

docks, &c., was to be put in his department. Now, Sir, have we not a right to ask the government whether this is really their policy? After what has been said in the speech from the Throne, have we not a right to know whether this is really the policy of the government? Have we not the right to have that policy of the Department of Marine and Fisheries, which will control these important works, and to have a statement given to the committee by the hon. gentleman who is authorized to give those explanations, and who will have these works under his control? Will any hon. gentleman say that we are wasting the time of the committee in bringing this question before us? I will not retort by saying that there are some hon. gentlemen on the other side of the House, particularly some hon. gentlemen who come from the same part of the country as the hon. gentleman who spoke a little while ago, who are wasting the time of the House. They come here to express the views which they think they should express in the discharge of their duties. We come here to do the same thing. We are all animated with the same wish to do our duty to the best of our ability, but at this advanced stage of the session, taking these declarations into consideration, and taking the importance of these works into consideration, I say that we should be in a position to know whether or not this policy of dividing the department of Public Works and giving part of it to the Marine and Fisheries is to be carried out by the government, and whether or not it is to be carried out at this session.

Mr. CLANCY. Mr. Chairman, I do not make any apology for again renewing what seems to me to be a very fair request. I quite agree with hon. gentlemen who say that we have no time in this House to waste. A very serious charge is made. It is that an hon. minister of the Crown absents himself from his place in the House because he is unable to rise and make a denial of a serious charge which was made against him. I was not present at the time and I wish to be set right if I make an incorrect statement, but I have been told that the hon. Minister of Marine and Fisheries (Hon. Mr. Préfontaine) was in his place in the House when he was confronted with having made this statement by an hon. gentleman on this side of the House, that he refused to answer, and it is a noticeable fact that the hon. minister has not been found in his place since, when this question has been likely to come up. I see it reported in two papers in Montreal that the hon. gentleman is not in Montreal but that he has returned to Ottawa, though I have no doubt that the hon. gentleman who had the courage to make the explanation believed that he was presenting a statement of fact. I repeat that it is not wasting the time of the committee to insist upon the rights of the committee to have an an-

Mr. CASGRAIN.

swer to a question of that kind. It is not taking any unfair advantage of the hon. Minister of Marine and Fisheries to discuss this question, because the charge is made that he has absented himself from the House and is absenting himself from the House in consequence of this very awkward question. If a minister of the crown will publicly make declarations of that kind they are not to be taken as individual utterances. The country understands too well and hon. gentlemen on both sides of the House understand too well the gravity of an utterance of a minister of the crown. He is always supposed to speak for the government and especially upon such an important question as this. My hon. friend (Mr. Casgrain) has read here, and no hon. gentleman, it seems, is prepared to get up and contradict it, from a speech in which the hon. Minister of Marine and Fisheries, speaking before the Liberal Club only a few months ago, in the city of Montreal, declared that it had been the work of certain newspapers unfriendly to the government to say that the present hon. Minister of Public Works had been conniving against the hon. Minister of Marine and Fisheries in regard to the shuffle of the portfolio. He gave that statement a denial but he added the very important statement that the Department of Public Works was to be divided, and he went so far as to specify the items which were to be taken from the Department of Public Works and placed under the control of the Department of Marine and Fisheries. It was said by the hon. member for Montreal, St. Mary's (Hon. Mr. Tarte) that that great spending department had been administered by a minister from the province of Quebec for many years. I am not going to discuss the propriety of placing the department under the charge of a minister from the province of Ontario. I have no right to discuss the propriety of doing that, but I have the right to call the attention of the committee to the fact that a compromise was to be made, that if the department was to be taken from some gentlemen representing that great province—I will not say from the people—that gentleman was to be compensated in some way by dividing the work and giving it over to him. This is not a light matter and it is not one upon which there should be a single moment of the time of the House wasted. I think it is a serious question and I am disposed to discuss it in that light. I repeat again that a minister of the crown was charged with having left his place in the House, with having refused to answer any question when he was in the House, and that he is not found in his place when he might know that this question would come up at any time. The government have been silent on the question, and I was astonished at the hon. gentleman who claimed that the time of hon. members from the western part of this Canada of ours is more valuable than that of hon. gentlemen from