

Plebiscite Act

anybody but a man of his own selection. In a city or an urban district, I believe there was a provision in the law whereby there was a fifty-fifty break or something like that. Of course, this is a political patronage system, and the government must get away from that, in this connection, just as quickly and as far as they can, if they want to obtain wholehearted support in favour of this plebiscite. I hear some hon. members laugh. I mean every word I say about that. The more partisan a tinge you give to this, the less likely it is to receive the cooperation of the public.

An hon. MEMBER: That is right.

Mr. HANSON (York-Sunbury): I am sure of it.

Mr. DOUGLAS (Weyburn): I believe there will be a good deal of disappointment at the statement we have just had from the minister. For all that he has tried to make it sound as pleasant as possible, the fact remains that, as the leader of the opposition has said, what we are going to have is a political set-up in the taking of this plebiscite, and it will not be received in a very kindly fashion. I believe that one of the most successful things which was ever done in this country was handled on a cooperative and largely voluntary basis, when the registration was taken in June or July, 1940, at a cost of less than \$900,000, over a period of three days. It was done at so low a figure because hundreds of people, irrespective of politics, race or creed, gave their services, thinking they were performing a national duty. That sort of thing should be capitalized upon again. But apparently it is not to be. Some members of the public resent the plebiscite now; they will resent it a great deal more if they have reason to believe that public funds are being used very largely to support patronage. That is what it is going to mean. I have no objection to the same returning officers being used as were employed in 1940, if some attempt is made to pick the deputy returning officers on a non-party basis. Why not ask them to set up non-partisan committees representing different viewpoints in the community, and so get a cooperative endeavour in the district? But if, as the Prime Minister has been asking them to do, all groups in this house go out and try to rally the people of Canada to give a preponderantly affirmative vote, and at the same time the machinery is set up on a purely patronage partisan basis, the two things will gibe very poorly, and a very bad impression will be created throughout the country. To talk of asking a few people here and there to do the work on a voluntary basis is not enough. You must either set it up on a non-

[Mr. R. B. Hanson.]

partisan basis, and then form representative non-partisan committees in the different districts, or leave it the way the minister has outlined it—which would be a purely pork-barrel affair, and would disappoint the public generally.

Mr. HANSON (York-Sunbury): In the same connection may I say just one word before the Prime Minister speaks. There is the position of enumerator, which is much more important than the others, because that is worth the most money. Are those positions to be filled on a political partisan basis? I suggest to the Prime Minister that he give some consideration to this question if he wants the plebiscite helped along.

Mr. MACKENZIE KING: I was just rising to say that there is nothing that I should deplore more than that anything connected with the taking of the plebiscite could be made an instrument of political patronage. I agree with those who say that it would completely defeat the purpose of obtaining the kind of cooperation which is most desirable. I see no necessity for it, and personally, if it were done in that way, I should abhor the whole business. I did not hear what the Secretary of State said, but I am quite sure that he had not in mind anything of the kind. His references were, I understand, to the appointment of the returning officers, and there has to be consideration given to the selection of certain officers who are already known.

But when it comes to choosing persons for such positions as that of enumerator, of which the leader of the opposition has just spoken, I can see no reason in the world why some arrangement should not be made between the different parties in the house which would satisfy everyone that we desire to have a perfectly impartial administration of the machinery of the plebiscite. Personally I think the citizens of Canada ought to welcome the opportunity of giving their services very largely, if not completely, voluntarily in connection with the taking of the plebiscite. I suggested the other evening that those who are appointed to any position might be told that while there is, perhaps, a fee attached to their services, the government would welcome receiving it back from them as an expression of patriotism in connection with that part of our war effort. I do not think that is too much to ask of the kind of persons who would be best qualified to fill the different offices under this measure. There should be in connection with it as much in the way of voluntary effort as can be obtained with a sense of security, and as much as possible in