

An Hon. MEMBER.—A leading article?

The Right Hon. Sir J. G. WARD.—It is an extract from a leading article published in the *Melbourne Argus* this morning:—

“Australia’s obligation to share in the defence of the Empire realised by the new Commonwealth Ministry, and the new Federal Cabinet has decided to cable to the Imperial Government offering a Dreadnought or an equivalent contribution”——

Hon. MEMBERS.—Hear, hear.

The Right Hon. Sir J. G. WARD.—Now, just listen. Let me inform the House that though, as honourable members know, the Federal Parliament was in session, an adjournment took place the other day,—

“And although the Parliament was in session, the Cabinet assumed the responsibility of making the offer, confident of the ratification of Parliament when it assembles. Sir Joseph Ward took the same responsibility as Premier, and also faced the position boldly, trusting to the Imperial spirit and the courage of the people to indorse his action.”

Let me ask those members who have quoted the Federal Government of Australia against me to realise what that means. I am not going to give any expression of opinion—it would be improper for me to do so—upon any of the troubles or causes that have brought about the change of Government, or the conditions under which it represents a majority in the Federal House of Representatives; but the new Government there is the only one that has had a majority behind it for a considerable period, and it has done as we have done in New Zealand—it has shown the people outside of Great Britain that the sons of the Empire out in these southern seas, when it comes to an emergency, are not going to be misjudged by the people who represent them in Parliament—that they are not going to display weakness, or a want of ordinary courage, or anything akin to cowardice; but the Government of the day is ready to accept the full responsibility, and will show what these countries will do when it comes to a question of insuring the dominance of the old British navy, which during the greater portion of the last century has given us its support and protection for next-door to nothing.

Mr. MASSEY.—And you objected to any payment at one time.

The Right Hon. Sir J. G. WARD.—I did nothing of the kind.

Mr. MASSEY.—You voted against it.

The Right Hon. Sir J. G. WARD.—The honourable gentleman is grossly unfair. He knows that he is trying to put me in a wrong position. I saw something of the sort published in one of the Opposition papers, and I thought it unworthy of myself to contradict it. I have always strongly supported the British navy, before I was in the House and since, both on the platform and in Parliament, and fortunately I have records that will show it from the very first; and such an insinuation to the contrary comes with bad grace from any one. Now, I want to say one word in connection with the representation of New Zealand. I have already informed the gentlemen who are present that every member of the Administration believes that the head of the Government should represent this country at that Conference. If the House decides in that direction—that the head of the Government is to represent the country at that Conference—it raises the question, so far as the head of the Government is concerned, of his responsibility to the country, to Parliament, and to his own party; and you cannot disassociate the three propositions upon any ground, as far as those who may not see eye to eye with the Government so far as policy is concerned. I say here now, in unmistakable language, that if this House expects the head of the Government to go to the Imperial Conference, and asks him to do so with Parliament sitting in his absence, I should unequivocally decline to go.

Mr. MASSEY.—You would not be doing your duty.

The Right Hon. Sir J. G. WARD.—The honourable gentleman will, I trust, do his duty.

Mr. MASSEY.—I shall do my duty.

The Right Hon. Sir J. G. WARD.—So will I. If the honourable member does do so he will be doing what is right, and so will I. Now, I want to put the question before honourable members in connection with this matter. I have noticed—and how thin indeed it has been—the statement that has been published; and here let me say that I compliment the Opposition Press of this country.

An Hon. MEMBER.—There is an exception.

The Right Hon. Sir J. G. WARD.—I say that in this matter the Opposition Press throughout this country—with an exception—has risen above party and beyond party in a way I most gratefully acknowledge, and in a way that is now and will be recognised when the history of this country comes to be written. It will then be written that when it comes to a question of vital consequence to the Empire as a whole, to the people of all classes, the Press of this country—those opposing the Government as well as those supporting the Government—have chosen to put the affairs of the Empire first and local and parochial party politics next; and they have in one voice gone in the direction of saying that this country should be represented at the Imperial Conference, and that the representative should be the Prime Minister. And now we come to the issue that Parliament ought to proceed with its business in the absence of the leader of the Government side.

Mr. MASSEY.—Hear, hear.

The Right Hon. Sir J. G. WARD.—There is such a thing known in the world of sport as “playing the game.” In 1902, when the late Prime Minister went to the Old Country, under what circumstances did he go?

Mr. MASSEY.—We all know.

The Right Hon. Sir J. G. WARD.—He came back from an appeal to the people, fresh from the polls, and was invited to an important ceremony, and he asked Parliament to adjourn until his return, and there was practically no dissent. The present leader of the Opposition and the members of his party voted for it, and they eulogized the Prime Minister’s going, and emphasized the fact that the Prime Minister of the day ought to go with the good feeling and appreciation and