

179. Have you any knowledge of the facility with which a key can be duplicated?—No.

180. Would you be surprised to learn that a safe-key can be stamped in three minutes?—No.

181. My point is that both parliamentary and local-option polls are menaced by carelessness in the system adopted with regard to the ballot-papers: supposing a person obtained possession of ballot-papers before the poll, could he not make use of them at the poll?

ALEXANDER FERGUSON, Printer and Stationer, sworn and examined. (No. 4.)

182. *The Chairman.*] You were the printer of the ballot-papers for the last Licensing Committee election at Wellington?—Yes, I was.

183. Will you tell the Committee whether that was one of the papers you printed [ballot-paper produced and handed to witness]?—Yes; I have seen this before. I should say it was one of the papers. I could swear almost that it is one, from little points about the type.

184. Did you give any ballot-papers to any one other than the Returning Officer?—No.

185. Would it have been possible for any one to have got that paper?—Yes, quite possible. If I had a dishonest employee he might have taken it out without any one's knowledge. There were a large number of these printed, and on account of the gumming required they had to lie out exposed.

186. Of course, you used every precaution?—Yes. There are all sorts of things that we have to print for racing clubs and others, and we also print examination-papers, and necessarily have to take all kinds of precautions.

187. *Mr. Taylor.*] Did you break up your type directly the required number was printed off?—As a rule we do, but I should not like to say it was done in this case. I do not think any copies would be taken of the printed form by any one, because it would have to be put through so many different processes.

188. *Hon. Mr. Hall-Jones.*] How many different processes would it go through?—It would have to go through a good many hands, and this has not been printed from a hand-press.

189. How many would you print in a sheet?—These were printed singly on a rotary machine.

190. *Mr. Wood.*] Have you ever found similar things to go out from your office?—Yes; we once had a case of damaged tram-tickets. A sheet had been spoilt and thrown amongst the waste paper, and a boy picked it up, and afterwards we found this out through the Tram-manager bringing it under our notice. It was not taken out of our place, because it was not properly numbered, but must have been picked out of the waste paper afterwards.

191. Do you know of any other instance?—None has been brought under my personal knowledge. These ballot-papers were all practically counted by two people into lots of 100.

192. *The Chairman.*] Can you say whether they were packed in hundreds or more?—I did not pack or count them, and it is so long ago that I would not like to swear; but so far as I know they were put up in hundreds.

193. If the Returning Officer said they were in five-hundreds you would not say that he was wrong?—They may have been packed in hundreds first and then repacked in five-hundreds. I believe that is so.

194. *Hon. Mr. Hall-Jones.*] Do you often discover errors in counting?—Yes; that is the reason why we had them counted or checked twice, because it was impressed upon us by Mr. Thomson that he should have them correct. He was very particular about that.

195. *The Chairman.*] There seems to have been a discrepancy of 100?—Yes; but I contend that that did not occur at our end. My people say they counted the papers carefully, jotted them down on paper, and added them up, so that the exact number should be delivered. Unfortunately we did not get a signature for the exact number, but for the parcel. We did not anticipate this trouble.

196. Do you usually get receipts for the exact number, or only for the parcel?—As a rule only for a parcel. We might get a receipt in some cases. It depends upon the importance of the thing.

197. *Hon. Mr. Hall-Jones.*] Was the receipt in this case for the number or for the bundles?—For the bundles. It really should have been for a specified number; but even in that case it would have been of very little benefit, because the Returning Officer could not have counted them, and one paper might have got astray outside.

198. *The Chairman.*] You have not machines for counting papers the same as you have for cards?—We have machines for numbering, but these ballot-papers were not ordered to be numbered. I could have put on a machine while they were being printed that would have shown consecutive numbers, but, of course, we had no instructions to put numbers on them.

199. *Mr. Wood.*] But there are machines that give the number of papers that are printed when going through?—You can put a numbering machine on a cylinder machine that registers the number printed without numbering the papers at all; but if there are any sheets spoiled, or one of the sheets slips, they have to be thrown out. That would hardly check the number printed.

200. *Mr. R. McKenzie.*] Are you satisfied that this paper was not stolen from your printing-office?—Yes; as far as I possibly can be. I do not think there was any one in my office that would be likely to take it.

201. How many people have you employed there?—Between twenty and thirty.

202. Do you know them all personally?—Yes.

203. Do you consider them all trustworthy and honest?—Yes, or I would not have them there. You must have honest people in a printing-office.

204. Are they sworn in?—No.

205. They are under no obligation to observe secrecy?—Not more than any ordinary employee is supposed to be.

206. Have they been working for you long?—Some of them have been there ever since I have been there. Some have been in the establishment for nearly twenty years.