

Dismissal of Returning Officer

And a list is given, which I will not read, of sixty-two ridings in which the returning officers were deceased, dismissed, resigned or had moved away. On looking the list over I find that, in the province of Ontario, in four ridings represented in this house by Progressive Conservatives, and in one Liberal riding, the returning officers were dismissed. In thirty other ridings the returning officer resigned; nine moved out of the riding; eight were deceased; three were removed because they were incompetent; and three were removed for other reasons—I believe for partisanship.

In the case of the honourable—and I call him honourable because he is a first-rate and honourable man—Mr. Daniel H. Reed, the returning officer for Davenport riding, what was the reason for his dismissal? I have not been able to find out, but a rumour has come to me that it was because of his age. How old he is I do not know. I do not believe the minister knows. I know of no one who can tell the minister how old he is. I myself have tried to find out, and I know of no means of doing so. But in any event, Mr. Speaker, he is physically fit. He does a day's work every day. He is one of the best carpenters we have in that part of the city of Toronto. If he was dismissed for old age, I can tell the minister this: He can dismiss at least twenty-five to forty per cent of all the returning officers in Canada. I therefore take it as an affront against the Liberals of Davenport riding and against myself that this worthy citizen, who has rendered such excellent service, has been dismissed on the trumped-up charge, I am told, of old age. That charge is not the truth, Mr. Speaker. He may be over sixty-five; I do not know. I do not know anyone who does know. But, in my judgment, that is not the truth. What is the reason that he was dismissed? The reason is that he is an honest man; that is why he was dismissed.

Some hon. Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. MacNicol: That is a fact, because he is an honest man and has given fair play to all candidates. When he was appointed in 1935 he succeeded a man who had been appointed by the previous government. When he commenced to make out lists of enumerators, he followed the same practice that was followed by his predecessor, who, I might say, was always given to fair play.

After he had made his list of enumerators, in making appointments of D.R.O.'s, because the D.R.O.'s can select their own clerks, and in selecting the polling places in which the vote was to be held, I had told his predecessor to share up with the Liberals as he shared with Conservatives. We had done that during the war, and the war was not very long over;

and I felt that it was only fair play to treat everyone in a fair manner. I knew of no other way to do it which would make for harmony. I did not want to have any reference made in the press to the effect that in my riding we were not playing fair with our Liberal friends. I have always found it good policy to be fair and honest all round, Mr. Speaker. When he followed that practice, I presume he gave half or thereabouts of the appointments as D.R.O.'s to the Conservative party and maybe half or thereabouts of the polling subdivision polls to the Conservative party. For that action he was bitterly attacked by my opponent, and that attack has continued throughout the last ten years. I told the minister—no, I do not believe I told him this, but I told his predecessor. His predecessor was an excellent man, the late Mr. Norman A. McLarty. He was not bulldozed and he was not pushed backwards in being fair. The same outfit that besieged the present minister the last few days besieged his predecessor. I told his predecessor what was behind the attack and his predecessor brushed it to one side and reappointed that good Liberal citizen. My hon. friend should have done the same thing. He should not have listened to the attacks made on that just and good man.

What brought the matter to a head recently was this. A letter was sent out by the chief returning officer, who in my opinion is the best that any country has had. I have a high regard for the Canadian chief returning officer; he is always on the job and always looking ahead. Anticipating an election some time this year, some two or three months ago now, I believe, he sent out a letter to all returning officers. The returning officer in my riding received a letter from him, asking him to have the enumerators named. The returning officers in other city ridings had the same call. That was only right. I compliment the chief returning officer on being on the job and being alive to his work and getting ready to see that an election may be conducted properly at any time. I had a lot to do with the compilation of the election act. I have been here nineteen years, and I have served on several election committees. At all times I advocated fair play to each and every party. Quite a number of the improvements in this act were suggested by me, and I say that humbly.

How are returning officers appointed? In part one of the instructions we read this:

4. For every electoral district the governor in council appoints a returning officer who remains in office on a permanent basis.

That is the policy of Australia, New Zealand, South Africa and England. They are not kicked out or thrown out on trumped-up charges. They are on a permanent basis