

to do it, and more than that, I mean to say I have no confidence in a certain number of these officers. They are the creatures of the Local Government, and if the Local Government chooses to put pressure on them there is great danger of their being governed by those who appointed them. It is for those reasons that I think the returning officers should be considered in every respect as Dominion officers, that this amendment has been proposed.

Mr. MACKENZIE. How can the hon. gentleman obtain more control over one set of officers than he has over another? What does it matter if they are local officers, he will have the same control over them precisely.

Sir JOHN A. MACDONALD. There is no counteracting influence.

Mr. MACKENZIE. No; the hon. gentleman simply wants to try another dodge in order to appoint men who will make returns such as used to scandalize the whole country. We know what sort of returns were made by his appointees in the past. The system in operation has, undoubtedly, worked well, and I am not aware that any difficulty has arisen.

Mr. BOULTBEE. There is no doubt that the hon. member for Lambton (Mr. Mackenzie) is fighting for something of great interest to his party. It is of great importance for them to retain returning officers appointed by the Local Government, because in more than one instance, in more than twenty instances in Ontario, the grossest favoritism has been shown by them, and they have thrown serious obstructions in the way of the Conservative party. The hon. member for North York (Mr. Strange) mentioned a case of which I am cognizant in which a registry office was made the Grit headquarters, and the business of the office could scarcely be carried on. In South Wellington, where certificates were being asked from Sheriff Gow for the purpose of enabling certain parties who were agents to vote, he stated, on more than a dozen occasions, in order to prevent them from voting, that he would have to consult his solicitor, who is the present member for South Wellington. I hold that as it is notorious that the influence of these men has been directed to prevent freedom in the elections, in almost in every instance the Conservative party and the Dominion Government should have the power of appointing officers who would do their duty fairly and honorably.

Mr. MACKENZIE. There are certainly as many Conservative registrars and sheriffs, and a great many more in some of the Provinces, I am sure. There was no object whatever in making the present law except to avoid the scandal that had existed of appointing officers who were brought directly under political influences, while these men were not.

Mr. BOULTBEE. It may be that there are more Conservatives than Reformers, but no case is alleged against those appointed by the Conservatives. The case is alleged only in the case of those appointed by the Grit Government, and that is where the trouble is.

Mr. GUTHRIE. This is the first time I have heard any charge of partizanship against Sheriff Gow. I do not believe it, but I believe that the hon. gentleman has been misinformed. Anyone who knows Sheriff Gow knows that he is incapable of doing injustice to any political party. My recollection of his proceedings is that he appointed the same deputy returning officers as his predecessor, the late Sheriff Grange did, unless they were dead or removed. I do not think the hon. gentleman has been correctly informed at all. That is not the sort of man Sheriff Gow is.

Mr. BOULTBEE. I did not say that complaints were made by the hon. member for South Wellington, but I have heard Conservatives complain that he delayed the certificates.

Mr. GUTHRIE. Of course I do not say that he did not, but what I do say is that it is entirely different from the character he holds. I never heard him charged with any misconduct in the performance of his duty as returning officer.

Mr. MILLS. The point to be kept in mind in the consideration of this clause is that the Government are a party in the matter. They will not stand indifferently between those engaged in the electoral contest. The Crown dissolves Parliament on their advice; they go to the country; the Crown makes appointments on their advice, and in every instance they are the parties who appoint returning officers, and there is very much greater danger of abuse, of improper conduct on the part of returning officers who are subject to the influence of one of the parties in the contest, than there is when the returning officers are appointed by some outside party. If the Government cannot trust men in high official positions, who have social and political positions to lose by improper conduct, how much less can those be trusted who will be appointed by the Administration for the time being. If the hon. gentleman is not satisfied to take the sheriffs for returning officers, why does he not designate a class in the Bill? Why does he not give Parliament power to appoint returning officers, who being once appointed by Parliament, would not be under the immediate control of the Administration. We all know how the returning officers acted when the Government appointed them. We know what took place in the representation of North Renfrew. A candidate who was defeated by nearly 200 votes was returned to this House, and the hon. gentleman defended his return. There were Mr. Sheepskinski, Mr. Calfskinski, and many others reported as voting for the candidate; and we know that the gentleman so returned succeeded in retaining his seat until that Parliament was dissolved. I refer to the return of Mr. O'Reilly. In West Peterboro' also we had the returning officer sitting in judgment on the qualification of one of the candidates and deciding that his qualification was not sufficient; and although he received a majority of votes, he was kept out of his seat by the returning officer who sent another gentleman here who occupied the seat during two Sessions. An improper return was made in the same way from Muskoka; and all these cases arose from the partizan character of the returning officers appointed under the law as it existed before 1874. When the hon. member for Lambton went to the country in 1874, he acted upon the principle set forth in the law now upon the Statute-book and which the hon. gentleman proposes to repeal. Was there a single complaint of anyone being improperly returned, of anyone being kept out of his seat in consequence of improper conduct on the part of a returning officer on that occasion?

Mr. BANNERMAN. Yes.

Mr. MILLS. Will the hon. gentleman name one case. I do not know of one. We know that in many cases in which partizans were appointed by hon. gentlemen opposite, they were disqualified by their partizanship from discharging the duties of their office. In my own constituency the hon. gentleman appointed as returning officer one of the most violent political partizans in that constituency. He went outside of the constituency for deputies, so that the Tory party might not lose a vote in the election, and he appointed Reformers as poll clerks, and in this way prevented twenty or thirty persons from voting.

Sir JOHN A. MACDONALD. They could vote.

Mr. MILLS. No; under the law they were not at liberty to vote; and I know that these poll clerks were not paid, although, I believe, the returning officer received the money to cover the expenses of the election. It is perfectly obvious that the proposition of the hon. gentleman is utterly inconsistent with everything like fair dealing in an election contest. He knows right well that no one who is not an active