

impartiality of all election officers". It also became his duty to recommend the removal of any returning officer who was incompetent or neglected his duty.

Notwithstanding that as a result of the adoption of this new system the responsibilities of returning officers were greatly extended, and thenceforward included the appointment of registrars as well as of deputy returning officers, no restriction of the discretion returning officers had formerly exercised in the selection of their subordinates was suggested, nor was it at that time proposed that there should be any change in their tenure of office. In 1925, however, the law on the last point was amended, it being provided that returning officers, instead of being appointed only for the purpose of conducting a particular election, should hold office during pleasure like other servants of the Crown. The first returning officers appointed under the new provision were those who acted at the general election held later in 1925. When, nevertheless, a second general election was required to be held within less than twelve months, most of the appointments thus made were cancelled and new returning officers named instead of the original appointees. Any other course was hardly to be expected in the absence of any arrangement about the casting vote or the choice of subordinate election officers.

I mean any government would be foolish, if the practice was to select political supporters, to go and direct two hundred and forty odd elections in any one or more of which there might be a tie, in which event the returning officer would cast his vote in favour of his party's candidate.

*By Mr. Kennedy:*

Q. Has it ever happened?—A. It has never happened.

Q. I do not believe the casting vote would have much to do with it.—A. No, but there is a possibility of it.

*By Mr. McPherson:*

Q. Are you suggesting taking away the right of the casting vote?—A. No. The proposal is contained in paragraph 10 of the report proper. It begins with the second sentence of paragraph 10.

There is, however, a change in practice which would, in my opinion, conduce much more greatly than any amendment of the statute to secure a marked and permanent improvement in the conduct of elections generally. This change relates to the actual as distinguished from the legal tenure of office of returning officers. Within five years there have been three general elections, but of the 241 returning officers who acted at the last, only 3 had acted at both the previous ones, and only 42 at either one or the other of them. The complications of the present election procedure makes the administration of an election a difficult and worrying duty on the first occasion on which it is undertaken. Moreover, the inexperience of a returning officer tends to give rise to misunderstandings and mistakes which constitute a serious handicap to candidates; usually also it increases quite unnecessarily the expense of the election administration. To make clear how and why the present practice has grown up, a historical review of the position of returning officers from time to time is appended (Appendix 1).

I do not think I need to bother with the next paragraph, but in paragraph 12 the subject is further dealt with.

12. These difficulties would largely disappear if it were understood that returning officers, by whatever administration appointed, should select subordinate election officers without regard to their political