

from the first on the ground that his offer to the British Government had no constitutional precedent in the history of the British Empire. It was stated in the circular telegram sent round by the Prime Minister that there was a precedent for such action. I have never heard such a precedent quoted. We have been proud to possess that inviolable right that the people shall not be taxed without the authority and sanction of the representatives of the people in Parliament; and when we have that right violated, there must be behind that violation some unassailable reason for the action of those who have brought it about. Now, what was the reason that prompted the offer of two millions to the Imperial Government? We are told that there was a crisis. It has been suggested that there was information in the possession of the Government that justified them in making that offer. I do not wish to attach too much importance to the statement in the telegram to the newspaper editors, because such a statement might have been made unconsciously. I do not accept that too literally. But what I want to point out is this: it is a remarkable thing to imagine that there was information in the possession of Ministers of the Crown in New Zealand that was not in the possession of the members of the House of Commons. There is not one member in this Assembly—I do not care on which side of the House he is—who is a “Little-Englander.” There is not one man in this House who would not indorse the proposition made from the Commonwealth that we are bound to England to the last man and to the last sovereign. That, I hold, will not be controverted by any honourable member. And when we differ on this question it cannot be said that we differ from any small or parochial point of view. There is no bigotry, there is no narrow-mindedness about our views. But what I say is that such a breach of the British Constitution could only have been justified by extremely definite and alarming information in the possession of Ministers of the Crown such as was not known to the people of the Dominion, nor, in the interests of the Empire, could be published under any circumstances. On the 22nd March this Dreadnought offer was cabled Home. It was on about the 22nd March that a vote of censure on the British Government was moved in connection with the naval programme, and one would imagine, whatever information was in possession of Ministers here, that at least some of it must have been known to members of the House of Commons. The following motion was moved in the House of Commons:—

“That, in the opinion of this House, the declared policy of His Majesty’s Government respecting the immediate provision of battleships of the newest type does not sufficiently secure the safety of the Empire.”

And seven days after the Prime Minister sent the wire from New Zealand offering two Dreadnoughts the vote of censure was rejected by a majority of 218 votes. I say in the face of that it is impossible for us to imagine that there ever existed in the minds of the British people a serious belief that the Empire was in danger, as we were led to believe by Ministers of the Crown in this part of the world.

An Hon. MEMBER.—You are wrong there: have you read the debates?

Mr. FISHER.—I have read the debates. On the 22nd May, Lord Charles Beresford said there was no need for panic.

The Hon. Mr. R. McKENZIE (Minister of Public Works).—If the public knew what was the position there would be a panic.

Mr. FISHER.—I will read exactly what he did say:—

“The self-governing dominions can best render help to the Mother-land not by spending two millions on a battleship to serve in British waters, but by making efforts to defend themselves from the only measures by which the dominions can be hurt—that is, from the cutting of trade-routes by an enemy’s fleet. . . . The investment of two millions in home (local) defence and in cruisers which would protect trade-routes would be a better investment than the expenditure of a similar sum in helping to defend Britain’s shores. But there is no need for panic.”

The Right Hon. Sir J. G. WARD.—How were they to do that?

Mr. FISHER.—The oversea dominions were being protected and have been up to the present by the Imperial navy. Our contribution towards that has been £40,000 a year until lately, when it was raised to £100,000.

The Right Hon. Sir J. G. WARD.—Lord Beresford knew all about that when he made the statement.

Mr. FISHER.—What was his concluding statement?—“But there is no need for panic.” Let me point out what Sir Edward Grey said. On the 29th March, seven days after our offer, he said,—

“Judge, if you like, when you have the full facts before you; but in the meantime I ask the House to stand with us in resisting what seems to me exaggerated alarm and mistaken apprehension, and in resisting the attempt to force upon us prematurely the extreme view which has been urged.—(Loud Ministerial cheers.)”

The Premier speaks about protecting the trade-routes of Australia. I think we ought to make a fair contribution towards the maintenance and supremacy of the navy. There is not a single man in the House who is not prepared to see the Dominion do justice in this respect; but, that being the case, we have a right to ask that the other outlying colonies of the Empire shall pay their share as well. Now, what are the naval contributions per head at the present time?—

						Per Head.	
						s.	d.
United Kingdom	...	...	...	...	...	15	5½
Canada	...	...	...	...	...	Nil.	
Newfoundland	...	...	...	...	...	0	3½
Commonwealth of Australia	...	...	...	...	...	1	3½
New Zealand	...	...	...	...	...	2	2½
Cape of Good Hope	...	...	...	...	...	0	5
Natal	...	...	...	...	...	0	7½
Transvaal	...	...	...	...	...	Nil.	