

NAVY ESTIMATES, 1947–48 HANSARD TEXT

HC Deb 18 March 1947

Order for Committee read.

The Parliamentary and Financial Secretary to the Admiralty (Mr. John Dugdale)

I beg to move, "That Mr. Speaker do now leave the Chair."

Owing to the absence of my noble Friend in another place, it falls to me today to present the last of the three Service Estimates, and to speak on behalf of the officers and men of the Royal Navy. The House will be aware, from my noble Friend's statement on the Navy Estimates, of the general picture of the British Navy today. I should like to divide my remarks into two parts. First, a review of the work that the Navy has done during the past year; and secondly, to report on the work which we propose to do during the coming year. This last year has been a year of run down. It has been a difficult year; not spectacular, as the war years, but nevertheless a very important year. At the moment some Departments have the difficult, but at the same time very stimulating, task of building and creating—building houses, factories and schools, and adjusting the financial system. Service Ministries, for one of which I am speaking, have the other side of the medal. My right hon. Friend the Minister of Health would never have built the houses which are being built today—

[Laughter]—I knew that would happen. That was too easy for the Opposition to resist. Nor would my right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade have had his successful export drive—[Laughter.] It has been a very successful export drive—if in fact, we had not given him some of the men with which to do it. During the past year we have released 374,000 officers and ratings. Allowing for our intake, that means a reduction in the Navy of 327,000, or enough to build 140,000 houses and produce a quarter of a million cars in a year.

Giving up men and women is not so simple as it may sound to some. I am sure many hon. Members will be aware of the difficulties. Let me first take the case of the Admiralty staff. Demobilisation involves a vast amount of work. Records have to be kept, gratuities have to be paid, clothing outfits have to be issued, and, as hon. Members are fully aware from cases that are brought to them, there are large numbers of men left in the Forces who think they ought to be demobilised. All this involves the Admiralty in a great deal of work. It is not only men and women we are giving up, but property. We have had a great task in giving up property. The vast majority of the Admiralty's total holdings of industrial and non-industrial requisitioned property at the beginning of 1945 had, in fact, been returned to the owners by the end of 1946. But the House will recognise the very difficult problem this presents, until we have managed to re-build the permanent storage space that has been destroyed by enemy action, of which there is a vast amount.

I may add, too, that we have released and reconverted over 2,000 requisitioned fishing vessels built for the Government during the war, and some privately owned.

This gives valuable help to my right hon. Friend the Minister of Food, and the fish landed by these ships have done, as hon. Members will admit, a great deal to ease the food situation. We have also disposed of large amounts of surplus goods of all kinds. The Admiralty is itself the disposals authority for only a limited number of products. We naturally dispose of warships, and also of rather curious items such as chain cable, navigational instruments, salvage equipment and diving gear. We have disposed of large quantities, and the total quantity of Admiralty disposals during the year amounts to approximately £27 million. Apart from this, we have declared surplus a large quantity of goods which have been disposed of by the Ministry of Supply.

During the war, not only we but the Dominions and the Allied nations suffered heavy naval losses. In the view of His Majesty's Government the Dominions clearly had first call when the time came to dispose of a number of vessels belonging to the Royal Navy. Accordingly, cruisers, a light fleet carrier, destroyers, frigates and corvettes have been, or are being, transferred to the Dominions, to the Allies and to India by sale, gift, or loan. In this way we have fostered to the utmost possible extent the integration of the resources of defence available to the British Commonwealth of Nations. We have also transferred a number of ships to our Allies, such as, for instance, the light fleet carrier "Colossus," which was transferred to France last year; the escort carrier "Nairana," lent to the Netherlands, and the cruiser "Aurora" shortly to be lent to China. All this disposal of men and property has been done by the Admiralty with a substantially reduced staff. It would be foolish—and I would not do so for a moment—to pretend that we have completely re-adjusted

ourselves to peacetime routine. Naturally, some branches have done so more quickly than others. Some may have done so with very great speed, almost immediately after the war. There must be others which are much slower, which have a much more difficult task in re-adjustment.

With a view to seeing that we have the minimum possible headquarters staff we have decided to appoint working parties, with power to go into every department of the Admiralty, and to make reductions wherever this is at all practicable.

Mr. Brendan Bracken (Bournemouth)

Of what do these working parties consist?

Mr. Dugdale

They are Departmental working parties. [Laughter.] They are not to be laughed at for that reason. Before leaving the work of the Admiralty I should like to pay a tribute to a great Admiralty servant, Sir Henry Markham. He held the position of Secretary of the Admiralty with outstanding ability and devotion during five of the most strenuous years in the history of the Navy. It would be difficult, I think, to find a more brilliant, fair-minded or charming civil servant. His death, at the early age of 49, has been a blow not only to the Admiralty, but to the entire Civil Service, and one which I, personally, have felt very keenly.

I will now leave the Admiralty and come to the men who man the ships and shore establishments of the Royal Navy. This time last year my right hon. Friend the Minister of Defence told the House that it was planned to reduce the Navy to some 200,000 by 31st December, 1946.

The target that he set has been attained, but the great run down has not been achieved without very considerable difficulties, including the acceptance of a lower standard of operational efficiency during this transitional period. We have experienced serious shortages in a number of branches, particularly those of the seaman and stoker branches, and in trained ratings for the radio and air branches.

A few ignorant people—nobody in this House, I would hasten to say—but there are ignorant people who say the Navy has little to do in peace time. I should like to remind the House of some of the work our sailors have been doing. One of the most important tasks performed by the Navy has been that of homeward trooping. In the main we have transported sailors, thus relieving merchant ships of a very great demand. We have also transported a large number of soldiers and airmen, and the total number that we have brought back, for all three Services, is approximately 100,000. At the beginning of 1946 there were 10 Naval hospital ships. Today, there is only one. Those ships have been engaged in transporting sick and wounded; not only our own, but those of our Allies throughout the world.

Another great work has been that of minesweeping. We are apt to think that when war is over all weapons are put away; but that, is not so with mines. Like great loathsome monsters, they lurk in the deep waters, where they have to be hunted out and destroyed, to the great peril of the people engaged in that task. How important is the need for this work may be gathered from the fact that in 1946, despite the combined efforts of many nations, no fewer than 74 merchant vessels were sunk or damaged by mines.

I am glad to say that 95 per cent. of them were in waters outside swept channels. Minesweeping has been carried out by our Forces in places as far apart as the Denmark Strait to the north-west of Iceland, the Sicilian Channel, and, far away on the other side of the globe, on the coast of Indo-China. I am glad to be able to report that no British minesweepers were sunk or damaged, and that no casualties were suffered, during the whole of 1946.

Altogether, during the past year alone, the British and Dominion Navies have accounted for some 4,600 mines. I think the House would like, as has been apparent up to now, to pay a tribute to the skill and devotion to duty of the men engaged throughout the past year in this arduous and nerve racking operation.

Another duty in which the Navy has been engaged has been that of preventing illegal immigration into Palestine by sea. A naval force has been maintained at Haifa throughout the year for this purpose. During the summer the work was particularly heavy, and between May and November no fewer than 14 ships were intercepted, containing, each one, between 400 and 2,500 immigrants. I was in Haifa myself last year and I saw something of the work our sailors were doing. I went on board ship and talked to them. I can assure the House that they were neither pro-Jew nor pro-Arab. They had a job to do, and they did it with tactfulness, firmness and efficiency. And a very difficult job it was too. They cross-examined me good humouredly on everything and anything for a considerable time, and I understand they cross-examined equally forcibly the right hon. Gentleman the Member for Warwick and Leamington (Mr. Eden) when he visited them the year before. I have mentioned these few salient examples—

Squadron-Leader Sir Gifford Fox (Henley)

How many have been killed on that operation?

Mr. Dugdale

To the best of my knowledge, none. The Civil Lord will certainly get the exact figures, and confirm or correct me. The work I have described is quite apart from the essential and continuous task of training officers and men so that the Navy may be ready at any time to meet any emergency that may come to it. All this has meant a great strain with reduced numbers. The Navy has stood up to the task of demobilisation as well as it has stood up to the tasks of war.

I said I would divide my remarks into two parts. I have spoken of the past. I shall now turn to the future. The Estimates we are presenting, Estimates of £196,700,000, are certainly large. I admit that at once; but I hope to show that they are no larger than is absolutely necessary to keep the Navy in a fit and proper state. I could, of course, compare them with those of last year, and they would, obviously, show a very big reduction; but I do not think that that is what hon. Members want; and I think they would rather have a comparison with prewar years. I propose to give them one. In 1938 our Estimates were for £123,700,000, and today they are for £196,700,000. But I think the most rigorous examiner of naval or any other kind of finance will admit that there has been some rise in prices since 1938. There are some people who say that prices have risen by 75 per cent.; some say even by 100 per cent.; but I shall be quite modest, and put it at 50 per cent. I believe there would be few people who would argue that there has not been a

general rise in prices of about that much since 1938. On that basis, the figure in 1938 would have come to £185 million, or within £12 million of the net figure in our present Estimates.

That £12 million can easily be accounted for by the increase there is today in our terminal charges. But I think that that figure of 50 per cent. is possibly an underestimate. There are a good many products which the Admiralty buy which show a considerable higher rise. For example, diesel oil, which we buy in fairly large quantities, costs 90 per cent. more than it did in 1938; and timber costs from 120 per cent. to 150 per cent. more than it did in 1938; and all these have, therefore, contributed to the figures shown on the Navy Vote.

Brigadier Head (Carshalton)

Has naval pay increased by 50 per cent. since 1938?

Mr. Dugdale

Certainly, Sir. It has increased by more than 50 per cent. But the increase in ratings' cost of living is considerably less than the increases I have mentioned here. Taking all this into account, I think we can claim quite reasonably that our Estimates are the equivalent, by and large, of those in 1938. I appreciate that that was a year in which we were in a process of rearming, but this is a year in which we are reversing that process, and one cannot turn the tap off in five minutes.

I would ask hon. Members to look at the number of men we are asking for. I do so realising to the full the great concern felt by all Members of the House, and not least by

Members of the Government, at the country's present shortage of manpower. Our present Vote A is 192,000 and the mean bearing for the coming year will be 182,000. In considering my comparison with the 1938 figures, hon. Members will, of course, realise that there have been several new commitments. The first, and by far the most important, is naval aviation. Before the war, this was a relatively small part of the Navy.

Today, it is no exaggeration to say, and it is a fact which surprised me when first I heard it and which will surprise many hon. Members, that one-quarter of the Navy is engaged, directly or indirectly, in naval aviation, and this proportion is increasing. A large number of these operations are indeed conducted from aircraft carriers, but, besides carriers, we also have a number of airfields. There are, today, some 23 airfields and air establishments in commission at home and abroad belonging to the Royal Navy, and employing approximately 22,000 men and women on shore jobs. There are, too, some 2,500 air category officers and ratings engaged on duties connected with flying, which before the war were carried out by the R.A.F. The striking power of carriers in case of war, in case anybody doubts, is well shown by the tale of the damage inflicted on the Japanese by aircraft of the First Aircraft Carrier Squadron in the last six days of the Japanese war—350 aircraft destroyed or damaged on the airfields, and 330,000 tons of shipping destroyed or damaged in the ports. That was simply the record of the First Aircraft Carrier Squadron alone during those days.

The House will see, therefore, that we are right in attaching tremendous importance to the development of naval aviation. We have today a force, if I may so describe

it, of flying sailors, which hardly existed before the war. This makes one of the biggest demands on the Navy's manpower. Another relatively small new item is combined operations organisation ashore. This employs 2,700 men and is again a new commitment. Then there are some 2,300 Commandos—making a grand total of new commitments of some 30,000 officers and men or about 15 per cent. of our entire manpower, and the great majority of these must of necessity be shore-based.

The right hon. Gentleman the Leader of the Opposition—and I am sorry to see that he has now left his place—taunted us with the number of men ashore today. I find on examining the position, that, in 1921, when the right hon. Gentleman himself was a Member of the Government, no less than 42 per cent. of the Navy was shore-based, excluding the entirely new shore commitments which I have mentioned and which did not then exist. Our present percentage will be 44.5, which is only 2 per cent. more, and this extra 2½ per cent. is more than covered by the extra training commitments which we have today. The run-down has been very much more rapid than it was after the last war, and the net result is that we have a far greater proportion of untrained men in the Navy today, and, therefore, a far greater need for training facilities, and they must, of course, or a large number of them, be trained ashore. Therefore, I think the right hon. Gentleman can relieve his mind to some extent of the fears that he has had that the Navy is becoming entirely shore-based.

Mr. Bracken

Before the hon. Gentleman finishes with his statistics, perhaps he would tell us the size of the Home Fleet in 1921, as compared with today?

Mr. Dugdale

Offhand, I certainly cannot, but I will see that the right hon. Gentleman has that information. The second reason for the size of our manpower budget is the increased complexity of naval warfare. Everything in life today is becoming more complicated, and naval warfare is no exception. So complicated is the equipment of a modern warship that she needs 20 per cent. greater complement than warships did maybe 10 or 15 years ago, or even, in fact, 20 per cent. more than in 1938. The most important reason for this is the development of radar. In 1938, only two ships were fitted with radar—and they were experimental. Today, radar is as much a part of the ship's life as, say, gunnery, navigation or signalling.

This brings me to the subject of naval construction. This year there will be only two destroyers laid down—and these are being laid down because they will introduce some important changes in naval shipbuilding and marine engineering, though we are, of course, continuing the construction of such ships as had already reached an advanced stage—a very advanced stage of development—when war ended.

While we shall not engage on any major work of reconstruction, we shall, and, indeed, we must, be certain that we spend an adequate amount of money on research, especially in respect of the effect of the atom bomb on naval warfare. The Admiralty was represented at the Bikini trials, the results of which are being carefully

studied, and the House will not expect me to say more about them today. There may be nothing to show for much of our research this year, next year or even the year after. If I might use a simile, research workers are something like the female elephant, which takes a very long time to reproduce its species—a very long time to get any results—but, when that result arrives, it is very often of considerable magnitude, and importance. So are the results of the research workers, and they have proved to be that in the past, and I have no doubt they will prove it again in the future.

We cannot hope any longer to have the largest Navy in the world. But we can and do hope to have the best equipped—as we are certain that we shall always have the best manned. We all hope that there will never again be any need to use it in war, but this does not depend on those who have charge of the Navy. They have one plain duty, and that is to see that, if ever they are called upon, they can present, either to the nation or to U.N.O., a first-class fighting machine. That is our duty, and that task, I hope, we are performing. We would, of course, like a number of new ships, for many we have are exceedingly old and have covered vast distances during the course of their lives. H.M.S. "Cumberland," for instance, has covered 393,000 miles, whilst the aircraft carrier "Victorious" has covered no less than some 356,000 miles since May, 1941. We have decided, however, like some Members have to do in regard to their clothes—to "make-do" for this year with a little patching.

A number of ships will be refitted and the House will, I think, be interested to know that, as and when they are refitted, certain improvements will be made in living

conditions for the men. The most important is that, as major refits are taken in hand, ships galleys will, whenever practicable, be re-equipped up to the best modern standard. This should make not only for less work, but for better food. I know how surprised I was myself last year on going aboard a ship, a small escort carrier, and, on going into the galley, saw the most wonderful equipment—chromium plated, and on which one only had to press a button to obtain what one wanted. I said "I never knew that we had that sort of thing." I was told "It is an American ship; we have just borrowed it." We are getting our ships equipped as and when we can, but it will be a slow process to bring them up to the best possible modern standards. Steps are also being taken, as ships are reconstructed, to improve conditions by the provision of more ventilation fan power, increased use of insulating materials and extension of air conditioning. We are going to provide increased refrigeration space, better washing and bathing facilities, reading rooms and cinemas and, for the first time, to the best of my knowledge, laundries in all but the smallest ships.

We have, too, decided that there shall be an alteration in the proportion of space occupied in all new ships by officers and ratings. In some of the older ships, the percentage of living space occupied by officers was out of all proportion. I think everyone will agree that an officer—and, indeed, a petty officer—should have more commodious quarters than an ordinary seaman. While there should be a distinction, we think that in the past the distinction has been far too great. In the "Vanguard" it is now less, but we hope in all new ships to make still further alterations with the view to reaching a more reasonable

proportion than we had before between officers and ratings.

I turn now to the Royal Dockyards. The labour force employed in the Royal Dockyards and other shore establishments in this country on purely naval work was reduced on 31st December, 1946, to just over 110,000, and further reductions may be expected during the coming year. If this reduction had been carried out as a previous reduction was after the last war, without any regard to its effect on the national economy, we might have had serious unemployment in the dockyard areas. I find, indeed, that there were no fewer than 6,000 unemployed at Devon-port alone in March, 1920. In order to avoid this the Admiralty has embarked on a big scheme of repayment work for other Government Departments and for commercial firms both in the dockyards and in the Royal Naval Torpedo Factory at Greenock, and in other naval factories as well. We have been able to help, and I think this should interest the House particularly at the present moment, both in the improvement of coal production and in the saving of fuel. An example of the first is the manufacture of the components for coal cutting and coal hauling machinery, and of the second, the provision of oil fuel tender tanks for railway locomotives which are being converted from coal to oil burning. Besides this, Devonport Dockyard have secured the contract for the construction and fitting of a new fore-end for the tanker "Athel Duchess," and done repairs to the ship's structure, the contract for which was of no mean proportions. These are practical examples of public enterprise, and I know they will appeal at least to hon. Members on this side of the House. They will directly employ some 5,000 men and we intend to continue this to

such extent as there is capacity after Fleet requirements have been met.

Mr. Austin (Stretford)

Does the figure mentioned include personnel engaged on aircraft repair, and, if not, will the hon. Gentleman give the figure?

Mr. Dugdale

It includes all those employed on non-naval work, that is on civilian work, and my right hon. Friend will give full detailed figures in his reply later. How are we getting the men—and women—necessary to man all these ships and those shore establishments which have to be manned by naval personnel? I am glad to tell the House that if the figures of our recruiting campaign are any guide to the future, and I hope they are, we shall be able to get a large proportion from voluntary recruitment.

The central problem facing the responsible authorities has been to make good the deficiencies occasioned by the severe restriction of regular entries about which I spoke earlier during six years of war, and to restore the balance between the various branches. Particular concern has been experienced by the serious lack of trained men for the Radar Branch, owing to the fact that by far the greater proportion of ratings in this branch during the period of hostilities were war-time entries who have since had to be released. Since the start of the release plan the Radar Branch has lost no less than 11,000 trained ratings, and hon. Members will realise from this the tremendous problem we have to face.

The numbers of entries on Regular engagements have so far kept all available training facilities working to full capacity. We now have a tremendous training task and the fact that available training facilities have been fully occupied cannot obscure the real need to obtain as many men as possible for long service engagements. Even if recruiting continues as it is at present, the Navy cannot reach its full requirement of regular service men until the 1950's. As Members are aware, the Royal Fleet Reserve has been reinstated and the R.N.V.R. has been reopened, while the details of the future organisation and the relations between the various Reserves are still being completed.

Sir Ronald Ross (Londonderry)

As I hear the "Impregnable" is no longer to be used as a training establishment, does this involve shortening the period of training?

Mr. Dugdale

That particular establishment is not to be used for new entries, but it will be used for others.

Sir R. Ross

Will it cut down the period of training for new entries?

Mr. Dugdale

No, Sir, there is no intention of doing that.

The House will recognise that the Royal Naval Reserve presents a special and difficult problem. If any demonstration were required, the last war made very

evident the vital and complementary roles accomplished by the Royal Navy and the Merchant Navy. There is obviously no advantage to be gained in adding in emergency to the strength of the Royal Navy if this is only done at the expense of the Merchant Navy. The question of how the Merchant Navy officer or man who enrolls for service with the Royal Navy in time of emergency can best serve the naval interest is now receiving full Admiralty consideration and until that consideration is completed I cannot say what the future of the R.N.R. will be.

I turn now to the R.N.V.R. Government approval was given last March for the reconstitution of the R.N.V.R. up to prewar establishment. In passing it may interest the House to know that recruiting for the R.N.V.R. had only just started two years and four months after the end of the 1914–18 war. The number of officers in the R.N.V.R. before the war was approximately 1,350. Eleven Divisions have so far been re-established and over 4,000 applications have been received from temporary reserve officers who have been released. No difficulty is, therefore, anticipated in bringing Divisions up to full officer complement. The prewar complement of ratings was, however, about 9,500 and we have, I am afraid, a long way to go before we reach this figure. R.N.V.R. officers who served in the last war will naturally have special consideration, but we intend otherwise to take all except specialists of our R.N.V.R. officers in future from men who have done their National Service on the lower deck. I hope hon. Members on all sides of the House will help us to re-build this Branch of the Royal Navy. I informed the House last week that we are setting up an entirely new Branch of the R.N.V.R.—the Air Branch—which, as a

start, will consist of four squadrons, the first of which will begin training on 1st May.

Whilst on the subject of recruiting I should like to refer to the great help which has been given to the Navy by the Sea Cadets. I have myself visited two Thames-side units, one in my own home town of Abingdon and the other, which I visited in company with the hon. Member for Kingston (Mr. Boyd-Carpenter), in his constituency, and I can testify both to the keenness of the boys and the great efficiency of the instructors. More than 30,000 boys were in training last year in Sea Cadet units. We hope to be able to take a considerable percentage of these into the Navy as they grow up.

Mr. Kenneth Lindsay (Combined English Universities)

Can the hon. Gentleman say why there was a decrease in the grant for the naval cadets?

Mr. Dugdale

It is simply per capita, because there are fewer of them, but it does not mean that we attach any less importance to the Sea Cadets, and I would like to make that absolutely plain now.

Vice-Admiral Taylor (Paddington, South)

Are we not going to work up to 50,000 Sea Cadets?

we can to encourage the growth of the Sea Cadet movement, in which we have every confidence.

So much for the men. I now turn to what are known in official language as "female personnel" but to most of us

as women. The announcement in the summer that the Women's Royal Naval Service was to be a permanent Service brought a number of enquiries from ex-W.R.N.S. who wished to re-enter. So far 209 ex-W.R.N.S. and some 1,846 serving W.R.N.S. have been accepted for re-engagement. In the light of the experience gained during the war we have decided after full deliberation that no change shall be made in the present system of discipline for the W.R.N.S. They will, therefore, not be brought within the scope of the [Naval Discipline Act](#) and the members of the Service will continue to serve on the same form of engagement as they have served up to now. I would like to pay a tribute to the magnificent work that the W.R.N.S. performed during the war. The greatest tribute, however, which any of us can pay is to be found in our intention to maintain the Service in peacetime.

[Lieut.-Commander Gurney Braithwaite \(Holderness\)](#)

Before the hon. Gentleman leaves the subject of the W.R.N.S., he has announced that it is the intention to continue this service; is it intended to continue the same categories as those in which they served during the war? Are they to be employed as writers, etc., or only as domestic workers?

[Mr. Dugdale](#)

Broadly speaking, in the same categories.

[Mr. Keeling \(Twickenham\)](#)

As the hon. Gentleman dislikes the term "female personnel," will he not try to persuade his brother Lords to alter this jargon?

Mr. Dugdale

It would give me the greatest pleasure to do so, and I hope the hon. Member will help me to find a new word.

We now come to a subject which will, I know, interest a large number of Members—the subject of welfare. The sailor has always been loved by the nation, but he has not always been as well treated as he might be. Some people are apt to forget this, and to believe that the sailors who helped Nelson to win the Battle of Trafalgar were treated as heroes should be, but it is far from so. Less than 50 years before the battle of Trafalgar no less a figure than the great Dr. Johnson turned his attention to the Navy, and his observations were, as always, both succinct and enlightening. He said: No man will be a sailor who has contrivance to get himself into a jail; for being in a ship is being in a jail, with a chance of being drowned. A man in a jail has more room, better food and, commonly, better company.

Captain Marsden (Chertsey)

Dr. Johnson never went to sea in his life.

Mr. Dugdale

I have enough to do to defend the Admiralty and the officers and men of the Royal Navy without engaging today in defence of Dr. Johnson, and I would leave that to others. I would not claim that we found, on taking office, conditions altogether similar to those described by Dr. Johnson, but I would say that we have found a tremendous amount of work that needs to be done if we are to give the sailor the conditions to which he is entitled.

We intend to spend altogether some £7 million on welfare schemes this year.

I have already referred to improvements in ships. Let me turn now to our barracks. Some of these, and let the Opposition note this, were actually built in Dr. Johnson's time, and the majority have had no substantial improvements made in them during the past 50 years. That is the position as we find it today. Architects' reports received show that in the majority of cases modernisation of the existing buildings is practicable, though the Royal Marine Barracks at Chatham and Devonport amongst others are of such an age and their sites so restricted that only by complete rebuilding on new sites can a satisfactory solution be found. In spite of the difficulty of finding labour and materials, we hope to make a start this year with some self-contained sections at a few of the establishments. The full cost of the modernisation programme at present contemplated will run into many millions of pounds.

These are major works, but we intend also to carry out a number of smaller improvements aimed at giving better lighting, ventilation and heating, and brighter and more cheerful decoration in sleeping, living and messing accommodation. We are providing £525,000 for this during the coming year.

The introduction of free passage facilities and married quarters for sailors' families is, as one admiral put it to me, the greatest revolution in the life of the Navy since the Battle of Trafalgar. It has, in fact, always been assumed up to now that the sailor—except the very well- to-do—left his wife and family behind when he went abroad. I

know all this business about the sailor having a wife in every port, but seriously it has been a real hardship both for the sailor and his family. Great gaps have been torn in the life of the sailor's wife. She has had a hard time in bringing up her family without the help and companionship of a husband and father. We are determined that these family tragedies shall cease. The majority of officers and ratings with more than one year still to serve abroad will now be able to bring their families out as soon as they can find accommodation. But let me make it clear and I want to emphasise this very strongly in case there is misunderstanding that there is at present a very grave shortage of accommodation.

Until this can be overcome, many sailors will not be able to make use of this new privilege. We hope to make a start this year with the provision of married quarters both at home and abroad.

Vice-Admiral Taylor

What will be the cost of passages for the sailors' wives and families?

Mr. Dugdale

The cost of the passages will obviously vary according to the distances which they have to go.

Vice-Admiral Taylor

But what sum—

Mr. Dugdale

I think I have already given way quite enough to hon. Members. Our full plans contemplate the provision of some 8,000 married quarters—though this programme will inevitably take many years to complete. I feel sure that the House, far from grudging such expenditure on welfare, would blame the Government if they had not decided to embark upon it. We know that owing to the war and the negligence of the Party opposite there is a colossal amount of work to be done to rebuild this country. We know there is need of houses, of schools, of hospitals and many other things which take money and materials and labour. We know this, and we shall not ask for more than our share. But we shall ask for our full share. While the sailor's wife must get a new house, the sailor himself must get a new barracks, new married quarters, and new welfare equipment in his ship. These things cost money, but the Government has also given the sailor some improvements which cost nothing.

During the past year we have attempted to make his life easier by the removal of a number of unnecessary restrictions and regulations. He will be able, as soon as the clothing situation gets a little easier and lockers, can be provided, to resume the wearing of plain clothes when off duty with more freedom than in prewar days. In shore establishments the irksome practice of "Liberty Boats" by which sailors were kept in barracks sometimes for an hour or even two after their leave period had started has been abolished for all except trainees. Men are no longer compelled to go to church parades every Sunday.

I come now to the question of officer selection. Today officers are drawn from three sources—the greater proportion come from the Dartmouth Entry, a smaller,

but nevertheless substantial proportion come from what is known as the "Special Entry" at the age of 17. There are lastly some promoted from the lower deck.

My noble Friend is giving particular thought to the whole question of officer recruitment. As hon. Members will be aware, there have been several committees engaged on different aspects of this problem during the past year, the last of which rendered its reports only quite recently. The whole field embraced by these reports is under his consideration, and I am not in a position this afternoon to convey to the Committee his final conclusions on Dartmouth and Special Entry. I should hope, however, to be able to announce the changes to be made in these systems in about eight weeks' time.

Meanwhile, however, I have an announcement to make about lower deck promotion. Before the war not more than 5 per cent. of the officers of the Royal Navy came from the lower deck. This is not right in a democratic age. There should be no barrier to any man obtaining commissioned rank and rising to the highest position in the Navy. It is difficult to estimate how many men with the necessary qualities are likely to show themselves fit for commissions, but we hope that in future it will be possible to select over all branches except professional officers an average of 20–25 per cent. of our officers, either through the Upper Yardmen Scheme or through the scheme of selecting Warrant Officers for direct promotion to the rank of Lieutenant. I come lastly to the representation of grievances. It is up to any man to state a grievance and to carry it even to the highest quarters but there is this objection that the ordinary rating might be overawed and find it difficult to present it first to his executive officer,

then to the captain and up to the admiral. We propose to make provision that he shall have the services of one who can act, in legal phraseology, as his "friend," and this will we hope prove of great service to the man who has a genuine grievance.

I turn now to the second point, the making of suggestions. I would emphasise that the right of the rating to make individual representation of suggestions through his Divisional Officer and the responsibility of the Divisional Officer for looking after the interests of his men must continue. We intend to introduce new machinery in addition. There are at present, as hon. Members know, Canteen Committees in all ships. These Committees deal in the main with matters relating to the Canteen Administration. We now intend to replace them with Welfare Committees with the object of providing machinery for the free discussion between officers and men of matters affecting the general welfare of the men within the ship or establishment concerned and their amenities. The members of the Welfare Committees will be democratically elected by ballot and will sit together with a small number of officers nominated by the captain. In this way we hope that every man in the Navy will feel that he has a part in the creation of the best possible conditions on board his ship.

I have told just a part of the story of one year in the life of the Royal Navy. It has been a full and, I think hon. Members will agree, a fruitful year. During the past four centuries we have grown from a small island on the edge of the continent to a great Commonwealth, which is the admiration of the world. And through all these years countless men and women have striven in every walk of

life to give us the finest democratic system that this world has ever seen. But while they worked the Navy watched our shores. If it had not watched, their work would have been in vain. It is still on watch today.

4.22 p.m.

Mr. J. P. L. Thomas (Hereford)

I should like to congratulate the Financial Secretary on the opportunity which has come to him, and which did not come to his immediate predecessors, of introducing the main Navy Estimates. Both I and my right hon. and hon. Friends behind me will have a good deal to say about the matter of his speech, but as to the manner of it, we would like to compliment him on the carrying out of this very responsible work. There was, I think, a bit of party flag wagging, and it is also the case that some of the plumes which he wore so gaily were borrowed from past regimes, but we offer our congratulations to him for the way in which he has carried out his task.

Before I pass to the Estimates themselves, may I pay our tribute from these benches to the memory of Sir Henry Markham? The Admiralty and the Royal Navy have suffered a grievous loss indeed. In that attractive, clear and deliberate signature, "H. V. Markham", which was known through every Fleet order to many thousands of persons who never met him personally, one read the main qualities of the man. He was the most delightful of companions on duty or off duty. He found time in his very busy life to unravel the difficulties of those who worked with him, and his knowledge of naval matters and also of this House of Commons, which he understood so well, was an invaluable help to those who served in the Admiralty as

junior Ministers. The best memorial left by him are the men whom he picked so unerringly to serve the Admiralty and who now carry on his work. May I also give my personal good wishes to his successor? If he guides the Admiralty in the future as he guided this poor benighted Tory in the past through trade union rules and trade union rivalries, the Admiralty is in very sure hands.

Since this House debated the Navy Estimates last year we have seen the setting up of the Ministry of Defence. There was complete absence of criticism from Navy circles over the choice of the new Minister in charge of that Department. Under the new organisation it is the Minister of Defence who is now responsible for apportioning the available resources between the three Services. In the White Paper, Command Paper 7042, which was recently issued by the Government, they say that these annual estimates will continue to afford Parliament the opportunity of scrutinising and discussing the several activities of each of the Service Departments. I am well aware of the difficulties of fixing business, especially in these urgent days of crisis, and I am not seeking to blame any particular party in the House, but I must say, and I speak I feel on behalf of those who are taking part in this discussion in all quarters of the House, that, as was said on the Army Estimates and the Air Estimates, it would have been easier for us if we had had the Defence Debate first to give us the wider aspects of National and Imperial Defence before we came to discuss the separate Estimates. We should then know more clearly the responsibilities of the Royal Navy during the coming 12 months.

The Minister of Defence (Mr. A. V. Alexander)

May I make the position clear? The point was raised in discussion through the usual channels and we had fixed Monday, 24th March, for the Debate on the Defence White Paper. It was postponed at the request of the Opposition.

Mr. Thomas

I realise that what the right hon. Gentleman says is perfectly true, but on the other hand it is not the Opposition which is providing these crises week by week so that business of this House has to be altered. It seems to me that, until we have that general picture of defence and strategy, each Service is painting its own corner of the canvas and rather hoping that when it joins up with its colleagues' the picture will look all right.

But I must make one very strong protest. This House is being asked to pass these Estimates in spite of the additional information given by the Financial Secretary today, and quite frankly he filled very few of the gaps, with very meagre information. We are being asked to sign something very much like a blank cheque, we are being asked to foot a bill in which the details are very sparse indeed. Why are the Estimates as well as the Explanatory Memorandum so devoid of information in this second year of peace? Let hon. Members compare them with the Navy Estimates and Memorandum in the last year before the war. Look at the size of the book of Navy Estimates in 1938 as compared with the one we have here this year. Let me take one example, the item in Vote 9, on page 120, headed "Guns, torpedoes, mines and ammunition." There is a surprising increase of £1,286,000 this year, and yet the whole item is dismissed in one line. In 1938 that same item

was give no less than three pages. In view of that extraordinary increase this year I should be grateful if the Civil Lord would give us a very full answer.

Then I come to the biggest grievance of all, one which I believe is held not only by those behind me but by hon. Members in many quarters of the House, and that is that we are left almost entirely in the dark by the absence of the Navy List about the size of the Fleet. What is the reason for that? Is it security? If it is security, whom are we about to fight? Anyhow, is it not true that the List is published and circulated to the many Government Departments? Is it not known in the Council of U.N.O.? Is it not true that it is circulated to our naval attaches at the Embassies abroad? If that is so, why is it withheld from Parliament? The United States Government have presented Congress with a detailed statement of the number of ships in each category, with particulars of their active fleet, their Ready Reserve and their laid-up reserve fleet, and what possible danger exists in giving similar information regarding the Royal Navy to the British people? Without the Navy List Parliament is being asked to debate these Estimates practically in the dark.

I now turn to the woefully abbreviated and inadequate Estimates themselves, about which I have a number of questions to put to the Civil Lord. I know he will do his best to answer them, as he always treats the House with the utmost courtesy, which is much appreciated in all quarters. The Financial Secretary talked about the enormous financial drop, as compared with last year. I was not quite clear as to what he said, and I want to go back from this year to last year. When we come to consider the total Vote of £196,700,000, there is a decrease

of £58,375,000 on last year's Estimate, or of £78,385,000 if we include the Supplementary Estimates. When we look closely we find that of the terminal charges, the money spent on clearing up the aftermath of war, money from which the Navy will not materially benefit in the year to come, only £11,500,000 is to be spent, whereas, last year, the sum was £80 million. The sum to be spent effectively on the Navy this year is, therefore, only £10 million less than last year, despite the fact that last year we had a Vote A of 492,000, and that this year Vote A is some 300,000 less. I can assure the House that we on these benches do not begrudge this sum, but we wish to be assured that the money is being well spent, and we would like to have far more detailed evidence of the things on which the money is being spent. We had all the details in the Estimates of 1938, to which this year was compared, but we have had very few details this year.

I now turn to Vote A, and I notice that this year the number is 192,665, including Royal Marine Police. I understand that this number will reach its maximum next month, and fall to 182,000 by March of next year. I was glad to hear that recruitment for Regular engagements had been going better with the Navy than with the other Services, because this is all important. The fewer who come to the Navy from compulsory recruitment the better, for the obvious reason that it will ease the manning position. But we are anxious that there should be no wastage of manpower. I was glad to hear the Minister of Defence say, last week, that special committees were to be set up in each Service to look into this vital question. But one cannot help feeling anxious that out of 314 captains on the active list only 65 are serving afloat, and that out of 532 commanders only 100 have seagoing appointments. I

wish the Admiralty could say that more of these officers are commanding units of the Fleet at sea.

We hear of the Fleet being held in reserve, and ships being laid up or being handed over to other countries. Speaking of the latter, I would like the Civil Lord, if he is in a position to do so, to let us know whether a final decision has been reached about handing over the "Ajax" and the "Achilles" to India. The position was left open in another place, and from this side of the House—and, I dare-say, from other quarters, too—we want to be assured that these two ships, which have such glorious histories, will not be taken from us. We should like also to be assured that the large number of ships laid up in reserve are not causing unnecessary misemployment of officers on shore. The Explanatory Memorandum states that active steps are being taken to avoid this by the use of protective paint and dessicants. I must confess that I am rather vague as to what "dessicants" are. Does it mean the methods used in America, where they are covering gun mountings with a light fabric, like a cocoon, and then spraying with protective paint? Is that the method being used here? I understand it is being used most successfully in America, and that it releases a far greater number of men than would otherwise be possible.

Is it only the manpower situation that is keeping so many ships out of active commission? I was shocked to read, in the newspaper, that when the Home Fleet returned from its last spring cruise, in the Mediterranean, it comprised only one battleship, one aircraft carrier, two cruisers, and one destroyer flotilla. Are these really all the ships that we could man for the Home Fleet on such an occasion? What a contrast it is from prewar days. For the same cruise in

1938 we had five battleships, two battle cruisers, six cruisers, two aircraft carriers, three destroyer flotillas, and one submarine flotilla. In addition, the Mediterranean Fleet itself was nearly as great in tonnage, and contained far more ships.

The Explanatory Memorandum refers to the disposition of the Fleet, bases and depots, but it does not say what Fleets, or squadrons, are in commission, nor what bases are in use even in home waters. What is likely to be the fate of the magnificent base at Rosyth? We brought this base up to date at a cost of vast expenditure during the war, and I still believe that a great base in the north will solve many of the recruiting problems which the Navy may have to face. What is the position in the Mediterranean? Are Malta and Gibraltar our only bases? What about the Eastern Mediterranean? With Alexandria handed over to the Egyptians, and Haifa likely to pass into the hands of the United Nations, where can our Fleet operate from East of Malta? Do the Government contemplate a base in Cyprus? I would like to join with the Financial Secretary in offering our praise and gratitude to the men of the Fleet for the magnificent, difficult, and patient work that they have had to do in connection with affairs in Palestine, and other troubles in, the Eastern Mediterranean. I assure the Civil Lord that the questions I am asking are not being asked out of idle curiosity. The position of our bases, and their distances from each other, have a vital bearing on the type and number of ships we keep in commission.

I should now like to come to naval aviation, and to say that I am glad that the Financial Secretary spoke as he did about it, but from what I am told—and I should like to know whether my information is correct—there are only

two ports in the United Kingdom where aircraft can be wheeled directly on to the decks of aircraft carriers. One, I understand, is on the Clyde, and the other is in Northern Ireland. The rapid embarkation of aircraft is of the utmost importance these days, and I commend, for the attention of the Admiralty, the new United States Navy Yard, at Norfolk, Virginia, where there is an airfield integral with the dockyard. Aircraft can land there, and taxi straight on to their ships. I hope that possibilities of this sort will not be overlooked in this country, especially in the replanning of Portsmouth and Devonport. In the case of Portsmouth, I believe that it would not be impossible to lay out a landing strip off the end of Whale Island. I should be grateful if the Civil Lord would look into these points.

I am glad to see that the Fleet Air Arm is being re-equipped with British types of aircraft, and if the Civil Lord could tell us what they are I am sure it would be of interest to the House. May the House also be told what the facilities are, in the present straitened circumstances of the Fleet, for adequate deck-landing training and practice? I know that these are technical questions, and that other speakers can probably say more about them than I can, but I mention them because, while it is apparent that the air side of the Navy is receiving increasing attention, we should like to be reassured that our pilots get plenty of experience flying on and off carriers at sea.

I come to the question of Reserves. We welcome the recent statement that R.N.V.R. air-squadrons are to be formed. I am certain that they will be a useful reserve, and will be much appreciated by ex-air branch personnel. I was interested in what the Financial Secretary said about the R.N.V.R. today. The reconstitution of R.N.V.R. training

divisions is welcomed in all quarters but I hope that the enrolment figures of ratings will show a considerable improvement. The maintenance of R.N.R. and R.N.V.R. reserves cannot be too much emphasised, and I hope that the Admiralty will push on quickly with recruiting while there is a large number of skilled instructors ready at hand for this work. Let them get going with all speed while we have the opportunity, and while these instructors retain their up-to-date skill. Above all it is good psychologically for other countries to know that we have strong Reserves behind us.

The Financial Secretary said that he was grateful for the help of the Sea Cadets. When the Navy Estimates of last year were discussed the Financial Secretary said that the Admiralty attached the greatest importance to the further development of the Cadets and Sea Scouts. In another place, we were assured that the position of the Sea Cadets was being well maintained. That does not seem to fit in with what the Financial Secretary said today. When we come to the decrease of £36,900 in the grant to them, the Financial Secretary said that it was due to smaller numbers. So it does not look as if the further development about which he spoke last year, is taking place. The position seems rather muddled, and I should be grateful if the Civil Lord would explain it.

Now I turn to the scientific services. We are both glad to see an increase on the Estimate of £1,391,000 over last year. Both the First Lord last year and the Financial Secretary referred to the importance of this work, and rightly, drew attention to the economy and increased efficiency which results from it. We were therefore most disappointed, the other day, when the Supplementary

Estimates were presented, to find that despite the First Lord's words, with humble encouragement from myself last year, and the pledge given by me on behalf of the Admiralty two years ago, last year's Estimate was under-spent by nearly £1 million. In the Debate on the Supplementary Estimates, we were ruled out of Order by you, Mr. Speaker, when we wanted to discuss this matter, and I should be glad if we could have an answer tonight. Last year, I asked that the excellent work done by personnel on research should be continued. The Civil Lord was just about to answer me when He was interrupted by an hon. and gallant Member from the Liberal benches, and I did not get my answer. I wonder, now that a year has passed, whether we can have that answer today. I believe it is most important work because fitting the man for the right job results in more efficient work from him. Personnel research is largely employed in the Services and in industry in America and industry in this country is very interested in it. I hope that the Civil Lord will be able to give a good report of its progress in the Royal Navy.

My last question deals with accommodation and the Government plans for rebuilding barracks and the provision of married quarters. I know these well and I am not defending any one party nor imputing blame to any one Government, when I say that the living standards in these barracks are recognised to be far below the standard required for health let alone comfort. I am glad to hear that the Admiralty intend to push on with the work of establishing married quarters and particularly married quarters abroad, because as the Financial Secretary said none of these free passages are available to the wives and children of the men unless there is accommodation

available when they get there. What I cannot understand is why Vote 10 B (a) and (b) is only £1,642,500 and when we add Vote C we find the new estimate of expenditure is £6,183,000 which is less than last year which totalled £6,202,000. Since the cost of labour and materials have increased it surely looks as if less building is to be done in the coming year than was the case in the previous year. This is the Civil Lord's own Department and I would be grateful if we could have some explanation of the figures which do not seem to tally with the hopes the Financial Secretary gave to us this afternoon.

I have offered some criticisms and asked a great number of questions and those questions would not have been so numerous had we had an adequate explanation in the White Paper on Defence, adequate Estimates and the Navy List. But I hope that the Admiralty realises that the first aim of those of us in asking these questions and making these criticisms is to be constructive and helpful to a Service which is looked upon with pride and affection by the great majority of right hon. and hon. Members in this House. The period of war has brought about a much keener appreciation of the interdependence of each Service on the other two. The high degree of inter-Service co-operation which has been achieved has resulted, we all know, in greatly increased efficiency and economy in the use of manpower and of equipment.

It is difficult to consider any of these Services in isolation, but it is still true despite the changes in the range and use of weapons that the function of the Royal Navy remains the same—to keep open and guard our lines of communication. Whether we have to do that alone or in conjunction with certain countries allied to us, or as we

devoutly hope as part of our duties under the aegis of U.N.O., our position is still an island off the coast of Europe, dependent on overseas trade for our existence in peace and upon unhindered traffic of supplies in time of war. This is a position which is unique and until the possibility of those dangers to our communications pass for ever, it is the duty of this Parliament and of all Parliaments to ensure that we have the necessary Forces at our disposal to protect them. To do this we must have adequate sea power. Whether we wield that power on the surface of the sea or in the air we shall do much of it through the agency of the Royal Navy. Let us not forget the lesson we have learned from the past and especially from the last century that, if Peace is to be kept, the means to wage war must be in the hands of those who hate war.

4.50 p.m.

Mr. Austin (Stretford)

The hon. Gentleman the Member for Hereford (Mr. J. P. L. Thomas), who has opened for the Opposition, always speaks with great authority on naval matters and is always most interesting. His past office and his very genial character always make it a pleasure to listen to him. In fact, I found myself agreeing with almost all he had to say and particularly the absence of detailed information in the Estimates and of a Navy List. I see no earthly reason why two years after the end of the war there should not be publication of a Navy List. Where I would quarrel with the hon. Member would be in his rather chary welcome of the very fine exposition of the Estimates by the Financial Secretary. It seemed to me that he quarrelled not with the figures but with the spirit and the content that was

contained in my hon. Friend's speech, which was certainly welcomed on this side of the House, because it revealed for the first time in the history of the Navy the realisation that justice ought to be done to the lower deck. This is the first step in that direction and accordingly we welcome it.

Two facts stand out in regard to the present Navy Estimates in contrast with previous years. Firstly, if one refers to the discussions at the Naval Disarmament Conference or the recent "Documents on British Foreign Policy" published by the Stationery Office, one always finds negotiations and arguments in abundance regarding the parity of naval power and the respective tonnages to be allowed. Indeed, it would not be out of place to refer the House to the 1935 Agreement reached with Germany whereby that nation was permitted to have parity in submarines and of one-third of our surface craft tonnage. All that is absent today. There are two major naval forces in the world today—ourselves and the U.S.A.—and accordingly we have no reason to quarrel with other nations as to what tonnage should be laid down. That does not mean that there should not be some limitation. There has been some limitation but we do not know it and perhaps next year the Estimates will have more information, the absence of which has been rightly emphasised by the hon. Member for Hereford.

The second point which stands out in contrast to prewar years is that at last it has become fairly clear that the Fleet Air Arm has come into its own. In fact, in the explanatory statement the Admiralty say: The aircraft carrier is now second to none among the fighting ships of the Royal Navy. Bearing in mind the comment I made last year on the "Repulse," the "Prince of Wales," the "Scharnhorst"

and the "Gneisnau," this transformation is very welcome. Last year I referred to the Fleet Air Arm as the Cinderella of the Services. This year perhaps it has become the fairy queen, and I hope it will not upset too much the battleship mentality, if I may say so, of the hon. and gallant Member for South Paddington (Vice-Admiral Taylor) or those who think like him at the Admiralty.

To say that the aircraft carrier has come into its own, is not quite enough, because we might tend to think in terms of the aircraft carrier coming to stay. It may shortly be, that the present aircraft carrier and its species may become obsolescent, but what I am concerned with is that if we have injected into the veins of the Admiralty something of the reforming nature which we know and value, we must keep them up to date on the aircraft carrier because in the next war the carrier may be out of date. I hope, of course, that never again will there ever be another war, and I hope the statement by General Eisenhower of putting himself out of a job will come true, but if we are to have a Navy let us have as good a Navy as possible. Trevelyan touches on this point in his "History of England" with an admirable illustration. He refers to the Navy at the time of Francis Drake and refers to the invention of the cannon bearing ship as the weapon of the broadside, and he adds that Drake saw such a vessel as a mobile battery whereas the Spaniards looked on the warship as useful for boarding only.

That illustrates the point I want to make, that the Navy must not be thinking in terms of the past but rather of modernisation all the time. There are so many new developments about which we know nothing. I notice that an aircraft carrier was launched recently at Belfast and it

is still on the secret list. We have not been told anything yet about it, but in the last war there were certain developments like rocket-aided take off from ships, and pilotless aircraft. Now we may have the use of atomic energy and in various ways the use of projectiles and who knows what that may lead to. We may see the fantastic development of a three-weapon combination. That is underwater, on the surface and in the air. All these things must be borne in mind by the Admiralty in its scientific research.

I should like now to touch on the question of manpower. Some two or three weeks ago my hon. Friend gave an assurance to the hon. and gallant Member for South Paddington with regard to the Polish Navy personnel in this country who would be admitted into the Royal Navy. I know that the Navy is the most popular of the three Services and it is a very natural popularity in my view, but I hope that the entry of our own fellows into the Royal Navy will be in no way prejudiced by the entry of others from the previous Polish Navy. In passing, regarding the difficulty that confronts the Financial Secretary in regard to recruiting for R.N.V.R. ratings—he is quite satisfied with regard to the recruiting of officers—may I say that the recent treatment by the Admiralty of Lieutenant J. T. Wardle, about whom I have a Question down tomorrow, who at a court martial was dismissed his ship amongst other things for having Christmas dinner with the ratings, in no way tends to popularise the R.N.V.R. amongst the ratings and is no indication of that democratisation of the Royal Navy which hon. Members on this side wish to see. I am interested to see what answer will be given because there may be unknown factors of which we do not know.

The Financial Secretary contrasted manpower between the present-day forces and the forces existing in 1938 or directly after the last war. He gave us a financial comparison between now and just after the last war, but when we look at the manpower figures we see that they are something between 191,000 and 192,000, whereas in March, 1920, there were 130,000—almost the same period after the last war. In March, 1938, there were 111,000. Although I would like to see a reduction in the Armed Forces, particularly in the Army, if I may say so, on a Navy Estimate Debate, and although I would like to see a reduction in the personnel in the naval Forces when it can be arranged, I really do feel that there cannot be a "naval mutiny" in the House on the question of reduction in personnel because of this one factor—that the battleship has been replaced as a striking force by the central task force consisting of the aircraft carrier.

There are obviously new dispositions and new commitments with regard to naval strategy which would need a certain period of trial and error in the Admiralty before it can define its actual requirements in regard to manpower. Accordingly I cannot really ask for a reduction in manpower at the moment, but there is this one point, that the Financial Secretary made it known to the House that the percentage of manpower ashore was something like 44 per cent. Making allowance for the maintenance of aircraft, which is a tremendous item, and other factors I am still not at all sure that we are not suffering from inflated manpower ashore. I think it is a very significant factor and one of the utmost importance. It is, in fact, if I may say so, demoralising to discipline to have too many men hanging about an establishment with very little to do. I understand that the Minister of Defence

has appointed certain committees to go into the question of surplus manpower, but if they are committees appointed from within a Department, how ruthless will they be with regard to cutting down in that Department. I would rather have seen the introduction of people outside to examine the question. Perhaps the hon. Gentleman will give that matter his attention?

My next point was touched upon by my hon. and gallant Friend the Member for Chelmsford (Wing-Commander Millington) in the Debate yesterday to some degree. It concerns the Royal Navy and the Royal Air Force integration. It is my view that if we are to see an increased personnel associated with aircraft in every form—it may be 50,000 today, something between a quarter and a third of the total personnel in the Navy—obviously we need closer co-operation and co-ordination with the R.A.F. I am not sure whether this is being developed. For instance, men who learn to fly, whether for naval aviation or for the R.A.F., must go through the elementary training. They must learn on a Tiger Moth and then go on to a Proctor or an Oxford trainer or some other machine. Why is it not possible to standardise flying training in the R.A.F. and the naval air arm up to the time when deck landing practice becomes necessary? In my view it would develop the very necessary sense of cooperation between members of the two Services and would also affect some economies.

That brings me to the point regarding the R.N.V.R. air arm which has recently been formed. I put down a Question to the Financial Secretary recently regarding the lodger accommodation provided by the R.A.F. for the Navy and it is true, as he told me in reply, that certain accommodation is provided. But if we are to have an

R.N.V.R. air arm it will not be able to subsist on a quota of a fortnight's flying a year. From what I know of the R.N.V.R. personnel who flew in the last war they will need continuous and regular training something on the lines envisaged by the R.A.F. for their reserve. What I suggest is that the Admiralty should make approaches to the R.A.F. with a view to extending this lodger accommodation. We know that landing fields for the Navy are limited; there are perhaps something like 20 air stations in Great Britain. But there are infinitely more R.A.F. landing fields and if a naval airman lives in a certain area of the country where there is an R.A.F. training ground on which training facilities are provided for the R.A.F., surely it is reasonable to make some arrangements between the R.A.F. and the Admiralty whereby the naval airman will be allowed to fly almost every week-end on an R.A.F. ground if he wants to and not wait for his fortnight's service per annum with the R.N.V.R.

Another point which seems important to me but which does not often receive attention it certainly merits concerns the service and maintenance of aircraft. This has a very tragic background because in the war there had to be some sort of improvisation and many lives were lost. There was not the inspection of aircraft that should have taken place and there certainly was not inspection comparable with that which took place with regard to R.A.F. aircraft. That is because of the infinite superiority of the A.I.D. in servicing aircraft and in keeping them up to standard as against the improvisation of the N.A.I. which, as I understand it is composed of naval officers who undergo a course of training in collaboration with A.I.D. but are not up to the standard of those trained men

with many years of experience of the A.I.D. In fact, I would say in passing that it is surely not good from the point of view of discipline, production or whatever factor you will, to have naval officers installed in a disciplinary way over civilian personnel repairing naval aircraft.

Here I am fortified by the answer given me recently to a Question when the Financial Secretary told me that the future of the N.A.I. had not been finalised. If it has not been finalised may I suggest that the future repair and maintenance of aircraft for the Navy should also come under the authority of the A.I.D., and that naval officers be removed from disciplinary contact with civilian personnel? It is my considered opinion that one cannot have a naval officer in any way administering discipline over a civilian.

If I may touch for a moment on long-term policy I should like to point out that I have recently had cause to study an Air Ministry Order, No. 1026/46 issued by the R.A.F., which refers to the formation of a technical branch. I think we must all recognise that if we have flying sailors we have also sailors who are nothing but engineers. There must be increasing importance attached to engineering in the Services. The R.A.F. considered this problem before the war and in the light of their experience during the war decided on a formation of a technical branch. It embodies certain branches, armaments, engineering, electrical engineering, and so on, but it does not interfere with the structure of the Service because it appoints certain personnel of the technical branch to a very high level who will integrate and co-ordinate all the technical branches concerned. For instance, we are concerned in the Navy with engine room, electrical, ordnance, aircraft, and

accordingly I have two Questions down tomorrow—I am rather sorry that they could not have been dealt with earlier—the first of which is to ask the Parliamentary Secretary whether, in view of the increasing importance in the R.N. of engineering in all branches concerned with ships, gunnery, equipment and aircraft, he will consider the setting up of a special technical branch composed of specialists from each section as has been done recently by the R.A.F. as set out in A.M.O. A1026/1946. The second Question asks the Parliamentary Secretary whether he will consider the representation of a senior officer of the technical branches on the Board of the Admiralty. The composition of the Board of Admiralty, as I see it is the First Lord, my two hon. Friends on the Front Bench, the five Sea Lords, the Secretary and one or two other personnel making a total of 11. In the light of our experience of regarding engineering and technical application of all kinds would it be too much to ask now that we should now have on the Board of Admiralty one gentleman, a senior officer of a technical branch, who would be able to collate the information concerning every form of engineering and every technical problem that concerns either the first Sea Lord on naval strategy, the second Sea Lord on personnel, or the fifth Sea Lord on naval aviation. Amongst others would it not be much more efficient if we had on the Board of Admiralty a representative of all the technical branches integrated. I submit this very humbly and I do not suppose I shall obtain very much satisfaction today, but it is my view that with increasing recognition of the importance of engineering and scientific skill ultimately some such organisation will have to be set up in the Admiralty.

That is all I have to say because I know that a great many other hon. Members wish to speak, and I apologise for detaining the House, but I should like to refer to what I said in the beginning and while sincerely thanking the Admiralty for their recognition—tardy though it is—of the rights of the lower deck I hope that it is only a first step. I know that to many men it would be an augury of a better future in the Royal Navy and that it will go a long way towards providing satisfaction and towards recruiting the personnel required in the Navy. In fact, it is the first realisation of some sense of democracy in what has, in the past, been the most reactionary of all our Services.

5.11 p.m.

Commander Noble (Chelsea)

I am sure we are all very glad that the hon. Gentleman the Member for Stretford (Mr. Austin) caught your eye this afternoon, Mr. Speaker. He always speaks with a knowledge of the Service and, I think, with great affection, especially for naval aviation. I agree very much with what he said about the working parties announced by the Parliamentary Secretary and that it would be better if they came from outside. With regard to the suggestion of a technical officer on the Board of Admiralty to which he devoted a certain amount of his speech, I should like to suggest—although the Civil Lord will no doubt take the point up later—that the Controller performs that duty with a large staff to advise him.

I should like first of all to reinforce what was said by my hon. Friend the Member for Hereford (Mr. J. P. L. Thomas) about the disadvantage we are in today in debating the main issues of these Estimates. We have

asked many Questions in this House in the last year in an endeavour to discover the strength of the Fleet. As my hon. Friend said, that information is no doubt given in the Navy List which is widely publicised to other Service Departments, and no doubt the size of the fleet is also being given every day in the Military Affairs Committee in New York to other countries of the United Nations. I think the time has really come when this House should be informed. Today, in the speech of the Financial Secretary, I am sure we were all very interested in the domestic details he gave at the beginning. I am sure we were all interested to know that we had been selling chain cable and diving gear, and to learn of the many transfers of ships to our Allies—of which we knew before, incidentally, because the information had already been given in reply to a question in another place. But what we really wanted to know was the size of the Fleet. Perhaps the Civil Lord is keeping that for the end? I am afraid that I am not at all confident. To those, however, who have some idea of the size of the Navy we had at the end of the war, and who subtract from that figure the transfers of which we have learned, there is no doubt that we have an adequate Fleet, but it is the maintenance and modification of that Fleet to which I should like to refer.

I was very surprised that there was no reference in either the Estimates or the statement to the atom bomb test at Bikini—of which I was also an observer—but I am very glad they were referred to by the Parliamentary Secretary. In the Report published in America by the President's Evaluation Committee, which was appointed by him to go to both tests, they stated on 30th July last year: The results of both tests are already under study by the Bureau of Ships, and will undoubtedly point the way

to changes in ships' size, design and structure, both above and below the waterline. We are very glad to have the assurance today that that is also being studied by our bureau of ships, and no doubt they are also studying whether we shall, in the near future, see ships driven by atomic power.

That brings me to the scientific services referred to in these Estimates. We are glad to see a net increase of about £1,500,000 for the expenses of research establishments and laboratories and of scientific research. There is also a slight overall increase on the amount for all these services put together. It must not be forgotten that in the recent Supplementary Estimate these services were underspent by about £1 million, and we were not in Order in discussing the saving. I only hope that when the Supplementary Estimates are printed next year, we shall not find ourselves in exactly the same position. I am not at all encouraged in that hope by the opening sentences of the paragraph on scientific research and development. The accompanying statement begins: "Within the limits of resources available." That is not really any great encouragement that a great effort is to be made in scientific research, "within the limits of the resources available." I think it is the most important Vote in the Estimates. This increase for scientific services has to be read in conjunction with Vote 8, in which some £85 million is being voted for ship-buildings, repairs and maintenance, which, incidentally, is a decrease of about £10 million on last year. I should like to feel that the figure of £85 million has been very carefully balanced against the much smaller figure we are now voting for scientific research. It would be very interesting to know, in the early days when these Estimates were being prepared, what these figures looked

like, and to see where the cut has been applied, and whether the amounts put in by the departments concerned were very much higher than the figures we are voting today.

We have to consider very carefully which is the more important, maintenance and modification, or scientific research. I hope we shall be given an assurance by the Civil Lord that we are able to do both. I again hark back to the paragraph I quoted, which begins with the words, "Within the limits of resources available." Especially do I think this is important, in view of the progress that has been made with weapons in the last few years, and in view of the progress being made now. It would seem, if our resources are limited, as hinted in this statement, that we have to consider whether we should have a long-term plan, a short-term plan, or both. I hope we shall have both. Supposing we have to decide on one or the other. If we adopt a long-term plan, we must decide to concentrate our efforts now on having a fleet fully up to date, with all modern equipment, in, let us say, 10 years' time, and until that time we must accept our present equipment with minor modifications as being sufficient to fight in any war which might take place. On the other hand, if we adopt the short-term plan, rather like we have been doing in the last few years, of bringing our present equipment up to date, we may find, in about five or six years' time, that all our equipment is very much out of date and we have not got the effort or research available to make the jump ahead we could make now. With regard to new weapons, which have already been referred to by the Secretary of State for Air in yesterday's Debate, great progress is being made. Progress with offensive weapons is probably

moving much faster than progress with defensive weapons.

I would now like to say a word about the Royal Naval Scientific Service, to which reference is made in the Estimates. I always have understood that naval scientists have a great name in the world. I hope we shall continue to attract in this service some of the best men from the scientific Civil Service, and that this Naval Scientific Service will be put on the map to such an extent that some of the best men from the universities will be encouraged to join it. I also hope that the men who are in it now will be encouraged to remain. There can be no delay in this matter, as there are many other jobs open to these men. Before I leave the material side, I would emphasise what I am sure is receiving great attention, and that is, in view of the economic position of this country, how important it is that any equipment which is in limited supply must be very carefully balanced. I am sure there are competitors in all branches of the Navy for certain types of equipment in short supply, and there are, no doubt, competitors among all three Services for the same equipment. No doubt the committee under Sir Henry Tizard deals with that side, and I hope we can be assured that anything in short supply goes to those places which need it most.

I should now like to say something about personnel. From the figures under Vote A of about 191,000, it seems that we have adequate personnel to man the Fleet. May I be allowed to congratulate the Admiralty, in passing, on the demobilisation job they have done? Since we met last year to discuss the Estimates, some 300,000 men and women have been demobilised. Members in all parts of the House will agree with me that we have probably had fewer letters

from our constituents complaining about demobilisation in the Navy than from the other two Services. That, of course, reflects on the organisation of the Admiralty and on the organisation throughout the Service. I am very glad the Parliamentary Secretary gave us some information about how the personnel is being employed. He told us that a quarter of the Navy was employed on naval aviation, and that we had never had so many shore commitments, which was due to all this complicated machinery and equipment, meaning that more shore training was required. I hope, in the near future, we may be told some more about this. My right hon. Friend the Member for Woodford (Mr. Churchill) referred the other day to the fact that it is very dangerous if the tail grows faster than the teeth, and this was referred to again in the Debate on the Army Estimates. I hope we can be given some figures, now we know roughly the reason for so many men being ashore, to make us certain everything is all right.

I was told the other day, in answer to a Question, and it was also quoted by the hon. Member for Hereford, that one-fifth of the captains and commanders are serving at sea, which means that four-fifths are ashore. That is the sort of thing which, unless explained to the general public, is rather misleading. They read that on the one hand the Home Fleet has only one battleship, one aircraft carrier and one or two other ships, and on the other hand, that we have 191,000 men in the Navy. Obviously, they want to know where they all are. While on the subject of personnel, I wish to ask one or two questions about national service men. Are any national service men included in this figure of 191,000, and if so, how many? How many additional personnel are required in the Navy

to train the national service men? I hope the Navy will be put on exactly the same basis as the other two Services in regard to commissions for officers, otherwise, if they have any choice, national service men may choose another Service.

In regard to Vote 7 and Reserves, I am glad to see an increase of £215,000. Here again in a recent Supplementary Estimate, when I was ruled very severely out of Order for raising this subject, there was a decrease of some £100,000. I hope this increase will be maintained. I think the figure we are voting for the R.N.V.R. is too low. On page 73 of the Estimates, we are told that such headings as maintenance of headquarters, armaments stores, et cetera, do not come under this Vote but under the appropriate Votes for these headings. We should be assured that the bid the Reserves make for this equipment and stores receives an equal hearing with the others,' who may have bigger guns when making their bids. I hope the Reserves will get their fair share. It is particularly important at the moment, owing to the fact that the equipment in many R.N.V.R. headquarters must be out of date as a result of the war. As these divisions expand to a much larger size than before the war, more equipment and more up to date equipment will be required, and this will inevitably mean some of the headquarters will be too small, and bigger headquarters will be required. I wonder whether the two ships at present allocated to the London Division of the R.N.V.R. will be big enough to hold all the equipment they should have, if they are to do the training in gunnery and signals they are required to do. When national service men go into the Reserve, is consideration to be given to having some inland R.N.V.R. headquarters? That would make

the whole problem simpler, otherwise people may have to do their training a long way from home. If there is a river, it would of course be very helpful. A man who has done a period in the Navy should be able to continue his training in weapons or material on shore, and inland if necessary.

I would now like to say a word or two about the size of the R.N.V.R. The Parliamentary Secretary referred to it.

Apparently, there are to be 1,600 officers and 9,000 men.

The Parliamentary Secretary gave the figure for officers, which he had already given to me in answer to a Question last week, and said that the figure for the men was very much below the 9,000, but he did not say by how much.

Actually, I understand that, at the moment, instead of there being 9,000 men for the R.N.V.R., there are only 286, which seems to be an unbelievably low figure. When one considers the large number of wartime sailors who manned the fleet at the end of the war, and who fully deserve the many tributes that have been paid to them, does it really seem right that only 286 of them should be in the R.N.V.R.? It seems to me that a very great opportunity has been missed. I can quite understand that many men, on being demobilised, want to get away from it all, but there must be an equally large number who, if suitably thanked for their services and given suitable encouragement, would now be on the books of the permanent R.N.V.R. I should like an assurance that this encouragement was in fact given. I do not think that it was.

Earlier in the Debate, the Financial Secretary referred to officers who had temporary commissions during the war now being considered for permanent commissions. There was a paragraph in the "Daily Telegraph" on this subject

this morning, in which the case was put forward that men who served in the ranks in the R.N.V.R. before the war, and then got temporary commissions, cannot go back to the ranks. Therefore, if there is no room for those officers, how are they to get back into the R.N.V.R.? I hope that point will be considered. I do not think there is any reason, except a financial one, why every officer who had a temporary commission during the war should not now come into List II, that is, every officer who is suitable. I should like to make a suggestion with regard to the permanent officers of the R.N.V.R., in connection with Lists 1 and 2. I understand that promotion under List 1, especially to commander and captain, is very slow. In fact, an hon. Member beside me says that it is practically non-existent. I suggest that, after an officer on List 1 has done a certain period of service as a captain or a commander, he should then be transferred to List 2, where the number should be increased, and so allow someone else working in his division to be promoted to either commander or captain. I put that forward as a suggestion.

With regard to training of R.N.V.Rs. at sea, I think that, before the war, their training at sea was both vague and spasmodic, and was left very much to the individual commanding officer to decide what training was carried out. I think that, in future the Admiralty should lay down the training for R.N.V.Rs. and other reserves at sea. Responsibility must be given to young officers when they go to sea for training, and a rating must be given experience at sea in a job that he is being trained for on shore. Nothing is more discouraging than for a young officer to go to sea for training, and to spend all the time sitting in the wardroom. In the same way, nothing is more

discouraging to a young rating than to spend all his time cleaning bright-work.

With regard to the training of the older R.N.V.Rs., I want to raise a point today which I raised last year. I hope that it will be possible to give some of the older officers in the R.N.V.R. training in such things as D.E.M.S., port control, etc., from year to year, and to promote them according to their ability and their age, so that, in the event of their being required again, they will be able to come forward at once, fully up to date in those subjects for which they are most suitable, and so release other active service officers for other jobs. I feel that it is even more preferable to train officers in this way than, perhaps, to bring a retired naval officer straight back, who may not have done any training or had any connection with the sea for the last 20 years.

Before I sit down, I would like to say one word about the R.N.V.S.R. In the recent announcement of the reinstatement of this Service, a certain amount of amusement was caused by the fact that it implied that there would be no pay, no promotion, no uniform, and, probably, no training.

Mr. Beswick (Uxbridge)

Would the hon. and gallant Gentleman tell me what the initials R.N.V.S.R. stand for?

Commander Noble

They stand for the Royal Naval Volunteer Supplementary Reserve. I am only too ready to oblige the hon. Gentleman. I do not think it is generally realised that, before the war, some of these men were so keen that they used to make

arrangements with private shipping companies to take them to sea and to give them some training, so that they could gain some experience at sea. The only experience which they ever got in H.M. ships was solely due to the initiative of certain commanders-in-chief, who arranged for them to go to sea in their own local flotillas. In this connection, I should like to mention the Colonies, and to suggest that consideration should be given as to whether the smaller Dominions and the Colonies can absorb the full number of volunteers that there might be in this connection. I know of cases where, at the beginning of this late war, men could not volunteer in their own country who, when they came here, were not given a very encouraging reception. In regard to the Colonies, such as the West Indies, there would seem to be great scope for local R.N.V.Rs., and, in the event of war, it would seem quite unnecessary to send more than a handful of trained personnel from this country to such areas.

I wish to say one word on the R.N.R., on behalf of skippers who have done such very good work in small ships, and to whom, I know, the Civil Lord would like to pay a tribute. I understand that these officers, if appointed to bigger ships, are not able to be promoted above the rank of skipper-lieutenant. I hope we might be assured that consideration will be given to their being promoted. I have raised a large number of points in this Debate, but I know that the Civil Lord will accept them in the spirit in which they have been made, and will realise that I have raised them because I have a great affection for the Navy, as I know he has. If he is not able to answer them all tonight, though I particularly ask that he will consider the modification in maintenance of the Fleet and the future of the reserves, I

hope that he will give them every consideration during the year that lies ahead.

5.40 p.m.

Mr. Blyton (Houghton-le-Spring)

I intervene in this Debate as one who spent the early part of

his life in His Majesty's Navy, although I never got higher than the lower deck and only reached the exalted position of an able seaman. I welcome the statement made by the Financial Secretary about giving increased promotion to the quarter deck from the lower deck. I remember that, while doing my torpedo training on H.M.S. "Vernon," the chief petty officer, with many years of service, told me that to get on to the quarter deck was like looking for a needle in a haystack. Men who had done years of service had to train young officers and make them proficient in their jobs, with no particular hope for themselves of rising from their respective positions.

There is another side in relation to the lower deck. During the war one young chap with a school-leaving certificate, with credits and two special distinctions, applied for a commission in the Signals. Everything went swimmingly with him when he was before the board, until he was asked what was his father's occupation. When he told them that his father was a political agent, they asked him for which party. He told them for the Labour Party, and he never got a commission. One wonders whether, if he had said the Tory Party, he would have received a

commission. I hope that the new increase in promotion from the lower deck will give an incentive to the men to study, and to try to reach higher positions in the Navy, and that the question of parenthood and of the political outlook of their parents will not bar them from getting on to the quarter deck.

I have been approached by the Trades Council in Portsmouth to ask the Financial Secretary if he would inform me what was the total cost of fitting out H.M.S. "Vanguard" for the Royal tour. There seems to be considerable consternation in Portsmouth at what is regarded as wasteful expenditure on this job. In putting this question, I am in no way casting a reflection on their Majesties, but am merely asking the Government to investigate the matter, as the charge is being made that there has been a great waste of labour and material concerning it.

My last point is to deal with what I believe our Government ought immediately to clear up. It is the position at Dartmouth College. If their parents desire them to take up a naval career, boys of 13 are sent to the college. I have had many years' experience in the educational world, and I know that a boy of 13 is hardly of an age to pick his future career. At 13, a boy ought still to be among his little friends in his own locality, and mixing with everybody in school. If we are to raise the school-leaving age to 16, then those boys who are to receive a technical education should have the same equality of opportunity and right to enter the higher places of the Navy, instead of their being kept in the hands of a selected few. In the past, it was found that, in civil life, the secondary schools were only open to children of parents

who could afford to pay. The bank book was the determining factor in getting a higher education. We, on this side of the House, fought tenaciously against that, and for years we have been able to get entry into the high schools of England. But a child can only get into the secondary school on the basis of a comparative examination, based upon ability, and I see no reason why that basis should not be applied to Dartmouth College.

Colonel Crosthwaite-Eyre (New Forest and Christchurch)

It is.

Mr. Blyton

Fees have to be paid, and the ones with the bigger bank books are the ones who can get their sons into Dartmouth College. It is the class position which I am fighting. This state of affairs was vividly illustrated by my right hon. Friend who rose from the lower deck to the rank of commander, when he tried to argue the matter last year. Out of the whole of the State-aided schools in this country, ten scholarships per term—30 per year—are granted for Dartmouth College. The public schools, which are less considerable in number, are given the same number. It means that 50 per cent. of the rich people with fat bank balances, and who are able to pay the fees at the college, can ensure that their sons shall become midshipmen, and shall rise to the quarter deck.

I say to the Front Bench: there can be no apology for this position. The Government ought immediately to clear the matter up, lock, stock and barrel, and give the working class children equality of opportunity to enter the officers' ranks in the Navy.

5.45 p.m.

Captain Marsden (Chertsey)

I listened with the greatest pleasure to the hon. and "gallant" Member for Houghton-le-Spring (Mr. Blyton). He was a member of the Royal Navy, and I hope he retains the same happy recollections of it as other Members have. He has fallen into the usual error concerning the choosing of officers. I have been on many boards choosing officers, and the fellows whom I chose usually did very well. He said that E. question which should not be asked was, "Who are your parents?" As far as I am concerned, that is the first question I always did ask.

Mr. Blyton

I said the question was, "What was your father's occupation?"

Captain Marsden

Well, we come to that naturally in the course of conversation. Why did I do it? For this very reason, that if the candidate had a happy British home background, whether it was in a castle or in a cottage, that was the best background he could have, and that always influenced me in choosing candidates. I have heard Members on the other side say that a candidate has been turned down because he played association football instead of Rugby, or because he had not got a bank balance. What happens is that one opens a conversation merely to get a reaction of the candidate's frame of mind and to discover what he has to say about these things. Consequently, when the candidate is refused he puts it down to something that he

has said. He is entirely wrong. He is refused or accepted on his general attitude. It must be remembered that whatever method is followed in choosing officers in the Royal Navy, it will be quite satisfactory to the officers and to the Royal Navy provided we get the best officers. That leads me to the question of the R.N.V.R., which is very important indeed. The Admiralty have slipped up in not retaining many of these ratings of the R.N.V.R., so many thousands of whom served in the last war. I was very pleased by the Financial Secretary's statement that in the future officers will be chosen from the ranks. That means to say that although they only expect 3,000 to come in as ratings by March next year, yet from those 3,000 the officers of the future will be obtained, so that although recruiting may be slow at the moment and there may be many more officers than men, as the scheme proceeds I have not the slightest doubt that we shall build up the proper numbers.

What I am concerned about are the changed facilities for training, which are most important. The actual facilities are very much hidden, as my hon. and gallant Friend the Member for Chelsea (Commander Noble) said. One cannot pick them out. They are hidden under all sorts of establishments which are under other Votes. It is true there is a fair sum of money for instructors. I hope the Admiralty are keeping up those numerous training batteries and bases around the coast. Then we come to the R.N.R.; I see the Admiralty's difficulties there because those men are professional sailors. Of course, they are very welcome indeed, but they must be taken out of merchant ships and we must make up their numbers in the merchant ships with untrained men. That is a problem. In the last war we had to arm our merchant

ships, and as the R.N.R. men came out we had to train other men to man the guns and defences of the merchant ships. I can quite see the Admiralty's difficulty. If they take the R.N.R. out, the Merchant Service suffers. Whether they take them out of the Merchant Service in time of war or leave them in, they must still be trained. There we come back to the question of the training establishments which were all round the coast during the war. Whether any of them are being demobilised now I do not know; I hope not. The Fleet Reserve, of course, consists of old Service men, and they will be in the same position in which they have always been.

There is a third category of training which is so necessary, and that is for the Merchant Service men. Although the Financial Secretary said nothing about it, when the White Paper speaks about the defence of our shipping routes, the merchant ship very largely defends itself by its own guns manned by its own men. In the Merchant Service now they have got these pools where, when a man at the end of his voyage is paid off the ship's articles, he remains in the pool and awaits further employment. I would like to know whether, under the same rules as existed during the war, after the appropriate leave, he is liable to any form of training or instructions. There again we come to these batteries and training places where the suitable men should undergo gunnery training, so that if a war does come again they are trained and are fit and ready to man the guns of the ships in which they may serve.

That brings me to the point to which I have been working up. Have the Admiralty considered certain territorial areas for these various types of reserves of all sorts, and for merchant seamen? I do not see why there should not

be a south-western area, naturally under the commander-in-chief, and a South-Eastern area, and one in Scotland. We could never leave out Scotland; there must be a training place up there. I ask the Civil Lord to consider whether all these training groups can be brought more or less together. It is rather redundant and causes overlapping to have different places, different instructors, different commanding officers and so on, but if there were centres in certain places so that they were easily accessible for the fishermen and for those who work on or near the sea, it would be more satisfactory all round.

I was hoping the Financial Secretary would be here. I cannot give him my overwhelming congratulations on his speech, because his view is still restricted. I think his horizon is limited. I do not think he knows what the Navy is really for. I find no fault with the matters on which he touched, but they did not really concern the Navy itself, and, indeed, he could not very well deal with many of the main factors. I wonder if he knows—he must know, but he will not tell us—what our Navy is. What Navy have we got? We do not know. Everybody else knows except us. Is it because of security reasons? That has been hinted at. The only security for not saying what Navy we have now is because we are ashamed of its smallness. When it was a big strong Navy we almost flaunted it to the world so that if one small ship went anywhere with the white ensign flying it would be known that the whole strength and power of the Royal Navy was behind it.

We have had some figures of the number of captains and commanders in sea-going ships. I think we can go closer than that. We have to get this information bit by bit. In all the Royal Navy there are only 61 captains in command

and 43 commanders. That means to say that there are only just on 100 ships flying the white ensign commanded by commanders or above, which gives us some indication of how small the Navy has sunk to. We would like to press the Financial Secretary to give not only the strength of our own Navy but, as always was done prewar, the strength of everybody else's Navy. The answer is the same year after year—"We do not know." Why we are spending £90,000 on naval attachés I do not know, because it is their primary job to find out. I should have thought that there were one or two countries as to which we could have said with some certainty. Surely, Japan and Germany have no navy. We know the exact navy of Italy and other countries, so why can we not have the White Paper containing comparisons, which always was published? The United States Navy is vastly bigger than ours, although they have not got a better Navy. Their Navy will always be bigger.

I am glad to see the Minister of Defence return to his place because I was about to refer to him. Among the numerous incidents of the past year, apparently the Financial Secretary takes no account of what, in my view, is one of the worst incidents which have happened for a long time, and that was the firing by Albania, of all countries, on our ships and the mining of the channel, by which our ships were damaged—I think one sank—and many lives were lost. That was not even mentioned, and I think that is one of the worst things that has happened to us. I can imagine that in the old days, my right hon. Friend the Leader of the Opposition would have had a couple of battleships there next morning, asking why.

Mr. Deputy-Speaker (Mr. Hubert Beaumont)

I do not think I can allow the hon. and gallant Gentleman to continue further on those lines because the Minister will not be able to pursue the subject, nor answer the criticism.

Captain Marsden

He has been on his legs twice, and I think he would refer to the point if you gave him a chance, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I must not pursue that subject, but I will only say that I think other people in the same position would have taken the same action, with the knowledge, of course—although they could not rely on the other side of the House—that when courage and initiative were in question they would receive the support of this side of the House. However, the matter is referred to U.N.O. This may be the critical point on which the whole of our future Navy and fighting Services will depend.

Major Cecil Poole (Lichfield)

Do I understand the hon. and gallant Member to claim a monopoly in courage for the other side of the House?

Captain Marsden

No, I said we appreciated courage, which is quite a different story. There are no conscientious objectors on this side of the House. On this incident to which I have just referred, the whole future strength of our fighting Services will depend. The question is now before U.N.O. What is our position if nothing is done and no action is taken? What will be the position if some action is ordered and nothing is done? What will be the position if Albania is ordered to pay some compensation for the damage she has done and refuses to do so? We must await events and see

what happens. This acceptance of the grave action of the Albanians against us does not reflect a true appreciation of our Royal Navy. The ships were damaged or sunk, the bodies were buried, the pensions were paid and, as far as I can make out, that ends the matter as far as the Financial Secretary is concerned.

The Financial Secretary made some play about the advantages now given to the lower deck of airing their grievances and making suggestions. Of course, that is regularising the position which always obtained in practice. Every man has an officer over him, and he could always go to that officer for help, which he always got. In fact if he was ever before the commander or captain on a charge, the officer of his division always had to attend and would necessarily watch his interests. An hon. Member said something which I thought was a very bad remark indeed. He referred to various things which the Financial Secretary had said, and then he said, "At last, the lower deck will get justice," or words to that effect. The inference of that remark is that up to date they never had had justice. All I can say is that no ordinary person who has been in the Regular Navy, either on the lower deck or on the quarter deck, will agree with a statement of that sort. If the hon. Member means that in the newer ships there are greater facilities for the men, nobody will be more pleased than the officers. The House must understand that all the improvements in the modern ships were on the blue prints and were even being put into construction long before this Government came into power. It is the natural sequence of events.

Major Bruce (Portsmouth, North)

Would the hon. and gallant Member say whether that is true in regard to the proposals for the redistribution of space in ships?

Captain Marsden

I should like to see the actual plans before making any comment on that. Where there is space, nobody would wish not to give the men more accommodation room. One thing that we would object to is, if the officers or men get greater comfort at the risk of minimising the fighting efficiency of the ships, because that is what the ships are for. There is so much one could talk about, but there is one question I should like to get right. There has been a great deal of improvement in the conditions of the lower deck ever since I went to sea. And I think there is only one hon. and gallant Member who has been at sea longer than myself. Those conditions have been improving all the time, and continue to improve.

Reference was made by the hon. Member for Houghton-le-Spring to boys of 13 years of age going to sea. I was at sea when I was just over 15, in a sea-going ship; I slept in a hammock, and had a much harder time than the ordinary seaman of today. But I was very healthy. I think the Civil Lord would agree with me, that the men of the lower deck, and the midshipmen—who rank even inferior to the lower deck in some ships—provided they sleep well and eat well are quite content. Given both those things no sensible man will come along and say he has a grievance about the conditions. I know that today we will pass these Votes. We on this side of the House have always voted for the Navy; hon. Members opposite have not always done so. Although, as on every other occasion, we may criticise and

make suggestions, at any rate we will support this Navy, and a stronger Navy if we can get it.

6.2 p.m.

Mr. Michael Foot (Plymouth, Devonport)

I agree with the hon. and gallant Member for Chertsey (Captain Marsden) on one point, and with other hon. Members who have spoken on that side of the House, in that it would be much better if we had more details and figures about the exact position of the British Navy today. But with regard to the other points the hon. and gallant Member made, I think he takes a rather gloomy view of the situation. He asked to what position the British Navy had sunk, and used similar colourful and disagreeable expressions. I must confess, I am very glad to see pride in the British Navy reviving on the other side of the House. It was only about 10 years ago that a Tory Prime Minister was apparently afraid to take diplomatic action in the Mediterranean because he felt the British Navy, after four years of Tory rule, would not be able to take on the Italian Navy. That was the lowest point to which the reputation of the British Navy sank, I should say, since the days when the Dutch sailed up the Medway two or three centuries ago. It was under a Tory Government that the British Government refused to take diplomatic action, and refused to carry out the pledges they had given to the rest of the world.

The hon. and gallant Member raised the question of the Albanian incident. He knows perfectly well what the answer is, namely, that the world today tries to deal with these matters in a more civilised fashion than was used in days gone by. In just the same way as we have abolished

duelling, in which people indulged in the past, now when one nation has a complaint against another it is agreed that that complaint shall be taken to an international body. That is the sort of way in which it should be properly dealt with. That is the way which has been taken by His Majesty's Government. It is a slur and a slander on the British Navy and the British Government today to say that proper action has not been taken with regard to the Albanian incident. I do not intend to follow the many other arguments which the hon. and gallant Member for Chertsey raised, but I suggest the whole spirit of his speech, and the way in which he dismissed the question of welfare and the treatment of sailors in the last part of his speech, indicates the reason we have had such appalling conditions in the British Navy in years gone by.

The hon. Member for Hereford (Mr. J.P.L. Thomas) said he could not congratulate the Financial Secretary altogether on his speech, because he had introduced some party spirit into the matter. If the absence of party spirit in the Debates in this House has been responsible for the conditions which prevailed in the British Navy until very recently, then I say the more party spirit we have in these Debates on the Estimates and military affairs the better. The hon. and gallant Member for Chertsey said we could not find sailors anywhere in the British Navy who had any complaints against the justice of their conditions. I never heard a more ridiculous and fantastic statement. Anyone who has come from a naval port, who knows the conditions in the Navy, anyone, like my hon. Friend the Member for Huddersfield (Mr. Mallalieu), who knows what the real facts are, knows that to be untrue. Apparently since the last Estimates Debate, when my hon. Friend the Member for Huddersfield made a very

remarkable speech, there has been considerable improvement, and we welcome many of the statements which were made by the Financial Secretary today.

The hon. Member for Hereford mentioned the figures in the Estimates regarding the provision of new barracks. The Civil Lord told us during the last Estimates Debate that he thought the barracks of Devonport ought to be blown up. I hope he still abides by that statement. I agree with the hon. Member for Hereford that there is some discrepancy in the figures in the Estimates, and I hope that point will be cleared up by the Civil Lord when he replies. We should like to be quite sure that these figures in the Estimates do not mean there will be any diminution of this work in the future. Hon. Members on this side of the House were very glad to hear the announcement made by the Financial Secretary in the course of his speech about improvements in dealing with grievances, and about the welfare committees to be established. Other hon. Members will be able to speak with more authority on that subject than I can. However, I believe that is a good step in the right direction.

While on the point of civil liberties in the Navy, I should like to ask the Civil Lord whether he can clear up one small point with regard to courts-martial procedure. There is now sitting a Select Committee inquiring into courts-martial procedure in the Army and the Royal Air Force; and we have been told that the Navy will take account of the findings of that Select Committee when it brings forward its results. But I hope that at the same time the Navy has been inquiring into the procedure which has been adopted in Naval courts-martial. Because although I believe that in some respects the procedure in the Navy is

better than that in the Army or the Air Force, it still leaves very much to be desired.

The Financial Secretary referred to the question of free passages and married quarters. We welcome this. He said—and I hope he will live up to this phrase—that we are determined to end these family tragedies. I wonder whether perhaps later on we can have some more figures on that subject? Could we be told how much has been done, and how many people have benefited from these new plans, some of which were announced by the Admiralty about a year ago? How much, in fact, has been rendered nugatory because there is not any accommodation available to which sailors' wives can be taken? We should like more details on that subject, and a full assurance that they intend—as I am sure the Admiralty is determined to do under the new direction—to press forward with these reforms as quickly as possible.

There was a rather notable omission on this subject from the statement of the Financial Secretary. On 29th May last year, when reference was made to married quarters and the improvements which should be introduced in this respect, it was said then that the Admiralty had schemes under consideration for reducing periods of absence from the United Kingdom, and plans for re-arranging periods of leave and drafting. I hope we can have some details on that subject, and be told whether the Admiralty has been able to make any progress in that respect, because from information I have from a naval constituency, I should say that is probably the biggest grievance of all.

As the Civil Lord knows, there has been considerable correspondence on the subject of long-service naval

pensioners, and the treatment which they are receiving. There are many long service naval pensioners who feel they are getting a bad deal under the present arrangements. There has been very complicated correspondence on the subject, which I have handed to my hon. Friend. A day or two ago the Financial Secretary gave an answer to my hon. Friend the Member for the Drake Division of Plymouth (Mr. Medland) on this subject in which he said at the end: Certain other modifications in the scheme are now being considered to meet grievances which have arisen but as soon as finality has been reached in these various interrelated matters, rapid progress should be possible with actual payments."—[OFFICIAL REPORT, 12th March, 1947; Vol. 434, C. 192.] I wonder whether the Civil Lord, possibly tonight, or at any rate at some time, could give us a much fuller statement altogether, because there is a very real sense of grievance still existing amongst some of these long service naval pensioners.

I now come to my main point. I wish to stress the remarks of the Financial Secretary with regard to the Royal Dockyards. The people of the Royal Dockyards, at Devonport above all, have a special claim on the Admiralty, and are anxious, as the Financial Secretary rightly said, that the tragic experiences which were felt at the end of the last war shall not be repeated. At the end of the 1914–18 war there was no planned effort to maintain work in the dockyards, or in the dockyard cities. As the Financial Secretary rightly said, in Devonport, there were 6,000 unemployed as a result of that planlessness and failure to have any proper scheme for making full use of His Majesty's dockyards. Indeed, after the 1914–18 war it was only after pressure from the trade unions that

certain types of work were directed to the dockyards; and relief came only after many thousands of skilled workmen had been lost to the dockyards and to the service of the Navy. So far as the conduct of the Admiralty now is concerned, there has been a much more intelligent approach to the whole matter.

The Civil Lord paid a most welcome visit to Devonport just over a year ago, when he was able to hear the complaints of the men themselves. He was able, not merely to talk to them and to hear the complaints, but to understand the eagerness of the people in the Devonport dockyard to see that the whole of their equipment was fully used for the benefit not only of the Navy, but of the nation at large. I think it was partly as a result of those experiences and conversations which he had that the Admiralty has been able to initiate the repayment scheme, to which the Financial Secretary referred. It is, as he said, a practical example of public enterprise, and is the most important development which has taken place in the Royal Dockyards in peace time for some 20 years.

The Financial Secretary said that some 5,000 people, divided among the different yards, were now engaged on using Admiralty equipment in the dockyards for producing civilian goods. Perhaps we could be given more details later about exactly what has been produced, and what figure it is hoped to achieve in the next two or three years. It is a real and imaginative approach to the whole problem. It means to say that the existence of the Royal Dockyards need not, in future, be dependent upon a lot of logrolling by hon. Members getting up in this House, or people going along to the Admiralty, to try to press for their own constituency, and having ships built there. It

means that there can be a planned system for making the proper and full use of Admiralty equipment, even though all that equipment is not required to build ships and naval vessels. I certainly welcome that new development.

Whilst the Admiralty are working on those lines, there are some other things they could clear up in the Admiralty dockyards, which I hope they will approach in the same manner. I hope the Admiralty are considering a complete overhaul of the establishment system as it exists in the Royal Dockyards at present. The Admiralty should be sufficiently aware of the bitter feelings aroused by the injustice of this system from the representations that have been repeatedly made by the trade unions over many years on this subject. It is a matter which has been on the agenda of the council, which the Civil Lord attends with trade union representatives, for more than 20 years; and it has arisen again since this war.

I hope something will be done to change that establishment system. It is a system which means that only a small proportion of those who enter at an early age have a chance of getting established at all. It is an utterly indefensible system. It is a system which arouses deep feelings of injustice in the minds of the men. It is unfair as between the industrial and the non industrial staffs. It is a procedure that was introduced in this country about 1834. There was a reference a little while ago to Dr. Johnson's times. It does not go back as far as that, but it is a system which came into operation about the time of the [Reform Bill](#), and it ought to go out of operation with the arrival of a Labour Government into office.

There are other matters of organisation in the dockyards which are completely out of touch with modern industrial conditions. I have here a handbook which gives the regulations governing the dockyards. Someone ought to go through this handbook with the recognition that industrial conditions have changed since the days of Lord Nelson. There is a regulation which says that a man who is discharged for misconduct shall never again be employed in a dockyard or any of its branches. That is a most harsh dictat, especially in ports like Plymouth, where the dockyard is pretty well the only place of employment. I have heard of cases, to which I have drawn the attention of the Admiralty, about this matter. There was, for instance, a man dismissed for selling betting slips in Devonport dockyard. Perhaps he should have been suspended for a period, but he had had ten years' service. Another was dismissed for "turbulent behaviour." I am not quite sure what that is. He also had had ten years' service in the dockyard. I am not complaining against the fact that he may have been dismissed for a period. At any rate, this regulation, which says that a man who is discharged for misconduct shall never again be employed in a dockyard or any of its branches—although I do not think it is operated in quite those terms always—should be scrapped and done away with altogether.

Another says that a man who may be convicted for a serious offence against the law will be liable to immediate dismissal, and this does operate, as the hon. Gentleman knows, because I have corresponded with him about cases arising out of this matter. There was a case of a man whose offence, judging by the amount of the fine imposed on him, was a quite trivial offence; but this regulation operated, and he was dismissed. The Admiralty, I am glad

to say, have reinstated that man, but that does not alter the fact that this principle should be done away with altogether, and that this workers' handbook should be brought thoroughly up to date.

I bring my remarks to a conclusion. I think that the Admiralty have made a really great contribution to the future of the dockyards, and I think that, for the first time, perhaps, we have a Govern-men in power which recognises that the strength of the British Navy does not depend upon the kind of principles which have been enunciated in some of the speeches from that side of the House. The strength of the British Navy depends upon the naval homes of this country. I went into a naval home in Plymouth the other day where there were three sons and two daughters. Two of the sons were in the Navy, and one was in the dockyard; one of the daughters had married a merchant seaman, and the other had married a person in the dockyard. It is in those homes, the naval homes of Devonport and Portsmouth and the other great naval cities throughout the country, that the real strength of the Navy resides. I believe that the Admiralty during this past 18 months has begun—only begun; I think they have a long way yet to go—on the great task of removing the real sense of injustice which does exist in many of those naval homes.

6.20 p.m.

Mr. Douglas Marshall (Bodmin)

The hon. Member for Devonport (Mr. Foot), who has mentioned the naval homes of this country and the high traditions that lie behind them, mentioned Plymouth and Portsmouth, and I think he would agree that he could

have mentioned such places, too, as Chatham, Saltash, Torpoint, Cawsand and the Cornish valley of the Tamar. I wish primarily to ask a number of questions. I know that there are many Members on both sides of the House who wish to take part in the Debate, and so I shall try to be very brief, and there may well be a certain amount of disjointedness about my speech. As I do not propose to dress it up, I should like first to draw the attention of the Minister to an item in the Estimates with regard to Germany. Hon. Members will notice that the Estimates on Page 7 state that no payment is made by the Navy in respect of requirements so met and no provision is therefore necessary in the Estimates. Yet if we turn to the White Paper we observe that these commitments are referred to, and these commitments must amount to a certain degree of expense. Hon. Members know that the Control Commission is costing 1s. 6d. in the £ of Income Tax. What is really the cost of the Royal Navy at the present Moment in Germany? I think that is a point we should ask. As other speakers have observed rightly, the Estimates contain very little detail. I should like to know too what has been the expense of the Royal Navy in its unenviable task in Palestine? What has been the cost of that during the past year?

I come to the question of welfare and the question of plain clothes. I do sincerely trust that the Admiralty will give attention to this matter. If the House will forgive me for one moment, I should like to read a little from a letter I received only today upon this matter: As you know we were promised 25 coupons over six months ago, and although I have tried hard, I have failed to find anyone even in the Royal Naval Barracks receiving any. There must be hundreds if not thousands like myself who have

come home from foreign service just after the outbreak of war who have been unable to obtain any civilian clothes. It is really about time this was altered. It is all very well for the President of the Board of Trade to say he has not got clothes. These men should be able to obtain civilian clothes when they come home so that they can have them on their long leaves. It is utterly disgraceful that they cannot. The next point I want to come to is on page 10 of the Estimates where reference is made to recruiting. The House will notice that the sum is £106,000, an increase of £9,000. Most of the comments and criticism are on the question of why so much money is wanted for this or that purpose. I am not going to make criticism of why the amount is so much, but why it is so small; because recruiting is a vitally important matter. If we are to consider recruiting in the United Kingdom from John o' Groats to Land's End and the amount required is said to be £106,000 it seems inadequate, I hope that adequate provision will be made for recruiting. I should like to draw the attention of the Admiralty to another matter in which I must declare my interest, because prize money has still not been paid. I should like to draw the attention of the Admiralty to the fact that the purchasing power of the pound is depreciating, and if that process goes on very much longer they will have to consider giving prize money plus payment plus in order to make up for its decreased value through its loss of purchasing power.

On page 77 there is reference to the R.N.V.R. There are II divisions and one further division for Cardiff. I will not weary the House with the names, but Scotland is represented, England is represented, Wales is represented, but Cornwall is not. The great city of Plymouth is not mentioned. There is no training centre there at all. I am

really very angry about this and I sincerely trust that the Admiralty will look at it again. Do they mean to say that from all this wealth of men that have been drawn from the West Country and from Cornwall there should not be a division in Cornwall for the R.N.V.R. I sincerely trust that the Admiralty will give that further consideration.

On the item for naval information we observe that extra provision is made for two scrutineers. What exactly is this? Do the Admiralty mean "censors"? If they do, why do they not say so? Why try to cover it up? And are they really necessary? On page 167 there is reference to Admiral Commanding Reserves. Comparing these Estimates with those for 1946, the point that stands out very clearly is that in 1946 the Admiralty had in A.C.R. a R.N.R. officer. Neither do they now have an R.N.V.R. officer in the Second Sea Lord's Office. Today they have not. It may well be the reply that I shall get is that it is now peace time and that, therefore it is not customary, it is not usual to have such appointments. I do suggest that it is absolutely necessary if we are to encourage and realise the value of the reserve officers that we should have high ranking reserve officers in every one of these particular divisions. While I am on the subject of the reserve, I may mention that I notice that the Financial Secretary in his speech rightly referred to the number of fishing vessels that have been returned by the Admiralty to the fishing fleets. I think that he recognised the vital importance of those vessels to the men who will need them and furthermore the vital importance of the men who sail in them. Once again I should like to draw the attention of hon. Members to what I said in my maiden speech—that in 1914 there were 2,000 men in the R.N.R. available from the Cornish fishing fleet, whereas in 1939 there were 200.

It is absolutely necessary that the Admiralty on every occasion should help the inshore fishermen, the fishermen of England, Cornwall, Wales and Scotland.

There is one other point which I will mention. In the White Paper there is some mention of fishery protection vessels. I am not quite clear what, in fact, is the area they cover, and I am asking for information. I hope that the Civil Lord, in winding up the Debate, may be able to say something about fishery protection vessels. Then I come to the question of escort vessels. I think that all hon. Members will agree that one of the most important matters concerning the Royal Navy is the connection between the Merchant Navy and the Royal Navy. It does not matter to what page of history we turn, we find that, when a war broke out, we were short of escort vessels. It is true that the Merchant Navy gets through, but they get through only by a terrible self-sacrifice and a terrible loss of life. Although I am not going into any technical questions, I want to call the attention of the Board of Admiralty to this problem, and to ask them to see to it that, if ever we are in danger again, these escort vessels will be available. When we come to the particular Estimate concerning Trade Division of the Admiralty, I notice something which is very curious. One assumes that these Estimates are correct, and yet, if one turns to Vote 12, one finds that the Director of Trade at the Admiralty receives £1286 a year—he is a captain of the Royal Navy—and that the Deputy Director receives £1862. Is this a new idea of Socialist incentive, or what is it? I see that the Minister himself appears to be a little bewildered by it, and, therefore, perhaps he may be able to give me an answer.

I would like to say in conclusion that I think all hon. Members realise the pride that we all feel in the Royal Navy, whether we had the privilege to serve in it in some capacity or other or not. My real point is that the Royal Navy is something of which the British are proud, and they know that, whatever the circumstances might be and whatever the future may hold for us, the Royal Navy will always be efficient and ready to engage the enemy wherever he may be.

6.33 p.m.

Mr. Mallalieu (Huddersfield)

I very much admired the vigour and passion with which the hon. Member for Bodmin (Mr. D. Marshall) is always prepared to do battle on behalf of Cornwall, but I think that his speech was in striking contrast with the spirit revealed in the speech of the hon. and gallant Member who spoke immediately before him from the Benches opposite. I was horrified by that speech. The hon. and gallant Member for Chertsey (Captain Marsden) has a great name in the Navy and in this House on matters of naval affairs, but it seems to me that he was using his prestige, perhaps unwittingly, to suggest, in the old way, that there might be a grievance here and there, but, generally speaking, everything was pretty well all right, or, if not all right, that everything would come out in the wash. He suggested that conditions were greatly improved and that we had really no need to worry. My experience of the Navy is very much less than his, but it was fairly intense, and, possibly, more recent, and I would say that, if the Admiralty had persisted in taking the line taken by the hon. and gallant Member, we should now be in for very

serious trouble in the Royal Navy. Happily, the speech of my hon. Friend the Financial Secretary has shown that the Admiralty, at last, are no longer taking that sort of view.

I have felt that, although the Navy, in comparison with the other Services, was a more enlightened and progressive Service, in many respects—and I say this without offence to the other Services—it is still, to me as a civilian, very much behind the times in comparison with what is going on in civilian life. It seems to me that each generation is tending to get the service which a previous generation deserved, and that methods the Navy uses to run its affairs would not be tolerated today in civilian life. We have heard a good deal about conditions of living on the lower deck. I no longer need to stress them in this House, because their badness is generally accepted, even allowing for improvements over the years, and in the past 18 months. But I say it is true—and I challenge the hon. and gallant Member to deny it—that conditions of work obtain in the Navy today which would not be tolerated for one minute in civilian industry outside.

One of the worst features, and the feature with which I was brought forcibly into contact, has been and still is the appalling gap between the conditions of the men on the lower deck and those of the officers. The gap was far too wide during the war, and is still far too wide today. The hon. and gallant Member for Chertsey tended to pooh-pooh the suggestions put from this side of the House about the system of promotion of officers. I think the Admiralty would be very unwise if they did not pay close attention to the points that have been made about Dartmouth, on the one hand, and promotion from the lower deck, on the other. One of the matters which I found was causing the

most intense bitterness among active Service ratings was the great difficulty they have in ever getting to the wardroom by promotion from the lower deck. Years ago, the Navy, perhaps, was made up of men who were satisfied to stay in the station of life to which it had pleased God to call them; but that is not true any more today. Men on the lower deck are beginning to be conscious of their own capabilities; and when they find, as they still do find, that their progress is severely restricted, all the enthusiasm, energy and ability that is in them is turned by frustration, into cynicism, into a "to-hell-with-you-Jack-I'm-inboard" attitude.

I have seen this frustration on the lower deck, and I was delighted to hear what the Financial Secretary said about the upper yardmen scheme for promotion. I saw that scheme in operation in the Navy. I served under officers who were promoted under it and I had previously served with them when they were training on the lower deck. It is my opinion that these officers who are promoted through that scheme were the best officers with whom I have served. They knew their technical stuff very well, and they had learned it the hard way. They knew a great deal of the conditions with which the men had to contend on the lower deck, but, unlike the warrant officers and others, they had not been long enough on the lower deck to pick up some of the worse lower deck habits of mind. I believe that that scheme is the best possible way to recruit the future officers of the Royal Navy, and I am delighted that it is the intention of the Admiralty to enlarge the scope of that scheme, although I really do not think that it should be limited to produce 25 per cent. of the total number of officers. It may be all right for a start, but I believe that the overall figure of 25 per cent. is really far too low.

Now, I come to another point on which there is a tremendous difference between the facts in the Services and in civilian life, and this is in the relations of officers and men and concerns the functions of an officer. Years ago, in industry, a mill-owner owned a mill, gave the orders and was under no obligation to explain his orders in any way. He did what he liked. That day, happily, has passed. The boss is still the boss, but the freedom to give orders is to some extent limited by trade union activity, and, even in the field that is free, the best employers realise the necessity for explanation to and consultation with the people who are to obey the orders. They know that the order is better executed if the reason for giving it is clearly understood. They also know that, in their operatives, there is a tremendous wealth of experience and knowledge which, if tapped, will help the more efficient running of the mill or factory. But, even today, in the Navy, there is no such contact as that between officers and men.

I am delighted to hear from the Financial Secretary that he is proposing to extend and develop the machinery of the canteen committees, which, in the old days, had very limited objects. I was not quite clear, in listening to the Financial Secretary, whether this development of canteen committees is going to be used for the much wider purpose that I have in mind. I would like it to be used, first of all, as a means by which grievances can be presented collectively, and I understand that that is to be done, and, if so, it is a tremendous advance on anything that obtained in the Navy before.

Secondly, I would like it to be used—and this will seem absolutely fantastic to some of the more experienced naval

officers—as a means of initiating discussions between officers and men on the problems of the ship, and, by that, I do not only mean welfare problems. I am not going to argue, I would not dream of arguing, in favour of the government of a ship by committees. It would be altogether wrong if every time the skipper wanted to turn two points to starboard he had to consult an ordinary seaman, or if the hands had to "lay for'ard" to decide if they would accept any order that was put down to them, but I do think there is a wide sphere in the running of a ship in which the experience of the lower deck ratings would be invaluable to the officers and in which, if the officers would take them into consultation, there would as a result grow up a feeling of partnership and friendliness between the two sides.

I had many examples in my short career on the lower deck of cases in which the energies of seamen were completely wasted in doing jobs that were not worth while. I remember that three days running I was put over the side of a stage to wipe oil off the ship's side, a very good job, an essential job, if it had not been for the fact that we were leaking oil in harbour at the time, and every time we mopped the oil off the ship the sea put it back again. These little irritating wastes of energy, the frustrations that develop from them, could be removed to a very considerable extent if from time to time it was possible for men and officers to get together and talk frankly about the day-to-day running problems of the ship.

I come to my last point, and it is a very big one, about the Royal Naval Barracks. I have been arguing, a moment or two ago, for a closer partnership between officers and men. I have been asking for a new type of officer, an

officer who does not have to stand on a pedestal and screen himself in an aura of majesty, but who can come down to the men and talk to them as a human being. It is a much harder job than just relying upon mere discipline, it is all the difference in the world between being merely a driver and being a leader. I am asking that in the future officers shall be able to develop the qualities of leadership to a much greater extent than has been necessary when they had to rely merely on the discipline under which orders are executed without query at all. Although I have been arguing for all that, when it comes to the question of the Royal Naval Barracks I want to argue not for a decrease in the authority of the officers, but, in fact, for an increase.

The trouble, as I saw it, with the Royal Naval Barracks in the various main depot towns was that they were altogether too large. They were so large that it was absolutely impossible for any officer or group of officers to control what was going on in them, and as a result the barracks in which I served, first as an ordinary seaman and subsequently as an officer, was run not by the officers at all but under a most elaborate and carefully worked out system which was itself controlled by some of the most skilful racketeers in the service of the King. That racketeering system had to be seen to be believed. The racketeers used to ease themselves into some of the key jobs, and a key job is one from which you can dispense patronage, and in which you can receive toll. The sort of patronage that these key men could dish out, and which they used in order to exert their authority and control the running of the barracks, was very varied. One type of patronage was to dish out freedom from draft chits, for example. Another type of patronage was to hand over to a

man a job in which he too could hand out patronage of one kind or another.

One of the racketeers, for instance, put his friends in the compassionate leave hut. There were three men in the compassionate leave hut in the barracks in which I served, and though those three men had many things, the one thing they had not got was compassion. They ran the compassionate leave hut as a strictly business concern. I remember another friend of mine getting into an especially lucrative position. He managed to get himself the job of showing visitors round H.M.S. "Victory", and when he reached the point in the ship where Nelson died he would explain to the party he was taking round that it was the custom to turn out the lights and then doff one's cap. Having turned out the lights and doffed his cap, he would promptly drop two half-crowns into the cap and say, "Thank you, Sir." At this, there was a good deal of fumbling, and by the time the lights went on again his cap was full of half-crowns put there by the visitors.

Another means of working a racket was to appoint one of your friends as mess caterer. I know one mess caterer who had an agent up the line who used, from one source of another, to acquire oranges. These oranges were shipped down on the train to Portsmouth and picked up by a naval working party, under a leading seaman, brought into the mess and sold by the mess caterer at a profit of something like 300 per cent. That kind of little racket by which the naval barracks are run goes right through the whole barracks—I will not say from top to bottom, but on the ratings' side at any rate. You cannot stop it in the barracks as they exist at the present time. During my time there they tried to put it down by bringing in a lot of ex-

Scotland Yard men, young men who had come in as regulated petty officers. They were known as "jet-propelled crushers," but I can tell the House that, jet propelled though they might be, they were left standing by the barracks stanchions.

I cannot vouch for this story, but it was told to me as being gospel truth by a commander of a barracks who had been worried about the disappearance of naval stores. There was a great leakage of "rabbits" at that time, and he called a conference in his office to discuss ways and means of putting this particular racket down. While the conference was going on he looked out of the window and saw an elderly chief petty officer begin to shuffle across the parade ground carrying a suitcase. He said to the conference, "I bet you that man is taking 'rabbits' ashore; we will have him stopped." He rang through to the main gate and stood at the window to watch. The chief petty officer shuffled steadily across the parade ground until he got about half way, and then quite suddenly he turned round and shuffled back again to his mess. He had been tipped off. The racket had somebody on the switch-board and somebody on the main gate, and a sign was sent to this man that he had to go back.

The atmosphere in these large and uncontrollable Royal Naval Barracks is corrupt and corrupting. When you come to this sort of place as a seaman, whether fresh to the Navy or whether you are coming in from sea, when you have been in just a week or two you have one of two ambitions only—apart from getting out as soon as possible. Either you want to get into the rackets or you want to loaf, and the art of loafing in barracks is a very fine one indeed. No one knows you well enough, no one

can know every one in a barracks well enough, to know what you ought to be doing, and provided you look purposeful enough you can get away with doing nothing whatever for days together. My particular system was to walk around with a piece of paper in my hand. If some gold lace came in sight I used to accelerate somewhat and try to look as if it was a signal. Another of my friends used to work the orange box. He used to carry an orange box around with him all day long during working hours. You would find him sitting on it in the most surprising places from time to time; if there was a sign of danger he would pick up his orange box, push it in front of him and march steadily for'ard about 20 paces until the officer went by.

There is no solution whatever for that sort of thing in the Royal Naval Barracks except this. When the barracks are rebuilt they should not be rebuilt in the form of great single barracks as they are at the present time, each housing in peace time perhaps 5,000 and in war time 12,000. Instead of building one barracks of a large size in Portsmouth, I would say it would be best to build perhaps five smaller barracks spread around the area, and the same for Devonport and most certainly for Chatham. They must be reduced to a size which will be of manageable proportions, so that the officers can exercise their authority, and can control and direct. I believe that even that will not be enough to bring up in any barracks the real spirit that we need in today's Navy, what for want of a better word I will call partnership, unless we press ahead with those other ideas about promotion and machinery for the discussion of naval problems to which I referred earlier.

There are times, at moments of stress in the Navy, when all these senses of injustice, inequality and the bitterness are swept on one side. It has happened on occasions that we have stopped being a collection of competing individuals and become what I want to see, a community of people working with each other, for each other and for their country. There are occasions when we achieve what is meant by those two great words of the Navy, a "ship's company." We achieve that spirit through danger. We achieve it in spite of the old system of organisation imposed on us by Admiralty. But when you leave a ship where there has been a ship's company and go elsewhere to another ship or to a barracks, you lose that spirit. I want the spirit, the realisation of a ship's company to be not an exception but the rule. I want it, indeed, to be transferred from the Services into civilian life as well, and I believe that the Government are trying to do just that in civilian life. I would ask them to make quite certain that in the Services their practice lives up to their civilian preaching. I want them to build up in the Services organisations which shall today be worthy of the spirit of the civilian society that we are trying to build ashore.

6.58 p.m.

Sir Ronald Ross (Londonderry)

I have seldom listened to a speech by any hon. Member opposite which I have appreciated more than that of the hon. Member for Huddersfield (Mr. Mallalieu), but if you take it as an argument in favour of promotion from the lower deck perhaps it is not very forceful. Certainly it was a very vivid and obviously a true picture of certain aspects of naval life which he had experienced. Before I address

myself to the matters I wish mainly to discuss, I would like to associate myself with one thing said by the Parliamentary Secretary, and that was his tribute to the complements of the minesweepers. I do not think that they as a body have really had the public recognition they might have had in this extraordinarily laborious, dangerous and difficult task. When you think of the conditions of the vessels, say in the Denmark Strait, and also the present fearful complications of the modern minefield, with its delayed action mines, deep minefields and so forth, I do not think that the country quite appreciates what a very great debt it owes to the complements of the minesweeper flotillas that have done so well in these last years.

It is an extraordinary thing that we know so little of what we are talking about this evening. I do not mean that we know so little about the procedure of suggesting, Sir, that you leave the Chair, but that we know so little about the Fleet and about our duty as to the Navy. We have one statement of policy in the Explanatory Memorandum, where it says that the function of the Navy is to keep open the vital lines of supply and provide support for the United Nations. That is an extraordinarily vague expression. In the old days it was much simpler. We had the yardstick of the two Power standard, or some such thing. Could we not have some definition of what force it is that will fulfil the purposes laid down in page 2 of the Explanatory Memorandum? The impossibility of our saying anything useful upon that subject is brought about by the fact that we do not know the strength of our own Navy and do not know the strength of anybody else's.

Not only is the Navy List not issued, but the Annual Fleet Return, which is the indispensable document for finding out what is the strength of the Fleets of the world, has not been published since 1939. With due respect, it is perfect nonsense to say that cannot be produced. The Admiralty know the strength of the British Fleet. They should know the strength of all our Allies, because there has not been an Ally to whom we have not either given or lent a ship, and in return for that they might tell us something about the strength of their fleets. I think they have told the strength of their fleets to U.N.O. The Navies of the enemy countries are pretty easy to enumerate, because, except for Italy, they do not exist at all. And yet we are not given the Annual Fleet Return, despite the substantial sums of money that go to the Intelligence branch of the Admiralty, and apparently there is no great reluctance on the part of many foreign countries to tell us their strength, or at all events to tell U.N.O. If I compare the First Lord with that great and noble river the Mississippi, I hope the noble Lord will not consider that it is an impertinence, but it will be remembered that it was said of the Mississippi: He must know something, But he don't say nothing, He just keeps rolling along. And the rolling along we have had has been a denial of any information on this subject for two years after the war. I would ask the Civil Lord to say whether there is any need for secrecy about our naval strength. If there is a need for secrecy tell it to us, tell the country, and I can assure the Civil Lord that everyone on this side of the House, and I think everyone throughout the country, will pay the greatest attention to the need for secrecy if he will say why it is necessary.

I am looking now at the Explanatory Memorandum of the 1939 Estimates, and I see there a long passage dealing with

the distribution of the Fleet. We have nothing in the present Explanatory Memorandum dealing with the distribution of the Fleet. Further, there was then a detailed exposition of the material of the Fleet, of the new construction, of the many different programmes under construction; and, of course, we have not now got that either. I do not think there has ever been a time when the information given to the House of Commons about the Fleet or about naval strength generally was more nebulous. We know practically nothing from official sources about our own strength or the strength of other countries. What we have been told, and that, I think, was the result of considerable pressure, is the number of ships that were given away or lent. We have not been told the number of ships that have been scrapped. We do not know how much of the wartime programmes under construction will be completed and how much will be scrap. The whole situation as to the present and future strength of the Fleet is quite unknown.

I am not in any way pressing forward any suggestion that there should be a building programme. I need not repeat the arguments, but I associate myself with what was said by my hon. and gallant Friend the Member for Chelsea (Commander Noble) as to the present situation. In past years there have been changes in terms of naval warfare so great that Fleets have become obsolete in a very short time. There was, first, the change from sail to steam and the armoured ship. Then, practically in our time, the change to the all-big-gun ship, and recently there has been the change to the aircraft carrier. It may well be that we may have a more violent and complete change as a result of investigation into modern and novel methods of warfare which were hardly used in this war, and we may find

ourselves having to build just as hard to keep our place as we had in the time of the all-big-gun ship. Let no one forget that this country is at the mercy of any hostile Power that commands the sea. I do not think there are any other countries in such a hazardous position. One thing vital to us is that we must be able to defend ourselves against any possible aggressor as regards command of the sea. A country which can command the sea can dictate to us.

Commander Pursey (Hull, East)

Would the hon. Member tell me what possible aggressor there is in the world that could possibly be superior to us in sea power, because there is not such a Power in the world?

Sir R. Ross

I was talking about the future. I was putting a general proposition which is as true now as it has always been. At the present time the situation is perfectly clear. We all know that the United States has infinitely the strongest Fleet in the world, and that ours, although second, and a long way behind in strength, is the best for quality, and that the other Fleets, so far as we know—and we do not know much from official sources, if anything—are none of them in a position to challenge our present naval position. I was not suggesting, I explicitly stated so, that there should be a big naval programme, but merely giving a warning as to the future, because if a new type which revolutionised naval warfare appeared we should have to build that new type in order to maintain our position, and, of course, that is a position which may arise from the study of the effects of the atomic bomb and other things.

Commander Pursey

Is not every Power in exactly the same position, and if there is no Power with a Navy superior to us except America, and America is not an aggressor nation, then what is the hon. Member worrying about?

Sir R. Ross

I am worried about the hon. and gallant Member asking such a silly question. He has not understood what I was saying, and I think I had better explain it afterwards, possibly in Basic English.

To return to my speech, I am glad to see that the best of our ships which are being given away are to go to the Dominion of Canada. I thoroughly applaud that, and would like to see a good modern Navy given to the Dominion, whose seamen did such gallant work in escorting ships across the Atlantic during the war. But there are other things which do not fill me with such enthusiasm. Apparently, the Admiralty have picked out all the ships with the most historic records to give away, or lend. The "Ajax" and "Achilles" are to be sold to India. If they have to go I suppose that they had better be sold, but it is hard when we think of the achievements of the "Ajax" at the River Plate.

Then there is the "Aurora." I do not think that there is a ship which had a prouder record in the last war than H.M.S. "Aurora." She was in action many times in the Mediterranean, and is to be lent to China. With all due respect to the Chinese, they are not a naval nation, and I cannot see how the Admiralty can expect a ship lent to China to be returned in good condition. If we have to

sacrifice this gallant ship we had better sell her, even if the Chinese do not pay, because at all events when somebody owes you money he is in your debt. To lend a ship to China neither gives you the commanding position of a lender, nor does it produce good will from the recipient of the gift. Further, the Chinese have never yet possessed an oil burning ship. Is it proposed to convert the "Aurora" back to coal burning? Even the modern ships built for China have been coal burners, because they have no oil, and cannot afford to buy it. It may be that the only result of sending this ship to China is that she will probably lie in a Chinese station, and resolve herself into her various elements.

Another thing which is rather puzzling is why 23 submarines were given to foreign Powers. None was given to the Dominions. I always thought it was the policy of the British Admiralty to discourage the practice of submarine warfare. Yet 23 submarines have been given away to foreign Powers—friendly Powers—to encourage the practice of submarine warfare. That seems a curious thing to do.

As one who, in distant days, was a member of political life in its lowest form—I was Parliamentary Private Secretary to the First Lord of the Admiralty—one thing which strikes me forcibly about the Estimates is that the Admiralty Office cost, in those days, one third of what it costs now. There was an Admiralty yacht called H.M.S. "Enchantress," which did admirable work in escorting convoys during the early stages of the First World War. She has been sold or broken up because she is over age. Now the Admiralty Office costs three times as much as it did then—which I agree is understandable, as there is a lot

of work in connection with demobilization—but their Lordships are sticking to the old motto: If you stick to the desk, and never go to sea, You will all be rulers of the King's Navee. I have asked before what it would cost to adapt a frigate for the use of the Admiralty. It is important that the political heads of the Admiralty should be in touch with the Fleet, and should not think entirely of shore establishments. It is an almost unique occasion when somebody on this side of the House is pressing for naval Ministers to enjoy themselves, to go to sea. They are often at sea in other ways, so perhaps I should say, "go afloat". This is very important. I cannot imagine that it would cost £30,000 to alter a frigate in such a way that it could be used by members of the Board when going on tours of inspection. I do not think that the Civil Lord, during most of his days at sea, lived in particularly luxurious conditions, and I think he could possibly persuade his colleagues on the Board that a reasonable standard of alteration would be sufficient. I think it is unfortunate that the Board of Admiralty should have to be the guests of those they are inspecting when they are going round their naval establishments. I think it is desirable that the flag should be flown afloat from time to time. I hope that the Board will consider this question, because it will not cost anything like £30,000 to alter a frigate, and the ship will in no way be reduced as a potential escort vessel, should the need arise.

I listened sympathetically to the plea that the Parliamentary Secretary made about the number of personnel employed ashore. He put it at 30,000. Ten years ago, there were 120,000 under Vote A, and now there are 191,000. It is impossible to say, because we are not told what ships are manned to full complement, but I think we

had something like four or five times as many ships at sea 10 years ago, as we have now. Yet, even allowing for 30,000 being employed ashore, that still leaves nearly 40,000 more men than we had 10 years ago. Here is one economy which I would urge on the Admiralty. It is true, as the Parliamentary Secretary said, that in order to use carriers they have to be backed up by aerodromes on shore. But if Coastal Command were transferred to the Fleet Air Arm—as they ought to be, in spite of the dislike of the R.A.F. for that transfer—there would be great economy in the use of aerodromes, and great advantages to members of Coastal Command who, from time to time, serve in carriers, and get to know much more about sea affairs than they can possibly learn by just flying over the sea. I have always thought that Coastal Command which, in its function, is just as much part of the Navy as the Fleet Air Arm, should act under the control of the Admiralty, and be embodied in the Navy.

There are a large number of personnel in schools and on courses. But I do not think that they should account for the few ships which we seem able to man at present. These schools and courses are very necessary because of technical developments. I believe that the use of radar has become so great that in some ships guns are having to be removed because of the quantity of radar equipment which has to be carried topside. Therefore, courses are necessary. I would say this as regards the anti-submarine school, which is situated in my constituency, that I certainly was tremendously impressed by how well it is being run and how useful it is proving, working as it does in the most dangerous waters which exist anywhere from the point of view of the protection of our commerce, that is, the approaches from the Western hemisphere as they

narrow down in the West Atlantic. It is an obvious place for such exercises and experiments to be carried out. I do hope that the Admiralty will give the anti-submarine school a permanent status. It has been there for a very long time and it is obviously the ideal place. I do not think that it could be established anywhere else without vast expenditure of money and a tremendous wastage both of equipment on the river front and of barracks. I should like to see the Admiralty give it that official status which will remove from it many of those difficulties associated with institutions in my constituency because they have been on a temporary basis. I certainly can say that nowhere else would the Royal Navy receive a more hearty welcome than it would in Londonderry.

7.22 p.m.

Mr. Keenan (Kirkdale, Liverpool)

I beg to move, to leave out from "That" to the end of the Question, and to add instead thereof: This House places on record the importance it attaches to the need of improved welfare services, improved accommodation afloat and ashore for the Royal Navy and the Royal Marines, and improved conditions of service which will provide opportunities for a fuller life to those serving, and invites the Government to take all the necessary measures to ensure this. Having listened to the hon. Member for Londonderry (Sir R. Ross) making a quotation from "H.M.S. Pinafore" I must say, for fear it is suggested that it might apply to me, that I have no intention of becoming one of the rulers of the "King's Navee," and I do not think I need make any apology to the House for not having worn what I think is a not very uncommon uniform including

the wide bottoms which none of the men like. I have the opportunity this year of moving an Amendment concerning welfare accommodation and life in the Navy generally, and I want to say that I feel rather pleased at having the opportunity, because last year I felt that, whilst the tributes that were paid to the Service and to the different admirals and others who had done so well in the last war and in the previous one were deserved, the ratings of the Service perhaps did not get the mention to which they were entitled. I feel as I felt then that the only tribute that I can pay and that this House can pay was to do something about the conditions under which they have lived for more than a century, for all of us who had any connection with the Navy at all, either as officers, men or civilians, know how disillusioned were many of those who served in the Service during the war years and in the years between the wars. It is rather as a duty to them that I have put down this Amendment.

I want to follow up what was attempted last year. As far as I know, for the first time in the history of this House, a proper and reasonable attempt is being made to alter the conditions of the service which have been neglected far too long. On the welfare side we had a very important statement today. I felt that the Amendment I had down had in some way influenced it, but I also felt that it was rather more what was said last year by the different Members of the House, not all on the one side, because there were several good contributions from the Opposition side of the House which were very valuable, and I hope that they were listened to with the right appreciation in the right place. I feel that we are entitled to more assurance than we have got even today from the Financial Secretary. To be quite candid, I hope it is not going to be a

case of jam tomorrow. There are a number of things in connection with welfare which I think might be given some attention. There is the method in which the men are paid. I suppose that that is really welfare work. They get their money at the table or it is given in their cap. I understand that the men resent it and we do want to see some alteration there. It is suggested that they should be paid at the ship's office which would be a more equitable arrangement.

I wonder how it is intended that the new welfare service is to operate, not merely as regards the accommodation which may be provided, but how far will it assist in the regulation of the length of time that men are abroad? For instance, I have a complaint which was sent to me in regard to H.M.S. "Glasgow", and I hope that the Civil Lord will take note of this. Here is the case of a ship which went away in August, 1945, and she was due to return this February. However, that has been changed and she is not to return now until November, and it is probable that it will be next February before she returns to Britain. I do not know how far the officer in charge of the "Glasgow" has been consulted about the length of time that the vessel has been away, but I am told that he will be out in June so that he will not be waiting until next February to get home. The men certainly resent it, and if I remember aright, the First Lord of the Admiralty had some visitations from relatives of the men concerned. In that connection I should like to ask the Civil Lord, Why was that democratic officer, as reported in the Press, so recently given three months for dining with four ratings on Christmas Day?

Captain Marsden

The charges against that officer included the supply of drink to men out of the officers' mess, which is contrary to the King's Regulations and despite orders that that should not take place.

Mr. Keenan

I am grateful to the hon. and gallant Member, because I think that for that action on Christmas Day the officer has been heavily penalised. That is one thing about which I am concerned, namely, the relationships between the officers and ratings. Those relationships seem too rigid and want altering, and we will never get a Navy in the future like we had in the past until there is some such alteration, because there was a method of recruiting in other days which no longer exists today.

Let me point out what I was told about it. Going home about a fortnight ago when the snow was on the station, as it was in all the cities of this country, I met two naval ratings from Chatham and they were able to tell me, on inquiry, what happened to two sailors who had been "booked" a fortnight previously for wearing their rubber boots although it was a snowy day. Let me just take the opportunity of expressing the opinion of those men from Chatham about the naval police service at stations like Euston. While I was speaking to these two ratings, a petty officer and another—who said, by the way, how glad they were that they had just finished their time and been demobilized—one of the naval police came by the waiting room where we were sitting and they told me that, as I could see, he was looking round and trying to find someone whose hat was not on straight, or some other

small thing. The opinion of the men, which I have had confirmed by others to whom I have spoken since, is that some of these policemen apparently enjoy the job. It keeps them on shore duty instead of being afloat, and they certainly find complaints and poor devils for the "book."

We have the case I was quoting, and I believe those two men received 10 days' number 11, which probably conveys more to hon. Gentlemen opposite than to me although I have actually been told what it means. I listened with interest and with some pleasure to the statement on the question of liberty boats. I have heard so much about that from time to time that I am very glad that at last something has been done. But when is it going to be applied? I was told that it was in operation a fortnight ago. I might be able to check upon it, because I was very anxious before this Debate to visit Chatham and although I did not press the matter I suggested to the Parliamentary Secretary and the Civil Lord that I would like to go there. While they were prepared to accommodate me, I know, I did not want any conducted tour because I would not see the things I want to see. On the question of liberty boats, it is stated that it is the intention to retain them for recruits and those with up to three months' service. This goes a long way towards meeting us, but I do suggest that the time has come—as we have been able to get the Admiralty to agree—when there is no reason or justification for retaining what is a useless practice and one which has been most unpopular in the Service. We should not so treat those whom we are trying to encourage to take up the Service and stay in it. That is the difficulty today; while we can get men through National Service we will not retain them without being able to do more than has been done hitherto.

On this question of a social welfare service I want to ask the Parliamentary Secretary to tell us what is to be done for those who are prevailed upon to stay in the Service. The men who put in 12 or 20 years or more are not very well fitted for civilian life when they leave the Navy. I do think we have to pay some attention to that, and I have had quite a lot of complaints about it. There is one very important matter about which I want to say something because I have received a statement of the views of a number of young men who were formerly in the Navy and who now hold fairly responsible positions in local authorities. I think we might with advantage invite the Admiralty to consider at least some of their ideas as to what was wrong. I am quoting what they said to me because it is important with regard to social welfare and was the result of what they had observed. It was something about which they felt very keenly and seriously. I will read this paragraph so that there may be an appreciation of what they think: Much has been heard, both in the Press and in B.B.C. broadcasts, of the Social Welfare Service available to ratings in the Royal Navy. Social welfare has, in the first instance, become the duty of Junior Divisional Officers on the principle that the Divisional Officer is responsible for the wellbeing of the ratings in his division. Unfortunately, the average Divisional Officer completely lacks the necessary gifts of social service desirable in order to satisfy the requirements of the ratings. Ratings feel that their personal matters are discussed in the Ward Room and other places and there have been many cases where ratings on watch have heard officers discussing the private affairs of ratings. This, of course, should not be tolerated and it is submitted that where a rating is in need of a Social Welfare Service this

should be provided in the Base. The staff for such a service should be persons properly qualified in social service and, if possible, the person in charge of the Department should hold a university qualification in social science. Whenever possible, ratings should be given leave to attend to their private affairs and this leave should not be granted at the instance of the ship's commanding officer but should be at the discretion of the Base Welfare Officer. I think that contains very valuable suggestions which are important because of the personal touch, and I am sure that there is much in their complaints and that they were well justified. There is one other matter upon which I want to say a word to the Parliamentary Secretary. I think this is a reform which has been needed for a long time and I do not want to say very much about it, but I do ask that consideration should be given to the uniform of ratings. Bellbottoms with the jumper and collar and the rest are looked upon with disfavour. So many ratings do not like them. I think the uniform rather cramps their style and probably acts as a deterrent. If we dressed the Service better it might be more attractive. Why can we not have them square-rigged? It is pandering to old ideas and goes back to the time when Nelson was alive. The authorities have not realised that he has been dead for over a century. I heard with pleasure the announcement that some attention was being given to this.

It was admitted last year that something more should be done. I want to know what has been done. If I remember rightly, the First Lord promised that there would be some consideration, but has anything been done in regard to reallocation of space? When the matter was raised, no one denied that ratings had to sleep anywhere they could, No one had taken much notice of this, and we were promised

there would be a re-allocation of space. I want to have an assurance that this matter will have the attention the Parliamentary Secretary promised. I am told that one mess is supposed to have 20 men in it, but that they have an additional eight. Only 11 or 12 of them can sling their hammocks, four have to sleep on the lockers, and the rest can please themselves. That sort of accommodation is characteristic of far too many ships in the Fleet. There is no need for me to say much in regard to barracks, other than to mention what was said by a Member opposite that they should be blown up. I am sorry I did not have a chance to go round Chatham Barracks.

I should like the Civil Lord to deal with a question which has caused a great deal of mischief in the country. This Government is being blamed over the question of the Royal tour. Members opposite are rather pleased about these things. As far as I can gather, it is being suggested, if not by Members in this House by people outside, that this is an ill time for the tour. Reference is made to the fact that the accommodation for ratings was stripped, and I have received a letter, although I know it is not true in what it says, stating: The Royal Family have one-third of the accommodation, the hangers-on and officers two-thirds, and we have the remainder to ourselves. I want a statement made which will clear the air. Last year the hon. Member for Reigate (Mr. Touche) said that one out of 10 had to do their washing in a bucket but perhaps one of the best observations so far as I am concerned came from the hon. Member for the University of Wales (Professor Gruffydd): The Admiralty is content to remain sleeping in the bosom of Nelson. Is it to be wondered that such a large proportion of the men in the Fleet should not choose to remain when the time comes for their release? I hope we

shall hear from the First Lord that he will initiate a searching inquiry into the conditions of service at sea, with a view to a speedy remedy, and that he will not appoint the late Lord Nelson as the president of it."—[OFFICIAL REPORT, 7th March, 1946; vol. 420, C. 598.] I wish to deal with the question of why we cannot get the men we want. According to the White Paper, in 1946 we demobilised 411,000. We were only able to persuade—

Mr. Speaker

The question of demobilisation does not arise here.

Mr. Keenan

I agree that it does not, but I was trying to deal with the conditions which determine whether the men will come into the Service or not. The figures are there for anyone who wishes to see them, and are as bad as when I asked for them 12 months ago. Men with 12 years' or more service are glad to get out because the Navy does not encourage them to stay in. Last year we had to draw upon men who were conscripted for national service to keep the Service going. I ask the Admiralty to get down to the questions which were promised to be dealt with 12 months ago. I realise that, as in the case of the Army, the changes demanded on behalf of ratings are not so easily carried out as they would appear. This House has apparently not got the last word in the Admiralty, any more than it has with the Army. There are 11 Lords in the Admiralty who will say "Yea" or "Nay" to the changes we demand, and of these only one comes from another place and two from this House. The changes we are demanding have got to be speeded up by those outside who have been living in the old traditions. Some day, I hope, we shall get a better

answer to the criticism there has been of the Service. Hannen Swaffer's book "What Nelson would do" has never been implemented. I have never been in the Service, but those in it have never been adequately compensated or had the tribute they deserve, and I ask the House to give them the tribute which is worthy of a great nation.

7.50 p.m.

Mr. Guy (Poplar, South)

I beg to second the Amendment.

In doing so, I feel that the case made out by my hon. Friend the Member for Kirkdale (Mr. Keenan) for the betterment of the welfare and conditions of the men serving in the Royal Navy today has been rather cramped, and has had the sting taken out of it by reason of the proposals made here this afternoon by the Financial Secretary to the Admiralty, and by the large number of speeches made by hon. Members on this side of the House who have also spoken of the conditions under which the men are serving. I feel sure that every hon. Member will agree with me that the Navy have had a good day today. After listening to my hon. Friend the Member for Huddersfield (Mr. Mallalieu), I am confident that HANSARD will be in great demand this week throughout the Navy, and that man will be very anxious to adopt some of the tricks about which we have been informed this afternoon. I must confess that a lot of them were new to me. The only practice that I can remember adopting during the 1914–18 war was to tie a piece of fat pork on to a piece of string, and to swing it in front of my comrades, in order to make them feel squeamish, and thus to get the cigarettes which they were unable to smoke. I wish that, in

those days, I had known some of the other practices about which we have heard this afternoon.

My hon. Friend the Member for Kirk-dale has done his level best today to get the Financial Secretary and my hon. Friend the Civil Lord to make some attempt this coming year to implement the proposals about which they told us this afternoon. This matter has been a hardy annual in this House for a great number of years. Anyone who looks up the records of the past years' Debates on Navy Estimates will see the many comments that have been made—especially, if I may say so, since 1942, when I had the pleasure of entering this House with my hon. Friend the Civil Lord—in order to get the conditions improved for the men serving in the Royal Navy, and especially for those of the lower deck. I believe that due notice has been taken of the many points put forward from both sides of the House. But it is no use our standing up complaining and putting points forward, unless we see that they are implemented by those in authority. Therefore, I feel sure that anything that has been said to-day must have some effect on my hon. Friend on the Front Bench.

It is a great thing to know that today those gallant comrades of ours, who served not only during the 1914–1918, but who also served with distinction during the last war, have had so many voices raised on their behalf in this House today, and that there are so many well-informed hon. Members who know what is required in the Service, what has happened in the past, and what is best for a reform in the future. The men in the Navy ought to be gratified to know that their interests are being so well looked after in this great Chamber. I am certain that the knowledge that there are so many hon. Members

interested in the welfare of the men serving in the Royal Navy will ensure a great future for this Navy of ours. It would be a great encouragement to those about to join the Navy, and to those of us who are propagating and lecturing in the various boys' clubs in this country, to know that there is a real future in the Service. It would give great encouragement if we could point out to them that their welfare and conditions of service are being ably looked after, and that those in authority will do their very best to give them the best conditions.

I feel sure that all that has been said this afternoon about our gallant comrades in the Royal Navy is justified, and that the time spent in this Debate has not been wasted. What has been said will be taken notice of by those who are serving and by those who are about to serve. If, in the coming 12 months, we can show that we have at least made a start in providing better conditions, welfare and benefit for them, we shall have done something in the right direction.

Finally, I should like to say a word with regard to the complaints one hears from time to time, about this, that or the other. All of us, on occasion, grumble about something or other, and it is only natural that some of those serving in the Royal Navy should feel disgruntled or upset from time to time, and should be anxious to get in touch with those who they think will voice their grievances. I feel that some of us might, perhaps, be granted the privilege of paying visits, not only to ships afloat, but to dockyards and barracks, in order to see some of the conditions for ourselves. I well remember in 1944, after listening to complaints by large numbers of dissatisfied Wrens, that a colleague of mine, the hon. Member for West Willesden

(Mr. Viant), and I visited a number of depots, at the invitation of the Admiralty, to investigate those complaints, and to see the conditions for ourselves. On investigation, we found that a great deal of the criticism was really unfounded. We were able to present a report to the Admiralty. It would be of great benefit not only to this House but to the serving men themselves if we could pay them a visit now and again. Therefore, I ask the Financial Secretary to give this request his careful consideration. If my suggestion could be carried out it would give the greatest satisfaction to those men to whom we owe so much and to whom we have sometimes paid insufficient tribute for their gallantry and courage.

8.1 p.m.

Lieut.-Commander Gurney Braithwaite (Holderness)

I would like, first of all, to congratulate the hon. Member for Kirk-dale (Mr. Keenan) on his good fortune in drawing the winning ticket in this annual sweepstake. It is something I have tried to do for a very long time without success. I would congratulate him even more on the subject which he has chosen—that of the welfare of the Royal Navy. We always listen with attention not only to him but to the hon. Member for South Poplar (Mr. Guy) who seconded the Amendment and who, year after year on this occasion, invariably speaks in support of the cause of the lower deck. The hon. Member for Kirkdale, however, is wrong if he imagines that this is the first time this matter has been raised in the House. Over and over again on the Estimates, particularly during the war years, the question of naval welfare was very common in this Debate.

I want to offer a few observations on this Amendment, which I hope the Government will accept. I certainly support its phraseology as a reservist of somewhat ancient vintage, because my time on the lower deck was done in the earlier part of the first world war at His Majesty's Ship "Crystal Palace" where the Royal Naval Division were first put through their paces, and very lively recollections I have of that time. The hon. Member for Huddersfield (Mr. Mallalieu) gave us an extremely diverting account of how in his case slow-footed justice hardly ever overtook fleet-footed crime, and I would certainly endorse most of what he said about the naval barracks. I was for some time in this late war executive officer at a base, and when the young men who arrived on draft misbehaved themselves we used to dispense with the bell, book and candle procedure at the defaulters' table; it was quite sufficient to say, "Look here, young fellow-melad, if you do not behave yourself, back you go to Chatham barracks." It was far more effective than "number 11," stoppage of leave or anything of that sort. However, there is an aspect of this matter to which I would draw the attention of the hon. Member for Huddersfield. In time of things are inevitable; the dodging of the column and all the rest of it do happen in time of war. In time of peace the barracks, from the point of view of their management and routine, are on a much more manageable basis.

I was glad to hear the Financial Secretary say that they now intend to make alterations and improvements in these barracks, and in due course to rebuild them. May I say in all good temper that I shall believe it when I see it, because the tragedy of the story of the naval barracks, put shortly, is a very simple one. In time of war there are neither the

labour nor the material for the purpose. The barracks have to be used, as the hon. Member for Huddersfield described to us, for thousands of men. In time of peace the Estimates are generally cut, and there is no money for the purpose. I warn the Financial Secretary that before this Government is very much older, when the economic crisis which is now hastening towards us descends upon this country, one of the first things the Treasury will suggest is that they should suspend this programme for rebuilding the naval barracks. I wish the First Lord success and I hope he will dig his toes in and resist, for I am quite certain that time will come.

Important as is the rebuilding of the barracks, I think what the House has more in mind today is the general question of amenities. I want to refer to the excellent system which began during this recent war, of Information Rooms in the main barracks, depots, and on board the big ships, where the ratings could go and see all the maps, newspapers, etc., and where HANSARD used to be supplied during the war. I would like to think that this Debate will be widely read by the officers and men in the Fleet. Indeed, they might get a hint or two from it. I would like to know whether the information rooms are being conducted as part of the peacetime routine, because they are of tremendous value. The chief form of amenity which is of value is something in the nature of a ship's club. We ran one at the large base where I was the executive officer. It was a club which contained all the general amenities like billiard tables, dart boards, a card room and a stage where shows could be put on, and so forth—a club run entirely by a lower deck committee elected on a democratic basis, with an accountant officer to act as treasurer in accordance with King's Regulations, and with which none

of us ever interfered unless by invitation, such as if they wanted our advice or counsel or if they wished to obtain leave for somebody who was required to appear in a show or something of that sort.

I would impress upon the House that this ship's club has blossomed out into a postwar association of men who served together at that base. I had the honour of taking the chair the other night at what they hoped was the first of a long series of annual dinners. I found that they have set up their own employment bureau, a clearing house between those who have not got jobs and those who have got jobs to offer, among officers and men, and they are doing this with far greater success than the Ministry of Labour. They have succeeded in placing a large number of their members. There we have what we really mean by welfare—a club in which men got together during the war and the comradeship of which goes on when the war is over.

That brings me to the last point I want to make, and the one which I would stress most. My view of welfare is that it is almost entirely a psychological matter. It is not so much the provision of this or that comfort. It is not even so much a question of accommodation. It is entirely a question of the mental atmosphere which is created in a ship or a shore establishment. In 1914, when I was on the lower deck, there was no organised welfare at all in the terms in which we discuss it now. But that does not mean that nothing was done on those lines. A great deal was done by the officers to organise comforts and amenities for the lower deck. In this recent war when one wanted to go ahead with things of this sort, when a ship visited a port or a base, I found a mysterious individual had been evolved

in the wartime organisation of the Navy called P.A.L.O.—the Port Amenities Liaison Officer, without whose blessing nothing could be done. Not a game of football could be played, not a hall could be obtained for a concert without his blessing.

There was a tendency—and I think it was inevitable in the circumstances—for P.A.L.O. shown himself not very efficient, or very suitable. If that did not happen, welfare was in the hands of the least occupied officer of the ship; and with the rude health of the Navy that was usually the doctor. The doctor was the man who generally had farmed off on him all sorts of things like welfare and education. The whole point of that, as I see it, is this. The moment a welfare officer, as such, is appointed in a ship or establishment, there is a great temptation for all other officers to regard the life of the ratings as none of their business. I think that is a great pity. I believe that hon. Members, wherever they sit in the House, will agree with what I am about to say. All the best welfare work in this country is spontaneous and voluntary. I always think it is a pity—although it is inevitable—that the clergy have to be placed on a salaried basis. I know the vast majority of them are extremely high-minded people, with the very best ideals. But we all know of cases, in every sect of religion, where somebody takes Orders because it is a job; and to that extent the Church suffers.

Perhaps I might be permitted to introduce a personal note, to show how I feel on this subject. My father, at the age of 19, started a mission in the East End of London, to which he went two nights a week until within three months of his death in his 80th year. For 60 years he was a social worker in the East End of London. That is what I mean when I

say that the best welfare work is done for the love of the thing; it is done on a voluntary and spontaneous basis. In this House we are here for the welfare of our fellow countrymen—a splendid mission. I think it is a pity that we live in economic circumstances in which we have to be paid, and in which there is a danger of membership of the House of Commons becoming a job and a livelihood rather than a great social work. Therefore, I hope that welfare will not become a Service profession, or a branch of the Service. I hope it will not be canalised, and narrowed down to the job of one officer or another. If so, there will be a tendency for the situation to take on the aspect of the famous story of the harassed mother with two small children at Southend, saying: "I've brought you kids here for the day to enjoy yourselves. If you don't enjoy danger where there is organised welfare in the Services.

I hope that in approaching this topic the Financial Secretary will study some of the very valuable things that were learned during the war, and that the officers of the Navy will be encouraged not to rebuff outside helpers, civilians, who are interested in this matter. Let me give an example of what I mean. During the war a number of devoted ladies all over the country used to knit comforts for the Fleet. And by the way, I hope that continues in time of peace, because it is just as cold keeping watch in peacetime as it is in the face of the enemy. I hope the comforts do not end when the guns cease to fire. But that is by the way. These comforts used to arrive for distribution, representing as they did a labour of love by people all over the country. Now, there is all the difference in the world in the manner in which these comforts are distributed. If they are thrown to the man by the supply assistant, saying, "That's your lot. Sign for it," the real

spirit of the thing is thereby destroyed. Even if it is handed to him by someone wearing the honoured uniform of the W.R.N.S., it is still a Service matter. At our base we were very fortunate in having a civilian lady, the wife of one of the officers, who took a great interest in the ship's club. Whenever a lad was going to sea for his first voyage, on his first convoy, while we had all the Service ceremonial and the supply system of booking the comforts, they were handed to the man by this lady. Some people may say that is sob stuff and sentimental talk. But the fact remains, that a smile, a handshake and a cheerful word go a mighty long way when a man is going to sea for the first time, when the thing can be divested, if only for a moment, of the Service atmosphere, and especially when, in the words of the hon. Member for Shettleston (Mr. McGovern) the lady is "kindly to the eye"—as was the case at our base—it makes a great difference.

Mr. James Callaghan (Cardiff, South)

The hon. and gallant Member has eyes in the back of his head.

Lieut.-Commander Braithwaite

The hon. Member must not imagine I do not know who is astern of me. A suitable reference is coming in a moment or two. The House anticipates me. This me to what I believe to be the proper conclusion of this matter of welfare. In the 1914–18 war I remember serving as a rating for a time in the old light cruiser "Minerva." The gunnery lieutenant of that ship took an immense interest in lower deck welfare. Whenever we were in port he would hurry ashore, and make arrangements for our football and entertainment and so on. He was the moving

spirit in all the ship's concerts; he knew all our troubles; he was the man who would always help if there was some problem at home. That gunnery lieutenant is now a famous man, with a great record in the recent war—Admiral Lord Fraser. He was beloved by every man who served with him in those days, so long ago, and beloved ever since. Towards the end of the recent war I remember being sent one day to Queen Anne's Mansions, and being detailed to go and give lectures on the work of this honourable House to the ships and establishments in the Mediterranean. I always felt that if I did nothing else I must have lulled to sleep many a tired watch-keeper who listened to my orations about what happened in the House of Commons. In Italy on one occasion the Admiral came and took the chair—a most alarming experience. I thought he had come to find out what Members of Parliament said to those boys when they were out there. But I found that I was quite wrong. It was his custom to attend that sort of thing, to go to discussion groups and listen to what was going on. He was immensely interested in all these matters which we have been discussing today—welfare, amenities, and mental as well as physical recreation. That officer, I am very glad to know, is now the Admiral Commanding Reserves, Vice-Admiral Morgan, who had the loyalty and affection of everybody who served under him at Taranto at that time.

Now I come to my hon. Friend the Member for South Aberdeen (Lady Grant), who in a most agreeable and successful maiden speech last week put her finger on what I believe to be the most important factor in all these matters, though she was talking about the economic situation at the time. She said what a mistake it was for men in industry to be treated as numbers on a clocking-in

machine. That was a splendid phrase, summing up exactly what we mean now, this being a psychological matter. I am quite sure welfare in the Navy begins at the moment a man joins his ship, or, indeed, reports into barracks. Is he treated as a number, or is he treated as an individual? Because from that moment his whole attitude to the Service will move in one direction or the other. I am bound to say—I am not going to introduce a controversial note—but I am bound to say that 30 years ago, when I was on the lower deck, harsh treatment, when it came—and it came quite often, in fact—came from officers who had been promoted from the lower deck. I am prepared to believe we have now entered a more enlightened age so far as this matter is concerned; but I do say that, because in those days they were the ones who chased us, and when there was severity, it was from that quarter that it used to come.

The hon. Member for Huddersfield, if I may refer to him once again in my concluding remarks, spoke of the importance of what he called partnership. I think he will agree with me that that varies with the size of the ship. In small craft there has got to be that perfect understanding between officers and men. After all, when one is travelling by train and one does not like the face of the man opposite in the railway carriage, one can always get out at the next station and go into another compartment; but if one decides in the middle of the Atlantic one does not like the face of one's messmates or officers, it is a mighty long way to walk home. In the atmosphere of the small ship one gets that complex. In the big ships as well, I believe, the Navy is far ahead of the other two Services in this matter of good relations and mutual confidence between officers and men. So, when I am asked who should be the welfare officers in

the Navy my reply is, "All of them. Each and all of them, particularly the divisional officers."

The Financial Secretary rather blew a trumpet about the welfare committees. I am sure he was not trying to convey the impression that this was some innovation; because that is very far from being the case. A long way back, in 1914, canteen committees were elected on a democratic basis, and officers and ratings used to sit together. If he is pressing for the extension of that sort of thing, all well and good; but do not let him try to throw it out that this is some sort of Socialist reform, because that would be very far from the truth. The acid test on these matters of welfare is very simple. We have heard a good deal today about terrible conditions and widespread complaints. But there is one very simple way of testing the welfare, and the relations between officers and men, and it is this. During the long war that lasted six years, those of us who sat in the last Parliament remember the state of the Order Paper at Question time; and there were few Questions on the Paper to the First Lord of the Admiralty complaining of conditions in the Navy. But there were large numbers put, on the other hand, to the other Service Departments. Those addressed to the First Lord were infinitely less.

Let us take another test, detention. The men sent to detention in the Navy were on a much lower ratio than those sent to detention in the other Services, and I suggest that that is an indication that, while nothing is perfect in this world, the Navy has a long and honourable record in this matter of welfare and relations between officers and men. I am quite sure that this state of affairs will be maintained and improved in the future, and in the years we are now entering, but none the less it is a good thing

that this honourable House should always stress the supreme importance of welfare, in the very best sense of that noble word.

8.25 p.m.

Mr. Dugdale

I am glad that the hon. Member for Kirkdale (Mr. Keenan) has raised this very important question, and has been followed by others who have stressed its importance. I should like to reply to a few of his questions. He asked, first of all, whether welfare committees will deal with length of service abroad. No, Sir. The answer is that they will not, because they are going to deal simply with those questions which affect the actual ship's life, questions which can be dealt with within the ship; and length of service abroad is, obviously, a question of far wider import, a question which would be decided by the Admiralty or the commander-in-chief, not by the individual ship's captain. Such cases as that would not be dealt with by the committees.

He also asked about the distressing court martial case that has recently appeared in the newspapers. I can only say now that my hon. Friend the Civil Lord will reply to that question when he winds up the Debate. I will leave it at that. He made, if I may say so, a somewhat unjustified attack upon the Royal Naval Patrols. The Royal Naval Patrols are in the same position as other police. It is their duty to keep law and order. It may sometimes be a very distressing duty, but it is their duty to do it. I think they have performed it in an efficient manner, and I think he has no case that they have in any way abused their position.

Mr. Keenan

Would the hon. Gentleman consider the case I quoted—that of a snowy day, on which the Naval Police should be able to use discretion, because of the men's health?

Mr. Dugdale

There may be individual cases, certainly; but I want to make it quite clear—and I am sure he will agree—that that sort of thing to which he referred is not true in general of the Royal Marine Police. He asked about the question of liberty boats. The liberty boats from shore establishments have been, as I said they would be, abolished in all shore establishments, except those for trainees. It was considered they should be kept for trainees as part of their naval training; but as soon as the trainees have passed the training stage, in every establishment the liberty boats are abolished.

He talked also about long service men and their re-employment in civil life. I agree that this is a very important point, indeed, and we see to it that, wherever possible, we get these men put into jobs in civil life, so that they will not be handicapped by their period of service in the Navy, and so that they will be able to start in civil life under the best possible conditions. He referred also to the question of uniforms. I was rather surprised to hear that, because I had always thought that the sailor was proud of his uniform. I admit I have never worn the uniform, but I think it is exceedingly becoming—much more becoming than the clothes we here have got on. I hope that the sailor does, in fact, like that uniform, and I have no reason to think he does not.

He also asked what had been done to reconstruct space in barracks. A great deal has been done. For instance, in many barracks in the past it has been the custom for men both to sleep and to eat in the same room. My hon. Friend the Civil Lord, who is in charge of barracks, informs me that now, wherever possible, that practice of using that, in future, there will be one room for the men to sleep in, and one room for them to eat in.

I was asked a question about the Royal tour. Let me make it quite clear that the Navy is proud to have the opportunity of taking their Majesties on this important voyage. We want to see that they are accommodated in the way most fitting to them, to see that their accommodation may be such as we should like our Royal Family to have. The only accommodation which has been interfered with is, as a matter of fact, officers' accommodation. Officers' accommodation has been reduced to some extent, in order to increase the accommodation for the Royal Family; but the only alteration in the ratings' accommodation is, that a certain amount of space—a very small amount of space—is taken up by a few sea cadets.

The hon. Member also mentioned the conditions in the Navy, which, he said, prevented recruitment. I can only say that, while, naturally, we have not got all the men we want in the Navy, we are exceedingly satisfied that, after this long period of war, our recruiting campaign is, in fact, going remarkably well. He also referred, in conclusion, to a book by Mr. Hannen Swaffer, and I would like to say a word on that. I have read it with great care, thinking that I might find something revealing which would give me an opportunity to say, "Here is something which should be remedied, something which will make conditions of life for

the sailor better." I read it through, but found absolutely nothing in it. I could myself, and so could any hon. Member, write an article in any large newspaper with a circulation of three million, as I think "The People" has—two or three million—asking anybody in the Navy or in any other force, who have any complaints to write to me. It is quite inevitable that, in these circumstances, one would get hundreds, and indeed, thousands of letters, and I have no doubt that Mr. Swaffer got them and was very pleased at having got them, but that does not prove anything at all. The hon. Member for South Poplar (Mr. Guy) said he hoped that Members of Parliament would be able to visit ships and shore establishments. We would welcome their visits, and we hope they may be arranged as speedily as possible.

I turn now to the hon. and gallant Member for Holderness (Lieut.-Commander Braithwaite). I will not follow him in his dismal prophecy of a slump, and, indeed, I would be out of Order if I were to refer to the economic crisis. I can only say that, were such a thing to occur, we would take every step to see that it fell as lightly as possible on the welfare services of the Navy, but I do not admit for a moment that it is going to occur. The hon. and gallant Gentleman also referred to the question of information rooms. These will be continued, as they performed very useful services, and we want them to be continued in every ship of sufficient size. I very much welcome his idea of the ship's club, and I hope I may be able to learn from him more about those to which he referred, as it seems to me to be an admirable idea.

Lastly, the hon. and gallant Gentleman dealt with the question of welfare as a whole. He said the job was usually

given to the least occupied officer, and there was a danger that other officers would feel that it was not their duty to pay attention to welfare. Anything that I can do to stress the importance of welfare work to every officer, I will do. We do not mean that, because a welfare officer has been appointed, other officers should feel that it is not their duty to see to the welfare of their men. It is their duty, and it remains their duty. The hon. and gallant Gentleman also referred to canteen committees. I am ready to admit that there may be, indeed there were, some ships in which there were properly elected canteen committees, but by no means in all of them, and we want to see that what has been done in the best ships will now be done in every ship by means of an Admiralty Fleet Order. We are also hoping to extend their functions somewhat, so that they will deal with all questions of welfare, and not, simply, canteen matters. This will be a very considerable extension of a practice which was followed up to a point in some of the best ships.

I have tried to answer various points that have been raised and I am glad that this discussion has taken place. I hope it will do a great deal to focus the attention of the House and of the country on the importance of welfare work in the Royal Navy.

Mr. Keenan

I beg to ask leave to withdraw the Amendment.

Amendment, by leave, withdrawn.

Main Question again proposed.

8.35 p.m.

Mr. Paget (Northampton)

I feel that there has been at least one criticism which has taken the Government by surprise today. After all the talk of shortage of manpower, and the lack of it in our industries which we have heard in the economic Debate, I feel that, at a time when no conceivable enemy has an oceangoing fleet of any kind or description, they must have been a little surprised to find themselves criticised for not having enough big ships. At any rate, I shall provide the Civil Lord with an answer. It is always nice for a Minister, when he comes to reply, to be able to say that he is blamed for doing too much on one side and too little on another, because my suggestion is going to be that we are, at the present time, maintaining far too many obsolete ships and weapons in the Navy.

Before dealing with that, I would like to say this. I had the very good fortune during the war to serve in the Navy. I served under officers of the Royal Navy, and I do not think that anybody who has had that experience could have felt anything but an enormous admiration for the officers of the Royal Navy. In the other Services, the Air Force and the Army, the amateur very soon caught up with the professionals, and there was not much difference in them, but, in the Navy, we of the R.N.V.R. never anything like caught up with R.N. The only people who disputed that were the R.N. officers themselves, who said that the R.N.V.R. officers serving under them were as good as any R.N. officers. We knew that it was not true, but it was one of the things that helped us to give of our best. I want to make it clear that I am not making any

kind of criticism of the superb qualities of the men who run the ships. Nevertheless, I do say that we have reached a stage at which there is no strategic justification for the maintenance of a battle fleet, or, to put the same thing in slightly different words, that a battle fleet that cannot fly is obsolete.

The objects of a battle fleet are and always have been twofold. First, they are to deny the use of the sea to the enemy; secondly, to maintain the use of that sea for the shipping of one's own nation. It is in the light of its capacity to do these things that a battle fleet must be judged. The history of the last 100 years has been a gradual retraction of the area within which battle fleets could perform their functions. Firstly, the torpedo boat stopped the close blockade. The 3-dimensional submarine invaded the area of the 2-dimensional ship, and the battle fleet had to be withdrawn from the enemy ports. Then, we got the shore-based air-craft. Within the limited area in which shore-based aircraft could operate, they exercised dominion over the sea.

So you get a position in which that area of the sea over which a battle fleet can exercise dominion is greatly retracted, and with the increasing range of airborne fleets that area will disappear altogether, because the airborne squadrons will be able to reach all the corners of the ocean. That is the situation which we are meeting now, and of course it must be made very clear indeed that, when one talks of a battle fleet maintaining dominion, it does not mean passing a battle fleet through the Channel, as the "Scharnhorst" and the "Gneisenau" passed through the Channel under an air umbrella. There it is not the ship that is gaining dominion over the sea, it is the

air which is gaining dominion and allowing the ships to go through. It is not the ship which is protecting, it is the ship which is being protected. The justification of the capital ship must rest upon its capacity to gain power of itself and for other ships, and I think that was in a great degree lost sight of when we came to the Pacific war, in which one found the battleships sent out to protect the aircraft carriers time and again having to be protected by the aircraft carriers. That was what happened.

So the situation steadily developed during the last war, and indeed I think the history of the Mediterranean war, during the later period of 1942 and 1943 at any rate, in a restricted sea, probably gives one a very good indication indeed of what one may expect in an ocean war in future, because the range of aircraft will have made the circumstances of an ocean similar to those experienced in the Mediterranean. There at any rate sea power was a question of drawing circles on a chart. Those circles were fighter cover, the circles representing our fighter cover were the areas of our sea power, and the circles representing the enemy's fighter cover were the areas of their sea power. There were of course great battles, such as the Battle of Matapan, but the Battle of Matapan was as strategically irrelevant as the battles of Hector and Achilles outside the walls of Troy. As a result of Matapan we could not use another mile of water and the enemy were not prevented from using a mile of water. Rommel's army and supplies passed across before Matapan and after Matapan in just the same way, because sea power was there exerted by the air forces represented by the circles.

We had a very alarming moment when the "Valiant" and the "Queen Elizabeth" were sunk in Alexandria harbour. We had not got a single capital ship in the Mediterranean, and it was said that the war in that area was lost, and indeed it was lost if we lost sea power in the Mediterranean. But after a bit it became reasonably obvious that it did not really matter in the least whether the battleships were on the surface of Alexandria harbour or at the bottom of Alexandria harbour, or on a sitdown strike with the French Admiral Godfroi. It made no difference because sea power was not in those battleships, it was being exercised in that restricted sea from the air. That does not mean for a moment that ships were not important. Ships were highly important, the auxiliary ships, the ships which do not gain or maintain sea power, but which exercise it when it is gained by a battle fleet or from the air.

The raiders, the light cruisers, the destroyers and above everything the submarines, they were the ships that counted in the Mediterranean. They were the successors of the privateers of the Napoleonic wars, they were the ships that raided into the area of another sea power, and if that other sea power was inefficient they could do great damage. The lesson to be gained from that area was that in spite of the fact that the enemy, within the range of their shore based aircraft, had sea power, they had an utter lack of coordination between their ships and aircraft and were not able to exercise it properly, and therefore we could raid. The battle fleet, the primary object and instrument of war in that area, was the bomber squadron, because it would beat anything else either afloat or in the air.

It has been said, I think in the last Navy Estimates Debate, that battleships were a great success in the last war. Frankly, that may do for a "Warship Week," but in a serious discussion it simply is not tenable. I believe myself that after the first year or so the battleships we had were more nuisance than they were worth. I remember during the Battle of the Atlantic going into Scapa, and there, when we were having those appalling losses in the Atlantic owing to a lack of escort vessels, always in Scapa there were the fleet destroyers, the best destroyers, never less than a dozen of them swinging round their moorings. Why were they there? In order to escort the battleships, because if a German battleship came out the battle fleet had to be there to deal with it. So strong was this battle fleet fetish that nobody thought what would happen if a battleship really did come out. The "Scharnhorst" did, and actually met the Russian convoy, and thereupon executed the manoeuvre proper for an unescorted capital ship meeting torpedo craft—she turned round and ran for her life. She was resolutely handled, she got out of it in heavy weather and turned back and had another shot, and she met the torpedo craft again, and turned and ran for her life. It was the only thing she could do. As a matter of fact she ran into the "Duke of York," but it was not the "Duke of York" which stopped her, it was the destroyers. The "Duke of York" eventually came up and finished her off, but the destroyers would have got her even if the "Duke" had not been there.

Certainly at that time the ambition of a flotilla leader would have been to find an enemy capital ship unescorted in the middle of an ocean. What would one do, having found it? In the day time one would have kept out of sight, and at night the destroyers would have closed in to that

intermediate area where they could see the big ship but the big ship could not see them.

Commander Maitland (Horncastle)

The hon. Member will forgive me for interrupting, but there were three heavy cruisers there as well.

Mr. Paget

Yes, there were three heavy cruisers with the convoy, but what the "Scharnhorst" turned from each time were the destroyers and not the cruisers. It was the destroyers' torpedo attack from which she turned away in every case. That, I think, would be inevitably what the big ship would do in those circumstances. At sea at night, visibility depends on size, and the small ship could place herself in a position from which she could see the big ship while the big ship could not see her. Those were the days before radar, and in those days the destroyers would have got a big ship unescorted, and that is why big ships were escorted. It was a pure fetish that the battle fleet had to be kept there, in order to avoid raids which were not really a menace, when the destroyers were desperately needed to deal with the submarines. I am quite prepared to agree that today a battleship would probably be able to sink a whole flotilla of destroyers without once seeing any of them. Radar fire control has, I have no doubt, advanced a long way since I was at sea, but radar control was coming on very fast then.

I am quite prepared to believe that radar control of fire would enable a whole flotilla of destroyers to be sunk by the big ship out of torpedo range. But that does not make the battleship safer. Quite the reverse. The radar which

the battleship uses against the destroyer is used by the aeroplane against the battleship. In those circumstances the peril of the battleship becomes that much greater. That is always the worry with new weapons. Weapon A is made obsolete by weapon B. Then weapon C makes weapon B obsolete, but that does not bring back weapon A. Each time, as one weapon replaces another, the older weapon becomes more and more obsolete. In these circumstances, that is the situation of the ship.

Take this question of sea and air weapons. The bomb sight enables the aeroplane to hit the ship. Then the anti-aircraft control of fire becomes such that the aeroplane can be hit on its bomb run and before it can release its bomb. The next stage is that the bomb sight is adjusted for a zigzag run. That is about where we ended up in the last war. The next step is that the ship's anti-aircraft missile has to be adjusted so that by magnetism it follows the zigzag of the aeroplane and hits the aeroplane. I believe we have missiles which will now do that very thing. We have missiles which will actually home on to the aeroplane. The aeroplane then has a missile which will hold on to the ship. The attacking arm which can manoeuvre in three dimensions at 300 knots will always have the advantage over the Fleet which has to launch its attack uphill when it is manoeuvring at about 30 knots.

Colonel Crosthwaite-Eyre

Will the hon. Member tell us how he correlates what he is now saying with the experience he mentioned of the Battle of the Coral Sea? His illustrations seem to deny everything that he said.

Mr. Paget

I pointed out that the Battle of the Coral Sea was very early in 1942.

Colonel Crosthwaite-Eyre

The hon. Member is now talking about a different period.

Mr. Paget

I was not talking about 1942. I was talking about the future. I was dealing with the matter as it now stands. That is what we have to look at. The Battle of the Coral Sea was an aircraft carrier battle, a battle of aircraft launched from Ships. That was the whole story of the Pacific war. There were special circumstances both in time and space which made it ideally suitable for that purpose. Whether that will be the situation in the next war I do not know.

Colonel Crosthwaite-Eyre

That is the point.

Mr. Paget

The old mistake has always been in preparing for the last war instead of for the next. I am told now, although in these Estimates we do not get very much information as to the next step we have to take, that only one battleship is now in commission. The "Vanguard" is used as a yacht, with her complement of—what is it?—3,000 odd men. She is expensive as a yacht, for as a weapon she is comparatively useless. Only one battleship is to the good. It means that the powers that be are beginning to catch up with the last war. They have to get on and think about the next war. The all important thing today is not to go on

maintaining obsolete vessels but to get prototypes of what is conceived to be the new form to deal with the kind of war we may expect. The Air Force and the Army have commitments now, but the Navy have no commitments. No possible enemy now has an ocean going fleet. That is all the more reason why we should be able to make use of this breather, so far as sea warfare is concerned, to develop the new types of weapon.

That is just exactly what the Estimates show that we are neglecting. Nothing like sufficient is being done, to develop those prototypes. They should be both air and sea vessels. We want to develop a very long range bomber for sea purposes and a bomber large enough to carry within its fuselage jet propelled wireless controlled projectiles, that may be launched from the air to attack a ship, or whatever the method may be. We should develop that type of aircraft because it is the battleship of the future. We should develop a type of craft which will co-ordinate with the battle squadrons of the air, the fast escort ship. It will be a ship capable of dealing with the highest speed of submarine, such as was being developed by the Germans at the end of the war. We should develop new submarine tactics. I do not believe we shall be able to operate with Asdic at anything like the speed at which submarines will be able to manœuvre. We have to develop wholly new devices and we now have an interval before somebody else builds an ocean going fleet to do it.

There are two essential things. We must have co-ordination between the two arms, the sea and the air. There may be a case for keeping the Army and the Air Force separate; I do not know, but I cannot believe there is any case for keeping the Navy and the air separate.

They should be amalgamated into a single organisation, able to work with each other as one and knowing each others problems. I urge anybody who wants to find out the benefits of co-ordination in these matters to read the German accounts of the Mediterranean war. It shows the disastrous consequences which flow for the situation in which those two arms have divided control. We heard yesterday in the Debate the point of view of Coastal Command about the Navy. We in the Navy often had very hard things to say about Coastal Command. These two should come together, but suddenly to take Coastal Command and separate it from the Air Force is not logical. The whole of the two Services must come together. That is a wide suggestion to make at this stage. We must seriously think about this matter. We must develop the prototypes of the next war. We must realise that the battle fleet, the conquering arm, the thing that can beat anything else it comes up against, is the flying squadron. All the other ships needed to exercise sea power must be co-ordinated with the battle fleet. But now it is a battle fleet that flies and not one that floats. It is only by bringing together these two commands that we can make the instrument which we need.

9.0 p.m.

Commander Maitland (Horncastle)

I so much enjoyed listening to the speech of the hon. Member for Northampton (Mr. Paget) that he caused me to forget my own speech. That is the worst thing that could happen to anybody in this House. It seems to me that he wants really a "cattle ship" or a "barrier." That is an old naval argument. I agree very largely with what he has

been saying and I hope to refer to his comments later in my speech. However, there is one point which I find somewhat disquieting. It is that I was able to understand everything he was talking about and, in my opinion, that means that almost certainly it is out of date. We in this House must remember that even though it may only seem a short time since we left the Navy, things move on and it is no use trying to give lectures on technical subjects to the Admiralty. I am shortly going to commit that sin myself and when I do I hope the hon. Member will forgive me as I now forgive him.

Before I come to the main points of my speech, I would like to take up one or two points made by the hon. Member for Huddersfield (Mr. Mallalieu). He made a speech which not only was extremely interesting but was amusing and very true. At one point when he was talking about rackets that go on in the barracks, I very nearly asked him why, when he became an officer, he did not do something about it; but it was soon plain that it was impossible to do anything like that because it emerged from his speech that he was obviously himself the head racketeer. I am very sorry that he is not here. There is one point which I would like to take up with him, and that is concerning the question of consultation between officers and men in the Navy. I could not quite understand what he meant. It seems to me that throughout my time in the Service I have continually consulted with the men with whom I have had the honour to serve. I cannot imagine when I was officer of a division in a cruiser doing any divisional work without having a little conference with my captain of the top and my locker man, who was more important, probably than the captain of the top, and an old able seaman and an intelligent young one, too. The

whole thing was done on a perfectly amicable and understanding basis.

Obviously it is not right to say that in the majority of cases friendly consultation about how to run a ship does not in practice go on. In wartime one has to make a certain amount of allowance for the tiredness of everybody, and particularly of the officers. Being at war is a very tiring performance, particularly in a small ship, as many hon. and gallant Members know. I think perhaps some of the unhappiness and some of the bad things that went on, possibly may have been due to that. We ought to make allowances for it. I think that the speech of the hon. Member for Huddersfield stressed the importance of trying to get the right type of officer. He indicated, for example, the lack of consultation which went on in his ship. When he was promoted himself, why did he not carry on with that consultation? It was perfectly open to him to do so. I can assure him there are absolutely no rules or traditions in the Navy which forbid it. I think that suggests how frightfully important it is to try to choose the very best officers that we can get for the Navy.

Not only are they responsible on many occasions for the lives of their ships' companies, but, very often, they are responsible for the whole of the happiness, health and general comfort of their men. I can understand hon. Members opposite if that is the basis of any criticism they make of Dartmouth even though I do not agree with them. What we must do is to try to get the best type of men for officers. I have studied this matter rather carefully. I have been to Dartmouth. I do not think the hon. Member for Huddersfield has been there, nor has the Parliamentary Secretary. I do not think many hon. Members opposite

who criticised Dartmouth have been there. I ask that before they make this severe criticism, they should visit the place and talk over the matter with the captain and officers and masters. They are in a far better position to state the case for Dartmouth than I am. Better still, if they go and look at the cadets, I think hon. Members opposite will find that they are probably the best advertisement for the Dartmouth system. I appeal to hon. Members opposite, before they bring pressure and criticism to bear, to try to see the other side of the case. I ask them to go to see for themselves.

Commander Pursey

I have been to Dartmouth. I spent a considerable time investigating conditions. Other hon. Members on this side of the House have also been to Dartmouth, so there is very little in the point which the hon. and gallant Gentleman makes that we ought to go and see for ourselves.

Commander Maitland

I happen to know that a good many hon. and gallant Members opposite have not been to Dartmouth. I advise them to do so before they make up their minds on this very important matter. The Parliamentary Secretary said in his speech that in eight weeks' time we were to have a statement on the various committees which have reported on the recruitment of officers. I welcome that but I suggest that it might be better still if a White Paper was produced on this vitally important subject, not producing the reports in facsimile but giving a general line on the recommendations they make. I think that would be a most excellent thing for the House to read, and then I hope that we shall be allowed time to Debate the matter in due

course. I would like to reserve my remarks in defence of Dartmouth for that occasion. I do not think it is very easy to comment until we have got the report.

I could not agree more with those hon. Members who have said that we do not know enough about what we are debating today. One hears a great deal about the "silent Navy." I have never quite understood why it is called the "silent Navy," but it is clear to me that there can be too much silence. That is what is happening now. We must realise in this Debate that the Navy is going through an extremely difficult transitional period. The Army and the Air Force, heaven knows, are having a difficult enough time, but I think that the Navy is facing an even heavier task. The Navy have a special problem, because they always have to plan on a longer term than any of the other Services. It takes a long time to design and build a ship, and when she is built has to last some time. Therefore, planning has to be for very far ahead. Also as the hon. Member for Northampton has pointed out, we do not even know quite what our function is to be in the future.

I will now break my rule, and refer to a rather more technical point. The reason I do so is because the Parliamentary Secretary mentioned in his speech that modern ships have to have far greater complements than older ships. He said that that was one of the reason why there was an apparent shortage in the number of ships afloat. I think that that was the deduction that he drew. I would not put this matter forward now, unless I knew that a considerable volume of opinion in the Navy supported what I now wish to say. I mentioned it in the last Debate on the Estimates, and it is now in our present manpower shortage even more important. I believe that fighting

ships, particularly the smaller types, such as submarines and so forth, can be designed to carry infinitely fewer men. Part of the considerably increased complements at present are due to the fact that as new inventions have arrived, which, taken by themselves, would have reduced the number of men required, they add to the number when they are installed in older ships. They have had the reverse effect from that for which they were designed.

That being so, I think there is a case for a strong directive, from the very highest quarter, that we should try, during this period when we do not quite know what the future holds, to investigate this problem of how to build and design ships which can be manned by far fewer fighting men. That principle, if it can be carried out—and I believe it can—will have a great many advantages. If you have a small, highly trained, fighting force, you will have to have a larger maintenance staff behind it. That maintenance staff would be composed nearly all of tradesmen, such as plumbers, coppersmiths, and shipwrights, who are interchangeable with their civilian occupations, much more so than the highly trained technicians who go to sea. I think that will be a good thing, that the Navy will be more flexible during the change-over from peace to war. Also, if you manage to create ships which can be run by fewer men you will be able to provide better amenities, the men, too, will be more highly skilled and, therefore, more highly paid.

I would now like to turn from that, and ask the Civil Lord a few questions. First, I would like to refer to the White Paper of last year. There have been several references to recruitment today, and I wish to deal with the subject of petty officers and chief petty officers signing on to

complete time for pension. I have been anxious about this, and the answers I have received from the Parliamentary Secretary to Questions put by me have made me more anxious still. The figures are very unsatisfactory. I would like to know how that side of recruitment is going on, and whether the situation in regard to petty officers and chief petty officers are getting enough attention?

It seems to me that all of us spend an enormous amount of our time trying to get better things for the junior ratings and trying to make everyone else officers, and we are rather inclined to forget the petty officer and the chief petty officer and all the things that happen to them. Speaking as a naval officer, I would say that the petty officer and the chief petty officer are the backbone of the Navy, and if we neglect that important factor, as we rather look like doing at the moment, then we deserve anything that is coming to us. I hope that the Civil Lord will be able to make me feel happier about that point.

I should also like to know if the scheme in the White Paper for the abolition of non-substantive rates is going according to plan. I am not very happy about that for I never thought that it would work. I have heard rumours that it is not going too well. I should like to know whether training is being held up and what amendments have been made to the White Paper in regard to non-substantive rates. The next point I should like to mention has already been mentioned by the hon. Member for Devonport (Mr. Foot), and I would like to back up what he says, in regard to the question of the payment of increased pensions to pensioners who served on the active list. The hon. Member for Devon-port, the hon. Member for Drake (Mr. Medland) and I have asked many Questions on this

subject and the last Question which the hon. Member for Drake put received a long answer which was reasonably satisfactory. The hard fact remains, nevertheless, that a considerable time has elapsed and these men are getting no increased money in the meantime. I should like to appeal to the Civil Lord to hasten this matter and see whether these men to whom the country owes so much cannot get what is their undoubted right as soon as possible. Many of my friends on the lower deck who are pensioners come to me and ask me when are they going to get their increased pensions. I am rather sick of telling them that they are going to get them soon because they ought to be getting them now.

I want to ask a question about the disposal of the German submarines. I think that this is obviously one of the matters which affects the Navy more than anything else—the question of possible enemy vessels which they may have to meet. I am told that there were 400 or 500 German submarines and that some of them were very fine boats indeed. I had the honour of serving with our submarine service during the war in a humble capacity and I know from what I heard that the German submarines were good. I want to know what happened to those boats. As I understand it, after the Potsdam Conference it was arranged that the United States of America, Russia and ourselves should divide the submarines and destroy them by, I think, 15th February of last year. I know that we have destroyed our quota, because it is mentioned in the White Paper. I have not heard whether the Americans or the Russians have destroyed theirs. As far as I remember they had to report that it was done, and I should like to know whether these reports have been received.

Last of all, I should like to come to something quite different from that about which I have been talking. I feel very strongly about it. It may seem rather stupid, but the House will, I hope, forgive me. I am really getting a little tired of this continual reference in the House and in the Press to the only qualities which a naval officer seems to possess as bluntness and heartiness. Sometimes when I go to make speeches in the country I am introduced by my chairman with the words, "Now we are going to have a breath of fresh air from the sea." One really finds that a little exasperating. I can feel the members of my audience settling down with an anticipatory wriggle almost as if they were expecting to see the hairs on my chest pop out of my shirt. It is not at all a good thing. [Laughter.] To be serious for a moment, there are many mothers and schoolmasters who are wondering whether to send their little hopeful, whom they regard as something extremely brilliant, into the Navy, and that sort of talk does not do the Navy any good.

It is vitally important and the point cannot be made too strongly. I am perfectly certain that hon. Members opposite who have served in the Navy will back me up when I say that we need all the brains we can possibly get in the Navy, and that to be a good naval officer needs as much brains and as high a standard of intelligence as any other profession, a fact which ought to be well known. The latest offender is my right hon. Friend the Member for Saffron Walden (Mr. R. A. Butler) for whom normally I have a great admiration. During the recent Debate on India he referred in these terms to the new Viceroy: It is certainly our desire ... that he should get through the formulæ of the Constitutional world ... with the bluff heartiness ... and the commonsense with which he is

endowed."—[OFFICIAL REPORT, 6th March, 1947; Vol. 434, c. 759–760.] All I would say is that anybody who knows Lord Mountbatten must realise that that is possibly the greatest slander that has ever been dealt him. Also, it is an extremely bad advertisement for the Royal Navy.

I will end on this note. When we are talking about recruiting officers for the Navy surely we must have one idea and one idea only—that we must get the best men we can possibly get. The object of this House and of the country is to have the finest Navy in the world. We must remember that the individual items, important as they are, which go to make up that object are not in themselves objects, and particularly at this time when the Navy is undergoing a hard and difficult period of transition nothing must be allowed to take away from that ideal.

9.24 p.m.

Commander Pursey (Hull, East)

One point in the speech of the hon. and gallant Gentleman the Member for Horncastle (Commander Maitland) in which I would support him is his suggestion that a White Paper giving some information about the result of these committees on the entry and promotion of officers should be provided. Might I ask him if he is aware of what is already on record as a great deal of it was collected by the late Admiral Sir Herbert Richmond and practically all the evidence is against the early entry of officers in the Navy.

Commander Maitland

I am sorry I did not catch that. Did the hon. and gallant Gentleman say the report which we were to receive?

Commander Pursey

No.

Commander Maitland

Then does he not agree that the real information will be in the report which we have still to receive?

§Commander Pursey

What the hon. and gallant Member is asking me to say is what, in fact, I did say. I supported his plea, and said that the evidence already on record, a large amount of which has been collected by Admiral Sir Herbert Richmond, was against early entry. The most important part of the speech of the Financial Secretary was his announcement on the changes for the selection of officers. He made a particular point, that instead of the prewar 5 per cent. of men awarded commissions from the lower deck, there would be between 20 to 25 per cent. That is a very small concession. The prewar numbers in the executive branch were about half a dozen, and five times half a dozen will only give us another two dozen extra. Last year, the percentage was 12½ and this means an increase of something in the order of only 30. That is to be divided between the two schemes—the upper yardmen scheme of promotion of ratings to sub-lieutenants, and the promotion of the few selected warrant officers direct to lieutenants. I should like to ask the Civil Lord whether these increases in numbers from the lower deck are to be at the expense of early entrants from Dartmouth College, or of the special entry

scheme between the ages of 17 and 18. This announcement will not satisfy the legitimate demands for democratisation of the Navy, and will not get the best type of officer which the hon. and gallant Member for Horncastle wanted to see in the Navy. We on this side of the House will await the further announcement on the reforms now being considered by the Admiralty, and if it does not go a long way further than this afternoon's announcement, we shall use every effort to force the Admiralty to go the whole hog, and make the Navy a truly national and democratic service.

Last year, I attacked the pernicious system of early entries into the Navy at the age of 13, whereby children are entered as naval cadets from preparatory schools, thus making the main stream of 312 officers into the Navy a class preserve. So far the position remains, however, that whereas over half of the executive naval officers, which is the largest branch, are entered at the age of 13, one-third enter at the ages of 17–18 through the special entry scheme, and only one-eighth are commissioned from the lower deck. The result is that the largest number of officers come from the smallest section of the community, and the smallest number of officers from the largest section of the country. With the Government's demand for the continuance of conscription in peace time, there must inevitably come the demand for full opportunities and advantages for everyone, limited only by their ability and character. No one on the other side would presumably disagree about that. There can be no question of a privileged class joining the Navy at 13, being able to short-circuit other entrants by virtue of half the vacancies for commissions having been awarded before the later entrants have a chance.

The early entry scheme from preparatory schools at 13 years of age has got to be abolished. Moreover, the special entry system of entries between the years of 17 and 18 from the public schools has also got to be abolished. All officers must, in future, serve in the ranks in the same way as in the Army and Air Force, and there must be a fair field for all and no class favours for the few. This afternoon, the Parliamentary Secretary stated that that principle had been accepted, as regards the conscripts and the future R.N.V.R. officers, and that they would be selected from ratings who had served in the ranks. If that principle is accepted for the temporary officers, it must also be accepted for the permanent officers. We cannot have one arrangement for those enlisted under conscription, and a totally different arrangement for the regular entrants into the Navy. Dartmouth College would then become the university of the Navy, where all officers would be trained together, instead of what it is today, a monastic public school, with other officers trained elsewhere, paymaster somewhere else, and others somewhere else still. All these officers should be kept together in one establishment at Dartmouth College, and trained together.

There is, however, a special type of officer to whom, so far as I know—and I have listened to most of the Debate—**313**no reference has been made this afternoon, but to whom I wish to draw particular attention. That is the warrant officer and the commissioned warrant officer. I, myself, served as a warrant officer, and therefore, can speak with some experience and knowledge of their position. The naval warrant officer has always had a much higher status than the warrant officer in the Army and the Royal Air Force, because, for centuries, going back to the

beginning of the Navy, they have always been officers and not non-commissioned officers. Yet they have a distinctive label, with a distinctive title. In big ships, they are messed in a separate mess, and are also denied the opportunity of performing duties which are performed by junior officers with much less experience and service.

During both world wars, warrant officers have seen literally thousands of temporary officers, with little or no previous knowledge of the naval profession, jump over their heads, and soar to the higher ranks, with higher status, pay, pension and other advantages, while they themselves have remained in exactly the same grade. Little or no advantage has come to the greater number of warrant officers, in spite of their meritorious war service. In fact, the majority of them, after over 20 years' service as officers, and, perhaps, another ten years' service previously as a rating, wear only the one stripe which the sublieutenant gets at the age of 21, but which warrant officers only get when nearing 50 years of age, and they have to retire as commissioned warrant officers. Such a situation is quite indefensible in these days of democracy.

It was the warrant officers who largely trained the temporary officers and carried them along in their jobs, to their own detriment. In particular, warrant engineer officers in small ships trained civilian entrants to hold the commissions which they themselves were denied. I suggest to the House that that is quite fantastic. In small ships, warrant officers perform the same duties as commissioned officers. In particular, the warrant engineer officer is the engineer officer of the ship. He is responsible for running high speed engines, and a large amount of auxiliary machinery, in fact, the whole engine room department. On

him depends, as on no other officer in the ship, the success or failure of the ship in **314**action. The executive warrant officers keep watch on the bridge at sea, in small ships, and are then in command of the ship. They have also performed these duties in some of the cruisers, and in ships as large as aircraft carriers, under convoy and other warlike conditions, in exactly the same way as the commissioned officers. Many commissioned warrant officers and even warrant officers commanded small ships during the war.

Surely, all this is complete proof of their capabilities as officers in the fullest sense of the word, and furnishes the complete argument for commissioned rank. Warrant officers in small ships also mess in the same mess as the commissioned officers. The performance of similar duties, and messing in the same mess with commissioned officers in small ships, is what is strenuously contended for throughout the Navy for all ships and shore establishments. Furthermore, in these democratic days there is no real justification for a separate mess for warrant officers, which is simply a relic of a bygone age of class distinction. The separate messing causes a lot of unnecessary dissatisfaction in the Navy, and actual friction and trouble when warrant officers are working with the Army and the Royal Air Force, because they are often relegated to the N.C.O.'s mess in those Services, instead of being accepted in the officers' mess, until such time as the position is challenged and rectified by superior authority. Similarly, warrant officer prisoners of war in the hands of the enemy were often placed in the wrong messes and suffered other injustices and indignities. The question of the warrant officers' mess was dealt with in a sensible way in one battleship which, I believe, took Lord Halifax and

his staff to America. They required accommodation and it was decided to use for the staff the warrant officers' mess, and the warrant officers messed elsewhere. That was an example of a case where it was not considered necessary to stick to the procedure by which the warrant officers were confined in their separate mess.

The point I want the Civil Lord to deal with is the reasons for the Admiralty's opposition to granting warrant officers commissioned rank on promotion. The general argument is that they should continue the same duties as they do now because those duties are essential.

The 315 warrant officers are quite prepared to go on performing these duties, and, in fact, claim that the increased importance of their duties, over a long period of years, demands the increased status. The warrant officer of today is much superior in knowledge and much more experienced than the "pukka" sub-lieutenant, yet the sub-lieutenant is senior to him and soars away through the various grades to the rank of Admiral, while the warrant officer is confined to warrant grade largely throughout his career. Few warrant officers get long and zealous service lieutenancies, because it is a question of "waiting for dead men's shoes," and then only just before retirement at 50.

The solution to these naval warrant officer problems is quite simple, and that is to abolish the title "warrant" from the naval vocabulary and promote ratings direct to commissioned rank in the same way as ratings are promoted to sub-lieutenant under the upper yardman scheme. They should be given the title of sub-lieutenant with a distinguishing letter for specialist qualifications in the same way as the commissioned specialist officers. They should then join the main stream of officers with the same

opportunities for promotion, specialisation, command of ships and everything else, and the same pay, pension and other prospects. All that is required to put warrant officers on a par with sub-lieutenants is to add to their present courses a short course in navigation and signals, a matter of about six weeks, and they will then attain the same qualifications. This has been done for eight years in the case of the few warrant officers specially selected for promotion direct to lieutenant, skipping the rank of sub-lieutenant, and has proved a success.

What can be done for the few exceptions should now be done for the whole. By this means, of simply dropping the title "warrant" and promoting the ratings to commissioned rank, the Admiralty will continue to get the service and specialist duties they require, and the advantage of the increased status. Already in big ships warrant officers promoted to commissioned rank have been retained to perform their specialist duties in the higher ranks. On the other hand, the officers will get the status and full opportunities they require, which is their [316](#)right in a lifelong profession, and to which they are definitely entitled by virtue of the important duties they now perform.

Certain hon. Members made the point of reserve officers getting fair treatment and promotion. But what can be more galling for those who have adopted the Service as a lifelong career than to see temporary officers coming in and jumping over their heads A point has also been made about temporary officers getting permanent commissions. Surely, the individuals to be considered for permanent commissions in a Service to which they have devoted their lives are the warrant officers in the first place? Where

there is a demand for more commissioned officers, surely those already in the Service should have consideration before temporary officers, or reserve officers who have adopted another profession for their life career? There must be no question of half measures with other distinctive titles, which rumour suggests are "Commissioned Officer, Grade I" and "Commissioned Officer, Grade II"; nor must there be a separate messes with a different title such as "Ward Room Mess B." The whole policy of class distinction for warrant officers must go by the board. The only proper policy in these enlightened days is, that if a rating is worthy of promotion to officer rank he should be promoted to full officer status, and not put in a position of being something different from the ordinary type of officer, whereby he will be branded with the mark of Cain for all time.

Until these reforms are conceded dissatisfaction will continue and increase amongst the warrant officers, and the Admiralty will not get the number of suitable candidates they require. A year ago the Admiralty stated that 230 seaman ratings were qualified professionally for warrant rank, but only nine educationally. It was estimated that the promotions for the year would be 77, which meant that another 60 had to be brought up to the educational standard. But already 59 had failed in the educational and technical examinations. This raises the question whether the standard is set too high, or, alternatively, the tuition is insufficient. The Admiralty provides tuition for the early cadet entries from the age of 13, and it is the duty of the Admiralty to provide sufficient tuition to bring these officers up to the required standard. Their attitude is: "Set the standard as high as you wish, but give us the necessary tuition to attain that

standard." The whole question of naval warrant rank must be tackled thoroughly, and far-reaching reforms, long overdue, introduced in order to attract an increased number of suitable candidates; and worthwhile positions and careers provided for those ratings prepared to accept the present onerous and responsible duties as their life career. The position has now been reached where nothing but drastic reforms on the lines I have indicated will satisfy the legitimate aspirations of what has been termed "the backbone of the Navy."

There is just one other point I wish to raise, and that is the question of the R.N.V.R. My constituency of East Hull, with the City of Hull, is the third largest port in the country. We have a branch of the R.N.V.R. This is one of the few branches which can provide accommodation for a ship: there are dock facilities and we want a ship; and I want to make a special plea to the Admiralty that the Hull branch of the R.N.V.R., representing the third largest port in the country, should have a ship allocated to them, in order that they can train properly aboard a ship instead of ashore.

9.46 p.m.

[Lieut.-Commander Clark Hutchison \(Edinburgh, West\)](#)

This Debate has been conducted mainly by hon. Members from the Southern part of Britain. I wish now to direct the attention of the Civil Lord to the North, because we in Scotland have a few questions to ask, and we hope that in the course of his reply he will say something about the various naval bases and establishments in Scotland, because so far nothing has emerged on that subject in the course of this Debate; nor is there anything to be found in

the White Paper, Cmd. 7054, except on page 7, where there is a passing reference to the retention, for the time being, of some training establishments on the Clyde. We are very concerned to know not only about the future of Rosyth dockyard, to which my hon. Friend the Member for Hereford (Mr. J. P. L. Thomas) referred, but, also, what are the Government's general intentions in regard to a base on the Clyde, and, also to the retention of the establishments at Scapa and Invergordon.

I should like on behalf of Scottish Members on this side to lodge a protest through the Civil Lord to his right hon. and noble Friend the First Lord for his refusal to meet a deputation from Members on these benches to discuss this matter with him just before Christmas. We felt at the time it was discourteous of the First Lord to turn down our request, and we felt that it was markedly so when, very shortly afterwards, he received two deputations on the same subject from two outside bodies not connected with Parliament at all. It seemed particularly discourteous to hon. Members on this side of the House as those of us who represent Scottish constituencies on this side are not so very far short in numbers of the Government's supporters in this House from Scotland; and after the next Election that position will assuredly be reversed.

May I ask now for a statement of policy in regard to Rosyth, because opinion of all shades in Scotland is very anxious about the stonewalling attitude which has been so far adopted? Nations and empires may rise and fall, political groupings and alignments may change, but one thing will not change, and that is physical geography; and it is quite obvious that we ought to have one naval base and dockyard facing on the North Sea. I can see no

justification for retaining all the main ports on the English Channel. It seems that the tendency is for everything to drift south now, and that under this Government's policy even the control of all industry is to be in the south in London, as well as the dockyards. I want to put this question to the Civil Lord. Do the Government agree with the theory that there should be dispersal of naval bases, so that they are located facing on the different waters around these Islands, or are they wedded firmly to the theory that, for some obscure reason or another, all the naval bases and dockyards must be on one coast line between the Thames and Cornwall? That is a general question to which I ask the Civil Lord to give a reply.

As regards Rosyth, there are six points which came to my mind emphasising why Rosyth is the most suitable place for a naval dockyard. The first is a strategic point; it is the only base on the North Sea. The second is a material point—the fact that we have there a well-equipped dockyard which has proved its worth, not in one war, but in two great wars in a short space of time. Nobody [319](#) will deny that Rosyth is admirably equipped. The third point is that of navigation. The navigable channels leading to all the other ports and dockyards are tortuous, but the estuary of the Forth is remarkably clear, from the point of view of navigation, and there is ample anchorage for ships of all sizes both below and above the Forth Bridge. There is the further argument in favour of the retention of Rosyth in that we have got there all the necessary ancillary establishments necessary for a great dockyard. There is the naval armament depot at Crombie, the fuelling depot attached to the dockyard and the naval air station at Donibristle—all the necessary adjuncts of a naval base. From the aspect of defence, I would remind the House,

Rosyth is the one dockyard of any size on which not a single bomb was dropped during the recent war.

Finally, on the question of manpower, it has always been a difficulty that Scotland was at a great disadvantage compared with England in supplying recruits for the Navy, because the men from Scotland had to travel great distances to the other naval ports, and it was not always possible for them to take their leave at their homes, because the journeys were so expensive. I suggest that it would be highly desirable to make Rosyth a manning port, where we could take in not only recruits from Scotland, but those from the North of England, and, possibly, from Northern Ireland, as it would be cheaper for them to go there than travel to Devonport, where they go now. I believe that all these considerations are admitted to be weighty by the Admiralty, and I believe that professional opinion in the Navy is in favour of the retention of Rosyth as a main dockyard and of its development as a manning port, and it is for that reason that I hope that, at this stage, when the war has been over nearly two years, the Government will declare its intentions in regard to Rosyth, because this matter is still arousing very deep concern in Scotland.

The only other point I want to put concerns the Financial Secretary, with whom I have been fighting a literary battle for some time. I want to ask what action is contemplated in regard to settling the just grievances of the permanent officers of the naval ordnance inspection department, and what progress, if any, has been made [320](#) in the reorganisation of that department, because no mention of the latter point is made in the White Paper. I would say to the hon. Gentleman that I have been very patient on this

subject, because, as long ago as 21st November, 1945, I raised this matter on the Motion for the Adjournment and the Financial Secretary then undertook to look into the points at issue. Further, almost a year ago, I spoke about this matter on the 3rd April, 1946, in the Debate on the Navy Estimates, and, on that occasion, the Financial Secretary gave me a firm assurance that he would deal with the specific points which I had brought forward. He said: As regards the other points, I regret that no action has been taken about the naval ordnance inspection officers. I will see if action can be taken, because I gave him a promise that the question would be taken up, and I intend to see that that promise is honoured."—

[[OFFICIAL REPORT, 3rd April, 1946; Vol. 421, c. 1306.](#)] All I am asking is that the Financial Secretary or one of his colleagues at the Admiralty will implement that pledge, which is there in black and white in HANSARD, and do something to remedy the grievances of these officers.

§9.55 p.m.

§Major Bruce (Portsmouth, North)

The House will understand my diffidence in addressing it tonight because I myself did my service in the Army; my only claim to the attention of the House lies in the fact that, along with my two colleagues on either side of the House I represent the City of Portsmouth. The first thing I would like to do this evening is to congratulate the Parliamentary Secretary on the most excellent review he gave us earlier in the day, and to congratulate him further on some of the most excellent intentions he has expressed. I feel sure that I speak for the majority of hon. Members

on this side of the House, and indeed for a large number of hon. Members opposite, when I say that his speech this afternoon showed that he is fully abreast of the democratic needs of our times, and I am sure, furthermore, that the general purport of his speech will be very well received throughout the ranks of the Navy.

In particular I would welcome his intention, expressed this afternoon, to establish welfare committees on which the lower deck will be fully represented. It is a little too early, and I doubt if the [321](#)Financial Secretary could enlighten us in any detail, to assess finally exactly what their functions are to be, but I am sure that everybody in the Navy will anxiously await the executive orders which will put this machinery into operation. His proposals, going only part of the way as they do at the present time, for the increase in the chance of promotion from the lower deck will also be very well received.

Hon. Members who are far better versed in naval matters than myself, the hon. and gallant Member for Horncastle (Commander Maitland) and the hon. Member for Northampton (Mr. Paget), have discussed, together with other hon. Members, questions of high strategy and the design of ships, as well as the ancient case—which I had heard of even in my civilian days—against the capital ship. I want to confine my remarks to the other half of the Navy which in the past, though I am bound to say not so much at present, has tended to be overlooked, that is to say, the personnel side. If any of my remarks this evening are critical, it is because I feel in some instances that the policy which has been put forward by the Financial Secretary this year, as it was indeed put forward last year, is not being fully carried out at the lower end. Later on in my

remarks I hope to produce some examples which I hope will illustrate to him the necessity not only of putting his principles and policies squarely before the House, but also of making completely sure, from the executive and administrative angles, that those policies are carried out to the last detail, not only in the letter, but in the spirit, at the lower levels.

Last year, when I first ventured to address the House on naval matters, I brought up the question of conditions on the lower deck. I rather thought at that time—and indeed other hon. Members on this side of the House did—that the Admiralty rather jumped down our throats when we raised this question. It is, therefore, extremely refreshing to observe that one of our principle contentions on that occasion a year ago, about the redistribution of space, is at any rate given some favourable consideration in the speech of the Parliamentary Secretary today. Last year it was obvious that the principal difficulties in regard to living conditions abroad arose largely from the fact that ships continued to have wartime complements in many instances. All that the Admiralty could do last year was [322](#) genuinely to indicate that they would improve those conditions during the following year.

I would now ask the Civil Lord for more detailed information about previously expressed intentions. We wish to find out the tempo at which reforms are being carried out in the Navy. On 23rd October, 1946, we were told that ships undergoing refit were to be equipped with galleys on the American standard. How much progress has been made and how many ships undergoing refit have been equipped with galleys on the United States standard? The general feeling in the Navy, among ratings with whom

I mix in my city, is that the food in the Navy is not as bad as it might be. The average sailor is content to hear sacrifices of food that are necessitated by the overall shortage. There is a general feeling, however, that food would be very much better if naval cooks were given their trade status.

In the Army there is the Army Catering Corps. I will not say that I set any vast store by that admirable institution, but my friends who are in the Navy feel that the Service would derive much benefit if cooks in the Navy had their trade status. Ships which are fortunate enough to be home based have a better time than those in foreign waters, because of the flexibility enjoyed by canteen managers in getting commodities. It is generally felt that it would be better also if more power in the selection of food were given to the mess committee. I understand that the selection lies at the present moment with the canteen manager.

The Financial Secretary was good enough to confirm today an announcement made by the former First Lord on 3rd July, that improvements would be effected in air conditioning when opportunity afforded. I would like to know how many opportunities have offered themselves since that time, and how many ships have had this system installed. The mess layouts in the majority of ships are improved very considerably, I understand, but comfort is still restricted, because of overcrowding. What progress has been made towards providing dining rooms separate from the sleeping quarters? I believe it is impossible to alter some of our ships, possibly because of the provisions of the Washington Treaty.

323I should be very pleased to know the intentions in that regard. During the past year an increasing number of amenities have been installed aboard ship. The ratings are very grateful indeed. Showers, drinking fountains, and radiators are being provided in the larger ships. However, there is a small snag. The very time when these amenities are most required, is when the ship is in harbour, and I am told that they are not then available. I would like the Civil Lord to inform us if there is any reason why these amenities aboard some of our capital ships cannot be made available to the ratings when the ships are in harbour.

I entirely agree with the remarks made by an hon. Member opposite in regard to civilian clothes. The Civil Lord, in answering a Question which was put on 30th October last, said that the matter was under consideration. He said there were two limitations. He gave one as the coupon limitation, but I gathered that the lockers were apparently one of the dominant considerations. Why cannot he revert to the prewar order, which stated that, provided that ratings could find room in their lockers without causing damage or displacement to their compulsory kit, they could have civilian clothing? Why does he not revert to that and, provided that the coupon difficulty could be overcome permit ratings to acquire civilian clothes? The former First Lord, now the Minister of Defence, announced on 3rd July that there was to be an extension of discussion groups aboard ship. I would be pleased if the Civil Lord could give some indication of the progress that has been made. I have had some experience of discussion groups in the Army and I found it very valuable indeed when I was in the ranks, and also when I became an officer.

If the return to peace has brought certain troubles and difficulties to the Admiralty in carrying out reforms, which we all feel it is desired to carry out, it has also brought certain other things which are by no means peculiar to the Navy. When peace breaks out—I believe that is the term—the practice in the case of the Army used to be for the "spit and polish" brigade to begin to rear their heads again. From information I have received, it appears that the Navy is no exception. I do not wish to exaggerate these matters [324](#) out of all proportion, but if a man is in a Service and under discipline, his life is circumscribed, quite properly, by conditions which impose certain restrictions upon his individual freedom. Then it is that little matters assume a very large importance. They go to show the truth of the statement made by my hon. Friend the Member for Huddersfield (Mr. Mallalieu) when he suggested that there should be a far greater and closer contact between the officers and the ratings, not only aboard ship but also ashore. Had there been a rather closer contact and appreciation of common problems, then some of the irritating incidents to which I am about to refer would not have happened.

In some shore establishments, the ratings of the non-duty watches have to parade for Sunday divisions. What is the purpose of a Sunday division parade? What is the reason and what is the logic for it? If a man is fortunate enough to be able to get away from his shore station at the weekend, and able to stay with friends or his family, obviously, he is in a much better position than those who have to stay behind. If he can afford the money to go into some local hotel or naval hostel, then he need not have any restrictions of this kind.

But if he is unable to afford to go anywhere, or is unfortunate in not having relatives near by, and is thereby compelled to stay in a shore establishment why should he be bothered with a Sunday, morning division? Just what useful disciplinary purpose is served by it? Here is another minor, but irritating point. During the war, in one shore establishment, there used to be a route, which was the shortest possible distance that could be found in and out of the establishment. For many years, ratings coming in and out of the various offices, workshops, and establishments used this route. But when the war finished, and a new commander came along, it was decided to change the route, because it was not desired to have these ratings going past office blocks. The men were compelled to make a detour, behind huts and over rubble, so that they should not be seen by anybody who happened to be in the office blocks. These petty irritations are not good for discipline.

Now I come to the question of raincoats, which is also a minor matter. I am sorry to trouble the House with it, 325 but I do so only to show that petty irritations still exist despite the most admirable intentions of the Board of Admiralty, the Financial Secretary and the First Lord of the Admiralty I am given to understand that overcoats are optional, whereas raincoats are compulsory. There was a Portsmouth general order recently which was worded as follows: The wearing of raincoats in fine weather contrary to my previous orders:—It is noticed, once again, that officers and men are wearing raincoats in fine weather. This practice must cease forthwith. Raincoats are not to be worn, except in wet or really cold weather. Commanding officers must pay special attention to liberty men, to ensure that all raincoats are clean and tidy. Dockyard patrols are to watch for contraventions of this order The

immediate result of this was that there was a heavier demand for the optional overcoat. People tried to buy them out of their resources, because there was no restriction on them. This morning, I thought I would tarry outside the Board of Admiralty. The weather was unusually fine; in fact, it was exceptionally warm. I watched several naval officers of very high rank indeed. Not only were they wearing raincoats, but I regret to say that they were undone. From the official standpoint they were improperly dressed. I mention this Portsmouth General Order as another irritating restriction which has no real purpose at all in conformity with the kind of policy that the Financial Secretary would wish to see carried out.

Now I pass to another point about the personal life of the rating, especially when he is ashore. I refer to compulsory attendance at divine service. Last year, Parliament decided, and the First Lord eventually agreed, to abolish compulsory attendance at church parade. I pass over, for the moment, the fact that at a dinner at which I was present recently a certain high ranking officer of the Navy sought to criticise, by inference, the policy of His Majesty's Government.

I would point out to the House exactly how its wishes are carried out. The Lords of the Admiralty have correctly expressed their belief and their conviction in the value of the men's attendance at church and though measures have been taken in order to ensure that there is no real compulsion, in fact, compulsory attendance does take place. I find from the Orders of one shore establishment in this country that at 10.00 hours divine service starts [326](#) and at 10.05 hours sounds of off divisions and block rounds. Then it says: All hands not attending church

fall in on quarter decks. It goes on to give special directions in regard to wet weather, and then it has this: No one is excused from divisions except those in church or in church parties. The intention behind these Orders is that, if a rating does not go to church, there will be an inspection, or a division, as they call it in the Navy. That is not the exact spirit in which this House, the First Lord of the Admiralty or the Financial Secretary desire that order to be carried out. I would point out that discipline is not only something which goes from the officers down to the ratings, but it is also a matter of discipline from this House down to the officers themselves. In other matters, they are much more particular. There is a rating in the city to which I belong who not so long ago regrettably refrained from saluting the Commander-in-Chief's car as it passed by. Disciplinary action was taken in that instance with alacrity as an outrider reported the matter very promptly indeed.

On the question of pay and prospects in the Navy, I should like to endorse the remarks which have come from the opposite side of the House on the subject of prize money. On 30th October the Financial Secretary said it was not determined but it was substantially less. All we can say is, if it is substantially less, we will have to accept that, but please do see that it is settled quickly. There should be no insuperable reason why it should not be paid up. We should be grateful at the moment if we could have some indication as to whether this prize money is free of tax. That does have an important bearing on the matter from the recipient's point of view. From views which I have been able to get from those ratings with whom I have spoken and with whom I have particularly discussed this matter, the new pay code is working out pretty well,

especially in the case of those ratings who are of the lower ranks, but in the case of the chief petty officer and the petty officer there is some dissatisfaction. That largely arises from the fact that the chief petty officer and the petty officer, are, broadly speaking, comparable to the staff sergeant and the sergeant in the Army, though their pay is not so high. The whole scheme of naval pay is differently [327](#) devised to the other Services and the whole trouble is that the rates are only comparable in regard to the age groups throughout the three Services if there is a long period of service both as N.C.O. and in actual man's service.

The reason why a disparity appears now is because the bulk of the petty officers and chief petty officers are well under 32 years of age, and, therefore, they are getting much less now. There is a general feeling that the pay code for the chief petty officer and the petty officer ought to be revised in these existing circumstances, because the whole scheme—and I had some experience of the Treasury myself when I was in the Army, for I was a married officer under 30 years of age and I know all about Treasury wrangles—was devised to give short-term advantage for the Treasury, and something better should be done. The principal feeling among the chief petty officers is that they ought to be given some status comparable with that of the Warrant Officer Class II in the Army. This is not argued only by the chief petty officers and petty officers themselves, but also by high ranking officers, and it has a very wide measure of support.

I pass finally to the most important question of all. I think it is vital that the House should realise that there is a feeling of frustration on the lower deck on the whole

question of promotion and methods of promotion. We have had promises of some very excellent concessions from the Financial Secretary this evening, but these will have to go a good deal further if we are to live up to the standard set by the Minister of Defence when he himself was agitating for these things many years ago. I do feel that the House should realise that some of the reforms of which we are having a glimpse today were fought for very doggedly by the present Minister of Defence in those days. He was asking very pertinent questions very impatiently as long ago as February, 1937, on this whole question of promotion from the lower deck. I would like, if I may, to give an indication of the type of standard to which the Minister of Defence himself aspired in the face of considerable hostility at the time from those who then occupied the benches opposite, and the kind of standard to which I feel the attention of the Financial Secretary should be drawn. On 32820th March, 1939, the right hon. Gentleman said: We have no hesitation in saying that if the Admiralty want to see a continuance and expansion of that national spirit of service in this greatest of all our Services, they must bring the Navy, I shall not say into line with the other Services, but in advance of the other Services, by providing channels of promotion from the lower deck.... I hold that with proper training every seaman who enlists in the Navy should have the right to promotion ... to commissioned rank."—[OFFICIAL REPORT, 20th March, 1939; Vol. 345, c. 939.] That was in 1939, and since that time we have had another war and the present Government have been in office for 18 months. I hope the time is very quickly approaching when the Financial Secretary himself will be able to live up to the standard that was so very eminently put forward by the

Minister of Defence when he was on the Opposition benches. If these things are done I have no doubt that there will be a very great increase in what I think all sides of the House regard as the desirable spirit in the Navy. I should like to ask one factual question. How is promotion going on in the naval electrical branch? As the House will recollect, on 23rd October the Financial Secretary announced the formation of this new electrical branch and said that opportunities would be available for people serving in that branch to obtain commissions. I should like to know how many such opportunities have been afforded.

It would, I think, be wrong of me if I were to close my remarks this evening without some reference to the Civil Lord of the Admiralty, who, I should like to say, has been most courteous in every way to those very numerous requests and demands he must have received from all the dockyard towns in this country. So far as the dockyard Members of Parliament are concerned, we do consider that the repayment scheme in the dockyards is a revolutionary thing which has, in fact, brought many great benefits to our citizens. Conditions in the dockyards are, naturally, primarily the concern of the trade union branches of the several trades involved there. We on this side have no doubt, especially after the very informative and instructive speech from the Financial Secretary, that there will be further effort in the year that lies ahead, not only in fresh policies and new ideas, but also to see that those ideas are resolutely carried into effect at all the levels to which they apply.

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§10.26 p.m.

§Mr. Brendan Bracken (Bournemouth)

The hon. and gallant Member for North Portsmouth (Mr. Bruce) is one of those critics from the ports who have always been a very candid friend of the Admiralty. He was rather unkind to-night to remind his party leaders of their past promises, and he was much too optimistic in hoping for better performances. The Government, having listened to his speech, largely consisting of a catalogue of his constituents' grievances, may prefer for once to listen to a declared opponent of the Government. I was surprised by some passages in the Financial Secretary's speech. He made some interesting digressions from rather small points, on how the Navy had helped the President of the Board of Trade, how it had helped the Minister of Health in building houses—a triumphant achievement that—how it had helped other Ministries, and how it had sold surplus stores, actually getting 20 million from the sale. I wonder what they cost the taxpayer. The Financial Secretary apparently forgot to deviate into such essential information as the present strength of the Navy. I regard the protests of my hon. Friend the Member for Hereford (Mr. J. P. L. Thomas), which were reinforced by many other hon. Members, as being couched in language which was almost too moderate.

These are utterly uninformative Estimates, and I defy anyone to read them and discover what sort of ships we have, where they are, and what the Navy is doing. It is disgraceful to treat the House of Commons to this vacuous type of document, and to sling these Estimates at us without any sort of adequate explanation, putting the Financial Secretary up merely to talk a little bit about co-operation with other Ministries, and to dilate a little on

welfare. Parliament in peace time is entitled to full information about the Navy. Many hon. Members have asked where is the Navy List. It is available in Government offices Ministers' secretaries and typists can read it, and it is circulated all around Government Departments, but it is not sold or given to the House of Commons, and without the Navy List, how can we judge these Estimates? The trouble about the present Administration is that they have a haunting desire for secrecy. They **330** seem to believe we should pass with alacrity these Estimates without any adequate information. All I can say about the speech made by the Financial Secretary is that so far as informativeness is concerned, it was like one. or indeed all, of the former War Savings speeches made by the right hon. Gentleman the Minister of Defence; it was no more informative, and it was not meant to be so.

The time has come—let me say this to the new Minister of Defence—to end this silly policy of secrecy, which has wrought such harm to our affairs. Surely the Government, after their experience during the last month, ought to recognise the folly of attempting to conceal everything from the House of Commons and the public. Ministers may contradict each other, but they do agree about one thing—maintaining a wholly mental and a partly physical black-out.

There is a great need for a clear statement of naval policy from the Government. The British Empire is rapidly diminishing. How will we replace the loss of famous bases? Naval policy must be completely transformed as a consequence of this Government's Egyptian and Indian policies, but no ray of light on these grave matters has

come from the Admiralty spokesmen here today. I hope very much that the hon. Gentleman the Civil Lord may give us a little information about naval policy, and not take up too much of our time by talking about the Admiralty's co-operation with Whitehall bureaucracies.

I have a number of questions to ask tonight which I hope the Civil Lord, having consulted with the Minister of Defence, may be able to answer. Have the Government devised a naval policy to meet the consequences of their wholesale withdrawals? If so, let us hear it. I take it that before these withdrawals were decided the Board of Admiralty were consulted and, perhaps, other Service Departments. After all, we are now dealing with a matter of vital consequence to this country. Our food supplies in wartime and our sea communications with important Dominions have been gravely affected by what my right hon. Friend the Member for Woodford (Mr. Churchill) called "Operation Scuttle." Much harder tasks will, I fear, in future be imposed on the Royal Navy in wartime as a consequence of the withdrawals to 331 which the Minister of Defence was a party. Do the Government realise this? I do not know; this Government passes all understanding; but I am quite certain the sailors do.

Now let me touch on another vital aspect of naval policy which was very well dealt with by my hon. and gallant Friend the Member for Chelsea (Commander Noble)—scientific services. Last year we listened to a lot of portentous rhetoric from the right hon. Gentleman the Minister of Defence on this subject. He made a speech or rather one long peroration about the Government's devotion to scientific development. Nobody could have attached more importance than the right hon. Gentleman

did to the development of the Admiralty's scientific services, and what do we see now? We see that the Government have not even spent the modest sum that they put in their last year's Estimate to cover scientific services. Really, I do think that the Government must sometimes think that this is not a wholly adult House. [An HON. MEMBER: "There is no reason for them to"] I agree with that statement so far as it fits the hon. Member. I also agree with what was said last year by the Minister of Defence, that it really is impossible to overestimate the importance of scientific services. German scientists gave the Admiralty a number of very unpleasant surprises in the last war, and one would have thought that the information we have about the atomic bomb and other new weapons would have called for the expansion of the Admiralty's scientific services. But no, there has been a big expansion in the cost of the Admiralty policemen, but a sharp contraction in the cost of the Admiralty scientists. I do appeal to the hon. Gentleman opposite to consider whether this is not singularly ill-contrived management.

Again, last year, we were given a glowing description of the then First Lord's interest—his deep interest—in the Royal Naval Volunteer Reserve. Well, I have looked through these Estimates, and if they mean anything, one must be very unhappy about the Government's handling of that important section of the Navy. No one can overpraise the marvellous war record of the Royal Naval Volunteer Reserve, but, again, more money is being spent by the Admiralty on naval police [332](#) than on the organisation of the Royal Naval Volunteer Reserve. It is illuminating to compare some of the statements made last year by the then First Lord about his anxiety to promote the growth of the scientific services and the Royal Naval

Volunteer Reserve with a reading of the Estimates before the House to-day. One would have expected that the then First Lord and his two lively assistants, would have done everything in their power to further the cause of the men who are so proud of their service in the Royal Naval Volunteer Reserve in the fiercest war in history.

One would have thought that those Ministers would have built up the organisation so that it might be a really remarkable link with the Royal Navy; that they would have developed the Reserve with all their might. Indeed, in this connection, as my hon. Friend the Member for Hereford said earlier to-day, it is amazing that the Admiralty should overlook the mass of highly trained men available as instructors for the Reserve. I can only hope that, as a result of to-day's Debate, the Government will really do everything in their power to encourage the interest of the former members of the Royal Naval Volunteer Reserve; that they will provide modern weapons for training, and place at the disposal of these men in convenient parts of the country, the premises which they require for their training; and that they will give them the opportunities for going to sea in one of the few His Majesty's ships which takes to the ocean wave nowadays.

I want to say a word or two about naval aviation. We have had a superficial review from the Financial Secretary, who is a rather superior person on naval aviation affairs. It is no exaggeration to say that the future of the Royal Navy depends very largely on this branch of the Service, and all who know Admiral Troubridge have complete confidence in his leadership. But this House has the right to know all about the resources made available by the Government to

naval aviation. I should have liked to have some statistics about the number of pilots who have been trained by the naval aviation branch in the last 12 months. I should be very interested to know if there is any attempt by the Admiralty to catch up with the Air Ministry's record of having so many men on the ground. That would have been very useful information, but it **333** was not afforded. I think that this House could profitably give a full day to the consideration of all aspects of the naval aviation branch. In the past it was starved. Too many of its gallant officers and men were sacrificed because of inferior planes and equipment. That error, not to say scandal must never be repeated. For that reason we would very much like to have heard from the Financial Secretary today a full account of the development of the naval aviation branch. Perhaps the many omissions of the Financial Secretary will be supplied by his colleague whose naval knowledge is very great and who is one of the esteemed Members of this House.

Now I want to say a word about barracks and accommodation, for anyone listening to the hon. Member for Huddersfield (Mr. Mallalieu) would imagine that most naval barracks are a sort of "Nark-over" for grown-ups. It may be that some of the statements he made here today are accurate. I very much hope they are not but I am bound to say that he made one of the most sweeping attacks on the petty officers who are responsible for the management of the barracks at Devonport. The hon. Gentleman began his speech by saying, "I am all for lower deck promotion for I think we want a different type or officer altogether." He spoke with great eloquence on that point and, later on, he said that some Dartmouth bred officers should be introduced to look after naval barracks because we could not trust the petty officers and others in

charge. Well, the hon. Gentleman may know what he is talking about, and I certainly am not in a position to answer him, but I must say that the statements he made about these worthy sailors or unworthy sailors as he would call them, will probably provoke a great deal of resentment in the dockyard towns.

I do not believe myself that our great barracks are run by racketeers, I know that unworthy people appear sometimes in our affairs, but I deny the sweeping statement that the barracks are run by racketeers, and I was very much surprised that one of the Ministers on the Front Bench—and we have three of them—did not challenge the hon. Gentleman to prove his statements. Instead, they sat comfortably while these attacks were made on the Services and the Admiralty without saying a word. The Minister of [334](#)Defence is pretty vocal on most subjects and I hope he will defend the Navy today. Now let me turn to an aspect of barracks which is less controversial than the point raised by the hon. and gallant Member for Huddersfield. Last year we listened to some rosy promises—

[§Mr. Paget](#)

Before the hon. Gentleman leaves that point did he observe that not one sailor on his side failed to agree with the hon. Gentleman?

[§Mr. Bracken](#)

I heard a number of statements from behind me which did not denote agreement. I do not know whether the hon. Member has been in Devonport barracks and witnessed

this racketeering. If so, perhaps he will get up and say so. If not, perhaps he will allow me to get on with my speech.

§Mr. Paget

I was in "Pompey" barracks, not Devonport, and it works just the same there.

§Mr. Foot

The hon. Member for Huddersfield (Mr. Mallalieu) did not make any reference to Devonport barracks. He was referring to Portsmouth barracks. The right hon. Gentleman could not have been listening to the speech. He should therefore withdraw—

§Mr. Bracken

The hon. Member for Devonport (Mr. Foot) cannot help being rude. I apologise for my geographical error, but I do not think I was unfair in any way in describing what the hon. Gentleman said about these petty officers and those in charge of these barracks.

But let me, for a moment, turn to a less controversial aspect of this barracks question. Last year we listened to glowing promises, again from the former First Lord, about the rebuilding or improvement of naval barracks and accommodation. I was delighted by these promises. He was strongly backed from this side of the House. The rebuilding was supposed to equal priority with building for the civilian population. Well, in view of the Minister of Health's performance, that is cold comfort for the sailors. Today the Financial Secretary repeated those promises, but he gave us no report of the wonders that we were told

would be effected in the barracks during the last year. He told us nothing about any substantial improvements, and 335 what I am very surprised about is that I do not think that the improvements he promised during 1947 are covered in any way by the Estimates. If the Financial Secretary is going to carry out the programme he described to us today, his Estimates give no information about them. The cost of the programme that he envisages is a very large one, but that information has been left out of these Estimates like a lot of other important information. I hope we will get an assurance from the Civil Lord that the Government intend to fulfil the promises made by the Minister of Defence and repeated this year by the Financial Secretary.

It is highly necessary to get on with this job of dealing with the barracks. Surely one way of dealing with the problem of those antiquated, overcrowded naval barracks would be for the Admiralty to persuade their old friend the Minister of Defence to use his influence to hand over some of the modern premises built by the War Office in the big ports. That would be a very good thing. The War Office have built excellent barracks in at least two big ports. Our War Lord or our overlord must sometimes find it very difficult to know exactly where his functions begin, but the right hon. Gentleman, who is exceedingly friendly to the Admiralty—if he will not object to my saying that—might persuade the Secretary of State for War to hand over some of the barracks built in or near the ports. It would be an enormous relief to his successor the present First Lord of the Admiralty. The military have barracks all over the country, generally in beauty spots or somewhere else where the public want to go to and cannot, and it would be no sacrifice for the War Office to hand them over to the

Navy. Perhaps our Air Force, who were great builders in wartime, might also contribute some buildings.

§The Secretary of State for War (Mr. Bellenger)

Cannibalism.

§Mr. Bracken

I am very sorry that the Secretary for War says that is cannibalism. I must remind him not to make flippant remarks in the presence of his overlord, the Minister of Defence, who takes his functions very seriously and who will not tolerate impudence from someone who is nothing more than a flag lieutenant in the new order of things.

336 Many of our naval barracks look as if they were designed by the duller apprentices of the men who built the Albert Memorial. Everything that was said about the structure of these buildings by the hon. Member for Huddersfield I entirely agree with. These buildings are hideous, cheerless, and they are grossly wasteful, and they ought to be razed to the ground. If the Financial Secretary thinks he can give them some facelift, he is wasting public money. He had better have a look at some of them and he will realise that his statement that most of them were built in the days of Doctor Johnson is quite wrong, as most of them were built in the days of Albert the Good—I think, largely, by the Liberal Party, but they are not here to defend themselves.

I believe that hon. Members opposite will agree with me that these barracks are a disgrace to the Navy, and a heavy burden on the taxpayer. I think that the Lords of the Admiralty should send some of their architects—and if

I were them, I should send some young architects who are not tied in any way to the Service—to look at some of the naval barracks in the United States. I think, too, that they would do well to look into the labour-saving devices which have been installed by the American Navy. This may seem a small point, but I have a lively remembrance of a visit to one of our great dockyard barracks, where I found sailors peeling potatoes with utility knives. In the United States of America, the American Navy provide inexpensive machines that peel potatoes. Surely, even a Socialist Government would not say that it is good naval training to put a sailor peeling potatoes with a utility knife?

§Mr. Beswick

Would the right hon. Gentleman say whether he got his reputation as being the finest First Lord of the Admiralty because of the reforms of this kind which he introduced?

§Mr. Bracken

In view of the performances that I have witnessed recently, I might almost make that claim myself. I hope the House will allow me to continue. I had hoped that the Socialist Party would not have found anything hilarious in a reference to the deadening, wasteful work on which many of our sailors are employed. I should have thought that it would be a very good thing to instal every sort of labour-saving machine, not merely 337 in the barracks, but also in His Majesty's ships.

I want to touch upon another subject—manpower. The Secretary of State for War has, I understand, been kept up until the early hours dealing with this subject of manpower. I am also informed that the Secretary of State

for Air, too, has devoted long hours to this particular topic. From what I have read and heard, I believe that much of the time and argument were devoted to the wastage of manpower, and to the excess of expenditure in Whitehall. I am concerned at the great cost of maintaining the Admiralty Office. We know that the Fleet has been greatly reduced; we know that hundreds of thousands of sailors have been demobilised, but I must say that the reduction in the expenditure of the Admiralty Office is lamentably insufficient. We have few men at sea, but the Admiralty is heavily barnacled by bureaucrats, and the blame for this must rest with the politicians, and not with the sailors [An HON. MEMBER: "That means the right hon. Gentleman himself."] I am glad that I have not had the guidance of this country's affairs for the last two years.

One of the most difficult, not to say harrowing and, indeed, invidious, tasks that can be given to the Board of Admiralty is to cut down the Navy after a war. In this important and distasteful work, the First Lord must, of necessity, give a b strong lead. It was unfair to the Board of Admiralty and to the Navy that the First Lord was sent off on all sorts of political missions instead of concentrating on the work of his great office. An absentee First Lord, deranges the business of the Admiralty, especially during a great demobilisation. Perhaps, as one of the ill consequences of the right hon. Gentleman's absence, these lopsided Estimates have been presented to this House. I really do feel that the Minister of Defence made a mistake when he consented to go with the President of the Board of Trade to India and to understudy the Foreign Secretary in other places. The Navy needed the guidance of the First Lord at that time, and by withdrawing himself I think he added to the

difficulties of the Admiralty in dealing with the very grievous problems of demobilisation.

Before I sit down, I should like to say a few words about the grievous problem 338 of manpower which causes a clamant demand for a reduction in naval manpower. I am no advocate of panic-stricken cuts in manpower, but all who care for the Navy should ponder the effects of the Government's proposal in the White Paper on Britain's economic position. The Minister of Defence knows that in that Paper the Government have reached the conclusion—and I think it is a reluctant conclusion—that they must make sweeping economies in the manpower of the Services. On this subject I want to say a word in all friendliness to those who represent the Admiralty here tonight. I know something about the injury done to our naval heritage by the hatchet men who were let loose on the Navy after the 1914–18 war. Their excesses of zeal wrought great harm, and although they saved money, they could not count the cost of their ill-considered economies. They applied the axe to some of our best young sailors of that time, thereby disillusioning some of the many well-known naval families, to which I was glad to hear reference made by the hon. Member for Devonport, families which for generations had sent their sons to serve the King at sea. That was a very false economy and I am very anxious indeed that we shall not see once again a recurrence of panic-stricken economies. It was years before the Royal Navy recovered from that injury.

These indiscriminating economisers may be loosed again upon the Navy. I know very well that the Minister of Defence will try to resist it, and I know the Board of Admiralty will also do their best to resist it. We do not

wish to see again things being done which could not be justified by any person who soberly considers the wisdom of risking our naval heritage by wild schemes of economy, schemes caused by endeavours to appease the public by exaggerating the terrible economic disasters that are likely to come upon us if wild economies are not made. I say to the Minister of Defence, and I say respectfully to the Board of Admiralty, that they should divert this danger by satisfying themselves and this House that there is no wastage of manpower in the Navy. I am sure that before much time passes the Government will call upon all Service Departments for further reductions. The glory of the Royal Navy springs not from ships or weapons or from any material things, **339** however good they have been or are now; her true glory is the men who from generation to generation have defended Britain on the seas. After the first World War some of the finest of our younger generation of sailors were lost to the Navy by this indiscriminate axing against which I have protested.

I fear that as our manpower crisis deepens, this tragic error may be repeated. The way to avoid it is for the Board of Admiralty to make as many economies as they can now. The White Paper on our economic position foreshadows sweeping cuts in Service expenditure. The Navy will inevitably be called upon to effect many more great retrenchments, and their Lordships must inevitably forgo some desirable improvements. I know it is asking a great deal of the Board of Admiralty to forego these improvements, but I would prefer that they did so and that they themselves were responsible for making such reductions in manpower as are necessary in the Navy, than that any outside persons should be brought in, whether they are Departmental working parties, business

men or even trade union leaders. The people to make reductions in manpower which the Government may deem necessary, are the Board of Admiralty themselves. We are asking the Board to undertake disagreeable tasks. I know we are all very prolific in suggesting economies which do not affect ourselves, but I hope that before any large economies are made we shall remember that our sailors are now and always have been poorly paid.

§Mr. Stubbs (Cambridgeshire)

Who is responsible for that?

§Mr. Bracken

Hon. Members opposite will live long enough to say the same things about their leaders. During the war we could find no words glowing enough to describe our debt to the Royal Navy. We should recall some of these effusive tributes when considering the provision we make for a Navy at peace.

§11.2 p.m.

§Mr. Willis (Edinburgh, North)

I will not follow the fiery remarks made by the right hon. Gentleman the Member for Bournemouth (Mr. Bracken) other than to say that had they been made prior to **3401939**, when the party of which he is a Member was in office, they might have been rather more useful than they have been tonight, and we might not have been offering the criticisms tonight that we are offering. I agree with those who have criticised the lack of information given by my hon. Friend the Financial Secretary, in one

respect, and that is in connection with the bases, particularly in Scotland. I think it is only right to say that the Scottish Members on this side of the House are disappointed at the fact that no reference whatever has been made regarding the Clyde, Invergordon or Rosyth. I do not know whether the feeling that exists in Scotland concerning Rosyth is really appreciated. Here we have a first class dockyard on which millions of pounds have been spent, a dockyard to which the Navy has to resort as soon as the declaration of war is made, and yet it is closed down whenever peace is declared. Compare this with Chatham. I forget just when it was built, but it was built by the Stuarts for a purpose for which it is no longer of any use. It is a manning base to which no capital ship can get, so that ships attached to Chatham have to go to Portsmouth or Devonport when they want to dock. So far as I can see, maintaining Chatham whilst closing Rosyth is quite unjustifiable, unless it is thought to assist recruiting for the Navy because it is near to London. It is suggested that not so many Scotsmen join the Navy as Englishmen. If that is so, and if the Admiralty want more Scotsmen in the Navy, the thing to do is to have a naval base in Scotland.

I should also like to reinforce the plea made by my hon. Friend the Member for Devonport (Mr. Foot) in regard to augmented pensions for pensioners called up for further service during the war. We should have some further information regarding the modifications that are being considered. These men have now waited 18 months, since December, 1945, for these pensions. I remember raising a number of questions at the time, pointing out certain anomalies in these pensions, and pointing out also the fact that in certain cases the men were not much better off as a result of having done six years' service during the war.

What we want to know is: What are the modifications, and when will these pensions be paid? Many of these pensioners are suggesting that they ought to receive a 341 £ per cent. rate of interest as from December, 1945, to make up for the period they have been waiting.

Tonight, however, I really wanted to speak about the artificer branches of the Navy. I make no apology for wanting to do so, because I feel I am in a position to do so, having been in the artificer branch for a number of years. The artificer branches are probably the key branches of the Service at the present time. The Financial Secretary spoke about the increasing complication of the modern ship. What he meant, of course, was that the modern ship was becoming a box of machinery. The success of that machinery, whether it functions in action, whether it functions at sea, no matter whether in the engine room, whether electrical equipment or ordnance equipment, is dependent upon the artificer branches. In spite of the very promising things that have been said from that Box since I have been in the House, the truth is, that during the past 25 years there has been a growing concern amongst the artificer branches at the treatment which has been meted out to them by the Admiralty. I am not surprised, because we find, on going back through those 25 years, that in some cases the artificer branches are actually financially worse off than they were in 1924; that their status has been lowered, and that today they are being more and more misemployed. We cannot expect a satisfied branch, nor a good morale, as a result of those conditions.

I should like to give a few facts to illustrate this. This afternoon the Financial Secretary said, quite light-heartedly, that a 50 per cent. increase had been given in

the rates of pay. I think it was the hon. and gallant Member for Horn-castle (Commander Maitland) who pointed out that chief and petty officers do not receive the corresponding increases; that increases have, in fact, been given to the lower ranks but not to the chief and petty officers. In the case of the artificer branches, the basic rate of pay for a chief engine room artificer in 1924 was 12s. 6d. per day. Today it is 10s. 6d. per day. Even including the two yearly increments to which he is entitled, he has to wait until he is 34 years of age—assuming he joins as a boy and his time counts from the age of 18—before he actually draws the same **342** pay as he would have done in 1924. This is the reward of faithful service in the past and gallant service during the past war.

When I was an artificer, fifth and fourth class engine room artificers, whilst not rated as chief petty officers, enjoyed the status of chief petty officers because they messed in the chief petty officers' messes, and, in accordance with the instructions in Regulation 626, they were accorded the privileges of those messes. But today that is not the case. We find, more and more, that fifth class engine room artificers are messing with the leading ratings, and the fourth class with the petty officers. This means that those artificers have actually had their status reduced. I have sent cases during the last 18 months to my hon. Friend about the employment of engine room artificers as messmen. Men did not join as engine room artificers to be used as messmen, and they resent being used as messmen when they joined as engineers, no less than another man who joined for special work would resent it were he employed in any other capacity. I agree that, in certain special circumstances it may have been necessary; but the number of cases in which this has

happened and the number in which artificers have been used for patrol duties and even used for patrol duties in ships with complements of 200 or 300, where there could be excuse for it, shows that there is a good case for much of the resentment on the part of the men concerned.

I want to make a number of suggestions to my hon. Friend, to which I would ask him to give serious consideration. In the first place, I should like to suggest that he again considers the question of rates of pay of chief petty officers. In the artificer branches, the position is that third class artificers get the same basic rate of pay as first class chief electrical, or chief engine room, or chief ordnance artificers. That means that it is possible in the same mess for a first class or third class artificer to be drawing, in cases where he has longer service, more pay than the chief, who has got much more responsibility. It has to be remembered, too, that pension is now based on the basic rate of pay. I do not know what my hon. Friend's answer is to this, but it does seem to me that the best type of men are not going to accept additional responsibilities if they are to receive no extra pay at all. I [343](#)suggest seriously for his consideration that he should look at this question of chief petty officers' rates of pay again. I am glad rates for other ratings have been increased; they should have been increased; but in doing so we have created an anomaly which must be dealt with if we are to get the best results in the Service.

The second point I want to make concerns, of course, the question of messing. I have already pointed out that in the past, as the result of artificers' messing together, they enjoyed a certain status. It gave rise to a certain esprit de corps and pride in their profession, and enabled them to

discuss their work in the mess. I asked a Question of the Civil Lord, I think two weeks ago, concerning the rebuilding of the barracks at Devonport, and the reply given seems to indicate that the Admiralty are now contemplating, in improving the messing conditions, general messing for chief and petty officers. I would like to ask my hon. Friend whether he has actually consulted the petty officers, or their representatives, about this matter, because, from my experience of the Navy, and I have had a few years' experience, there was a great deal of feeling about it. Are the Admiralty going to throw over Article 626? If the men want it, well and good, but I see certain difficulties in the way.

I have mentioned one—artificers messing in three different messes as a result of that innovation. That means, we destroy the contacts between them which will enable them to tackle their work in a very efficient and competent manner. In the general mess, we inevitably find that the various branches keep together. We find artificers and chief petty officers grouped together and so on, and they form their own cliques in the messes. A mess, to a man aboard a ship, is his home. In this country, we do not like living communally; we like to get away somewhere by ourselves. My experience of the Navy is that, when a man is drafted to a new ship, the first thing he does is to look for a sort of hiding-place out of everybody's way. I ask the Admiralty to consider this very carefully before coming to any final decision.

My next suggestion, and I think this applies to all ratings in the Navy, concerns the discharge of men from the Service, [344](#) and fitting them into civil employment. Recently, I have had a long correspondence with the

Ministry of Transport trying to get Board of Trade certificates for temporary engineers. It seems to me that, now that the Navy has become more and more mechanised, the men in the Navy have become more and more skilled, and I think an endeavour should be made to give these men something that will be recognised outside as of value in obtaining civil employment. In the engine room branch, we get a boiler room certificate and an engine room charge certificate. These certificates, surely, should have some value, but, in actual fact, they have no value at all, and, at the present time, there are very few employers who will look at them. My own experience was that they were not only useless, but, when it came to being registered for this war, nobody knew what they were, and, as a result of possessing these certificates, I found myself put into the Royal Artillery. I had had 9 years' training as an artificer, and eight years at sea as an artificer, and the reward was to be put in the Royal Artillery. That is the value of these certificates today, and I think it is all wrong.

The Admiralty will have to make up their minds, if they want to satisfy the lower deck, that they will give them something that will be of value to them when they get outside. I also had another experience in trying to fit ex-Servicemen into civil jobs. I remember serving on the Scottish Committee of the National Association for the Employment of ex-Soldiers, Sailors and Airmen, and I remember a special meeting being convened to consider finding jobs for unemployed ex-Servicemen. The only two suggestions put to that meeting were: first, that they should be employed on the dustcarts, instead of women; and, second, that they should be employed in groups to go to houses to clean the front door bell and polish the doorsteps for three or four days a week, and, if they got

sufficient householders to take them on, they would get a nice week's pay. That is not good enough for ex-Servicemen. We have got to do something better for the ex-Servicemen. We do immediately after a war, but I am talking about 10 or 12 years after, when the inclination is not to pay much attention to them.

Finally, I want to ask my hon. Friend to consider this question of mis-employ- 345ment. It should not be difficult to avoid mis-employment as much as possible. It creates a very bad feeling amongst ratings who are mainly concerned with their own job. It is the same in the Army. A man who joins R.E.M.E. in the Army does so to be an engineer and not to be a soldier. In other words, he does not want to be in a tank or fire a gun, or anything like that; he goes in as an engineer. Misemployment, so far as I see it, causes a considerable amount of ill-feeling, and has a bad effect on recruiting because people outside get to know of these things. It also has a very bad effect on the morale of the lower deck. In conclusion, I ask my hon. Friend to consider the points I have made, because if he does tackle them he will be doing something very valuable; he will be building up the morale of what I consider to be the key men in the Service.

§11.21 p.m.

§Colonel Crosthwaite-Eyre (New Forest and Christchurch)

If I do not follow the hon. Member for North Edinburgh (Mr. Willis) too far it is for three reasons. The first is because no Englishman dare follow a Scotsman into his own parts, and he has talked about these provinces North of the Clyde where I should be most rash to follow him.

Secondly, of course, he spoke about the artificers' branch of the Royal Navy. I, myself, with my very limited experience, would remark that he has made a good case and one I would be ready to support. He has talked about pensions and mis-employment, on both of which he made a good case that is worthy of answer. Therefore, I hope if I do not follow him further than that, he will not take it as implying any disrespect, but merely that as an Englishman I am unwilling to follow a Scotsman into the lairs of the Grampians and, consequently, willingly bow to the logic of his own particular technical case.

For myself, I wish to talk about the Royal Marines, and I start, like so many other hon. Members in this House this afternoon, by entering a personal complaint. That complaint is that this branch of the Service in which I am personally interested was only mentioned once throughout the whole course of what has now been an eight hours' Debate, and that mention was purely in reference. I would like to ask the Civil Lord if he will make certain answers to certain specific 346 questions which I would like to put to him. In the first place, these Estimates disclose that the strength of the Royal Marines is going to be some 18,150 in the current year, as against 42,000 last year. That shows a reduction of 42 per cent. I would like to ask the Civil Lord how many of these 18,000 he estimates will, this time next year, be represented by continuous service and by hostilities only personnel. I say this because no branch of any Service can suffer a reduction of this nature if the reduction is entirely going to be at the expense of continuous service personnel. Were any such root and branch attack to be made, the Royal Marines cannot hope to maintain that efficiency which alone justifies their continued existence.

The Second Reading of the **Royal Marines Bill** was one of those occasions which, unfortunately, had a certain amount of latitude, but not enough. An hon. Member opposite, I think it was the hon. Member for South Cardiff (Mr. Callaghan), made a speech in which he said the Royal Marines were not getting enough recruits. The Civil Lord started to reply, but he was ruled out of Order when we were reaching the point where he would have given the House the required information. Therefore, I would like to ask the Civil Lord tonight if sufficient continuous service personnel are being obtained to continue the efficiency of this Service. It was also said during the Second Reading of the **Royal Marines Bill** that the object was to bring the Marines into parallel with the Royal Navy. I have had correspondence with the Civil Lord, who has been most helpful on the matter, but I would ask if he can say anything definite about whether the Royal Marines will enjoy the same terms as the Navy for short engagements, that is, seven years' period engagement and five years with the Reserve. I hope he will say something definite on that point. The Financial Secretary said that some of the Royal Marine barracks were fit only for destruction. I would like to ask, under Vote 10 (B), if any of the million pounds to be spent this year is to be devoted to Royal Marine barracks, equally whether some of the Estimate of two million pounds is to be allotted for this work. We are told that new barracks have to be built, and I would ask if either the amount for future allocation or the **347** amount allocated this year is for Royal Marine barracks.

If I may go on to a wider issue—and I have listened to a great many speakers in this Debate—I would say that if any lesson is to be learned from the war, it is that naval warfare must be of the utmost mobility. We have heard

that the days of the capital ship are done, and that we should go in for aircraft carriers with the maximum bombing weight. But, if we have learned anything from the last war, and if one could see anything of the future, it is that naval strategy should be based on the assumption that this country can escort and land a decisive force in any theatre of the world in which we may have to face a hostile combination of forces. In view of all this, who can say what our future naval role will be? But one can see something of the possible future role of the Royal Marines.

During the last war, for instance, we had at short notice to consider the establishment of naval bases in Norway, Crete, Addu Atoll, the Azores, Sicily—and one could mention more. We have watched during the war the lessons learned by the United States. I think it is no idle thing to say that the United States marine forces did experience far more amphibious warfare than we did and that the lessons they learned should be capable of being used by ourselves to our own advantage. I would like to ask the Civil Lord whether we have in the broadest sense considered those lessons and how far we are willing to apply them to ourselves. We fully realise that the first job of the Royal Marines in this country is to provide sea-going detachments for H.M. ships. I believe I am also right in saying that it is now the policy of H.M. Government that commandos should be provided by the Royal Marines, and I would like to ask the Civil Lord how much further that policy goes, and how far H.M. Government have made up their minds as to the role of the Royal Marines in combined operations. We have heard a few words from the Financial Secretary on that subject this afternoon.

As I think anyone must admit in any quarter of the House, it is necessary for this country no longer to view itself as a sea-girt isle, but rather as a base from which, in any emergency, task forces have to go forth to establish themselves 348 wherever it may be necessary, either for our trade or Imperial defence. That I think is our overall strategic requirement. In view of that, how far have we gone in the study of the problems of combined operations, and in that particular sphere, how far have the Navy said that they wish to retain unto themselves the task of launching and establishing the task forces? I speak as one with little experience but it seems to me that it is the essential task of the Navy to launch and establish these task forces. I felt, particularly, after reading the experiences of the Americans in the Far East that unless the Navy was prepared to accept the responsibility of taking the Army, of landing the Army and for establishing the Army, then there was bound to be not only a waste of manpower, but probably a physical waste of manpower through casualties, because of the division of responsibility. I would like to ask the Civil Lord whether he could give us any idea of how far these discussions may have gone and whether any policy was evolved.

One other point. We in the Royal Marines, I think one can say, are as proud of our corps as any other section of the forces but we are the one branch which has, so far, no reserve force. We want to be able to gather ourselves in civilian life and retain the value of the training we have received, in the knowledge that we may perhaps, in future, be of use again to our country. A year ago I asked the Financial Secretary whether the Royal Marine Forces Volunteer Reserves would be established. I was then told that it would. Three months later I asked the Financial

Secretary whether anything further had been done. He said there was nothing further he could say. I do hope that now, nine months later still, the Civil Lord will be able to tell us something concrete about it. I would like to remind him that in the meantime the Royal Marines Association has been established. This is merely like any other old comrades club, but it has had an enormous success throughout the country both in seaports and inland.

Therefore, if I may say so, as a body of people who are only too willing to retain the associations they made during the war, not only for their common interest in peace but also as reserves of strength for this country if it should ever be called upon again to exert itself, I [349](#) hope the Civil Lord tonight will be able to tell us frankly and openly that the Royal Marines Volunteer Reserve promised a year ago can now be visualised as a fact. In that connection, my hon. and gallant Friend the Member for Chelsea (Commander Noble) talked of the R.N.V.R. and the establishment of inland divisions. I hope that the Royal Marine Forces Volunteer Reserve will be allowed to use those inland divisions as well.

In conclusion, I do feel that, again in my very short experience, the Royal Marines have perhaps been viewed as the marginal asset of the Admiralty. In my experience they have been called upon from time to time to do the most incredible jobs, for most of which they had never been trained and most of which were suddenly required. I hope that the Civil Lord tonight, perhaps on the remarks I have made, will give us some idea of the role they are going to play in the future. Those of us who have studied what our brother corps in the United States have done feel that a great future lies before the Royal Marine Corps of

this country if the Admiralty will give a lead to the fulfilment of that role. With the impress of the tradition and spirit and knowledge which has been gained in the Royal Marine Corps, they may then go forward to do in the future as in the past their task of trying to do their share worthily in the defence of this country.

11.36 p.m.

The Civil Lord of the Admiralty (Mr. Walter Edwards)

I think the House will agree that we have been spending a very useful eight hours in discussing the important matter of what is to be done for the Navy in the ensuing year and what has been done during the past year. I think I can assure my noble Friend and the Parliamentary Secretary that at least they have nothing to be displeased about with the reception of the Estimates by the House from both sides, and, in fact, so far as the speeches are concerned, they do at least leave the impression that the present administration is trying to do all it possibly can to meet the needs of the country, despite the remarks of one or two members—one hon. Member and one right hon. Member. That being the case, I should imagine that they will be perfectly satisfied. I must say that I have been greatly impressed with the sincerity of all the speeches today. I think that every hon. Member and right hon. Member who has spoken has at least tried to speak in a constructive fashion, for the sole purpose of seeing that the British Navy is going to be the best in the world. I really greatly appreciate it.

There has been quite a long discussion, and I am quite certain that hon. Members will not expect me to reply to the tremendous number of points which have been put to

me by all who have taken part in the debate. Even the hon. Member for Hereford (Mr. J.P.L. Thomas), whom the whole House likes to hear on these matters, gave me no fewer than 13 questions to which he hoped I would reply, but I am quite certain that, with his experience, he would agree that if I did my duty by him and spent the whole of my reply on his behalf, I would not have time to reply to any other Member who has taken part in the Debate. Perhaps I might try to deal with some of the points that have been raised, and I would refer to the point that was raised by the hon. Member for Hereford. Both he and a number of other hon. Members did complain very bitterly of the fact that the size of the Estimates booklet for this year was not as large as in 1938, and that there was not so much detailed information contained in the Estimates as in prewar years. I want to assure the House that there is nothing missing in that document which may have been there in the past. Not for one moment has it been done with the intention of hiding facts from the House. I think I can claim that it is the policy so far as this year is concerned which has been applied to the three Services.

Hon. Members quite rightly and naturally demand to be told of everything that has taken place. As far as the control of the Navy and the monies which have to be spent are concerned, I would like the House to accept the assurance that it is not just for the sake of withholding information that these particulars have been omitted. As and when it may be deemed to be wise to give that information, we shall gladly give it to the House. I realise that the shortage of information may possibly be responsible for the rather large number of questions which I have been asked to answer. With regard to the complaint that hon. Members of this House cannot see the

Navy List, I am informed that it is in the Library, and has not been out of it throughout the war.

Mr. J.P.L. Thomas

I can assure the Civil Lord that we on this side of the House know all that. We also know that the Lists of the three Services have been available in the Library throughout the war. But we also know that no instructions have been given since the war to make these Lists available for information on the Floor of the House, and, therefore, information about the Navy is still withheld from the British public, in this particular case, and about the other Services. Therefore, I think that the criticisms which have come from all quarters today about the Navy List still stand, and are justified

Mr. Edwards

I was certainly left with the impression that some hon. Members believed that it was not possible for them even to see the Navy List.

Mr. Thomas

Could the Admiralty give instructions to the Library that the Navy List can now be quoted on the Floor of the House, and, therefore, given through us to the British public?

Mr. Edwards

I will certainly consider it, and put it to the First Lord.

Mr. Bracken

Why not put it on sale again? There is nothing secret about it, and the Admiralty, at one time, made a small income from selling it. There is no reason why newspapers and others should not have the List.

Mr. Edwards

I can assure the right hon. Gentleman that we will consider the matter. Another point which was raised by the hon. Member for Hereford was with regard to what he thought to be a fact—that although the Estimates have come down by close on £80 million from last year's figure, actually, as a result of the terminal charges for the two years, it really means a reduction of only £10 million. Again, perhaps, the question might not have been asked had the full details been given. I am sure it would interest the House to know that, in one instance alone, we shall, in this next financial year, have to pay £28 million for stores and services which were not paid for last year. We have to pay other Government Departments for these stores and services. In addition, there is no less than £14,500,000 to be paid next year as the result of increased pay, both to naval and industrial personnel. Furthermore, in order to avoid spending money this year, we have used up quite a large amount of our stocks, but £4,500,000 will have to be found for this purpose next year. That, at least, gives some indication that the reduction is far more than the £10 million which the hon. Member for Hereford thought it was.

Then there was the question of wastage of manpower. I realise that that is a point which must trouble hon. Members, and I can assure the House that it troubles the Admiralty as well. No doubt hon. Members are justified in

believing that, again, the figures refer to the number of people who are now shore-based, and that there may, possibly, be some wastage of manpower. Here again I am quite sure that the House will be interested to know that one of the main reasons for that is our present commitments. In normal times the intake, which we would call drafts, would be approximately 7,000 a year. Last year that intake had gone up from 7,000 to 47,000 and this year we anticipate that it is going to be about 36,000. I am quite certain that every Member will appreciate that when we are having five times the intake we are going to have a far greater number of men on shore training, which must mean a larger number of men to train them. This is reflected in the higher number of instructors and officers who have to be in charge.

Another reason why there will be a larger number of men on shore during the next year is because the staff colleges, which were discontinued during the war, have been restarted and they will certainly take in a fair number of officers. There is also another point as far as the training of officers and men of the Navy are concerned, and that is that the Navy is becoming so technical that it is necessary to have a long period of training. For instance, if a man is carrying out radar work he will have to have a much longer period on training than when radar was not a feature of the work of the Navy. There are many other duties which are being performed at the present time than would be performed in normal times. There is the question for instance of storing ships in reserve, which does emphasise that we are not out of the war and completely in a time of peace, and one cannot try to make a comparison. As was mentioned by the Financial Secretary, we had these extra commitments of the Fleet Air Arm and

such services of which there was so little before the war. I hope that that explanation will at least clear some of the doubt which may have existed in the minds of hon. Members with regard to the use of officers and men on shore for the Royal Navy.

The hon. Member for Hereford raised the question of the reserve fleet and whether there could not be saving of manpower if we adopted American methods. I can inform the hon. Member that we are going into that question. We shall do what is humanly possible, but sometimes the Royal Navy does not get enough money. We cannot always compete with the United States as far as money is concerned, and that may be the determining factor as to how far we can carry on the same policy which is carried on in the United States.

Then we come to this question of Rosyth, which has even had to be introduced by an English Member. It is rather strange for that to be done, but am quite certain that the two Scottish Members who spoke in the Debate would not care so long as it was done.

Lieut.-Commander Hutchison

On a point of correction. I am a 100 per cent. Scotsman, and I raised it.

Mr. Edwards

I am afraid that the hon. Member for Hereford raised it in the Debate today when he spoke first. I realise the concern of the people in Scotland, particularly in the Rosyth district as far as the continuation of that place as a naval establishment is concerned, and also of those on the Clyde

who want the Navy to be installed there permanently, but I am afraid there is not much information that I can give on those points at the moment. We have received requests from various bodies, and the hon. and gallant Member for West Edinburgh (Lieut.-Commander Hutchison) referred to the case of the First Lord refusing to receive a deputation of Conservative Members of Parliament. I was present at a deputation which was received by the First Lord just before the application was made, and that deputation comprised representatives of all the leading citizens of Edinburgh and Glasgow and surrounding places. My noble Friend is taking a great interest in this question.

Lieut.-Commander Hutchison

I made the request at the beginning of December, and the other one was only made early this year.

Mr. Edwards

I am not quite certain about the times. I only point out that my noble Friend has received a very representative deputation from Scotland on this issue, and we had to inform that deputation, in the same way as I have to inform the House, that we were unable to tell them anything definite about Rosyth. The matter will be kept under review, and should there be any alteration in the present situation whereby employment would not be possible, we shall certainly give the people in those districts the fullest possible notice.

Mr. McLean Watson (Dunfermline Burghs)

Has any attention been given to the fact that the population of Rosyth is gradually being reduced, and that men are leaving the dockyard because of the uncertainty of the conditions there? Has my hon. Friend any suggestion to make to ensure that the dockyard would be able to undertake the work which might be provided there?

Mr. Edwards

Yes, I can say that those matters will be taken into consideration. I can also say that the number of people who have left the dockyard is very small indeed, and we certainly do not find any great diminution in the actual number in employment there.

Mr. Watson

The main point is that is the skilled men who are leaving the dockyard.

Mr. Edwards

I am sorry, but I have no information to that effect. In any case, I will look into it.

Mr. Watson

It is my information.

Mr. Edwards

We have no such information at the Admiralty at present.

The hon. Member for Hereford raised the question of naval aviation, and pointed out there were only two ports where aircraft could be taxied on to ships. That is perfectly

true, but if we have to find some more it means taking an airfield to a port or taking a port to an airfield, and neither of those are easy jobs to undertake in present conditions Obviously it is something which we must keep in mind in relation to the question of the future of naval aviation. We have a number of new types of aircraft, and, in answer to the hon. Member's question, the types at present in use are the Seafire Mk 47, the Sea Fury, the Sea Hornet and the Firefly; and flying experience is given at sea at present.

A number of hon. Members referred to the Reserves, and there has been some comment about the delay in setting up the R.N.V.R. While I suppose it is not good policy to refer to what happened under other Governments, it is true to say that, as far as the war before last is concerned the R.N.V.R. was not set up as quickly as we have set it up. I am certain hon. Members will appreciate that there are some difficulties in the quick setting up of the Reserve when the whole machinery of the Department is so badly affected as a result of conditions in the interim period and demobilisation. However, we do claim to have got on with this task as quickly as possible As has been mentioned by my hon. Friend the Financial Secretary this afternoon, we have a large number of applicants for officers' posts in the R.N.V.R.—in fact, more than we can take at present. We are not pessimistic about getting the ratings. One has to remember that many of these ratings who were in the R.N.V.R. during the war, and many who were not, want a little breathing space in life outside the Service before deciding to take up some form of naval training. I can assure the right hon. Member for Bournemouth (Mr. Bracken) that we are very deeply interested in the future

of the Reserve, and everything that we can possibly do will be done.

Captain Marsden

We know it will take some time for these men to drift back to the R.N.V.R., but the really important question is: Will the training establishments, batteries and facilities for learning their job, be kept up to date? If they are allowed to deteriorate it takes a long time to repair the damage.

Mr. Edwards

That point is realised. While I could not give exact information on the matter, I can assure the hon. and gallant Member that what he has said will be taken into consideration. Then there was the question of the Royal Naval Reserve, which I believe has been explained by my hon. Friend as being a little bit more difficult after the recent war than after the 1914–18 war. It was certainly a great inconvenience to the Merchant Navy, particularly in the early part of the war, and even in the latter part of the war, when they had such a large number of perhaps their most brilliant men coming into the Royal Navy to undertake naval duties. However, we certainly appreciate the services that were given by members of the Royal Naval Reserve, and we paid the greatest regard to them. The fact that we have not yet got our scheme right does not cast the slightest reflection on the work of the men of the R.N.R. It is simply that the matter has to be considered in the light of what is to the best advantage of the country as a whole. With regard to the Sea Cadet Corps, there seems to be some concern about their numbers being reduced from 36,000 to 30,000. The position is, that the boys are not coming forward so quickly as we anticipated

they would. But every step is being taken, and we will certainly keep in mind every possible method of at least maintaining the numbers, if not improving them.

The question of the scientific services and research was raised, in particular by the hon. and gallant Member for Chelsea (Commander Noble), in, if I may say so, an admirable speech, and also by the right hon. Member for Bournemouth (Mr. Bracken) and the hon. Member for Hereford. The answer is, that we did intend to carry out the promises that were made by my right hon. Friend the Minister of Defence last year, when he was First Lord. But here again, in this field we found many difficulties as a result of not being able to get the buildings we wanted, and in many cases not having the materials required. And, what is perhaps just as important, many of the scientists who were working for us during the war decided to go back to the type of work they were doing before the war. Many of them came into the Service in the national interest, and we certainly had no control over them returning to their other studies. That left us with a smaller number. That is really the answer to the question why the whole of the money was not spent last year. It will be noted that we have estimated for more money to be spent this year than was in the Estimates last year. We place great emphasis on the question of scientific services. As soon as we can get the thing going it will be the desire of the Admiralty to give science and research the place they deserve in priorities. It is priority number one, second only to manpower.

As regards accommodation, the hon. Member for Hereford said that the figure in Vote to under Subhead B was less than that estimated last year. But if he will look at

the Vote as a whole, he will find that we are estimating for £1,000,000 more for works this year. Next year iwe under-spent that Vote, not because we did not want to spend money on improved barrack accommodation, where it was necessary for improvements to be effected, but because there was such a big demand on the building labour in those areas that there was very little of the labour force left for us; so that we could not spend even the money provided. We are hoping, as the building labour force of the country does increase, to get more of it to assist us in this job of making improvements, if not of completing modernisation.

I hope the House will forgive me for having taken so long in replying to the hon. Member for Hereford, but as he led off, and, I believe, dealt with most of the points that subsequent speakers dealt with, I thought that if I covered his speech I should cover most of the Debate too. The right hon. Gentleman the Member for Bournemouth was not quite so navalised—if I may use the term—as most of the other speakers in the Debate. He certainly seemed to be going for the Government the whole of the time, and I do not think other speakers were going for the Government. But he is on the Opposition Front Bench, and he certainly has a duty in that respect. I think I have dealt with most of the points raised by the right hon. Gentleman.

I would add to what I said about scientific research, that there is pooled research run by the Government at a cost of about go million, and the Navy is receiving benefit from that. On the question of architects raised by the right hon. Gentleman, he will be pleased to know, I am sure, that so far as our modernisation schemes for the Royal Naval and Royal Marine barracks are concerned, we are getting

outside architects to help from the Royal Institute of British Architects. I understand that they have been over to the most modern barracks in Germany, and we hope to get some benefit from what they have learned. [HON. MEMBERS: "Why?"] I think we can say, quite seriously, that the Germans did have the most modern barracks—because they put them up at a much later time than we did: that is quite easily explained.

There is one important matter raised during the Debate. I think it is of such importance that I ought to read a statement to the House on the subject. It is the matter raised by the hon. Member for Stretford (Mr. Austin), in which he referred to the statement which appeared in the Press regarding an officer in the Navy, namely, Lieutenant Wardell, R.N.V.R. The hon. Member mentioned that the action of the Admiralty, under its disciplinary code, in charging this officer with two acts prejudicial to good order and discipline in taking lunch and intoxicating liquor in the ship, was liable to affect morale, and recruiting for the Navy. I think I ought to take the opportunity of explaining the whole of the circumstances of this event. I have gone very carefully into this matter, and I am bound to say that a considerable amount of misunderstanding has arisen about the court martial at Rosyth on 7th March on Lieutenant Wardell, R.N.V.R.

This officer was charged with committing two acts to the prejudice of good order and naval discipline in taking lunch and intoxicating liquor with five ratings in a ratings' mess in his ship, and giving beer and spirits to these ratings. The gift of spirits or intoxicating liquor on board His Majesty's ships is specifically prohibited by King's Regulations and Admiralty Instructions. Experience has

shown that the entertainment of ratings by officers subsequently leads to acts of indiscipline or other unfortunate results, and it has been found in the best interests of officers and ratings that such entertainments should not take place. The wisdom of this rule was amply demonstrated on this occasion, for I am sorry to say that one of the ratings, who was seen after the meal in an intoxicated state, disappeared from the ship shortly afterwards, and, while there is no evidence to show how he disappeared, the possibility that he lost his life by falling overboard cannot be discounted. The circumstances of such incidents pointed to the desirability of the most careful consideration before altering the regulations. I am advised that the trial was properly conducted in every way, and I see no reason for interfering with the sentence of the court martial.

I think it is very essential to emphasise to the House this particular case, because it has received a fair amount of publicity, not only in this country but in other countries, and this is really the first opportunity that the Admiralty have had of acquainting the public with the full facts. I am quite certain that, in a case such as this, it is the duty of the Admiralty to see that men on board ship should act in a way that will prevent any loss of life ensuing unnecessarily. I am very sorry to have to report these facts to the House, but that is the actual position.

Major Bruce

May I interrupt my hon. Friend? As a result of the ruling which he has just given, can he say whether it is the rule that, in future, it will be out of order for any officer in the

Navy to partake of food and visit the messes of ratings on the same ship?

Mr. Edwards

I have just referred to the charge. The charge against this officer was of committing two acts to the prejudice of good order and naval discipline by taking lunch and intoxicating liquor with five ratings in a ratings' mess. I think we shall find that the King's Regulations and Admiralty Instructions forbid officers, individually, going into ratings' messes and having lunch. Whilst everybody wants to democratise things as much as we can, there are some limits in a disciplined Service to which we have to have regard. We cannot do away with discipline entirely in the Service, and I should want to consider very carefully the implications of any alterations of the Regulations before we would go to that extent.

There was, on this occasion, I suppose, as a result of the statement made by the Financial Secretary this afternoon, not quite so much criticism of the Dartmouth system for entry of officers into the Navy, but there was some, and I think it was rather vocal in one or two cases. I am not going to deal with all the points tonight, for the simple reason that the Financial Secretary has said today that the matter is under very active consideration, and that, in about eight weeks' time, we may be able to come to the House with some definite information. On the question that there should be a White Paper issued before any action is taken, I do not think it is usual for either of the other two Services when they decide to change their method of the entry of officers into the Service to publish a

White Paper, but I am prepared to put the point to my right hon. Friend to see what he has to say about it.

There has been one conspicuous point in the Debate. On the last occasion we discussed the Navy Estimates there was, from both sides of the House, a lot of criticism about the overcrowding that was then taking place. I am very glad to note that on this occasion there has been very little criticism on that matter. From my visits to naval establishments I am glad to note there has been a considerable improvement in this respect, and on my last visit to Chatham I was very pleased to see the great improvement in the place and to see that they were not sleeping in the same room in which they were eating and living. That is something which gives me great pleasure, and I am sure it also pleases the House.

I was asked to say something about Fisheries Protection by the hon. Gentleman the Member for Bodmin (Mr. D. Marshall), but I am afraid I shall have to write to him in this connection since I have not yet been able to get the information he desires. Another point was raised by more than one hon. Member, and that was the question of the "Ajax," the "Achilles," and the "Aurora." Of these, two are going to India and one to China. The latest information is that the "Ajax," the "Achilles," and the "Leander" have been accepted by India for their use, but we do not know when they will be able to take them. It may be some time, but they are not taking the three at once, and it may be some considerable time before the second or the third go.

Mr. Bracken

Are these ships being sold to the Indians?

Mr. Edwards

I think the right hon. Gentleman will find that these ships are on loan, but I am afraid I have not got that information.

Sir R. Ross

In another place the reply was given that these three old cruisers were being sold. I would like to know the cost.

Mr. Edwards

If that reply was given I would imagine it is correct. The hon. Gentleman the Member for West Edinburgh made out a useful case with regard to the Naval Ordnance Inspection Department. All I can tell him is that this matter is under active consideration, and no doubt he will not have to wait so long for a reply as he has done in the past. A question was raised by the hon. Gentleman the Member for Houghton-le-Spring (Mr. Blyton) with regard to the cost of altering the "Vanguard" to meet the needs of the nation in taking the Royal Family out to South Africa. The actual cost of these alterations was in the region of £170,000. I do not know what form of complaint this body in Portsmouth has in connection with this visit; whether it is that they should not have gone in the "Vanguard" but should have gone in something else. But whatever the Royal Family had travelled in, it is quite certain that it would have cost some money, and I am sure the vast majority of the people in the country would approve that when the Royal Family are making these visits abroad they should go in the finest battleship in the world. I feel that this meets with the wishes of the vast majority, and as

for the wasting of material, it does have to be appreciated that when one adapts a ship of this character to undertake a special duty the ordinary layman may think that something is being wasted. But I can assure the House that the utmost economy was exercised, and the work was carried out very satisfactorily indeed.

I may have to keep the House a very long time if I have to reply to all the other points, but I would like to reply to the hon. and gallant Member for New Forest and Christchurch (Colonel Crosthwaite-Eyre) because he did me the kindness of telling me that he was going to raise these points. The force of 18,150 in the Royal Marines is to be made up of 11,000 continuous service personnel and 7,150 "hostilities only." We are not up to the numbers required without any National Service entry, but the figures are really encouraging. So far as short engagements are concerned in the Royal Marines, this has actually been approved by the Board of Admiralty, but it requires legislation to be passed to put it into operation. What we are thinking of doing is to institute a seven years' short engagement in the Royal Marines, and then leaving it to the man himself either to do five years on the Reserve, or to continue for another five years. That is in the forefront of our minds, and we hope to meet the wishes of hon. Members in this way.

Regarding Vote B, I would like to say that the amount of approximately £65,000 is for Royal Marine barracks. Regarding the Volunteer Reserve, that again is a question of legislation. There are a tremendous number of points for me to answer, but I trust that the House is agreed that I have covered the main points. If there are any special points which hon. Members think I left out, I shall be only

too willing to invite them to tell me of those points, and I will try to let them have the information they require.

12.20 a.m.

Vice-Admiral Taylor (Paddington, South)

I should like to ask about the maintenance of secrecy with regard to our present naval Forces and Fleets, and where they are. It is very difficult to understand why this secrecy is necessary. Surely, not so far as security is concerned, and I hope it will not be long delayed before the public have full information about our present Fleets and where they are. We have not been informed in any way whatsoever with regard to the strength and composition of our post-war Fleet. That is more understandable than the secrecy with regard to our existing Fleet. There is no doubt whatever that the change over for war to peace as far as His Majesty's Navy is concerned present great difficulties, particularly on account of the scientific discoveries, the coming of the atom bomb, the rocket and so on. This has made the changeover more difficult and the post-war composition and strength of the Fleet more difficult, because undoubtedly these are facts that have to be taken into account with regard to the composition of the Fleet, the vessels that are required and the construction of the ships. We live by the security of our sea communications and many people have mentioned, or put forward, proposals that the Fleet of the future shall be chiefly composed of aircraft—that we shall be able to defend our lines of communication by means of air power and that makes the Battle Fleet, and so on, obsolete. I entirely disagree with that point of view and I maintain it

is impossible to safeguard our sea communications by means of air power. It cannot possibly be done.

Sea power is dependent not only on surface ships, aircraft, and on the strength of our Mercantile Marine, but also on the bases which we have throughout the world. Nothing has been said in the reply given by the Civil Lord with regard to that most important point, the maintenance of our sea power in connection with bases, because without bases it is impossible for our Fleets to function. The British Empire is dwindling, due to the action of the Socialist Government, and we have not been told anything about what bases we are to have or the provision that is being made for our Fleets in substitution for those which we lose when we lose various parts of the Empire, which we are losing so fast. I want to mention, as an example, that, in the Mediterranean, we have lost the port of Alexandria—an immense base for our Fleet. What do the Government propose instead of that base? It is our duty, if we are to maintain our power in the world, to have sufficient naval Forces at sea in order to maintain our security and the security of our sea communications. We and the public do not know what the strength of the Fleet is today. There is only one destroyer which is to be laid down under these Navy Estimates. We cannot delay for an indefinite time before we begin the construction of our postwar Fleet. We are in very dangerous times. The world is in a very dangerous state: it is very unstable. Nobody can say what will happen in the near or the more distant future. We made a fatal blunder after the last war. We do not want to make the same blunder this time. We relied on the collective security of the League of Nations. It completely failed. Now I hope we are not going to wait, in the construction of our postwar Fleet, on the collective

security which is to be provided by the United Nations organisation. We cannot rely upon that. We must of ourselves construct and maintain a Fleet which is powerful enough, in combination with the assistance given by our Dominions and the Colonies, to protect the British Empire and to maintain our security.

I particularly desired to take part in this Debate to draw attention to the position of the officers who were retired under the 1919 Warrant. The other day in this House there was the Increase of Pensions Bill, which, in due course, will become an Act of Parliament, and the officers in the Services will benefit from it when it becomes an Act. But it was out of Order to discuss the pensions of naval officers under that Bill because the Services were not named in it and, therefore, this is the first opportunity which one has had for stating their case. I am glad to have a chance of doing so now. In 1919, as is well known, the Royal Warrant was issued prescribing new rates of retired pay and an Admiralty Fleet Order was issued in 1919, which stated as follows: It has been decided that 20 per cent. of the new rates for retired officers shall be considered as due to the high cost of living and shall be subject, after five years, to changes either upwards or downwards according as the cost of living rises or falls, revision thereafter to take place every three years up or down on the basis of the Board of Trade prices. It is important to realise that this provision of the 20 per cent. of the pensions has been taken into account when the cost of living only applies to naval officers, and to the officers in the other two Services. This increase was the first increase in pension which had taken place since Victorian days some 30 years before and it was overdue. It was brought in because of the increase in the cost of living over

the years before 1919 which had gone up by over 100 per cent. From 1919 to 1922 there was a rise in the cost of living but as a period of five years had not elapsed no change was made in the officers' pensions. The cost began to fall in 1924 and, in accordance with the Royal Warrant, the officers' pensions were reduced in 1924 by five and a half per cent. In 1927 they had been reduced to six per cent.; in 1930 they had been reduced to seven per cent. and in 1931, first, there was a reduction to eight per cent. and some three months later the officers pensions were reduced to 11 per cent. below the 1919 basic rate. The 1931 reductions were clearly a breach of faith of the provisions of the 1919 A.F.O.

They were arbitrarily imposed. However, they were loyally accepted by the officers as the inevitable result of the 1929–30 economic collapse. In 1934, however, there was a slight rise in the cost of living, and, in that year, the Government decided that they would consolidate and stabilise the officers' pensions at nine and a half per cent. below the 1919 basic rate. That was definitely a breach of faith on the part of the Government, who had given an undertaking to the officers retired under the 1919 Warrant that 20 per cent. of their pensions should rise or fall in accordance with the rise or fall in the cost of living.

But, immediately the cost of living began to go up, the Government decided to stabilise these pensions at nine and a half per cent. below the basic rate. In 1944, the Pensions (Increase) Act was passed, which gave increases to certain pensions. Those pensions which did not exceed £400 a year, received an increase of 10 per cent. That meant that officers receiving pensions up to £400 a year received the nine and a half per cent. reduction which had taken place,

plus one-half per cent. Officers receiving pensions of between £400 and £600 were given an increase of seven and a half per cent. Pensions of between £600 and £645 a year were increased to bring them up to £645, and any pensions of more than £645 a year received no increase at all.

In moving the Second Reading of this Bill in 1944, my right hon. Friend the Member for the Scottish Universities (Sir J. Anderson), who was then Chancellor of the Exchequer, in referring to a promise which he had made on 3rd December, 1943, said: I made it perfectly clear that the Government would concentrate on cases of what I described as real, grave hardship. He added: That will be essentially the approach which the Government propose to make, that is, to take account, as in the legislation following the last war, of the position of the pensioner, and to provide increases for the lower ranges of pensions, in order, so far as may be practicable, to mitigate really severe hardship ... Nor, I suggest, is this a time for departing in such a matter from the basic principle that financial assistance given ex gratia, not as a right, must be concentrated on cases of real and proved need."— [OFFICIAL REPORT, 3rd March, 1944; Vol. 397, c. 1761.] Where it is a question of an ex gratia payment, one entirely agrees with what my right hon. Friend the then Chancellor of the Exchequer said, that account must be taken of the need and hardship involved. But I suggest to the House that, in the case of the officers who received pensions under the 1919 Warrant, it was not a case of an ex gratia payment at all; it was a case of whether the Government were going to fulfil their obligations or not under that 1919 Warrant, and they did not do so.

I have another point to make. [Laughter.] Hon. Members may laugh, but I will make them all, notwithstanding the time. The Chancellor of the Exchequer also said on that occasion that the full restoration of 9½ per cent. would give more favourable terms than those contemplated in 1919, and that the officers had gained up to the outbreak of war by reason of the stabilisation. As a matter of fact, that is not correct. The stabilisation took place at 55 per cent. over the prewar figure, and in 1937 the figure was 54 per cent., and in 1938 it was 56 per cent., so in 1938 it had gone above the figure on which the pensions were stabilised. Therefore, it is not correct to say that the officers benefited up to the outbreak of war. With regard to the first statement that they would receive more than they were entitled to under the 1919 awards, I should like to ask the question, if the cost of living rose above the 1919 figure, would any increase have been given to officers? If that is not so, then the 1919 Warrant would not have been carried out. I maintain that that was a wrong thing to suggest.

The other day a Pensions (Increased Bill was introduced into this House and the Government made another nibble at the question of taking into consideration the cost of living with regard to retired pensions. Under this Measure pensions between £600 and £750 will receive an increase of 5 per cent., and between £750 and £787 ten per cent. increase to bring the total up to £787 10s. Over that amount there will be no increase at all. This increase was no doubt due to the same reason which had induced the Government in 1944 to increase those pensions—that was the vastly increased cost of living and the diminishing purchasing power of the pound. Although the Government realised and put into practice the principle that they must

increase those pensions, due to the rises in the cost of living and the depreciation of the purchasing power of the £ sterling, they have not yet accepted and put into practice the whole of the principle. If the principle is accepted, surely to goodness it should be applied to officers' pensions as a whole whatever the amount. But that has not been done and the officers have all the time considered that this matter was a breach of faith and the breaking of the contract given to them by the Admiralty in the A.F.O. That must have a very bad effect on obtaining the services of the best men for officers for His Majesty's Navy. I should like to put this question to those who are trade union leaders and officials as well as to Members of Parliament generally. Supposing a private employer had entered into a contract to pay his employees a certain sum and then that employer arbitrarily broke that agreement, what would the trade union say and do? There is no question of what they would have said or what action they would have taken.

The Government should set an example and should be good employers instead of bad employers. When they undertake obligations they should carry them out to the full. They have not done so. It cannot be disputed that the cost of living has risen enormously during the war and since the war, and it will rise still more. The officers with the higher pensions are penalised much more than those with the lower pensions. There are subsidies amounting, I think, to £350 million a year to keep the price of food down, paid for by an increase in Income Tax, which affects the officers with the higher pensions far more than those with lower pensions. They are hit both ways. They have had no increase in their pensions since the 1935 stabilisation at 9½ per cent. below the 1919 basic rate, and

they have to suffer again by increased taxation to pay for the subsidies on food brought in by the Government. The cost of living index which was based on a working man's family budget should not, and does not, apply to the officers.

Mr. McKinlay (Dumbartonshire)

Why not?

Vice-Admiral Taylor

Because they have a higher standard of living, which they deserve. I know that the principle and policy of the Socialist Party are to pull everybody down to a low level which, they think, would be to the advantage of the country, to remove all incentive and take away all the advantages which should be given to officers who have shown their efficiency and ability in rising to a higher rank. They receive higher pay. Therefore, they do their best to provide better houses and do more for their wives and families and increase their standard of living. When these officers retire they should be given such a pension that they will not have drastically to reduce that standard of living. It should be the aim of the Government not to reduce the standard of living of retired officers. Therefore, I strongly protest against the action of the Government in not carrying to its logical conclusion the principle which they have adopted, and they should include the whole of the officers in the increase of their pensions instead of placing this limit up to the figure of £787 10s. The officers with the higher pensions which they have well earned, are suffering considerably. I hope that although I may receive no reply to this request, the Government will go into the matter again and give to these retired officers justice,

which they have not had since 1935, when the Government broke their pledge given in the 1919 Warrant, and stabilised these pensions at 9½ per cent. below the basic rate.

Finally, I would ask the Government to go into the question of the pensions of officers' widows. They are far too low—they are disgracefully low—and nothing has been done to assist the widows in any way. They have to suffer from an immense rise in the cost of living, and an enormous depreciation in the purchasing power of the £. It is wrong that they should suffer the hardships they have to suffer. Officers in the Service render great service to the country, and in wartime everybody acclaims what they do. But when the war is over they are forgotten. I ask the Government to look into this matter of the pensions of officers' widows, and to take some steps to improve them far above the level at which they are at the present time.

12.46 a.m.

Mr. McLean Watson (Dunfermline Burghs)

. I hope the hon. and gallant Member for South Paddington (Vice-Admiral Taylor) will not think me discourteous if I do not follow him in the case he has been putting before the House in the last few minutes. I want to put one or two points to the Civil Lord, who I hope will give me a reply. In any case, I dare say the matter I wish to raise will have his consideration. Rosyth Dockyard, which has figured so largely in the Debate during the last hour or so, is in my constituency, but I have never claimed a monopoly of interest in that dockyard. It serves too large an area for me to claim any monopoly in that respect. I welcome the reference made to Rosyth Dockyard this

afternoon by my hon. Friend the Member for Hereford (Mr. J. P. L. Thomas). I hope I may still call him my hon. Friend, because when he was at the Admiralty we got on very well together. In fact, I have been on the very best of terms with a whole succession of representatives of the Admiralty, and the hon. Member for Hereford was no exception to that rule. I was pleased to hear him this afternoon show some concern about Rosyth.

When I listened to the speech of the right hon. Member for Bournemouth (Mr. Bracken) I wished he had been First Lord of the Admiralty in 1925. He referred to the "panic economy" which seized Governments following the 1914–18 war; he indicated that he was opposed to that panic economy, and hoped that there would not be panic economy following the war which has just ended. I noticed that on the benches behind him there was a very loud silence when he made reference to that panic economy. There was no need for surprise at that, because the Government that was responsible for imposing the panic economy was a Tory Government. It was a Tory Government that was responsible for reducing Rosyth Dockyard to a care and maintenance basis in 1925. This evening the hon. and gallant Member for West Edinburgh (Lieut.-Commander Hutchison) referred to the discourtesy of the First Lord in refusing to meet a deputation of Unionist M.P.s from Scotland on the subject of naval bases in the North. Well, if that indicates a change of heart on the part of Scottish Conservative Members, and if it indicates an exceptional interest in Rosyth Dockyard, I welcome the support that we may get from that quarter as well I remember that when the question of the reduction of Rosyth to a care and maintenance basis was discussed in this House in 1925, and was forced to a

Division, not one Tory Member loom Scotland voted in favour of the retention of Rosyth Dockyard. Of course, that was in 1925, at the time of the panic economy of the Tory Government that followed the close of the Great War. I hope we are not going to have any panic economy on the part of this Government. I hope that the steps that are taken will not be panic steps, but will be carefully planned and carefully carried out.

So far as Rosyth Dockyard is concerned, we have made our plea perfectly plain. We want Rosyth Dockyard to be a manning area as well as a repair yard; and we want it to be more than that. The claim we have made to the Admiralty is that Rosyth should be the recruiting centre for seamen from Scotland. When the old Caledonia was brought to Rosyth, and we had the beginning made of the training of boys there as seamen or as artificer apprentices, we welcomed that as an indication on the part of the Admiralty that they were going to develop Rosyth. Just as Portsmouth and Devonport served the South of England, we expected that Rosyth was going to play the same part in naval affairs in Scotland. But it has not so developed; and, as a matter of fact, the Admiralty have done little or nothing to recruit Scotsmen for the Navy. The Navy has largely been an English concern. Englishmen have mainly manned and officered the Navy, except, perhaps, in the higher branches where Scotsmen have occasionally forced themselves to the front.

That is what we expected. We expected that Rosyth would be developed as the centre for recruiting for the Navy in Scotland. But it has not been developed. I want to make an appeal to the Financial Secretary, who is on the Front Bench, to develop in Scotland recruiting centres for the

Royal Navy. I want to remind him that, when the war came, they were not long in discovering that in Scotland we had the very material that was required for the Navy. They not only took the fishermen, but they took the fishermen's boats as well during the period of the war, and the fishermen have had some trouble to get their vessels back from the Admiralty. But, at any rate, when the last war came the Admiralty had no difficulty: they knew that in Scotland was the very material that they required for manning the ships of the Fleet.

All round the Scottish coasts, round about the islands, in Scotland as well, there is a hardy population who are lovers of the sea. Many of them find their livelihood on the sea continually. When the war came they were the men who were roped into the Navy. I want to appeal to the Financial Secretary on the grounds that if these men from Scotland were good enough to be recruited for the Navy in time of war, they can also be good to recruit for the Navy in time of peace. But so long as no encouragement is given to Scottish boys to volunteer for the Navy, so long as there are not proper recruiting centres in Scotland from which the Navy can draw men who are acquired for manning the ships, so long as that is not done, we in Scotland will only have a secondary interest in the Navy, and we ought to have a first-class interest in it, because they are our people and because of the facilities that can be provided if the Admiralty care to recruit men from that area for the various branches of the Navy. There is no better material anywhere in this country than can be found in Scotland. In their desire to get men for the Navy, I hope a greater effort is to be made by the Admiralty to draw upon the resources of Scotland, and that can best be done by

developing Rosyth as it should have been developed long years ago.

Reference has been made to the fact that Rosyth was reduced to a care-and-maintenance basis in 1925, and kept in that state for years, but, just before the last war broke out, Rosyth was reopened. A great deal of the machinery that had been employed in the dockyard prior to reopening had been taken away, and the place had been stripped of much of its equipment during the years in which it was left on a care-and-maintenance basis. What happened when the last war broke out? There was another panic. Evidently, the Admiralty realised that the dockyards situated in the South of England were not going to be too secure during the period of the war, and it was necessary to have a naval base upon which they could rely, and the one upon which they could and did rely during the whole period of the war was Rosyth. Not one bomb fell on Rosyth dockyard during the war. It is the safest dockyard to be found in this country. The German Luftwaffe found some difficulty in getting to Rosyth. It is quite true they passed over it once or twice, but there were no bombs dropped there, and never, on a single occasion, did the Germans come and all go back again.

That deep-water base is situated in such a position, so far inland and yet in deep water with a protection of aerodromes out on the coast that keep it perfectly safe, that there is no safer dockyard in this country. I said years ago, long before the last war broke out, when I was appealing for Rosyth Dockyard to be reopened, that Rosyth was the safest in the whole country. I hope that we are not going to have another economy panic, although we have had hints from the other side that that might happen.

The Financial Secretary, however, whenever an indication was given that there was likely to be an economy campaign, scotched it in no uncertain manner, but it is quite possible, in the situation as we see it now, that we may have an economy campaign, but I warn the representatives of the Admiralty here tonight that, if an economy campaign means that Rosyth is once more reduced to care-and-maintenance basis, there will be trouble in Scotland. It will not be the trouble that was given in 1925; it will be much more serious than that. Reference has been made to certain deputations which came to London to present the views, not of my constituency, but of a broader area. It is true that at an earlier stage the first deputation which met the First Lord of the Admiralty, who is now the Minister of Defence, was a representative deputation from my constituency, but it has broadened since then, and interest in Rosyth is not now confined to the Dunfermline Burghs or even to the East of Scotland. This is a Scottish question, and I would warn my hon. Friend the Financial Secretary that the right hon. and gallant Gentleman the junior Member for the Scottish Universities is an intensely Scottish Nationalist, and it is not a case of the Scottish Nationalists coming to the Bar of the House and seeking to come to the Table alone. If ever a Scottish Nationalist appears again in this House he will have two Tory supporters, because the Scottish supporters have become so Nationalist that there will be trouble for the Socialist Government if they dare to lay a finger on Rosyth or anything that is definitely Scottish. They are much more Scottish than the Scots, and evidently there is going to be trouble from that quarter as well as from this side the House if Scotland does not get a square deal on the question of Royal Dockyards.

I have never had the apprehension and concern which have been shown by many people in Scotland, including those who have sought to interview the First Lord of the Admiralty. I have never believed that the Admiralty would be guilty of a first-class blunder such as they made in 1925. I believe that since Rosyth was opened the last time so much money had to be spent during the period of the war to make it an efficient instrument for carrying out its work that the Admiralty will hesitate before reducing it again to a care-and-maintenance basis. For that reason I have never had the apprehension that Rosyth was in danger of being so reduced. There may be a rude awakening for me one day. Some fine day we may find a representative of the Admiralty coming to that box and announcing that the Board of Admiralty had come to the conclusion that Rosyth should be reduced to a care-and-maintenance basis. Rut I do not believe that that is going to happen, and I believe that Rosyth has a claim to be retained as well as Portsmouth and Devonport.

We have heard about barracks for the Marines, and I am tempted to make a plea for barracks to be constructed in Rosyth, but after the speech that has been made by the hon. Member for Huddersfield (Mr. Mallalieu) I am beginning to doubt whether we should have these sinks of corruption introduced into such a place as Rosyth. I hesitate to make a suggestion that barracks should be erected, but at the same time I hope the two representatives of the Admiralty on the Front Bench will take note of the fact we want Rosyth to receive its share of repair work. I have already said that we do not claim that Rosyth should be a building yard. It differs from Devonport, or even Chatham, and the Clyde can build ships. So far as Scotland is concerned, we are perfectly

prepared to allow battleships to be built on the Clyde, but we claim that Rosyth should have its share of the repairing which has to be done.

I want to mention one little matter to the Civil Lord, whom I am glad to see back in his place at this time of the night. That matter is this. What is the liaison between the Admiralty and the Board of Trade? Early in his speech, the Financial Secretary made reference to the derequisitioning of property requisitioned during the war, and I should like to know what liaison there is between the Admiralty and the Board of Trade. The Board of Trade makes itself busy in getting industries distributed, factories erected, and industrial plants into these buildings. What I would like to know is whether there is any real liaison. In my constituency, there is a large factory, occupied by the Admiralty for a long period and which is still occupied by the Admiralty. This building was converted for the purpose of providing accommodation for workers in the dockyard. A manufacturer was ready to go to this fine, stone-built, and well laid out factory, but due to delay on the part of the Admiralty, or because of misunderstanding between the Admiralty and the Board of Trade, the manufacturer has said he will not carry out his bargain. He expected to obtain possession at the end of the year and there is no prospect of the building being released, and a new industry coming to Dunfermline.

Mr. W. Edwards

I would like to say at this point that there is close cooperation between the Admiralty and the Board of Trade, but there was no indication in this particular case that we should derequisition these premises, because it

would have meant that a large number of Admiralty workmen, who were using it as a hostel, would have been turned out into the street.

Mr. Watson

I think the Board of Trade is not free from some of the blame. If the Admiralty had been properly instructed at the beginning, the difficulty might have been minimised, but I will not pursue this matter any farther. I know that the Civil Lord has done everything he could, and I know that since I came into these negotiations an unfortunate situation has existed. I hope that there is close liaison between the Admiralty and the Board of Trade, although in this case it seems that liaison had not been so close as it might have been.

At any rate, I hope that we are to retain Rosyth dockyard and I do not look favourably upon 250 odd men being thrown out into the streets, because that building has been a very useful hostel of the Admiralty during the war and even now. I hope that between the various Service and Government Departments there will be close co-operation so that these difficulties will not arise. I hope that when next we discuss the Naval Estimates we will get back to the type of estimates we got prior to the war. I agree with the hon. Member for Hereford, who first raised this matter, that we do not get the information in the Naval Estimates today that we used to get prior to the war, and I hope that when the next Estimates are presented we will have a full account of what the Admiralty intends to do during the next 12 months.

1.11 a.m.

Mr. McKinlay (Dumbartonshire)

It is not very often that we keep Members on the Front Bench out of their beds and I want to say quite definitely that Members of this House have occupied 35 minutes each since the commencement of the Debate, and I am not asking too much if I ask for five minutes. I want to raise the question of the care and maintenance of personnel in the Services and to place on record that, at least in my view, the medical attention given to ratings is of the most casual character. I am not saying that without having ground for doing so. I had an experience in connection with a member of my own family who was in hospital on the other side of the world for six weeks and the Admiralty did not know anything about it. He was never visited by a resident Admiralty surgeon. I want to quote a case which, to my mind, showed criminal negligence on the part of the medical officer who examined the rating. It refers to a member of the Wrens who, on May 20, 1946, reported on parade that she had a pain on her shoulder and a pain on the chest, and with the most cursory examination, the medical officer determined that it was rheumatism from which she was suffering. He prescribed a bottle of salicylic and gave her an embrocation and said she was much too healthy looking to be suffering from pneumonia. The sequel to that case was that within four days the girl came home, having explained to the doctor that when she lay down the pain was intense. Within 48 hours of arriving in Glasgow she was immediately switched to the Southern General Hospital, where she lay for months and had pints of fluid extracted from the lung and, I regret to say, is now suffering from tuberculosis and has been discharged from the Service with 100 per cent. pension. Of all the silly observations coming from a

medico—that a person is too healthy to contract pneumonia. How the girl travelled from the barracks in the South of England to Glasgow without collapsing, I do not know I have long corresponded with my hon. Friend on the matter and I agree that he did what he could. I am satisfied that even a Minister must give some encouragement to break down something which has grown up over a period of years, and it is my view that, once a person is in the Services, too much is taken for granted. I am satisfied in my own mind that had that girl had the treatment she was entitled to receive, and had she been sent to lay up, there is just the possibility that she would not be in the position in which she is just now. She was discharged from the general hospital six weeks ago, and is ready to go in again this week. She is a girl with her lung deflated, who weighed 12 st. 6 lb., and was said to be too healthy to contract pneumonia. I am satisfied that the Minister would be quite justified in overhauling the whole system of reporting sick and examination. If a member of the Forces reports sick he or she ought to be thoroughly examined and not too much taken for granted I hope that my hon. Friend will not take offence at my raising this in the House after the voluminous correspondence I have had with him. I do urge upon the Minister that we have heard a lot about care and maintenance of warships and equipment, but it is all useless if you have not a healthy personnel. We will do the Service a very considerable service, if I may say so, if he will overhaul the methods of reporting sick and examination.