HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

ADJOURNMENT

SPEECH

Friday, 8 May 1942

BY AUTHORITY OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
Mr CURTIN (Fremantle—Prime Minister) (NaN.NaN pm). - I move -

That the House do now adjourn.

I have received a communique from the Commander-in-Chief of the Allied Forces in the South-west Pacific Area stating that a great naval battle is proceeding in the south-west Pacific zone. This battle arises from the operations which began on the 4th May and to which I referred in the House this morning. The events that are taking place to-day are of crucial importance to the whole conduct of the war in this theatre. I have no information as to how the engagement is developing, but I should like the nation to be assured that there will be, on the part of our forces and of the American forces, that devotion to duty which is characteristic of the naval and air forces of the United States of America, Great Britain and the Commonwealth. I should add that at this moment nobody can tell what the result of the engagement may be. If it should go advantageously, we shall have cause for great gratitude and our position will then be somewhat clearer. But if we should not have the advantages from this battle for which we hope, all that confronts us is a stern ordeal and a greater and graver responsibility. This battle will not decide the war; it will determine the immediate tactics which will be pursued by the Allied forces and by the common enemy. I ask the people of Australia, having regard to the grave consequences implicit in this engagement, to make a sober and realistic estimate of their duty to the nation. As I speak, those who are participating in the engagement are conforming to the sternest discipline and are subjecting themselves with all that they have - it may be for many of them the last full measure of their devotion - to accomplish the increased safety and security of this territory. In the face of such an example I feel that it is not asking too much of every citizen who to-day is being defended by these gallant men in that engagement, to regard himself as engaged in the second line of service to Australia. The front line needs the maximum support of every man and woman in the Commonwealth. With all the responsibility which I feel, which the Government feels, and which, I am sure, the Parliament as a whole shares, I put it to any man whom my words may reach, however they may reach him, that he owes it to those men, and to the future of the country, not to be stinting in what he will do now for Australia. Men are fighting for Australia to-day; those who are not fighting have no excuse for not working.