

and, further, that the Conference was a result of the New Zealand Dreadnought offer. This latter statement is not borne out by the facts. Now, the necessity for this Conference has arisen not through any action of New Zealand, or, at any rate, not mainly through any such action, but more particularly through the action of Canada. Canada has determined to take its share in the defence of the Empire; but Canada is not prepared to take its share in Imperial defence without knowing where it stands. It wants to know what Great Britain has to offer with respect of representation. Canada will not devote millions of money to this purpose without knowing what is to be the position with regard to the Mother-country's fleet, the internal defence of Canada, the protection of her own shores and trade routes, and that is why she asked for a consultation with the Mother-country with respect to this question of defence. After Canada had asked for this Conference there came the Dreadnought offer from New Zealand, and there was also some suggestion from Australia; and the British Government naturally concluded that it would be a convenient time, as one Dominion—that of Canada—had already expressed the desire for consultation, and others had expressed the desire to help in the defence of the Empire—that it was a very convenient opportunity to have a conference on the whole question of military and naval defence. And it is desirable, whatever may be the origin of the Conference, that the Defence Minister and the Prime Minister of New Zealand should go. That question we have practically settled, and we come to the one immediately before us—the question as to whether the going-away of the Prime Minister is of so vast importance that everything in the way of legislation and consideration of the financial position of the Dominion should stand over for three or four months. That is what we have to decide, and honourable members must decide this matter according to their wisdom and as they see fit. We shall be asked by the Prime Minister to pass supplies. I suppose he will bring down a loan Bill. We are asked to give him an extension of appropriations for another three months—to extend from the 30th June to the 30th September—that is to say, the ordinary appropriations. And what appropriations are they? The appropriations of last year. No new work can take place, no new road, bridge, or work of any kind can be carried out until Parliament meets again, and we can deal with that question by means of estimates and an appropriation. Everything is to stand still, while the Ministry can do what they like with the Dominion's money up to the 30th September, the only limitation being that they are not to expend more than was voted last year; and those votes are for certain specific works, and they can do no other. And why is it all done? In order that the Prime Minister might go away and feel himself free with regard to the position of his own party. Now, the leader of the Opposition has represented to the meeting what appeared to him to be a very important issue. The issue is this: there are two important things we have to consider—the question of Imperial interests and of our own interests; and the Prime Minister has brought into this another issue, which I think ought to have been left out altogether, and which he has not left out—he has brought in the issue of party, and of his own party. Now, I do believe that if he had been ruled only by Imperial instincts he would have said to himself and his colleagues, "This is a matter that is greater than party, and I am not going to ask Parliament to consider me, my colleagues, or my party. I will make this secondary to the great Empire interests, and will go to the Naval and Military Conference to do my duty as a member of the Empire, and will leave my colleagues and the party, in full confidence of their ability to do so, to carry on the work of the House, trusting to members of the party to stand by my colleagues and to keep things going until I come back; and, in addition, I will trust the other honourable gentlemen of this House led by the leader of the Opposition to play the game fairly while I am away." And I am quite sure that would have been done. What has happened? Instead of going to the leader of the Opposition and asking him, as I say he should have done—as I believe was done on a previous occasion—instead of going to him and saying, "I deem it to be my duty to go, and I intend Parliament to go on; I trust you while I am away not to take any unfair advantage, and I am quite sure you will not do so," what has happened? He ignored the leader of the Opposition—not a solitary word has been said to him—and, in fact, it is perfectly true, as Mr. Massey said, this occasion has been used by the right honourable gentleman for the glorification of himself and his party, and the leader of the Opposition and everybody else has been cast into the shade. If the right honourable gentleman had been imbued with nothing but Imperial instincts, it would have been fairer for him to go to the leader of the Opposition and have said, "I will see that the work of Parliament goes on, but the contentious matters I would ask you not to expect me to bring on until I come back; but there is a vast amount of work which can be and which ought to be done during my absence, and I will ask you to deal fairly with myself and my colleagues while I am away"; and I am sure he would have received a kind response from the leader of the Opposition and those who follow him. There are many matters that can go on during the time he is away. Let me ask honourable members who are here, what in Heaven's name is to prevent the ordinary finance of the Dominion being dealt with in the Premier's absence? Before he goes he has to make provision for the necessary ways and means by way of Loan Bill or some other such proposal. If so, what is to prevent his colleagues from bringing before us the ordinary public-works estimates and the public-works proposals for the year, and having those considered by Parliament, and with the advice of Parliament making the very necessary provisions for the year? What is the necessity for the Prime Minister to be here to consider those questions? With regard to dealing with supplies, if before going away he gets his Loan Bill, surely his colleagues and Parliament are perfectly competent to decide how the supplies are to be used for the services of the Dominion. Are we to be asked to leave the Executive a free hand to do exactly what they like with any Loan Bill or with any money we may pass during the few days we shall be in session of Parliament? It is monstrous to suggest that a Parliament of eighty men assembled are not competent to deal with this question of supply after it has once been provided. If that doctrine is to be believed for a moment, what is to happen in the case of the Hon. the Premier being absent in any connection? Is the whole work of Parliament to be stopped? I say