THE CONGRESSIONAL FRONT.
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SHIPS IN WAR AND PEACE.

We have always been a maritime nation. Our history is studded with the exploits of seafaring men of hardy spirit who established our commerce upon the deep waters of the world. Our foreign commerce was a sort of individualistic business for many decades. Men of fortitude built and fitted out ships and carried our goods and products to all corners of the earth. They received little encouragement from government notwithstanding the fact that other nations followed a policy under which maritime commerce was the especial solicitude of government. To be sure other nations were more dependent not only on sea commerce but upon the revenues which were derived from carrying the goods of other nations. That is apparent from the tonnage which each country carried in its own ships. About 60% of Italy's exports and imports were carried in her own ships. In the case of Germany it was 70%; for Japan it was 80% and for the United States it was less than 30%. In the case of Great Britain her tonnage was 2½ times greater than ours. In 1936, Congress enacted a basic Merchant Marine Act which provided for operating subsidies to ship owners and also construction subsidies so that we could more readily compete with other nations for the sea commerce of the world and that program has steadily gone forward.

THE STIMULUS OF WAR

Then came the war and with it an immense stimulus to ship building in the United States. There were so many reasons for this. Our allies needed ships to meet the sub menace. We needed ships for cargoes and troops. The war was being fought over vast distances and ships were indispensable to transport troops and keep them supplied. Moreover, we had the resources, the skill, the materials and supplies with which to project a vast ship-building program and in a short time, facilities were constructed and a ship program launched which was the most elaborate in the history of the world.

THE PROGRAM

The over-all program, including all types of vessels under both long-range and short-range policies calls for the construction of 7490 vessels of which 1215 are small craft. This will aggregate about 75 million tons of shipping at a total cost of 17 billion dollars. About 1980 vessels large and small have already been completed and 2992 others are under construction. The remainder have been authorized and will get under way as time goes on. It is truly a staggering program which can be better visualized by saying that if these vessels were laid end to end, they would probably extend for a distance of 500 miles.

WHEN IT'S OVER

When it's over, over there and when the shooting has stopped, we shall have a merchant marine of thousands of ships, the aggregate tonnage of which may conceivably be as much as 30,000,000 tons. It will be the largest merchant marine in the world. What will happen to it? Except in extraordinary circumstances, it is not policy for the government itself to engage in the business of operating vessels. What then shall be done with these vessels? It would be proper policy to sell them to our citizens so that our sea-borne commerce might be maintained in the post-war period. But at what price shall they be sold? And suppose other nations come along and want to buy these vessels? They may want to buy vessels which our own citizens do not care to purchase. At what price shall they be sold? And what shall be done about the commerce of the axis countries. Shall we prevent them from building up a merchant marine for the years immediately succeeding the war in order to frustrate any attempt they might make to rebuild their armaments and prepare for another war? These and other questions will arise when war is over and the world goes back to the more felicitous business of re-creating higher and better living standards.