

such conduct as I am about to describe, in the hope that its opinion may be of such a nature as to have a wholesome effect on other revising officers, and perhaps upon this same revising officer himself, in the performance of their subsequent duties in connection with the lists. The revising officer is called upon to perform, as has been frequently pointed out, a double function. He is not merely a revising officer—he is also a compiling officer; and the name he bears is derived only from the second part of his duties, that of revising and criticising the work he has already done as a compiler. It will be remembered, no doubt by everybody, but I must state it again in order to avoid obscurity in my remarks, that the first duty of the revising officer is to obtain copies of existing voters' lists, poll books and other documents of that kind, showing who are entitled to vote during the year before the Act was put in force. The Act goes on to state that with the assistance of those assessment rolls which he is to take as *prima facie* evidence of the qualification of the persons named thereon, and "such other information as he can obtain," he is to go on and make his primary list of voters. The Act made no provision as to what he should consider sufficient or proper information to justify him in putting the name of any elector upon the first list. During the debate on that point the right hon. Premier expressed his view that it was the duty of the revising officer, in making the first list, to obtain what was to his mind satisfactory *prima facie* evidence of the right of each applicant to have his name placed on the list. If he was satisfied, on the face of the application, and without any evidence being adduced, either pro or con, that the person who claimed to be registered had a *prima facie* right to be registered, he was to insert that name in the list, and leave those who objected to it to move afterwards for its removal at one of the two courts of revision. The revising officers of Ontario met in convention before their duties began, and if I remember correctly, adopted a formal agreement that they would accept no other information besides the assessment rolls and the voters' lists, except in the form of applications either from individual voters or from one person, putting in a list of voters in both cases authenticated by a statutory declaration. I am not aware how far this rule has been adopted by revising officers in other Provinces, or whether it was adopted at the suggestion of the Government, or at the instance of the revising officers themselves. Even under that rule, which has been adopted in Ontario, there has been great lack of uniformity. Some revising officers have accepted applications for the insertion of a long list of names, authenticated by one declaration, made by the person who compiled the list. Other revising officers, among whom I must number the one for the east and west ridings of Elgin, required individual declarations made by each person who claimed the right to have his name placed on the list. Some revising officers, I am informed, in other Provinces than Ontario, perhaps in Ontario as well, have refused to accept any applications or to pay any attention to any declaration of qualification until after the publication of the first list, saying that the proper time to make these declarations is at the preliminary revision, in which decision I think they are contravening the very words of the Act. Others have received such applications, and have taken what seems the obviously proper course of giving notice of a day on which the list should be completed and sent to the printer, so that the electors in the division who have not been registered might know the time within which to put in their applications. Others do not give this notice, among whom again I must number the revising officer for the Elgins. Of those who have accepted and dealt with those applications, some have simply given no notice whatever to the applicant, whether his application has been successful or not. Others have returned the rejected applications,

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with reasons endorsed, directly to the applicants. Others, as again the revising officer for the two Elgins, have returned the rejected applications in batches to the persons through whom they were sent in. That is the course he has pursued in the east riding. In the west riding, so far as I am aware, he has returned no rejected applications to anybody except the revising officer's clerk, and they have lain in the clerk's office until the president of the Reform Association applied for them and got them; so that the persons whose applications were rejected did not know it in time to make a second application in a more acceptable form and thereby get their names on the list. Unfortunately, these acts of the revising officer, who happens also to be a judge, cannot be questioned; his rule is absolute; no appeal can be had from it; and it is all the more necessary that his action should be criticised in this House, which I consider is the proper place in which to criticise it, and that the attention of the House should be given to it. I said that the revising officer of Elgin, insisted on individual applications being made by parties claiming registration. The result was that both parties circulated large numbers of printed forms of applications and declarations amongst their friends, asking them to fill them up and send them in to the revising officer's clerk. This was done. Now, to carry out the spirit of the Act, to carry out the policy announced by the Premier himself last Session, the course of the revising officer, when these applications were sent in to him, I conceive should have been this. He should have simply required an intelligible statement from each individual elector as to the qualifications he claimed, and a sufficient identification of his property, where the qualification was a property qualification, and an intelligible declaration as to the other points required from resident income voters and others. Instead of doing that, he has assumed to treat these applications as he would a technical pleading in court; he has assumed to require an absolute adherence to the wording of the Statutes; he has assumed to require that no contraction of words shall be used, and that ordinary business language shall not be sufficient, thereby making it absolutely impossible for any ordinary farmer, farmer's son, tenant, mechanic, laboring man, or other person unlearned in the law, without having a copy of the Act before him at the time of his application, to put in an application satisfactory to this lynx-eyed official. By such conduct he has gone far towards practically disfranchising all those classes of voters. Of course their chance is not entirely gone yet. They have still the opportunity of going to the first or second Court of Revision and having the error of the revising officer rectified; but this is subjecting them to great cost and great trouble; so that, if he is not disfranchising these parties, he is imposing upon them a tax which the law did not contemplate, as the sole condition on which their names should be registered on the voters' list. It may be said, why did they not consult a lawyer and get their names registered? Everybody does not wish to go to the expense and trouble of consulting lawyers with regard to this matter, and the necessity of consulting a lawyer before we can claim our undoubted legal rights to exercise the franchise. We have been accustomed to see our names put on the voters' list by the sole action of the local municipal authorities, and that is the rule in every Province as regards the Provincial franchise. It is only in regard to the Dominion franchise that a man must be taxed to secure the franchise. Even a reference to a lawyer would not, in every case, secure this right to the voter, for a great many of the applications I intend referring to were drawn up by lawyers, and the applications were rejected by the revising officer as incorrect in a technical sense. When I say these applications were rejected on mere legal quibbles, I am prepared to back up my assertion by reading a few of the objections raised, and giving the House the substance of the applications