

Selection of Returning Officers.—The Special Returning Officers selected were appointed by the Chief Electoral Officer with the concurrence of the Government, and the Select Committee is satisfied that they were well fitted by their experience to conduct the work for which they were sent.

The Select Committee considers that the success of the Special Returning Officers, despite many difficulties, in enabling such heavy polling to take place is a tribute to their efficiency and that their diligence is worthy of great praise.

The Polling Officers were the officers commanding the respective Service units, or officers delegated by them, except that in the Middle East two travelling polling-booths were organized to cover small isolated groups and these booths were in the charge of officials deputed by the Special Returning Officer.

The Chief Electoral Officer was in charge of the arrangements for the despatch of propaganda material in support of the candidature of members of each political party and of Independents. Nominations of candidates closed at midday on 9th September. The official list of candidates was thereupon despatched to the Special Returning Officers in the United Kingdom, Canada, Middle East, and the Pacific Area. The propaganda material printed for despatch to the Pacific by air mail left Wellington on 11th September. The same material was transmitted by cable to the Middle East and Canada on Sunday, 12th September.

In the Middle East arrangements had been made for 12th September to be free of manoeuvres to facilitate voting. On that date, owing to the non-arrival of the propaganda material, voting was stopped till 19th September at the instance of General Freyberg, so that the men could have the opportunity of prior perusal of the electioneering material. Some six thousand votes had been cast, however, before the signal stopping the voting was received by units.

(2) METHODS EMPLOYED FOR RECORDING VOTES

The voting was carried out in accordance with the requirements of the Electoral (Members of the Forces) Regulations 1941, and the evidence before the Committee indicated that it was conducted in a proper manner and that there was no unfair practice, breach of secrecy, negligence, or other irregularity.

(3) METHODS OF DEALING WITH VOTES

(a) *Counting the Votes.*—The evidence indicated that the preliminary and official counts were conducted in a proper manner, that there was no unfair practice, breach of secrecy, negligence, or other irregularity. The scrutiny of the rolls revealed only two cases of dual voting, these being in the Middle East, and the necessary disciplinary action was taken and the votes disallowed. In the absence of scrutineers appointed by political parties, official witnesses in the Middle East were nominated by 2nd New Zealand Expeditionary Force Headquarters in accordance with the regulations. These officers certified that, as witnesses of the scrutiny of the rolls and scrutineers of the official count, to the best of their knowledge and belief all requirements of the regulations were carried out in every respect and that they were entirely satisfied that the figures contained in the official count of the Special Returning Officer were accurate. These witnesses also verified that the results were faithfully transmitted by cable to New Zealand.

In the Pacific, representatives of political parties were able to attend the scrutineering and official count. The party scrutineers assured the Special Returning Officer that they had no objections to offer regarding the conduct of the election.

(b) *Disposal of Voting-papers.*—The Electoral Act, 1927, section 155, provides that used ballot-papers are to be forwarded to the Clerk of the House of Representatives to be stored for twelve months before being destroyed. They are thus available in the event of any recount. The Electoral (Members of the Forces) Regulations 1941, clause 27 (2), provides—

“The result of the count as so notified by the Special Returning Officer shall for all purposes be deemed to be correct and shall be accepted accordingly for the purposes of any recount.”

This clause contemplates the circumstance that voting-papers might be destroyed by enemy action, and consequently the Special Returning Officer's declaration was deemed to be final.

Servicemen's voting-papers were thus by law not available for the purposes of a recount.

In the Magisterial recount in the Eden Electorate it was held by the Magistrate that servicemen's voting-papers were not available for the purposes of a recount.

Used ballot-papers, counterfoils, and rolls were returned to New Zealand to be dealt with in accordance with section 155 of the Electoral Act by the Special Returning Officers in the United Kingdom, Canada, and the Pacific Area, but not in the Middle East. In this case the Special Returning Officer, on his own discretion, ordered the used voting material to be burnt. The electoral material was completely destroyed by placing it in the incinerator provided for the disposal of secret material. The operation was supervised by Captain Bolland, of the Special Returning Officer's staff, and other members of his staff were present. A guard was provided by the Provost Corps.