

By Mr. Heaps:

Q. Would you revert back to the question of voting? Suppose a person's name is not on the voting list and he is absent from the electoral district how can he get his name on the list?—A. There are conditions imposed under which he can vote if his name is not on the list at the time.

Q. If his name is not on the list and he is absent during the specified time can he mail his name in and put it on the electoral list?—A. I have not discovered that.

By the Chairman:

Q. Had you finished reading the statute?—A. Yes, I have finished that. The chief electoral officer of the Commonwealth states that compulsory voting appears to be generally popular with parliamentary candidates, political organizations, etc. and to have been accepted without demur by the majority of the people. He says:—

While the compulsion is distasteful to a section, especially those with conscientious or religious objections, and to some electors at an election where none of the candidates are regarded as representing their views, on present indication it would seem that compulsory voting will continue to be a feature of the Commonwealth law.

By Mr. Heaps:

Q. Have you any information as to how many of the total votes cast were spoiled ballots?—A. No, I have not. I have some more information later on as to the percentage of voters whose excuses are accepted and so on. I have already referred to the fact that one of the effects of compulsory voting is the percentage of the electorate recording their votes has been increased from 70 per cent prior to the introduction of compulsory voting to 95 per cent at the last election. On the occasion of an election I am informed the fact that voting is compulsory is extensively advertised in the press as well as over the radio. The chief electoral officer informs me that after an election the names of all electors who have voted are marked off the certified roll, and the names not so marked indicate those who have failed to vote. Notices are sent to such defaulters, calling on them to furnish reasons for their failure to vote. I think I shall quote certain figures given me by the chief electoral officer at this point. He says:—

Notices are issued to these persons, . . .

He is referring to persons who have failed to vote.

. . . except where the divisional returning officer knows the person has since died or was absent from the commonwealth or for any other reason was unable to vote, calling upon them to furnish their reason for not voting. Replies are received from about 75 per cent of the persons to whom the notices are issued, the bulk of the balance being returned undelivered by the postal authorities owing to the persons having left the addresses for which they were enrolled or otherwise (the latter applies mostly to prospectors and other itinerant workers, etc.). In a few instances in which the recipients ignore both the original notice and a reminder (sent by registered post) they are proceeded against through the courts and fined for failing to reply.

Of the replies received about 95 per cent contain valid and sufficient reason for failure to vote, mostly sickness, long distance from a polling booth, religious objection, etc. Of the remaining five per cent generally at least one half contain reasons not wholly satisfactory, but where the administration considers a formal warning against any future dereliction sufficiently meets the case. In only about 2 per cent of the total non-voters is the reason given for failure to vote unacceptable, and in these cases the defaulters are so informed. . . .”

[Mr. Harry Butcher.]