

Right Hon. the Premier, on the whole, was free from feeling, but I must confess that he was very contradictory on one or two important points. For instance, he said distinctly these two things: if he had not made the offer to the Imperial Government the Naval Conference would never have been heard of. That was towards the end of his speech; I took it down verbatim. And at the beginning of his speech he said the offer of the Dreadnought was not directly or indirectly affecting the Naval Conference. I do not know whether honourable members noticed that.

The Right Hon. Sir J. G. WARD.—I did not make the former statement. I did not say that.

Mr. T. E. TAYLOR.—I think that if the right honourable gentleman will look at his *Hansard* proof he will find that he did. I do not propose to discuss the Dreadnought question in detail to-night, because I take it that is not the matter that is before us; but I want to refer now to that communication calling the Conference. The leader of the Opposition referred to some part of it, but I do not think he mentioned this: in this despatch of 1st May, indicating that the Conference would be called, the Right Hon. Mr. Asquith was very careful to say that it was a subsidiary Conference—not the ordinary Imperial Conference. He was very careful to say that it was a Conference to deal with technical and quasi-technical questions. He was also careful to say that Canada was being represented by the Minister of Defence, or, failing the Minister of Defence, by some other member of the Government, assisted by an expert; but he said—and this is the vital clause of this despatch—"it is entirely for the Government of New Zealand to decide the precise form of its representation." Does that indicate that the Imperial Government declared that only the Premier could represent New Zealand? Now, a paper down South a day or two ago said that if the Prime Minister does not go, no one can go, clearly stating—I can put no other meaning upon it—that the invitation had been addressed personally to the Prime Minister. If it is so, then it is in direct contradiction of the terms of the despatch calling the Conference—"The exact character of the representation is entirely a matter for the Government." The Premier said that the Hon. Mr. Hall-Jones would have refused to act if he were asked to do so, and that struck me at the time as being a very remarkable statement. I have always understood that the High Commissioner was there to attend to any matters affecting the well-being of this country that the Parliament and the Executive ask him to attend to. "The Conference will be of a purely consultative character and will be held in private, and the deliberations will be assisted by the presence of members or other expert advisers of His Majesty's Government." The Premier said, in speaking, that the business of the Naval Conference transcends anything we can be called upon to deal with in this country. I think the Premier will remember saying that, and I join issue with him there. I hold—and, of course, every member is entitled to hold an opinion on this matter—I hold that there are many questions of greater importance than a purely consultative conference—a subsidiary conference to deal with technical and semi-technical questions relating to defence. There are many matters of greater importance, and I tell the Premier now that there are thousands of men in this country who will keenly resent the postponement of the Parliament until the end of the year. We have been retrenching hundreds of men from the public service. There are, no doubt, several thousand men in this country who are out of employment, who do not know where to look for to-morrow's meals, who are weighted down with anxiety as to what they are to do to provide for their own and their family's ordinary necessities.

The Right Hon. Sir J. G. WARD.—How many are there in Christchurch?

Mr. T. E. TAYLOR.—I will undertake to say that in Christchurch there are four or five hundred men out of work. In answer to an appeal made by Mr. Wilson, secretary to one of the unions down there, last week a hundred and fifty men in writing disclosed the condition in which they were. In asking for the information, he said that it would not be used publicly, that he would not print their letters; but I believe a hundred and fifty answered in writing his appeal for information. Now, we all know that if a hundred and fifty men will disclose in detail their trouble, there are a large number of men who will suffer in silence, and will not answer an appeal of that kind. The Premier must know that from one end of the Dominion to the other three or four thousand would be a very moderate estimate to make of the unemployed in New Zealand. I want to see an efficient representation of this country at the Naval Conference. We are not discussing that at all. There is no one in this gathering going to oppose the Dominion being properly represented there; but I hold that we should secure that representation without dislocating the whole of the public business of this country for the next six months. That is the point; and I believe that a vast number of people in New Zealand will hold the opinion that the Premier's personal desire to figure on a stage as big as London is largely responsible for the strenuous effort he is making to personally attend a Conference which is not an ordinary Imperial Conference of Premiers, which will sit in due course in 1911. They may be wrong in coming to that conclusion, but all that is happening now lends colour to the suggestion that the personal equation is figuring very largely in the attitude that the Premier has taken up with regard to the exact representation of New Zealand at the Naval Conference. I say there are certainly several thousand men in New Zealand who are almost at their wits' ends to know how to provide for their requirements of to-morrow, and the Premier says that the business of the Naval Conference transcends anything we can be called upon to deal with in this country. For three years this Government has had the chance of dealing with the question of our land defences, and what has been done? What will the Right Hon. the Premier have to report to the Naval Conference if the question of land defence should come up? He will have to admit that the Volunteer Force in this country is absolutely disorganized and disheartened. He will have to admit that the condition of things is so bad that the Defence Council has recently been disbanded. There is no Defence Council now, I understand. He would have to admit, if he were frank, that matters relating to the defence of New Zealand are in a perfectly chaotic state. Now, I take it that that is a very important matter that this Parliament ought to deal with forthwith. If that is postponed for six months, you may find the temper of the country