

Government, he said, were aware of one matter that has not been published in the Press. I want to know whether the confidential communication that has been withheld from this conference refers to that particular matter, and whether it contains any reference to the Naval Conference and the question of who shall represent the Dominion at that Conference. What is the nature of the despatch?

The Right Hon. Sir J. G. WARD.—I do not know what the honourable gentleman's idea is. I decline to answer anything regarding what is confidential. I want to say, without breach of confidence, that the offer made by the Government was a spontaneous offer, unsolicited by the British Government. We made it on our own responsibility for reasons which we believed justifiable. We accept the full responsibility. Anything that is confidential I decline to disclose, nor should I be asked to do so.

Mr. T. E. TAYLOR.—Cannot the right honourable gentleman tell us, without disclosing details, whether any of the despatches refer to some grave matter which is still kept a secret between the British Government and the New Zealand Government, and whether any despatch that has been kept from this conference refers to the Premier's personal effort to represent the Dominion?

The Right Hon. Sir J. G. WARD.—I decline to answer any questions of the kind.

Mr. MASSEY (Franklin).—Sir Joseph Ward and gentlemen,—In speaking to the motion which was moved prior to the dinner adjournment by the Hon. Mr. Duncan, I may say at once that it is not my intention to speak at any great length. I intend to speak as concisely as I possibly can, and on that account I hope to be able to make my points more clearly and perhaps more effectively than any that were made by the right honourable gentleman who opened this debate. Now, Sir, I notice that the proceedings of this meeting are being reported by members of the *Hansard* staff. To that being done I shall not offer the slightest objection. I think the utmost publicity that we can possibly give them should be given to the proceedings of this meeting. But what I am anxious about is this: I am anxious that this meeting should not be in any way identified with an ordinary meeting of Parliament. This is not a meeting of Parliament, but a meeting of members of Parliament convened by the Prime Minister, and we are here, in the first place, to show courtesy to the Imperial Government, who have forwarded an invitation to the New Zealand Government asking that the country should be represented at the Imperial Defence Conference intended to be held in London in the near future. In the second place, we are here out of courtesy to the Prime Minister, who has forwarded an invitation to individual members of Parliament to meet him this afternoon. But, gentlemen, while this is the case, I hope that later on there will be no attempt made to validate the proceedings of this meeting by Parliament itself, because what is being done this afternoon and evening is not in any way binding on Parliament or on any individual member thereof. The honourable gentleman when he was speaking—I was able only to make a few very rough notes—seemed to suggest on the part of those who do not agree with him a tendency to underrate the importance of the coming Imperial Conference. Let me tell honourable gentlemen that, speaking for myself—and I think I can also speak for the members who sit around me—we do not underrate the importance of the coming Conference in the very slightest. We all know that important events have taken place in European politics during the last few months, and that in consequence of those important events it has become necessary for Britain and for the self-governing colonies of the Empire to recast their naval policy. The question is, what is best to be done under the circumstances? And let me say here that there is no necessity for heroics, or hysteria, or theatrical displays. The latter are all very well in times of peace, but they are of very little use when, as Kipling says, "the guns begin to shoot"; and that is the time for which this country and for which the different countries of the British Empire have to prepare. We have to prepare not only to defend our own country, but to assist the Empire to which we belong in maintaining its supremacy. Now, gentlemen, the Prime Minister this afternoon had a great deal to say about the policy of this Government. I would ask the right honourable gentleman, and any member of this House who has had a long experience of parliamentary life, to tell us what is the defence policy of this country. Does any one know it? Have we a defence policy? I ask the right honourable gentleman, when he replies—as I have no doubt he will—to take the opportunity of telling us what is the defence policy of this Government. I challenge him to do it. I do not know what the defence policy of this country is, and I have been here five Parliaments—I am now commencing the sixth—and I assert that there is no country in the British dominions which has expended so much money in proportion to its population on defence, and which has so little to show for it, as the country to which we belong; and I am ashamed to have to say it. There is no country so absolutely undefended as New Zealand is at the present moment. It is no use mincing matters; we have got to get down to bed-rock and face the position, and I hope that it will be part of the business of the coming session to consider how we can best put the country to which we belong in a state of defence. As Lord Beresford says, that is the best way to assist the Empire to which we belong, and I sincerely hope that when the opportunity comes along—I hope that it will come soon—we shall be able to do it. I hope that when the next war-cloud comes along we shall be able to do something better for the Empire, and something better for ourselves, than offering a Dreadnought or Dreadnoughts, which we have to ask Britain for the money to pay for. The people of this country are loyal and enthusiastic, and they are willing to make any sacrifice on behalf of the Empire to which they belong, whether that sacrifice takes the form of men or of money. We have done it before, and are prepared to do it again; but what we ask for, and what we are entitled to get, is a strong and intelligent lead in connection with defence matters. And the position—and I challenge any one to deny it—shows that in connection with defence matters we have never yet had a strong and intelligent lead in this country. It seemed to me while I was listening to the honourable gentleman this afternoon in the course of the long speech which he made, and in which he wandered all over the subject from Dan to Beersheba, he introduced a lot of irrelevant matter which had nothing to do with the points under discussion, but which will have the effect—