

MINUTES OF EVIDENCE

HOUSE OF COMMONS,

FRIDAY, March 8, 1929.

The Special Committee appointed to consider the Dominion Elections Act met at 4 o'clock p.m., the Chairman, C. G. Power, presiding.

O. M. BIGGAR, K.C., called.

By the Chairman:

Q. You are a barrister practising in the city?—A. Yes.

Q. And you were for a number of years the Chief Electoral Officer?—A. From 1920 to 1927.

Q. During that time you had occasion to study the workings and the administration of the Dominion Elections Act?—A. Very closely.

Q. And also to make reports, under section 72?—A. Yes, sir.

Q. To the Speaker of the House?—A. Yes, sir.

Q. Will you tell the Committee, generally, what was contained in those reports, and make any suggestion you care in regard to improving the workings of the Act?—A. Mr. Chairman and gentlemen: the last report I made was that following the general election of 1926. That was dated December first of that year, and it incorporated the suggestions which had been made in previous reports and which had not been acted upon, so that the report carried my knowledge of the election administration and election machinery up to two or three months before I ceased to be Chief Electoral Officer. I have really nothing to add to what is in that report. The only general remark which I have to make with regard to the contents of the report is to repeat the view I have always held that an electoral machine that is well understood by everybody, candidates and public, is likely to work very much more efficiently than a perfect machine which nobody understands. You may theorize about election machinery as much as you like, but it is the practical thing which has to be carried on by, roughly speaking, one hundred thousand people. There are approximately that number of people directly engaged in the public service, and, of course, there are probably 150,000 or 200,000 more who are working at elections and consequently are interested in the machinery.

By Mr. Kennedy:

Q. What do you mean by "a perfect machine which nobody understands"?—A. You can work out a machine, but very generally each one has its disadvantages as well as its advantages.

The general subjects are covered in my report in paragraphs 8 and 9 chiefly, and are in regard to the situation concerning lists. I might deal with these general subjects first and then come to the particular proposals which I have made. I did not suggest any specific action with regard to lists, but I did point out some of the general considerations which apply to the present machinery for preparing lists, and one may say, by way of preface, that really the lists exist, not for the sake of the election machinery as such, but for the sake of the candidates. If it were simply a question of giving facilities for everybody to vote, then you would not need any lists. The reason you need

[Mr. O. M. Biggar, K.C.]