

been possible to arrange anything in consultation with him I should have been glad to have conferred with him, and asked his co-operation, if possible, to fix upon a definite course. Realising as I do that, except with the good will of members, however much some may differ with me, there must be a general informal decision of all members, I thought it right to come and make a statement to them, and ask members to consider the question fully for themselves. The cause of our assembling is well known to every one who is here. The cause is beyond the control of the Government of this country. We are not, either directly or indirectly, responsible in any way for the convening of a Naval Conference in England. We neither suggested it nor were we consulted about it prior to the Conference being announced. The causes, therefore, that have arisen which call for the Government ascertaining the views of members of Parliament in New Zealand are entirely beyond our control. No one can blame the Government for the position that has arisen, and it is upon this position that the Government requires to have an indication of the views of members of Parliament before we can, as under ordinary circumstances we should, submit for the consideration of His Excellency the Governor the outlines of a Speech from the Throne to be delivered upon the meeting of Parliament. If, as the outcome of an expression of opinion on the part of the members present, a decision is arrived at that New Zealand is to be represented at the Imperial Conference, and if that representation is to be by the Prime Minister, and if the House is to adjourn owing to his attendance at this Conference—if that position is arrived at by this meeting, obviously, then, it will be apparent to every honourable member that the Government should of necessity submit to His Excellency the Governor the outlines of a Speech from the Throne, intimating to Parliament the actual causes for a short session, and the provision required for the financial arrangements to enable the public business of the country to be carried on. Provision for supply in the usual way would require to be made, an increase in the "unauthorised expenditure" approved, and there we would stop. If it were decided that the country wished to be represented at the Imperial Conference, and that representation was to be by the Prime Minister, a short Speech from the Throne of that nature would comply with the constitutional position, and fill the conditions that are essential. On the other hand, if the House in its judgment decides that the Dominion ought not to be represented at the Imperial Conference by the head of the Government, that there ought not to be an adjournment of Parliament, then honourable members will see that we would require to advise his Excellency in a different direction altogether, the Speech from the Throne embodying as it would do a general sketch of the legislation to be submitted and to be considered during the full session of Parliament. We are in the position at the present moment that if we were to submit the shorter Speech to which I have alluded, and it was decided there should be no prorogation of Parliament, as there would not be under ordinary circumstances, then we would be blamed—and rightly so—for not having outlined for the members of Parliament that business which we proposed to submit to them to go on with during the course of the session. That is one of the difficulties that presents itself. Another is, in the event of the Parliament of the country deciding in its wisdom that we are to be represented at the Imperial Conference at the time fixed by the British Government, then it becomes necessary to have a short sitting of Parliament to enable that decision to be complied with. The Government is in the position that, if we refuse to respond to the invitation to be represented at this important Conference, we would lay ourselves open—and rightly so—to a charge of indifference to being represented at what is generally understood to be an epoch in the history of the British Empire. If we refuse, on the one hand, to respond to the invitation of the British Parliament—and we are not in a position to do so at the moment until we have the opinion of the members voiced by them or recorded by them—we would be blamable. On the other hand, we cannot accept until we know what is the decision of the members of Parliament.

Mr. T. E. TAYLOR.—How did Australia deal with it in the absence of Parliament?

The Right Hon. Sir J. G. WARD.—I want to be courteous to the honourable gentleman. It is, however, very important that I should be allowed to make my statement complete.

Mr. T. E. TAYLOR.—It is a fair and proper question to ask.

The Right Hon. Sir J. G. WARD.—The honourable gentleman will recognise that I have an important task in hand, and I think I should be allowed to first complete it.

Mr. T. E. TAYLOR.—Very well. I will ask it later on.

The Right Hon. Sir J. G. WARD.—Considering that the matter is a very important one, I would like in consecutive order to state what I have to say. I will endeavour to be as brief as I can.

Mr. T. E. TAYLOR.—I will ask the question later on, then.

The Right Hon. Sir J. G. WARD.—I have no objection whatever to that. The position being as I have stated, I consider it is due to honourable members that I should put on record what has been done in connection with this matter; and I want to try and make the position clear on one point. I think to-day it would be not only inopportune, but unfair, to ask for an affirmation or a contrary decision upon the Government's proposal of the offer of a Dreadnought, or two, to the British Government, and I propose to ask Parliament, when Parliament is assembled, to arrive at a decision upon that question—as to the action of the Government on that matter. I am not on the present occasion seeking to obtain from the members, before the meeting of Parliament, their views on that matter, because I recognise that that is the right of Parliament, and that Parliament itself should affirm, or otherwise, as it thinks proper, its opinion on the proposal that the Government has made in that respect. But it is to the facts as I have already conveyed them to honourable members that we require to give the necessary consideration. I refer to the Imperial Conference. In the course of my remarks to-day you will see that from the information conveyed by the British Government, especially relative to a despatch which they announced was to be here, and which in the ordinary course should have been here before now, but which has not yet reached the Governor, and consequently not reached the Government, that it is quite clear that the British Government