

Sir HECTOR LANGEVIN. I am not in a position to answer that question authoritatively, because the Supplementary Estimates are not yet completed.

MURRAY CANAL.

Mr. PLATT asked, Has an extension of time for the completion of Murray Canal been granted to contractors? If so, when was extension asked for, when granted, and to what date has the time been extended? What is the date for completion in original contract?

Mr. POPE. The date of the completion arranged for in the original contract was July 1st, 1885. The date of the contract with J. B. Silcox & Co. was 24th August, 1882. No written extension of time has been given.

POSTMASTER AT MILFORD.

Mr. PLATT asked, Who is at present postmaster at Milford, Ontario? When was appointment made?

Mr. McLELAN. That office is at present vacant.

FISHING LICENSES IN EAST AND WEST LAKES, PRINCE EDWARD COUNTY.

Mr. PLATT asked, Have fishing licenses for net and seine fishing in East and West Lakes, county of Prince Edward, been refused to any or all applicants? If so, upon whose representations and for what reasons?

Mr. FOSTER. Fishing licenses for net and seine fishing in East and West Lakes, county of Prince Edward, have been refused to all applicants. They were refused upon the representations of the District Inspector, who said they were destroying the fish.

CONDUCT OF RETURNING OFFICERS.

Mr. MILLS (Bothwell) moved :

That the return laid upon the Table of the House by the Clerk of the Crown in Chancery, relating to the return and gazetting of members, be referred to the Committee on Privileges and Elections, to make enquiry into the conduct of certain returning officers and the Clerk of the Crown in Chancery, and the said committee have power to send for persons, papers and records, and to examine witnesses on oath or affirmation.

He said: I regret that I have to bring the misconduct of certain public officers under the attention of this House, but I think the duties assigned to them under the law are of such immense consequence to Parliament and to the country that it is absolutely necessary that this House should exercise the most careful scrutiny over their conduct. The duties that are imposed upon these officers who are referred to in this motion are not onerous, they are not difficult to perform, but they are certainly of very great consequence, and, being of great consequence to the constitution of Parliament itself, it is of the utmost importance to this House, and to every member of the House, to look to the conduct of these officers with the most jealous care. If there is any matter about which this House should be careful, if there is any subject more than another about which it should divest itself of everything like partisan bias, and should think only of the honor, the dignity and the fair constitution of Parliament, it is with reference to the conduct of these officials who are connected with the elections, and who constitute in some degree the machinery by which the House of Commons is called into existence. The conduct of the officers who are necessarily connected with a parliamentary election, and by whose faithful and honest conduct this House may in some degree approach accurately and strictly to the character of a representative body, can never be a matter about which Parliament itself can be indifferent. The writs that are issued by the Crown, upon

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the advice of the Administration of the day, for holding a general election are not the only authority which governs the actions of either the returning officers or the Clerk of the Crown in Chancery. The returning officers look to these writs for their authority to hold an election, but the manner in which that election is to be held and the duties which devolve upon them are not derived from the writ, but are derived from the statute law by which their conduct is regulated, defined, and clearly set out. In fact, the legislation in this matter is so clear and so precise that no officer of ordinary intelligence, who is disposed to discharge his duties honestly and as the law directs need make any mistake. In the case of the returning officer, he has not, as formerly, any discretion with regard to the day of election or with regard to the day of nomination. He is entitled to receive the nomination of candidates in a certain way and upon certain conditions. The day on which he has to sit for the purpose of receiving nominations is set out. The hour when he is to cease receiving nominations is set forth. After the nominations have been received, it is for him to issue a proclamation and to name with the utmost definiteness the places at which votes are to be polled. He appoints the deputy returning officer, he names the poll clerks, and the statute sets out the duty of these clerks with as much definiteness, with as much fullness, with the same freedom from any ambiguity or doubt, as it does his own conduct, and does not leave him any discretion as to when he shall make his return. It provides with the utmost precision when that return shall be made. It says that if certain events do not happen, then he is to make it at the end of six days from the day of polling. He is not to do it after that, but on the expiration of that particular period, and on the contingency of a recount, then he is to take immediate action after that recount is completed. There is no room for discretion, there is no authority for delay. Even in England where there is no such precision—at least there was not formerly—in the statutes, yet Parliament intervened in case there was the least exhibition of a want of due diligence on the part of the returning officer in the discharge of his duty. When he has made his return, then the law provides that the Clerk of the Crown in Chancery upon receiving that return shall gazette the member so returned and having a majority of votes, in the next ordinary issue of the *Gazette*, so that there is, in his case, the same precision, the same definiteness, the same absence from any discretion left him, that there is in the case of the returning officer. He is not permitted to make any delay. Those who framed the law know what the duties of a Clerk of the Crown in Chancery are. They know that they are not arduous. They know that they are not complicated. They know that it is possible for him to take action immediately after the receipt of these returns, and so it is provided that he shall, on the receipt of these returns, gazette the party so returned in the next ordinary issue of that paper. Now, what I have to complain of is, that this duty, which is set out with the utmost clearness and precision, about which no man of ordinary intelligence need err, was grossly neglected in certain cases by the Clerk of the Crown in Chancery, as it was grossly neglected in certain cases by the returning officer. Now, Sir, the members of the House stand here upon a footing of equality. There is no superiority in rights or privileges of one member over another. If the officers who were appointed to conduct the elections, to make the returns, and to gazette the members, discharged their duties as the law directs then there is nothing of which any member can complain. Formerly the officers who were connected with elections were named in the law itself. Some of those might sympathise with the Opposition, and some of them with the gentlemen on the Treasury benches. If there was a disposition to go wrong, if there was any bias influencing the