

and I believe were intended to have the effect—of clouding the real issue. What is the real issue? There are really two. The first point is whether the Hon. the Prime Minister is going Home to represent us at the Defence Conference. The next is one I will deal with later on. I take it that we who represent the people and who are assembled here to-day are all at one on the point that New Zealand should be properly and adequately represented at the Defence Conference which is intended to be held in London at the end of next July. But in listening to what the honourable gentleman said this afternoon I came to the conclusion that he had made up his mind to go Home—that he felt he had a majority of members of Parliament behind him, and he was going Home to represent us at the Imperial Defence Conference. Well, I will say this: that I should like to see him in his place during the coming session. I had looked forward to seeing him there, as I wanted to do some plain talking to the right honourable gentleman. I wanted to call him to account for the sins and shortcomings of the Government from my point of view, and from the point of view of many of the people of this country; and, though I looked forward to doing so with a very great deal of pleasure, I am willing to give up that pleasure and allow the honourable gentleman to go Home and represent New Zealand at the Defence Conference, and I shall not raise the very slightest objection to his so doing. The other point is a good deal more important: whether the business of Parliament should be postponed. The right honourable gentleman quoted a precedent. He quoted that precedent established in 1897, and he asked the intelligent representatives of the people of this country to believe that the position now is parallel to the position in 1897. Why, I should have thought that the very dullest intellect not only among the people sitting in this building, but among the people outside, would have seen that there was absolutely no analogy between the position now and that of 1897. I was here in 1897, and what I said then has been quoted, and I am prepared to stand by every word of it. I do not go back upon a single sentence of it. What was the position in 1897? One of the most unique events in British history—such an event as had never happened previously, and may not happen again for centuries: the Diamond Jubilee of one of the wisest sovereigns that has ever sat upon the British throne. It was not an ordinary event—it was a great Imperial celebration. Invitations were forwarded from the Imperial Parliament to every British colony and dependency, and those invitations were accepted. We sent the Right Hon. the Prime Minister at that time—Mr. Seddon—to represent us, and we sent a body of troops with him representative of our local defence forces; and I believe we were well represented. But in other respects was the position the same as it is now? In 1897 there was not a cloud on the horizon. The country was prosperous; money was plentiful, employment was plentiful. I wish I could say that was the position now. Unfortunately, that is not the case, and I am sorry for the individual who does not see the difference between the position now and the position as it was in 1897. I supported the Right Hon. the Prime Minister at that time in going Home to represent us at the Diamond Jubilee, and the session was postponed not altogether because the Prime Minister would be absent from the colony, but out of compliment to the Sovereign and the Imperial Government. I would do the same again. I was right then, and I say that I am right now, and those who think with me are right in the course we are taking. I say that the business of the country should be proceeded with in spite of the right honourable gentleman going Home. I am aware that he quoted precedents, but I tell him that the balance of precedent is against him. Those who are acquainted with the history of this country will remember that Sir Edward Stafford, who was Prime Minister about 1875 or 1876, when most important questions were before the Parliament of the country—questions of tremendous importance—the proposed abolition of the provinces, for instance—in spite of that fact, in spite of that great question being under the consideration of Parliament, Sir Edward Stafford went Home to London, and was absent for many months, and that, too, at a time when there was no cable or steam communication, and the business of Parliament went on in his absence; and very properly so. Many members of this House will remember that Sir Julius Vogel went Home to represent this country; or, rather, I should say he went Home in connection with the financial affairs of the country. He was absent for about twelve months, and a session of Parliament took place during that time. Now, so far as I am able to discover there was not a single suggestion that the business of Parliament should stand over, and that it should not be proceeded with in the usual way. Coming to a later period, many members who are here to-night will remember that in 1902 there was another Imperial Conference, and the late Mr. Seddon went Home. He did not attempt to close Parliament up, but, on the contrary, he left his first lieutenant in charge, and who will say now that the business of that session was not conducted satisfactorily? I heard the Speaker at that time say from the chair at the close of the session—and it must be on record, although I have not looked it up—and he was a man of long experience, longer than any other man in the political life of the country—that the business of that session had been conducted more satisfactorily than ever previously in the whole of his long experience as a politician, and he had been in Parliament forty years. He was absolutely correct; and what was done then in the absence of the Premier can be done again. The Right Hon. the Premier tells us, or at least he says in effect, that he is going Home to represent New Zealand at the Imperial Conference—that it is necessary he should go, because he is the only man in New Zealand fit and able to represent New Zealand. Then he follows that up by saying that if he goes Home the session must not be proceeded with as usual, thus again practically saying that there is not a single member in the party, not one of his colleagues, fit to conduct the business of Parliament, fit to lead in his absence. What a compliment to his senior colleague, Mr. Carroll! What a compliment to Mr. Millar! What a compliment even to the junior member of the Ministry, Mr. Thomas Mackenzie!

An Hon. MEMBER.—He is all right.

Mr. MASSEY.—Of course he is all right. He looks perfectly happy for the first time during the last ten years. The Right Hon. the Premier had a very great deal to say about putting this matter above party. Now, I would like to see him place it above party; but his actions do not