

(March 22nd, 1913.)

## The Borden Naval Policy.

BY MR. ARTHUR MEIGHEN, M.P.\*

AT a regular meeting of the Club on March 22, 1913, Mr. Meighen said:

My duty just now is to say something worthy the attendance of busy men on behalf of the Naval Policy of the present Government. Rising directly in front of me I see two conspicuous and threatening difficulties; first, to compress into half an hour any useful restatement or compendium of a case so thoroughly elucidated during four years by the Press of Canada, and second, to present a party view—in which I enthusiastically share—a party view of a party question without too vigorously invading party politics. To surmounting these difficulties I now without further introduction address myself, and if I do not get over the last hurdle very gracefully, I invite you all to try the same acrobatic performance, and then to criticise my attempt this afternoon.

The main proposal of the Government is to add without delay to the fighting power of Britain's Navy, three of the strongest ships of war known to Naval science, built with the money of Canada but placed unreservedly under Admiralty control—subject only to recall on sufficient notice. There are other important but subsidiary proposals, such as the mutual encouragement by the Governments of Britain and Canada extended to Canadians to man these vessels, the commencement on a practical basis and the prosecution on an expanding scale of ship-building of all kinds in this country, Britain even sharing in the extra cost. Meantime the organization of a permanent Naval Policy stands for mature consideration and development and for submission to the votes of Canadian electors.

What I have sketched as subsidiary proposals for the moment are really of great and lasting consequence but sedulously overlooked by our party opponents. And I, too, am compelled to-day to centre my remarks around the first—the commanding element of our policy.

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Permit me in very moderate language to refer to some objections to this proposal offered before your Club a few days ago by Hon. Mackenzie King. Mr. King took exception first on constitutional grounds, claiming that our constitutional foundations in the British North America Act are not wide enough to enable us to place Canadian-owned vessels under Imperial control for Empire defence. "The British North America Act," he said, "never contemplated going outside of Canada and affecting the Naval Power and authority of Britain." This at least has the merit of novelty. Well, as Mr. King says, we have the power to legislate for the peace, order and good Government of Canada in matters—among others—of Naval defence. And if we have the power to provide for our Naval defence surely there is an implied power to decide in what way we may best so provide. Acting within the compass of that authority we now elect that the best way is to add to the Imperial Navy, our present defence. Later on Mr. King says:—"Our Pacific fleet could go to the rescue of Australia or to assist in the China seas." Now it must be under Admiralty control before it can strike. So Mr. King's position is that our vessels may cruise the Antipodes and the China seas, but the moment they enter waters that wash Britain's shores there is an end of the constitution.

Then again—this Government, he says, is bound by the joint resolution of March, 1909, no matter what is best for the Empire. I answer: That resolution in its latter clause provided clearly that whenever need arose we owed it to Britain to spring to her side with all the resources of Canada. If then such need exists we can take this step under the direct mandate thus propounded. That it does exist I will presently show. For the present I add only this, that the first part of that resolution specifying the character of the Naval Service Canada should organize, specifying that it must be consistent with the highest advice of the Admiralty in 1907, in co-operation with the Admiralty always, and that its single purpose must be the supremacy of the Imperial Fleet; that resolution with those clauses we say clearly banned and forbade the programme of the late Government, and those clauses applied to-day just as clearly negative the proposals of the same party now.

Lastly, Mr. King advances an ethical argument. He says to own three of the most powerful instruments of destruction in the world is not good national morals. I always understood that battleships were made to fight and to destroy—to

prolong peace by being able to fight and to destroy. To build battleships is either wrong or right; under present world conditions I conceive it to be right, but how can it be good morals to build a ten thousand ton vessel, and bad morals to build a twenty thousand? It is bad ethics, we are told, to build large warships that will contribute to victory but good ethics to build smaller craft that are fore-doomed to defeat.

So much for objections. I now come to the positive side of the argument. The Borden proposal to provide at once a number of master battleships for the Imperial Admiralty is the quickest, most direct and effective way to aid the Motherland. That affirmation I do not propose to argue. It is an axiom that no serious man disputes. The Admiralty had been telling us so plainly for twelve years and never more forcibly than in December, 1912. Ah! but we are told, though that be true, the Motherland is not in danger to-day—there is no need, “no emergency,” as they like to praise it. “Britain is not on her knees. Her fleet is still the strongest by a fair margin, so we don’t need to assist her in the quickest, most direct and effective way. We can afford to start where Britain started centuries ago, where the United States started may decades ago, and wait for the evolution of a fleet built here before lending a hand to Britain.” My duty is to show you that such an attitude, such a delay, are unthinkable to the Canadian Nation.

In the first place, the Parent Country has for 150 years borne the burden of the defence of our shores, and of our commerce without aid from us. The share of her expenditure attributable to her responsibility for this country is hard to apportion but is undoubtedly enormous, perhaps \$400,000,000. She bears that burden to-day protecting a sea commerce of Canada of over \$400,000,000 annually. Does an Imperial obligation then not now exist? “But,” we are told, “Britain would have had to maintain her sea supremacy anyway for her own protection as an island kingdom, and for the safety of her trade.” Suppose that is true, how can it affect the argument? We have got the benefit, we are part of the Empire whose parent branch has borne this tremendous strain. We are strong now, growing proudly into full partnership. We look at Argentina with \$200,000,000 spent that Britain has enabled us to save for home development. We look at every other independent maritime state and read the same lesson. We have had the benefit. We are part of the Empire, and have obligations as such. We are able to make

practical acknowledgment. I put it before you—should we not do so now—directly and effectively now?

But other and tremendous facts make our duty clearer still, and show the advantage to Canada of doing this thing for duty is always golden in the end. Within the past fifteen years the great nations of Europe and of Asia have added to their armaments by sea and land at a pace unknown in history, until to-day half of this world, the advance guard of civilization is in very truth an armed camp. Conspicuous among these there is one great people, out-numbering the total white subjects of George V. scattered over seven seas, and increasing more rapidly than Britain, France, Austria, and Italy added together,—one great people I say, great in arms, on land the strongest on the globe, supreme in military Europe, impregnable against attack by land or sea,—a great people, great in wealth, in commerce and science the marvel of the age, fertile and resourceful of intellect, resolute and indomitable of will, virile of character and historically fond of war,—that people an ascendant people with hope always burning and organized for results as never a nation was organized, that people within those years has entered the lists as a naval power, and is already second in the world. Their present law provides, even granting that it will stand without amendment for seven years, for one thousand per cent. greater instantaneous fighting powers than it had as recently as 1898. By 1915, says the Admiralty memorandum,

“Great Britain will have 25 Dreadnought battleships, and two Nelsons, and Germany 17.

Great Britain will have six battle cruisers and Germany six.”

A margin of safety “which,” the memorandum says, “does not err on the side of excess, and will steadily diminish as Britain’s older predreadnought vessels grow obsolete and new vessels become larger.”

By the same year, says this official document, Britain’s strength in capital ships will be surpassed by the other powers of Europe as 35 to 51.

The astounding growth of the German navy has been accompanied until lately by significant official statements and an astonishing National enthusiasm, for National enthusiasm will always respond when National interests are involved. The Emperor himself, in whose great ability and peaceful ambitious Sir Wilfrid Laurier expresses reliance, has not hesitated, until very lately at least, to voice his country’s purpose. I admit his supreme authority and capacity. He is

perhaps the most forceful personality on earth. But in 1901 he said, "as my grandfather reorganized the army, so I shall reorganize my navy without flinching, and in the same way until it stands on the same level as my army so that with its help Germany may reach the position which it has not yet secured."

In 1899 he coined the winged phrase,  
"Our future lies upon the water."

Around this spirited rhapsody some three-score songs have clustered, and they are sung daily by the children of the fatherland. And again,

"Without the consent of Germany's ruler nothing must happen in any part of the world."

Then as lately as 1907, on election night, he said from his Palace window,

"I thank you for your ovation. To-day you have proven the word of the Imperial Chancellor. Germany can ride if she cares to. If men of all ranks and faiths stand together we can ride down all those who block our path."

And this is attributed to Prince Bülow, Chancellor at the time, and appeared in a semi-official organ,

"The movement of Naval expansion in Germany will not end until a German Navy floats on the sea that can compete with the Navy of Great Britain. Equally strong on sea and on land the world may choose our friendship or our enmity."

"The old century," says another temperate and typical journal, "saw a German Europe. The new century shall see a German world. To attain this consummation two duties are required of the present German generation—to keep its own counsel, and to create a strong naval force."

Kaiser William II is a master of many activities, but essentially a soldier and possessed with that supreme belief in himself that has distinguished the greatest of men, that inspired Cromwell and Alexander and Bonaparte, and now as he turns the vessel of his country toward the troubled seas of a World Empire he never doubts that she will survive the storm because, in his belief she carries the Julius Caesar of this century.

Not for over three hundred years has supremacy on land and sea been united in the same power, not since the days of Phillip of Spain. Should such a thing result at this time and under modern conditions, either by success in the race of armaments or in the clash of war, it would be serious for the world—but for us as an Empire it would be the setting of the sun. I repeat, whether without war by preponderance in

armaments, or with war by victory in battle, the verdict may be differently phrased, but the stern sentence is the same. On this subject listen to Churchill, speaking the words of Premier Asquith, of Mr. Lloyd George, and Sir Edward Grey, of the whole Liberal Government weighted with an Empire's care,—

"Between us and other nations—there is no parity of risk; our position is highly artificial. We are fed from the sea. We are an unarmed people. We are the only Power in Europe that does not possess a large army. We do not wish to menace the vital interest of any continental state, and if we did wish to we have not the power. When we consider our naval strength we are thinking not of our Commerce but of our freedom, not of our trade but of our lives."

And again,

"If any single nation were able to back the strongest fleet with an overwhelming army the whole world would be in jeopardy, and a catastrophe would swiftly occur."

Now listen to Mr. Balfour who knows also what these things mean. In June, 1912,

"There are two ways in which a hostile country can be crushed. It can be conquered, or it can be starved. If Germany were master in our home waters she could apply both methods to Britain. Were Britain ten times master of the North Sea she could apply neither method to Germany. Without a superior fleet Great Britain would no longer count as a power. Without any fleet at all Germany would remain the greatest power in Europe."

We may gloss the subject as we like and take diplomatic assurances unaccompanied by facts of policy, but that nation has succeeded best that accepted diplomatic assurances only in the light of facts and policy. And a country that seized Schleswig-Holstein without warning, and Silesia without warning, that turned suddenly and humbled Austria in '66, and then in 1870, just a few weeks after a French Ministry had assured its people that the outlook for peace never was brighter—invaded that Republic and erected the German Empire on the ruins of France, that country, I say, cannot complain if we govern our conduct with due regard to history and conceded facts of the present day.

What then is my conclusion? It is this,—that as regards the Motherland these are no ordinary times. They are even now and until the tide turns, the pace slackens, extraordinary, and momentarily so. England is still, we believe, supreme on water, and she is determined so to remain. Does that

affect the argument? Does that affect our duty to her or to ourselves? Are we to wait till her hands are up before coming to her side? Are we to wait till war-clouds appear before commencing to build Dreadnoughts that take two and three years to complete? Is there not a call to Canada for immediate, direct and effective aid? If not now, how could there ever be when that aid in naval war could mean anything at all?

We may hold back if we will, and take comfort in vague principles of cosmopolitan benevolence, but if we do and others of our kin, equally entitled, do the same, we may prepare as a great state to close the books, smooth the path of liquidation, and sing the even song of Empire.

"But," we are told, "Australia is having built a fleet unit." Well, Canada should be more than a copyist. But Australia has done already what we purpose doing now, and the resources of that Dominion now add to the strength of the line of steel that guards the heart of this Empire. Situated as this country is we may fear no attack by sea except on the Pacific by the defeat of the British squadron in the China seas, or on either coast by the collapse of our battle line in the North Sea. We are not a small independent nation like Argentina, guarding against attack by similar states and trusting only to a jealous maintenance of the balance of power for protection against the strong. We are part of Greater Britain, and must order our affairs of defence in the light of that supreme unalterable fact. We fall only when Britain falls. Our present policy centres on that truth. Our permanent policy must follow the same pole star. Should other counsels than Mr. Borden's now prevail, then, I ask you to answer—which is the more likely to triumph,—an august Empire, proud of her centuries of success and prone to reflect on her past, long accustomed to unchallenged supremacy at sea, but disseminating her strength under widely scattered controls, each withdrawable and perhaps unavailable in war, or a great ascendant nation, nerved by ambition and organized for defined results, its thousand giant energies all concentrated on a well studied purpose, and "moving imperturbably to its goal across the whole lifetime of a generation?"

"Ah," but we are asked, "what about our autonomy?" We have autonomy long established, dominion autonomy, provincial autonomy, even municipal autonomy, each supreme within its orbit. But the defence of this Empire by sea is not a provincial, not a dominion, concern. It is preeminently an Im-

perial concern, and it is no more a breach of our autonomy to add of our own free will to a united navy than was it straining Britain's autonomy to erect for all the bulwarks of a common defence. No, it is the highest exercise of the autonomy of both. It is autonomy to autonomy engaged.

Gentlemen, that is our policy. (Applause.)