

public officers throughout the country to set the law at defiance, to disregard its provisions, and the Government promised legislation upon the subject. I know that the First Minister has for some time assumed that this House is here for the purpose of merely registering his wishes, that he decides beforehand what shall and what shall not be done; and so it may be that he, looking at the past, might be justified in assuming that the law which is now upon the Statute-book and which it is the duty of certain officers to obey, will be repealed. But it would only have been fair to his supporters in this House to have recognised their right of independent judgment and action, and to have refrained from giving any such order until the law now on the Statute-book was repealed. There is no excuse for this conduct. It is not only a highly improper proceeding in itself, but it is a proceeding altogether unwarranted. There was no supreme necessity imposed on the Government in the direction in which they have gone. Parliament has been in session for six weeks. The First Minister has no information he did not possess before the House met. He knew what appropriations were necessary for the voters' lists, to meet the claims of the revising officers, their clerks and bailiffs, and the cost of printing the voters' lists. All this information was in the hands of the Government when the House met. If the hon. gentleman thought it was unwise that this measure should be continued upon the Statute-book, why did he not propose its repeal, so that we might have had a Bill under consideration, which Parliament could have dealt with before the time came that the officers were called upon to discharge certain public duties. Instead of doing that, we have the action taken which is reported in the newspaper; and I find the notice was sent not merely to the revising officer in Prince Edward Island, but I believe it was sent to revising officers everywhere throughout the Dominion. We told the First Minister when he proposed the measure that it was one not in the public interest. We pointed out the appliances which the House could command for the purpose of preparing the voters' lists, and we urged that this machinery was not such as made it desirable that the policy which had worked satisfactorily for eighteen years should be departed from. We pointed out to the hon. gentleman that he would entail very great inconvenience upon members of this House and upon candidates seeking election to this House; also a very serious expenditure upon the country and that the expense was wholly unnecessary, and that even if the expense resulted in the preparation of satisfactory voters' lists, it would not have done more than had been accomplished by the Provincial law. The hon. gentleman disregarded our representations. He was so anxious to secure for his dependents, his wards, the privilege of voting for representatives to this House that he could not forego the opportunity on the eve of the elections of making radical changes in the law. Well, Sir, the hon. gentleman has had an opportunity of trying his experiment, and a trial of twelve months has not resulted in a way so satisfactory to him or his supporters that they feel like continuing to carry the law into effect. But, Sir, the hon. gentleman, instead of coming down frankly to the House at the opening of the Session and admitting that he had been mistaken, and that it was necessary that the law should be repealed or amended, has taken the very extraordinary course of proposing to suspend the law, and giving instructions to public officers to disregard those duties which the law has imposed upon them, because he proposes some time in the future to introduce a measure of repeal. Now, we know that the hon. gentleman is not likely to propose a measure which he does not think is in his own interest—and, when I say in his own interest I am speaking of his interest as a public man, as the leader of a party in this House. The hon. gentleman knows that many of those lists were defective, that serious complaints were made with regard to the preparation of those voters'

Mr. MILLS (Bothwell).

lists, and he has given instructions which show that he is resolved to interfere with the operation of the law, and impose upon the people of those constituencies where elections are likely to take place, in consequence of the elections being contested, an imperfect voters' list, and to deny the people the opportunity of amending their lists. We know that a large number of persons who are on the voters' lists to-day are no longer even residents of the Province; they reside abroad, and it is only by constantly amending the voters' lists that we can obtain a fair voters' list for the purpose of holding an election. I venture to say that there is scarcely a constituency in this Province where twelve months will not make a change of ten per cent. in the voters' list; and yet the hon. gentleman proposes not only to continue those lists without any authority on the part of Parliament, but he has assumed to instruct the revising officers throughout the country that, instead of proceeding with the work and undertaking to discharge those duties which the law has imposed on them, they are to disregard the law, because, forsooth, he intends submitting a measure to Parliament before Parliament rises. Now, Sir, I say that is a most improper proceeding; it is one which this House ought not to tolerate. But the Government have gone on in acts of usurpation, step by step, until they not only disregard the authority of Parliament but set the law of the land itself at defiance.

Sir JOHN A. MACDONALD. The objection which the hon. gentleman takes is that the Government have assumed certain despotic powers, trusting to the fact that the House will register the opinions of the Government or my own individual opinion. *Hinc ille lachrymæ.* Because the majority of the House will not register the hon. gentleman's opinions, therefore he gets up and makes this statement of grievances. As I understand it, Mr. Speaker, the duties of the revising officer do not commence yet; they do not commence until the 1st of June, and as yet, therefore, no harm has been done. Now, I will not be drawn into a discussion prematurely, nor will I think the House favor a discussion at present on the merits of the Bill of my hon. friend the Minister of Justice, with respect to the Franchise Act. The hon. gentleman has made a partisan speech; he made an attack upon that measure. Well, when that measure comes up we will discuss it, and perhaps the House will agree that it is a reasonable Bill; perhaps they will register the decree which the hon. gentleman speaks of, or in other words will express an opinion that it is a reasonable Bill. If that Bill becomes law, there will be no revision of the voters' lists in 1887. That Bill may be right or it may be wrong; the principle objected to by the hon. gentleman we will discuss when the Bill comes up, but if the House really passes an Act declaring that there shall be no revision of the voters' lists for 1887, don't you think it was a wise precaution to state to the different revising officers to hold their hands for a few days until we see whether that Bill is passed or not. If it be passed all that the revising officers would do in the meantime would just mean so much money thrown away, and it was simply for the purpose of saving that money that this was done. We said: If that Bill is adopted all your action and all your expenses will be so much waste, and therefore we ask you to hold your hands. If the Bill is not adopted there is no time lost; there is plenty of time for the revising officers to perform all the duties they are required to do under the Franchise Act of 1885. It was simply a precautionary measure to inform the revising officers that they need not go on appointing their clerks and incurring all these expenses until they saw whether the Bill passed or not. That is the plain common sense of the matter.

Mr. BLAKE. It may be, Sir, if the House adopts the views of the Government, as to the law which is now on the Statute-book being suspended for this year, that some