the Atlantic to test the feasibility of regularly scheduled service. Subsequently, these countries and the United States

had agreed to undertake this work jointly: the first flying boats passed through Botwood in July, 1937. Regularly scheduled transatlantic service using wheeled aircraft posed greater difficulties, but in the summer of 1939 paving was completed on the runways at the Newfoundland Airport, as the facility being built near Hattie's Camp had been named.[24]

Yet another bright spot on the Newfoundland scene in the summer of 1939 was the iron ore mining operation at Bell Island, Conception Bay. This enterprise had slumped in the early 1930s but after Hitler had come to power the Dominion Steel and Coal Corporation, owners of the mines, had found a big market for their product in Germany. They did not hesitate to sell. Nazi rearmament had revived Bell Island; Nazi war would revive Newfoundland.

When the British ultimatum to Germany ran out on Sunday, 3 September 1939, Newfoundland was at war along with the mother country. There was no parliament to decide in St. John's and as in 1914 the British action automatically brought Newfoundland into the war. For its part, the Commission hurriedly brought into operation an apparatus of wartime administration under the terms of an Act for the Defence of Newfoundland that had become law on 1 September. Regulations issued under this Act the same day dealt with the control of aliens; navigation by sea and air; the prevention of espionage, sabotage, signalling, etc.; the control of population, vehicles and lights; the prevention of enemy propaganda; censorship; the control of firearms, exports and imports, and foodstuffs and prices; and miscellaneous other matters. On 15 September, using its powers under the same Act, the government also introduced foreign exchange control regulations.

In keeping with a defence plan adopted in 1936, the Commission had decided in the spring of 1939 to create a small home defence force. Captain Claude Fanning-Evans of the Durham Light Infantry was subsequently recruited to train it. In October, after he had arrived in the country, legislation was passed to create the new unit, to be known as the Newfoundland Militia. When the war began, responsibility for defence matters lay with the commissioner for home affairs and education but this duty was quickly transferred to the commissioner for justice, L.E. Emerson, whose influence within the government now grew apace. The immediate financial consequences of the war were explained on 20 November by the commissioner for finance, J.H. Penson, in a broadcast speech before the Newfoundland Board of Trade. As part of its contribution to the war effort, Newfoundland would henceforth only look to the United Kingdom for grants-in-aid sufficient to cover its debt payments and other charges there. This decision would require both retrenchment and new taxes but the reconstruction programme the government had started would be maintained. In truth, however, J.H. Gorvin's days in Newfoundland were numbered and his plans and dreams would go with him. By creating new employment opportunities and justifying new priorities in spending, the war would soon permit the government to abandon Gorvin's radical approach to reconstruction, which had been forced on it in the first place and which,

as anticipated, encountered stiff business resistance. In social and economic policy, therefore, Newfoundland was fast turned in a quite new direction by the war.

Much happened in short order in Newfoundland after 3 September 1939, but the contrast with the unquestioning enthusiasm of 1914 is nonetheless striking. As in Canada, the government set out in 1939 to fight a war of limited liability. Newfoundland would be faithful and true, but her role must match her resources. In practice this meant no conscription, a small home defence force, and a recruitment policy for overseas service that directed most volunteers into the fighting forces of the United Kingdom, though Canada was also allowed to recruit in Newfoundland for her army, navy, and air force. In accordance with this approach, specially-designated Newfoundland units were in time created in the Royal Artillery and the Royal Air Force. The largest single contingent of Newfoundlanders to go overseas, however, belonged to the Newfoundland Forestry Unit, which was formed by the Commission in the autumn of 1939 at British request. From the Commission's perspective this unit, which was based mainly in Scotland, had many advantages: it exemplified patriotism, soaked up unemployment and was paid for by London.

While facilitating enlistment for service abroad, the Commission pressed on London as early as 15 September the view that the defence of the Newfoundland Airport and the Botwood seaplane base was beyond its means. The Newfoundland government's answer to this serious problem was that the facilities in question should be turned over to the Royal Canadian Air Force for the duration of the war. This proposal was firmly rejected in London, but events would soon show the wisdom of the Commission's stand. In an age of air and submarine warfare, Newfoundland manifestly could not defend herself and, as it turned out, the United Kingdom could not defend her either. The defence of Newfoundland was, on the other hand, integral to the defence of Canada and the United States, a situation those countries could not but acknowledge. Beset by difficulties of her own, Canada had abandoned Newfoundland financially in 1933 but on 8 September 1939, Mackenzie King told the House of Commons that "the integrity of Newfoundland and Labrador" were "essential to the security of Canada."[25] Henceforth, the relations of the two countries would hinge on that vital consideration. Newfoundland depended on Canada, but Canada now also depended on Newfoundland.

On 20 March 1940, while the "phoney war" was still in progress, L.E. Emerson gave the regular weekly Tuesday night recruiting broadcast over VONF. He chose as his subject "Newfoundland at War," and he used the occasion to review the history of the country during the previous six months. Newfoundland's record of service, he said, was "certainly not unworthy," considering the country's resources and population. Moreover, it compared well with what was being done "elsewhere in the Empire." Newfoundlanders were "fighting a crusade of Christianity against the forces of evil."[26] Perhaps they were, but what Emerson did not say was that in the process the war had given the government a new lease on life and had brought

the country back from the edge of the economic abyss. That was fortunate for all concerned, but in truth Newfoundlanders had only just begun to pack up their troubles.

I am grateful to the late A.P. Bates for his comments on this paper.

Notes

[1]For a detailed account of the background to and history of the Commission of Government, see my *Newfoundland in the North Atlantic World 1929-1949* (Kingston and Montreal, 1988).

[2]*Newfoundland Royal Commission 1933: Report*, Cmd. 4480 (London, 1933), 195.

[3]*Evening Telegram*, St. John's, 15 July 1939, 7.

[4]The agreement was embodied in legislation passed by the Commission on 31 December 1938. *Acts of the Honourable Commission of Government of Newfoundland 1938* (St. John's, 1938), 515-51.

[5]*Evening Telegram*, St. John's, 27 July 1939, 6.

[6]*Daily Express*, London, 27 March 1939, 10.

[7]*Ibid.*, 29 March 1939, 8.

[8]*Ibid.*, 3 March 1939, 9.

[9]Public Record Office, Kew, England, Dominions Office Records (DO) 35/723/N2/41, "Commentary on 'Daily Express' Articles on Newfoundland Affairs of March 27th to April 1st," encl. in Walwyn to Inskip, 11 May 1939. Transcripts of Crown-copyright records in the Public Record Office appear by permission of the Controller of H.M. Stationery Office.

[10]DO 35/740/157/53.

[11]*Ibid.*

[12]*Evening Telegram*, St. John's, 14 August 1939, 6.

[13]*Ibid.*, 8 May 1939, 6.

[14]*Ibid* 4 January 1939, 5.

[15]*Ibid.*, 6 June 1939, 5.

[16]*Acts of the Honourable Commission of Government of Newfoundland 1939* (St. John's, 1939), 76.

[17]*Evening Telegram*, 22 June 1939, 5.

[18]*Ibid.*, 6.

[19]*Ibid.*, 23 June 1939, 6.

[20]*Ibid.*, 7.

[21]*Ibid.*, 11 January 1939, 5.

[22]*Ibid.*, 14 March 1939, 5.

[23]*Ibid.*, 28 June 1939, 4.

[24]*Ibid.*, 17 July 1939, 4. For a description of the Newfoundland Airport see *ibid.*, 9 June 1939, 5.

[25]Canada, House of Commons, *Debates*, Fifth (Special War) Session, Eighteenth Parliament, 8 September 1939, 35.

[26]*Evening Telegram*, St. John's, 20 March 1940, 9.