

Dismissal of Returning Officer

(a) in an electoral district the urban areas of which have not been altered since the last preceding dominion election, give notice accordingly to the candidate who, at the last preceding dominion election in the electoral district, obtained the highest number of votes, . . .

That was myself.

. . . and also to the candidate representing at that election a different and opposed political interest, who received the next highest number of votes, that was Mr. Gunn.

Why a returning officer should be censured for following out this rule, I do not know. The minister does not know, but he listened to this attack which came down from certain officials. It was sent in not by very many. Before I take my seat I am going to ask that the correspondence be tabled. I may have to put a motion on the order paper asking for it. If it is not done, I am going to ask that this whole matter be sent to the committee on privileges and elections, and we shall bring before us these men or women, whoever they are, and have the minister tell us on whose advice he discharged this competent man. Then we shall find out the nigger in the woodpile. When I use that phrase I am not disparaging the coloured people. It might be a white man or a white woman; I do not know who it is that is in the woodpile. I have a warm feeling for the coloured race. I love them too much to say anything detrimental about them. Other hon. members here were also on these elections committees, and they remember my part in these committees.

I will take my hat off to no man in Canada on the study of election laws or the question of voting. I have spent thirty-five years on those matters—and perhaps later on, not now, I shall have time to talk about it. Perhaps I may speak about voting when we are discussing another motion on the order paper. No one has taken more interest in these matters than I have. I have always appeared at the elections committees when they have been called, and many of my recommendations were adopted.

However, there was one I did not get through, one which I wanted to get through. Let me take my hat off to the province of Quebec. Much has been said about that province. Well, they are ahead of us in one thing. In one election rule or practice particularly they are ahead of us; and I tried to have their practice incorporated in our elections act. The procedure I have in mind is that the government party named the deputy returning officers; and the opposition party, or that party which had the next highest number of votes, named the clerk.

It is getting to be a nightmare, as I have no doubt the hon. member for Quebec South (Mr. Power) will say before long, when he rises to speak on his resolution—I have no doubt he will say that election expenses are getting to be a nightmare.

The Quebec act eliminates the use of scrutineers. The next election I will be compelled to have scrutineers in every poll in my riding, because I am convinced there is something sinister—I was going to say that there is some devilry; that is the best word I can use—behind this procedure of throwing out of office an honest, gracious and Christian Liberal who fought for the minister's party for a long time.

I cannot speak of him too highly, because in two elections I have found him one hundred per cent fair and square, all the way through. I feel very warmly about this good man being thrown out. And what will be the result? I will have to appoint not less than 131 scrutineers—and you know, Mr. Speaker, what that costs—I will have to appoint more than one for each poll, probably two for each poll. I will have to have those scrutineers to see that I get fair play. I would not have had to do it if Mr. D. H. Reed had been left in office, and if I knew he was going to be in there again I would not have to do it. But I will have to know. And let me say that if there is any skulduggery behind this thing I will be on the job to watch it. You can count on that.

In Quebec, that is the law. The government names the deputy returning officers and the next party, the party running up, names the clerks in each poll. In that way candidates may eliminate scrutineers, if they wish to. If in my riding, if I named the clerk I would name a man honest enough to watch my interests in the poll, and one who would see that everything was done properly and the D.R.O. would do likewise.

In Australia and New Zealand the election officers are really above partisanship. The ministry has nothing to do with them down there. The same is true in England—although, of course, the ministry is head of the whole law. But in those three countries they try to eliminate election machinery, as far as they can, from political influence. Returning officers are permanent; no mention is made in the act of dismissing them for age. Because a man of sixty-five is not old. I am that old myself—and not much more, either. I know my hair is gray; but in my family, hair became gray early in life. I am glad to have this gray hair—and I have lots of it, too.

Mr. Graydon: It is a sign of wisdom rather than age.