

that he is not familiar with the details of the department, and he cannot be expected to give that authoritative information which a cabinet minister would. We have people here to-day from Dawson city, from Battleford and from distant points who have travelled thousands of miles to transact business with the Minister of the Interior, but they have been forced to return home without being able to attain their object. I trust, Sir, that we shall soon have a Minister of the Interior with whom the people of the Northwest Territories can transact public business, and through whom they can make their grievances known to the government of Canada.

Mr. R. S. LAKE (Qu'Appelle). Mr. Speaker, in a matter of such importance to the Northwest Territories, I feel it my duty to say a very few words at the present time, and especially shall I address myself to the urgency of the appointment of a Minister of the Interior. To learn, as we did the other day, that the terms of this Bill had been agreed upon and laid before parliament without consultation with the Minister of the Interior—and as it afterwards proved, in direct opposition to his known views—was surprising enough; but to have the statement ten days later from the Prime Minister, that he had then no intention of selecting a new Minister of the Interior, was simply amazing. I am glad to say that on the following day the right hon. gentleman modified that statement and gave us a hope that in the near future there would be an appointment. I feel that we are entitled to ask from the right hon. gentleman an absolute and positive statement on this question.

If it is not unconstitutional to go on with such important measures as those before the House in the absence of the Minister of the Interior, and I believe it is unconstitutional, I will make this assertion, that it is plainly against the spirit of the constitution, and that it is also against the principles which were laid down by the Prime Minister himself, in the Order in Council which was published in connection with the retirement of the Earl of Dundonald last year. I submit, Sir, that it is absolutely necessary at the present time that the Prime Minister should admit into his most confidential counsels some man who is thoroughly imbued with the spirit and the aspirations of the west. I do not believe that the Bills in their present form would have been brought down if the Prime Minister had had in the cabinet at the time they were being discussed a gentleman from the west who was in touch with the west; and I feel quite certain that those Bills would not have been introduced in the terms in which they were—terms which practically threw down the gauntlet to the people of the west on a subject on which the Prime Minister must have known that they were very sensitive indeed.

In his speech in introducing the Bills, the right hon. gentleman said: 'The Northwest Territories have at the present time a large measure of local autonomy.' He went on to say that they have 'most of the essential powers which are now given to the provinces,' and he concluded by saying that he proposed to crown that with 'complete and absolute autonomy.' I sometimes wonder whether it could be possible that the right hon. gentleman really meant that when he said it. I do not think that anybody who chooses to study these Bills and to take them in connection with the constitutions of the other provinces of Canada, can doubt but that it is proposed to form in the Northwest Territories 'imperfect and inferior organizations,' to quote the words of the premier of that country; and if more proof were needed that the people of the Territories did not believe that they were going to be put on the plane of the older provinces of the Dominion, I would point to the character of the meetings which are now being held almost daily throughout the west. This question is not dealt with up there as a party question. I notice that in the towns in the district which I have the honour to represent, in several cases the prime movers are gentlemen who are supporters of the right hon. gentleman opposite; and I was surprised to hear that he had not heard that other objections had been taken to the terms of these Bills above and beyond the objections which were taken to the educational clauses. I may tell him that I have received copies of resolutions taking the very strongest objections to other clauses. Of course, the terms in which the educational clauses are couched have been such as to raise a feeling which must overshadow all other feelings amongst the people of the Northwest Territories; and therefore we find that the agitation against these educational clauses takes the first place. But I can assure the Prime Minister that there are the very strongest objections against the proposal that our lands should be retained by the Dominion of Canada. There are the very strongest objections to having the perpetual exemption from taxation which is at the present moment enjoyed by the Canadian Pacific Railway Company placed on the shoulders of the new provinces forever. That is a burden which we believe the Dominion of Canada should bear. I may say that the large measure of local autonomy which the Prime Minister referred to in his speech as having been enjoyed by the Territories has developed a strong western sentiment and solidarity which is manifesting itself in connection with the clauses of these Bills; and I would suggest to him that he should put this matter to the test by inviting some gentleman from amongst the western Liberal members of parliament to enter his cabinet and in this way open a seat in the Northwest Ter-