

parallel in British history before, and I think that perhaps on that occasion the course adopted was justified. But it does not exist at the present time, and I am strongly against the House adjourning. I should be delighted, however, to see the Right Hon. the Prime Minister representing the Dominion in England.

Mr. HERDMAN (Wellington North).—Sir Joseph Ward, —Sir, I gather from the significant silence of the members on that side of the House that they propose to vote against the amendment submitted to the House by the honourable member for Bruce.

An Hon. MEMBER.—We are waiting for arguments.

Mr. HERDMAN.—If they have not been supplied with arguments, or, rather, if they have failed to understand the arguments that have been supplied, it is their fault, and I am sorry for them. It seems to me to be clear that they, without entering any protest, and without giving any expression of opinion, propose to obey you, and permit you to go Home to London, and to consent to the suspension of the business of the country. As that course obviously is to be taken by this Assembly, I desire to enter my protest before the House comes to a division. The question as to whether or not it was advisable to present the British Government with a Dreadnought, to my mind, is irrelevant to the present discussion. There are only two questions for us to consider—one as to whether you should go Home to represent this Dominion at the proposed Naval Conference, and the other—which is immediately under consideration—whether it is right and proper and in the general interests of the country that during your absence this House should adjourn. With regard to the first question, I agree that you, Sir, are the most fit and proper person to represent this Dominion at that Conference. I hold that opinion, and I hold it strongly, for these reasons: To my mind, the Conference which is about to take place will be one of unquestionable importance. You have pointed out that it has been called a subsidiary Conference. Mr. Taylor, from Christchurch, has pointed out that it has been named a subsidiary Conference. But the very fact that the Conference is being called prior to the date upon which the ordinary Conference of Premiers would have been called indicates beyond all doubt that this proposed gathering of colonial representatives is to be one of great importance. I need not labour the question. We are all familiar with the events that have taken place during the last few months, and it seems to me to be clear that every dependency of Great Britain should, if it is possible to do it, send some representative to this meeting, in order that the whole question of national defence should be thoroughly considered and investigated. We, Sir, desire information on the subject of national defence. You, no doubt, desire information on that most important question. The other gentlemen who will attend that Conference will desire information from you as to the proposals which you intend to make here regarding our own local defence. The matter that has been brought under the notice of members by Mr. Fisher indicates that it is highly desirable that you, in the capacity of Defence Minister, should attend there not only in order that you should get exact and reliable information as to what is to take place in future regarding Imperial defence, but in order that, if possible, you may return here with some sound defence policy. We know what has taken place regarding defence matters during the last fourteen or fifteen years in the history of this country. Colonel Fox came to it, and condemned our defences. He was succeeded by Colonel Pole-Penton, who likewise condemned our defences. He in turn was succeeded by General Babinington, who in scathing terms reflected upon the administration of the defence of the country. It was recognised then, after these three gentlemen had come, had seen, and had gone away, that the Commandant system was impossible, and you, I believe, were responsible for introducing a novelty in the shape of a Council of Defence. That Council of Defence has likewise proved a failure. In my opinion, the real cause of the failure of defence in this country lies in the fact that our Volunteer system has never had a chance, and that political interference has spoilt it during the last fifteen years. Well, Sir, we trust that as a result of your visit to England you will come back fully satisfied that there must be no political interference in matters of defence in future. If a system of compulsory training is adopted in lieu of the existing system, I am not quite so sure yet that political interference will not spoil that also; but I hope, at any rate, that you will come back from England convinced beyond all doubt at least on one point, that there shall be no political interference in matters of defence. If there is, our defence will be hopelessly weak to the end of time. So much for your proposed visit to the Old Country. Now I turn to a more important question—the question immediately under the consideration of this Assembly—the question whether you should have your way and that Parliament should adjourn. I, for one, hold a strong view on this point. I venture to say that if Parliament adjourns, and does not go on with the business of the country, we shall be doing something that is wrong and unconstitutional. The only precedent that can be produced in support of the step which you propose to take is the occasion in 1897 when the late Mr. Seddon visited England—an occasion of extraordinary importance—nothing like this. Am I to understand from the right honourable gentleman that his position in the House is so weak that he cannot afford to go Home and intrust the government of the country to the gentlemen whom I see sitting round about him to-night? Is it the case that the right honourable gentleman is so much afraid of rebellion amongst his own followers that he dare not leave this country for two months for fear of being ousted from office? I believe I may assure the honourable gentleman that he need have no fear from members of the Opposition, for I venture to think that it is one of the principal desires of the members of the Opposition that the right honourable gentleman and his Government and his followers shall continue to sit on the benches which they occupy at the present time until three years are over, and until the Augean stable which has become so unclean under their management has been restored to a thoroughly clean condition.

The Right Hon. Sir J. G. WARD.—And then we will annihilate the Opposition.

Mr. HERDMAN.—No; then I think the time will be appropriate for the right honourable gentleman's removal. I believe that time is soon coming, and that is one reason why the right