

The Prime Minister seems in the end to have given my hon. friend from Brandon (Mr. Sifton)—if I may use a common expression—a dose of his own medicine. For the hon. member for Brandon thought that this matter should be settled by the government without giving any opportunity to the people of the Northwest Territories to consider the terms of the proposed Bill, and the Prime Minister, carrying that idea a little farther thought that the matter should be discussed and the Bill brought down to parliament without giving even the ex-Minister of the Interior an opportunity to consider or even to see it.

I would remark to my hon. friend from Edmonton (Mr. Oliver) that the manner in which this Bill was introduced—introduced on the eve of the return of the ex-Minister of the Interior, who was then still a minister (Mr. Sifton) and on the eve of the return of the Minister of Finance (Mr. Fielding)—affords an excellent specimen of the way in which a 'blind pool' was offered those gentlemen. Let us revert for one moment to the debates of 1902 and to the speech which the Minister of the Interior (Mr. Sifton) then made with all the authority of a member of the administration. The ex-minister spoke then for the Prime Minister of this country, for his colleague the Minister of Finance, and for my hon. friend the Postmaster General (Sir William Mulock.) He was endeavouring to show good reason for postponing the introduction and consideration of a Bill of this kind, and what did he say :

Last year it was arranged that a discussion should take place, and our friends of the territorial government did urge that it should take place earlier. But the Minister of Finance was obliged to go to England immediately after the session, and a discussion in his absence would of course have been impossible, he being one of the members of the government whose presence would be absolutely necessary in addition to the Prime Minister and myself. So that until the return of the Finance Minister from England, it was impossible altogether to arrive at any arrangement as to when the conference should take place.

I am not reading this as simply the language of the Minister of the Interior, but as a declaration by the present administration, whose mouthpiece that hon. gentleman then was, that the consideration of this question could not possibly be proceeded with in the absence of these ministers. But to-day, not much more than two years later, we find the Prime Minister of this country, in the absence of his Minister of the Interior and his Minister of Finance—the presence of both of whom this government had declared absolutely necessary in order that this question might be considered and a decision arrived at—we find the Prime Minister bringing down to the House on the 21st of February this important measure in the absence of these two ministers. And we find further that notwithstanding that ex-

traordinary—I might even say, in view of all the circumstances, that indecent haste—not one single step has since been taken to press this Bill through. And when we asked the right hon. gentleman why it was that, without regard for constitutional usage, in absolute contempt of all constitutional precedent, he not only did that which I have just mentioned but brought this Bill down, as the Act of the government and the result of the collective wisdom of the government, without the assent of his two colleagues,—who above all others should have been consulted—when we ask him why he took that extraordinary course, he vouchsafes to the House not one word in explanation. I ventured to suggest some days ago that it was due, not only to the House and the country but to the right hon. gentleman himself, that some explanation should be given. I am still of that opinion. What was the reason, when the Minister of the Interior (Mr. Sifton) was expected in Ottawa within two days, that this Bill was rushed into the House of Commons before his arrival, while not one step has been taken to forward it through any of its stages for three weeks afterwards? Why was it, when the Minister of Finance was on his way home from England and expected to arrive, as he did arrive, in Ottawa within four or five days, that the Prime Minister rushed in feverish haste to the House with this measure, and has not since sought to advance it one single stage? Was it because some of the right hon. gentleman's colleagues were wavering and he dreaded the result of the influence of two such strong members of his cabinet as the ex-Minister of the Interior and the Minister of Finance upon those who were hesitating to indorse the course the right hon. gentleman purposed to pursue. Was there any idea in the mind of the First Minister that these gentlemen might not be so ready to hesitate or to retreat once this measure had been brought down as a government measure. Was there anything of that kind in the mind of the right hon. gentleman? I do not know. I cannot tell what was in his mind, but we at least are able to conclude that something very extraordinary must have impelled him to take the course he did.

But a still more extraordinary condition of affairs seems to have existed with regard to the representatives of the Northwest Territories. The right hon. gentleman, when I brought up this matter in 1902 and again in 1903, took the ground that the Northwest Territories already had a very considerable degree of responsible government. They had a legislature of their own, a cabinet of their own, and he pointed out that with the exception of the right to incur debt and one or two other matters, they were already invested with the powers of responsible government. Well, Sir, the ex-Minister of the Interior (Mr. Sifton), in the speech to which I alluded a moment