

AFTERNOON SESSION.

Debate on the Draft Address in Answer to His Excellency's Speech.

On motion of Hon. Mr. KELLY, the House resolved itself into a Committee of the whole, to take into consideration the Draft Address in answer to His Excellency's Speech at the opening of the Session,—Mr. BELL in the Chair.

The 1st paragraph was agreed to without remark.

On the 2d paragraph being read—

Hon. Mr. HENSLEY rose to move its adoption, and said:—Mr. Chairman: This clause may not meet with the approval of all hon. members, though I am unable to see that any one can raise against it a valid objection. It does not censure any party; it simply states a fact. While it says that "the late time at which it was deemed advisable to dissolve the last Assembly, and the Ministerial arrangements resulting from the General Election," prevented His Excellency from summoning the House at an earlier period, it does not cast the least reflection upon the late Government. We charitably suppose that they had good reason for delaying the Election. But, as some eight or ten months of the most suitable season of the year for holding it, elapsed before the House was dissolved, a satisfactory explanation of the matter, from some of His Excellency's late advisers, would, no doubt, be gratifying to hon. members, as well as to the people generally. As you are aware, Sir, the "ministerial arrangements" referred to in the clause, are those rendered necessary by the resignation of the late Government and its principal officers, whose places had to be filled up to carry on the public business of the Colony. Those hon. members who accepted offices of emolument, of course, had to vacate their seats; and, though the writs for the Elections, in such cases, were made returnable as soon as possible, delay in calling the Legislature together was impossible. We do not wish to attach blame to the late party in power; we merely express our willingness, notwithstanding the lateness of the Session, to devote a sufficient time to mature such measures as the exigencies of the Colony and the public service may require. It, however, would afford me pleasure to hear from two hon. members present (Messrs. Duncan and Henderson), who held seats at the late Executive Board, an explanation of the reason why the General Election was so long delayed. It is surmised that the late Government deferred the dissolution of the Assembly until Confederation might be matured; but as those two hon. members are understood to be decidedly opposed to that measure, they could not have consented to the delay on any such ground.

Hon. Mr. McAULAY.—Mr. Chairman, I cannot but admire the moderation of the hon. gentleman who has just resumed his seat! At first he was not going to cast any reflection upon the late Government, but he concluded his speech by calling upon them to give an account of their actions. Conduct like this is unparliamentary. Never before, I believe, has such a thing occurred in any country, as an incoming Government attempting to call their predecessors to account on the floors of the Legislature. A new light has dawned upon the world since the advent of the present Government party to power, and I hope it will benefit from the faint illumination which that light affords. It is contrary to parliamentary rule for one House to refer to the proceedings of another. But the hon. member's allusion to the acts of the late Government seems merely intended to cover the mis-

deeds of his own party. He complains of the lateness of the Session, and throws all the blame upon His Excellency's former advisers. His excuse will not stand the test of investigation. The General Election was held on the 26th of February, and the House was not summoned to meet until the 18th of April. Why the delay? The pleading about ministerial arrangements will not satisfy the public. Were the Officers of the late Government asked to retain their places for a few months, until the business of the Session could be got over? The real fact of the case appears to be that the leaders of the party now in power were so anxious to obtain office, that, rather than forego the sweets of emolument for a few weeks, they were prepared to put the people to expense, and the country members to great inconvenience. I will not move any amendment to the paragraph under consideration; but I hope that the Hon. Attorney General will adhere to parliamentary rule more strictly in the future.

Mr. BRECKEN.—I regret that the hon. Leader of the Opposition is not in his place: if he were, I have no doubt he would satisfy the Hon. Attorney General respecting the delay in holding the General Election, which seems to cause that hon. member so much uneasiness. I believe, however, that his surmise was pretty nearly correct; that the late Government deemed it advisable to delay the Election until the intentions of the Imperial Government, with respect to the position this Island would occupy in regard to Confederation should be made known. Though I am opposed to Confederation, I believe the policy of the late Administration, in waiting to ascertain the decision of the Home Government on that question, was a sound one. It was but right that the people of this Island should be made aware of what the Imperial Government purposed to do with them, before they were required to go to the polls. This is a small Colony; and, though we objected to enter the proposed Confederation, it was possible that the authorities at Home might resolve to include us in the Bill then about to be brought before Parliament. The people, I think, will not blame the late Government for delaying the Election until the public mind was relieved upon that point. It would have been unwise to put the country to the expense of a General Election, without knowing what would be our future fate. But, Mr. Chairman, if I recollect rightly, the late Government placed their resignations in His Excellency's hands some ten or twelve days before their successors were appointed, therefore the very late period at which the Session was called, could not be altogether attributable to the time at which the Election was held. And, after the Government was formed, and they had placed their friends in office, there was apparently no occasion for delaying the opening of the Session until last week. They were strong—at least numerically so, whether really strong or not. They had nineteen to eleven of the Opposition—or eighteen to twelve—a question which I suppose the hon. member for Tryon alone can solve; consequently the absence of two or three members from their seats should not have delayed the public business. But, I suppose we must accept the explanation in the paragraph under consideration, that "ministerial arrangements," or perhaps more properly, "ministerial difficulties"—prevented an earlier call of the House. We know, Sir, from the declaration of the hon. Leader of the Government himself, at the late nomination, that his present supporters in the Legislature are composed of all political parties; therefore it is easy to understand how difficulties may arise. The paragraph before the Committee is moderate; and, indeed, the whole Address is moderate; and, had it not been for the allusion made by the Hon. Attorney General to the course pursued by the late Government in reference to the General Election, I would not have troubled this hon. Committee so early in the debate.