

to deliberate, to consider what position they are going to take, who they are going to call upon to fill the very important place left vacant by the late minister.

Mr. R. L. BORDEN. The right hon. gentleman appreciates of course the fact that in this connection I called attention to the peculiar condition, namely, that we are about to pass a very important Bill with regard to those Territories.

Sir WILFRID LAURIER. Yes, and this is a reason why, in my estimation, instead of pressing the matter, we should exercise a little delay. This Bill cannot be postponed if we intend to have these provinces begin operations on the 1st of July next. There are many reasons why this should be done, the people expect it, and therefore we cannot delay the prosecution of the Bill. But the hon. gentleman wants us at the same time to proceed with the Bill and to proceed with an election in the Northwest Territories, or somewhere else. I do not think, under the circumstances, we can do anything else than to proceed, as governments have always proceeded in these matters, and to take time to consider who is the best man to seek to fill this position. There are numerous precedents, of which I will refer to a few. There has been a vacancy before in the portfolio on the Interior. For instance, the Department of the Interior had been filled by a very able man, the Hon. Thomas White, from the 5th of August, 1885, to the 21st April, 1888, and then a vacancy occurred through the death of that gentleman. That vacancy remained from the 21st April to the 3rd August, 1888, not one month, not two months, not three months, but more than three months elapsed before the vacancy was filled. This occurred during a session of parliament, and I do not remember that any word of criticism was made against the government because they did not proceed immediately to fill that portfolio. But that is not all. I would call attention to another important department of the government, the Department of Railways. That department was created on the 20th of May, 1879, it was filled by Sir Charles Tupper, who occupied the position until the 23rd of May, 1884, when the position became vacant and remained vacant—how long? To the 25th of September, 1884? No, but until the 25th of September, 1885, nearly a year and four months. But that is not all. The Hon. John Henry Pope occupied the portfolio from September 25, 1885, to April 1, 1889, when a vacancy again occurred by the death of Mr. Pope, and the portfolio remained vacant until the 28th of November, 1889, when it was filled by Sir John A. Macdonald. He occupied the post of Minister of Railways until the 6th of June, 1891, when the portfolio became vacant and remained so until the 11th of January, 1892, when it was filled by the hon. member for Lanark

(Mr. Haggart). Yet there was not, so far as I remember, much criticism on the fact of these vacancies remaining so long, one of them for a year and four months. On the present occasion, a vacancy has occurred in the portfolio of the Interior, but it will not remain vacant for one year and four months, not even for four months, not even for three months, but in due time, and before long, I shall give my hon. friend the fullest satisfaction that he desires to have on this question.

Hon. GEO. E. FOSTER (North Toronto) The right hon. gentleman has, as usual, risen to the occasion in his own way; whether that way is satisfactory to the House and to the country is another matter. He has, as often happens recently, not treated the matter seriously. He seems to think that, as the responsible head of a government, he is not bound to give any sufficient reasons for violations of constitutional practice, violations of precedent and violations of the canons of good government. He read my hon. friend, the leader of the opposition, a lecture upon propriety, which I think was altogether uncalled for. It seems to me that the hon. member for Carleton (Mr. R. L. Borden) introduced his reference to the Department of Public Works in the most kindly and most courteous way. He attempted to find no fault with the minister personally. But what did strike him, and what, I think he expressed to the House very properly and very reasonably, was the fact that one of the most important departments of the government is now, not for one month, or two months, or three months, or four months, but for many, many months more than that, practically without a head. Well, whilst disposed in every way to have a kindly feeling to the hon. gentleman who has the misfortune by illness to be away from his department, I think it is very well understood that there is not a probability of that hon. gentleman again administering that department. He has been out of it for a long series of months. It has been practically taken over by another gentleman who is not responsible in the way that a minister is. I am not at all saying that he would not make a very good responsible minister, but no man can in a lay position, so to speak, administer a department with the same power and with the same sense of responsibility as one who is specially appointed under the law. So that, in reference to that the maxim which has been so often mentioned here of late that the King's government must go on applies. The King's government must go on. It will not wait even for illness or for death or for any of these circumstances. The affairs of the country are over and superior to all these and there is not the least doubt in the world that the department suffers from the lack of a responsible head.