

**ELECTIONEERING UP-TO-DATE WITH
SOME SUGGESTIONS FOR
AMENDING THE CORRUPT PRACTICES
ACT; WITH THREE ADDITIONAL
CHAPTERS ON THE CASE OF THANET**

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649402458

Electioneering Up-to-date with some Suggestions for Amending the Corrupt Practices Act; with Three additional Chapters on the Case of Thanet by Charles Roden Buxton & J. C. Haig

Except for use in any review, the reproduction or utilisation of this work in whole or in part in any form by any electronic, mechanical or other means, now known or hereafter invented, including xerography, photocopying and recording, or in any information storage or retrieval system, is forbidden without the permission of the publisher, Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd, PO Box 1576 Collingwood, Victoria 3066 Australia.

All rights reserved.

Edited by Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd.
Cover @ 2017

This book is sold subject to the condition that it shall not, by way of trade or otherwise, be lent, re-sold, hired out, or otherwise circulated without the publisher's prior consent in any form or binding or cover other than that in which it is published and without a similar condition including this condition being imposed on the subsequent purchaser.

www.triestepublishing.com

CHARLES RODEN BUXTON & J. C. HAIG

**ELECTIONEERING UP-TO-DATE WITH
SOME SUGGESTIONS FOR
AMENDING THE CORRUPT PRACTICES
ACT; WITH THREE ADDITIONAL
CHAPTERS ON THE CASE OF THANET**

ELECTIONEERING UP-TO-DATE

Electioneering Up-to-Date

With some
Suggestions for Amending the Corrupt Practices Act

By
CHARLES RODEN BUXTON

With Three additional Chapters on the Case of
Thanet

By
J. C. HAIG
(Late Liberal Election Agent for the Thanet Division)

LONDON
FRANCIS GRIFFITHS
34 Maiden Lane, Strand, W.C.
1906

5 books
gift
James K. Pollock
12-18-59

PREFACE

It is not the object of this book to make charges against either persons or parties. Many of the cases referred to would be held, on an election petition, not to come within the scope of the Corrupt and Illegal Practices Act, 1853. Many, again, of the practices described are deeply rooted in custom, and would not be condemned—nay, would in some cases be applauded—by public opinion. Nor is either of the established political parties attacked, to the exclusion of the other; though it is true that the party which counts among its members the larger number of wealthy men figures the more prominently of the two, and that a stricter law would, in the main, be to the advantage of the Liberals at the poll.

The object of the book is to draw attention to electioneering practices which make elections unreal, foster dishonesty, and degrade the standard of public life; and to suggest certain amendments of the law. The aim is to give the reader the means of judging for himself. With the facts before him he will be able to say how far the conclusions are well or ill founded.

The first five chapters illustrate certain practices habitually carried on in almost every part of Eng-

land; practices which are generally acknowledged and accepted, but which cannot be reconciled with the spirit (whatever may be said of the letter) of our electoral legislation. The sixth deals with the amendment of the law. In the remaining chapters, contributed by Mr. J. C. Haig, Liberal election agent in the last contest in Thanet, an attempt is made to show, by an admittedly extreme example, how a really clever candidate can reduce the Corrupt Practices Act to a farce. The suggestion is that, in other divisions, results similar in character may be achieved, though probably with less complete success.

If I were addressing those only who have seen the inner working of an election, a few general statements would probably have been sufficient. To them the practices to which I have referred are familiar enough. But my hope is to convince the sceptical and the indifferent; and for this purpose specific examples are necessary. I have, therefore, quoted a certain number of cases by way of illustration. The series might be multiplied indefinitely. The material is to be found on every hand.

At the same time it must be remembered that much of this evidence is by no means easy to acquire in a perfectly definite form. A large number of cases are kept back from the mistaken idea, so prevalent after an election contest, that it is better, at all hazards, to let sleeping dogs lie. Many, again, of the practices referred to are taken as a matter of course, and the idea of drawing attention to them does not even occur to those concerned.

Others remain unnoticed because those who have had a part in them are ashamed to let them be known. Others are suppressed because a number of individuals benefit by their continued existence, and their continued existence depends upon the privacy which protects them. Others, in which fear plays a part, are concealed because those who have suffered by them are not willing to risk the further material harm which might follow if they published them abroad. Those who pursue the last named practices are in the habit of pointing to this silence as proof that no intimidation exists; in other words, of using the silence which their own terrorism has created, as evidence against the fact of the terrorism itself.

The cases which come to light must thus run the gauntlet of many different motives and influences, all tending to concealment. If only a few cases were available for proof, these few would imply the existence of a larger number still unrevealed. Even if they did not, even if the few cases stood alone, they would still represent an amount of degradation and hardship which ought if possible to be avoided.

I have taken some pains to ensure the accuracy of every statement of fact. Shortly after the General Election I made enquiries on this subject from some 260 candidates, half of them Unionist and half Liberal, and a few others concerned in the election. My letter contained these words: "The only cases which would be of any use are, of course, those within your positive knowledge,

such as, if they came within the law, you think you would be able to prove in court." I received replies from all parts of the country, both rural and urban; from those places where electioneering is generally supposed to be pure, as much as from those whose reputation in this matter is low. In every case where I have utilised the facts supplied me I sent a second letter to my informant, so as to secure further assurance of "their strict accuracy." For some of my facts I am indebted to Mr. Allan H. Bright, who kindly placed at my disposal a quantity of material which he had collected within the last few years. The press, my own experience, and the reports of election petitions—though these last I have used but sparingly, since the facts they contain are tolerably familiar to the public—have been the remaining sources of my information. I am aware that I should have drawn a more vivid picture if I had been able throughout to give names and places. Most of the facts used, however, were given me on condition that nothing should be said which would serve to identify the persons concerned, and so expose them to possible retaliation. If, again, I had repeated matters of hearsay—stories of the type always prevalent at an election, which often contain a substantial amount of truth—I should have produced something more superficially striking. But I have thought that nothing could really be more impressive than the bare recital of a few completely attested facts.

Although this book contains proposals for

amending the law, I would not be thought to suggest that mere legal restriction is the ultimate remedy for the evils I have indicated. These evils are merely the symptoms of a deeper malady. It is public opinion which is at fault. A large part of the public, indeed, does not realise the facts at all; but a still larger part, though it realizes, does not condemn them. It would be interesting to trace the cause. The truth is, I think, that we have not genuinely accepted the democratic principle. We do not see that that principle requires the free expression of the voter's opinion; that without such free expression, democracy is a farce. The reason why interference with opinion is not much condemned is that opinion itself is not much respected. And it is, perhaps, for the same reason that we are so blind to the moral aspects of the electoral problem. We should object to bribing a judge; we should consider that a sacred trust was reposed in him, and that we had induced him to betray it for a mean reward; and not only to betray it, but to keep up the solemn pretence of exercising it at the same time. We see no harm, however, in cajoling the voter to betray a trust which, in its kind, is equally sacred. And similarly, we do not resent, in the case of the voter, the tyrannical use of power. All these things are condoned by the well-to-do; we cannot blame the poor if, too often, they adopt a like standard. Elections will not be substantially purer until public opinion becomes cleaner and saner.

Meantime, a beginning must be made. At pre-