

Proceedings on Adjournment Motion
[Translation]

These are the causes. I suppose that in some cases certain of these returning officers have reached the age of 65 while others, because of redistribution, no longer live in the electoral districts. But this does not account for the majority of the cases I have in mind. It seems to me that the government is using section 8(1) as a reason for making these wholesale changes. This subsection provides:

The offices of all returning officers appointed prior to the passing of this Act shall be deemed to be vacant and the Governor in Council may appoint to such offices either the same persons as now hold them, any of such persons or any other persons; he may also thereafter appoint from time to time a returning officer for any new electoral district and a new returning officer for any electoral district in which the office of returning officer becomes vacant, within the meaning of subsection (2).

With redistribution we have a completely new electoral map of Canada, with new ridings. That is the justification which is being used. I do not intend to speak about particular cases here, though this has happened in my own riding as it has happened in ridings in every province.

Being a returning officer is like holding any other job. A man has to be at it for a while before he can do it well. It takes at least one election to learn the job, often with the help of candidates who have had experience in elections. They do not become competent right away. It seems to me a pity that the experience which has been gained in the last three general elections should be lost in this way. The people I am speaking about are, generally, Conservative appointments, I know. They have proven themselves to be competent returning officers and they probably acted in the elections of 1962, 1963 and 1965. These are the people who are being replaced under this section of the act which allows the appointment of new returning officers to new electoral districts.

All this seems a pity, especially as we have virtually taken redistribution out of politics. We have appointed independent commissions to draw the boundaries of the new electoral districts. There is a provision whereby we can make protests in the House of Commons, but the system is virtually out of politics. It is too bad that this other aspect of politics still has to be present. Why do we not go all the way? Why not appoint competent people to these positions on a non-partisan basis? Or if we are not prepared to do that, why not at least retain the competent people we have, regardless of the manner of their original appointment?

Mr. Albert Béchard (Parliamentary Secretary to Secretary of State): Mr. Speaker, having listened to the hon. member for Burnaby-Richmond (Mr. Prittie) enumerate all the arguments advocated for the recent replacement of returning officers, I cannot see which one I could use, because the hon. member has put forward all those arguments which justified the replacement of certain returning officers.

The hon. member referred to length of experience and he says so in his question; why replace people who have a long experience?

Mr. Speaker, when we think of the numerous replacements which took place barely five years ago, in 1960, let us say six years ago, one may wonder how long an experience a returning officer could have acquired in so short a time. Experience is not the only yardstick of competence.

I would also like to add that the returning officers which have just been appointed are extremely competent. Needless to say, several returning officers who had been appointed in the previous ridings have been reinstated.

Mr. Speaker, the hon. member referred to an act which was passed on November 20, 1964: the Electoral Boundaries Readjustment Act. This act, gave us entirely new ridings. Consequently, reporting officers had to be appointed to assume this very important responsibility in the 264 new electoral districts—260 rather, since four remained unchanged, namely Roberval and Verdun in the province of Quebec, and Elgin and Niagara Falls in Ontario. All the others are new districts, since their boundaries have been modified. Therefore, returning officers had to be appointed for the next federal elections.

Mr. Speaker, the government have scrupulously abided by section 8 of the Canada Elections Act and section 27 of the Electoral Boundaries Readjustment Act when they made the changes which had become necessary, either because the returning officer had reached age 65 or because he did not reside in the new electoral district.

[English]

NATIONAL PARKS—PRINCE EDWARD ISLAND—
LOCATION OF NEW PARKS

Mr. Heath Macquarrie (Queens): Mr. Speaker, I hope my respected colleagues will pardon me if I delete some purple passages and omit some of my remarks because of the hour. I was delighted to read the report of an