

I contend that the fleet units should be kept up and be increased from year to year. At all events, nothing should be done, until after the next Imperial Conference, that might tend to its disintegration. It is true that a Disarmament Conference was recently held in Washington, the object of which was to reduce arms and create a naval holiday. But it will be remembered that Mr. Harding's policy, and that of the Republican party in the last American election, was one of opposition to the League of Nations. On every platform of the United States they voiced their opposition to the League, and although after their election public opinion forced that government to summon a new conference, the one recently held at the American capital, the American shipyards have nevertheless been kept busy. The conference at Washington declared a ship-building holiday, but so far as Canada is concerned there was no necessity for this: Canada has always enjoyed a maritime holiday. She has been content to sponge on the hard earnings of the British taxpayers, who have had to pay heavy taxes on sugar, bread, coffee, tea and all sorts of other necessities in order to maintain a navy to protect our shores. Now, while the conference at Washington recommends a curtailment in the building of capital ships of war, this does not prevent President Harding's administration from going on with the construction of a merchant marine. And after all is said and done, as I pointed out the other night, the merchant marine has always been the backbone of British maritime strength, from the days of Drake and Frobisher and Hawkins down to the present time. There is nothing in the recommendations of the Washington conference to prevent the people of the United States from launching a great ship-building policy and building as many merchant marine ships as they please. And they are doing so. You go down the New Haven and Hartford road, passing through all the towns from Boston to New York, and down the Atlantic seaboard, and at every seaport you will find shipbuilding plants, which were closed for some time—they were formerly war plants—but are, most of them, now busily engaged executing orders both from private individuals and from the government. The object is to supply a fleet of merchant ships that shall carry the American flag into the seven seas to secure trade for that country. They are spending millions of dol-

[Mr. Church.]

lars in expanding the merchant marine, in the hope that eventually, notwithstanding the sentiments or the recommendations of the conference at Washington, they may out-distance the British merchant marine fleet, to which this Empire owes so much. I tell you, Mr. Speaker, that we are living in a fool's paradise, so far as that conference is concerned. The world has witnessed similar conferences before. Such conferences have been held at various times in the last hundred years; they were held in Gladstone's day; and they have always failed to a greater or less extent of their purpose. We need not, therefore, be over sanguine as to the efficacy of the latest assembly at Washington. Take the Genoa conference, again. What hopes can we entertain in respect of it when we think of the secret treaty between Germany and Russia. Russia to-day has a million and a quarter men mobilized and she is in a warlike mood. The conference at Genoa has virtually failed, and the outlook in Europe is far from reassuring to-day. As one leading French statesman said the other day, as reported in the various newspapers, war is as imminent to-day as it was immediately prior to August, 1914. I want to emphasize as strongly as I can the inadequacy of the present vote. I think the Government should at least retain the fleet unit they now have as it has been.

At the Naval College at Halifax there are forty cadets now undergoing training. In a couple of years' time they will have graduated, and what is to become of them then? What also of the forty who have graduated now on our fleet unit? What is to become of the college itself? I should like to see that college continued and the fleet unit maintained until another Imperial Conference is held at any rate. Talk about economy! We shall pay up in millions a little later for our folly in reducing this vote. It will prove to have been no economy at all.

Now perhaps the Government will inform the committee, with whom they consulted in framing their policy. Have they consulted the British Admiralty? Have they even consulted their own experts? If so, where are the written reports? Who is responsible for the recommendation to reduce the vote from \$2,500,000 to \$1,500,000? I do not see how it is that this is the only department—that of defence—that is singled out for a forty per cent or fifty per cent reduction. Is this an honourable policy? Is it, indeed, a justifiable policy?