

were defeated, it would make no difference inasmuch as in view of the fact that the lists would not be printed there could not be a general election.

The by-elections were fought on the issue whether the government enjoyed the confidence of the country or not. The overwhelming majorities against the Conservative candidates made clear the view of the people, particularly when one considers that all by-elections were held in what used to be called the old Tory province of Ontario. Even that province has lost all confidence in this administration.

I have here the correspondence, which will speak for itself; it will settle the question as to whether the government itself has been responsible for the delay or whether the responsibility lies with the franchise commissioner, who is not here to answer for himself. I wrote to the Prime Minister as follows:

House of Commons
Canada
Leader of the Opposition
Ottawa, August 20, 1934.

The Right Honourable
R. B. Bennett, P.C., K.C., M.P.,
Prime Minister of Canada,
Ottawa.

My Dear Prime Minister:

When the franchise bill was under discussion in the house, we were given to understand that, as soon as the bill was passed, the franchise commissioner would immediately be appointed, and that the preparation of the basic lists, under the provisions of the new act, would be proceeded with at once. Apparently, up to the present time, notwithstanding the immediate appointment of the franchise commissioner, there has been no appointment of the enumerators who have to do with the preparation of the lists.

I should have mentioned that parliament prorogued on July 3.

Under the provisions of the act, it would appear that the franchise commissioner cannot proceed with the preparation of the basic lists of voters until after the returning officers for the different constituencies have been appointed. The boundaries of the polling subdivisions being defined by the returning officers, it is, apparently, impossible for the enumeration or registration of voters to commence until the returning officers have completed this preliminary work.

The appointment of the returning officers now rests with the government, the former appointees no longer remaining continuously in office, as was provided in the act which was repealed last session. It would appear, therefore, that the delay in having the basic lists, demanded by the new act, immediately prepared, is not due to any neglect on the part of the franchise commissioner, but is something for which the government itself is responsible.

The delay in the preparation of the basic lists is the more to be regretted in that the

old Dominion Elections Act having been repealed, save in so far as its provisions have been made to apply to by-elections held prior to a general election, it will be impossible to hold a general election until the basic lists have been prepared under the provisions of the new Franchise Act. I think you will agree that the electorate should not be deprived of its right to have available at any and all times the machinery necessary for the holding of a general election. It was the expectation of members of the House of Commons that the preparation of the basic lists would not be delayed beyond the summer months. Obviously, their completion should not be delayed beyond the month of September. In the circumstances, I have felt that I should write you without further delay in order to ascertain definitely how soon the country may expect the appointment of all returning officers, and within what time thereafter it may be reasonable to expect that the basic lists will be completed.

I am aware of course that the franchise commissioner has certain powers which he is free and expected to exercise wholly and apart from any action or control on the part of the government. My first thought was to write to the franchise commissioner, asking him for an explanation of the delay in the preparation of the basic lists. Having ascertained, upon inquiry, that the returning officers had not yet been appointed, and it being apparent from the provisions of the act that the franchise commissioner is necessarily restricted in hastening procedure until after their appointment, I have felt that, before communicating with the franchise commissioner, I should address this communication to the government.

Yours sincerely,

W. L. Mackenzie King.

I received the following reply:

Office of the Prime Minister
Canada
Ottawa, August 22, 1934.

The Rt. Hon.
W. L. Mackenzie King, C.M.G., M.P.,
Leader of the Opposition,
Ottawa.

My Dear Mr. King:

I am in receipt of your letter of the 20th instant which I have read and referred to my colleagues. It is our view that, having regard to the size of this country and the difficulty in obtaining the necessary information, there has been no unreasonable delay in appointing the returning officers for the 245 constituencies. The list is now practically complete and a special Gazette will be issued within the next few days.

I quite agree with you that the machinery for the conduct of a general election should always be upon the statute books, but the amount of effort required to make effective the provisions of the legislation passed at the last session was far greater than I expected. However, from the inquiries I have made, I believe that everything that can reasonably be done is being done and that the preparation of the basic lists will not be unduly delayed.

Yours faithfully,

R. B. Bennett.