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THE FRAUD ON THE PUBLIC

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ON August 18, 1906, the Commanders-in-Chief were informed confidentially of certain reductions which were to be made in the composition of the sea-going Fleets. These arrangements were kept secret from Parliament and the country. As they were subsequently published, there is no violation of confidence in describing them.

At that time, the sea-going Fleet was composed as follows:—

Battleships.			Cruisers.		
Mediterranean	.	8	1st Cruiser squadron	.	6
Atlantic	.	8	2nd do.	.	6
Channel	.	16	3rd do.	.	6
			4th do.	.	4
		—			—
Total	.	32	Total	.	22

The changes announced reduced this force to the following numbers:—

Battleships.		Cruisers.	
Mediterranean . . .	6	1st Cruiser squadron .	4
Atlantic	6	2nd do.	4
Channel	14	3rd do.	4
		4th do.	4
	—		—
Total	26	Total	16

A variety of reasons was assigned by the Admiralty for the change, which, being confidential, cannot be divulged. The loss to the public is the less, because none of the reasons adduced was the real reason.

The real reason not having been mentioned by the Admiralty, it is not confidential, and may therefore be stated. The whole object of the reductions was to save money by avoiding the necessity of increasing the *personnel* to the number required to reinforce the reserve crews, and by economizing on the maintenance of ships in full commission.

It is for precisely the same reason that, although, after the strongest representations on my part and in deference to public indignation, the policy has been in part—but only in part — reversed, the Mediterranean Fleet remains weakened and inadequate, and the

whole Navy is short of men to-day, in spite of the increases in the *personnel* effected in 1910-11 and 1911-12.

Briefly stated, the effect of the reductions was as follows.

The margin of force required to maintain units at tactical strength while allowing for casualties and repairs, was abolished. In every sea-going Fleet there occur unforeseen contingencies which may at any moment disable a number of ships. In the summer of 1906, six out of the eight battleships under my command were at one time unable to proceed to sea, and in the case of four of those ships, the defects could neither have been foreseen nor prevented. The remaining two vessels were refitting. The fewer the ships in a squadron, the greater the deficiency in case of loss.

The reduction of the squadrons below the required tactical strength gravely impaired the conditions under which the proper training of officers is alone possible. Even with the force under my command in the Mediterranean, the number of vessels was insufficient to provide that adequate training which is the most essential element in the fighting power of a

Fleet. Under the conditions resulting from the reductions of 1906-7, proper strategical and tactical exercises became impossible.

The cruiser work, in particular, could not be adequately practised with the small number of vessels under my command, so that, in Fleet training, battleships must frequently be used to represent cruisers, the battle squadron being represented by one ship. Under the new scheme, the number of cruisers was reduced by one-third.

These observations represented then, and represent now, the opinion of the Service. The justice of that opinion has forced the Admiralty partially to repair a fatal error. But until an effective and a responsible War Staff is constituted at the Admiralty there can be no security either that former mistakes will be completely rectified, or that new blunders will not be committed.

The ships removed from active service were to be placed in the reserve.

The orders were issued by the Admiralty in August, 1906. They remained unknown to the public until October 15, when the intelligence of the intended reductions was published

in the Press. Public indignation was at once aroused and found vigorous expression. The sequence of events is highly significant. Eight days later, the Admiralty issued a memorandum, which was published in the Press on the following day, October 24. The silence of the Admiralty during the eight days' interval was perhaps due to the absence from England of the First Sea Lord. The memorandum was promulgated to the officers of the Fleet in the form of a Minute.

The object of the memorandum was to prove that the Reserve Fleet was not a Reserve Fleet, and that therefore the reduction of the Active Fleet was a mere transference of vessels from one fighting fleet to another.

It was stated that the Reserve Fleet was henceforth to be known as the "Home Fleet"; that it was to be placed under the supreme command of a Commander-in-Chief at Sheerness, whose "functions will not interfere" with the Commander-in-Chief already at the Nore; that the Fleet would be "organized with a view to enhancing its value as a fighting force"; and that "the primary object aimed at will be sea-going efficiency." It was stated,

further, that "a sliding scale" would be adopted in the strength of nucleus crews ; and that any vessel requiring a refit in the Active Fleets would be replaced by a ship from the Home Fleet.

With the exception of the change of name, none of these conditions was fulfilled.

But the memorandum served its purpose. It was acclaimed by the Press, which, misinformed by the authorities, had little choice but to believe what it was told, and the public were once more deceived into a false security.

It will be observed that, until the news of the reductions in the sea-going squadrons was prematurely and unexpectedly published in the Press, there had been no suggestion of a "Home Fleet."

I said privately at the time, and I say publicly now, that the Home Fleet was a fraud on the public and a danger to the State.

During the two years which elapsed before the fraud was finally abandoned, so grave was the disorganization, demoralisation and confusion, that, had this country been suddenly attacked, the Navy, in my opinion, would have

suffered an initial reverse, if not a crushing defeat.

It should be pointed out that at this time under the new distribution of the Fleet, unless the whole number of fourteen battleships of the Channel Fleet were available—that is, not in dockyard hands under repair, and having no breakdowns or defects—the German manœuvring squadron, provided that it was intact, was actually superior to the British Channel Fleet.

Abroad, the foreign stations and the trade routes had been deprived by the scrapping policy of a number of war vessels; the naval bases and coaling stations in the West Indies, the Falkland Islands, Esquimalt and Trincomalee had been dismantled, partially abandoned, and the stores sold. At home, the *personnel* of the Navy had been reduced by 3,000 men; the number of men in the Royal Dockyards had fallen from 35,340 in 1904 to 27,315; and forty-one coastguard stations had been closed. There was (and is) no Government dock on the east coast capable of accommodating a *Dreadnought*. As regards naval construction, the programme

for the current year, 1907-8, again showed a reduction in heavy armoured ships. The building of small cruisers and destroyers was gravely in arrear. The short service system had been introduced into the Fleet, thereby creating a source of serious weakness.

The results of that policy are still evident. The cruiser force has not been replaced upon foreign stations; the protection of trade routes is still dangerously inadequate; the foreign stations have not been restored; graving docks have not yet been provided on the East Coast; and the short service system is still in force. None of these deficiencies can be remedied on the outbreak of war by improvised means. Much time, labour, and money, for instance, must be expended upon the restoration of the naval bases abroad; for the existing machinery has been allowed to rot, and the stores have been sold.

VII

ORGANIZATION FOR WAR

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IN 1907, the ships in home waters were distributed among three Fleets: the Channel, Atlantic and Home Fleets. Each of these was stationed at a different place under a separate command. Of these, the Home Fleet, really a Reserve Fleet manned by nucleus crews, and used for the training of young seamen and stokers, was declared by the Admiralty to be "instantly ready for war." All three Fleets were to be placed under one command in war; but in peace, they could only be placed under that command for training purposes at such times as the Admiralty thought proper to arrange. The Admiralty did not think proper to combine the fleets for training purposes, except upon one occasion (October, 1907), when fifty vessels from the Home Fleet out of 244 were sent upon manœuvres.

In order to organize a Fleet for war, it is

first of all necessary to devise a plan. That plan must be arranged in accordance with the policy of his Majesty's Government. The Government having acquainted the Admiralty with their policy, it becomes the duty of the Admiralty to state what force is required to carry that policy into execution, and, having obtained such force, to organize it upon a definite plan. The reason why a war plan is necessary beforehand is that upon the outbreak of war there is no time to make one.

Whether the Admiralty—in the absence of a War Staff—should make the plan, or the Commander-in-Chief, is a matter, at present, of arrangement. With a properly constituted War Staff, the question would not arise. The essential point is, that there should be a plan.

But, at the time under consideration, even assuming an adequate war plan to have been in existence, the vessels required in order to carry it into execution were not available.

The business of the Navy is to fight. In order to be able to fight with a reasonable prospect of success, the Fleet must be organized

for war during peace. Naval warfare of to-day is an affair, not of single ships but, of fleets. Fleets must be constantly trained to act in concert; the units of the Fleet must be constantly trained to act with the Fleet; and, in addition, training must be given to squadrons and single ships acting in conjunction with their independent initiative.

To conduct training for war is the duty of the Commander-in-Chief. In order to perform it, he must, as I have said, proceed in accordance with a definite plan.

But as a Fleet consists of a large number of vessels of various classes, it is necessary that the Commander-in-Chief should always know at any given moment where each ship is stationed, what is her condition, and what is her rate of speed. If he is ignorant of these facts, he cannot tell what ships he has available; and if he cannot tell what ships he has available, he is necessarily unable either to carry any plan into execution, or to conduct the training of the Fleet. It is, therefore, essential that the whole of the Fleet upon a station should be placed under one command, and that the whole of the War Fleet—as

distinguished from the Reserve Fleet—should be in one place.

Having regard to these considerations, it now becomes clear why, when the Fleet in home waters was split into several independent commands and distributed among several ports, organization for war, which includes readiness to carry into execution a plan, and the training of the Fleet, was impossible.

The only Fleet of whose ships, their position, their condition, and their speed, the Commander-in-Chief of the home waters had accurate information was the Channel Fleet, numbering twenty-one vessels. With regard to the ships of the Home Fleet and the Atlantic Fleet, their position, condition and speed, there was no means of obtaining periodical and accurate information. There were 244 vessels in the Home Fleet and thirteen vessels in the Atlantic Fleet. But all these, in addition to the Channel Fleet, were to be placed under one command upon the outbreak of war. There were thus 257 vessels of whose position, condition and speed the Commander-in-Chief in war was kept in ignorance.

In addition, the small force of twenty-one vessels which was immediately under his command, was constantly being reduced by the removal of ships for refit, repairs and other purposes. The Channel Fleet was the only force in home waters ready for immediate action. Upon one occasion, six battleships and one armoured cruiser were under repair at one time. Contrary to the terms of the Admiralty minute of October 23, 1906, these ships were not replaced by ships from the Home Fleet. The First Lord of the Admiralty, Mr. McKenna, stated in the House on November 12, 1908, that these seven ships were withdrawn upon the recommendation of the Commander-in-Chief. The statement was totally incorrect. The responsibility belonged to the Admiralty and to the Admiralty alone.

Upon another occasion, the total strength of the Channel Fleet consisted of thirteen battleships and three unarmoured cruisers.

In July, 1907, the Admiralty restored to the Channel Fleet its complementary units, and brought the Fleet to what was approximately its former strength.

In the meantime, some of the more notorious facts of the case having been made known by the Press, much public indignation was aroused, and vigorous protests were uttered in the House of Commons.

It was officially stated in the House and by that part of the Press which was inspired by the Admiralty, that during this period the Home Fleet was in "a state of development."

The facts were, of course, that the distribution of the Fleet had been suddenly changed in order to effect economies; that in order to disguise this intention the Reserve Fleet was represented as an Active Fleet; and that the system of commands and the distribution of ships was so devised as to make war organization impossible.

When the pretence was exposed, the distribution of the Fleet and the system of commands was reversed to what it was before the changes were made.

VIII

THE COMMITTEE OF INQUIRY

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THE correspondence between myself and the Board of Admiralty relative to the question of organization for war began when I assumed the command in home waters, and was continued until December, 1908. On the 19th of that month, I received an intimation from the First Lord, that he had reduced the term of my command from three years to two years. On the 24th of March following, I was ordered to haul down my flag.

Having been relieved of the restrictions rightly imposed upon officers on active service, I considered what course I ought to pursue in making known the truth with regard to naval affairs, in order that the security of the country and of the Empire might be restored. It was first of all necessary that so grave a situation should not become associated with party politics. It is, perhaps, worth while at

this point to observe that there are few uglier qualities of partisan politics than the eagerness of one side to accuse their opponents, whenever they criticize the conduct of naval affairs, of being inspired by the vulgar desire to score a point in the party game. For if the party which happens to be in power deserve criticism, it is the simple duty of the Opposition to criticize them ; and when the Government and their supporters cast aspersions upon the motives of their political opponents, their action is far from honourable. Its effect has been to deter the Opposition from fulfilling their proper responsibility, for no one likes to be perpetually accused of foul play. There are few aspects of public life so discouraging, none which suggests so painful a doubt of the value of our system of governance, as the political situation with regard to matters of national and Imperial defence. In justice to the Unionist party, it must be said that when they are in power, the criticism of their opponents has always been directed to proving that they are providing too lavishly for the Services ; whereas, when a Liberal administration is in office, the more difficult and

ungrateful task of protesting against illegitimate economies falls upon the Unionists, who are accused of party spirit into the bargain.

In view of this unhappy posture of affairs, what is a naval officer—whose politics, as Lord Collingwood said, are the politics “of Old England”—to do, at a moment when he believes it to be his duty to expose the truth? I considered that, in my own case, the right course of action was to appeal directly to the constituted authorities.

I therefore wrote to the Prime Minister, under date April 2, 1909, setting forth what in my view were serious dangers to the security of the Empire. That letter was published in full in the Report (Parliamentary Return, 256) of the Sub-Committee of the Committee of Imperial Defence, which was appointed by the Prime Minister, to inquire into the questions of naval policy raised in the aforesaid letter.

It is gratifying to be able to state that the chief recommendation made by His Majesty's Ministers, in consequence of the state of things revealed by the inquiry, has now begun to take effect.

That recommendation was the formation of a War Staff at the Admiralty.

The words of the Report are : "The Committee have been impressed with the differences of opinion among officers of high rank and professional attainments, regarding important principles of naval strategy and tactics, and they look forward with much confidence to the further development of a Naval War Staff, from which the Naval Members of the Board and Flag Officers and their Staffs at sea may be expected to derive common benefit."

The Report was dated August 12, 1909. On January 11, 1912, the creation of a War Staff was officially announced.

The Committee also stated in their Report, that "the First Lord of the Admiralty furnished the Committee with a résumé of the steps which have recently been taken to develop a War Staff at the Admiralty, and indicated further advances in this direction, which are in contemplation." Thus were the public led to believe that the institution of a Naval War Staff was actually in progress. Such, however, was not the case.

What really happened was that two officers who had been summoned to give evidence before the Committee of Inquiry, were dismissed from the Admiralty, and the Divisions in which they had been respectively employed were abolished. One Division was the Trade Division of the Intelligence Department, which was concerned with the inestimably important business of the protection of the Trade Routes. The other Division was the War Division of the Intelligence Department, also abolished. In its place was instituted a new Division, called the Naval Mobilization Department, to which an officer was appointed in the room of the officer dismissed. These were the changes, which were described by Mr. McKenna as the "reorganization" of the Naval Intelligence Department at the Admiralty, which was the beginning of the formation of a War Staff. These changes took place two years ago. No measures were taken to form a War Staff until the accession of Mr. Winston Churchill to the office of First Lord.

"In connection with the question of War Plans," reported the Committee, "it should

be mentioned that Lord Charles Beresford attributed many of the Admiralty's alleged shortcomings to the absence of a proper strategical department."

I did, and I do.

What were the "alleged shortcomings"? The Committee in their Report summarized them under three main headings, viz. :

Part I.—The organization and distribution of the Fleet in home waters.

Part II.—Small Craft and Destroyers.

Part III.—War Plans.

With regard to the organization and distribution of the Fleet in home waters, I stated that the requirements were: "One large homogeneous fleet, complete in all units, battleships, armoured cruisers, protected cruisers, scouts, destroyers, mine-ships, mine-clearers, and auxiliaries, trained under the orders of one Commander-in-Chief, maintained at sea, and in full commission; the administration of the various divisions being entrusted to the Admirals in command of them."

Under the system in force during my tenure of command in home waters, not one of these conditions had been fulfilled.

What was the result? The Committee stated in the Report that since March, 1909—when I was ordered to haul down my flag—the Fleet had been completely reorganized as I suggested.

With regard to Part II., small craft and destroyers, I gave evidence before the Committee showing that the provision of these vessels was dangerously inadequate.

In their Report, the Committee denied the deficiency. But the Admiralty at once began to build both medium cruisers and destroyers, thereby reversing the policy they had followed during the previous four years. In 1906-7 there were laid down two torpedo-boat destroyers; in 1908-9 twenty-one of these craft, including three for the Dominions, were laid down. Why, if there was, as the Committee asserted, "no such deficiency as to constitute a risk to the safety of the country," have the vessels in question been built?

With regard to Part III., War Plans, the Committee denied that I had any "substantial grounds for complaint in this matter." Such is not my opinion. But it is more pertinent to note that the Committee immediately

recommended the formation of a War Staff ; and that, after two more years' demonstration of its necessity, culminating in the crisis of the summer of 1911, the Government have begun to carry that recommendation into execution.

IX

HOW NOT TO DO IT : THE
ADMIRALTY MEMORANDUM

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HOW NOT TO DO IT: THE ADMIRALTY MEMORANDUM

THE most recent official statement of the principles of naval defence is contained in the "Notes supplied by the Admiralty for the use of the War Office in the Debate that was to have taken place in November, 1910, in the House of Lords, on a motion by Lord Roberts." (Parliamentary Paper Cd. 5539, price $\frac{1}{2}d.$)¹ The title is an instructive piece of literature; to find fault with it would seem ungracious; and yet it might be suggested that this portentous legend is, if anything, a little verbose, and also that it fails to describe the contents of the Memorandum. Had the treatise been called "The Result of Abolishing the Collective Responsibility of the Board of Admiralty," the War Office would at least have been warned of what they might expect.

¹ See Appendix IX.

But owing to the postponement of "the Debate that was to have taken place," etc., the Memorandum was in danger of being lost to the world, when it was happily decided, apparently by agreement among Lord Haldane, Mr. McKenna, and Sir Ian Hamilton, to include it as an appendix in the second edition of Sir Ian Hamilton's interesting essay in the art of military fiction called "Compulsory Service." In that volume, to the "Notes supplied," etc., are appended the initials "A.K.W.," which correspond with the initials of the late First Sea Lord. But when the "Notes" were issued as a Parliamentary Paper, it appeared without the initials.

Whether or no the First Sea Lord wrote the Memorandum is immaterial to the point at issue. The sole responsibility both for its contents and for its publication now rests upon the First Lord of the Admiralty, Mr. McKenna. For the Memorandum was not issued to the House of Commons with the approval of the Board of Admiralty.

Nevertheless, it was put forward by Mr. McKenna as an Admiralty Note embodying the official view of the Board. Mr. McKenna

has informed Parliament that if one member of the Board and himself approve of anything, such approval is the approval of the Board of Admiralty.¹ When the First Lord thus arrogated to himself the authority of the whole Board, the Sea Lords did not resign, but tacitly acquiesced in an unconstitutional innovation. It must therefore appear that the elimination of the one member of the Board, leaving the First Lord sole arbiter, presented no difficulty.

Presumably, too, Lord Haldane would not have permitted the Memorandum to appear in the appendix to a book to which the Minister for War had kindly contributed a preface, had he not believed the "Notes supplied by the Admiralty for the use of the War Office," etc., did represent officially the views of the Board.

The motion by Lord Roberts — whose arguments the Memorandum was apparently devised (through the War Office) to confute— was to the effect that the military defences of this country were dangerously inadequate. The Memorandum therefore sets forth a series of reasons why invasion is impossible under

¹ See Appendix X.

existing conditions. Such, at least, is evidently the intention of the Memorandum; but so subtly are its terms conceived that no brief description can accurately define its scope and complexity.

The Memorandum, for instance, begins by asserting that "the really serious danger that this country has to guard against in war is not invasion. . . ." It is here permissible to inquire, if there is no serious danger of invasion, for what purpose Lord Haldane established the Territorial Army? It has been officially stated that the object of a Territorial Army is to deal with "a raid"; also that it is to compel the enemy to embark so large a force that it could not possibly escape the British Navy while it was crossing the sea. The Memorandum contains no reference to a raid, but deals entirely with the imaginary large force. Napoleon once advised his Generals never to "make a picture" in their minds of what their adversary was going to do. The great soldier's own practice was to make a picture in his mind of what he himself was going to do. Mr. McKenna, however, knows better. His Memorandum depicts an

imaginary enemy doing imaginary things and deservedly suffering an imaginary defeat.

In "Fallacies and Facts, an Answer to 'Compulsory Service,'" by Field Marshal Earl Roberts, V.C., the following references are made to the Memorandum:

"It is assumed, to begin with, that we are at war with Germany alone, and that our Navy has no other problem to deal with. It is further assumed that our naval superiority over Germany in home waters must always be so great that, even if half our Fleet is decoyed away by a stratagem, the remaining half could make a certainty of crushing the whole German Navy. It is further assumed that at the time when the projected invasion is undertaken the whole German Navy, including apparently even commerce destroyers, is shut up in its ports, and that it will only come out in order to act as a passive escort to the transports carrying the invading army. It is assumed that an immense fleet of transports will be necessary . . . the Germans will require at least 200,000 tons of shipping, or three tons to a man, to carry 70,000 men across the North Sea, and will be obliged to use at least 150

vessels, that is to say, vessels of an average tonnage of little more than 1,300 tons, for the purpose; many of these vessels . . . will not steam more than ten or twelve knots. It is assumed . . . that the whole operation of getting the men on board, crossing the North Sea, disembarking, and getting ready for an advance inland would, given fair weather and no opposition afloat or ashore, take three weeks—about the time it took us to land troops at Cape Town . . . that the Germans will have neither destroyers, nor submarines, nor wireless telegraphy, while we shall have an unlimited supply of all these adjuncts of modern warfare . . . why should they [the enemy] deliberately select the conditions least favourable to themselves?"

Lord Roberts goes on to show that every one of the assumptions so lightly made is a fallacy. He deals with the question as a soldier. I propose to examine the Memorandum from the point of view of a naval officer.

The Memorandum, having affirmed that invasion is not a "really serious danger," states that what is the "really serious danger" is the "interruption of our trade and destruc-

tion of our Merchant Shipping." In other words, that the point of attack will not be these islands, but the trade routes. How does Mr. McKenna know what the point of attack will be? But assuming, for the sake of argument, his theory to be correct, let us see what the Admiralty propose to do.

"The strength of our Fleet," says the Memorandum, "is determined by what is necessary to protect our trade, and if it is sufficient for that, it will be *almost necessarily sufficient* to prevent invasion, since the same disposition of the ships *to a great extent* answers both purposes."

This is one of the most remarkable sentences, alike in its qualifications, implications, statements and syntax, ever found in an official contribution to the study of strategy.

In the first place, the strength of the Fleet is *not* determined by what is necessary to protect our trade. It is determined—or should be determined—by what is necessary to defeat a given combination of hostile forces, and *also* by what is required to patrol and to protect the trade routes. Here are two distinct functions, for each of which a different class of vessel is

employed, and with regard to each of which different strategical and tactical problems are involved.

The initial assumption, then, is a fallacy. But the Memorandum goes on to assert that if the Fleet be strong enough to protect trade, "it will be *almost necessarily sufficient* to prevent invasion." What does this extraordinary collocation of words mean? If it means anything it means that the Fleet will *not* be "sufficient" to prevent invasion. A Fleet is either sufficient or it is not, just as a door must be either open or shut. "Almost necessarily sufficient" and "to a great extent" are expressions implying a margin of inferiority; and it is upon that margin—a margin of weakness — that the Admiralty rely to "prevent invasion." This is a highly consolatory doctrine. Pursued to its logical conclusion, it would prove that the weaker the Fleet, the less the chance of invasion.

Then we are told what is the "main object" of the Fleet. It used to be held that the main object of the Fleet was to seek out and to destroy the enemy wherever he was to be found. But, not at all. "The main object aimed at

by our Fleet, whether for the defence of commerce or for any other purpose" (rather a large expression) "is to prevent any ship of the enemy from getting to sea far enough to do any mischief before she is brought to action." Presumably the operation of blockade is here intended as a means of preventing both invasion and commerce destruction. Very well. But how will blockade avail against hostile ships already "at sea far enough" to do mischief? According to the Memorandum, the whole British Navy will only be "almost necessarily sufficient" for blockading purposes. We are then to understand that thousands of miles of trade routes will be left naked to the depredations of cruisers or armed merchantmen.

But the blockade is assumed in the Memorandum to be "almost certainly" (another margin of weakness) effective in preventing a large fleet of transports from reaching our shores. Quite so—unless they started before the blockade was established. Presumably we are to believe that the enemy would wait for that operation of war to be completed.

But the Memorandum, abandoning in the next paragraph the theory of effective blockade,

assumes that the large fleet of transports is at sea. It is then stated that the moment it was sighted intelligence of the event would be immediately transmitted to the Admiralty by wireless. The Admiralty would then issue orders by wireless to "every ship which happened to be in a position to intercept the transports" to concentrate upon them. Ships of war, it may be observed, do not "happen to be" in positions under any reasoned scheme of organization for war. They are where they are told to be. But would the enemy transports be unaccompanied by hostile warships? Apparently they are to be convoyed by the hostile Fleet, for we read further on that "the fleets would engage each other while the destroyers and submarines torpedoed the transports." What, then, would occur to the scattered miscellaneous British ships, "happening to be" in various "positions," thus disorderly hurried by wireless into the presence of a hostile fleet, armed, disposed, and prepared at every point? The larger the mob, the greater the danger of swift demoralization.

But the Memorandum, again abandoning its own theory, assumes that a Fleet action has

been avoided, and that the transports have arrived off these shores. Then, we are informed, they would "be attacked and sunk by submarines which are stationed along the coast for that purpose." It will be observed that the officer in charge of the transports is to take no measures to defend his ships. Considering that submarines are blind when they attack, it may be that the said officer's intrepid composure is justified.

Then the Memorandum discovers yet another resource in the "improbable event" of all the foregoing devices having failed. The whole destroyer force is to be called into action as a "second line of defence." Part of that force is assumed by the Memorandum to be "acting oversea," being presumably employed in blockading the enemy's coast. That assumption is again based upon a fallacy, as there are not at this moment enough or nearly enough destroyers to work off distant hostile coasts. If by "oversea" the coasts of Germany are indicated, the existing number of destroyers available for watching is seventy-one.¹ Of these only seventeen could be

¹ July, 1911.

actually stationed oversea. Thirty-four would be required for reliefs going or coming, seventeen would be resting, leaving three to spare. These are the only conditions under which a destroyer force can be used, because of the intense strain imposed upon officers and men. Germany has seventy-three destroyers, which would own the great advantage of being stationed at their own bases.

To confuse, as the Memorandum confuses, the whole question of tactical action "oversea," with provision against an emergency at home, without giving any details or figures or suggesting how either operation is to be carried into execution, affords another example of the cynically careless methods employed in dealing with subjects of national importance.

But at this point the Memorandum suddenly begins to form that "picture" of what the enemy might, could, should, or would do, against which Napoleon warned his strategists.

"To understand thoroughly the small chance of an invasion from the other side of the North Sea being successful," says the Memorandum, "it is necessary to put oneself in the place of

the officer who has to undertake the responsibility of conducting it."

The officer in question is represented as meditating, hand to brow, upon the extraordinary difficulties of his task. He does not know how he can get his "great fleet" of transports to sea in secret. It does not, however, occur to him that, as Lord Roberts has pointed out, he only requires five big liners—not "a fleet." Our imaginary officer therefore sees no chance of getting his transports to sea unobserved. Next, he calculates—quite inaccurately—that Great Britain has double his own force of battleships and cruisers "besides a swarm of destroyers," and then he remembers that he does not know and cannot find out where all these hostile vessels are at the moment. Next, he perceives that his "great fleet" will cover "many square miles of water" and must carry lights, so that it "will be visible nearly as far by night as by day." "How," according to the Memorandum, he demands of himself—"how can he hope to escape discovery?" Again, he remembers that many of his transports are slow, and must therefore be destroyed if they are

“discovered.” He considers that even if he is convoyed by warships, destroyers can “avoid” the warships and torpedo his transports; nor does it occur to him to use his own destroyers to defeat this manoeuvre.

At this point our foreign officer has a brilliant inspiration. What if he “decoyed” away half the British Fleet? But his heart again fails him, for he calculates—again incorrectly—that the other half is quite big enough to do his business. As in a scene at a melodrama, he beholds the fleets engaging each other “while the destroyers and submarines torpedoed his transports.” Even if by a miracle he won the battle, he sees in the distance other submarines waiting to attack, and beyond them the coast lined with “a superior force”—number not stated—of soldiers.

Here follows the epitaph of that unhappy officer, as composed by the British Admiralty.

“Taking all these facts into consideration, he would probably decide, as the Admiralty have done (*sic*), that an invasion on even the moderate scale of 70,000 men is practically impossible.” It might be added that subsequently our friend—not being an Englishman

—would “probably” be superseded in favour of a competent officer.

If the Memorandum is to be regarded as the official view of the Board of Admiralty, it would be interesting to learn what the War Staffs of foreign countries think of that document. If it is not the official view of the Board, how is it that the Memorandum is headed “Admiralty,” and that the Sea Lords accepted the situation?

It may be suggested that it is the publication of such papers as “The Notes Supplied by the Admiralty,” etc., etc., which impresses foreign observers with the delusion that we are a nation of hypocrites. They cannot believe that we are really so simple as we seem. Our published ideas of strategy are supposed to be an attempt to mislead the foreigner: whereas they are really an endeavour to confuse our own people in order to serve the ends of party politicians.

X

THE ORIGIN OF THE SCARE
OF 1909

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IN March, 1909, His Majesty's Ministers, as everyone remembers, announced that they had under-estimated the shipbuilding capabilities of a neighbouring nation and over-estimated the capacities of this country. They informed Parliament of certain discoveries which sent a tremor throughout the Empire and which instantly inspired the oversea dominions to volunteer help to the United Kingdom.

On March 16, 1909, Mr. McKenna, in introducing the Navy Estimates, said : "The difficulty in which the Government finds itself placed at this moment is that we do not know, as we thought we did, the rate at which German construction is taking place. . . . Two years ago, I believe, there were in that country, with the possible exception of one or two slips in private yards, no slips capable of

carrying a *Dreadnought*. To-day they have no fewer than fourteen of such slips, and three more are under construction. What is true of the ships is also true of the guns, armour, and mountings. . . . I have given reasons for believing that the German power of constructing this particular type of ship is at this time almost if not fully equal to our own, owing to the rapid development during the last eighteen months. . . .”

Here was a sufficiently damaging confession; but Mr. McKenna carefully omitted a material part of the truth.

The Prime Minister said: “The first assumption was that the German paper programme—I think I described it as a paper programme”—he did—“was one which might not be realized, and certainly would not be exceeded. That has turned out not to be true. . . . The right hon. gentleman asks when did we know that? We knew it, or heard of it, at any rate, in the Autumn, I think in November (1908); and it was in view of that most grave, and to us not only unforeseen, but unexpected state of things, that we had to reconsider our programme of the present year.”

Thus the Prime Minister, who also carefully suppressed a material part of the truth.

On March 29 following, Sir Edward Grey said: "First of all, the House and the country are perfectly right in the view that the situation is grave. A new situation in this country is created by the German programme. Whether that programme is carried out quickly or slowly the fact of its existence makes a new situation. . . . That imposes upon us the necessity, of which we are at the beginning—except in so far as we have *Dreadnoughts* already—of rebuilding the whole of our Fleet. . . . The doubtful point of the situation is our comparative capacity for the construction of gun-mountings. . . . That is the real point of urgency. . . ."

The Foreign Secretary, like the First Lord and the Prime Minister, carefully omitted from his statement a material part of the truth.

What all these Ministers omitted to state was the fact that *nearly three years* before these alarming speeches were delivered, *and two and a half years* before the Government were informed of the fact, the Admiralty had received full and detailed information from

M.B.

N.B. | a skilled witness of the increase in German shipbuilding capacity and the capacity for producing gun-mountings, which was already in progress.

The suppression of that information by the Admiralty and their refusal to act upon it, was the sole cause of the scare of 1909.

Had the Admiralty at once conveyed the information they received in May, 1906, to the Cabinet, it would have been easy to take the necessary action, to order the ships required, and to enlarge the capacity for manufacturing gun-mountings, by asking more private firms to work for the Admiralty and by utilizing the machinery kept idle at Woolwich, from which factory the men were discharged.

The Admiralty, however, chose to suppress their information, to reduce the shipbuilding programme, and to keep the manufacture of gun-mountings in the hands of two allied firms.

On March 16, 1909, Mr. Asquith stated that the Government first became acquainted with the news in the Autumn of 1908, or two years and six months after the Admiralty had in fact received the information. Even then, it was,

not the Admiralty but, the original informant of the Admiralty, who told the Cabinet.

Why did the Admiralty suppress this extraordinarily important information?

That question has never been answered. There are other questions, not less vital to the national interest, to which answers have not yet been given. As, for instance: Did any official profit directly or indirectly by the restriction of the Government orders for gun-mountings to two firms alone?

It may be argued that, as these events occurred some time ago, and as the policy of the Admiralty has since to a certain extent been reversed, there is nothing to be gained by reviving old issues. I reply that in these acts of maladministration resides the explanation, hitherto withheld from Parliament and the country, of the vast increase of the Navy estimates for this year and last year; of the vaster obligations incurred, which must be discharged at immense and increasing cost; of the deficiencies in men, in officers, in small cruisers, in docking accommodation, and in stores, which to-day render the Navy inadequate in every respect,

N.B.

except in the matter of heavy ships. The Fleet is like an army which is all heavy artillery.

The wrong will never be righted while its causes remain concealed, and while those responsible for maladministration continue to wield authority.

An unsuccessful attempt was made by Mr. Duke, K.C., to elucidate the matter, whose details he placed before the House of Commons on March 16, 1910.¹ Mr. Duke stated that the gentleman who first informed the Admiralty of the German extensions had since been asked to resign his position as Managing Director of the Coventry Ordnance Works, a firm whose designs for gun-mountings had hitherto been rejected by the Admiralty. Subsequently, in July, 1909, an order for the whole of the gun-mountings for a battleship was given by the Admiralty to the Coventry Ordnance Works.

When Mr. Duke set forth the whole of the details of the case on March 16, 1910, Mr. McKenna at first declined to make any statement whatever on the ground that Mr. Duke

¹ The reader is here referred to the published reports of the debate.

did not say that he personally believed "in the truth of the statement he made." Mr. Duke said "the right honourable gentleman must take his own course." Mr. McKenna's final reply is worth quoting. He said :—

"The case of Mr. Mulliner was raised upon most of the Opposition platforms in the country during the last election, but now only one gentleman opposite has ventured to get up in this House and repeat the allegations which Mr. Mulliner made, and that hon. member does not dare to get up in his place in Parliament and say that he believes in the truth of the statement. The Committee will, I hope, therefore exonerate me if I make no reply to the absolutely baseless charge of Mr. Mulliner."

The Committee let the matter pass, thereby affording another interesting example of the futility of the theory that the House of Commons exercises its office as guardian of the public interest.

The fact remains that those "Admiralty officials" whose honour was directly and publicly impugned made no attempt to defend themselves. If the statements were "abso-

lutely baseless, as Mr. McKenna declared, why did the parties implicated fail to sue their author for libel?

When the facts of the case were made public in the Press, upon the platform, and in the House of Commons, it was the duty of the First Lord of the Admiralty to clear the officials in his department from the charges brought against them, if he could. If he could not, it was his duty, as trustee of the public interest, to bring them to justice. But Mr. McKenna proved himself unable to protect either his own department or the public.

In 1906-1907, the building programme was reduced by one battleship, in 1907-1908 by one battleship, in 1908-1909 by two battleships—four in all.

In 1906, Germany, by a significant coincidence, added six large armoured cruisers to her programme. In the same year and in the following year, the British Admiralty laid down no armoured cruisers at all.

In 1909, being acquainted with the facts concealed by the Admiralty, the Government were seized with a panic and ordered eight

battleships and two armoured cruisers. They also took measures to extend the capacity for constructing gun-mountings.

Hence the sudden and heavy increase in the Navy Estimates in 1909 and succeeding years. The Government were compelled to order the four battleships dropped during the three preceding years, in addition to the four vessels of the programme of the current year. Thus an extra burden of more than eight millions for battleships alone was suddenly placed upon the Estimates; a burden which, had the Admiralty done what they themselves in 1905 declared to be their duty, would have spread over the three preceding years, and the unseemly spectacle of His Majesty's Ministers fallen a prey to panic would have been spared an amazed Empire.

It is now, perhaps, clear to those who protest against the increase of the Navy Estimates, why that increase occurred.

There were three years' economies and deferred obligations to be made up.

What is not clear is why His Majesty's Ministers, in explaining the situation to the House of Commons in March, 1909, failed to

inform the House that the Admiralty had known of what Sir Edward Grey described as "a new situation" two years and a half before the Government knew, and had deliberately suppressed the facts.

But the Government chose, not only to shield the Admiralty from the just censure of the House of Commons but, to retain in the public service officials who had suppressed information involving the security of the Empire. The responsibility, constitutionally speaking, rested upon Mr. McKenna, as First Lord. He was not requested to resign, nor did he request the resignation of the members of the Board.

A neighbouring foreign nation was adroitly brought forward by Ministers as the cause of the trouble. Those who profess to seek peace and ensue it may be advised to look at home, and, before indulging in provocative comparisons, to acknowledge that they themselves were to blame.

No later than March 13, 1911, the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs stated in the House of Commons that the "German Naval Law when complete means a navy of thirty-

three capital ships, including *Dreadnoughts* and cruisers as well as pre-*Dreadnoughts*."

That statement was grossly incorrect. The German Navy Law of 1900, with its amendments of 1906 and 1908, ordains a Fleet of, not thirty-three but, fifty-eight armoured ships. The error was the subject of comment in Parliament, but Sir Edward Grey has never taken the trouble to correct it. To my knowledge his carelessness has aroused strong irritation abroad, where it is held that, when the British public discover that the German Fleet is to consist, not of thirty-three armoured ships as officially stated but, of fifty-eight armoured ships, there will be another outcry against German perfidy.

The British public would be better employed in insisting that the British Government should restore a standard of naval strength, which the present Administration abandoned in violation of the repeated and categorical pledges of Ministers, and under which provocative comparisons with friendly Powers were avoided.

N.B.

XI

THE SHIPBUILDING
PROGRAMME

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THE SHIPBUILDING PROGRAMME

ON June 30, 1909 (three months after the Government had announced that they were gravely in arrears with all their naval preparations), at the request of the London Chamber of Commerce, I published my suggestion for a shipbuilding programme.

It was to extend over four years, and was to comprise :

16 Battleships.

36 Second-class cruisers.

24 Anti-torpedo-boat destroyers.

52 Torpedo-boat destroyers.

4 Floating docks with accessories.

Provision for floating coal depôts.

Provision for Stores.

Provision for present and future requirements, 19,000 men recruited at the rate of 5,000 a year for four years.

I was criticised in the Press, both for asking too much and for asking too little.

In 1888, when I brought forward a Naval Defence Act, providing seventy vessels at a cost of twenty millions, I was described in the House as an enthusiastic seaman given to exaggeration and generally not to be taken seriously by serious people. Three months later, the same House voted every ship and every pound. Taught by experience, therefore, it was possible to regard with comparative equanimity the attacks made upon me. The event has partly proved that I was justified, and I await, not without confidence, a complete justification.

For the Admiralty, although the country had been repeatedly assured that the Fleet was perfect in every detail, began at once to adopt (without acknowledgment) my proposals. They have not yet, however, adopted them in their entirety.

I am far from claiming that my estimate of requirements is not subject to modification. What I do claim is that it represents the experience of fifty years service in the Royal Navy, applied with the most sedulous care to

the needs of a grave situation. I have given definite reasons for every one of my requirements, which are based upon the practical work of the Navy.

It is not the practice of the First Lord of the Admiralty to give reasons for the provisions contained in the Navy Estimates, nor to explain omissions in those confused and voluminous statements, totally incomprehensible to the taxpayer or to his representatives in the House, for whose benefit they are ostensibly published. It is, therefore, impossible for the public to discover whether or no the Admiralty are fulfilling their responsibilities. The public are deliberately kept in ignorance.

I asked for sixteen battleships, and gave my reasons for the proposal. The Admiralty have provided fourteen battleships, giving no reasons for their provision other than those implied in the course of indiscreet references to a neighbouring Power. I asked for twenty-four anti-torpedo-boat destroyers of a new class designed for special work. The authorities have provided none of these. I asked for fifty-two torpedo-boat destroyers, and of these, the

Admiralty have provided forty, although for years the country was officially informed that the destroyer force was amply sufficient. I asked for thirty-six second-class cruisers for scouting purposes and for the protection of the trade routes, and the Admiralty have provided nine. I asked for four floating docks with accessories and the Admiralty have provided two.¹

The balance of my programme which has not yet been provided is therefore: two large armoured ships, twenty-four anti-torpedo-boat destroyers, twelve torpedo-boat destroyers, twenty-seven second-class cruisers, and two floating docks.

		£	
1 Lord Charles Beresford's Original Programme			68,220,000
Provided for by the Government since Programme was published—			
Programme.		£	
1909-10	4 Armoured Ships (the 4 "Contingent") at £2,000,000	8,000,000	
1910-11	5 Armoured Ships at £2,000,000	10,000,000	
	5 Protected Cruisers at £400,000	2,000,000	
	20 Destroyers at £100,000	2,000,000	
1911-12	5 Armoured Ships at £2,000,000	10,000,000	
	3 Protected Cruisers, 1 Unarmoured Cruiser (say 4 at £400,000)	1,600,000	
	20 Destroyers at £100,000	2,000,000	
		<hr/>	35,600,000
	2 Floating Docks		600,000
			<hr/> <hr/> <u>£36,200,000</u>

Joined also 12,900 Men and Boys from March 31, 1910 to March 31, 1911.

Now either my estimate was excessive, or it was not. If it was excessive, I challenge the First Lord of the Admiralty to prove the fact. If it was not excessive, the country is being defrauded.

I may not unreasonably claim that in 1889 my representations were justified to the letter. And to-day, as the Admiralty and the Government have brought in shipbuilding programmes which, in exact proportions as they were palpably at variance with their previous statements, were in accordance with my representations, I shall continue to believe that, at least, I am not yet proved mistaken.

Since 1909, the authorities have insisted upon basing their requirements upon a comparison drawn from the Fleet of one foreign Power alone. But the intentions of that Power, apart from subsidiary increases made known as soon as they were arranged, were published for all the world to see in the year 1900. The extraordinary fluctuations of the British shipbuilding programme cannot then be due to the action of Germany. Those who complain of sudden increases in the Navy Estimates are justified in their protest.

They were misled. They are still being misled.

The following tables show the record at a glance.

SHIPS LAID DOWN BY GREAT BRITAIN AND GERMANY,
1906—1907 TO 1911—1912.

	GREAT BRITAIN. ¹			GERMANY.		
	Armoured ships.	Small Cruisers.	Destroyers.	Armoured ships.	Small Cruisers.	Destroyers.
1906-7	3	0	2	3	2	12
1907-8	3	1	5	3	2	12
1908-9	2	6	18	4	2	12
1909-10	8	6	22	4	2	12
1910-11	5	5	20	4	2	12
1911-12	5	3	20	4	2	12

¹ Vessels for Dominion Navies excluded. These are:—2 large armoured ships, 3 small cruisers, 6 destroyers. But, with the exception of 1 large armoured ship presented by New Zealand to the United Kingdom, these vessels do not come under Admiralty control.

The result of the naval policy of the last five years with regard to foreign Powers will give the following situation on April 1, 1914, in respect of large armoured ships.

1914.

Great Britain.	Germany.	Triple Alliance.
Dreadnoughts . 22	Dreadnoughts . 16	Dreadnoughts . 25
Invincibles . 10	Invincibles . 5	Invincibles . 5
pre-Dreadnoughts	pre-Dreadnoughts	pre-Dreadnoughts
15 years old . 23	15 years old . 18	15 years old . 33
—	—	—
55	39	63

Where is the Two-Power standard? Where is the Two-to-One standard? Where is the half-as-much-again superiority postulated in the Admiralty Memorandum, Cd 5539?¹ And what is the policy of his Majesty's Government?

If it consists in maintaining the Two-Power standard, it is an utter delusion. We are sixteen ships short of the Two-Power standard. If it consists in maintaining a Two-to-One standard, we should in 1914 possess 78 large armoured ships instead of 55.

I offer no opinion on the subject of policy. I merely indicate the facts. In five years we have forfeited the numerical predominance we held in 1905. During that period, his Majesty's Ministers have constantly asserted the "unassailable superiority" of the Royal Navy.

It is for Parliament to compel Ministers to a definite declaration of policy. If Parliament fails in its duty, the country must take the consequences.

My own view of the situation was expressed in 1909. I affirmed then, as I affirm now, that the passing of a new Naval Defence Act is essential; and that the building programme should be financed by loan.

¹ 19th November, 1910.

XII

THE MANNING OF THE FLEET

XII

THE MANNING OF THE FLEET

THE key to the policy of illegitimate economy which was pursued by the Admiralty from 1904 to 1909, is the determination to save pay and pension by reducing the *personnel*. In 1904, the provision for an additional 8,000 or 10,000 men made for the future requirements of the Fleet was secretly cancelled. There followed: the reduction of the establishment, the introduction of the disastrous short-service system, the closing of the coast-guard stations, and the reduction of the coast-guard. The result was that, in 1906, there were not enough men to go round. It is not generally understood that more men are required in peace time than would be required during a war, for the simple reason that in peace time a large number of men are being passed through the training schools—gunnery, torpedo signalling, and the like—ashore. In time of war, the

training schools would be emptied and the men sent to sea. Roughly speaking, the process is a continual series of permutations: at sea, on shore, on leave, and so on. Any dislocation of the process involves a corresponding inefficiency and hardship.

In 1906, owing to the recent increase in the Fleet, for which the required additional men had not been provided, the dislocation occurred. It was no longer possible to supply full crews to the ships in active commission, and nucleus crews to the Reserve ships and contingents for training. The immediate result was that the Admiralty "scrapped" squadrons of valuable ships, and then reduced the sea-going squadrons by nearly 25 per cent., adding the men thereby released to the nucleus crews. Even then there were not enough men properly to work the nucleus crew system. The deplorable mutiny at Portsmouth was largely due to the facts that men in the nucleus crew ships were set to perform dockyard work, the Dockyard establishments having been reduced, and that they were being constantly shifted from ship to ship, according as the need was most urgent.

At the same time the periods of training were shortened. The Fleet was also weakened by the passing of trained seamen into the Reserve before their time, and the simultaneous entry of short-service men, who knew nothing of their duties, and who, so soon as they had learned them, were also passed into the Reserve.

These things do not merely belong to the category of past misdeeds. The situation is worse, if possible, to-day. The Fleet is so short of men that it is constantly found impossible to recommission one ship without taking from another vessel a crew which, having just completed a commission, are entitled to an interval on shore. The nucleus crews themselves are in a condition which demands a commission of inquiry. Even the new large armoured ships are short of what should be their proper complement.

All information with regard to complements has been steadily refused by the late First Lord, on the ground that such information is "confidential." The fact, of which Mr. McKenna seems to be ignorant, is, of course, that on the 15th of every month the Regulations provide

that full information as to complements should be supplied by every ship to the Admiralty "for use in the Houses of Parliament."

It was the knowledge of the dangerous deficiency in the *personnel* that induced me, in bringing forward my ship-building programme, to ask for 19,000 more men, the recruiting to be spread over four years. These were to be additional to the 6,000 annually required to make up wastage.

In the year 1909-10 the Admiralty added 3,000 additional men to the Estimates. In the year 1910-11, another additional 3,000 appeared in the Estimates. But what was the real condition of affairs?

In reply to a question, the first Lord stated in the House on May 10, 1911, that the number of men and boys recruited for the Royal Navy between March 31, 1910, and March 31, 1911, was approximately 12,946!

Deducting from the total number the normal figure for wastage, which is about 6,000, there remain (excluding non-combatants) over 6,000 additional men and boys. My estimate of the annual addition required was, not more but, actually less, than this number.