

Mr. MASSEY.—It was a very improper thing to do.

The Right Hon. Sir J. G. WARD.—I am sorry the honourable gentleman thinks so.

Mr. T. E. TAYLOR.—It did not go through to all papers.

The Right Hon. Sir J. G. WARD.—It was addressed to the editors of all papers.

Mr. T. E. TAYLOR.—Some deny point blank that they received it.

The Right Hon. Sir J. G. WARD.—It was a general authority that it was to be given to the Press of New Zealand.

Mr. T. E. TAYLOR.—I am surprised they did not all get it.

The Right Hon. Sir J. G. WARD.—I say it was a general authority to send it out to the editors of the Press of New Zealand. There was no distinction of any sort or kind made, and I am very much surprised to hear that any one of them did not get it.

Mr. MASSEY.—Did you send it to the *Dominion*?

The Right Hon. Sir J. G. WARD.—Where is the *Dominion*?

Mr. MASSEY.—Did you send it to the *Christchurch Press*?

The Right Hon. Sir J. G. WARD.—The authority was to send it to the editors of all papers. I can look up the matter, and see what papers received it. I repeat there was a general instruction for that telegram to be sent to all papers, and that as far as I am concerned no distinction of any kind was made. If it did not go to the *Dominion*, it did not go to the *New Zealand Times*. I tell that to the honourable gentleman to pacify him. It was telegraphed from Wellington, and it is possible—and I should not be surprised to find it so—that for that reason it did not go to any of the papers in Wellington. I will be very glad to look it up and see. The instruction given by me was to send that telegram to the editors of the Press throughout this country. I repeat that, because I have not distinguished between one or another in a matter of this kind. Before that communication had been sent to the Press every honourable member knows that the Government had come to their decision. And here, by the way, let me say that—though there are some in the country who do not agree with it, and that they have a right to differ from the Government in a matter of the kind I fully recognise, and I cannot find fault with it—the action of the Government, generally speaking, has been affirmed and applauded throughout this Dominion as the right thing to have done, and one in the general interests of the Empire. I have here on this table many hundreds of communications from representative bodies and individuals of all kinds and classes throughout this country, without a single exception, supporting the action of the Government. It would be invidious of me to take any one of them—they apply to all classes in New Zealand from end to end—in city, town, and country; and, generally speaking, the action of the Government in this matter has been applauded and supported. I allude to that only for the purpose of affirming that which a large number of my listeners here, as well as myself, know to be the case: they all at heart know—and we know—that if there is any doubt about the superiority of the British navy to maintain the supremacy of the sea that we, as a portion of that country, would very quickly cease to be a portion of it. Therefore the people of this country, irrespective of party or of political feeling, in view of the nature of the momentous matter that has arisen, have, with a few exceptions, affirmed the action of the Government from the North Cape to the Bluff. So in that respect the action we took at that moment is justified in the opinion of the people.

Mr. MASSEY.—Did you ask us here to tell us that?

The Right Hon. Sir J. G. WARD.—The honourable gentleman must know that I cannot in the course of my explanation avoid referring to that.

Mr. ALLEN.—Could not you deal with that in Parliament?

The Right Hon. Sir J. G. WARD.—I will, of course, deal with it in Parliament, but I say a complaint has been made as to the way the Government acted in this particular matter.

Mr. ALLEN.—It is very unfair to ask us here to tell us that.

The Right Hon. Sir J. G. WARD.—Will the honourable gentleman tell us now if he is going to agree with the proposal?

Mr. MASSEY.—Make the proposal.

The Right Hon. Sir J. G. WARD.—The honourable gentleman will see that I must make this explanation in the general interests of the country and as the justification for our action, which has resulted in our being invited to the Imperial Conference.

Mr. MASSEY.—Nonsense. It has nothing to do with it.

The Right Hon. Sir J. G. WARD.—It has, because I say advisedly that my belief is that if we had not made that offer of a Dreadnought or two to the British Government you would not have heard of the Imperial Conference being held, and for that reason I am justified in saying what I am doing about this matter. And I here want to put on record why we made that offer which I believe was a factor in the convening of the Imperial Conference, and which certainly has created the necessity of honourable members being present to-day to say whether or not we are to accept the invitation. It is in my opinion necessary that I should put on record what we have done in that respect. I have read the despatches connected with this matter, and I am now going to quote the record of a statement made publicly in the House of Commons by Sir Edward Grey, the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, on the same subject. He said,—

“He commended the absence of party feeling in Mr. Lee’s speech, but said that the Opposition ought to have deferred the motion of censure until July, when the ship-building vote would be considered, and when more information enabling them to form a right judgment would be available to the House and the country.”

The Minister continued,—

“It is right to view the situation that is created by the German programme as grave. When that programme is complete Germany will have thirty-three Dreadnoughts, the most powerful fleet in the world. That imposes on Britain the necessity of rebuilding her whole fleet,”