

change the law has not cited one case where a returning officer acted improperly.

Mr. BOULTBEE. The hon. gentleman who has just spoken says that I have not shown a single case. We have asserted, and I do not think it can be denied, that the North York registrar's office was used as a room for committee meetings, and that the sheriff in Guelph delayed people who wanted certificates for voting under the pretence that he had to get counsel's opinion first. Hon. gentlemen opposite say the Ontario Government does not interfere. The Premier of Ontario, in talking on the question during last Session, said he would meet this Government on that question at the polls. What did he mean by that but that we would have the whole force of the Ontario Government against us. Every possible means, every sheriff and division court bailiff and license inspector, and every creature they have, is used against us.

Mr. BANNERMAN. The hon. member for Bothwell said he knew of no case where a returning officer had acted unfairly since 1874. I can show where a returning officer, the registrar of the county of Renfrew, declared on a nomination day that the present Auditor-General was elected through a flaw in our nomination paper; and when appeal was made to Judge Wilson, he in his judgment condemned that returning officer for the action he took. That returning officer, moreover, never appointed a deputy, or a clerk, or anything else, without first consulting the head-centre of the Liberal Association in Renfrew.

Mr. CASGRAIN. We have had under the present system the elections of 1874 and 1878, or, I suppose, about 450 individual elections. In my judgment and experience of twenty-five years I maintain the grievances have been very exceptional and slight, and the present system is the best one. There is no necessity for the change. Because there is some antagonism between Ontario and the Federal Government, why should the other Provinces be interfered with? If we go back to the old system we will have returning officers like the one brought before this House who asked for twenty-four hours consideration to reply to the question as to what was his name.

Mr. LANDRY. The hon. gentleman is mistaken in saying that this law has been in operation since 1874. It was framed after the elections of 1874. The principle was voted upon in the county of Montmagny, where they did not choose either the sheriff or the registrar, but they selected men of their own party to act as returning officers. If the hon. member for L'Islet does not want any changes in his constituency it is because he has a registrar named by the late Joly Government, who is ready to do what he has done already.

Mr. CASGRAIN. I deny that, Sir.

Mr. LANDRY. He did place the polls at the end of parishes, though I do not know that it was at the solicitation of my hon. friend. It was done and he profited by it.

Mr. CASGRAIN. I desire entirely to contradict what has been said. There was no complaint at the last local or Federal election.

Mr. FARROW. In my own riding a partizan returning officer was appointed by the Mackenzie Government—one of the worst partizans that could be found. The village of Brussels belonged half to me and the other half to Centre Huron, and this officer ordered all the votes to be polled in North Huron and they did so, and that same half again polled its vote in Centre Huron. I have often wondered how the late Premier can wear such a long, serious, and sanctimonious face when he knows that such facts took place under his Administration.

Mr. MACKENZIE. I can only say that this is the first time I have heard of any impropriety of the returning

officer. In large counties where there is only one registrar and one sheriff, of course some one else has to be appointed. I know nothing about the appointment, and have no recollection of the circumstance at all. The fact that we took that function deliberately out of the hands of the Government showed that we had no other object to serve than to have the public work done properly.

Mr. GUTHRIE. If what the hon. member for North Huron told us is correct, it is a very strong argument why we should not adopt this clause. We are told that in his riding neither the sheriff nor the registrar was appointed the returning officer, the reason, no doubt, was that they were acting as returning officers in the other riding. As they had to get somebody else, he tells us they selected a violent partizan, of whose conduct he complains. Now, that is precisely what we wish to prevent by passing this amendment. We want to prevent the selection of strong partizans, and to leave that duty in the hands of men of established character.

Mr. BOWELL. The remarks of the last speaker afford rather an argument that the law should not remain as it is now. If in a county where there are three ridings there are only two officers provided for, under the law, it would follow that the appointment of a third officer would be necessary.

Mr. MACKENZIE. Sometimes there are two registration officers.

Mr. BOWELL. I am speaking of cases where there are not two, of which my own county is one. There are three ridings, and in every case the Government has had to appoint an additional returning officer. In my own riding I am glad to say that the registrar, though appointed by the Reform Government, is a gentleman in whom I have the most implicit confidence. But there is a sheriff in the adjoining county who, in the last Dominion election, gave certificates to doubtful voters and sent them into rural sections of the county to act as agents of the candidates and there depositing their vote. It is men of that kind who should not occupy the position of returning officer. I know it is not the intention of the present Government to overlook the sheriffs and registrars, who are believed to be impartial men, and these will receive appointments. But where cases of the kind to which I refer have occurred, it is the duty of the Government to see that such men do not get a similar appointment again. The hon. member for Bothwell told us he knew of a Tory returning officer who took the trouble to go out of the division to select returning officers who had no votes, and he afterwards told us that, under the law as it then existed, the returning officers had they had votes could have not recorded their votes; and in the next sentence he told us, that by going into an adjoining county and bringing young men who had no votes, he disfranchised thirty or forty returning officers. If that is logic I do not understand it.

Mr. MILLS. I did not say so.

Mr. BOWELL. By what means then did he disfranchise the returning officers, unless he appointed those who had votes? When this question was under discussion in the House I remember calling attention to the fact that in constituencies where the contest was likely to be close, a partizan returning officer, or a returning officer who intentionally appointed friends of one particular party, might by that means carry an election, and the law was then repealed. Now the hon. member for East York referred to a threat on the part of the Ontario Premier. Hon. gentlemen know very well that in discussing the question of the boundary, on which we have not yet had the very valuable opinion of the leader of the Opposition, they stated distinctly and boldly and in a threatening tone that it was at the elections, that they hoped would take place in 1883,