

in fifteen years. I think I have dealt with most of the points raised by the Prime Minister this afternoon. I have put the position from my point of view. Every member is responsible to his constituents in the same way as I am responsible to mine, but so long as I remain in Parliament I intend to state my position clearly, to express my opinions as I form them. The position, so far as the Parliament and people of this country are concerned, is clear, plain, and straightforward: there is no possible doubt about it. And just because it is clear, plain, and straightforward, and because there is no difficulty or objection to the right honourable gentleman going Home, I say the business of the House and the business of the country—most important, most serious business—which is waiting for consideration should be proceeded with in the ordinary way. I hope the right honourable gentleman will adhere to the promise he made prior to the dinner adjournment, to the effect that the motion proposed by Mr. Duncan will be divided—that we shall be able to vote for it in parts: take the first part by itself—that is, the question of the right honourable gentleman going Home—and then take the second part by itself, which I consider, and I think most honourable members will consider, far the more important of the two—the question whether the business is to be postponed for three months.

The Hon. Mr. T. DUNCAN.—I object to the motion being divided.

Mr. MASSEY.—Then, if the honourable gentleman objects I take it as a breach of faith on the part of his leader, the Prime Minister. The right honourable gentleman is responsible. A breach of faith may be nothing to the member for Lyttelton, who has interjected, but it is to the ordinary member of Parliament and to most of the people.

Mr. LAURENSEN.—Oh, I will deal with you very shortly.

Mr. MASSEY.—The honourable gentleman will be fully occupied in using the whip on the Government supporters.

Mr. LAURENSEN.—I will use it on you, my boy.

Mr. MASSEY.—Let me emphasize this point: The Prime Minister, from his place in this chamber, and speaking as Prime Minister, gave a definite promise that the motion would be divided. It is on record. We expect the right honourable gentleman to adhere to his promise as an honourable man and leader of the House. And I want the people of the country to understand, in spite of the position taken up by the Hon. Mr. Duncan, who proposed the motion, that a breach of faith will be committed if he does not do so.

Mr. T. E. TAYLOR.—May I ask whether the despatch—

The Right Hon. Sir J. G. WARD.—I am not going to answer questions. I am not here to answer questions. I came here to make a statement to the gentlemen who have assembled and to hear the opinions of members, and I am not in the position of being examined as a witness, and I do not intend to be put in that position by any one. I have avoided anything in the shape of feeling, but I am certainly not going to be categorically examined.

Mr. HARDY (Selwyn).—What about the promise you made this afternoon?

The Right Hon. Sir J. G. WARD.—I have not reversed it in any way.

Mr. HARDY.—I am glad to hear it.

Mr. T. E. TAYLOR (Christchurch North).—I think that there has been an unnecessary amount of feeling displayed on certain points in the speeches both of the Premier and the leader of the Opposition. We were told distinctly, when the Premier started to speak this afternoon, that this conference was not one for the purpose of discussing the matter of the Dreadnought offer, which would come up before Parliament in the ordinary course, and that the opinions of members would properly find expression on the main question being debated later on. Under these circumstances it seems to me that the points to be dealt with by this conference are not matters for anything approaching warmth or personal feeling. What I asked the Premier seemed to me a perfectly legitimate question, and I did not see why it should not have been answered at once. The Premier said that a despatch promised by Lord Crewe in reply to the Government's offer of a Dreadnought or two had not turned up. That strikes me as a very remarkable thing, because plenty of time has elapsed to permit of that despatch reaching New Zealand, and I was going to ask whether the British Government has been advised that that despatch is missing. It seemed to me to be a quite reasonable question, and I was not asking it with the view of embarrassing the Premier in any way. I was much interested in the Premier's statement that the provision for the repayment of the Dreadnought loan—which, by the way, I think, will never be floated, because the boat will never be given—was to be by means of a sinking fund of 1 per cent. I do not believe there is anybody at this conference who has not got the feeling that the Naval Conference is being held in order to get rid of the embarrassment caused to the Liberal party in Britain by the offer, unasked for, by our Government of one or two Dreadnoughts, and the evidence in support of this suggestion will probably be found in the concealed despatches alluded to by the Premier. I do not propose to discuss the Dreadnought offer at any length now, but there are one or two points that seem to be important at this stage. I asked the question some time this afternoon whether this conference had been given the whole of the despatches that had passed between this Government and the Imperial Government in regard to the Dreadnought offer and with regard to the Naval Conference, and the reply was that the Government will not disclose confidential despatches. Well, now, there has not been a single word said to show that any aspect of either of these matters was such that they should form the subject of confidential despatches, and I can see very great danger to any country, and much more to a democracy like New Zealand, if the Government of the day is to be permitted to conceal from Parliament—which is really the master of the Ministry—State documents simply by marking them "Confidential." Parliament might easily be converted into a perfect puppet-show if the practice is allowed to grow up of the Government of the day concealing despatches, that surely belong as much to Parliament as to the Cabinet, by marking them "Private and confidential." I recognise that the Prime Minister must, of necessity, be permitted to carry on certain communications that are not to be made known to the world. But we have not had a