

with which his colleagues may not be so well acquainted.

Well, we have a statute which says that the Minister of the Interior shall have the control and management of the affairs of the Northwest Territories, and we have the words of the Prime Minister himself who tells us that the Minister of the Interior, apart from any statute, has a special responsibility with regard to the affairs of the Northwest Territories with which he is more closely connected than his colleagues. But what are we proposing to do at present? We are proposing to take a step which the right hon. gentleman and his colleagues declare to be one of the most momentous ever taken by a parliament of Canada. Yet the right hon. gentleman has not filled the post of Minister of the Interior. That position is still vacant. We are now in the heat of debate upon the Bills he has introduced. Before long we shall be in committee on those Bills, and we shall not have the advantage of the presence and counsel of a minister specially responsible for the administration of those Territories. We do not find at present in the cabinet any minister who is able to carry on the work of that department. I have been informed by men, whom I have no reason to disbelieve, on various occasions during the last two or three weeks, that the work of that department is practically at a standstill for the lack of a responsible minister, familiar with its affairs and able to give his undivided attention to them. Why is this the case? Is there any reason for it? Let me show my hon. friend how zealous he was in respect of such matters when little difficulties, such as have recently occurred in the present administration, happened to occur some ten years ago in the Conservative administration of that day. What was the right hon. gentleman's view then:

No administration would dare to sit and discharge the public business of the country unless the different provinces, or at all events the great provinces of Ontario, Quebec, Nova Scotia and New Brunswick, were properly represented in the cabinet; and when it is known that at present three of the ministers representing one province—that three of those gentlemen who represent a great portion of the population of the country—are out of the cabinet at the present time, whether officially or not, they are practically out of the cabinet. I say that we are not only in the midst of a great political crisis, but that we have reached a position unprecedented in the history of Canada, where the government would undertake to carry on the business of the country, one great province, the second in the Dominion, being altogether unrepresented in the cabinet.

But what is the right hon. gentleman proposing to do to-day? We have in the Northwest Territories to-day a population 150,000, greater than was the population of New Brunswick at the time when it served as an illustration for the comments of my right hon. friend which I have just read.

Mr. R. L. BORDEN.

He is proposing to give to these Territories a constitution which at no time in the future will a Canadian parliament be able to change, and, forgetting the great constitutional rule which he laid down in days gone by, he is proposing to do this in the absence of any representative of those Territories in the cabinet. He is proposing that parliament should finally deal with a measure vitally affecting the Northwest Territories while these Territories are absolutely unrepresented in the cabinet. For what purpose was that statute passed creating the portfolio of Minister of the Interior? Why, if not that there shall be in the cabinet a minister representing that country who would be thoroughly competent to safeguard its interests especially in matters of such importance as the one now before us? Why, in those days my right hon. friend was so anxious in this regard, that upon the mere rumour of the resignation of ministers from Quebec, he moved the adjournment of the House and discussed the question at length. Later on, upon full explanation being given, when he had been assured that those gentlemen had not resigned and were at one with their colleagues, he was so much interested in the constitutional aspect of the case that he again moved the adjournment. But to-day when we inquire whether or not the vacant portfolio of the interior will be filled, my right hon. friend seems to emerge temporarily from a condition of forgetfulness. He is as one who would say: 'Why, bless my soul, then there is a Department of the Interior; I must look after it one of these days. There are Northwest Territories, but I had almost forgotten their existence. One of these days we will take the question up when there is nothing else to do; but in the meantime we will go on and deal with most important questions affecting these Territories without any regard whatever to the statute.' In those days he was a stickler for constitutional usage but to-day he displays a complete change of front. Let me read one more brief extract from a speech of the right hon. gentleman of those days:

Moreover here are two seats vacant, vacant since yesterday, and although the hon. gentlemen who occupy these seats may not have tendered officially their resignations to His Excellency, it is quite evident that they are no longer in harmony with their colleagues, otherwise they would be in their places to discharge their share of the business of the country.

In view of the cynical disregard of the constitution which we see every day in this House, is not the reminiscence, brought up by the utterances I have just quoted, perfectly delicious? Here are two-thirds of the cabinet not in harmony with the other one-third, if we apply the test which the right hon. gentleman himself applied ten years ago. How many of the colleagues of my right hon. friend are present in the House to-day? There is a vacant seat next to him.