

Parliament and is the first session of that Parliament. If it is necessary that New Zealand should be represented it would be desirable that the date should be fixed not earlier than the last week in July. On receipt of reply from the Home Government, Parliament will be called for the 10th June for the purpose of considering the matter, that being the earliest possible date under the existing prorogation. The opinion of Ministers here is that the representations of all parts of the Empire at the Conference is essential, and that the course the Home Government is taking is the right one and is in the best interests of the Empire. They recognise that it would be a matter of much regret if, through not being able to postpone the meeting of the new Parliament, New Zealand could not be represented at the Conference.

“J. G. WARD.”

Cablegram from the Secretary of State for the Colonies to His Excellency the Governor:—

“His Excellency the Governor, Wellington.

“London, 12th May, 1909.

“WITH reference to your telegram of 6th May, I desire, in name of Prime Minister and of His Majesty's Government, to express their gratification at readiness of Dominion's Government to take part in Conference. I hope that, as result of communication now proceeding, it will be possible shortly to fix definitely date for its meeting convenient to all Governments.

“CREWE.”

Telegram from His Excellency the Governor to the Prime Minister, Wellington:—

“The Right Hon. the Prime Minister, Wellington.

“Waiouru, 18th May, 1909.

“THE Governor has to-day received the following telegram, dated 17th May, from the Secretary of State for the Colonies: ‘Please inform your Ministers that Government of Commonwealth of Australia and Government of Canada have accepted invitation to Defence Conference proposed in my telegram of 30th April, and that Governments of South African Colonies will authorise delegates sent Home in connection with union of South African States to attend Conference. In these circumstances, I earnestly hope that the Dominion of New Zealand will be represented, and that it may be possible for Sir Joseph Ward, as Minister of Defence and Prime Minister, to be spared from his important duties to attend Conference. It is now proposed to hold Conference at end of July, as that date will be convenient for the other delegates, and will, I hope, be also convenient to your Prime Minister.’

Telegram from the Prime Minister, Wellington, to His Excellency the Governor, Auckland:—

“His Excellency the Governor, Auckland.

“Wellington, 19th May, 1909.

“THE Prime Minister presents his compliments to His Excellency the Governor, and will be glad if he will telegraph Secretary of State acknowledging receipt of telegram dated 17th May, and intimating to him that the importance of the Naval Conference is fully recognised by the New Zealand Government, and efforts will be made in the direction indicated; and the Secretary of State for the Colonies will be advised as soon as the Prime Minister is in a position to do so.

“J. G. WARD.”

Here I want to say that before an answer to the last communication can be sent it is necessary, as far as the Government is concerned, that the Government should know what the opinion of members of Parliament is, as, until we know what their opinion is, it is not possible for us to say “Yes” or “No” to the invitation. We will not accept the responsibility of saying “No” to it until we have the opinion of the members who are assembled to-day. It is for this reason I have asked honourable members to meet here upon this occasion and in this way, because there was no other way open to me—because there was no other way of ascertaining their views upon the question in time to enable me to reply. Having done that—having ascertained what the will of Parliament is upon the matter—our responsibility in that respect ends. We cannot—and I am going to discuss it later on—we cannot, with the responsibility upon our shoulders, agree to suggestions which we have seen made that some one without responsibility to the country—that some one not vested with the full responsibility entailed upon a Minister of the Crown—should be deputed to represent this country at a Conference of such a magnitude as this is—at one of such vital importance to the Empire as a whole; and in that respect New Zealand is vitally concerned—at one where the Prime Minister of England, in that despatch to which I have alluded, declares that the New Zealand offer of a Dreadnought is to be considered. This the British Prime Minister has put on record in a despatch, not only to this Government but to the Canadian Government, to the Australian Government, and to the South African Governments. In sending a circular cable on the subject to the respective Governments he has intimated that among the matters to be considered at that important Conference is the offer of the New Zealand Government, on behalf of the people of this country, of a Dreadnought, or two; and at that Conference that important matter is to be considered. I direct attention to this, for the purpose of keeping the sequence of this matter in the minds of honourable members. In acknowledging the offer of Dreadnoughts by the New Zealand Government, the British Government, through His Excellency the Governor, intimated that they were sending out to this country a despatch in connection with the offer for our consideration. I have directed attention to the fact, which is put on record in its sequence, that after they had sent that communication they decided, for reasons best known to the Imperial Government, to hold a Conference in London, at which they invited the oversea dominions to be present by representatives. Up to now we have not received the despatch referred to, for the obvious reason, it appears to me, that the Prime Minister of England has, in a certain despatch sent to the Governments of all the self-governing dominions, said, among other things, that the offer of the New Zealand Dreadnoughts is to come before that Conference for consideration. That being so, the responsibility is on the members of Parliament of this country to say whether or not the Government of this country is to be represented at that Conference, and to say by whom it is to be represented. I want to say that the Ministry are absolutely unanimous in the view they take with regard to the question of representation at this unprecedented Conference,