

the way of cooperation of all parties in respect to it. The details of working that out might require a conference between the leaders of the different groups. Certainly, whenever I have heard the matter discussed and in discussing the matter with my colleagues on a prior occasion, that is the view we all had. Reference was made to some recent election in which the enumerators were chosen by the different parties—some from one party, some from the other.

Mr. HANSON (York-Sunbury): That was, I believe, in urban districts, and only in urban districts.

Mr. MACKENZIE KING: Only in urban districts.

Mr. STIRLING: And, in rural districts, in the old-fashioned way, as in these regulations.

Mr. MACKENZIE KING: Well, I think we must try to introduce a new fashion if we can, as far as this proposed plebiscite is concerned. At any rate I have no hesitancy whatever in expressing emphatically my opinion on this matter. I should deplore seeing it made in any sense of the word a political patronage affair. I shall do all on my part to impress upon those who have to do with it that it be made as largely as possible a matter for voluntary effort, so administered as to ensure cooperation between all parties on the understanding that it is intended to be as fair and square as may be possible.

Mr. ROWE: I am glad to be able to agree with the Prime Minister when he is taking that attitude. Would he consider urging the returning officer to use for deputy returning officers, wherever possible, returned soldiers of the last great war?

Mr. MACKENZIE KING: I think the suggestion is a very good one. I should not like to commit the minister who is in charge of the bill, or any of my colleagues, without a conference on the matter, but the kind of suggestion which the hon. member has just made appeals very strongly to me personally and will, I believe, appeal equally strongly to others.

Mr. COLDWELL: May I suggest to the Prime Minister that this be carried out as far as possible on a non-partisan basis? I do not think we can call it wholly non-partisan, but let us endeavour to get all the parties to agree as far as possible to the appointment of the officers. At the present time most, if not all of the returning officers, are Liberal appointees and, I believe, Liberals. If that is the case, they will remain so, but let the other political parties appoint either the

deputy returning officer, or the poll clerk, alternately, as the case may be. I think then a large measure of cooperation could be obtained, it being recognized that the government would appoint the returning officers. The other officers might be appointed alternately by the political parties interested or represented in constituencies. In my opinion, as far as possible this should govern not only in this particular matter but in other matters during the war. There is a great deal of resentment, in constituencies represented by members who are not on the government side of the house, at the petty political patronage shown here and there, and it does interfere with the war effort. I believe the Prime Minister sincerely wishes to avoid that. He does not want to have that obtain during the war. He said so early in the war and I take his word. But in my own province of Saskatchewan there is a great deal of criticism of the political appointments that have been made of inspectors and others, and if we tried to carry this out on an all-party basis we would do much to unite our people and obtain a good vote, and probably a vote that would be more likely to be the vote which the Prime Minister wants in this plebiscite—an affirmative vote. I am certainly strongly in favour of trying to eliminate that kind of politics from our effort during these war years.

Mr. HANSON (York-Sunbury): I am reassured by the Prime Minister's statement and I thank him for going as far as he has. The returning officer is the key man all the way through, and if he is not directed to conform, in many instances he will not do so. I remember trying in the last election to get a returning officer to eliminate a certain deputy returning officer who, in my opinion, was not qualified or fit. My recollection is that I even went so far as to telegraph to the chief electoral officer. The chief electoral officer did what he could, but he had no authority. I suggest to the Prime Minister that he go the whole way and review the returning officers, because, after all, they are the key to the whole situation, and if they are partisan it is difficult to eliminate partisanship down through the ranks.

Mr. MacNICOL: At the time the registration was taken, the minister in charge, who, I believe, was at the time the present Minister of Agriculture (Mr. Gardiner) was, I may say, quite fair. As far as my riding was concerned—and I believe this extended pretty well to other cities and towns, though I cannot speak for