

the time is so important with respect to our financial arrangements, and our financial conditions, and the employment of our people—the time is too important for us to allow three months to go by while we sit still and do nothing. It cannot be right that we should put ourselves in that position. Now, just one word with regard to the action of the Prime Minister, which I think is so unfair to us and the country. He has told us here to-day that if he cannot get an adjournment of the House he will not go. I say that is an unfair position to place honourable members in. It is unfair by a threat of that kind to attempt to coerce us into doing what we believe to be wrong, and that is to agree to an adjournment of the House and a stoppage of the business of the country. It would have been more fair and honourable, having asked us here to get our opinion, to allow us to decide the whole issue without any threat or intimidation of that kind, and I hope the Prime Minister will yet withdraw the intimidation he has cast at us to-day. If he does not—if he still maintains the threat he holds over our heads—I can tell him it will not have the effect he hopes it will have on those who have made up their minds that the work of Parliament ought to go on although the honourable gentleman is not here. It will not have the effect of inducing them to depart from what they believe to be the right thing to do. Many of the people of this country are in such a condition that we cannot allow three months to go by without dealing with questions of importance to them, of importance to us, and of importance to the finances of the country. This amendment is not moved with the idea of preventing the honourable gentleman from going. We have passed the resolution that he shall go. We are anxious he should go, and I think I can say on behalf of the Opposition that, if he does go, whoever he leaves in charge, and his party, will receive every consideration from those who remain here—those members of the Opposition who will be here to assist in every reasonable way the carrying-out of the work that is to be done—and that no attempt whatever will be made to reap an unfair advantage in the honourable gentleman's absence.

The Right Hon. Sir J. G. WARD (Prime Minister).—I am bound to say that I have been treated unfairly, and I say it with some regret. I made it very clear, I think, when I agreed that the motion should be divided and that the two proposals should be put separately, although the mover himself was quite entitled to have them moved as one, and upon which a vote of the members of the House would have been taken as one. At the request of some honourable members I stated I would have the two parts of the motion put separately. I think it would have been fair to me to have told me that it was intended to move an amendment upon the second portion of the motion, and an unusual course in that respect has been followed. There has been no breach of faith on my part. I am not quite certain that I can say the same for the honourable gentleman who has just sat down. I am sorry to have to say it. What I have stated is quite true, and every old parliamentarian knows that I am right in my contention. Nor am I exaggerating the position; and any man who has been Speaker or Chairman of Committees will tell you that that is so. I repeat that an intimation of the proposed amendment should have been given before the motion was broken in two. The honourable member for Bruce knows as well as I do that his amendment is a direct negative of the motion—it is absolutely so—and since he put it I have consulted with those who have experience, and they concur with me. However, I will put my complaint aside. I want to say a word in connection with the proposal to have New Zealand represented at the Imperial Conference. I told the House my intention in the matter to-day. I said that in the interests of the public and the country, that in the absence of an adjournment of the House for the time proposed, recognising what was my duty as leader of the party and as head of the Administration, I could not be present at the Conference to represent New Zealand if a motion to that effect was carried. I desire to repeat that if a motion is carried not to adjourn the House during my absence at the Conference I must remain here. Permit me also to say that that statement is not made for any party purposes, and I have not introduced party. No person who listened to the communication sent by me to my colleagues on the 20th March, and considered by them on the 22nd March, can have any doubt, because there is no mistaking the terms of the communication and what it meant. I will read that extract from the statement again, in order to remind honourable members of what was contained in the communication and what it implied:—

“The responsibility devolving upon the Government in taking this action is a great one, the refusal of Parliament to sanction it involving as it would the retirement of the Government or an appeal to the people; but I feel confident that the loyalty of the people of New Zealand, voicing itself through their representatives in Parliament, will indorse the action of the Government.”

There is no man of experience in this country will contradict me when I say that I put on record there the correct constitutional position. It was beyond all question, and we knew it. We knew exactly at the time the vital importance of the step to this country, and from information in our possession we believed that we were acting wisely. Every honourable member of this House knows that if we had waited for the convening of Parliament, and the contentious wrangling that would have been certain to have followed the proposals to offer a Dreadnought to the British Government, that a great deal of the wonderful effect that has been produced, and which was intended when the offer was made, would not only have been minimised, but would have been largely defeated. It has been recognised by all parties in the Old Land, and by practically all parties in this country—of course there are some exceptions—that the offer was timely and wisely made—made at the psychological moment, and made in the best interests of the Empire and of this country. I have in my possession now several hundreds of such expressions of opinion, coming from men representing all classes in this country and all interests. Then we have resolutions from responsible bodies of every description indorsing what has been done. And I am prepared to accept an indication of the people of the country in that way as being a fairly reliable guide of the approval of the action of the Government in the extraordinary position we found ourselves placed in; and the only ground upon which we could have failed to take that course would have been from lack of moral courage to undertake the responsibilities we believed to be right to accept