The Minister of the Interior: I am ready to speak to the question of privilege in regard to the reply of the attorney-general to the questions of Nobles Crabbe and Muller. The answer of the attorney-general amounted to a general charge against the cabinet of interfering with him in the discharge of his duties and of acting in a manner derogatory to the interests of the community, in maintaining last April an armed guard at the police station. The charges of the attorney-general resolve themselves into three, which I shall take up in turn.

1. That the marshal maintained, during April last, an armed guard in the police station, with the approval of the majority of the cabinet, and against the approval of the attorney-general.

2. That such action was unwise, unnecessary, and groundless.

3. That if there was any reason to apprehend a disturbance the action taken was such as to precipitate the very disorders it was intended to prevent.

Mr. President, I admit the first charge. I admit that the majority of the cabinet maintained a guard at the station house not only without the consent of the attorney-general, but that he did everything in his power to prevent it. The thing that he did not do was to go down and find out what was actually going on. I think that instead of censoring the marshal, he deserves the thanks of the community that in spite of the resistance of his superior officer he had the principle and the courage to take measures which, I think, prevented the recurrence of happenings similar to those of the 30th of July last.

Having admitted the first charge, that the marshal defied his superior officer and the cabinet approved it and advised it, only a strong reason can exculpate the cabinet, and if I do not give sufficient reason for their action, I ask that they be condemned as they should be.

Our defense is that at that time the majority of the cabinet had good reason to believe that Volney V. Ashford and Robert W. Wilcox were contemplating violence, and that the attorney-general, if not actually assisting, was conniving at it. Now I maintain that I have not got to furnish legal proof of this, such as would be needed to procure a conviction before a jury; but if I show that we had good reason to believe it we were justified in the action which we took. I don't propose to indulge in rhetoric or adjectives, but to make plain statement of facts and of the information which I received, and then let the gentlemen here draw their own conclusion. The reasons which actuated us involve a considerable amount of the secret history of this country during the last three years. I do not propose to state any facts which are not essential. There are a large number which bear on the subject which I have stenched out, but I think that I have retained enough to convince the house.

I will show first why we had cause to distrust R. W. Wilcox and to believe that he was intending to disturb the peace.

As you all know, Mr. Wilcox was several years a ward of this country studying abroad, until his return in 1887. A fact not so generally known is that he organized at that time a conspiracy to dethrone the King, overthrow the ministry, and proclaim a new constitution. One of those who assisted him in drawing up the constitution is now present in this house. They went so far as to actually have the constitution engrossed, and Wilcox, with others, went into the palace and demanded of the King that he abdicate and declare his sister Queen. They even had the form of abdication written out for him to sign. If it had not been for the faithful service of Robt. Parker, the matter which came to a head in July, 1889, might have come to a head in the early part of 1888. The tactics which Wilcox pursued were almost identical with those which he employed in last July, except that he went into it so subtly that he managed to draw in a great many innocent persons, who did not understand it until they were so deep in that they could not withdraw. One of these became frightened and came and told us, and that is how we came to know about it. As soon as I learned about it, I sent for several of the prominent conspirators, one after another, and charged them with it, and they confessed. I put their statements in writing and they signed them, and I have those statements to-day. The object was, straight and simple, to compel the King to abdicate. They had the abdication all written out and they tried to compel him to sign it. Within a day or two after the matter came to my knowledge, they all knew that I knew it. The wife of R. W. Wilcox came to me (as she said, at the request of her husband) and begged me with tears that they might be allowed to go away. She said they would go back to Italy and that would be the last of it. It may be said that the cabinet ought to be condemned for not bringing it all out at that time, and so preventing the trouble of July 30.

Perhaps we were right and perhaps we were wrong. The reason we did not was that the country had been disturbed and we did not wish to again arouse alarm.