

*Plebiscite Act*

the rural districts—I found his administration in the taking of the registration eminently fair. In Davenport the appointments were divided between Liberals and Conservatives, because in the previous election there had been only two parties running in that riding. In some other ridings where there were three parties running in the previous election, the appointments were divided up after that manner. I am glad to hear hon. members endorsing the recommendation I made at the time the elections act was enacted. I strongly advocated then—and I was very much disappointed that my recommendation was not carried out—that the government of the day name the returning officer in the ridings, and that the opposition, or the other parties as the case might be, name the clerk. I suggested that the government of the day name the returning officer and the deputy returning officers in the polls, and the opposition or the candidate of the party which was next highest in the previous election name the clerks, so as to eliminate politics. I am glad to hear hon. members recommending the same thing, and I hope that if there is an amendment to the elections act, that suggestion will be followed.

Mr. CLEAVER: I wish to add my support to the suggestion which has been made that the vote should be taken on a strictly non-partisan basis, and I would go further and suggest that we should not leave the matter in the air merely as a pious hope. I think definite instructions should issue from the cabinet minister in charge to the election officer explicitly informing him that all of the officers, deputy returning officers and clerks, are to be appointed on a strictly non-partisan basis; that is to say, that each of the major political parties in all the ridings should definitely make one-half of the appointments of deputy returning officers and one-half of the appointments of clerks. I would further urge that this entire work should be done on a strictly voluntary basis as a war service. The national registration in my riding was done on a straight fifty-fifty basis. The Conservative party appointed half of the officials and the Liberal party half, and all did the work without cost to the government, even for the hiring of halls. I would urge that that practice be followed on this occasion, and that the entire cost of the plebiscite, the entire work in connection with it, be on a voluntary basis, with the exception, of course, of the printing.

Mr. CASSELMAN: There is one difficulty that presents itself to me. I have not had an opportunity to look at the regulations; but according to the instructions under the Dominion Elections Act, the chief returning officer appoints the deputy returning officer,

[Mr. MacNicol.]

and the chief returning officer has nothing whatever to do with the appointment of the clerk. The deputy returning officer has the right to appoint the clerk. I say this because I had occasion to look it up at the time of the last election. I did have an arrangement with the chief returning officer for the district, but the arrangement fell down because at the last minute it was pointed out to me that under the law he had nothing to do with the appointment of the clerk—that was the duty of the deputy returning officer. These regulations, based on the instructions under the elections act, will place that in the same position as it is in the elections act, and unless the regulation is changed I do not see how there will be a division of appointment as far as clerks are concerned.

Mr. WHITE: May I say a word with regard to what the Prime Minister has said about having appointments on a non-partisan basis. Unless the instructions are followed out, it may work out in the same way as it did at the time of the taking of the census, because at that time the Minister of Trade and Commerce issued instructions to the census commissioner in each riding that the appointments were to be on a non-partisan basis, divided between the major political parties. He also pointed out that returned soldiers were to have the preference, and so on. The census commissioner in my riding refused to answer a letter or to give me any information. I submitted to him a list covering all the polling divisions. He would not appoint a single man I suggested, and in the village in which I reside he appointed a man who had obtained exemption from military service in 1914 as a conscientious objector. I communicated with the Minister of Trade and Commerce, who replied that he was much disturbed at my letter and would look into the matter at once. I received no further communication from him, and that man who was a conscientious objector in 1918 proceeded to take the census in my village. If instructions are given, unless they are followed up and it is seen to that they are carried out, the whole thing will be a farce, just as it was at the time of the taking of the census. I suggest to the committee that returned soldiers and returned soldiers only, where available, be appointed as enumerators, deputy returning officers and poll clerks.

Mr. ROSS (Souris): I was pleased to hear the Prime Minister express himself as he did. But I had exactly the same experience in my riding as a previous speaker during the taking of the census; the lists we submitted were entirely ignored. I go back to the time of the national registration. The then Minister