

The average per head is about 7d. New Zealand's contribution per head last year was 10½d.; we have since raised it to 2s. 2d., and before you make any further contributions to the Empire or towards the navy it would have been better—it would have been statesmanlike—for our Premier to have come down to the House and have said, "Gentlemen, the British Government is considering this question of the supremacy of the navy. We raised our contribution last year from £40,000 to £100,000. I suggest we should raise it still further." Not only that, but he should have given this House the opportunity that my friend Mr. Allen and myself have been asking for—I for four years and he for fourteen years. We have been asking the Government to give us a policy and a lead in connection with this matter of defence, and we could never get it. Now, because the question is raised at Home it has become a question of policy, and it is the only means by which New Zealand could be forced into a realisation of its shameful defencelessness. When you come to think that in this Dominion year after year we have had hundreds of thousands of pounds voted, and that during the past twenty years something like four millions of money has been bungled and squandered in the most shameless manner on our so-called defences, is not the term justified? I have said in this House before, and I shall say it again during the coming session, that we have had criminal neglect in regard to the administration of our defence matters. It would have been a more *bona fide* and a more genuine offer to the Empire, and it would have been a more Imperialistic attitude on the part of the people of this country, if our Parliament could have said, "You go on building your Dreadnoughts. We will attend to our own defences and make ourselves as impregnable as possible, so that in the event of hostilities it would be too hazardous an undertaking for any foreign nation to come here and try to get a footing." There would have been something sensible in that. The Colonial Conference of 1897 had a report from the defence experts of the Imperial Government, in which they say specifically that the dominions oversea must first of all provide for their own defence. As to the matter of the adjournment of the House, the Premier has suggested that if we do not agree to the abandonment of the session he will not be able to go Home. At any rate, he will refuse to go Home. He controverts the statement made by the honourable member for Christchurch North that there were four or five hundred unemployed in Christchurch, and I believe he said, in replying later on, there were not more than two thousand unemployed in the Dominion. I am afraid the honourable gentleman's estimate of the number of unemployed in this city alone is very far from correct. He has not the slightest conception of the state of affairs underneath the surface. It is not likely he knows the position as well as the ordinary members of the House, but he is going to find it out from them if the opportunity offers.

The Right Hon. Sir J. G. WARD.—I know more about it than you do.

Mr. FISHER.—Then, if you do know more about it, you will know the correctness of the statement made by the honourable member for Christchurch North. If you know more about it, I think you should know that such a statement "that there are only two thousand unemployed in New Zealand" is absolutely incorrect and wrong. You will find that the members of the House will bear that out. What I say is this: there is important business for this House to carry out during the coming year—extremely important business—and whilst I do not for one moment see any reason why the Prime Minister should not represent New Zealand at the Conference, I do not for one moment imagine, on the other hand, that any member of the Opposition, or any one opposed to the Government, is going to take any advantage of the Prime Minister's absence to embarrass any of his colleagues on that account. If they attempted to do so they would damage their own reputations and interests in the eyes of the people, and quite rightly so too. That is not the intention; but what we do ask is that we shall be allowed to proceed with the business of the country and to deal with the questions that ought to be dealt with. If the Prime Minister knows more than the private members, does he not know that the reports of the Registrar-General prove conclusively that people are leaving this Dominion at the present time at a much greater rate than they have done for very many years past? Did he not state before the Imperial Conference in 1907 that the requirement of New Zealand above all things was population? He said New Zealand was a country that could carry twenty million people. What chance have we to carry twenty million people at the rate they are going out of the Dominion at the present time? It is the business of Parliament to meet and provide works and carry out a legislative programme that is going to stop this exodus. If we are going to closely settle this Dominion we must have the land question finally settled; we want the Native-land question finally settled. There can be no shadow of doubt that until these questions are settled and the money-market improves we are going to continue to have this exodus from the Dominion; and for that reason alone, if for no other, I think the House will be justified in asking that the session shall continue. Now, the present attitude of the Prime Minister is rather curious, because he recognised the fact, or at least he recognised it some time ago, and not only pointed out to the Imperial Conference in 1907 that New Zealand had a carrying-capacity of twenty million people, but he said this:—

"We have under one million of a population at the moment. We have all the ramifications of the development of great public works so essential as a provision for the future to enable people to settle in the interior of our country. We have still before us the making of the railways throughout our country. . . . Whilst anxious to help the Old World and the other portions of the Empire in making a system of common defence on both land and sea, the all-importance of which we recognise to the fullest possible extent, we still have to keep before us, as a young country, the fact that in the future many millions of money will be required for the country itself to carry out great undertakings that in the Old World have been carried out, many of them—such, for instance, as your railways—by private enterprise."

And so on. And then, after pointing out what great works lay before the State in developing this Dominion, he went on to say—

The Right Hon. Sir J. G. WARD.—Why do you not say that I was using that argument as against the proposals to build a local navy? You ought to be perfectly fair.