

Foul-ups at the polls concern candidates

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Strange happenings at ballot boxes throughout Northumberland riding cast doubt on the accuracy of election results.

Members from the three major political camps Thursday night called for some form of investigation to begin immediately to delve into disturbing reports of election offenses.

Dr. Doug Galt said he would call for an investigation as soon as possible after he fielded a number of reports and personally witnessed the bedlam when he visited a polling station near his home in Salem.

Dr. Galt's name remained on an electoral list after he had voted.

"I'll be asking some question here," pledged Dr. Galt. "I went into the polling station in Salem and found out my name was not crossed off the list. There was nothing stop me from voting again. I already voted at the advance polls."

Others were also outraged at delays in opening four polling stations in Cobourg June 3 after as many as 10 election officials didn't show up. That delay led to a two-hour delay in posting poll results at the end of the day.

The two-hour information blackout, 8-10 p.m.,

caused mayhem at

party headquarters for candidates who had to rely on numbers provided by their own scrutineers - figures that couldn't be verified.

NDP candidate Murray Wepler was incensed the Brighton Returning Office would not release figures and was immediately on the phone to NDP provincial headquarters in Toronto.

"I have great reservations about the screw-up here simply because (Premier Mike) Harris wanted to save some money - Elections Ontario was strapped. It's just another demonstration of incompetence by Harris."

Mr. Wepler said the matter had been turned over to NDP higher-ups to pursue a full investigation.

But, just when it appeared things couldn't get worse, they did. More reports of irregularities began surfacing in Brighton, Port Hope and Grafton later in the evening.

Word spread quickly that scrutineers found 10 ballots already cast in one box that had names on an accompanying list

to accredit them.

The incident troubled federal Northumberland MP Christine Stewart who was on hand at the Grafton Legion with Liberal candidate Carolyn Campbell.

"Here we have a case where there were 10 more ballots in a box than there were names on the list," said Mrs. Stewart. "That says a lot about tonight, that there is something seriously wrong."

Mrs. Stewart also spoke to others who told her of other instances where names of people who had not already voted were not taken off the voter's list.

In another instance, Canada Post officials left large stacks of voter registration cards throughout the riding in foyers of apartment buildings where anyone could have stolen them, Mrs. Stewart said.

"It's very sad. Anyone could have walked away with these cards and used them any way they wished. We just won't know," Mrs. Stewart said. "The Liberal association is going to have to seek legal advice to determine how to look into this."

Despite the concerns, Dr. Galt defended the move to cut the estimated \$12-million cost of enumeration by utilizing the 1997 federal voter's list. The move meant and estimated 700 enumerators across the province did not have to be paid.

Returning Officer Play, a veteran of federal and municipal elections, had little comment on the incidents saying, "This will be left up to the political officials to decide."