WILLIAM COAKER AND THE LOSS OF FAITH: TOWARD AND BEYOND CONSENSUS IN THE SUSPENSION OF NEWFOUNDLAND'S SELF-GOVERNMENT, 1925-1933

GENE LONG

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William Coaker and the Loss of Faith: Toward and Beyond Consensus in the Suspension of Newfoundland's Self-Government, 1925-1933

By

© Gene Long, B.A.

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Department of History
Memorial University of Newfoundland

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ABSTRACT

This thesis attempts to show that the loss of Newfoundland's self-government in 1933 was the result of an historical process rooted in the political experience of the country which can be identified as having its origins in the disillusionment first expressed by William Coaker in 1925. As leader of the Fishermen's Protective Union whose political career followed a parallel course of decline with that of the country as a whole, particularly as the state failed time and again to effectively regulate the country's fishery, Coaker conceived an idea of government by commission which would come to stand as a singular contribution to the evolution of Newfoundland's political and constitutional history.

In order to establish a context in which the events of this period can be assessed it is necessary to consider both the historiographic reference points which reveal significant gaps in the treatment of the relevant issues, and the longer historical patterns which gave rise to a profound political malaise. The country's crisis may be defined as one of collective self-confidence in which over time, as Coaker continued to advocate a radical proposition for political reform, others came to adopt his views as their own, without including his prescriptions for retaining some measure of democratic practice.

In the end Coaker objected vigourously to what he

identified as an anti-democratic distortion of his original proposal. But by this time the idea of a commission government, while bearing his imprint, had come to take on its own attributes derived from the political discourse of the period, which included an extensive process of review through the proceedings of the Amulree Royal Commission. It is in the light of a close reading of the primary Newfoundland sources, and in particular those which illuminate the course of Coaker's idea, that the suspension of self-government may be seen as the end result of a protracted search for a solution to the country's unending struggle to move forward.

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Introduction

In the fall of 1925 William Coaker addressed delegates to the annual convention of the Fishermen's Protective Union (FPU) for the last time as president of the organization.[1] It was a year and a half since the election of a government led by the self-described "plain man of business", Walter Monroe.[2] In his address Coaker railed against what he called a "high-wayman's administration" which he said was doomed to be "destroyed" because of the hostility toward it throughout the country. The partisan tone was typical of the opening proceedings at FPU conventions, but on this occasion the president's speech contained a dramatic proposal which went much beyond the normal parameters. He called for the formation of a party that would appeal to the electorate on a single issue: "passing a law to place the government in the hands of nine men for ten years, electing the nine men somewhat on the lines pursued for years of selecting the Executive."[3]

Eight years later, in the spring of 1933, Walter Monroe

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[1]The convention was held on the last weekend of November, although its proceedings are dated December 25th in the summary which appears in W.F. Coaker, ed. Twenty Years of the Fishermen's Protective Union (St. John's 1932), p. 236. See reports of Fishermen's Advocate, 4 December and 11 December, 1925.

[2]S.J.R. Noel, Politics in Newfoundland (Toronto 1971), p. 179.

[3]The method of election would be based on denominational representation. For an excerpt from Coaker's speech which clarifies the context and substance of the proposal, see Appendix A.

appeared before the Amulree Royal Commission and testified that he "heard it said that the people generally were sick of politics and would like nothing better than a form of commission government for ten years."[4] He added that he was doubtful whether this was so and thought public opinion should be tested with a party formed on such a programme and a general election held on the question. Monroe was being disingenuous in ascribing to others support for an idea which had come to represent the favoured political option of most of the merchant elite. But while there may have been demonstrably broad acceptance of the proposition, it is significant that the currency which William Coaker's idea had taken on in the intervening years since 1925, was presented by a leading public figure in such tentative terms.

When the Amulree Commission presented its report in November 1933, a document which Neville Chamberlain, then the Chancellor of the Exchequer, described as "perhaps one of the most remarkable and interesting ever drawn up in the history of (the British) Empire,"[5] there was no provision for popular sanction of its recommendations, nor was there to be a retention of any form of democratic franchise in the proposed new regime. The Royal Commission, which was established as a

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[4]Charles A. Magrath papers, Provincial Archives of Newfoundland and Labrador (PANL), Reel 2, 24 March. Monroe's testimony was not recorded verbatim, but presented in a text prepared by the Commission secretary, P.A. Clutterbuck.

[5]House of Commons, Parliamentary Debates, vol. 284 (7 December 1933), col. 1847.

condition of British financial assistance in meeting Newfoundland's debt payments due at the end of 1932, was given a warrant with deceivingly simple terms of reference: "To examine into the future of Newfoundland and, in particular, to report on the financial situation and prospects therein."[6]

When the Royal Commission published its report, it was widely seen to have given voice to a popular call for the introduction of a new form of government. In doing so the Commission reflected a point of convergence in the positions being advanced by Coaker and Monroe, two men who otherwise had very different political careers and accordingly different points of view. To the extent that such a commonality of opinion existed, the creation of a commission form of government may truly be seen to have been an undertaking initiated from within Newfoundland. But in its recommendation to suspend indefinitely the Letters Patent defining the constitutional authority of the country as a self-governing Dominion, the Amulree report imposed a logic of its own, and as such contributed an essential exogenous element to the "situation and prospects" which it examined in Newfoundland.

Walter Monroe, like most others, was enthusiastic in accepting without reservation the verdict of the Royal Commission.[7] William Coaker, standing nearly as alone as when

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[6]Newfoundland Royal Commission, 1933, Report (Hereinafter described as Amulree), p. 1.

[7]Daily News, 30 November 1933.

he first proposed his idea of commission government, rejected the scheme recommended in the report as one which differed "materially" from that which he had been promoting intermittently for eight years.[8] Coaker's objections rested essentially on the criticism that the proposed form of government would amount to "despotism" without any form of elected representation, and that in any case, any such fundamental change in the constitution of the country should not proceed "without first having the matter submitted to the people." In this, Coaker found himself confronting circumstances replete with multiple ironies and contradictions. As the primary advocate of a proposal which had come full circle in a form he believed would haunt those who accepted it as "traitors to the land that bore them", there was a drama in this historic moment which rendered his own position as that of a tragic progenitor desperately trying to disown a legacy.

There are numerous important issues surrounding the events of this period which have either been overlooked or mistakenly or inadequately addressed in the literature of twentieth-century Newfoundland politics. The role played by William Coaker is one of these, as is the genesis and course of the idea of commission government and the interaction between public discourse in Newfoundland and the Amulree Commission, whose report was ultimately informed in a central

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[8]The full text of Coaker's response to the report, as contained in a letter to the Evening Telegram, 23 November 1933, is attached as Appendix B.

way by the testimony it received. This thesis will attempt first to identify the issues raised implicitly and otherwise by the historiography, and then proceed by way of background to Coaker's intervention in 1925, and the subsequent evolution of his proposal, to examine the milieu of 1933 in which the Amulree process was played out and the context in which commission government became the preferred option.

Chapter 1

Issues and Non-issues in the Literature

An essential point of departure for a discussion of the literature on the collapse of self-government must be the seminal historical work of Ian McDonald.[1] While the limitations of this study are apparent in its periodization, namely, that except for a brief concluding chapter, its detailed analysis ends when the actual "end" begins, it is nonetheless McDonald who most clearly demarcates the line of continuity between the decline of William Coaker and the FPU and the general failure of the country in 1933. McDonald's central assertion is that Newfoundland's mercantile elite had never accepted responsible government as anything more than "an expensive luxury" and that this, combined with their refusal to countenance any attempt to regulate the fishery, left the country with "no common set of aspirations to unite the whole."[2] McDonald specifically and correctly identifies the fiasco of merchant opposition to the 1919 fishery regulations introduced by Coaker as Minister of Fisheries in the first Government of Richard Squires as the pivotal episode which triggered Coaker's personal disillusionment and generated an

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[1]Ian McDonald, To Each His Own, William Coaker and the Fishermen's Protective Union in Newfoundland Politics, 1908-1925 (St. John's 1987).

[2]Ibid., pp. 142-145. McDonald also emphasizes the conservative and debilitating role played by the Catholic Church in its opposition to Coaker.

ongoing crisis in the capacity of the state to function.[3]

While McDonald's analysis is essentially unimpeachable, his conclusions vis-a-vis the loss of self-government remain to be substantiated by a closer study of the years following 1925. His observations on the merchant disposition toward responsible government are critical to his thesis and require further assessment in light of later events.[4] McDonald makes reference to Coaker's 1925 appeal for a commission form of government and notes that this was re-stated in 1929, but there is no substantial comment on the intervening years or the reception this proposal received and the impact of its circulation following 1929.[5] It is worth noting that in an essay examining what he called the FPU's balance of power strategy, McDonald offers a comparative assessment of Coaker's early ideas on politics and government with those of contemporaneous populist movements in western Canada. He suggests

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[3]Ibid., Ch, 6, pp. 86-106.

[4]Ibid., for example, pp. 19 and 118. In McDonald's PhD. thesis, of which the monograph is an edited version, there are more detailed references to support this view. "William Coaker and the Fishermen's Protective Union in Newfoundland politics, 1908 - 1925", London 1971, Centre for Newfoundland Studies (CNS). See for example, p. 126 and p. 306.

[5]Ibid., pp. 133-34. There is one curious reference in McDonald's work to a submission made by Coaker to the Amulree Commission in relation to the fishery regulations, see p. 110 and footnote #21. In his PhD thesis, the footnote indicates the comments on Coaker's submission are based on a draft contained in Coaker's papers (CNS). No such draft can be located in these papers and while there is evidence Coaker did make a presentation to Amulree (see Chapter 4 below), there is no record or indication of this in the Magrath papers.

that although there were similarities with, for instance, Henry Wise Wood and the Non-Partisan League, which advocated replacing political parties by organized interest groups, Coaker did not call for the abolition of the traditional party system.[6] This of course stands in direct contradiction to what became the eventual trajectory of Coaker's political thinking, and illustrates the shortcomings of any account which does not see his career through its later years.[7]

The lack of attention to Coaker's role in the events leading up to 1933 is evident in the two other foremost scholarly works of Newfoundland politics in this century. S.J.R. Noel, who offers the most thorough consideration of the period as seen against a backdrop which he traces to 1908 and the defeat of Prime Minister Robert Bond, describes Coaker as suffering from "uncharacteristic ennui" after 1921. In a statement which in part must be seen to have influenced later writing he observed: "He was never again a radical force in politics."[8] To this it would not be an overstatement to reply that indeed, Coaker's boldest initiative was yet to come.

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[6]Ian McDonald, "W.F Coaker and the Balance of Power Strategy: The Fishermen's Protective Union in Newfoundland Politics", in J. Hiller and P. Neary, eds., Newfoundland in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries: Essays in Interpretation (Toronto 1980). All further references to McDonald are of To Each His Own, op. cit.

[7]An essential reference point for any comparative assessment of Coaker's views with movements of the period elsewhere is the work of C.B. Macpherson, Democracy in Alberta: Social Credit and the Party System (Toronto 1953).

[8]Noel, Politics in Newfoundland, p. 148

While Noel's discussion of what he describes as the "unconditional surrender" of self-government is generally thorough, there is one noteworthy error in his reflection on the constitutional issues raised by the report of the Amulree Commission.

Noel did not describe the Amulree report accurately when he suggested it would be only "a theoretical possibility" to consider options for some form of representation which might have been retained. This, he claims, would be pointless, because "the report does not discuss any alternative constitutional forms to the one proposed."[9] In fact the Amulree report did contain a fairly detailed, if not satisfactory, discussion of precisely this kind.[10] It would appear that the report's discussion of these "alternatives" was based on a memorandum on the subject prepared by P.A. Clutterbuck, the secretary to the Royal Commission.[11] What is especially interesting about this document is that it shows that as late as September, 1933, long after the Commission had heard from its many witnesses, there was no certain direction as to what the final report would recommend. Furthermore, it contains the very relevant submission by the secretary that, in his considered opinion, retaining some form of representativeness in any change to the country's constitution was, for a variety of

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[9]Ibid., p. 220.

[10]Amulree, pp. 192-197.

[11]This document is attached as Appendix B.

reasons, desirable.

Peter Neary's recent work presents an indispensable contribution to our understanding of the unfolding of these events.[12] But unfortunately, as James Hiller has observed, the point of view is "from Whitehall and Government House" and consequently neglects to give serious consideration to the expressed feelings and opinions, which are ample in the primary sources, on the momentous questions of the day as they were seen by the people of Newfoundland.[13] Neary's chapter on the period 1929 to 1934 is only a fraction of a much larger study of the actual period of the Commission Government and the country's evolution toward Confederation in 1949. It is apparent that because of his exhaustive attention to the minutiae of diplomatic and administrative reference sources, his perspective privileges non-Newfoundland material. That this approach has its limitations is made clear in the first chapter. One significant illustration of this is when Coaker is dismissed as a non-actor who was suffering from "senescence", even though the three members of the Royal Commission were all at least ten years his senior.[14]

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[12]P. Neary, Newfoundland in the North Atlantic World, 1929-1930 (Montreal 1988).

[13]J. Hiller, "Twentieth Century Newfoundland Politics: Some Recent Literature", Acadiensis, 20 (Spring 1991), p. 191.

[14]Neary, Newfoundland, p. 42. Coaker was born in 1871 (McDonald, p. 15) while according to Neary, p. 16, the three members of the Amulree Commission were septuagenarians. During this period Coaker did complain of ill health and offered this as the reason he was spending more time at an estate he had

Because his work generally neglects local sources, Neary exaggerates the extent to which the Amulree report was a product of "the normal Whitehall government machinery."[15] Without referring to the testimony heard by the Commission, Neary states that government by commission had been advocated by "nearly all the witnesses".[16] This assertion, which has become somewhat of an unfortunate refrain in the literature, cannot be reconciled with a reading of the transcripts of the Commission's proceedings.[17] The Amulree report itself is the most likely source for this: "That it was essential that the country should be given a rest from politics for a period of years was indeed recognised by the great majority of witnesses who appeared before us."[18] This is not an adequate summary of

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purchased in Jamaica. See for example, Fishermen's Advocate, 20 February, 1931. But while continuing to travel extensively outside the country as he did through most of his public life, Coaker, in addition to being a Minister without portfolio until the defeat of Squires in 1932, maintained a prolific output of published material and thereby an important level of engagement and influence with the events of the day.

[15]Ibid., p. 41.

[16]Ibid., p. 31.

[17]Magrath papers, reels 1 and 2. Charles A. Magrath was the Canadian nominee to the Royal Commission, along with William Stavert appointed by Newfoundland and Baron Amulree appointed by Britain. (For biographies, see Neary, pp. 15-16.) In its report, the Commission stated it had held "about 100 formal sittings", heard from 260 witnesses, and received "a large number of letters and memoranda from all parts of the country." (Amulree, p. 2) While these papers do not contain a complete record of all the interviews, they represent an immensely under-utilized resource for the study of this period.

[18]Amulree, p. 195.

the range of the testimony, especially when the report itself recognizes, in its discussion of the alternatives referred to above, that the proposals received included various suggestions for "modifications" to the country's constitution. It is most likely, that for the Commissioners, aside from its self-serving value, this statement was based on a reading of one of the documents prepared by the seemingly ubiquitous Clutterbuck, who presented a tally sheet of constitutional opinions put before the Commission. For present purposes, it will suffice to note that this list cannot be and should not have been taken at face value because its contents do not accord with the actual record of proceedings.[19]

The untested validity of this received characterization of the testimony weakens Neary's account and also serves to skew the logic of certain of its descriptions. The only reference Neary makes to the testimony before the Commission, is to cite the opinions of Leonard Outerbridge who, as a member of a merchant's committee, advocated the publication of pauper lists and "the disenfranchisement at the next general

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[19]Clutterbuck's list shows 10 witnesses in favour of Confederation with Canada, 10 favouring continuation of the present system of government, and 45 in support of Commission Government, Magrath papers, reel 2. The list is reproduced as an appendix to an unpublished paper by P. Fenwick, "Witnesses to the Lord" (1984) CNS. Fenwick interprets the evidence as "the overwhelming majority" of witnesses wanting Commission Government. It must be noted that this list, which is undated, is in conflict with a list attached to the memo prepared by Clutterbuck (Appendix C), which was prepared at a later date and designed to supersede the former. See Chapter Four for discussion.

election of the persons named on them."[20] Such evidence is conveniently used to support McDonald's argument of the hostility of the mercantile elite toward responsible government. The problem with this is that with such a comment, the witness was presupposing the continuation of general elections, albeit with a limited franchise, and this could hardly be construed to warrant counting as an opinion in favour of the total suspension of self-government.

There are also problematic aspects of Neary's interpretive framework, as for example, his statement that Prime Minister Frederick Alderdice "swallowed the bitter medicine served up by the Amulree Commission manfully."[21] In fact, Alderdice, as the very first witness before the Commission, was also the first to advocate a commission form of government because "the existing constitution left much to be desired."[22] In any event there was not a great loss for Alderdice personally to suffer, for as Neary clearly shows, the quid pro quo of his acquiescence as government leader was his appointment as one of the first members of the new regime.[23] There is certainly nothing in Alderdice's speeches in the House of Assembly at the time to indicate anything "manfully" was required or being exhibited on his part.[24] A

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[20]Neary, Newfoundland, p. 42.

[21]Ibid., p. 42.

[22]Magrath papers, reel 2, March 20.

[23]Neary, Newfoundland, pp. 32-35.

[24]See discussion below, Chapter Four.

perhaps more curious example of the view behind Neary's narrative comes at the conclusion of the first chapter when he states that at the end of the day, when Amulree's report was accepted and a new era was to begin, Newfoundland's "ship of state" had been "salvaged".[25] It may be that the results of the Amulree process could be described as a salvage operation, but to suggest the ship of state was uninterrupted in its course denies the essential fact of the loss of popular sovereignty, which could hardly be taken as an incidental aspect of the turn of events.[26]

There is one other important issue in Neary's account which is in need of correction, in part because it relates to the role played by Coaker and also because it is a common error elsewhere in the literature. Neary presents the election of Alderdice in 1932 as though there was one campaign issue, namely Alderdice's pledge to appoint a committee to examine the feasibility of "placing the country under a form of Commission Government for a period of years."[27] In the first

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[25]Neary, Newfoundland, p. 43.

[26] At the end of his second chapter Neary describes the inauguration of the new regime in 1934 as the beginning of a "noble experiment". Ibid., p. 74. Such a view may be contrasted with that of Harold Innis, who in 1937, wrote: "The writer confesses a strong bias on this matter and he cannot refrain from a profound sense of shock when he saw the "Colonial Building" (House of Assembly) filled with office desks... Is Newfoundland a significant blind spot on the democracy of Western civilization?" in "The Amulree Report: A Review", in The Canadian Journal of Economics and Political Science, 3 (1937).

[27]Neary, Newfoundland, p. 14.

place, Neary does not mention that it was Coaker who persuaded Alderdice to include this in what appears to be essentially an addendum to an otherwise fairly detailed campaign programme.[28] Furthermore, the election of 1932, contrary to Neary's suggestion, and much to the disappointment of Coaker, was not contested on the question or the promise of commission government. For a number of reasons, particularly whether any mandate can be seen to have existed, this is an important issue which bears closer examination and will be explored further below.[29]

James Overton has written two essays which represent a significant contribution to a consideration of the issues under review here, particularly as he deliberately sets out to examine both the local conditions of the period and the substance of political opinion in Newfoundland in relation to the findings of the Amulree Commission.[30] Although he asks many of the most pertinent questions and brings a generally refreshing theoretical orientation to the discussion, his work

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[28]See William Alderdice, Election Manifesto, 1932 (CNS)

[29]See Chapter Four. The same description of the election of 1932 is contained in Encyclopedia of Newfoundland and Labrador, Vol. 1 (St. John's 1981), p. 717. In an unpublished essay examining this election, James Thistle, in a survey of the country's newspapers, clearly shows the peripheral extent to which the commission idea was an issue in the campaign, "The Election of 1932 and the Suspension of Democracy", 1990.

[30]J. Overton, "Economic Crisis and the End of Democracy: Politics in Newfoundland During the Great Depression", Labour/Le Travail, 26 (Fall 1990) and "Public Relief and Social Unrest in Newfoundland in the 1930s: An Evaluation of the Ideas of Piven and Cloward", in G.S. Kealey, ed., Class, Gender, and Region: Essays in Canadian Historical Sociology (St. John's 1988).

regrettably perpetuates a number of the historical misassertions enumerated above and in addition contains very problematic internal inconsistencies. In his essay on "The End of Democracy", Overton states that in 1932 Alderdice had "but one election pledge"[31] and again, that he was elected on "the sole issue" of commission government.[32] This is simply not the case and such a distortion is compounded by the statement that "most who appeared before the [Amulree] Commission were asked about the form of government which they thought best for the country", which is also not borne out by the evidence. Overton's account is further weakened as he cites (from a secondary source) the erroneous numbers in favour of commission as indicated by Clutterbuck.[33]

Overton is, however, the only scholar to put William Coaker squarely in the picture during this period as he undertakes to explore "the attitude of the working classes, labour leaders and labour's political representatives to the crisis of the early 1930s."[34] In the end though Overton seems to lose his way, and while crediting both Coaker and the young J.R. Smallwood with first proposing the commission government idea in the 1920s, he traces an eventual course in which the

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[31]Overton, "Economic Crisis", p. 109.

[32]Ibid., p. 91.

[33]Ibid., p. 114. The secondary source is Fenwick, "Witnesses".

[34]Ibid., p. 86.

Evening Telegram of 1931 and the merchant politicians of 1932, in the wake of the violent riots of that Spring, preside over a mood in which "the anti-democratic sentiment which had been smouldering burst into flame."[35] From this, Overton proceeds to argue, evidently without being mindful of his originally stated purpose and the evidence he presents of the central role of "labour's leaders", that "the national ruling class handed the reins of power to their British counterparts."[36]

There are at least two significant problems with Overton's account. First, he ultimately does not adequately address the nature of the tension between the elites and the poor and working classes. Part of the difficulty with this has to rest with the ambiguous position Coaker straddles as a figure who was ostensibly a representative of one class, but who, by this time, near the end of his career, carried bona fide credentials of the other. A further area of confusion is apparent in Overton's treatment of the riots of 1932 and the issue of their "class character". In his essay on relief and public policy, Overton goes to some lengths to demonstrate the "political dimension" of unrest in Newfoundland throughout the period: "Once the power of the organized unemployed had been demonstrated, those ruling the country were in constant fear

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[35]Ibid., p. 109. An analysis of opinion in 1933 will show that there could not have been a "flame" of such feeling in 1932.

[36]Ibid., p. 123.

that further violence might break out."[37] On the one hand Overton makes a persuasive case in illustrating the manifest agency of the oppressed sectors of the population, but in his second essay, he emphasizes the role played by the merchants in the storming of the Colonial Building in April, who were in turn made "very uneasy" by the violence.[38] In this critical event, which led directly to the defeat of Richard Squires and the election of Alderdice, it is as though he cannot resolve whether it was the "organized unemployed" or the merchants who were responsible for the unrest which laid the ground for further calls for commission government.

Secondly, in Overton's view, it was the issue of providing relief which became central to the growth of "anti-democratic thought".[39] In this he essentially ignores the performance and corruption of the Squires regime and its attendant alienation from the people, particularly the working class and poor of St. John's who found themselves again, as they had been previously, in an opposition alliance with the country's merchant class. Furthermore, by focusing on one issue, he fails to take into his account of the emerging general crisis of the state, the critical factor of the

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[37]Overton, "Public Relief", p. 158. There were at least four significant disturbances in 1932, in February, April, July and October. Overton's work represents the only serious consideration given to these events.

[38]Ibid., p. 112.

[39]Ibid.

continuing failure of succeeding governments, including the second effort by Coaker as a Minister without Portfolio from 1928 to 1932, to regulate the fishery. It is simply not possible to articulate a coherent analysis of the failure of self-government, particularly one which includes an assessment of the role played by Coaker, without examining this issue.[40]

Finally, it must be pointed out that Overton's treatment of J.R. Smallwood represents an immense overstatement of his influence during this period, one which Smallwood himself would have been delighted to read, especially as it his own writing which provides the main source of material. During the 1920s Smallwood, notwithstanding his self-promotion, was barely a gadfly on the scene and alternately a sycophant to Coaker and Squires. In 1927 he published a brief hagiographic monograph of Coaker's life, notable for the typical inventive descriptions of events with which he had no first hand knowledge, such as the elocution of Coaker's first ever public speech to a group of fishermen.[41] Overton should have simply

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[40]Despite such problems with his account, Overton does make a number of worthwhile points, including the observation that the Royal Commission "both reflected and helped shape a consensus." Ibid., p. 115. This not insignificant dynamic is discussed in Chapter Four.

[41]J.R. Smallwood, Coaker of Newfoundland, The Man Who Led the Deep-Sea Fishermen to Political Power (St. John's 1927). It is interesting to note that there is evidence Coaker sent Smallwood, who was in London, three hundred dollars to pay for a press run of 3,000 copies of this work. Smallwood wrote Coaker pleading for him to wire money as he had a publisher who would take his manuscript, which he would write if Coaker agreed, on a promise of guaranteed distribution of 2,000 copies, for which the F.P.U. would be responsible. It is not

accepted the view he cites of Richard Gwyn, Smallwood's autobiographer, who observed that at the time J.R.S. was merely a "Squires 'yes' man and a Liberal party lackey." [42]

Overton does not present any convincing evidence that Smallwood had anything to do with the formulation of the idea of government by commission. He cites an article Smallwood wrote in 1926 calling for a "special commission of intelligent men" to overhaul the public service, but the connection of this to Coaker's idea is tenuous if not non-existent.[43] More telling, Overton includes a lengthy extract from Smallwood's writing where he, again in characteristic fashion, retroactively sets himself up as the prescient visionary who, as a candidate in the election of 1932, told the voters of Bonavista not to bother voting because "I guarantee you here and now that inside of two years the House of Assembly will be closed down, the government will be turned out, and Newfoundland will be under a Royal Commission appointed by the King. I guarantee you this."[44] Like much of Smallwood's writing,

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clear in this episode exactly who was the student of the art of self-promotion. Coaker papers, letter from J.R. Smallwood, 30 December, 1926.

[42]R. Gwyn, Smallwood: The Unlikely Revolutionary (Toronto, 1972), p.98.

[43]Overton, "Economic Crisis", p. 101.

[44]Ibid., p. 111. The excerpt is from J.R. Smallwood, I Chose Canada (Toronto 1967), p. 187.

this is a study in counter-factual history.[45] It is surprising that Overton would accept Smallwood's version of history when in another instance, he is able to point out that Smallwood's detailed account of a public meeting in St. John's in 1932 actually took place in 1931.[46]

In a review of the literature which addresses the politics of this period, there is one other scholarly essay deserving consideration. Rosalie Elliot, in writing about the political scandals which destroyed the first government of Richard Squires in 1923, presents a very strong argument establishing a causal relationship between these events and the collapse of ten years later. In reviewing the impact of the report of the Hollis Walker Royal Commission of Enquiry, Elliot states: "The profound sense of moral inferiority and ineptitude that was established in 1924 left little doubt in the minds of the colony's people that they were indeed unfit to govern themselves."[47] Her clear exposition of the complex web of intrigue and corruption involving virtually all the major political figures of the day, with the notable exception

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[45]Any reader of Smallwood will be aware of his propensity to claim credit for anything he can, particularly if there is no way of challenging his account. In this case, it is difficult to imagine Smallwood telling voters on the campaign trail not to vote. But then this was the only election he ever lost, and there is something consistent in his attempt to claim credit even for this, his own defeat.

[46]Overton, "Economic Crisis", p. 103.

[47]R.M. Elliot, "Newfoundland Politics in the 1920s: The Genesis and Significance of the Hollis Walker Enquiry", in Hiller and Neary, Newfoundland, p. 199.

of Coaker and the members of the FPU, goes a long way to setting the stage for what followed.

However, in her discussion of subsequent events relating to the Amulree Commission, Elliot states unreservedly the problematic notion later taken up by Neary, that the Commission's conclusions were drawn up in Whitehall.[48] While in the strict sense this may be true insofar as the ultimate imprimatur on the Amulree report was that of the Dominions Office, it is a view which reduces a much more complicated process to a terribly simplistic and even conspiratorial level, and along the way negates the crucial input of those in Newfoundland who Elliot identified as experiencing a profound measure of collective self-doubt. For present purposes, it is enough to note that her account represents one approach to a central recurring issue in the literature, namely the extent to which the suspension of self-government was a product of local or external forces.[49]

Finally, by way of concluding a survey of the relevant

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[48]Ibid., p. 198.

[49]For a view similar to Elliot's see S. McCorquodale, "Public Administration in Newfoundland During the Period of the Commission of Government: A Question of Political Development", unpublished PhD thesis, Queen's University, 1973, CNS, p. 137. For an opposite view see J. Chadwick, Newfoundland: Island Into Province (Toronto 1967), p. 171. Two essays which give an excellent summary of the issues on both sides of the question are: P. Hart, "The Breakdown of Democracy in Newfoundland, 1931-1934", unpublished paper (1987), CNS; L.B. Wheeler, "The Loss of Responsible Self-Government and Dominion Status by Newfoundland, 1933-1934", unpublished paper (1967), CNS.

writing, the work of David Alexander must be considered. As a historian whose research and analysis exhibits a multi-disciplinary strength of political economy, Alexander has contributed two essays which, inter alia, reflect directly on the causes of the crisis in Newfoundland in the early 1930s.[50] In the first, Alexander makes an explicitly drawn argument that the collapse came as a result of economic, not political, factors. By reviewing the comparative spending patterns of Newfoundland and Canada, he demonstrates that the difficulties arose not as a result of a "riot of spending" by corrupt politicians, but rather from a historically driven tendency by Newfoundland to "replicate the economic performance of its continental neighbours" through imported development strategies which were not suited to a very narrow economic base.[51]

Secondly, in examining the apparently intractable and chronic structural weaknesses of the Newfoundland economy, Alexander points to the failure of government initiative in the fisheries during the 1920s as a key factor which produced a "steady march toward stagnation and dependence", a process

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[50]D. Alexander, "Newfoundland's Traditional Economy and Development to 1934", in Hiller and Neary, Newfoundland, and "Development and Dependence in Newfoundland, 1880-1970", in E.W. Sager et al., eds., Atlantic Canada and Confederation (Toronto 1983).

[51]"Newfoundland's Traditional Economy", pp. 34-35. A variation on this argument is made by R.A. Mackay in Newfoundland: Economic, Diplomatic, and Strategic Studies (Ottawa 1946), p. 75. For a longer historical view situating Newfoundland's development in relation to the emerging North American economy, see H. Innis, The Cod Fisheries: The History of an International Economy (Toronto, 1954).

which was marked by its contrast with that of Norway and Iceland. The explanation for this, he argues, was: "that members of the government were not clearly distinguishable from the mercantile class which dominated the economy; that leading politicians did not see the industry as a growth pole for the future; and finally, whatever the politics of the matter, that government revenues which might have been ploughed into the industry were already heavily committed to servicing an imposing external debt."[52] There is an obvious value here to a thorough assessment of the economic dimensions of what, after all, was essentially a declaration of bankruptcy, one which was largely made necessary by Britain's refusal to countenance any default on debt payments.[53] But even Alexander seems to have been aware of an ultimately unsatisfactory emphasis on matters which do not account for the inescapable, though difficult to quantify, political exigencies of the day.

In a final essay before his death, Alexander wrote a challenging and, by his own disclaimer, incomplete essay in

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[52]Alexander, "Development and Dependence", p. 17. For a further analysis of the historical weaknesses in the structure of Newfoundland's economy see R. Ommer, "What's Wrong with Canadian Fish?" in P.R. Sinclair, ed., A Question of Survival (St. John's 1988).

[53]The argument that Newfoundland could have avoided bankruptcy by pursuing, in the pattern of other countries at the time, including Britain, an honourable course of default was first made by A.F. Plumtree in the "The Amulree Report (1933): A Review" in the Canadian Journal of Economics and Political Science, No. 3, 1937.

which he posed a number of questions which represented a divergence from his previous work. He called for research to be undertaken into what he called "the sources of low productivity" and attempted to establish a relationship between the quality of labour supply and "the ability of the country to mobilize its population to maximize its potential."[54] An excerpt from the concluding paragraph in which he reflects again on the collapse of 1933 summarizes the purpose of his line of inquiry:

> The extent of illiteracy is not proof that labour productivity was less then it might have been, but it is good reason to suspect a linkage. Far more important, however, are its implications in terms of class social relations and the quality of public life and public decision making. Wide differences in educational skills and information between a governing elite and the mass of the population can breed an unwarranted deference on the one hand and a selfish noblesse oblige on the other. It also breeds a sluggish intellectual life and an unimaginative debate about the goals of the society and how they might best be realized. Anyone who surveys the economic and political history of Newfoundland cannot escape the impression of a political culture which was sunk in a mediocrity which the country and its people did not need. Perhaps it was an inescapable adjunct of the country's small size, its relative youth and the conflict of loyalties generated for British people abroad of vicariously participating in the magnificence of the British Empire. We will not know until some scholar produces an intellectual portrait of the country, for in such a work lies more of the answers to the problems of Newfoundland's economic history than its economic historians are ever likely to sup-

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[54]D. Alexander, "Literacy and Economic Development in Nineteenth Century Newfoundland", in Sager, Atlantic Canada, p. 113.

ply.[55]

There are numerous issues raised in this passage, some of which are more contentious than others.[56] This thesis, without pretending anything near so ambitious as an intellectual portrait of the country, nonetheless in part takes its cue from the precept offered by Alexander, and shared by others,[57] that the history of Newfoundland, its place and its

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[55]Ibid., p. 137. In a footnote to his remarks on the "mediocrity" of the political culture, Alexander attributes this as "the general message" in S.J.R. Noel.

[56]That low literacy levels contributed to political decline is not substantially borne out by the evidence presented in this thesis, in view of what may be described as an extensive and not unsophisticated public discourse in the face of overwhelming problems. See Chapter Four below. For a further discussion of literacy and educational issues of the period, see P. McCann, "Denominational Education in the Twentieth Century in Newfoundland", in W.A. McKim, ed., The Vexed Question: Denominational Education in a Secular Age (St. John's 1988). The question of unwarranted deference versus noblesse oblige may be seen as the terrain for a vigourous debate on a range of issues concerning Newfoundland's political culture which has followed the publication of G. Sider, Culture and Class in Anthropology and History: A Newfoundland Illustration (Cambridge 1986). See particularly S. Cadigan, "Battle Harbour in Transition: Merchants, Fishermen, and the State in the Struggle for Relief in a Labrador Community During the 1930s" Labour/Le Travail, 26 (1990); J. Overton, a review article in American Anthropologist 89 (1987); and F.L. Jackson, "The Marxist Mystification of Newfoundland History" Newfoundland Studies, 6, 2, (1990). For an excellent essay which falls outside this debate but nonetheless offers very relevant case study evidence, see R. Ommer, "Merchant Credit and the Informal Economy", in Historical Papers 1989 (Ottawa 1990).

[57]As a vehicle for constructing his summary arguments on Coaker and the loss of self-government, McDonald asks, not rhetorically: "And how does one account for the very squalor of political life in Newfoundland?" (To Each His Own, p. 142). Elliot adds to a near cacophony which rings from the pages of Newfoundland's historians: "'Honest merchant administrations' led by 'plain men of business' result in only superficial

people, can only be understood by paying much closer attention than has hitherto been shown in scholarly work to the interplay of ideas and politics as they were manifest within the country.[58]

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change where the standard of wholesale unadulterated venality on the part of the many is substituted by the equally repulsive one of wholesale unadulterated greed and exploitation on the part of the few", Hiller and Neary, Newfoundland, p. 199.

[58]This approach is essentially the basis for the argument presented in J. Webb, "Newfoundland's National Convention, 1946-1948", unpublished MA thesis, Memorial University, 1990, CNS.

Chapter Two

Prelude to the Beginning of the End

It is not necessary to posit a theory of the inevitability of Newfoundland's collapse as a self governing Dominion to observe from a review of the previous eighty-year period, dating from the grant of representative institutions in 1832, that certain unmistakeable patterns of tenuousness were constantly gripping the country in its nascent formation as a political entity. Historicism aside, there is a remarkable continuity of crisis which moves from generation to generation through to the early years of this century when things really did begin to fall apart. The Amulree report, in an extensive and surprisingly detailed account of this history, noted "there was almost unanimous agreement among witnesses that the present period of misfortune might be regarded as having originated" with the defeat of Robert Bond as Prime Minister by Edward Morris in 1908.[1]

Notwithstanding the report's propensity for hyperbole in attributing views to the witnesses, this remark indicated a clear measure of historical consciousness amongst the population which provided important depth to a self-conscious articulation of the problems facing the country. In a later section the Commission submitted its own view counterposed to the common one it heard: "We ourselves would have been inclined to place the commencement of this process [of

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[1]Amulree, p. 37.

deterioration] at a much earlier date,"[2] and expressed its sympathy with the writing of D.W. Prowse who, in 1895, a year after the failure of Newfoundland's two indigenous banking institutions, offered an unambiguous indictment of a political system in which "merchants and politicians on both sides have helped to bring the unfortunate Colony into disrepute by the fierce rancour and bitter personal hate which characterised their party struggles."[3]

Gertrude Gunn has argued that Newfoundland's political history to at least 1865 was marked fundamentally by features of inherent weakness and instability. The constitution granting a representative Assembly in 1832, which gave way to self-government in 1855, "stemmed from consecutive colonial policies inappropriate in their timing to the place."[4] Her analysis focuses on the overriding impact of sectarianism as the driving force informing political behaviour and which, following the events of 1861 that saw three people killed and 20 wounded in a St. John's riot, resulted in the adoption of the "denominational principle" as a permanent constitutional convention.[5] Her conclusion, one which echoes a theme of the

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[2]Ibid., p. 81.

[3]D.W. Prowse, A History of Newfoundland (London 1895), p. 534.

[4]G.E. Gunn, The Political History of Newfoundland 1832-1864, (Toronto 1961), p. 188.

[5]For detailed accounts of the 1861 riot and the events that led to it, see Prowse, History, pp. 488-491 and J.P. Greene, "The Influence of Religion in the Politics of New-

Amulree report, was that this principle, which nominally put an end to sectarian strife actually institutionalized "the pervasion of sectarian politics through the whole of public life."[6]

It may be, as Noel suggests, that this early example of "consociational democracy" converted the merchant Protestant elite into acceptance of the "evils" of liberal democracy.[7] But if it appeared that responsible government had been given a secure lease, it was not long before the continuing latent self-doubts of the country's population became writ large in the Confederation debates which dominated the next decade. Perhaps the most interesting feature of this struggle, as James Hiller has shown, was not so much the arguments in favour of joining with Canada, but the nature of the alliance of those opposed. Irish Catholics, who resisted what they saw as a threat to "Home Rule" joined with Protestant merchants who did not want the competition of Canadian commerce: "Thus the anti-confederate party emerged as a strange coalition of left and right, those espousing the maintenance of responsible government on principle, and those who hated responsible government but had to argue for its maintenance from a belief

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foundland, 1850-1861", unpublished MA thesis, Memorial University, 1970, CNS.

[6]Ibid., p. 185. For the later practice and effect of this principle, see G.O. Rothney, "The Denominational Basis of Representation in the Newfoundland Assembly, 1919-1962", in Canadian Journal of Economics and Political Science, 28 (1962).

[7]Noel, Politics, p. 24.

that confederation would bring catastrophe."[8] At this moment, whatever the negative motivation, the country would seem to have established some measure of self-confidence in pursuing an independent destiny.

However, the parameters were fragile. Noel, in his survey of the thirty year period following from the election of 1869 and the defeat of Confederation, describes a syndrome which affirms the observation made by Prowse and which prefigures the general view of the decline after 1908:

> Thereafter there was little to distinguish one party from another. Parties, in so far as they may be said to have existed at all, were mere ad hoc creations, cabals of politicians whose association with one another signified nothing more than their common desire to capture the government. And each government in turn stood on a quicksand of shifting alliances within the Assembly, where the real struggle for power took place...Elections gave the people a choice, went a popular aphorism, 'between merchants and lawyers and lawyers and merchants.'[9]

Following the bank crash of 1894, which the Amulree report described as having "a far-reaching effect on the Island's political economy"[10], a general mood of despondency was characterised by a new set of negotiations on Confederation and appeals to convert to a Crown Colony which were

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[8]J. Hiller, "Confederation Defeated: The Newfoundland Election of 1869", in Hiller and Neary, Newfoundland, p. 78.

[9]Noel, p. 25. For evidence which confirms the validity of the aphorism, see K. Kerr, "A Social Analysis of the Members of the House of Assembly, Executive Council and Legislative Council for 1855-1914", unpublished MA thesis, Memorial University, 1983, CNS.

[10]Amulree, p. 24.

evidently "put forward by many persons and the Opposition."[11] The situation was ultimately put in order by the entry of three Canadian banks, the first of which, the Bank of Nova Scotia, was established by none other than William Stavert, who would later become financial adviser to the Alderdice government in 1932 before being appointed as Newfoundland's representative to the Amulree Commission.[12] With the election in 1900 of Robert Bond, the last Prime Minister remembered fondly by the witnesses in 1933, the country reached a zenith, short-lived though it was, in its troubled process of maturation.

What is perhaps most interesting about Bond's tenure, from the perspective of later events, is that it was bracketed by two separate and fundamental challenges to the foundations of the country's emerging sovereignty. The first was the infamous 1898 Reid railway contract which, according to Noel,

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[11]Prowse, History, p. 534.

[12]Amulree, p. 29. It is worth noting that in 1894 Prime Minister A.F. Goodridge, who was in office less than a year, appealed to Britain for emergency assistance in the form of a loan of one million dollars, the dispatch of a warship to deal with potential unrest, and the appointment of a Royal Commission to enquire into the "whole political and commercial position of the colony." This request was followed up by his successor, D.J. Greene, who in asking for assurance of co-operation, was told that the British government was prepared to appoint a Commission if requested, but could not guarantee "the course they might take" on receipt of its report. When Greene, who was in office for a shorter time than Goodridge, was replaced by William Whiteway, the negotiations with Britain were put on hold pending talks with Canada. See Ibid., p. 25. For further details on this period, see J.K. Hiller, "A History of Newfoundland, 1874-1901", unpublished PhD, Cambridge, 1971, CNS.

forced a division in the country on a question of basic principle: "Whether the government or a private industrial empire was to be the greatest power in the land... the ancient battle over responsible government flared up again."[13] Bond's opposition to the deal provided the basis of a near sweep in the 1900 general election.

Elected as a patriot determined to defend the country's integrity, this became Bond's greatest liability. His insistence on carrying forward the struggle for Newfoundland's independence, following his successful campaign to win possession of the French Shore in 1904, brought him into a protracted conflict with Britain, the United States and Canada over U.S. fishing rights in Newfoundland waters.[14] In the end, Bond lost not only the immediate battle to the combined forces weighed against him, but also his standing in the country, which was finally undermined in the election of 1908. This happened not by a clear vote against him, but by an intervention by the Governor of the day who resolved a constitutional crisis brought on by a tie election in favour of Bond's opponent, Edward Morris.[15] Thus, Bond's fall from

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[13]Noel, Politics, p. 28.

[14] For a detailed account of this period, see F.F. Thompson, The French Shore Problem in Newfoundland (Toronto, 1961).

[15]See Ibid., chapters 4-6. Regarding Morris, who had split with Bond over his "nationalist" fisheries policy for no apparent reason than to position himself for an election, Ian McDonald wrote: "Morris' party was no more than a fraud, a vehicle to be used by its leaders to buy their way into office

grace reflected a diminution in the strength of Newfoundland's ability to function in the larger world, a corresponding weakening in the population's resolve to support a champion of their best interests, and an injudicious interference in Newfoundland's affairs through the anomalous authority of the Crown's representative.

And so, at the beginning of the century, Newfoundland's "ship of state" was battered, but on the face of it not beaten, and had weathered a not insubstantial amount of time. However, it would not take long before its carrying capacity would be put to much greater strain. Without entering into a detailed review of the well chronicled events which commenced with the birth of the FPU, followed by the war years and their aftermath, there are a number of important features of this period which warrant particular reference in their relevance to the issues at hand. These include: the administration of the war effort, the position of the municipal government in the city of St. John's, the political orientation of the working class, and finally, Coaker's fishery regulations of 1919.

The first two issues bring into focus certain aspects of the collective experience during this era that would later reverberate and give voice to the proposition that perhaps politics, as such, could be a dispensable part of public life. The administration of the war effort was exactly as it

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and further their ambitions. It represented co-operation with the Reids, and for the rank and file, it became an efficient channel for patronage and profit." To Each His Own, p. 3.

generally is during war, the virtual takeover of the state by a military imperative. Patricia O'Brien, in a study of the Newfoundland Patriotic Association (NPA), a national body established to meet the exigencies of war, traces the evolution of a process that saw a virtual collapse of constitutional authority. The collusion between Edward Morris and Governor Walter Davidson produced a state of affairs in which their "disregard for the constitutional conventions of responsible government and the (Patriotic) Association's continuing absence of legal sanction did not worry anyone as long as the war effort enjoyed the support of the three political parties and major opinion leaders."[16]

There are various subsidiary issues here, including the extraordinary conduct of the Governor and the eventually exposed rampant profiteering of the Water Street merchants, which resulted in legislation in 1917 limiting the ability of the Legislative Council to do their bidding.[17] There is also the critical experience of conscription and Coaker's unilateral choice to sanction its introduction over the profound objections of his supporters, as an expression of his deeply held loyalty to the Empire. But ultimately what emerges in the function of the NPA is an imprint of a parallel public authority, an ordering structure which existed outside and

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[16]P. O'Brien, "The Newfoundland Patriotic Association: The Administration of the War Effort, 1914-1918", unpublished MA thesis, Memorial University, 1983, CNS, p. 50.

[17]Ibid., p. 292.

beyond the normal political framework. What began as an exceptional undertaking in an effort to construct a national consensus amid an uncertain base of popular support for the war eventually became institutionalized in the formation of a National Government in 1917. Party politics was first subsumed and essentially eliminated within the operative mode of the country's administration, and then transformed by this into a parliament without opposition.[18] These were the cornerstones of an idea whose time would come again, later.

Coincident with the war there existed in the city of St. John's a second important case of administrative authority substituting for elected representativeness. Melvin Baker has shown how an international movement for civic reform was given expression in the capital city in the form of an appointed commission which governed for two years from 1914, an undertaking which had an antecedent in the similar tenure of an appointed commission from 1898 to 1902.[19] The commission was installed as the result of an initiative by merchants who were concerned about increasing insurance costs owing to inadequate water supply and fire protection services, and confusion

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[18]It is important to further note that throughout this period there was a campaign on the part of Morris, the Reids, and for a while at least, William Coaker to pursue the option of Confederation, thus signifying the continuing lack of confidence in the value of the country's independence. See McDonald, To Each His Own, Ch. 4.

[19]M. Baker, "The Government of St. John's, Newfoundland, 1800-1921", unpublished PhD thesis, University of Western Ontario, 1980.

arising from overlapping jurisdiction with the Legislature in setting local tax rates.[20] The commission was given a mandate, among other things, to prepare a charter for approval which would clarify the legislative basis of municipal government.[21]

Because of delays in receiving approval for this charter, the council elected in 1916 on an interim basis had to have its mandate extended by the legislature annually until 1920. At this time a second commission was appointed to govern the city while arrangements were being made to meet the legislative requirements for the first election to be held under the new charter. Further delays caused the replacement of this commission by yet another, following an interim period of a month when the city was without a governing authority of any kind.[22] What is noteworthy about this experience is the manner in which the process may be seen to have popularized certain notions about reconciling representation with the need

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[20]The motivation was not entirely self-interested on the part of some reformers, particularly William Gosling, the president of the Board of Trade, who appeared genuinely alarmed by the inability of the city to address appalling conditions affecting much of the population. He calculated the city's death rate in 1913 at nearly 19 per thousand, higher than the rest of the island and that of Glasgow and London. See M. Baker, "Municipal Reformers in St. John's", Urban History Review, 9 (1981).

[21]The Amulree report contains further analysis of the problems caused by weak municipal administration in St. John's, and its complete absence outside the city, which it said contributed to "retarding the development of a public spirit and a sense of civic responsibility." Amulree, p. 217.

[22]For a summary of these events, see "Municipal Government" in the Encyclopedia of Newfoundland and Labrador, Vol. 2., pp. 649-651.

for strong administration. This is a theme which found constant expression in concerns about the country as a whole in the decade which followed, even among those who were not advocating a wider application of the commission form of government. For those who were, like William Coaker, it is quite likely that the experience in the capital served as a model to be drawn on in the struggle between politics and good government.

The period of the First World War is also important politically for what it produced at the level of class relations, and in particular, what occurred within the movements of working-class mobilization. Specifically, there was a tremendous exhibition of strength on the part of the industrial working class of St. John's which, while corresponding with similar movements throughout the world, is in part significant because it was never connected in any meaningful way with Coaker and the FPU.[23] Barbara Neis, in her study of the regional basis of support for the FPU has argued that the fishermen's union was limited in its growth according to the conditions and work processes in the industry and by the opposition of the Catholic Church hierarchy.[24] In

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[23]For the extent of labour unrest in Canada, see G.S. Kealey, "1919: The Canadian Labour Revolt", in Labour/Le Travail, 13 (1984).

[24]B. Neis, "A Sociological Analysis of the Factors Responsible for the Regional Distribution of the Fishermen's Protective Union of Newfoundland", unpublished MA thesis, Memorial University, 1980, CNS.

reference to St. John's, she adds that the city's workers were suffering from an "overall low level of organization" combined with a general lack of identification with workers in the outports, with whom in certain instances, such as the coopers, they were in competition for work.[25]

This view conflicts with the demonstrably high level of mobilization and militancy which has been recorded by Jessie Chisholm in her research on strikes by workers in the city prior to 1914 and in her account of the formation of the Longshoreman's Protective Union.[26] Furthermore, it presents a one-sided view of the relations between the FPU and both the Catholic Church and the city workers. Indeed, in the literature on Coaker there is no real attempt to examine the extent to which, as leader of the union, he was responsible for creating its alienation from those parts of the country where it never took root. Although the reactionary character of the Catholic hierarchy is indisputable, there has been little attention paid to Coaker's apparent lack of effort in overcoming the opposition of the Church and his failure to appeal directly to Catholic fishermen and the predominantly Catholic

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[25]Ibid., pp. 67-69.

[26]J. Chisholm, "'Hang Her Down': Strikes in St. John's, 1890-1914", unpublished paper presented to Atlantic Canada Studies Conference, Edinburgh, 1988, and her "Organizing on the Waterfront: the St. John's Longshoremen's Protective Union (LSPU), 1890-1914" Labour/Le Travail, 26 (Fall 1990).

working class of St. John's.[27]

Peter McInnis, in his study of the Newfoundland Industrial Workers Association (NIWA) makes the point that Coaker did not endear himself to workers in St. John's by constantly denouncing import tariffs for their effect on prices charged to fishermen,[28] and furthermore, that Coaker's links to the Reid family during the war made him suspect in the eyes of railway workers who staged a massive and successful strike against the Reid Newfoundland Company in 1918.[29] Eventually,

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[27]See McDonald, To Each His Own, pp. 39-40. In response to a directive from the Archbishop forbidding Catholic fishermen to join the FPU, Coaker lifted the union's oath of secrecy and loyalty but did nothing to maintain the support of fishermen in Catholic communities like Ferryland. Subsequently, his dogmatic insistence on campaigning for prohibition would reinforce the appearance of his union as dedicated to Protestant ideals.

[28]P. McInnis,"Newfoundland Labour and World War 1: The Emergence of the Newfoundland Industrial Workers' Association", unpublished MA thesis, Memorial University, 1988, CNS, p. 94. For background to the tariff issue and the relationship between the fishery and the city during this period, see J. Joy, "The Growth and Development of Trades and Manufacturing in St. John's, 1870-1914", unpublished MA thesis, Memorial University, 1977, CNS, pp. 184-187. In his speech to the founding convention of the FPU in 1908 Coaker set the tone for his approach to the workers of St. John's: "We are not a selfish combination, for our aim is to benefit the Country, as well as the fishermen, while the unions at St. John's exist to secure advantages for themselves at the expense of the fish catchers in the outports. Theirs is for self, which of course is their right, ours is a noble endeavour..." in Coaker, Twenty Years, p. 5

[29]McInnis, "Newfoundland Labour", p. 200. Coaker's ties to the Reids arose from their efforts to promote Confederation, during which they paid considerable attention to recruiting his support. For an account of the strike, see P. McInnis, "All Solid Along the Line: the Reid Newfoundland Strike of 1918", Labour/Le Travail, 26 (1990).

Coaker's antipathy towards the interests of the city's working class would have direct political consequences as the NIWA sponsored candidates in the election of 1919 with the deliberate purpose of offering an alternative to the FPU as a general representative of the country's workers.[30] It is perhaps instructive in this context to note how Coaker dealt with the attacks of the Catholic Church during the first election contested by the FPU in 1913 when it formed an alliance with Bond and won nine of the ten seats where its candidates ran. He went to great lengths to dissociate himself from charges of "socialistic tendencies":

> I have been accused of circulating socialistic papers. I have never subscribed for a socialistic paper, never circulated one, nor do I know anything of such circulation. I have not read a half dozen copies of Cotton's Weekly in my life, and for four years I have not read a sentence contained in such a paper... The Union knows absolutely nothing about any socialistic paper or papers, and have had no connection with the circulation of such papers.[31]

This not entirely forthcoming statement was made to the annual FPU convention following a campaign that saw in addition to red-baiting of the union, the election of George Grimes, a self-described socialist who was recognized as the resident intellectual of the FPU and who was later active in the formation of the NIWA, "personifying the only discernable

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[30]See R.H. Cuff, "The Quill and the Hammer: The NIWA in St. John's, 1917-1925" in M. Baker, et al., eds., Workingman's St. John's: Aspects of Social History in the Early 1900s (St. John's 1982), p. 54.

[31]Coaker, Twenty Years, p. 24.

piece of common ground" between the two unions.[32] It is likely here that Coaker's approach to politics was informed by the emphasis he placed from the outset on building the FPU in part as a commercial enterprise and of having the Union Trading Company imbued with "the adoption of business principles."[33] It may be argued that one consequence of this strategy was to contribute to the efforts of others to undermine the potential for radical political formations in Newfoundland, although it is not clear that the NIWA was disposed to function as such a vehicle.[34] In any event, it

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[32]Cuff, "NIWA", p. 51. Grimes had been an activist since 1906 and among other things was evidently responsible for inculcating the young Joe Smallwood with an interest in socialist ideas. He also managed to forge strong enough links with the fledgling Socialist Party of Canada to generate the quite remarkable circulation figures for its national publication, Cotton's Weekly, to a peak of 260 copies per week in 1913. See Smallwood, I Chose Canada , p. 74 and D. Frank and N. Reilly, "The Emergence of the Socialist Movement in the Maritimes, 1899-1916", in R.J. Brym and R.J. Sacouman, eds., Underdevelopment and Social Movements in Atlantic Canada (Toronto 1979).

[33]Coaker, Twenty Years, p. 4. In the earliest written assessment of Coaker's career, John Feltham argues that the decline of the FPU was ultimately an expression of the contradictions of its mission as Coaker focused on commercial activities and the members turned away from an organization which came to resemble a traditional mercantile outfit. See J. Feltham, "The Development of the F.P.U. in Newfoundland 1908-1923", unpublished MA thesis, Memorial University, 1959, p. 136.

[34]There is also a view that Newfoundland lacked a radical political base because there was no "wave" of immigrants bringing with them socialist ideas, as elsewhere in North America. See B. Gillespie, "Trade Unionism in Pre-Confederation St. John's" in Baker, Workingman's, p. 15. Although McInnis emphasises the militancy of the NIWA, it was generally careful not to adopt a radical political orientation. See for example, the anti-revolutionary tract from its newspaper in J.

did not take long before the independent entry into the political field by St. John's labour became co-opted in an alliance with the city's merchants in the name of combined opposition to the government of Richard Squires.[35]

This brings us to Coaker's fishery regulations of 1919. The essential outline of what transpired between November of that year, when Coaker's initiative as the new fisheries minister was introduced only days after the election of Squires' government, and January 1921, when the regulations were withdrawn, is detailed elsewhere.[36] In short, the regulations were designed to achieve stability in European fish prices, particularly in the Italian market, by setting minimum prices that exporters were obliged to follow and to achieve quality control by issuing licences with rules governing inspection and standardization. In addition a single government agent, who was to take direction from an Exporters' Advisory Board, was appointed to negotiate the sale of all fish to the European markets. Within weeks the Daily News, which was primarily motivated by its political role as champion of the opposition forces, began a campaign of virulent denunciations of the programme and gave over its pages to all manner of invective directed toward Coaker in

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Harvey, "The Framework of Industrial Society," (St. John's 1919), pamphlet, CNS.

[35]Ibid., pp. 55-57.

[36]See especially McDonald, To Each His Own, ch. 6 and Noel, Politics, pp. 142-148.

particular, who it insisted was in a conflict of interest in his position as head of the union's trading company.[37]

The regulations had the full support of the Board of Trade and all the chief exporters, particularly John Crosbie who, as Minister of Shipping in the previous government led by Michael Cashin, had been working to implement similar measures. But there was a group of recalcitrant merchants led by A.E. Hickman who, during the fall trade, encouraged by the irrepressible A.B. Morine[38] and the unrelenting propaganda in the press, broke ranks and sold cargoes of fish on their own terms in defiance of the regulations. This "sensational development" was hailed by the News as a decisive breakthrough, which it was, and the regulations were effectively suspended by the Board of Trade upon a recommendation of the Advisory Board on January 6.[39] Coaker was in Europe at the time supervising the implementation of the scheme and was powerless to do anything to arrest the unravelling of his

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[37]See for example, Daily News, St. John's, 8 and 9 Dec., 1919. Various contributors argued that the rules favoured larger exporters at the expense of smaller ones and that Coaker was betraying fishermen by acting on behalf of the merchants.

[38]Morine was a figure whose shadow was a permanent fixture on the political scene, dating from his nefarious role in the Reid contract of 1898 to the fall of Monroe's government in 1928. In a singular case of blind coalition building that would come back to haunt him, Coaker resigned his Bonavista seat in 1913 to allow for the election of Morine as an FPU member in order to make use of his skills as a "brilliant orator", Feltham, "FPU," p. 64. See also "Morine", in Newfoundland Encyclopedia.

[39]Daily News, 18 Dec. 1920, and 7 Jan. 1921.

cherished undertaking.

As suggested earlier, while this episode has been recognized for its historic display of merchant myopia, in the inability of the "Trade" to follow a disciplined course which was designed to safeguard its own interests, there was another critical result. On his return from Europe later in January Coaker filed a number of articles with the union's paper, the Evening Advocate, in which he defended the regulations and denounced the actions of Hickman and his "political clique" of Crosbie, Cashin and the News.[40] But he also went further and drew on the experience as an indication of the desperate state of politics, "where evil is deep rooted and far exceeding what is generally believed", leading him to signal his own disillusionment and confess that he no longer had a desire "to remain a public man."[41] One month later, when the House of Assembly had opened and Coaker had to speak to a pro forma withdrawal of the regulations, he took up a theme which he had often invoked during the bitter struggle and pleaded for politics to be set aside in the national interest, lest the country's independence be threatened:

> I say again it is time to place country first and party anywhere. The question of the country comes first and all other considerations must follow that. What I want done is that which is best for the country, and I will do all in my power to assist in bringing that about. If we persist in only debating while unemployment is increasing and fishermen are without supplies, we are hastening the

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[40]Evening Advocate, St. John's, 28 Jan. 1921.

[41]Ibid., 29 Jan.

day when Confederation will be staring us in the face.[42]

Coaker's advocacy of a non-partisan approach to the problems facing the country followed the logic of his own experience in the National government and also revealed his disenchantment with the uneasy alliance he had entered into in joining forces with Squires. In fact Coaker's entire career to this point may be seen to have revolved around a continuing series of attempts at coalition building in search of a coherent political strategy to advance the programme of the FPU.[43] Invariably, these efforts produced costs which put in question the value of such alliances. An essential ambiguity is also apparent in Coaker's relations with the country's merchants whom he courted, in part counting himself as one

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[42]Proceedings of the House of Assembly, 1921, p. 59. Coaker insisted that with regard to the regulations he had only one regret, namely that there was no real "power to punish" in the legislation and as it result it was rendered "utterly valueless", pp. 54-55. This session of the House was marked by a number of disturbances resulting from an organized campaign by the unemployed of St. John's demanding work and relief, representing a clear level of hostility among the city's workers to the Squires government. For a description of these events, see E.R. Forbes, "Newfoundland Politics in 1921: A Canadian View" in Acadiensis, 4 (1975).

[43]These attempts were generally initiated on a unilateral basis, as Coaker continuously sought and received from FPU conventions the authority to act alone on crucial political decisions. In advance of the decision to join forces with Squires in 1919 he was given an assurance that any move he made would be given full support, representing what Noel described as "an interesting reversal of internal democracy: the annual convention was to be bound by the decision of its leader!", Politics., p. 142. Coaker's alliance with Squires was marked with tension from the outset, owing to Squires' role in prolonging the conscription issue in 1917 with the deliberate intention of embarrassing Coaker. See McDonald, To Each His Own, p. 71. For Coaker's strained and ultimately unhappy arrangement with Bond, see Ibid., ch. 3.

among their number, while seeking their co-operation with the regulations.[44] On the one hand he was determined to pursue a course in both politics and commerce as an independent agent with a relatively clear set of objectives. But at the same time he was treading paths fraught with contradictions and the trappings of compromise.

A year later, at the FPU convention of 1922, Coaker openly indicated his dissatisfaction with Squires by announcing his intention to resign from politics because he was convinced he could exercise more influence outside the Executive Council than in.[45] He also continued to discuss politics in general, and evidently with some reflection on his personal experience, described it as the vilest of business: "The life of a public man nowaday is one that few should envy, it is as near Hell one can go without smelling the brimstone."[46] His plan to leave politics was, however, a temporary notion as he became increasingly obsessed with the promise of industrial diversification represented by the Humber pulp and

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[44]So that, for instance, in his speech to the House of Assembly he appealed to the common ground among knowledgeable merchants on both sides and particularly to John Crosbie, "as we have worked together and know each other's minds". Proceedings, 1921, p. 55.

[45]Coaker, Twenty Years, p. 210.

[46]Ibid. MacDonald describes this period of Coaker's disenchantment with politics: "Political parties were increasingly becoming mere aggregates of individuals who were, for the most part, unable to define Newfoundland's interests, let alone serve them, and who had settled for maintaining their own self-interest." To Each His Own, p. 121.

paper project in Corner Brook.[47] It was for this reason he again contested the election of 1923 with Squires and subsequently found himself in the middle of a scandal which produced perhaps the most bizarre period yet witnessed in the political life of the country:

> Politicians of all parties engaged in a wild scramble for office, scarcely moving outside the capital for fear of missing their place in the game of musical chairs. The scene was one of unprecedented confusion. Factions mysteriously took shape and just as mysteriously evaporated; the puzzling combinations of one day became the bitter feuds of the next, and vice versa. Party politics became meaningless; the party system, such as it was had evaporated.[48]

Between 1 July 1923 and 1 July 1924, five different administrations held office. When Squires was forced to resign by four of his senior ministers, William Warren formed a government that presided over the very public and drawn-out proceedings of the Hollis Walker Enquiry, which reported in March 1924 with a damning indictment of criminal behaviour on the part of Squires and his Minister of Agriculture.[49] When

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[47]For background to this, see J. Hiller, "The Politics of Newsprint", Acadiensis, 19 (1990). Hiller questions the view that Coaker deserved most of the credit for the success of negotiations on the project and argues that Squires protected the financial position of the country as a guarantor, pp. 18-19.

[48]Noel, Politics, p. 173.

[49]Squires was found to have been misappropriating funds for his personal benefit on a massive scale. The revelations showed him to be an unconscionably corrupt first minister. See Noel, Politics, pp. 167-170. Coaker had declined to sit in Squires' cabinet after the 1923 election, but accepted a position from Warren without portfolio. Coaker's continuing ambivalent relationship with Squires took the form of a curious and untenable defense at the F.P.U. convention later

Warren signalled his intention to prosecute Squires and to extend the investigation to other Departments, his ministry was brought down by an intrigue which Elliot has persuasively argued arose from an extraordinary collusion between Squires and the opposition to limit the damage to only those so far implicated.[50] Squires, who was out on bail when the House was called, managed to induce four members of the government to break ranks and vote with the opposition on a measure of non-confidence, with Squires himself casting the deciding vote.[51] Warren then formed a second ministry by jettisoning Coaker and making his own alliance with the opposition. This attempt soon failed and when Coaker declined an invitation to form a government, he recommended none other than A.E. Hickman, the exporter who had played the lead role in breaking his fishery regulations.[52] Hickman led a party called "Liberal-Progressi-

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in the year, which revealed both the staying power of Squires' reputation and the lengths to which Coaker would go to protect the Liberal Party: "We all no doubt regret that so brilliant a leader as Sir R.A. Squires, so young in years, so clever and resourceful should by the wheels of the gods have to resign the premiership under such circumstances." Coaker, Twenty Years, p. 223.

[50]Elliot, "Newfoundland Politics", pp. 190-194.

[51]Noel, Politics, p. 170.

[52]McDonald argues that Coaker refused to assume the post of Prime Minister on this and two other occasions, in 1923 and 1932 (in both instances following an ignominious defeat of Squires), because of his pre-occupation with the commercial activities of the FPU, To Each His Own, p. 141. Coaker's support for Hickman can probably be explained in part by a personal relationship owing to the employment of Coaker's daughter, Camilla, at Hickman's firm. See Coaker papers, letter from A.E. Hickman, 12 May 1921.

ve" in a campaign against a party which had come together around Walter Monroe and called itself "Liberal-Conservative".[53] The election gave the appearance of party lines being hopelessly confused, as in part they were, but in Monroe's singular focus on the evils of "Coakerism", at a time when Coaker was not a candidate, there was a fairly clear indication of the winning party's basic disposition.[54]

Monroe's election returned the country to a point where political conflict could be seen to reflect genuine ideological and class divisions. It would not take long for these to become clearly manifest. But in the meantime, there had been a relentless series of assaults on the integrity of the political system and the character of most of those who participated in it. The resulting disillusionment among the population needed only an articulate expression of what most people must have known to be true: the institutional foundations of the country's public life were weak, vulnerable to

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[53]Noel describes Monroe's group, notwithstanding its moniker, as "a true merchant party of the nineteenth century type", Politics, p. 176. Monroe was a businessman with no previous political involvement, which under the circumstances was his strongest asset. There was by this time a well-developed history of using party labels in a less than transparent way. The previous designation for the merchant party was "Liberal-Labour-Progressive" (reflecting the "alliance" with St. John's labour) in the 1923 campaign against Squires; the "Liberal-Progressive" party was originally the anti-Liberal merchant coalition of 1919, which included Hickman as a candidate. See Encyclopedia, pp. 710-714.

[54]McDonald notes that Monroe was not disposed favourably toward the trappings of responsible government and had called in 1923 for reversion to Crown Colony status. See unpublished PhD thesis, p. 326; the footnote in McDonald's monograph is incomplete.

abuse and for some time had not been demonstrably capable of meeting the country's promise as a self-respecting and confident community.

Chapter Three

A Country on the Course of an Idea

In September 1924, as part of a programme initiated by Coaker for the re-organization of the FPU, the union's weekly paper, now called The Fisherman's Advocate, moved its operations from St. John's to Port Union, the home of the Trading Company and site of the annual conventions.[1] In announcing its new mission, the paper promised it would henceforth be "free-lance" and not tied to any government. Its move from the capital was necessary owing to what it said were dominating influences which "touch almost every hem of the political garment, whether government or opposition, and the truth is often half told or absolutely concealed because the wheels within wheels operating in St. John's are powerful enough to coat almost any crime with sugar."[2] While the FPU was going through a general re-orientation, including the adjustment of having its MHAs back in opposition and its president out of politics and focusing on commercial activities, Coaker was once again being lured back into an active role in the political game. He was preparing to contest a by-election in his old seat of Bonavista which had been won by Monroe in the

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[1]J.H. Scammell, an FPU MHA, became editor of the paper. See Coaker, Circulars, 20 Sept. 1924. Coaker's efforts to regenerate FPU strength evolved over a three year period, ending with the appointment of Scammell as his successor as president in February 1926. See Coaker, Twenty Years pp. 221-243; also McDonald, To Each His Own, pp. 120-123.

[2]Advocate, 5 Sept. 1924.

general election and which the Prime Minister had now to re-contest, according to the law respecting offices of emolument held by members of the Executive Council.[3]

Coaker's decision to run in this by-election, which led to the only electoral defeat of his career, stands as a notable event in that it represents a case where his personal moral convictions seriously interfered with his political judgement. It is clear from an appeal made by Hickman to recruit him as a candidate, and from Coaker's own analysis after the event, that his primary motivation was to campaign against the Monroe government's swift initiative in repealing Prohibition.[4] Coaker's determination to invest in an issue which hardly represented a serious challenge to the new government shows both the extent of his deeply held religious views and his willingness to bring these to a traditional mix

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[3]Encyclopedia, Vol. 1, p. 714. The regulation was repealed in 1928. Bonavista had been the main centre of agitation of the United Fishermen's Movement, an outfit set up to oppose the FPU and Coaker. See McDonald, To Each His Own, p. 120.

[4]Coaker papers, letter from A.E. Hickman, 8 Oct. 1924. Hickman emphasized the support that would be forthcoming from the Methodists if he were to focus on Prohibition, and promised to make a pledge to work for the repeal of Monroe's legislation. After the campaign, Coaker engaged a public war of words with Methodist leaders, who he denounced for not delivering support to his campaign, which he said was launched after consultation with them and prior to deciding whether he should run. See Advocate, 12 Dec. 1924. After the election, the Advocate estimated that 700 of 800 Catholic votes in the district went to Monroe as "party politics triumphed over the temperance principle." Ibid., 31 Oct. It didn't acknowledge that the Catholics were not party to the moral fervour that went with the temperance campaign.

with sectarian politics. It might also be observed that in this instance it was as though, despite his professed view of the decline of principle in public life, Coaker was unable to resist the call of partisanship himself. In this he was likely also driven by a sense of obligation to ensure a semblance of debate by providing a voice of opposition to the Prime Minister, even if it meant standing virtually alone on an issue which had otherwise generated an "overwhelming consensus".[5]

In 1925 there was a second by-election, or rather the absence of one, which became a focus of attention for Coaker and which would provide an essential context for his speech to the FPU convention in the fall, where he introduced the proposal for government by commission. Early in August, A.E. Hickman, as leader of the opposition, led a delegation to see Governor William Allardyce to present a petition requesting his intervention to fill a vacancy which had existed for six months in the district of St. John's East. The governor responded according to advice given him by Monroe's cabinet and forwarded a letter to Hickman outlining the constitutional implications of the request and advising that he had no authority to act, as such responsibility rested entirely with the government.[6] Notwithstanding the publicly issued statem-

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[5]See Noel, Politics, p. 180.

[6]See Governor's Correspondence, 1925. Memorandum from Committee of Council, 7 Aug. This seven page memo stated that the Cabinet assumed full responsibility for the delay in calling the by-election and refuted the opposition claim of an onus to act by the governor with reference to the definition

ents, it would appear the government was displaying an inordinate sensitivity to the backlash it had engendered with an income tax reform that had been transparently designed to benefit merchants, including the Prime Minister and other members of his cabinet, at the expense of the general population. The resignation from the government ranks over this issue by Peter Cashin provided the opposition with an obvious target, one which would only grow larger as the government refused to call the by-election.[7] The Advocate, which was the country's only opposition paper[8], seized on the issue of delay and commenced a campaign of virulent hostility directed toward the governor. The paper also focused its attack on A.B. Morine who, as the government leader in the upper house and a member of the cabinet, was publicly explaining the government's

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of the governor's role in the Consolidated Statutes (3rd Series, Ch. 4, Sec. 4). The statutes, according to precedents cited going back to 1903, were interpreted to mean that the governor could only act as governor-in-council. The memo also listed other reasons more spurious, such as the six month period having expired before the petition, the need for a new voters list to include women as a result of the government's recently passed suffrage bill, and the costs and general disruption such an undertaking would involve.

[7]Cashin, who had inherited the seat of Ferryland from his father Michael, and was therefore a naturally influential figure, would have drawn significant attention to his action by accusing Monroe of having enacted "class legislation of the rankest kind." See Noel, Politics, p.182.

[8]Since its move to Port Union, the paper was claiming it had increased its subscription list by "thousands" and that it was "without doubt the most largely circulated paper in the country". Advocate, 8 May 1925. Coaker had said his goal in moving the paper was to increase its circulation to the previous high of 8,000. Twenty Years, p. 229.

position and accordingly drawing attention to himself.[9] The governor was accused of driving a nail into "the loyal feeling" of the people toward the Crown, and it was said that his actions would give sustenance to a "spreading" feeling in favour of annexation with the United States. The tenor of editorial commentary contained more than the usual flair for overstatement:

> We feel sure that thousands of the people, who are sick and disgusted with the farce of governments that has existed during the past twenty years, and who find each party securing power turning out much worse than their predecessors, will view with alarm and indignation the action of the Governor, in proclaiming himself as the tool of the Tory party, the butchers of our constitution, and the upholder of an alien imposter in his usurped position as a dictator of Newfoundland. The governor must be recalled. He no longer possesses the confidence of all the people of this country. He has become a part of the Tory machine, and there are men in this country who will die before tamely submitting to such ignominy and outrage.[10]

This passage reads like it was written by Coaker, particularly in that it was the first public demand for the governor to be re-called, and idea he would soon champion. In addition, the description of people's "disgust" with parties going from bad to worse was a theme Coaker would begin to invoke regularly. As the Advocate continued to develop its campaign against the governor, it returned to the curious and unsubstantiated suggestion that support for annexation was

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[9]See Morine's explanation, Evening Telegram, 8 Aug. 1925.

[10]Advocate, 14 Aug. 1925. The "alien imposter" is a reference to Morine, who was originally from Nova Scotia.

growing as a result of the governor's refusal to take action. It warned that if a plebiscite were to be taken, support for joining with the U.S. "would exceed two thirds of the votes cast."[11] The notion of annexation may have in this case existed as a specific result of frustration with the limitations of British parliamentary institutions, but it also stands as an expression of a nascent search for alternatives to the existing political order and an indication of at least some measurable interest in exploring all possibilities.

An East End Electors Committee was formed to mobilize on the issue in the city, and soon organized a public meeting and demonstration which was described as "one of the largest and most representative ever witnessed in St. John's." [12] A parade was held which, after being prevented entry to the governor's residence "marched around the town to the accompaniment of three bands, with skyrockets and fireworks of every description." This was followed by an address from Sir Michael Cashin who, although retired from politics, Coaker believed would likely be the opposition candidate.[13] In a letter sent to the Secretary of State for Dominion Affairs seeking guidance on the issue, Allardyce said that the crowd had nearly been incited to violence by Cashin's speech, which

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[11]Ibid., 11 Sept. 1925. The notion of annexation may have been a result in this case of frustration with the limitations of British parliamentary rule, but it also stands as an expression of a nascent search for alternatives to the existing order of things.

[12]Ibid., 22 Oct. 1925.

[13]See Coaker, Twenty Years, p. 368.

he quoted: "If those present had the spirit of their forefathers the gates would have been pounded down and there would have been a wreck at Government House."[14]

The morning after the parade a petition was presented to the governor with 6,000 names. Allardyce did his best to assure the deputation that he had no wish to act "other than in a constitutional way" and suggested they give further consideration to the matter and to his position.[15] During the following weeks the governor requested but did not receive further direction from the government, and wrote again to the Secretary of State, this time requesting advice on whether he should file an action against the Advocate for libel. He indicated that senior ministers such as Crosbie were urging him to do so and that he had received the support of the Prime Minister should he wish to proceed. But despite what he called a campaign of "scurrility and abuse," he felt it would be difficult to obtain a conviction from a local jury in view of the failure of the prosecution against Squires in the wake of the Hollis Walker enquiry. The argument in favour of such an action was the benefit to be derived in "cleansing the political and public life of the Colony."[16] The Secretary of State replied that it was up to the governor whether to

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[14]Governor's Correspondence, 1925, letter to L.S. Amery, 7 Dec. 1925.

[15]Ibid., letter to Colonial Secretary, 23 Oct. 1925.

[16]Ibid., letter to L.S. Amery, 7 Dec. 1925.

proceed, but he should not go forward without "definite and formal advice from Ministers to do so."[17] No such action was taken, but such considerations as these indicate that a very real political conflict was in process.

It was in fact this campaign against the governor which provided the most recognizable feature of Coaker's speech in November to the annual meeting of the FPU and which, unlike his dramatic call for a commission form of government, carried immediate resonance among his supporters. As we shall see, the commission idea was not something easily presented and received in the usual routine manner in which the president's proposals were normally endorsed. It was, however, not inconsistent with the attacks against the governor, and together both issues represented a general calling into question of constitutional precepts. In his speech Coaker returned to the issue of the governor's role a number of times, during which he introduced a new element in the form of a nominee to replace Allardyce. He said he had been "pressed by scores of correspondents to make the selection of a governor a live issue and petition the Home Government to appoint Sir Robert Bond the next governor."[18] He went on to offer a general rhetorical warning to his listeners: "If this is not done there can be no protection in future for public rights and privileges from governors, and in defence of the

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[17]Ibid., letter from L.S. Amery, 12 Feb. 1926.

[18]Coaker, Twenty Years, p. 239.

rights won nearly ninety years ago by the Fathers of Responsible Government." Interestingly, Coaker saw no contradiction between his proposal for a commission government and those rights and privileges of responsible government which he held to be sacrosanct.

Coaker immediately followed up on his commitment to make the re-call of the governor and the appointment of Bond a "live issue", but he was determined to put his own mark on such a campaign. In the next edition of the Advocate, which contained a text of his speech, he published a letter to the paper's readers and attached a form which was designed as a ballot containing three questions. The first asked whether the governor should be recalled by the King, the second whether the King should be asked to appoint Sir Robert Bond as the next governor, and the third was: "Are you prepared to support candidates pledged to pass a law to have the country's public affairs administered for ten years by an elected commission as outlined in my recent address to the FPU convention?"[19] The incongruity between the first two and the third question is apparent in Coaker's description of these issues in his accompanying letter as "matters of lively importance", on which he was seeking guidance. Except for Coaker's convenience, it is impossible to see how the question on commission, which had no previous public airing, could be taken as a

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[19]Advocate, 4 Dec. 1925.

"lively" issue.[20] In addition, Coaker described the proposed measures as designed to give the people "a greater control and voice in the government of the country." This may have been fairly attributed to the first two questions, but it is not at all clear that the application of the third would have met the test of such a description.

Coaker was in fact launching a tendentious initiative behind an already rather dubious campaign in which constitutional authority was put in question by a weak argument concerning the position of the governor. There is not much doubt that he and his colleagues successfully generated a hostile sentiment against the office of the Crown's representative[21], but this was in large measure fuelled by a classic partisan attack based on a legitimate grievance about the by-election delay. It is important in this context to note that alongside Coaker's questionnaire, the paper ran two editorials, one in reference to the three questions and

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[20]In his speech, after introducing the idea, Coaker later returned to it by way of saying that "some are enquiring" as to who might be best to serve on such a commission government, which indicated he must have had some preliminary discussion among his FPU colleagues before going public. He then outlined a list of 18 potential candidates who, if elected, "would constitute the strongest Executive in the history of the country." The list included Bond, Squires, Cashin, and other mostly prominent Liberal figures, none of whom could be discounted by Coaker's restriction of not being in office at the time.

[21]It is worth mentioning the irony of Coaker's involvement in this campaign, in view of his proud record of service to the Empire, particularly on the conscription question, for which he was knighted in 1923.

another reviewing the FPU convention. Neither endorsed, nor even addressed directly, the commission idea. In the first, the editorial dealt only with the governor, and said people were questioning the value of the office as they were satisfied he had broken the law and had become a "tool" of Morine. On the convention, the editorial obliquely suggested Coaker had presented proposals on "far-reaching subjects" which had been received enthusiastically and were considered "easily adjustable to present day requirements." Thus, his speech had "given a lead to thinking men."[22] This was in contrast to a specific report that resolutions on the governor's re-call and the appointment of Bond were carried unanimously.

In its next edition, the Advocate reported on the first results of what it called "our referendum" and in response to these, began to flesh out the commission idea, putting forward a number of qualifications and expressing reservations about its practicability. All replies received, with one exception, had been in favour to all three questions. An editorial explained that a commission was an alternative that would likely have to be faced in four or five years and only then because it would be preferable to "Government by Downing St. or Government as a province of Canada."[23] In a second editorial the paper called Coaker's proposal a warning which had

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[22]Advocate, 4 Dec. 1925.

[23]Ibid., 11 Dec. 1925.

rendered "a signal service" if it had done nothing more than to set people thinking.[24] It admitted that not everyone would "see eye to eye with Sir William", and cautioned that his views represented opinions and not "positive dogmas". Such a tentative review in a paper which otherwise stood fast by everything Coaker said and did, represents both the extent to which Coaker was staking out ground entirely on his own and the reluctance of his colleagues to follow what was seen and understood to be a radical course. In a final note the paper insisted that Coaker was "actuated by the highest motives" and concluded with an observation that carried remarkable prescience: "If his views are not at all times feasible and his plans capable of practical application, he at least supplies the future architect with the essential and basic idea of the new structure." This is precisely what would transpire with the issuing of the Amulree report eight years later.

In the meantime, the letters were starting to pour in. In its next edition, the paper reported that hundreds of forms were being received daily and that the "greatest surprise" was the support for the third question.[25] This was taken as evidence that people seemed to have been thinking seriously about "some alternative form of State management other than that of the Party", and one of the reasons for this had to be

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[24]There appears to have been no notice given to Coaker's convention speech at the time by either the Daily News or the Evening Telegram, the country's two pro-government dailies.

[25]Advocate., 18 Dec. 1925.

that they were "staggered" by having A.B. Morine dictating the policy of the country. It also noted that it was "not pleasant" to observe the amount of disrespect toward the governor, but this could also be explained by the "nauseating aspect" of his conduct being led by Morine's advice. In a series of columns which continued over the next two months, the paper published sample letters which contained a variety of approaches and points of view toward the three questions. In general these tended to represent a kind of automatic affirmative on all three, in deference to the request of the president, but without demonstrating a high degree of commitment to or understanding of the specific proposition of commission government. This reflected a basic ambiguity and the essential problematic of a programme which, while advocating the abolition of party politics, was at the same time characterised by partisan invective and repeated calls, by both Coaker and the Advocate, for the defeat of the government and its replacement at the next election by the Liberal Party.

Such inherent tensions were illustrated in Coaker's New Year's message when he rejected appeals that he re-enter politics to lead the Liberal party, and instead called for a united opposition to defeat Monroe with a pledge to establish a commission form of government.[26] This would have obligated the new government to immediately call another election, one which, according to the proposal, would be organized along

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[26]Ibid., 24 Dec. 1925.

denominational lines. In effect this would replace party politics with sectarian representation. Both the method of electing the commissioners and the constitutional basis of such an election represented two of the greatest "practical" problems previously referred to by the Advocate which would return to haunt Coaker in 1933.

On this occasion Coaker also explicitly reinforced the view of his prescription as a warning: "The day is not far distant when the country will be forced to decide, probably with its back to the wall, whether it will be governed by a commission elected by the people, by the nominees of the British government governing as a Crown Colony, or as a poverty-stricken, Godforsaken province of Canada." In this he was not only accurately anticipating the prospects that would be confronted by the Amulree Commission, but was also setting in motion an irrevocable process of delimiting the options and defining in advance his pre-disposed preference. If history was about to close in, Coaker was determined to try and give it shape rather than have the country molded by inexorable circumstance. The Advocate, in contrast, took a more optimistic view, one which more clearly reflected partisan objectives, as it saw: "a day not far distant when once again Liberal principles will rule in government, (and) Liberal institutions (will be) safe from Tory marauders.[27] The difficulty of reconciling immediate political goals with more

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[27]Ibid.

fundamental reform was apparent in many of the published submissions responding to the questionnaire. One such example was in a letter from "Observer" in Eastport who had given the proposal for a commission government "much consideration" and came to the conclusion that the government was "a bunch of bluffers and should be banished".[28] For many of the correspondents this clearly did not mean the banishment of party politics per se, as in the view of one from Trinity who expressed agreement with the president and took this to mean that "Liberals like Bond, Coaker and Hickman should replace Monroe."[29] Others seemed to support the commission on the expectation that Bond or Coaker would lead it.[30] Some did, however, address the proposal on its own terms, such as in one of the first letters printed where the writer (from Port Union) said he was struck by the idea, as he had concluded "for some time past that some drastic change from our present system of government is necessary."[31] Another, from Corner Brook, suggested that ten years would be too long and that maybe a commission would not be necessary if Coaker would return and lead a government that "could and would do what a commission would do."[32]

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[28]Ibid., 8 Jan. 1926.

[29]Ibid., 22 Jan. 1926

[30]Ibid., 18 Dec. 1925; 26 Feb. 1926.

[31]Ibid., 18 Dec. 1925.

[32]Ibid.

Many of the letters complained that more copies of the Advocate were not available in their communities, or said that in lieu of this they were writing on behalf of others. On the 8th of January, barely one month after the publication of the questionnaire, the paper reported it had received "about 3,000" replies, and again, on the 22nd of January, stated that forms were still pouring in. If this can be taken at face value, even with some allowance for exaggeration, it indicates that Coaker had indeed succeeded in creating a "live issue", but exactly the nature of what had been brought to life is not entirely clear.[33] He had planted a proverbial seed amid an already blossoming constitutional conflict and used a partisan campaign as a vehicle to set people thinking about an idea, one which, as he had predicted, would only emerge full blown when the country found its back to the wall.

There is little doubt that whatever the extent of informed support for Coaker's commission proposal, there was an immediate impact from the effort to foment opposition to Monroe's government. As the pressure continued to have a writ issued for the overdue by-election, Coaker himself refrained from promoting the commission idea beyond his original

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[33]In his letter to the readers of 4 December, Coaker stated the circulation of the Advocate was now "over five thousand", which would indicate an extremely high rate of return on the forms and either an unusually attentive and loyal readership base, or much exaggeration in the paper's counting. In any case, the tone of many of the letters suggested there was a good deal of discussion in many communities.

intervention and pushed for mobilizing other political energies. Following the publication of his questionnaire, he approached the East End committee on the by-election issue with an offer to co-ordinate a petition campaign in the rest of the country outside St. John's.[34] He proceeded with this undertaking by appealing to local FPU councils to prepare for the possibility of a general election by circulating petitions for the re-call of the governor and the appointment of Bond as a means of maintaining a high level of "political interest."[35] That he did not mention the commission issue indicates that it would likely have got in the way of a more straightforward appeal to partisan instincts, which as events would show, were moving forward on a number of fronts.

In December he had received a report from Ken Brown, at the time an FPU MHA from Grand Falls, who informed him of a conversation he had recently had with Peter Cashin, who was now sitting as an independent member.[36] Cashin indicated that

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[34]Coaker papers, letter from E.R. Chafe, 23 Jan. 1926.

[35]Circular letters, 6 Jan. 1926. In February Coaker appointed Scammell, a sitting MHA, to succeed him as president of the union, even though at the fall convention where he was given a mandate to select his replacement, he insisted the person who followed him should not be in active politics. As part of this process, it was agreed Coaker would retain control of the union's political affairs. See Advocate, 12 Feb. 1926.

[36]Brown, who was labour leader in Grand Falls, was recruited by Coaker broaden the FPU's base of support and to strengthen its caucus in the House. See McDonald, To Each His Own, p. 123. He would later run with Alderdice in 1932 and become the country's first Labour Minister.

he did not like the idea of a commission running the country, but on the other hand was "apparently right out for a Squires-Coaker-Cashin combination" as the means to defeat Monroe.[37] The formation of exactly such a coalition would indeed eventually provide the basis for a successful assault on the government, but it would take some time before this could be put in place. The first cracks appeared in the form of an open cleavage created in the spring by the resignations of no less than five members of the government, including Gordon Bradley, who would figure prominently in the events of 1933 as leader of the Liberal opposition.[38] The coming together of the coalition referred to by Cashin occurred as consequence of the death of his father, the intended candidate for the by-election which still had not been called.

Upon the death of the senior Cashin, Coaker, after publishing a warm tribute to his old enemy, evidently made overtures to Peter inquiring as to his political intentions.[39] Cashin responded by expressing a keen interest as a "young public man" in taking advantage of any advice Coaker

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[37]Coaker papers, letter from K. Brown, 8 Dec. 1925.

[38]For the resignations, see Noel, Politics, p. 183. The Advocate (28 May 1926) attributed the development to hostility felt toward Morine by Bradley and C.E. Russell who were asked by Monroe to resign if they would not co-operate. They obliged and were followed by the three others, leaving the government in a precarious position of requiring the support of an independent member to survive. A majority was barely made secure by the defection of an opposition member who took Bradley's place in Cabinet.

[39]For the eulogy, see Advocate, 3 Sept. 1926.

had to offer in view of a political atmosphere which necessitated "the various chiefs" giving careful consideration to their respective positions.[40] Shortly after this, Cashin wrote a second time to complain about the impression he was getting of the approach being taken by Liberal leader Hickman in preparing for two imminent by-elections outside St. John's and his lack of commitment in pressing the issue of St. John's East.[41] These preliminary exchanges were taken further several months later as Cashin responded to an enquiry from Coaker about "political rumours" of attempts by Monroe to construct a coalition government out of his precarious position in the House. He confirmed there was "plotting" underway to dump Monroe and intrigues being planned by various players to attempt a coalition with the opposition.[42] Cashin felt it necessary to assure Coaker that he would never be party to such manoeuvres: "The Standard Manufacturing Company could not manufacture sufficient soap to wash me clean if I again become associated with them." Cashin was continuing his dialogue with Coaker while giving the appearance of being

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[40]Coaker papers, letter from P. Cashin, 6 Sept. 1926. Cashin wrote to thank Coaker profusely for his sympathy and the publication of his tribute, and to ask for assistance in arranging the purchase of a property for his mother. Cashin also reveals that he was the writer behind the pseudonym "Toby B." which had been appearing for a number of months on the front page of the Advocate providing relentless and merciless attacks on the government.

[41]Ibid., letter from P. Cashin, 20 Sept. 1925.

[42]Coaker papers, letter from P. Cashin, 4 Jan. 1927.

disinterested in the ongoing permutations around him.

When the two by-elections outside the capital were held in November, returning one government and one opposition member, the results provided the only point of reference for Coaker's commission idea since early in 1926. The Advocate, in commenting on a low voter turnout, observed that people were sick of party government and would vote two to one in favour of government by commission for a period of eight or ten years as "the only hope of sane administration of public affairs."[43] At the end of the year, Coaker's annual message contained no mention of commission, emphasizing the need for fishery reform and predicting Monroe was likely to "smash" in the spring, resulting in a big Liberal victory.[44] The year-end editorial re-stated the view that people were sick of Monroe and "all governments in general", but did not refer to commission.[45] In January the Advocate returned to this theme in a reflection on "the country's position", and stated that "politically, the people are in a wilderness." It said the country was without a government, except in name, and referred to "wild men" outside the government, acting as "clowns of the lowest calibre" in dictating policy.[46]

The plotting which Cashin had described to Coaker soon became the subject of open speculation which, if accounts in

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[43]Advocate, 26 November 1926.

[44]Ibid., 31 Dec. 1926.

[45]Ibid.

[46]Ibid., 21 Jan. 1927.

the Advocate were correct, represented a bizarre twist on the commission idea as the government appeared to borrow from it in an attempt to save its own life. The paper accused Monroe of planning to appoint a Royal Commission to "overhaul the general condition of the colony's affairs and to give them an unlimited period to do their work."[47] A month later, details of a strange series of events were published, giving evidence of Monroe's attempts to entice members of the opposition to join with the government in forming something that would resemble the national administration of the war years.[48] The Advocate was then in the curious position of having to denounce what it called "persistent talk" of government by commission indulged in by members of the government, without making any distinction between such scheming and the idea it had been trumpeting. Subsequently, any discussion of commission was dispensed with as the by-election was finally called in St. John's East and the government suffered a major defeat in what had been one of its strongholds.[49] This was of course heralded as a return to Liberalism.

The Advocate remained silent on the issue of commission

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[47]Ibid., 4 Feb. 1927.

[48]Ibid., 4 and 11 March 1927. H.M. Mosdell, recently elected in Fortune Bay, indicated in a statement that a round of "consultations" took place, ostensibly under Monroe's guidance, but which showed that he was not in control of the manoeuvres and that there were again members on his side attempting to have him overthrown.

[49]Ibid., 20 April 1927.

until the end of the year when it ran an editorial on "Democracy" in which it reviewed an address on the topic by Sir Edward Grey, the British Foreign Secretary during the war. In an inconclusive and rather ambivalent summary of his remarks concerning the need to defend democratic institutions, the editorial noted that the efficacy of such institutions was being questioned both at home and abroad, and in referring to its own campaign for commission, suggested the friends of democracy could take much solace in Grey's views.[50] The same general tone carried over into the paper's review of the FPU convention, in which no mention was made of any need for constitutional changes, but rather the people were said to be anxious for an opportunity at the next election "to efface political hypocrisy from their midst."[51] It emphasized fishery reform and the need for governments to follow the wishes of the people in order for the whole "system of government not to be subverted." This would ensure that the country would not be forced to "strike her flag as a self-supporting, progressive Commonwealth."

It would appear that there was no longer a deliberate campaign to promote the commission idea simply because partisan imperatives were once again ascendant as Coaker concentrated on the re-organization of the Liberal party and the re-entry onto the scene of Richard Squires. The first

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[50]Ibid., 2 Dec. 1927.

[51]Ibid., 9 Dec. 1927.

public indication of this work seemed to appear out of nowhere when Squires emerged to dissociate the Liberal party from a movement by the government to open talks with Canada on Confederation.[52] In a published letter to this effect, he signed himself as Liberal leader and in so doing made a frontal assault on Hickman.[53] When the House of Assembly opened in May, nine members of the opposition, including seven unionists, with William Halfyard, the senior FPU member as their spokesman, announced they had formed a new Liberal party with Squires as their leader.[54] Peter Cashin was not a member of this group and explained that his non-alignment was because "local political parties are so much nonsense... There is not a member of this House who has not been on either side at one time or another, who has not been either Liberal or Tory."[55] This of course was not entirely true, as the elected FPU members generally remained in their place and as such constituted the only real and lasting coherent political formation over a long period.[56] And notwithstanding the disclaimer,

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[52]J.R. Smallwood takes credit for bringing Squires and Coaker together. He alleges that while he was in London he arranged for Coaker to meet with Helena Squires who would act as an intermediary in getting the two men together. There is no corroboration for this. I Chose Canada, p. 166.

[53]Advocate, 17 March 1928.

[54]Proceedings, 1928, p. 10.

[55]Ibid., p. 15.

[56]This fact is emphasized by McDonald. While the political vision of the FPU may have at times lacked clarity for a number of reasons, not the least of which was the overbearing

Cashin was clearly a part of the move against Hickman and the accompanying formation of that formidable combination he had sought three years earlier.

The Liberals were not the only group re-organizing in anticipation of a general election. In July Monroe resigned and turned over the office of Prime Minister to his cousin and business partner, Frederick Alderdice who, like Monroe in 1924, came into office as a merchant without any political experience.[57] Both men were born in Ireland.[58] The election in October saw the return of Coaker alongside the victorious Squires, as once again the FPU brought its strength to the aid of the Liberal party, which in any event was poised for victory because of the deep antipathy toward Monroe's government.[59] There was no discussion of commission during this campaign as Coaker was determined to make another attempt to reform the fishery and in this context was focused on advancing the Liberal cause in traditional unionist terms: "The experience of the past four years has convinced every fair

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presence of its leader, the elected members were rarely dragged into the common and unsavoury practice of party switching.

[57]See Noel, Politics, p. 184.

[58]Neary, Newfoundland, p.13.

[59]Noel states that Coaker and Squires ran separate campaigns with the unionists running under the FPU name and the alliance underplayed. This may have been so for Squires who did not want to invite an attack on the bogeyman of "Coakerism", but Coaker clearly ran with an appeal to voters to rally around "the Liberal banner unfurled by the candidates in every district." Advocate, 12 Oct. 1928.

minded man and woman that Tory rule is class rule."[60]

Perhaps the most interesting feature of the re-born alliance between Coaker and Squires is the rapidity with which it fell apart and the consequent return by Coaker to his public disavowal of the system of party government. There were a number of factors contributing to this process. Within months of taking office as a Minister without portfolio, Coaker wrote to the FPU councils and expressed his concern about the declining strength of the union and participation among its members.[61] He was especially distressed by what he saw as a "spirit of self-seeking and self-interest" overtaking the principles of co-operation and unity. And in a revealing passage, he confessed alarm at what he found upon re-entering the government as a Minister:

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[60]Ibid., 12 Oct. 1928. It is significant that Coaker mentions women voters here, for this was the first general election in which women had a limited franchise. During the campaign he held a public meeting in Bonavista with "about 300 lady voters" present, which the Advocate described as "the first women's political meeting held in Newfoundland by a candidate to consider the issues of a general election." 24 Oct. 1928. In his tenure during Squires' first regime, Coaker failed to follow through on a commitment made to women on the issue of suffrage. See T. Bishop, "Newfoundland's Struggle for the Women's Franchise", unpublished paper, 1980 (CNS), p. 12. He only considered women's voting a positive thing insofar as the example in England had shown women as a "safeguard" against instability because they "had no use for the red flag" and would work for "moral uplifting", especially in the campaign against spirits. Twenty Years, p. 277. The history of women's suffrage represents a major gap in the literature. The only source other than Bishop's brief account is an unsigned article in Smallwood, The Book of Newfoundland, Vol.1 (1937), p. 201.

[61]Circular , 15 Feb. 1929.

> I am shocked at the spirit which is coming over our people. Everyone is after a government job. Members tell me they are deluged with applications for jobs of one sort or another. I have about 150 applications for jobs myself. When we fought the election last Fall we fought it on a fishery policy, and better and brighter industrial and social conditions in the country generally. We believed that we won our election on that platform. Apparently it was not so, for now everyone writes for jobs and favours. Few, if any, ever write their member about a fishery policy or industrial development or ask in what way and when we intend making a move to improve conditions. No one writes us on such public issues as these. Great issues seem to have been submerged beneath the self-seeking that is everywhere so prevalent.

If Coaker was shocked by the self-interest of his own supporters, he could hardly have been impressed with the game of politics as it continued to be played, in and outside of parliament. In April the Advocate offered another in its periodic reflections on politics, again without any reference to the commission idea, in which it considered the political scene and asked: "Is everybody a hypocrite? Are all our public men hypocrites or simply politicians, or what?"[62] The paper suggested the country's progress was cursed by politics and political considerations, particularly when it came to the fishery, and called for the opposition and merchants to dispense with their partisan activities and get on with "patriotic action by all those qualified by experience." It was during this period that Coaker was consulting once again with Water St. to prepare a new programme for the grading and export of fish, which would be presented in legislative form

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[62] Advocate, 5 April 1929.

in 1930.[63] In the summer of 1929 increasing unemployment, particularly in St. John's, became a focus of concern as the Advocate urged the government to be careful in its approach so as not to "saddle" the whole country with the burden of providing relief for the city's workers.[64]

The combined effect of these matters brought Coaker to a renewed despondency by the end of the year when he reviewed the situation facing the country, and in reference to his address of 1925 and the proposal for commission government, wrote that he was "more convinced than ever of the soundness of my contention."[65] He admitted he did not know whether the country would "tolerate such a change" but thought the people should be given an opportunity to say yes or no. He complained of the strain politicians were under to respond to "self-interest" and the constant demands being made on the treasury from all sides, and concluded that the "necessary changes to

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[63]For accounts of Coaker's efforts at reform during this period, see Coaker, Past, Present and Future (St. John's 1932), unpaginated, ch. 10; also Report of the Commission of Enquiry Investigating the Seafisheries of Newfoundland and Labrador other than the Seal Fishery (1937).

[64]Advocate, 14 June 1929. The government appointed a commission which reported in the fall and recommended a variety of schemes for winter work, concentrating on arrangements to send unemployed men from St. John's to work at wood-cutting in Grand Falls and Corner Brook. Ibid., 20 Dec. 1929.

[65]Ibid., 27 Dec. 1929. In referring to his earlier speech, he revised the numbers on the proposed commission. He said he had advocated the election of six men, which was actually down by three from the original. Although he was assuming only men would be elected, he began these remarks by suggesting that "care must be exercised by the women voters and an effort to get back to political sanity made through their efforts."

political sanity" could not be brought about under the existing system of electing party governments, "be they Liberal or Tory or Labour." He ended on a note that would be sounded again and again through 1933 and in the pages of the Amulree report when he observed that there was a time when politicians who offered money to voters would "destroy the temper politically, but today the bribing politician is the most sought after and the most popular for a period."

On this occasion, Coaker's comments were taken up by both the Daily News and the Evening Telegram, the country's two anti-Liberal papers, as a significant statement deserving of response. The Telegram described the New Year's message as "Coaker's Faith Destroyed" and noted that he "had abandoned the last vestige of hope" that the country could administer its own affairs.[66] The paper gave credit for Coaker's "frankness and courage" in leaving himself open to charges of "infidelity to his own colleagues." It said that while his criticism of party government reflected on the administration of which he was a part and was, therefore, "extraordinary", his views were "very much to the point." It added:

> Not a few are beginning to wonder whether it is not actually the case that we have ceased to show ourselves capable of managing our own affairs, and whether it would not be a wise plan, even though it would be a humiliating admission of incapacity, to ask for the suspension of our constitution, and for the appointment of a commission with power to administer the affairs of the Colony until such time as political sanity had been restored.

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[66]Evening Telegram, 2 Jan. 1930.

This expression of sympathy for Coaker's proposal on the one hand indicates the success of his promotional effort over a period of several years. But in describing the commission as appointed and not elected, the editorial illustrates that the idea was misunderstood and misrepresented on what for Coaker at least were critical and defining terms, exposing further what may be seen to be its inherent conceptual problems.

The Daily News, in contrast, showed no sympathy whatsoever and used the occasion to launch a broadside against both Coaker and the government. It said Coaker was evidently "tormented by a pricking conscience" and described the proposal as calling for "a sort of dictatorship - of which he would, of course, like to be a part."[67] The paper charged that Coaker did not believe what he said about one party being no better than another (which was probably true) and accused him of attempting to hide his own cowardice in not being forthcoming about matters "that would shake the administration to its very foundations." Coaker's "utterances" could not be sincere or taken seriously, it argued, when he was failing in his own responsibilities in rarely attending Cabinet meetings and "had not been in the city a dozen times" in the past year.[68] The News was thus demonstrating, as it always had,

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[67]Daily News, 2 Jan. 1930.

[68]Coaker had travelled in the Spring to Jamaica for his second visit there. He was rarely heard from in House of Assembly debates throughout this term. See Proceedings, 1929 through to 1932.

the finer points of partisan realities and in doing so confirmed the risks Coaker ran in speaking openly from what was clearly an untenable position to take as a Minister.

Throughout 1930, Coaker's responsibilities revolved around the perennial attempt at fisheries reform. By the end of the year, his experience caused him, not without some apparent exasperation owing to twenty years fighting on the issue, to believe that the legislation he presented in the spring would be successful in establishing the necessary "machinery". This explains his continuing presence in the government ranks. But it did nothing to affect his overall view, because, as he saw it, "a system to standardize salt fish and regulate its export is more, in my opinion, than Party or Party government."[69] He went on to reflect on his comments of a year earlier, which he noted had "caused considerable conversation, especially among politicians", and said that now being one year older, he was "more convinced than ever" that his proposal was in the best interest of the country. The News responded to Coaker's message by suggesting that it differed materially from that of the previous year by focusing on the fishery and described the content as "an admission of his own impotence."[70] The paper was essentially correct in observing that if the government was not proceeding apace, Coaker should assert himself, but was unable to because

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[69]Advocate, 26 Dec. 1930.

[70]Daily News, 3 Jan. 1931.

of the political consequences of doing so. Coaker was clearly revisiting a bind from his battle of ten years earlier with the exporters. And the issues were exactly the same, as he struggled to devise rules with a form of self-regulation that all would agree to. In the face of opposition from West Coast exporters who carried influence with Squires as a member representing Corner Brook, he proposed exemptions for non-participants, which only served to undermine the purpose of any such legislation.[71]

Meanwhile, in the spring of 1931, opposition was being mobilized against the government as St. John's merchants issued a call for a Royal Commission to address the country's growing financial problems. As the depression deepened, a collapse in fish prices combined with dramatic increases in relief expenditures to create an ever-expanding deficit on current account. The government was facing an immediate crisis in both meeting interest payments on outstanding loans and negotiating new credit arrangements.[72] As a means of stressing the urgency of the times, and in an apparent attempt to re-open the discussion on options the country might have to consider, the Advocate reprinted the text of Coaker's 1925

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[71]For a detailed review of the fishery issues as Coaker saw them, see Advocate, 22 May 1931.

[72]See Noel, Politics, p. 188 and the review of this period in Amulree, pp. 51-53. For an account of a public meeting held by the merchants, see Advocate, 1 May 1931.

speech.[73] It was at this time, in accordance with stringent conditions laid out by the banks, that the government launched a systematic attempt to cut expenditure, and Coaker assumed the duties of directing retrenchment.[74]

According to the Advocate, Coaker was applying a knife "assiduously" in the interest of "national stability and advancement", for which the country would be forever grateful.[75] This was accompanied by an editorial with a historical review of the propensity by successive governments for overspending which criticised the two Squires regimes as "not one whit less blameless than the Tory administrations preceding." It followed this in a subsequent edition with a promise that when the next election came, it would campaign for men of merit and not party."[76] It said Coaker would not stand at the next election and would not be connected with any party. This was apparently because both Liberal and Tory parties had men in their ranks who "should never again presume to seek public support."

The most significant event in the fall of 1931 would appear to have occurred in England, where party politics were suspended to make way for Ramsay MacDonald's National Governm-

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[73]Advocate, 3 July 1931.

[74]For the conditions laid down by the banking syndicate, see Noel, Politics, pp. 190-191.

[75]Advocate, 31 July 1931.

[76]Ibid., 14 Aug. 1931.

ent. This had an immediate impact in Newfoundland as it provided a model for dealing with an intractable financial crisis. Before long Squires was reported to be making overtures to the opposition, as a result of a free hand given him by members of his government.[77] The Advocate now appealed for a "country first" policy and for the opposition to forget "self and party" and to "shoulder their portion of public responsibility."[78] Such advice was not likely to be heeded, particularly when it carried the familiar ring of similar circumstances when the opposition was unsuccessfully making the same appeals in the dying days of the Monroe government.

Calls for the formation of a national government were now being alternated with a return to the issue of commission government as Advocate editorials insisted the people were "fed up with the game of politics" and predicted "if a true and tried leader" appeared on the scene advocating placing the country in the hands of "small commission for ten years", he would sweep the country.[79] In December the paper reported that "the people" were discussing the commission idea and in response to requests from "several correspondents", it presented a detailed outline of how the proposal would work in

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[77]Ibid., 30 Oct. 1931.

[78]Ibid., 6 Nov. 1931.

[79]Ibid., 6 Nov. 1931. See also Ibid. 20 Nov. A columnist in the paper," Zeus", claimed that "thousands of people the country over read with delight" the appeal for commission and described a "manifest enthusiasm" for the idea, particularly if Coaker were to be its leader. Ibid., 27 Nov. 1931.

which it re-stated the essential features as put forward by Coaker.[80] It also introduced the suggestion that a national government should be considered as a means of extending the existing parliament to prepare a law for the suspension of the Elections Act and to sponsor an election of six commissioners. It further expressed the view that Confederation was not an option unless terms were "extremely generous" and suggested that this was not likely because Canada had turned down an offer of the purchase of Labrador.

The financial position of the country continued to worsen as another deadline for loan repayment fell due and the government was forced to accept an ultimatum from the banks which placed extraordinary restrictions on policy making, amounting to a virtual receivership.[81] These conditions had a direct impact on the government's ability to respond to growing demands for work and relief. In February the House of Assembly opened with a speech by Peter Cashin, the Finance Minister who had resigned three days earlier, in which he accused the Prime Minister of falsifying minutes of Cabinet to conceal fees he had been paying himself out of public funds, including an annual sum of $5,000 from the War Reparations Commission.[82] One week later Squires was assaulted at his

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[80] Ibid., 4 Dec. 1931. It emphasized that Coaker would not be involved as a leader or otherwise.

[81] See Noel, Politics, for the conditions, pp. 193-196.

[82] Proceedings, 1932, pp. 20-24.

office by a group of several hundred unemployed workers organized as a self-styled Citizens' Committee.[83] On 5 of April a massive parade which had proceeded to the House of Assembly to present a petition demanding a full enquiry into Cashin's allegation broke into an all out riot as Squires and other members of his government barely escaped serious injury.[84] For Squires the "game" was over. It would not be long before it ended for all the country's politicians.

The riot and civil unrest in the Spring of 1932 represented, among other things, a continuing capacity for vigourous political mobilization, particularly in the capital city, in the face of popular disillusionment and alienation. Sometimes, as in the parade of 1925 demanding the issue of a by-election writ, the grievances were narrow and partisan. On other occasions, as in the demonstrations of unemployed workers in 1921, or the railway strike of 1918,[85] the motivation was more broadly political and directed toward achieving basic goals of social justice. In 1932 a long tradition of protest reached a climax which can only be seen to have suited the gravity of both the charges against Squires, who was now

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[83]Advocate, 12 and 19 Feb. 1932. It was reported that Squires was struck "by different members of the mob at least twelve times", and that he bled considerably.

[84]Ibid., 8 April 1932. The Evening Telegram estimated the crowd at eight to ten thousand people, which if true would have represented about a quarter of the population of St. John's, 6 April 1932; see Census of Newfoundland and Labrador (1935). One of the most interesting accounts of these events is contained in W.J. Browne, Eighty Four Years a Newfoundlander (St. John's 1981), pp. 195-200.

[85]See Chapter two for discussion of these events.

being chased from office a second time, and the material conditions of the period. The consequences of adding civil disorder to an already uncertain political atmosphere in which the idea of government by commission was gaining support, guaranteed a lasting and historic impact of the revolt against Richard Squires.

Chapter Four

The Discourse of a Closing Act

Frederick Alderdice was elected in June 1932 with an overwhelming majority that saw an opposition of only two Liberals and one independent returned.[1] Just as in 1928, when the single issue focused on replacing the incumbent government, the only real question facing the voters was, as the Advocate put it, in rather unfriendly but still neutral terms, whether Squires should any longer "be permitted to administer the public affairs of Newfoundland."[2] As for government by commission, it was at best a peripheral issue, even though Coaker had succeeded in extracting a promise of an enquiry into its feasibility from Alderdice. The Daily News reported at the beginning of the campaign, in commenting on Alderdice's pledge as contained in a letter it published from him, that "for some time expressions of opinion" had been heard that some form of government by commission should function until the country's finances had been rehabilitated.[3] It said that

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[1]The size of the House had been reduced for economy to twenty seven members from forty. Squires and his wife Helena, who had been the first woman elected to the legislature in a 1930 by-election, were defeated in Liberal strongholds and all except one of the FPU bastions fell to Alderdice's United Newfoundland Party, as the incumbent members, including Coaker and Halfyard, declined to stand. See Encyclopedia, pp. 717-718.

[2]Advocate, 20 May 1932.

[3]Daily News, 4 May 1932. In his letter Alderdice said he was responding to a request from Coaker: "I should like to make it clear that if returned to power it is my intention immediately to appoint a Committee of Enquiry to consider the

such opinions may or may not have been general, "but it was one not infrequently offered as a solution for our economic difficulties." That the idea was more fundamentally directed toward political reform escaped notice, as did any further discussion of the question for the duration of the campaign.

The Telegram addressed Alderdice's programme without any reference to his promise of an enquiry. It emphasized instead his "solemn pledge" to conduct the country's affairs in an "honest, efficient, economical and business-like way" and to put an end to waste and extravagance.[4] The explicit implication was that this was a pledge Squires "could not possibly give" and the only way that the country could "be given its chance" was by returning to honesty and business-like methods. Meanwhile, the Advocate was expressing its dismay that the commission idea was not being given a chance: "What is strange about this pledge of the Opposition Leader is that so far very few of his candidates have referred to the matter from the public platform."[5] As a result, the paper went to some lengths

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advisability of establishing a system of Government by Commission for a number of years. Should the proposal be favourably reported upon it will be then submitted by referendum to the electorate for their approval." Here Coaker had added the important element of a referendum which was designed as a substitute for his previous suggestion of simply electing a party committed to the proposition. With this the practical problems would be multiplied as the idea now called for an election on the issue, a process of consultation, a referendum for approval, and finally an election of the commission.

[4]Evening Telegram, 10 June 1932.

[5]Advocate, 27 May 1932.

to again review the proposal, with the by now familiar warning that the country faced the greatest crisis in its history and within two years would be forced to choose between Confederation, default on its interest payments, or government by commission.[6] In its last edition before the election, the paper suggested that there were thousands who would not bother voting but who would "gladly sweat to get to the polling booths if government by commission were an immediate issue."[7]

It is apparent then that Alderdice was not elected in 1932 with a mandate to implement commission government. He had agreed to adopt the promise of an enquiry as one part of his platform which would appeal to those voters who would not

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[6]Ibid. It also added yet another element to the mechanism for implementation by suggesting that a referendum should be required to attain sixty per cent approval. In its discussion of the election for six commissioners, four protestants and two catholics, it acknowledged there might be some difficulty in selecting the right men, but that elected in such a manner, they would be no worse than any other six "that for a quarter of century has sat at the council table." In all this there was no recognition of the problems that would be created by denominational representation in areas with unclear majorities, or for the non-representation that would result in any case for substantial minorities. For the changing demographics of this period and the attendant problems in applying the denominational principle, see Rothney, "The Denominational Basis of Representation".

[7]Ibid., 3 June 1932. The paper refused to endorse the Liberal party, although it did offer a mild defense of Squires for having faced the problems of the depression "manfully". But because of Alderdice's pledge, it was hard pressed not to advise its readers to vote for the merchant party. It referred to Coaker's appeal for a national administration to move forward on commission and admitted that "hundreds" of men who had written and called for advice seemed "lost". It then restated its support for a commission and for policies of retrenchment and fishery reform and urged readers to vote for the candidates that supported these policies.

normally vote for a merchant's party but who, as readers of the Fishermen's Advocate, would respond to an idea clearly identified with their leader. Although it may be that Alderdice had personally come to view Coaker's idea positively, particularly as it may have represented a latent merchant view that responsible government was in any event dispensable, there is no evidence at this time that either he or other leading forces outside the FPU were committed to the proposition. The fact is that while the idea had been in circulation for some time, it was largely within the limited purview of Coaker and his supporters. As such it would have been seen to acquire certain proprietary attributes with which others would not want to be associated. Despite the years of propagation, the commission idea as yet still belonged to Coaker and for this reason it would take some further time before his partisan opposites could comfortably embrace it as their own. And notwithstanding any predisposed tendencies of the merchants, this would only occur with a great deal of reticence.

As the economic crisis deepened, Alderdice's government was given no choice at the end of the year but to finally put in place that Royal Commission which the merchants had been calling for in 1931 and which Monroe had considered in 1927. This time it was imposed from the outside as yet another of the continuing conditions by which the country was able to secure assistance to meet its semi-annual loan obligations. The creditors were not the banks but the Canadian and British

governments and they came forward to prevent a default not only with the stipulation of a joint commission with appointments by all three countries to investigate into Newfoundland's future, but with the critical caveat that the recommendations forthcoming were to be put immediately to the legislature for approval.[8] Thus was the Amulree Royal Commission brought into existence, in a fashion described by the inimitable editorialists at the Advocate as constituting the "terms of surrender" for a country desperately in need of assistance.[9]

But this is not to say the game was yet over, or that the country, in receiving the appointment of Amulree, had run its course of self-determination to an end. It remained for the Royal Commission to conduct its hearings through a process which would soon win the confidence of even its detractors by functioning as an exhaustive investigation in pursuit of its

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[8]See Neary, Newfoundland, pp. 14-15 and Noel, Politics, p. 310. According to these accounts, this obligation essentially foreclosed on any possibility of the Amulree report being rejected, although it is not likely there was any forethought given to the eventuality of the legislature voting to suspend itself. In any case, such a provision did not preclude the Royal Commission from recommending some form of popular sanction for any far-reaching proposals.

[9]Advocate, 17 Feb. 1933. The negative reception was in part a response to the announcement of the make-up of the Commission, which included William Stavert, a Canadian banker advising the government, as Newfoundland's representative. This was the only critical response to either the terms for assistance or the personnel. For positive reviews see Evening Telegram, 23 Feb. and Daily News, 23 Feb. 1932.

mandate.[10] The records of this enquiry clearly show that whatever the divisions of opinion in the spring and summer of 1933, there was no lost opportunity for the people of Newfoundland, at least those equipped to do so, and even those not so well-equipped, to make their case before the Royal Commission and to have their concerns met with a large degree of equanimity.

When the members of the Commission arrived in St. John's in March they took notice of an event which occurred during their first days of hearings and which, judging from the line of questioning pursued with several of their first witnesses, provided a key point of departure for their deliberations. A public debate jointly sponsored by two societies, the Llewellyn Club and the Methodist College Literary Institute, was held to consider the proposition that "Newfoundland should be governed by a Commission for a period of ten years."[11] This meeting received wide coverage in all three major papers with each reporting the audience deciding in favour of the question by a four to one majority.[12] The Daily News had promoted the

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[10]The Advocate eventually urged its readers and any "citizen of unbiased mind" to present their views to the Commission orally or in writing. 31 March 1933. Amulree's first public statement was an open invitation to the public to contact the Commission and come forward with submissions, which would be received in private and "treated with the strictest confidence." Ibid.

[11]Daily News, 30 March 1933.

[12]Ibid.; Evening Telegram, see column by "Observer", p. 6; Advocate, 31 March 1933.

event as addressing a subject which had been "widely discussed at various times in the country's history" but which was receiving increasing attention in difficult times.[13] It once again misrepresented the issue as an "idea of an appointed commission" which it said had "many proponents and a large number of opponents." In doing so it illustrated that the idea did indeed have a life of its own and almost a year after Alderdice's election, was now much more clearly in the public domain, and accordingly, subject to all sorts of variation and interpretation.

It is of course significant, and it was certainly not lost on either the Advocate or the members of the Royal Commission, that a "large" St. John's audience would give such a strong endorsement of the idea. This is all the more so given that a previous debate on the same question one month earlier attracted much less attention and delivered a verdict, by a much smaller margin, in the negative.[14] The reports indicated a range of issues considered in both instances; in the first the assumption was of an appointed commission, while in the second the suggestion was for five commissioners, "four of them local and one appointed by the British government."[15]

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[13]Daily News, 28 March 1933.

[14]Daily News, 24 Feb. 1933. The earlier debate was sponsored only by the MCLI and must have been either intended or seen afterwards as a dry run for a more substantial programme.

[15]Ibid., 30 March 1933.

In the first debate the affirmative side gave voice to many of the themes Coaker had articulated and emphasized a view which became somewhat of a refrain before Amulree, that a commission would be beneficial if only for its size, because the country was overgoverned "with the trappings of an elephant on the back of a cat."[16] In the second debate the argument focused on the "complete destruction of the morale of the people" which was described as "this vicious outcome of constitutional government."[17]

There is no doubt that such a public airing of the question put it squarely on the agenda, particularly in St. John's, in a way not previously seen. However, the lines were anything but clear and the resolution would remain open for much further reflection, both in public and in front of the in camera hearings before the Royal Commission. That the question was an unsettled, and unsettling, one was reflected in two responses to the second debate. Albert Perlin, who was writing a lead and thoughtful daily column in the Telegram, declared his strong opposition to the proposal and suggested the debate

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[16]Ibid., 24 Feb. At least three different witnesses used the same expression during the hearings. It was invoked again by the News when the Amulree report was published, and attributed as an "historical pronouncement of the late E.M. Jackman during the last century" in making the argument that responsible government was not suited to a large country with a small population. Ibid., 30 Nov. 1933.

[17]Ibid., 30 March 1933.

had been won merely as an expression of clever debating form.[18] Raymond Gushue, the president of the Board of Trade, who was one of two speakers presenting the negative argument, may have partially and inadvertently confirmed this when he indicated in his interview with the Commission on the day after the debate, that he led the side against the commission idea, but "not according to my own desires."[19]

It may not have been coincidental that this debate was scheduled during the first days of hearings before Amulree. By the time Gushue appeared, the Commissioners had already heard from some of the most prominent people in the country a good deal about suspending responsible government in favour of some sort of commission. Although most of those appearing were not making submissions or being questioned on constitutional matters, as this was not, after all, the ostensible focus of Amulree's mandate, there was among the first witnesses a considerable amount of discussion which set much of the tone for the ensuing proceedings.[20] It should also be noted that

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[18]Telegram, 30 March and 4 April 1933. Perlin's identity as the author of the column is revealed in the "Confidential Diary" of H.F Gurney, the British Trade Commissioner who visited Newfoundland in the spring and fall of 1933, see 11 April. Dominions Office Records, 35/386.

[19]Magrath papers, 30 March.

[20]The only guide to the proceedings, a chronology taken directly from the Magrath papers, and supplemented with useful biographies, is contained in Fenwick, "Witnesses". This paper shows 157 witnesses heard and 24 letters received, which compares with Clutterbuck's list of opinions containing 65 names. Thus, it is clear that the vast majority either were not asked or did not venture an opinion on political matters. The Commission spent its first three weeks in St. John's before leaving to visit nine other communities and Halifax and

questions of politics and constitutional matters often represented only a brief interlude among a variety of other topics. Although it is impossible here to provide a systematic review of the records, it is necessary to highlight certain themes as a means of shedding light on the process which informed the report of the Commission, and in particular to assess the views of the witnesses as they were summarized by the secretary in his memorandum at the end of the hearings.

Alderdice and Monroe were two of the first to bring forward the Commission idea, but they each gave it a different expression. For Alderdice, the people had lost all sense of self-reliance, and a change to the constitution would be desirable, but any form of commission government should be composed of Newfoundlanders.[21] Monroe attributed all of Newfoundland's problems to responsible government and while he felt both an election and a referendum should be held on the idea, he believed a commission should be comprised of three or four men from outside the country.[22] It is difficult not to get the impression during these early sessions that the Commissioners were taken by surprise by the depth of feeling against the political system as it operated in the country, and were caught struggling to make sense of all the talk of

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Montreal, then returning at the end of May for three weeks in the city and one final hearing at Bay Bulls.

[21]Magrath papers, 20 March.

[22]Ibid., 24 March.

radical changes to the machinery of government.

This is evident in their discussion with A.A. Werlich, the manager of the Bank of Montreal, with whom they held the first involved political discussion following Alderdice.[23] Time and again the Commissioners took turns probing for views on the commission idea and other alternative constitutional possibilities. Werlich said a commission for ten years was a good idea and he believed it was being supported "even by men who should be in a position to know". Twice he was asked what the fishermen thought of such an idea, but he said it was too difficult to say and that he really did not know. When asked by Magrath what reaction there would be to such a proposal, he simply said "The politicians say we are not competent to govern ourselves." To which Stavert, Newfoundland's representative, offered the opinion that he thought "results have shown that." Amulree then wondered, without seeking a response, if it could be said the people had lost the art of government over time or whether it was just a recent "spasm of recklessness."[24]

Peter Cashin was the next to discuss political matters and although there is no verbatim account of his testimony, the secretary filed a report in which Cashin emphasized that the existing system was too large and elaborate for such a

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[23]Ibid., 27 March.

[24]This is one occasion in the transcripts where the speakers from the Commission are clearly indicated. More often, there is no identification of the person putting the question.

small community.[25] He felt that the House of Assembly should be reduced to twelve members and the Cabinet to six, but suggested that if it was recognized, as he himself had, that the country "was not fit to govern itself", a form of commission for ten years might be a "salvation." He added that he believed this would be resented greatly. Finally, while he was neither for nor against Confederation, he felt this option was preferable to a reversion to Crown Colony status. The range of opinion soon broadened during an interview with J.E. Taylor, from the Bank of Commerce.[26] He was asked if he thought the system of administration was too expensive for a small community and when he said yes, adding that it was too elaborate, he was then asked what new form of government he would suggest. His answer was that the form of government should stay the same with representation by districts as they existed, but financial controls should be strengthened. Coming from a banker, this clearly indicated that not everyone in commercial circles was committed to radical constitutional changes.

Bennett Stafford, the manager of the Newfoundland Hotel, at first resisted the Commissioners' political enquiries.[27] When asked his views of the situation, he replied that he had no opinion: "That is what you people are here for, to tell us

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[25]Ibid., 23 March.

[26]Ibid., 24 March.

[27]Ibid.

what we are going to do." But then he volunteered the opinion that doing away with elections would be a good thing, and the Commissioners pursued the issue almost relentlessly. They asked what sort of government, and he said it should be composed of outsiders. Did he mean to close the House of Assembly? Certainly, because nasty feelings would not die down after elections. And what about Confederation? He said people were talking about it, but would never vote for it. Finally, he offered the view that it would be a great pity if after the Commissioners left, something was not done. The House should be closed so the people could look forward to the next ten years. He didn't know how many people were in favour of that idea, but noted that William Coaker had it "in his mind" and if it was put to a plebiscite to have a commission government for ten years, "you'd win." And what about colonial status? Ninety five per cent of the people did not know the difference between a Dominion and a Colony.

Eric Bowring, a leading merchant who had organized meetings in opposition to Squires in 1931, did not think very much of "the people" or of responsible government: "The average person here is such that we ought never to have had self-government, we are not fit for self-government."[28] Accordingly, a commission for ten years would be the best thing. Again, the Commissioners wanted to know how such a proposal would be received, would there be objections? Bowring

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[28]Ibid., 27 March.

thought that because of sentimental reasons, "you might get through government by commission", because it would only be temporary and people could see the end of it, "whereas you would never get through a reversion to a Crown Colony." Magrath asked if the situation could be saved with three or four aggressive men in the House of Assembly, but was told that they would never get in if they told the truth. This was followed by the submission from Raymond Gushue, who said he had led the debate against commission but without wanting to take that side.[29] What was his view of getting the consent of the people for commission; could the government pass it through the House of Assembly? He felt that it could without going before the country because in any case, you could not expect an intelligent response from the electorate. But ultimately, he believed that the country would at some time become a part of Canada.

Just when it may have seemed to the Commissioners that they were uncovering a certain degree of commonality, if not in detail, then in approach, their line of questioning was challenged. R.F. Horwood, another leading merchant, was not quite so flip or gratuitous in the face of weighty matters.[30] One of the commissioners asked whether, with two Houses of parliament and all that went with them, he had considered if

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[29]Ibid., 30 March.

[30]31 March. Horwood was the owner of a large lumber company.

such a large administration was necessary. He answered that he failed to see how you could have democratic government without sufficient representation. He was then asked if the country might not be better served as part of a larger community. "That is a very broad question my Lord." Would there not be brighter opportunities? "I do not say that. All the advantages we would have then we have now." He did venture though, that if political life was going to be killed off, it would likely take fifty years and not ten, his view being formed partly from experience as a defeated candidate.

It was not uncommon for contradictory opinions to be quite literally drawn out from the witnesses. Marmaduke Winter, a businessman and member of the upper House, was all over the political map, perhaps as a result of attending the public debate on commission.[31] He said he was not a politician, and that politics had been reserved mostly for a few lawyers. Consequently, the more that control of the country was taken out of the hands of local people the better. But when asked how the people felt about Confederation or commission, he said they would not be in favour of Confederation and that he agreed with the view that "we should have our own government", even though people were sick of the politicians. He was followed by J. Ayre, another merchant, who was forthright in the view, which he thought was "gaining ground more and more" that a commission would be the best thing. He was

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[31] Ibid.

asked for details and said three men would be best. Outsiders? Yes, definitely. Businessmen? Why not. It was put to him then (by Magrath) that in the spirit of democracy, it would be difficult to have outsiders brought in and for public men to agree to be ruled by them. His view of that was simple and by now, becoming familiar, at least from certain quarters: "We're not fit to govern ourselves... what we want is very stiff handling."

Although the process was still at only a preliminary stage, certain unmistakable themes were beginning to emerge, albeit from a limited pool of intervenors. But many of these would find echoes and be reinforced as the Commission made its way across the island and upon its return for a second round in St. John's, where it would hear from broader sections of the population. Unfortunately, when it visited the outports and spoke to fishermen, it did nothing to pursue with them the questions on which it had previously seemed so anxious to get a reading. Twenty fishermen were interviewed in small groups in four different communities, Carbonear, Heart's Content, Bonavista and Catalina.[32] Not once, during many long hours of discussion, was there a question raised about political or constitutional matters.[33] The testimonies of the fishermen

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[32]Magrath missed these hearings and did not rejoin the Commission until its return to St. John's.

[33]In Carbonear two fishermen were asked if there was not at one time a union that looked after their interests, and whether it had been effective. One replied simply that Sir William Coaker had gone into politics. And before that? "He

of our men do and some will not. We do not believe in cutting men's wages." Thus, politics was about getting paid a fair wage. James Power of the Coopers' Union said he had no political opinions of his own, but when asked about Confederation, volunteered that it should not be left to ordinary people. "There should be a body of intelligent men to consider that. They know what is good for the country, not the ordinary man, they do not know...You could then put it to a vote when the people understood it."[36]

But not all the union representatives were without opinions on political matters. In Grand Falls, the delegation was divided.[37] Cater, from the Papermakers, had an interesting exchange in which he first ventured that the people were overtaxed because "our system of government as we have known it for the last twenty five years is a wash out." And in what way was the government a washout? Perhaps, he said, he should not have put it that way. "There is something wrong. There may not be anything wrong with the form of government, but there is something wrong with the way it is carried out." The delegation was asked whether they all shared this opinion. Scott, from the Amalgamated Trades, said yes. But Wall, from the same union, begged to differ by putting a fine point on the issue: "The trouble with Newfoundland is that she has got the trappings of an elephant on the back of a cat... what

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[36]Ibid., 12 June.

[37]Ibid., 22 April.

did, however, contain a systematic catalogue of criticism about the structure of the fishery and the exploitation being suffered at the hands of the merchants and exporters. Much of this evidence found its way directly into the Amulree report and provided the basis for its most enlightened analysis and informed recommendations.

The Commission did put political questions to a number of other representatives of non-elite sectors of the population, namely from four of the most important union organizations in the country.[34] In these interviews there was a tremendous variety of opinion, with endorsements covering the full range of political options. There was also a reluctance exhibited to be drawn into politics, and this stands in clear contrast to a more primary concern with bread and butter issues. Michael Coady, for instance, of the Longshoremen's Union, was asked if his union had formed an opinion on the difficulties facing the country. He said no. He was then asked what he thought personally and said he could not say, he "could not deal with anything like that."[35] When he was asked what his men were saying or whether they were saying anything, he replied: "Some

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was a great help to the fishermen... if Sir William had continued it would have been of great benefit to the fishermen of the country." Ibid., 17 April.

[34]The groups included five mill workers at Grand Falls, together representing three unions, three mill workers at Corner Brook (only one of whom was represented as a union representative) and one person each representing the Coopers' Union and the Longshoreman's Protective Union in St. John's.

[35]Magrath papers, 8 June.

Newfoundland wants is a commission of ten honest men and pay them."

On to Corner Brook. There, George Smith, a worker representative, was also forthcoming.[38] His group was asked if they gave any attention to the general government of the country. He said naturally they thought about it. Did they have any conclusions? He said, personally, he did not see any objection to the present form of government, providing the right men could be found to represent the country, which seemed to him to be the difficulty. He was asked what complaint he had against the class of men elected from time to time. "I imagine they have too many outside interests. To my mind a man who represents people should be a person who is not tied up with outside interests. He should be free lance." Did he and his friends take any steps to make their opinions felt? "No, I cannot say that we have. We are very tolerable in Newfoundland."

The members of the Royal Commission were quite obviously on a bit of a fishing expedition. At times they coaxed with gently placed suggestions. In other places they seem to cajole with near harassment in pursuit of a line of logic. The direction was toward a definition of how far they could push the question of change to the constitution, and in particular, the idea of a commission. To what extent was it a viable

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[38]Ibid., 26 April. There was no union affiliation indicated.

alternative? Was it not maybe the only alternative? What did people think other people would think? Was a referendum really necessary? What shape would a commission government take? There was a veritable Pandora's box of constitutional options on the table. And the untested and nebulously defined idea of commission was a tantalizing window, one as yet still wide open, and in need of a handle.

In their struggle to achieve clarity the Commissioners may even have created some converts to the idea. It may be generous to suggest this was a case of unintended consequences, but it is based on two assumptions from reading the transcripts. One is that the Commissioners were not, at least at this time, working with any kind of hidden agenda. The other is that they were genuinely challenged by both the despondent mood of the people and the intellectual problems posed by an ill-defined proposal for constitutional change. The commission idea clearly seemed to be doing something to capture people's imagination, however unattractive it might appear on the surface because of its prima facie undemocratic nature.

One prominent example may be cited of the Commissioners' rather zealous technique. During a long session, Charles Jeffrey, the editor of the Evening Telegram, appeared to be virtually browbeaten into giving up his efforts to argue for Confederation and conceding that commission was an option.[39]

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[39]Ibid., 2 June.

It is quite likely that by this time, having just returned from Canada where there was no interest being shown toward Newfoundland, and as a result of the general hostility expressed toward the idea of Confederation (especially by the many people who seemed to think nobody else would support it), the Commissioners were persuaded that it was not worth pursuing. Amulree, in an uncharacteristic outburst which came during a rambling discussion about the merits of democracy, suggested that there could be no "real check on good government" and demanded to know: "That is the reason why some people have been writing to the press and speaking out at public meetings in favour of commission government. Is that not right?" Sounding very much defeated, the editor replied: "Yes quite. I feel it would do us no harm, if for a period it were possible to suspend the present form of government and to have this country placed under a commission." As an afterthought, Jeffrey insisted that such an action could never be carried out without taking the opinion of the people.[40]

There are two final interviews which may be considered instructive in reading the Commission's hearings as the vehicle which set up the findings of the Amulree report. Both offer a reference for an assessment of the Clutterbuck memorandum (Appendix C). Albert Perlin was not dissuaded from

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[40]It is worth noting that during this interview, Stavert responded to Jeffrey's suggestion that Canadian politicians were no more honest than those in Newfoundland by saying, "Let us leave honesty out and say more experienced."

his resistance toward the commission idea, at least not yet and not during the course of his hearing.[41] (He did come round to the proposition, only a month later in his columns as "Observer" in the Telegram, but maintained to the end that he did not think this would be recommended. See below.) He suggested to the Commission a range of ideas that he felt would work toward rehabilitation, without having to take drastic measures. These included a small body of experts that would prepare a written constitution which would contain severe penalties for graft[42], a progressive system of education to improve the "attitude" of the people, and the use of broadcast educational programmes to inform people about the country's serious problems. In a summary review of his proposals, one of the Commissioners said he had suggested commission government. He said he did not.

His name, however, appeared on Clutterbuck's first list among the reputed forty-five people in favour of commission. There are numerous other instances of names appearing without corresponding opinions existing in the recorded testimony, but the best proof of the unreliability of this list rests with the existence of the second list attached to the September memorandum. This second list, like the memorandum, was in all likelihood prepared for consideration at a meeting of the

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[41]Ibid., 8 June.

[42]For a detailed summary of Newfoundland's constitutional status, both written and unwritten, see Clutterbuck's memo, Appendix C.

Commissioners in September when they re-convened in St. John's for final preparation of their report.[43] Its chart of "pro" and "anti" commission is much more modest and has eliminated most of the questionable and incorrect categorizations which were contained in the first, including that of Perlin's name. It shows fourteen for commission and eight against, with comments attached to those favouring commission, indicating a variety of approaches. Some of these, such as Winter, who saw parliament continuing, and Lake, who saw it as a means of getting to Confederation, may still be questionable entries in this column. And one misrepresentation remains, that of J.E. Taylor of the Bank of Commerce who, as we have seen, was not "for" commission. If Taylor was moved to the other camp, and Perlin's name added, it would not take much for the majority in favour to be reduced to a bare margin. The point is, not that there was not a great deal of support for the commission idea, whatever its incarnation, but that not all the witnesses were in favour. The would-be consensus was not all there.

Harris Mosdell was the only independent Member of the House in 1933 and his interview with the Commissioners must have given them pause for thought.[44] He told them Newfoundland's problems were caused by an absolute lack of organization combined with being a country "on the fringe of BNA Confederacy trying to duplicate the whole panoply of govern-

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[43]Daily News, 15 Sept. 1933.

[44]Magrath papers, 31 May.

ment." In his view Confederation would pass outside St. John's and as a result carry the country. When they asked what alternatives he would have in mind, he replied, "What other alternative can there be, if you'll pardon my Irish way of answering. This Commission cannot say we've looked you over and find you're unfit for self-government." The Commissioners tried to play to his obvious disdain for commission by suggesting that any amendment to the Letters Patent would probably be strongly resisted. He said he did not know that it would, but his own reaction was hostile "because you are maintaining the old order, not doing anything in the way of radical change." He believed once a commission had re-organized the country, it would just be handed back to the same "insular bunch". But Mosdell's views were perhaps most challenging and relevant when he concluded by putting his own opinions in the background and speaking directly to the Commissioners about their work and the process yet ahead of them:

> We are rather shocked at our position. Tremendous importance is attached to the work you gentlemen are doing and the anticipation of the report you are expected to make, and I do not think you will find anybody standing out against the adoption of the report so long as it is reasonable, and it would be a great mistake in my opinion...to delay any material part of the programme. That is necessary for the rehabilitation of Newfoundland, whether it is to take the line of Confederation and direct action of the legislature, or as the result of a plebiscite, or whether a commission form of government. Whatever is in your minds a definite plan should be adopted, the country should be told it, and the country should be urged and recommended to adopt it immediately. We are frightful people in Newfoundland for looking forward to the future and hoping the best is going to

turn up without doing a great deal to realize our hopes.

In this Mosdell was giving the Commission its marching orders. His remarks embodied a number of key principles that were reflected in the substance of the memorandum prepared for the Commissioners later in the fall. One, that despite all the puffed up confidence of many of the leading merchants, there were real long term problems with the commission idea. Two, nobody was certain, not even those with definite opinions, what was the best thing to do. Three, the people were depending on the Commission for a decisive result that would provide direction and clarity. And finally, the Commission should not dither. Whatever the mechanism for implementing its programme, it had to be initiated immediately. In reading the September memorandum, it is remarkable the extent to which these elements were combined in a coherent presentation of the options facing the Commissioners. Perhaps more remarkable, is that Clutterbuck came down on the side of a minimalist definition of what shape a commission should take, suggesting that it was necessary to avoid the suppression of the legislature in order to prevent a violent reaction. Although there is no record of a submission that was apparently made by Coaker to the Commission, it is very likely that it was his appeal to preserve some form of democratic process combined with a warning about the consequences of not doing so which resulted in the emphasis on anticipating what the memo referred to as

partisan "stampeding".[45] The Amulree report rejected this advice in favour of accepting Mosdell's admonitions to act with haste and to get the job done.

While the Amulree hearings were underway and continuing through to their conclusion on 23 June, the country was left in a state of suspense until the report was published and delivered on 21 November. In the interim the debate was carried forward in the pages of the press, with the Advocate carrying the commission banner and insisting that no action be taken without the consent of the people, as though it feared a losing battle on this principle.[46] Perlin's columns as "Observer" in the Telegram were filled with analysis of the possible constitutional options facing the country and which, until he changed his mind, argued strongly for rejection of the idea of government by commission.[47] The Daily News ran comparative commentaries on fascism, socialism and democracy and the relevance of changing world conditions to Newfoundland's situation, noting that the "political student" would be

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[45]Coaker received a telegram from Clutterbuck on 24 June requesting that he meet with the Commission. The next day he received a second telegram saying the Commission was "grateful" for his offer, presumably to forward a written submission. In August he received a telegram thanking him for a memorandum he submitted, but there is no other indication of the contents of this submission. See Coaker's papers. Coaker's views on the prospect of a violent response were contained in a telegram he sent to the Dominions Office immediately after the Amulree report was published, see Appendix B.

[46]Advocate, 7 April 1933.

[47]See for example, Evening Telegram, 6 April 1933.

struck by "the way in which democracy is fading from the earth".[48] It observed that the dictatorships of Russia, Italy and Germany were being joined by Britain and the United States where the people had consented to the "semi-dictatorship of national administrations", which begged the question that was being asked in Newfoundland of whether democracy was doomed to yield to "some form of autocracy", namely a government by commission.

All such rather academic, if not somnolent, activities were rudely awakened by a report in the middle of July that J.H. Thomas, the British Secretary of State for the Dominions, had stated in the House of Commons that the Royal Commission was continuing its work and would be reporting soon whether Newfoundland was to remain a Dominion or become a Crown Colony. All three papers jumped on the suggestion that Amulree's mandate included the possibility of such reversion, ignoring the scope of constitutional change which was otherwise evident in the options being widely debated. The Advocate said that to entertain the idea "would mean confusion worse confounded... a humiliation of the worst type ever administered to a British people" and also that it was pointless to discuss such a possibility because it would be "resisted by the united strength of the whole people."[49] It insisted that only the commission it had been promoting for so long would be

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[48]Daily News, 5 May 1933.

[49]Advocate, 14 July 1933.

acceptable, but this time it recommended the composition of such a body to be three members and the Governor, with the same power and authority as that normally resting with the legislature.

Perlin in the Telegram questioned whether this was another "slip of the tongue" for which the Secretary of State was so celebrated, or if in fact this was within the Commission's terms of reference.[50] Such a question of reversion was "too ridiculous" and had to be considered "definitely out of court." Despite such a dismissal, and this may very well have been the desired effect of the "slip", over the next several days, the columnist was provoked to re-consider the commission idea as an alternative to Crown Colony status. He reviewed Coaker's proposal and while insisting he did not believe this would be recommended by Amulree, began articulating the positive aspects of a political control which would not abrogate democratic rights, but would nevertheless mean delegating to an appointed committee the task of overhauling the country's administrative system.[51] He eventually arrived at the position, which would be maintained in future columns, that "If it be necessary to limit the responsibility of our people in connection with their government, a commission is unquestionably the best way out."[52] In so doing he was

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[50]Telegram, 11 July 1933.

[51]Ibid., 14 and 15 July 1933.

[52]Ibid., 18 July 1933.

engaged in a kind of catch up with Coaker and a pursuit of precisely the issues confronting the Royal Commission.

Shortly thereafter, reports appeared from London that the Commission had submitted its report and its recommendations included the suspension of the constitution with the country's administration to be handed over to a nominated commission with full powers.[53] The Advocate described this a "bolt from the blue" and noting that Stavert had categorically denied that any part of the report had been completed, called on Alderdice to make a statement without delay on the issue. Perlin greeted the "rumours" as an indication that the country must be prepared for proposals that would place "very definite restrictions on our political independence."[54] And this, he was now convinced, would be a very good thing. Indeed as the country literally drifted into the fall, a kind of consensus was pretty much in full flight, suspended though it may have been in anxious anticipation.

Coaker intervened directly for the last time in the debate before the report was delivered by writing a column in which he said he was responding to requests from numerous people who had asked his opinion of the situation facing the country.[55] He addressed at some length the financial crisis and offered a number of suggestions focusing on the fishery

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[53]Advocate, 4 Aug. 1933.

[54]Evening Telegram, 5 August 1933.

[55]Advocate, 22 Sept. 1933.

and calling for the Royal Commission to recommend reducing the rate of interest being paid on debt charges as means of overcoming the critical problem of defaulting on payments. He concluded his review by returning to the political issues facing the country and sounded a clarion call which the Commissioners, and their superiors in London, could only have found persuasive in the midst of their own final deliberations:

> Party government must be dispensed with for at least ten years and provision made for Government by an elected commission presided over by the Governor. The country is generally sick and disgusted with Party Government and the present generation would gladly agree to a suspension of both Chambers of the Legislature for the next ten years, if not longer. The greatest curse that could be inflicted on a suffering and agonized people would be to bring about a general election and replace the ins by the outs... The future welfare of this country depends largely upon the recommendations of the Royal Commission. If it is a milk-and-water scribble it will damn the country and sour feelings toward the Home Government and if recommendations are not possible that will be certain of fulfilment and provide means for the rehabilitation of the fisheries, a forty per cent reduction of the interest on the public debt, and a suspension of the animosities, intrigues, patronage and boodle of political office seekers, then all our sufferings will have been in vain and a gloom deeper and blacker than any hitherto experienced will envelop the country and the people.

The Advocate continued to campaign aggressively for commission by promoting the idea as one which was continuing to gain favour with the population. It re-emphasized the corollary that a plebiscite was necessary to confirm and validate such opinion, but in doing so was caught in a basic contradiction wherein the certainty of such sentiment would

appear to obviate the necessity of taking a vote on the question.[56] This was not lost on the Telegram's Perlin, who continued to carry forward that paper's endorsement of the idea. In a discussion of whether a plebiscite would be appropriate, he reported on a conversation he had with a member of the House of Assembly who had said he could not support a proposal for commission without a vote first being held.[57] The columnist insisted that he did not believe a commission would be recommended, but then proceeded to argue that if it were, it would reflect a reality that democracy, as evidenced especially by events in Europe, was in fact becoming an anachronism.

In Newfoundland's case, he argued, governments were only democratic to the extent they were elected and all decisions were accordingly taken in the name of the people without any need for recourse to further consultation. Consequently, if the existing Parliament voted to take drastic action, particu-

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[56]For example, see Advocate, 29 Sept. 1933. It cited as an important sample of opinion that of Captain Samuel Roberts of Wesleyville, who told the paper that if the matter were submitted to a vote, "...as far as the North is concerned, we need not worry over the outcome or wait for the returns." See also, Ibid., 2 Oct., in the report of support for commission from an unnamed "prominent clergyman."

[57]Telegram, 16 Sept. 1933. The paper's editorials did not put forward a specific position in advance of the report and only clearly stated its full endorsement of the commission proposal after the fact. In reference to the columnist's reported conversation, if it is assumed that the politician was a member of the government side, this indicates a process had to occur within the government to ensure that any such views were eventually silenced.

larly to alter the country's constitution, it had a right to do so consistent with normal practice. He argued that in an emergency, "actions otherwise unconstitutional may, in a period of crisis, be sanctioned by the constitution," which, he pointed out, was not written and therefore "open to numerous constructions and wide liberties." He cited the example of the United States which was at the time granting extraordinary powers to the presidential office of Franklin Roosevelt with the assistance of court rulings validating the principle of emergency power. In addition to arguing that a plebiscite would be costly and a waste of time, he warned against "unpatriotic politicians" attempting to persuade the people to vote against their own best interests, and offered a view which was in direct conflict with that of Coaker and the Advocate: "In the circumstances, whatever drastic changes may be recommended by the Royal Commission, always provided that they are acceptable to well-informed and patriotic opinion, ought to be made effective by the Legislature without recourse to that doubtful medium of expressing sound opinion, the plebiscite."

This debate on the merits of seeking popular sanction for any radical changes occurred as the members of the Royal Commission returned to St. John's, for consultation with Alderdice and to consolidate their findings.[58] As news was

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[58]Telegram, 14 Sept. 1933. See Neary, Newfoundland, for further details of events as they transpired through the fall months, pp.29-32.

received that it would be some time yet before the report was simultaneously released in London and St. John's, it is difficult to imagine the nature of the suspense and the accompanying tension as rumours supplied the only game in town and people busied themselves with speculation as to who would fill the seats on the expected commission government.[59] The British Trade Commissioner observed the scene and confirmed that while the anticipation of some form of commission may have been well founded, nobody could be certain as to the substantive content of the Commission's recommendations:

> Almost everyone I met speculated as to their findings and the effect they would have on business. Many conjectures were made but the Commission and the officials attached to it have wisely given no indication whatsoever as to their intentions. They have accomplished an extremely difficult task in a small place where rumour and conjecture are rife, and have gained the respect of the business community because of the manner in which they have conducted their enquiries and their ability in preventing any information leaking out concerning their report.[60]

Notwithstanding the variety of opinion in favour of some form of commission, it is clear that right up to the moment the report was released on 21 November,[61] there was not a general expectation that it would recommend the complete

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[59]Ibid., 4 November 1933.

[60]H.F. Gurney, "Confidential Diary," 25 Oct. 1933. Dominions Office Records, 35/386.

[61]Noel, Politics, states, without reference or explanation, that the report was "delivered" to the British House of Commons on 4 October, p.212. If this was the case, there is no evidence that whoever received it did anything to make its contents public.

suspension of the institutions of responsible government. This is borne out by commentary in the press,[62] and by remarks made by Gordon Bradley, the leader of the Liberal opposition in the House of Assembly. Upon the release of the report, the Telegram and the Daily News embraced its recommendations without reservation. During the course of the next several days, in advance of the debate in the Assembly, both urged its immediate adoption, without a referendum, and reported on the support the report was receiving, particularly from the St. John's Board of Trade, the Great War Veterans Association, and others.[63] When the Assembly opened on 17 November, it moved with remarkable haste and lack of ceremony to accept in full the recommendations of the Royal Commission.[64]

Bradley's intervention is notable in a number of respects. First, he admitted that he had "no knowledge whatsoever" as to the report's contents and though he had made

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[62]See for example the Telegram editorial of 20 Nov., in which the paper suggested merely that the fiscal policy of the country should be thoroughly re-organized, and if this required supervision by independent experts, it was "not unlikely that such a stipulation might even be welcomed." Perlin wrote on the day of the report's release, before having seen its contents, that he did not believe responsible government would be abolished, but that the existing parliament might be extended to prevent any interruption in implementing the recommendations, Ibid., 21 Nov.

[63]Telegram, 22 and 24 Nov.; Daily News, 22 and 24 Nov.

[64]The proceedings of the House debates, as with those of 1932, were never published but are contained in transcript form in the Provincial Archives. Edited excerpts from the speeches made by Bradley and Alderdice are contained in P. Neary, The Political Economy of Newfoundland (Toronto 1973).

a guess, he was "many, many miles from the truth."[65] Second, in introducing the debate, he articulated a defense of what he called the "sovereign rights" of a people under natural law, and said the population had "never dreamed" when electing the members to the House that they would take away such rights without the consent of the people.[66] Third, he expressed the view that the essential problem with the report was in the failure of the Commissioners to penetrate "the company manner of witnesses" and to "get inside the skins of the great mass of individuals."[67] As a result, he saw the greatest danger lying in the effect the report would have on the people and the reaction that would result in time with the absence of direct representation. In this he echoed the main thrust of the argument put forward by Coaker, which was an insistence that the proposals were doomed because of the potential for popular revolt against the abrogation of the right of self-government.[68] Finally, it is clear that it was Coaker who provided the basis for the series of amendments proposed by

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[65]House of Assembly, Proceedings, 1933, transcript, 28 Nov. Bradley accused members of the government of indicating to some people in St. John's two months earlier what the report was likely to recommend. The day before the report's release, the Daily News columnist "Scriba" rejected rumours to the same effect and insisted that Alderdice had been in normal receipt of "communications" concerning the schedule of events, 22 Nov. See also Neary, Newfoundland, pp.29-32.

[66]Proceedings, 27 Nov.

[67]Ibid.

[68]See Coaker's letter, Appendix C.

Bradley to establish a further process of review of the report by sending a delegation to London to seek terms which would not involve the loss of representative institutions.[69] Coaker had issued an unsuccessful appeal to communities to organize meetings and to petition for such action.[70] Bradley referred to the letter from Coaker published in the Telegram and reprinted in the Advocate, and demanded some accountability on Alderdice's campaign promise to investigate the commission idea, and to take action only upon the results of a plebiscite.[71]

Alderdice responded by insisting that the Commissioners had indeed captured the essential sentiments of the people: "It seems to be almost uncanny how (they)...were able to enter into the minds of our people and paint such a truthful picture of our affairs."[72] He took strong objection to Coaker's published analysis, and in particular, to the view that the country's status would be reduced to that of a Crown Colony, or in Coaker's words, the same type of government reserved for "colored races". In a rather uninspired turn of phrase, the

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[69]The amendments are contained in Neary, Political Economy, p.53, and appear to be borrowed directly from Coaker's published letter to the Telegram. J.R. Smallwood claims to have been the source of Bradley's ideas, an assertion which is challenged by J.K. Hiller, "The Career of F. Gordon Bradley," Newfoundland Studies, Vol. 4, No. 2 (1988).

[70]Advocate, 24 Nov. 1933.

[71]Proceedings, 28 Nov.

[72]Ibid.

Prime Minister indicated the Governor would not be given any more authority than to follow the advice of the commissioners, and that this would place the country "betwixt and between a Crown Colony and a Dominion."[73] He did, however, manage a certain amount of rhetorical flourish in his concluding remarks as he invoked a long list of those for whom he spoke, emphasizing the desperate plight of fishermen, loggers, miners, "workers of all classes" who were unemployed, and women and children "suffering from the pangs of hunger and cold." All such conditions, along with the uncertainties facing civil servants, teachers, and businessmen, could only be ameliorated by accepting the new regime as proposed. He ended by thanking the British Government for a generous offer and proclaiming that on behalf of all Newfoundlanders, the government accepted the report "fully, frankly and freely."

Bradley's amendments were clearly presented in the spirit of making final arguments in a case already lost. He indicated that the Liberal party, at least what remained of it, would assist in the new scheme of government, and would not countenance a total rejection of the British offer. When his amendments were defeated, he and his colleague, R.J. Starkes, left their seats in the Assembly and the resolution to accept the report was thus adopted unanimously.[74] Bradley returned to the House two days later to participate in its indefinite

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[73]Ibid.

[74]Daily News, 29 Nov. 1933.

suspension by seconding a motion put forward by Alderdice formally thanking the British Crown and assuring it of "the grateful and hearty co-operation of all patriotic citizens."[75] It was not insignificant that these measures were approved without a recorded contrary vote, for this made the task of the British government that much easier in pushing its resolutions through the House of Commons. There the debate was much more seriously engaged, though the outcome was never in question, as many of England's most senior politicians participated in a number of sessions on an omnibus "Newfoundland Bill", including one all night sitting which set a post-war record of 23 continuous hours of debate.[76]

The Labour opposition to Ramsay MacDonald's National government raised a number of issues in its critique of the report, which Clement Attlee read as describing "an utter failure of competitive capitalism." In addition to placing unreasonable burdens on British taxpayers who had their own share of suffering, the report was seen to offer nothing that would address the "fundamental viciousness of the economic system" and was merely proposing to bail out bondholders and hand the country "back to the capitalists."[77] Stafford Cripps spoke most directly to the question of the loss of democratic institutions and denounced the proposals as reflecting a

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[75]Proceedings, Dec. 1.

[76]See Political Debates, House of Commons (London 1933). Also Advocate, 22 Dec. 1933.

[77]Political Debates, 19 Dec., pp.224-231. See also Neary, Political Economy, for excerpts from these debates.

"tendency to accuse democracy of a crime for which it is not responsible."[78] He particularly emphasized that the wording of the government's legislation provided for Newfoundland's Letters Patent to be "revoked" without any provision for their re-instatement, and that this was an unacceptable affront to any pretence of preserving the dignity of the population. As a result of this intervention, J.H. Thomas, the Secretary of State, conceded that the government would amend the wording to read "suspend" when the legislation was sent for final approval to the House of Lords. The Advocate, which had continued to vigourously denounce the entire exercise as it was played out in the Legislatures of both countries, offered a sarcastic reflection on the semantic debate, an opinion which ultimately spoke to both the failure of the country and the perceived distortion of a constitutional prescription the paper had for so long championed:

> Our main point in referring to this is to draw our readers' attention to the fact that there is another word in the English Dictionaries spelt 'renege'. In a particular sense the word is used in reference to a player in a game of cards who does not 'play the game'. It can be used in a general sense as well, and one standard Dictionary explaining it in this sense says it can be used in referring to 'one who fails to comply with one's promise or obligation'. The constitution of Newfoundland is dead. The game is played and the people know who reneged. His name is F.C. Alderdice.[79]

The Advocate and Coaker were among the very few voices

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[78]Ibid., 18 Dec., p. 939.

[79]Advocate, 29 December 1933.

raised in opposition to the proposals in Newfoundland.[80] While such interventions resonated with righteous patriotism in the face of what was seen as a "huge piece of treachery" carried out "in an ignoble fashion with indecent haste,"[81] these objections could not have constituted a serious challenge coming as they did from the long-time leading proponents of commission government. The Telegram ignored what it must have seen as captious complaints from these sources when it trumpeted the broad support the report was receiving and noted that there was no "cavilling" in response.[82] The Daily News charged Coaker with hypocrisy as one who had "made the welkin ring" for several years promoting the commission idea and who was now being ungrateful and intemperate in his criticism.[83] The game was played and the constitution, for a time at least, was indeed dead for all meaningful purposes. In their rush to assign blame for what they saw as selling out the country, Coaker and the Advocate appeared entirely oblivious to the

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[80] As if there was not enough irony in the position of the leading proponents of commission denouncing the report, they were joined in doing so by Coaker's old nemesis, A.B. Morine, who wrote two extremely critical letters to the Toronto Globe, and copied them for publication in the Advocate, 1 Dec. 1933. Richard Squires, who had not been heard from in public for some time, sent a telegram opposing the report to the Dominions Office, see Neary, Newfoundland, p.37. Coaker believed that it was the prospect of Squires leading the opposition to the report which persuaded the Commissioners from proceeding with a referendum, see Advocate, 15 December 1933.

[81] Ibid.

[82] Telegram, 27 Nov. 1933.

[83] Daily News, 29 Nov. 1933.

essential contribution they had made in setting the stage for the final act.

Throughout the course of this drama, it is the role of the Amulree Royal Commission which emerges front and centre as the primary vehicle for the acting out of the country's conflicted political personality. It was as though in the image of the Royal Commission, the country was able to see a projection of its own future. Indeed the real impact of the Amulree Commission may have been that by its very existence it offered a model of that elusive new arrangement which Coaker had been trying to define for several years. In the process of the country's dialogue with Amulree, there emerged a paradigm that would simply call for the transfer of authority from one Commission to another. After all, it would not require much in the way of a departure to go from entrusting a body of experts with the troublesome task of charting a course for the future, to handing over the entire administration of the country to a similar body charged with the same essential mandate, extended indefinitely. It is perhaps fitting then that it was Coaker, the one who had most clearly articulated a certain vision of the future, who was also the most adamant in rejecting the work of its harbinger.

Chapter Five

Conclusion

This thesis has attempted to show that the loss of Newfoundland's responsible government in 1933 cannot be seen merely as an act of treachery by the government of the day, nor simply as the result of a dictate imposed by outsiders, nor even as a desperate response to a crisis brought about by the specific conditions of the time. Although it was arguably more or less a function of each and all of these factors, it was, more importantly, the end result of a process with a clear historical gestation that carried an unmistakable Newfoundland character. William Coaker was wrong when he predicted that the population would not stand for the unilateral suspension of the country's political institutions. That the people did not respond to his appeals for mobilization nor spontaneously move to register any discernible protest, may be seen as a vindication of the decision taken by the Royal Commission to recommend proceeding without any provision for consultation to establish a regime that itself would have no pretence of representativeness. This was hardly a difficult risk to calculate in view of the enormous opinion that had converged around the basic proposition that the political process itself had to be usurped as a pre-condition for moving the country forward.

In the end, Coaker found himself in a familiar position of denouncing a merchant government for selling out the

country. It was precisely such a vantage point which in 1925 led him to call for abolishing the party system of government. It was then that he articulated a view which was informed by his own experience and that of the country as a whole where the future seemed to hold only an inescapable pattern of replacing the political "ins" with the "outs", a syndrome that would eventually produce a crisis of profound proportions. If the Liberals, who were the only group willing to sponsor reform of the fishery but were otherwise incapable of governing responsibly, were to be replaced at regular intervals by a merchant party dedicated first to the principle of self-interest, then the country was bound to be held back by a continuous struggle to achieve a minimum level of political stability.(It is worth noting that for twenty years following the re-election of the Morris government in 1913, there was no political formation successful in winning a second term in office.) Positioning himself somewhere between a warning and a prediction, Coaker, in a characteristic far-sighted fashion, seized the initiative to offer a prescriptive remedy that was designed with the best of intentions to reconcile a virtually unresolveable tension between preserving democratic practice on the one hand and transforming traditional institutions into an experimental and wholly unrecognizable form on the other.

It is to Coaker's credit that as his proposal entered the realm of public consideration and became the property of whoever attached themselves to it, he and the editorialists at

the Advocate maintained a determined commitment to insist as best they could on the inviolable principle of representation as a necessary feature of political reform. But there was an inherent weakness in the structure and practicability of the idea which constituted a formidable obstacle in the way of any clear vision toward its implementation. This was apparent even as its formulation evolved from an initial suggestion of a commission composed of ten to one comprising nine and then six and finally three representatives. These were to be elected on denominational lines, which may have been a valid attempt to construct a new formula rooted in historical practice, but was nonetheless hardly a programme that would guarantee either representative or effective government. It also remained entirely unclear how such a system could be efficiently introduced on the promise of a party coming to power with an intention to implement such a platform. A new government would first have to hold a referendum, on the assumption that it had no mandate to move unilaterally, and if the results were favourable, it would pass legislation to govern the holding of new elections which would then be contested by candidates running according to their religious affiliation. For an idea which was supposed to minimize and eventually to eliminate partisan conflict, it is difficult to see how such a process could have been carried out, particularly within a condensed time frame, without engendering a great deal of conflict in which sectarian and other interests substituted for political

divisions, with no fewer complicating and debilitating consequences.

As it turned out, the ascension to power of Alderdice's party in 1932 and the subsequent appointment of the Amulree Commission, with its process of broad consultation, was as close to being true to Coaker's programme as could be realistically expected. It was here that the ultimate weakness of the proposal was revealed, as the essential problem of implementation was entrusted, and quite consciously so as Coaker's recruitment of Alderdice to the idea indicates, to a merchant regime that was not likely to approach the issue with any clear commitment to democratic values. The limitation of Coaker's proposal was not just that its implementation was dependent on politicians, but that given the turns of the political wheel of fortune, it was almost inevitably going to come to rest on the good offices of representatives who had an entirely different conception of the nature of politics and who were accordingly motivated by an interest in restricting the perceived evils of popular rule. It is clear that, after the election of Alderdice, as the commission idea gained support beyond the F.P.U., through public debates in the capital city, in many of the submissions made to the Royal Commission by leading merchants, in much of the pro-government press commentary, and by the closing speech of Alderdice in

the House of Assembly[1], that in none of these places was there a professed commitment to democratic principles approaching anything like that articulated by Coaker. While he was advocating a change, albeit a drastic and radical one, to the political system, others took the idea as an opportunity to replace electoral accountability by some form of an appointed committee. All that was needed to give the proposal further momentum was the perception of an existing consensus on the question of eliminating politics from representation. And for the creation of this, Coaker was absolutely instrumental.[2]

In this light it is instructive to read the analysis of the Amulree report as it went to great lengths to describe and

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[1]In his speech Alderdice expressed the view that the arguments made about the sanctity of representative institutions did not stand up against the historical reality of experience which had shown the practice of politics to be not worth defending and that in any case, the right to vote was "only a theoretical thing."

[2] It must be noted that, despite his protests after the fact, Coaker was not entirely consistent in putting forward a democratic point of view, and this may be seen both in the very idea of a commission as a substitute for parliament, and in his own autocratic stewardship of the F.P.U. over such a long period. A specific instance in which he betrayed his own non-democratic impulses and embraced such a variation on his proposal was apparent when he wrote in 1932: "Newfoundland cannot come into her own under Party government. We have too few suitable men for the Parliamentary conduct of public business in this country. What is required for Newfoundland and what is most essential for present conditions is a Mussolini. If a man with a soul encased in steel, experienced and not under forty years old, appeared on the political horizon in this country today as a Mussolini I would support him with all my strength." Past, Present and Future, Ch. 10. This sentiment, however, must be understood in the context it was presented, namely that of a furious critique of the relentless failure by merchants to move forward on fishery reform.

explain the contributing factors which defined what it called a general demoralisation of the people. It identified a "vis inertiae" existing throughout the country[3] which was attributed by the Commission as largely resulting from the iniquitous credit system in the fishery and the "far-reaching psychological effects" it produced among the population.[4] The account of the workings of this system was detailed and merciless in its indictment of the role of the merchants.[5] It followed this with a report on the evidence it had received concerning the political system, and concluded there could be no doubt that "a continuing process of greed, craft and corruption...[had] left few classes of the community untouched by its insidious influences."[6] The combined effects of self-interest in politics and the fishery had put the country in a vulnerable position, unprepared for the disruption and devastation that would arrive with the years of the depression.

By 1932, the report stated that "no less than 70,000 persons, or 25 per cent of the population were in receipt of

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[3]Amulree Report, p.78.

[4]Ibid., pp.79-81.

[5]In a later section the report made reference to the "salutary measures" introduced by Coaker in 1919 to reform the fishery, and castigated the merchants again for their failure to support an initiative it said was in their own best interest, the results of which had severe long term consequences for the country. Ibid., p.109.

[6]Ibid., pp.81-81.

public relief, other than poor relief or relief for the aged poor."[7] Then in 1933, any prospects for even a temporary recovery were destroyed as the shore fishery collapsed, affecting "nearly three quarters of the population."[8] Finally, the Commissioners ventured to "emphasize" certain aspects of political life which deserved consideration and focused on two in particular. The first concerned the issue of "job farming" and the effects of the "spoils system" on the country's administration and its civil servants. It noted that the capital city had an approximate population of 40,000, which was a very small base from which to recruit an educated class for public service: "...the members of it are all known, if not related, to each other: everyone knows everyone else's business and it is a simple matter to ascertain which way any particular civil servant voted."[9] Secondly, it examined the consequences of denominationalism on the workings of government and drew the conclusion that instead of the churches playing a positive role as a "check to political malpractice", the divisions only served to contribute to the "general demoralization."[10]

All of this, and more besides, was used to construct a

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[7]Ibid., p. 83.

[8]Ibid., p. 85.

[9]Ibid., p. 87. Such a picture may appear patronizing, but this does not mean it wasn't accurate.

[10]Ibid., pp. 88-89.

background analysis which was designed to establish a case for dismantling the country's political machinery as a means of securing its solvency. It may be, as Peter Neary has argued in presenting evidence of the secretive final machinations, that the choice of structure for the commission regime was given to the Royal Commission by the Dominions Office as a conduit for the British government's refusal to entertain any scenarios that would see a delay or partial default of debt payments.[11] But this was only done at the eleventh hour, following a critical refusal by Canada to co-operate in providing assistance to meet payments falling due at the end of the year, and after a protracted and systematic review of innumerable options short of the one recommended. It is also clear that even then this choice was not the preferred solution of all the Commissioners, particularly Magrath who, as the Canadian appointee, publicly indicated his disagreement and dissatisfaction.[12] On the one hand, this vacillation in formulating the recommendations indicates the tenuous nature of the perceived political basis for advancing such a proposal. At the same time, however, it points to the reality that such a programme would not likely have seen the light of day if it had not first been presented to the Commission, and as such to the British authorities, as a bona fide proposition with tangible support in Newfoundland.

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[11]See Neary, Newfoundland, pp. 23-27.

[12]Ibid., pp. 31-32.

In the Royal Commission's report, there were three options put forward for political reform which allegedly represented the range of views submitted by witnesses. (This followed a discussion of two other options, the sale of Labrador and the possibility of Confederation, which were both rejected on the grounds of not being viable, and in the case of Confederation, not receiving support from the population.) These options were introduced with the Commissioners' statement of a guiding principle whereby rehabilitation had to proceed in a "two fold character": financial assistance would have to be coupled with political changes that would advance not only "material prosperity", but also allow the country to "win free from the malign influences" that would otherwise threaten any prospects for ameliorative progress.[13] The report outlined the political options as falling within three categories: a continuation of the existing form of government with modifications to ensure the permanence of some form of expenditure control; alterations to the system of government without modifying the constitution; and finally, a "radical change of system."

These categories reflect those outlined in the memorandum prepared by Clutterbuck, but in the report the first two were rejected in a perfunctory fashion as not meeting the test of providing for a new political machinery that would "ensure the execution of a constructive forward policy designed to improve

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[13]Amulree Report, p. 192.

the condition of the people."[14] The Commissioners set up a circular logic in which the outcome was already determined by a condition which precluded certain potential options: "We are satisfied that such machinery could not be created without a modification of the existing constitution." The Commissioners concluded that they would not be justified in enlisting the financial assistance of the British government, "while the fundamental causes of the present difficulties were to be neglected."[15] Finally, the report made the case explicit in a manner which reflects on both the self-conscious uncertainty of its own position and the weight of arguments, presumably from both the witnesses and British authorities, recommending anti-democratic measures:

> After much anxious consideration, therefore, and in spite of a strong pre-disposition in favour of the maintenance of established institutions, we have been forced to the conclusion that only by a radical change of regime for a limited period of years can the island be assisted to effective recovery.[16]

The report then gave consideration to two final possibilities in either the formation of a National government or an extension of the existing parliament. Both of these were seen to be inadequate in responding to the desires of that "great majority of witnesses" who had called for a rest from politics, differing only as to the form that rest might take:

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[14]Ibid., p. 194.

[15]Ibid.

[16]Ibid., p. 195.

> The desideratum was not that the country should be freed for the time being from the prospect of a general election, and from the demoralising influences of party politics, but that... the existing Legislative machine should be temporarily suspended and the government of the country placed for a period of years in the hands of a 'Commission'.[17]

This passage represents the formal introduction of the language which Coaker had been using for eight years into the lexicon of constitutional discourse, and it is made clear that the concept which gave it definition was taken from the people who had appeared before the Royal Commission. This thesis has attempted, in part, to qualify the received wisdom concerning the extent to which this idea was embraced by the population, insofar as available sources indicate. But the evidence also shows that at the same time, the general formulation, with important distinguishing features according to who was advocating it and when, was not only in wide circulation, but in a real sense can be seen to have constituted an actually existing consensus. In the end, the objections regarding process and form were shown to be a limited liability where disagreement amounted to an insignificant, albeit resonant, challenge. For, despite the absence of any provision for accountability, and the lack of a plebiscite on the recommendations, the substantial content of the Commission's political analysis could have been written by William Coaker at any time between 1925 and 1933. The response by the Royal Commission to the malaise it discovered in Newfoundland reflected a manifest

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[17]Ibid., p. 196.

crisis in which all sense of political efficacy had been thoroughly undermined. In the final analysis, the articulation of its solution may be seen to have been an indirect expression of self-determination on behalf of a people who had for some time been willing to yield their own voice.

E.H. Carr has written, in a discussion of how historical interpretation of political events tends toward a skewed analysis according to a certain view of progress, that it is necessary in regarding the past to pursue a neutral course in passing judgement: "Nothing is more radically false than to set up some supposedly abstract standard of the desirable and condemn the past in light of it."[18] In the case of Newfoundland's loss of self-government in 1933, a loss which not incidentally included the abdication of the country's full status as a Dominion within the Empire[19], there is not much point in assigning blame, or for that matter, questioning the validity of the findings of the Amulree Commission or the wisdom of the government of the day in acceding to a recommendation from the outside. For, as James Overton has suggested, in considering the attributes of what Antonio Gramsci called the Caesarist solution of political forces converging in response to crisis, it is an open question whether the idea of

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[18]E.H. Carr, What is History? (London 1961), p. 128.

[19]For a thorough legalistic treatment of the complex questions surrounding the history of Newfoundland's international constitutional status, See William Gilmore, Newfoundland and Dominion Status (Toronto 1988).

commission government was progressive or reactionary in character.[20] What is clear is that the idea emerged as a result of an intervention by William Coaker who carried it forward over a period of time as a legitimate political agenda which eventually came to dominate the country's public discourse. As such, while it may have prepared the ground for a kind of interregnum which had not originally been envisioned, the proposition was one nonetheless authentically rooted in the Newfoundland political experience.

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[20]Overton, "Economic Crisis", pp. 123-124.

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Appendix A

Excerpts from Address to FPU Convention by William Coaker, November 1925[1]

The future depends more upon the right type of men elected than the policy they advocate. I may not be included in the next list of candidates appealing to the electorate. I have fought for certain ideals since 1909. These ideals were supported by a portion of the electorate and opposed by the other portion. I still believe in these ideals, but I see very little hope of putting them into effect and I would not again willingly undertake to carry political burdens and their incessant worries unless absolutely assured that the political ideals I have entertained for a lifetime would form a part of the political creed of a new government. I see many breakers ahead, and mountainous seas which will engulf the ship of State unless commanded by the best crew procurable in the land. Many big and far-reaching problems await to be solved... but which will never be solved satisfactorily under the peculiar conditions which for the last thirty years have guided the electorate in the choice of its rulers. The chief aim of some political leaders has been to attain power or defeat their opponents regardless of the bluff and insincerity practised to attain the end. What I would like to see is a party appealing to the electorate on the single issue of passing a law to place the government of the country in the hands of nine men for ten years, electing the nine men somewhat on the lines pursued for years of selecting the Executive, that is to ensure denominational representation. I would like to see Catholic districts selecting three members of the Government of nine, the West Coast and Conception Bay selecting three more and the North three more, filling vacancies as they occur in each section and permitting the nine elected Commissioners to elect their own Chairman, who would be Prime Minister. The Deputy heads would administer the Departments. All legislation to be published prior to enactment to enable the public to discuss such or memorialize the Government in connection therewith. Such a policy pursued for ten years would produce reforms, establish industries, procure retrenchment and place the fishing industry on a sound businesslike basis. It would cut out graft, reduce the Civil Service list to its proper proportion, dispense, for a period, with the animosities and bitterness of party strife and permit the country to concentrate upon vital matters that await solution without having before its eyes day by day, as now, the spectre of the voters turning them out of office, because graft was limited, or jobs and pickings were unobtainable, or what the owners of inferior fish would do with their vote and influence in the event of being graded inferior by the proper inspection. Personally, after very considerable experience, I

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[1]As published in Coaker, Twenty Years, p. 236 ff.

am convinced that the future of the country can best be served and attained under a Commission somewhat on the lines I have outlined. There would be no limit to the number of Candidates nominated for each division and the elections would be under the Election Law as far as applicable. The Party favouring such an issue, if elected to power, would have to convene the Legislature immediately after it became the Government and enact the necessary legislation. If the Upper House refused to pass such legislation its refusal would be overcome by the law of 1917 which enables the House of Assembly to enact laws without the concurrence of the Upper House. Following such an enactment dissolution would follow and an election take place to select the nine commissioners in three sections of three for each. The Catholic people would select their own representatives, the Church of England and Methodist would do the same. St. John's, Trepassey, Placentia, St. Mary's, Harbor Main and Bell Island would elect the three Catholic representatives, because the population is Catholic by a heavy majority. Conception Bay, Burin, Fortune Bay, Burgeo and the West Coast would elect three. The districts from St. Barbe to Trinity would elect three, which being largely Protestants would permit Protestants to be elected and there would be no trouble experienced in selecting three Methodist and three Anglicans. After ten years the Commission would issue a proclamation to elect members for the House of Assembly and Party politics would again dominate the elections and return a Party Government. I have given much though to the future development and progress of the country and I repeat, I am convinced that unless some such arrangement is made there can be no escape from the breakers nor can there be stable business progress. More progress would be made under such a Commission in ten years than would be possible in fifty years of Party government.

Appendix B

Letter by William Coaker to Evening Telegram, 23 November 1933

Dear Sir - You request my views on the Report of the Royal Commission: but I feel sure you appreciate the difficulty, if not the impossibility, of forming a considered opinion or coming to any definite conclusion within a few days in reference to such a comprehensive, complex and important document, the preparation of which required the concentrated attention of its compilers extended over a period of several months.

However the whole appears to be summed up in the despatch dated the 19th., inst., from the Rt. Hon. the Secretary of State for the Dominions, to the Hon. the Prime Minister of Newfoundland in reply to the latter's request for an indication of the attitude of the British Government to the recommendations of the Commission. Perusing that Despatch, it is quite obvious that the immediate welfare of Newfoundland and Newfoundlanders is not its main theme. Its text is based on, (1) the political situation facing the country, and (2) the necessity of protecting the bond holders and financial creditors of Newfoundland; whereas our pressing and imperative needs are the feeding and clothing of our starving and destitute people during the coming winter; and the finding of remunerative employment in productive labour for over twenty thousand of our male population, in order to enable them to resume the support of themselves and their families before another year passes. These are the questions with which the country is concerned - of even paramount importance of outside interests, financial or otherwise; but these questions the Report fails to effectively answer.

What remedial suggestions have the Commissioners offered in so far as the development of our fisheries is concerned? They make no definite recommendation only, namely, the spending of $165,000 to provide four schooners to test out the possibilities of the fishing grounds and the establishment of six bait depots as an experimental step toward the provision of bait supplies: and the only help the Report contemplates giving to the rehabilitation of our main industry is the suggestion to create a new department of natural resources embracing the fisheries, forests, agriculture and mines, presided over by a Commissioner, not from Newfoundland, but from England. Is that assisting our staple industry as was expected? Does that afford Newfoundland the aid so urgently required to man her fishing fleets, finance their outfitting, and assure to those who prosecute the voyage, reasonable hope of obtaining suitable returns to maintain their families and themselves? It is true the Report contains many references to the necessity of restoring the fishing industry of the country, but it

lamentably fails to solve our problems in that respect; and many of the proposals which the Report indicates in my opinion, if given effect, would only make matters worse. They may sound well in the theory, but in the main they are impracticable and offer no remedy for the ills from which this industry has been suffering for the past few years.

The main principle underlying the Report is the establishment of a Commission form of government for this country. I approve of Government by Commission - provided proper safeguards are afforded our people. My ideas as to the creation of this new system of government and its operation in the administration of the country's affairs differ materially however from those of the Commissioners. I am absolutely opposed to the scheme of government as outlined in the Report. Not alone does it involve the complete abrogation of our rights of self-government, but proposes to set up a governing body vested with the widest and most autocratic powers, uncontrolled and uncontrollable so far as the people of Newfoundland are concerned who are denied even the right of selection of those to whom they are asked to surrender their liberties. That would not be government! That would be sheer despotism and contrary to every principle upon which government within the British Empire is founded. It is humiliating enough to have to witness the giving up of responsible government, but to be plunged from the status, theoretical though it may have been, of a self-governing Dominion of the Crown to a position below that of the ordinary Crown Colony, is degrading. We should be put on a par with one of the subject races - an intolerable situation to even contemplate. A Commission selected by, and properly representative of, the people, to govern the country for a definite term of years, freed from the disturbances and disadvantages of party politics, might very well prove the salvation of Newfoundland; but there is a vast difference between that system of government and the plan proposed by the Royal Commission. Greatly as default by this country in its financial obligations is to be deplored, I think it is preferable to the acceptance of the proposals as contained in the Report.

Our Legislature has been called together for Monday next to deal with the report. I cannot for a moment bring myself to believe that there will be any hasty decision reached on what is perhaps the most momentous question ever submitted to the consideration of the people's representatives - involving not alone the political destinies of our country, but the intimate interests of every man, woman and child in Newfoundland. Obviously it is not a matter for any snap judgement, and realizing the interests at stake, appreciating the fact that not only is the protection of the creditors of Newfoundland concerned, but the most sacred rights and liberties as well, it must be presumed that the most mature thought will be given

to the Report and the recommendations it contains, before any action is taken. Every precaution should be observed to see that every phase of the subject is exhaustively considered before any definite conclusion is reached. To rush a matter of such importance through the Legislature may very well involved a disaster to the people of this country, even more far reaching than that conjectured by the Commissioners.

In my opinion the Legislature would be unwise if it accepted the recommendations in their present form; but it would be false to its trust and its members recreant in their duty to the people they represent if they tolerated any attempt to rush the matter. It is not too much to say that those who hastily or inadvisably or for any unworthy motive vote for the acceptance of the Report in its present form, will be remembered in the history of this country as traitors to the land that bore them.

There are certain acceptable phases in the Report, but there are many objectionable features. The latter may be removed if time is given to analyse and properly consider the recommendations and suggest some counter-proposals. An opportunity for this should be afforded, and it is only fair, not alone to the members of the Legislature, but to the public at large, that time should be given in order to properly assess the value and effect of the document upon which the destinies of this country depend. The suggestion which I venture to make is that, following the discussion on the Report, to take place on Monday next, the House should rise for an interval sufficiently long to enable the Report to be exhaustively studied, as well by the representatives of the people, as by the public itself; and in so far as objections to the recommendations may be disclosed, an opportunity should also be afforded for the submission of counter-proposals to the British Government; and to that end a Commission should be appointed to proceed if necessary, to England, to confer with the representatives of the British Government to see whether some more acceptable plan could be evolved, and some better method devised to safeguard our national obligations and assure the recovery of our country at the same time, protecting us against the ill-effects which are bound to follow if the proposals in their present form are carried out.

I do not think it is too much to ask that this country be allowed at least a few weeks to properly consider a Report which has taken months to prepare. In that the recommendations involve the surrender of our rights of self-Government, I seriously question the power of the Legislature to assent to the abrogation of these rights without first having the matter submitted to the people, and I feel confident that were any other country within the British Empire faced with a decision which we are now asked to make, nothing would be done by the

representatives of the people unless and until the question was first submitted at least by way of a plebiscite to the determination of the people themselves.

Yours truly,
W.F. Coaker
St. John's, November 23rd.

Cable despatch by William Coaker to the Secretary of State for Dominion Affairs, November 25th, 1933 ("Saturday last", as printed in Fisherman's Advocate, 1 December)

"Government intends force through Legislature meeting Monday next acceptance recommendations Royal Commission Report without allowing time for proper consideration vital issues involved. Such procedure bound to have disastrous effects. In his Manifesto last year Prime Minister gave solemn pledge nothing would be done altering constitutional position unless approved by electorate. In view this undertaking and supreme importance matter, if measure rushed through over heads of people, as now contemplated by Government, immediate agitation for repeal will result, justified on grounds of treachery and surrender country's rights without people being given time properly study question. Have advised Governor in best interest country to implore Government to allow time people consider issue and take plebiscite, otherwise fear tranquillity country will be endangered, authority undermined and widespread turmoil and unrest follow. Believe country if properly consulted will endorse Commission Government, on reasonable conditions, for period of years, but if present proposals brought into effect grave dissatisfaction, intense bitterness and lasting antagonisms will result."

Appendix C[2]

Notes on Commission Government (presented by P.A. Clutterbuck, Sept. 1933)

Of the witnesses who have appeared before the Commission to date, 15 have been in favour of "Commission Government" for a period of years and 8 against. It will be seen from the attached list that those in favour are made up of 3 members and 1 ex-member of the present Cabinet, 1 ex-Prime Minister, one member of the Upper House, 1 Minister in the last Government, 2 Civil Servants, 1 Bank Manager, 2 Merchants, 1 lawyer and 2 commercial men. Those against comprise 4 members of the present Cabinet, the late Prime Minister and his Finance Minister, 1 merchant and 1 commercial man.

The advocates of Commission Government have in the main been actuated by the genuine belief that in no other way will it be possible to satisfy the essential needs of the country, namely to stamp out graft and corruption, get rid of the professional politician, and lead the people back to a sense of independence and self-reliance. They are united in the idea that it is 25 years of politics that has led to the breakdown of responsible government, and that, the crash having come, it would be suicidal to attempt to rebuild on the same foundation. It is only by firm control and a prolonged political holiday, they claim, that the country can be saved.

Those who oppose Commission Government do so for four reasons: (a) On account of the humiliation involved; Commission Government would mean Newfoundland is not fit to govern herself. (b) It might necessitate reversion to the status of a Colony and this would mean putting the clock back. (c) While the people might accept it today they would soon be dissatisfied and the position of the Commissioners would become intolerable. (d) The composition of the Commission would in any case present serious difficulties.

It will be observed from the attached list that the opponents of this form of government are mostly politicians. This is only natural since it is at the politicians that the proposal is aimed. On the other hand the Cabinet Ministers and the others in the opposite camp are not all so disinterested as might appear, since it is not unfair to say that some at least see in the proposal an attractive and patriotic device for keeping their own party in power and completing the ruin of their political opponents. These might have different views if the Commission were to be composed of outsiders.

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[2]This document is from the McGrath papers, Reel 2, "Miscellaneous." It is signed by P.A. Clutterbuck with a note that it was presented 15 Sept. 1933.

Individual suggestions as to the form which Commission Government might take have naturally varied with the angle from which the problem has been approached. But for the purposes of this note it will be convenient to consider the suggestions under two heads: (A) Those which would not necessarily impair the status of the Island as a Dominion and (B) those which would do so.

A. Commission Government in a form which would not necessarily impair the status of the Island as a Dominion.

It may be taken as axiomatic that any proposal which involved the disappearance of the Legislature would be inconsistent with the existing constitutional instruments. The Constitution of Newfoundland is somewhat complicated, being partly written and partly unwritten, the former being contained partly in Letters Patent and Royal Instructions, partly in Acts of the U.K. Parliament and partly in Acts of the Newfoundland Legislature. The main instrument is the Letters Patent of the 28th March, 1876 which constitute the office of Governor and define the Governor's powers and authorities. Clause III. of the Letters Patent deals with the Constitution of the Legislative Council and Clause IV. empowers the Governor "to summon and call together the General Assembly ..., and also, from time to time, in the lawful and accustomed manner, to prorogue the Legislative Council and the House of Assembly ..., and from time to time to dissolve the said House of Assembly." Clause V. authorises and empowers the Governor, with the advice and consent of the Legislative Council and Assembly, to make laws for the public peace, welfare and good government of Newfoundland.

Detailed provisions regarding the House of Assembly are contained not in the Letters Patent but in Newfoundland Acts, but it is clear from the above Clauses that the Letters Patent postulate the existence of a Legislative Council and House of Assembly and further that the Governor has now power of legislation except with the advice and consent of the two Houses. Any proposal to enable the Governor to act independently of the Legislature, which would be dissolved for the time being, would therefore seem prima facie to require amendment of the Letters Patent.

On the other hand, it may be argued that the Letters Patent are only a part of Newfoundland's written constitution, and must be read subject to her unwritten constitution, namely to the advance in constitutional usage and practice which has taken place since 1876. At the time that the Letters Patent were issued and for many years afterwards Newfoundland was a Colony and, as such, subject in the last resort, to control from the United Kingdom. In the course of time her position became that of a self-governing Colony with Dominion status

and the extent to which she became immune from interference is shown by the correspondence with Downing Street at the time of the Reid contract in 1897. Finally, with the passage of the Statute of Westminster in 1930, she ceased to be a Colony and became a Dominion. Yet throughout this period the Letters Patent have remained unamended. It is inevitable in the circumstances that certain clauses in the Letters Patent should be obsolete and others obsolescent, from which it might be argued that it is Newfoundland's status as a Dominion rather than the former constitutional instruments which must be the determining factor. If some clauses of the Letters Patent are obsolete, why not others? If this argument is sound, it might suffice for the Newfoundland Government to enact legislation dissolving the Legislature for a period of years and placing all executive and legislative power in the hands of the Governor and an Executive Council to be nominated by him. But while the position is not free from doubt - indeed it is a nice constitutional point - the correct answer is I think, that it is merely the restrictive Clauses of the Letters Patent that have become obsolete, i.e. those which imply control from the United Kingdom, and that the remainder, which carry no such implication, continue in full force as the foundation of the constitution of the Island which can only be altered by His Majesty under the powers specially reserved in the Letters Patent to the Sovereign. This conclusion is reinforced by reference to the Commission issued by the King to the present Governor (14th October, 1932) which authorises, empowers and commands His Excellency to "exercise and perform all and singular the powers and directions contained in" the Letters Patent. In these circumstances, it is, I think, to be assumed that any steps for the suppression of the Legislature would require amendment of the Letters Patent, a course which, as shown under B, would inevitably impair the status of Newfoundland as a Dominion.

Given, then, that the Legislative Council and House of Assembly must be retained in being, how could Commission Government be established? It would seem that this could only be carried out in one of two ways:

1. The Government to appoint a Commission, composed of such members as they might think fit, and to empower them to take executive charge of all Government Departments and all public business. The Commission would have no legislative authority but it would be understood that whenever it required fresh legislation to be passed it would make recommendations to the Government who would undertake, in the absence of strong reasons to the contrary, to accept them and to put the necessary legislation through Parliament. The Government would further undertake not to enact legislation except on the recommendation of the Commission. Under this scheme the Commission would be subordinate to the Executive Council

(which would be retained in being on a purely honorary basis) but would be immune from interference by that body except and in so far as fresh legislation might be required. The weakness of the scheme lies in the fact that since most executive work depends in the last resort on financial provision and since financial provision requires legislative sanction, the freedom of action granted to the Commission might prove to be illusory.

2. The Government to pass an Act reconstituting the Executive Council (as they are fully entitled to do under Clause II. of the Letters Patent of 1876). They might for instance, decide that the Executive Council, instead of consisting of twelve members as at present, should in future consist of the Prime Minister and the Secretary of State, and four members to be nominated by the Governor (the understanding being that two would be selected from Canada and two from the United Kingdom). They could further provide by legislation that those members of the Executive Council who were not already members of the House of Assembly should be ex-officio members of the body. The Executive Council would then proceed , just as they do today, to take charge of the executive business of the Island and the members would between them be responsible for running the various Government departments, for framing policy and for carrying through the necessary reforms. The Executive Council would in fact be the "Commission", with the Prime Minister (subject to the Governor) at the head of it and the Prime Minister would depend on his majority in Parliament for putting through the fresh legislation on which the Commission might decide. This might work very well but the weakness of the scheme lies in the fact that all members of the existing Executive Council, other than the Prime Minister and the Secretary of State would be thrown out of office and while they would no doubt behave themselves at first they might before long constitute a disgruntled bloc in the House. The scheme could only work satisfactorily as long as the Prime Minister was absolutely sure of his majority.

B. <u>Commission Government in a form which would impair the status of Newfoundland as a Dominion.</u>

It is to be expected that neither of the forgoing schemes would be satisfactory to the advocates of Commission Government since neither would interfere with the machinery of Parliament, still less provide for its suppression. It would thus be possible for a new Government to reverse the action taken by the present Government and to restore the status quo with all its dangers. If it should be desired to safeguard the country against this possibility, it would be necessary to suspend the present Parliamentary system and this would involve the alteration of the Letters Patent.

Assuming the at the Government wished to go to these lengths, the appropriate procedure from the constitutional standpoint would be the submission of an Address to the Sovereign from both Houses of the Newfoundland Legislature setting out the grounds on which the provision of the Letters Patent was desired and praying for the issue of new Letters Patent under which both the executive and the legislative power would be vested in the Governor who would be assisted by an Executive Council consisting of x members to be nominated by him. It could be recommended that x/2 should be chosen from Newfoundland, x/2 from the United Kingdom, and x/2 from Canada, or such other proportions as the Government might see fit to suggest. Alternatively, if it were desired to do so, it might be recommended that all the members should be chosen from outside Newfoundland. Further recommendations might be that there should be an Advisory Council composed of prominent men in Newfoundland (who would serve in an advisory capacity) and that the new regime should be subject to review either at the end of a stated period or when Newfoundland was again able to pay her way. On the assumption that these recommendations were adopted by His Majesty, arrangements could then be made for the issue of new Letters Patent revoking the existing Letters Patent and containing provisions in the sense desired. The existing Royal Instructions would also have to be revoked and fresh instructions issued, and it would further be necessary for a new Commission to be issued to the Governor.

But while from the standpoint of procedure no special difficulty would seem to arise (though action of this kind is of course unprecedented) the implications of such a course would undoubtedly be far-reaching.

In the first place, it is clear that, both executive and legislative power having been invested in the Governor, His Excellency could not be left in the air as a virtual dictator. But, it may be said, Newfoundland is a Dominion, and, as such, able to dispose of her own destiny. Why then should she not have a dictator if she wished? If the South African Parliament for instance chose to abdicate its functions and place all executive and legislative power in the hands of the Governor General, would there be any cause for interference? Whatever the answer to this last question (which would be a nice exercise in constitutional theory) it is clear that Newfoundland would, in any case, be regarded as in a different position from that of any of the larger Dominions. It will not have escaped notice that the Governor is a Governor, and not a Governor-General. It may be taken as axiomatic that a small and backward community like this could not be left to the tender mercies of a Governor appointed from home without supervision of some sort. At the present time the Island enjoys full "responsible government", i.e., a system of government under which Ministers elected by the votes of the

people are responsible to the people for the good government of the country, the Governor being a constitutional figurehead who is required (except possibly in certain contingencies into which it is not necessary to enter here) to act on his Minister's advice. If there ceased to be elected Ministers and the Governor and the Governor was given complete freedom of action (either alone or as "Governor-in-Council), it would be necessary for him to be accountable to some authority for his actions and (unless this form of government could be made to fit in with some wholly novel scheme of political union with Canada) this authority could only be the U.K. Govt. It follows that the introduction of "Commission Government" in this form would automatically deprive Newfoundland of Dominion status and would degrade her to that of a Colony under U.K. control. In other words the Governor would be responsible to the appropriate Secretary of State in London for the good government of the Island and the Secretary of State would be responsible to Parliament, who in turn would be responsible to the U.K. electorate.

It follows from this reasoning that the issue of new Letters Patent would not in itself be sufficient to secure the end desired. If the U.K. Parliament is to assume the responsibility, it would be necessary to obtain its consent. In view of the recently passed "Statute of Westminster", Section 1 of which defines the expression "Dominion" as including Newfoundland, the appropriate procedure would doubtless be the passage of a further Act of Parliament (which would be specifically stated to have been passed with the request and to the consent of the Newfoundland Government) providing for the administration of Newfoundland, as a Colony.

The assumption by the U.K. Government of responsibility for the good government of Newfoundland would in turn involve responsibility for its finances. This would necessitate a grant-in-aid equivalent to the amount of the annual deficit. The novelty of the situation (vis., the demotion of a Dominion), the size of the deficit, and the notorious mis-management, not to say corruption of previous Newfoundland Governments, would all combine to attract attention and there would no doubt be many to say that the United Kingdom had already shouldered enough responsibilities. It would be idle to pursue speculation too far, but the conclusion naturally suggests itself that, if the U.K. taxpayer were to be saddled with this additional burden, the least that could be done to pacify him would be to link the Colony to sterling and to revise the tariff on a preferential basis.

A further point which ought not to be overlooked is that the position of the present Government would be affected. Under a regime of this kind, a Governor of the administrative type would be required (as Mr. Dunfield has already acted) and the

present Governor, whose training and experience have lain in other directions, would no doubt feel himself unfitted for the post.

If such a form of Government were successfully introduced, could it last? If it were possible to include in the Executive Council (i.e. the "Commission) the leaders of both political parties, there might be a chance of it doing so, but this is unfortunately not the case. Given the exclusion of Sir R. Squires, the changeable and temperamental nature of the people, and the fact that the "Commission" would have to indulge in unpopular reforms, it is difficult not to share the belief of those who affirm that the position of the "Commissioners" would soon become intolerable. If the people were to be stampeded by ex-politicians, as they might quite easily be in default of a quick recovery, a garrison might even be needed. But apart altogether from such possibilities, agitation for a return to the status quo could only be a matter of time; the more drastic the change the more violent the reaction. In the face of popular sentiment not even a garrison would avail.

The foregoing considerations would apply to all the suggested forms of "Commission Government" which would involve the suppression of the Legislature. The danger of the country being stampeded by Sir R. Squires and his associates would of course apply also to those which would allow of the Legislature being retained in being. But it would seem from the above analysis that if some such form of Government should be considered essential for the immediate future, the safest form and that which could be introduced with the least embarrassment both to Newfoundland and the United Kingdom is that discussed under paragraph (2) of head (A). This would not involve the suppression of Parliament, and would be fully consistent with the constitutional instruments; and though it would theoretically be liable to reversal by a new Ministry the danger could, if necessary, be countered by an extension of the life of the present Parliament for such period as might be considered appropriate in the light of the then prevailing political conditions. But whether even this comparatively mild form of "Commission Government" could be introduced without a referendum is of course a matter which the Government alone would be competent to decide.

PRO.	ANTI
Monroe (if first put to the country by party formed on that basis).	Cashin.
Taylor - dictators from outside	Walsh.
Stafford - outsiders	Horwood.
Bowring - some form or other	McNamara
Baird - U.K. to take over Newfoundland for a few years.	H. Winter
Gushue - if Confederation not possible	Sir R. Squires
Sir M. Winter (but with Parliament still continuing)	W.J. Browne
Angel - schoolmaster government	L. Outerbridge
Ayre - Commission of 3 from outside and Advisory Board (hon.) of 10 or 12.	
Emerson - 7 or 8; 2 from U.K., 1 or 2 from Canada, remainder local.	
Dunfield (Commission of 6 presided over by Governor of C.O. type, cf. Nigeria; Mr. Alderdice & Lieut. (Emerson), Sir R. Squires & Lieut. (Sir T. Cook) and two men of standing from U.K.)	
Lake - as leading to Confederation (Commission of 5 - 3 local, 1 U.K., 1 Canada).	
Archibald - Bell Island - absolute control for the time being.	
H. Mitchell - if referendum first.	