Newfoundland Question

ITS IMPERIAL IMPORTANCE

How Canada is Interested.

An Able and Exhaustive Speech

By Hon. Senator Howlan.

APROPOS of the resolution passed by the House of Assembly on Saturday, the following speech, delivered by Hon. Mr. Howlan in the Senate a few days ago, exposes clearly the grounds of the matter, and shows how the interests involved are of Canadian and Imperial concern, as well as how justifiable is the stand taken by Canada and Great Britain as against the intrigues of Bond and Blaine :—

The question of the fisheries of Newfoundland is a broad one—a question that is of interest to the whole British Empire. The Newfoundland fisheries do not belong to Newfoundland, but to the whole British world. They have a perfect right, under the constitution, to make laws for the protection of those fisheries within the three-mile limit. They are users, so to speak, for the generation in which they live of those fisheries. The British people from Melbourne, Australia, or from Hong Kong, have just as good a right to go and fish within the three-mile limit of Newfoundland as have the Newfoundlanders themselves, and it is on that principle, and that alone, that the objection was raised with regard to the bait question. When the Act was passed in 1885, it did not receive the Royal assent. Why? The Imperial authorities knew as well then as they knew afterwards that it was impossible to take away the rights of any British fishermen in these waters to participate in these bait fisheries, and the gentlemen who were then answerable to the Governor of Newfoundland, as his advisers, distinctly promised, if the Act was passed, that it would have have no bearing, directly or indirectly, in the most remote manner on Canadian fishermen, otherwise the Act would not have received the Royal assent. What is the answer given to that question now by the gentleman who is responsible to Her Majesty's representative in Newfoundland? That he was not answerable for the representations made by a previous Premier of the colony who had made these promises. That is simply absurd. There would be no continuity of government if the Premier of one day could repudiate the promises of his predecessor. That was the basis of the whole question, and that was the error which the Newfundlanders committed, that they thought the fisheries were their own, and that they could make such laws as would suit their own views and for their individual benefit. They had no right to grant any particular body of persons any special rights or privileges in fisheries which they did not absolutely own themselves. What belongs to all cannot be given to one, and that was the principle underlying this bait question. A great deal has been said and a great many points have been raised on the fact of what the Newfoundlanders call the bounty-fed fishermen interfering with their industry. That is a question with which we have nothing to do; it is a question of domestic economy in France. As has been well observed by the hon. gentlemen who preceded me here, it is not the intrinsic value of the fisheries of St. Pierre and Miquelon that France considers. France values the French fisheries in North America because they are the great nursery of her seaman, and that is why France gives a bounty. But my hon. friend has not stated the whole question with regard to these bounties. Not only does she give a particular bounty on each quintal of fish produced from the French American fisheries, but she also gives a bonus to every man who goes out from her reformatories to those bank fisheries, so in that respect she has done everything in her power to promote her fishing interest. The representative men of France are not wanting in a patriotic desire to preserve all their rights and privileges, and they know that unless they make special arrangements to maintain the fisheries at St. Pierre and Miquelon no trade would be attracted to those islands. Why do people go there from Quebec, Halifax, St. John and other ports? The question is easily answered. While we are obliged to maintain a high tariff to raise a revenue, the islands of St. Pierre and Miquelon have scarcely any tariff at all, but are carrying out what we, at the time of Confederation, proposed to do on the Lower St. Lawrence, when we thought of making a free port of Gaspe. At one time the tariff of St. Pierre and Miquelon was only 1 per cent.; now it is 2½ per cent., and large quantities of goods are sent to those islands from several Canadian and United States ports. The result is that a large trade has grown up between those islands and various ports on the Atlantic coast. There is quite a trade between Fortune Bay and St. Pierre and Miquelon. The people of these two places have often intermarried, and I am of the opinion that the Government of Newfoundland have taken the course with regard to Canada, of which we complain, mainly for the purpose of stopping this French trade. Why do I think so? My hon. friend (Mr. Boulton) in his remarks which were simply a reiteration of Newfoundland's case, admits that the object of the island Government was to prevent the French fishermen from getting bait when they passed the Bait Act. The first people who broke that law were the islanders themselves, and the Government and to put on steamers to stop them. They were fining and confining them, but they did not stop the traffic. They next tried to make a treaty with the United States. Now, if the duty in that county was equal to the bounty paid by the French fishermen, the question would be at rest, but the fact is, while the duty is fifty cents in the United States, the French bounty is $2 per quintal. It has been stated that after attention was called to the effect which the Act would have upon Canada, it was only passed on the assurance of the gentlemen who were then in power in Newfoundland, that nothing should be done under the Act to interfere with our rights. We slept on those rights for a short time; we were unwilling to believe that such a course would be pursued towards us. What do we find? Did the hon. gentleman himself find any fault with the course that Canada pursued towards Newfoundland? Not at all. It is true he had changed his opinion since last year, but at that time he expressed very appropriately his indignation when a Canadian fisherman was taken almost in chains and placed in gaol in Newfoundland. The hon. gentleman brought the matter to the attention of the House, and after repeating the facts as stated in the St. John Evening Herald, he said:

"The Government of Newfoundland are irritated—I do think justly so—because Canada saw fit, when Newfoundland was negotiating what is called the Bond treaty (which was going to give privileges to the people of the United States with regard to getting bait, and with regard to trade and traffic arrangements, which were denied to their fellow colonists in Canada), to interfere, and according to this paper the island Government is resenting upon an inoffensive citizen this interference on the part of our Government. It is quite probable that such is the case. It is not improper to say just here that the Government of Newfoundland are wrong in the position they are taking with regard to discriminating against Canada."

Now, the hon. gentleman has changed his opinion altogether. He thinks we are discriminating against Newfoundland. Now when did we commence to discriminate? It was after Newfoundland vessels came into our harbors with loads of fish and bait to sell, whilst our fishermen were refused bait and lost their season's fishing. We complained, and very justly so. As the hon. gentleman from Richmond has very properly said, no single case has been proved where a Canadian vessel has obtained bait on the Newfoundland coast, and sold it to the French. In a discussion on this question with a gentleman who thought he knew a great deal about it, he said, "No, but you took bait from the Magdalen Islands and sold it to the French." I said, "My dear sir, I have had a great deal of experience in the Magdalen Islands, and I understand that the French fishermen fit out for the banks about the first week of April. Now the whole allied fleets of Europe could not get to the Magdalen Islands at that time of the year, so that that contention falls to the ground." Why is it that the United States are so anxious to make a treaty with Newfoundland and not with Canada? This bait question is of paramount importance to the fisheries of North America, and if they could be secured by the United States they would have the key to the whole question, and shut us out of this very great factor of our fisheries. That Blaine-Bond treaty, of which so much has been spoken, only permitted the people of Newfoundland to get their codfish caught in their own waters into the United States markets free. There are about 5,350 coast miles of fisheries belonging to British America, of which about 2,000 miles are on the coasts of Newfoundland. The United States, north of Cape Hatteras, has about 1,070 miles. We own about 3,329 miles. Now, these British American fisheries that we sometimes think so little of, are exceedly valuable when compared with those of other countries. The sea fisheries of the world produce annually fish to the value of:

British European sea fisheries	....	$34,090,000
British American	"	20,195,596
United States	"	13,030.821
France	"	12,166 666
Norway	"	6,250,219
Russia (European)	"	2,425.156
Russia (Asiatic)	"	10,896 625
Netherlands	"	1,635,725

You can see how valuable our fisheries are, and if we were to sit idly and quietly by and allow the whole Canadian fisheries to be paralyzed without asserting the legitimate rights that we have to the fisheries, or without calling on the people of Newfoundland to carry out the promise they made when this Act was passed, we would deserve to lose them. I want to emphasize the fact that it would have been perfectly impossible for them to get their Act sanctioned unless they had made it a condition precedent that the rights of the Canadian fishermen should not be interfered with. Newfoundland owns vessels other than those which have their headquarters in Newfoundland ports. Among them are vessels owned in Dundee and Glasgow, and it is is simply absurd to suppose that a vessel from Lunenburg, flying the British flag, should be denied the privilege of procuring bait in a Newfoundland port, when a Dundee vessel would experience no such difficulty. We have allowed this question to remain unsettled from season to season hoping that the Government of Newfoundland would come to its senses, and that we could get along amicably together; but something had to be done when they went so far as to imprison some of our people. Numbers of fishing vessels from our Maritime Province ports have lost a year's fishing. Do you think that those men can go without being paid for that loss? There is no doubt in my mind that when the queston comes before a judicial tribunal the Government of Newfoundland will have to pay these men for the losses they have sustained through being robbed of their rights. Very soon the Newfoundland Government will be called upon, under a judicial decision, to indemnify these men. Now, with regard to these French fisheries, which the Newfoundlanders think they can wipe out by their legislation, it is simply absurd to think that the French Government will be affected by any action that they may take. If it was necessary to put a bounty of forty francs per quintal on the fish caught by their fishermen, they would grant it in order to protect those fisheries, and when you find a premium like that offered they will get bait. They did get bait all through, and they will continue to get it. It is unfortunate, no doubt, for Newfoundland that those old French treaty rights exist. It is unfortunate for us that some treaties were ever made, but treaties must be observed, and the French Government could not understand how two hundred thousand people in the Island of Newfoundland could influence the policy of the Imperial Government. They could influence the Imperial Government if they were imposed upon, but there is no evidence that they have been imposed upon. These questions must necessarily arise between nations, and I daresay some time or other the British Government will be able to settle this difficulty of the French shore. It is an important question, but it never would have taken any such course as it has followed if a fishery which was not recognized when the treaty was made had not grown up and become a very important branch of the in-shore fisheries of Newfoundland—that is, the lobster fishery. The French fishermen came in and found the lobster trap set and took them up and went on with their own fisheries, as they had a right to do. The following statement of the exports of products of the Newfoundland fisheries in 1882 shows the importance of the cod fishery:

Codfish	$6,034,242
Seal	1,926,896
Herring	581,543
Salmon	14,505
Lobster	104,189
All other fish	40,000

giving an annual average of the fisheries of $7,901,370. The product of the French fisheries is not more than one-fifth of that—about $1,390,000. In 1879 they had 7,168 men and 177 vessels engaged in the fishery. The tonnage was 27,865 tons, and the catch amounted to 369,628 quintals. That cannot materially interfere with the price of fish throughout the world. If it were wiped out entirely it would have very little effect, because a very important factor enters into the foreign market—the fisheries of Norway. Therefore, it is not a matter of such vital importance as might be thought by the Newfoundland fishermen. The Newfoundland Government have also cultivated the bank fisheries by granting a bounty of $3 per ton on all vessels engaged in the industry. They have not cultivated it as we have done under our policy adopted in 1879, which has resulted in creating the finest fleet of fishing vessels in the world. Our fishermen who, from boyhood to manhood, and manhood to old age, have been accustomed to visit the shores of Newfoundland every year, and trading with the people of the Island, could not understand why they were refused privileges which they had enjoyed all their lives. They went there as usual to get bait and catch fish, but were refused the privileges which were accorded to foreigners. If we were to stand by and see our fishermen treated in that way we would not be doing our duty. It is true when two men or two provinces or two nations quarrel necessarily reprisals are made, but I hope that better feeling will prevail, and that we may be able to get a renewal of our old trade relations with Newfoundland. We had a modus vivendi by which we could have gone on and continued the trade between us until matters were settled. Our interference with the Blaine-Bond treaty has been referred to. Now, they are only a small population of two hundred thousand, while we are a people of five million. In all matters of trade between this country and the United States we have treated Newfoundland as one of the family. Through the perseverance, energy, tact and talent of our representatives, and the facts which were adduced at Halifax, we were awarded $5,500,000 for the use of our fisheries for ten years, and of that sum Newfoundland got $1,000,000. Had Canada gone to the United States and tried to make a treaty without including Newfoundland the Islanders would have had reason to complain, and would have been justified in trying to make a treaty for themselves. Even though we had been so unwise, selfish and unpatriotic as to attempt to make a treaty without including Newfoundland, the Imperial Government would have stepped in and compelled us to consider the interests of our sister colony. That being the case, it was but right for the British Minister at Washington to ask the Canadian Government if we were satisfied with the Blaine-Bond Treaty, and our Government very properly said no. Before Confederation I happened to be a member of the Government of Prince Edward Island, and we thought we could make a trade arrangement with the United States. At that time we imposed light dues and harbor dues, which were hard on the United States fishermen. A United States fishing vessel would come to one of our ports and pay ten cents per ton, then visit a New Brunswick port and pay ten cents there, and a port in another province and pay similar dues there. After Confederation, all the provinces that entered the union at that time made lights free, but we still kept on the ten cents a ton in Prince Edward Island. I was sent to Washington to make a trade arrangement and we offered to take off this ten cents a ton and make other concessions. As soon as I came before the Committee on Foreign Relations I found that we had no power, and when I went to Sir Edward Thornton he rebuked me and showed me that we had no power to enter into such an arrangement except in conjunction with the other colonies. The Government of Canada have done everything they possibly could to meet this difficulty without losing their self-respect, and I think it is hardly to be expected that we should sit quietly by and allow Newfoundland to make a treaty which would give special privileges to the United States from which we were excluded. My hon. friend from Shell River refers to a pamphlet which was distributed here two or three years ago. That pamphlet had no bearing on this particular question. It related to the fisheries, but only to the inspection of fish. We used to subject Newfoundland fish to inspection when they came to our ports, and it was represented by the Board of Trade of Montreal that this involved a useless expenditure, so far as the user was concerned, because the inspection law of Newfoundland was so strict that it could safely be accepted all over the country. This fact was represented to the Government by the Board of Trade and their view was adopted. I do not know how you can stop smuggling from St. Pierre, unless you adopt the idea of an old friend of mine. There was at one time a great deal of tea smuggled into Nova Scotia, and he said there was but one way to stop it—take off the duty. I do not know any other way to stop smuggling from St. Pierre. It is very hard for the Newfoundlanders; but I see no other way of putting a stop to it. A few years ago, a great deal of coal oil was smuggled across the St. Lawrence into this country. When the wind blew in a certain direction it was surprising how many barrels of coal oil floated across the river. I do not see, either, how the few thousand quintals of fish that the Feench fishermen catch in Newfoundland waters can be reduced, because it is well known that other bait will do, even though they could be prevented from procuring bait under the Newfoundland law; the only difference is that it is not so easy to get it. When it was necessary for our fishermen, who had missed their bait at Newfoundland, to fit away for their second trip, bait was found in Cape Briton, and carried over the new line of railway therein to the vessels at the Straits of Canso and other places. I mention this fact to show how matters of this kind can be met under difficulties. But this is not the legitimate way, nor should our fishermen be compelled to this makeshift. It was hardly to be expected that we could sleep on our rights under such a state of affairs, particularly when the Crown law officers of England were of opinion we had a perfect right to take bait on the Newfoundland coast. In conclusion, permit me to say I trust we shall soon resume friendly relations with our friends and neighbors in Newfoundland, and that in the meantime I think it would be a matter to be regretted that any further unpleasantest should occur. I also hope sooner or later a condition of affairs may arise in the public mind of her people which may find representatives from among them sitting with us in this Chamber. They are like all islanders—high spirited but hospitable; and with all such the sober second thought always finally rules.

Hon. Mr. POWER—Perhaps the hon. gentleman from Alberton will not object to say whether the hon. gentleman from Shell River was in error when he said that Canada brought her tariff into operation against Newfoundland before Newfoundland brought her tariff into operation against Canada.

Hon. Mr. Howlan—I do not see what object is to be gained by that question. The Government of Canada obtained from Parliament the power to put on the duty if necessary. When did they put on the duty? Under compulsion—under provocation of the worst kind. If the hon. gentleman owned a couple of vessels at Halifax, and after fitting them out for the fisheries and sending them away, they returned in a couple of weeks without a catch in consequence of not being able to get bait, he would soon see where the difficulty lay—especially when vessels from Newfoundland were coming into Nova Scotia ports and selling their fish in our markets free from duty. We had never thought it an invasion of our rights—never by hint or by act, either in the press or on the public platform, or by correspondence with the Government; but after the unfriendly act of Newfoundland it was time that something should be done to let those gentlemen know that our rights were not to be trampled upon with impunity.

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apr6 d&w

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Charlottetown, April 11, 1892—eod & wky

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