

# THE DEBATES OF THE NEWFOUNDLAND LEGISLATURE 1933

Edited by James K. Hiller

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HOUSE OF ASSEMBLY  
OFFICE OF THE SPEAKER

A pivotal turning point in the history of the Newfoundland and Labrador Legislature occurred in 1933 when, because of an economic and financial crisis, the Legislature voted to suspend democratic government, effective in 1934. The suspension was meant to be short-term, but lasted fifteen years.

The debates presented in this volume provide first-hand accounts of the state of the Dominion. The legislators of the day were acutely aware of the enormity of their decision to suspend government, but concluded that unfortunately there was no choice but to take the actions they did. During the debates Prime Minister Alderdice made the following poignant statement:

*“We know what we give up; but when we have to choose between self-government on the one hand, and a release from financial abyss into which we are plunged on the other, who would for a moment hesitate in his choice? When we have had a chance laid open to us to maintain our people in comfort, to release them from the state of semi-starvation which is their lot today, would we not give up almost anything?” (p. 490)*

The debates of the final three sessions of the Newfoundland Legislature (1932-33) prior to Commission of Government have never been published. Meticulously reconstructed from various sources, this volume presents the most complete version of the 1933 debates of the House of Assembly and Legislative Council than has ever before been available.

I congratulate and thank Dr. James Hiller for his important contribution to the historical record of our Legislature and I am pleased to present this long overdue volume.

Sincerely yours,

**ROGER FITZGERALD, MHA**  
Speaker of the House of Assembly

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## PREFACE

The debates of the last three sessions of the Newfoundland Legislature before the suspension of responsible government in 1934 were not published at that time, possibly as an economy measure. This volume contains the debates of the two 1933 sessions, reconstructed from the *Journals* (essentially the minutes) of the House of Assembly and of the upper house, the Legislative Council; from a typewritten and in places fragmentary transcript of most of the Assembly's proceedings (in the Legislative Library); and from extensive newspaper reports.

The project was largely funded by the J.R. Smallwood Centre for Newfoundland and Labrador Studies at Memorial University. I am also grateful to the students and others who helped with what proved to be a long and at times tedious process. In particular, I would like to acknowledge the valuable contribution of Keith Collier. The publication of these debates has been made possible by the House of Assembly, the Legislative Library, and the Queen's Printer. Thanks are due, therefore, to the Clerk of the House, Mr. William MacKenzie and the Director of Information Management, Ms. Kimberley Hammond, and to the Information Specialist, Ms. Trine Schioldan, who prepared the index.

JKH

## EDITORIAL NOTE

Extracts taken from the *Journal* of either House are printed in italics.

The debates include sometimes lengthy extracts from newspaper reports. When this occurs, the speakers' names are indented.

To the best of my knowledge, no transcript is available of the debates of the Legislative Council, and the newspapers did not fully report its proceedings. It has been necessary, therefore, to rely heavily on the *Journal*.

Given that this text is derived from three sources, it has not been possible to impose absolute consistency in such matters as spelling and capitalization.

It should be noted as well that some of the project transcribers did not always distinguish between *The Daily News* and *The Evening Telegram* in their citations.

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## INTRODUCTION

The result of election held on June 11, 1932, was a landslide victory for Frederick C. Alderdice's United Newfoundland Party (UNP), which won 24 out of 27 seats.<sup>1</sup> There were only two Liberals elected - F. Gordon Bradley (Humber), who became leader of the tiny Opposition, and Roland Starks<sup>2</sup> (Green Bay). There was one Independent (Harris Mosdell).

The new government inherited all the problems faced by its discredited Liberal predecessor. The Depression persisted, Newfoundland's major industries faced severe difficulties, poverty and unemployment remained serious problems, and the government's financial desperation made the country's continued political independence a central issue.

The UNP government eventually concluded that since it could not raise any more loans, and since expenditures had been cut as far as possible, partial default on public debt interest payments was inevitable. Alarm bells rang in the headquarters of Canadian banks, in Ottawa and in London. Default by a dominion was unprecedented, and there were serious (if perhaps exaggerated) fears about its potential impact on the market for dominion bonds in general, and on the Canadian dollar. Eventually, it was settled (in December, 1932) that the British and Canadian governments would loan money to cover the debt interest due on January 1, 1933, on condition that Newfoundland would accept a royal commission of enquiry. On February 17, 1933, the commission was appointed, consisting of Baron Amulree (William W. Mackenzie), Charles A. Magrath (a Canadian banker) and Sir William Stavert. The last of these was also a Canadian banker, and had replaced Sir Percy Thompson as financial advisor to the Newfoundland government, which supported his appointment. Thus there was no Newfoundlander on the body which was to decide the country's future. When the Legislature met on April 10, the royal commission was already at work, taking evidence and later traveling the country. Even so, it was business more or less as usual at the Colonial Building.

The royal commission's report appeared on November 21, and the Legislature reconvened on November 27 to consider its recommendations, which resulted from extensive discussions with the British government. It was clear that neither the Canadian government nor the Canadian banks would provide any more financial support, and interest payments on July 1 had been met only with British support. The report's central recommendation was that responsible government should be suspended until the country was self-supporting, and there was a request from the people. A British-appointed commission would take over the government,

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<sup>1</sup> Legislation in the 1932 session reduced the number of seats in the Assembly from 36 to 27.

<sup>2</sup> Sometimes spelled "Starks", though this is almost certainly incorrect.



consisting of three Newfoundlanders and three British appointees, chaired by the Governor. The debt would be rescheduled and guaranteed by the British government.<sup>3</sup>

Though there had been talk of a referendum, the Alderdice administration quickly pushed through the Legislature an endorsement of the royal commission's recommendations. The Opposition's complaints and amendments had no impact. Instead the Legislature voted itself out of existence and closed on December 2. It was a sad and hurried end to almost 80 years of responsible government.

### FURTHER READING

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<sup>3</sup> A White Paper on Newfoundland was issued at the same time as the release of the royal commission report.

## **THE MINISTRY, 1932-1934**

UNITED NEWFOUNDLAND PARTY (ALDERDICE) CABINET, JUNE 1932 – FEBRUARY 1934.

**Prime Minister, Minister of Education, and Minister of Finance:** Frederick C. Alderdice

**Minister of Justice:** L.E. Emerson

**Secretary of State:** John C. Puddester

**Minister of Labour:** Kenneth McK. Brown

**Minister of Marine and Fisheries:** John G. Stone

**Minister of Agriculture and Mines:** William J. Walsh

**Ministers without portfolio:** Harold Mitchell; Francis M. McNamara; James S. Ayre; Samuel J. Foote; Harry A. Winter.

### **Outside Cabinet:**

**Minister of Posts and Telegraphs:** William C. Winsor (promoted to Cabinet, March 1933)

**Minister of Public Works:** Herman W. Quinton.

[In the absence of the ministers, W.J. Browne acted temporarily as Minister of Finance in 1932 and as Minister of Justice in 1933.]

**Speaker:** James A. Winter

**Leader of the Opposition:** F. Gordon Bradley (Liberal Party)