

COMMITTEE OF IMPERIAL DEFENCE.

HC Deb 29 July 1909 vol 8 cc1381-432

Motion made, and Question proposed, "That a sum not exceeding £66,171 be granted to His Majesty to complete the sum necessary to defray the charge which will come in course of payment during the year ending on the 31st day of March, 1910, for the Salaries and Expenses in the Department of His Majesty's Treasury and Subordinate Departments, including expenses in respect of advances under the Light Railways Act, 1896."

The PRIME MINISTER It is so long since this Vote was very thoroughly discussed in Committee of Supply—the last occasion being, I think, four or five years ago—that it seems to me that it will be for the general convenience if I take the somewhat unusual course of making a short introductory statement as to the working of the Defence Committee before any criticisms are offered—if criticisms there are to be—on the Vote itself. This Committee has now been in existence, since its creation by the right hon. Gentleman opposite, nearly seven years. Considerable doubts, and some apprehensions, were expressed at the time of its original institution as to whether it could be made to fit in with the ordinary working of our administrative machinery, and particularly with the maintenance of the due and separate responsibility in the cases of the War Office and the Admiralty. Those doubts have, I think, been solved, and those apprehensions allayed, by the experience of those seven years. For myself, I desire to say at once, having now worked for the best part of four years in intimate and continuous relations with the Defence Committee, that I regard it not only as a valuable but as an indispensable part of our administrative organisation. It is very important that the Committee, and people outside also, should understand not only what are, but what are not, the functions of the Defence Committee. A good deal of misapprehension exists in some quarters as to that. I am only repeating in my own language what I think was said by the right hon. Gentleman at the time the Committee was brought into existence, when I say that, firstly, it is an advisory and not an Executive Committee, and secondly, it has nothing to do with determining the policy of the country. The Cabinet must always be responsible for national policy. The two great Departments, the War Office and the Admiralty, must always be responsible for the execution of the policy so determined. The Defence Committee does not intervene either in the one or in the other. The functions of the Defence Committee arise out of the necessity felt, I think, in almost all the great countries of the world—but which is nowhere so pressing as it is here owing to our geographical and economic conditions—the necessity of co-ordinating the work of the Army and Navy. It is the primary business of the Defence Committee to study and determine what is the best provision that can from time to time be made for the naval and military requirements of the Empire as a whole; to keep both military and naval requirements and their due relation to each other constantly in view. This, I need hardly remind the Committee, is a more important and responsible task than it ever has been. The co-operation of the different parts of Empire both by land and by sea, and community of purpose so far as it can be obtained—a reciprocal adaptation of means to resources—has become almost the most urgent of our Imperial problems. If the Committee is to discharge those functions adequately, and not to trench upon the territory of either of the Executive Departments on the one side or of the Cabinet on the other, it is necessary that it should be in its composition an elastic and flexible body. In point of theory—what I would call constitutional theory—it sits purely to advise the Prime Minister. He nominates its Members. He can add to the number or diminish the number at his own will, and in accordance with the particular problems which, for the time being, demand investigation and attention. Under the present Government, during the four years we have been in office, the full Committee constituted by my predecessors—and which has since rendered the same service to myself—has consisted of six Cabinet Ministers, in addition to the Prime Minister, namely, the four Secretaries of State (other than the Home Secretary), the First Lord of the Admiralty, and the Chancellor of the Exchequer. It has consisted, next, as representing the Navy, of the First Sea Lord, and the Director of Naval Intelligence, and as representing the Army the Chief of the General Staff, to direct the military operations. In

addition to these official Members it has had the services and the cooperation of the Inspector-General of the Forces (Sir John French), who occupies an independent position; of Lord Esher, who is a great expert in all these matters, and latterly, at my nomination, of Admiral of the Fleet, Sir Arthur Wilson. That has been the composition of the full Committee, but from time to time we were able to add to it, and we ought to add to it, Members ad hoc. For instance, at this particular moment I hope that before the distinguished representatives of the Colonies who have come here to attend the Imperial Conference leave these shores we may have the opportunity of inviting some of them to take part in a meeting of the Defence Committee, and to consider there some of the problems which concern them and us alike. I only mention that in order to point out to the House that it is extremely important that we should not have the Defence Committee a stereotyped body, but that we should be able to meet from time to time representative men from all parts of the Empire to contribute to the common stock of knowledge and experience.

Those being generally the functions of the Committee and its present composition, I think it would be interesting to the Committee to be told, so far as it is possible to do so, the kind of tasks upon which of late the Defence Committee has been engaged. There are some matters, of course, which in their nature are so confidential that it is not possible to disclose them, as it would be impossible to discuss them. But the matters to which I allude are matters in regard to which we have had during the last three years, I think, exhaustive inquiries conducted in the first instance by Sub-Committees of the Defence Committee, whose reports have then as a rule been submitted to the Committee for criticism and confirmation. The subjects which have been so considered, amongst others, which I am afraid I cannot mention, have been these:—

The military needs of the Empire in reference to recent changes in Army organisation.

The military requirements of the Empire as affected by the defence of India.

The strategical aspects—a small but important matter— of the Forth and Clyde Canal.

Aerial navigation, in view of its recent and prospective developments.

Our policy in regard to the Channel Tunnel and, generally, the means of transit across the Channel.

The standard of fixed defences and garrisons in various parts of the Empire and the scale of reinforcements for them.

This is not an exhaustive list, but those are typical illustrations of the kind of subjects which have occupied the attention of the Sub-Committees. Then we have carried out what I think is a very useful reform in establishing in connection with the Defence Committee a historical section which is capable of compiling naval and military history of past and contemporary wars from the combined standpoint of the Navy and Army. I believe hon. and right hon. Gentlemen opposite have, as we have, somewhat melancholy memories of what these histories have cost us in the past. They have been very expensive compilations, but they have not always been very instructive. We have effected, I hope, by the establishment of this historical section not only an economy in point of actual expenditure, but, from the co-ordination of the work of the different persons concerned, under the distinguished officer who occupies the post of Secretary to the Committee, I believe it will be found that the character and quality of his work done is very superior to most of that done in the past. In this connection we have had for a long time past a Committee called the Colonial Defence Committee, which considers the defences of Colonial ports, and other measures which relate to what I may call the Colonial aspect of Imperial defence. We have this year established a joint Naval and Military Committee, which will consider, in like manner, questions affecting matters connected with the defence of Home ports. These two Committees will work side by side, both under the Defence Committee, so that their work may be brought into correlation from time to time; and I believe by their collaboration they will materially help us to solve some of the outstanding problems both of Home and Colonial defence. Let me add what I think is a very important point. The Defence Committee, as a whole, keeps a continuous record of its proceedings. That is a most important point. We have the advantage when a Government comes into office that the Defence Committee has in black and white the

decisions arrived at by their predecessors and the evidence on which that decision was founded. The same thing holds good to-day, and I am perfectly certain the work of future Administrations will be enormously facilitated by the power of access to this mass of **carefully digested material**, showing from time to time how the problems of defence presented themselves to the Defence Committee, and the materials they had for their solution, and consequently the **progress which has been made towards a final solution in the interests of the Empire**. I thought it might be of interest to the House to give them that **general outline of the work of the Committee** in order that they might appreciate the **purposes upon which this Vote is being expended**. Before I conclude I would like to say a word or two upon two matters which have recently come before the Defence Committee, and which are of great public interest and importance. The latest in point of time is the inquiry which has been held during the last two months into certain very serious allegations made by **Admiral Lord Charles Beresford** as to the organisation and distribution of the Fleet in Home waters during the last two years. That matter is still sub judice in this sense, that the Committee have not yet finally adjusted their report, though it will not be very much longer delayed. There has been no slackness in the matter; we are all pretty busy men; we held 15 sittings; we took a great deal of evidence, both oral and documentary; we went into all the questions submitted to us by the gallant Admiral with very great minuteness and complete thoroughness, and whatever may be the merits or the demerits of the conclusions which we shall ultimately record, they certainly have not been arrived at without thorough investigation—an investigation conducted, I need hardly say, **in the spirit of the most complete impartiality** as between all interests concerned. That is all I can say at the moment in reference to that branch.

[Arthur Balfour]

But there is another investigation of a more comprehensive character as to which, I think, it is my duty to say a few words to the Committee. **In the year 1905** the right hon. Gentleman opposite, who was then Prime Minister, speaking as I am speaking to-day by way of introduction to the discussion in Committee on this Vote, made a statement which attracted universal attention, and was of the highest interest and importance in regard to the possibility of these islands being invaded by a foreign Power. The conclusions which the right hon. Gentleman then arrived at, with all the authority of his position, and stated to the House and to the country, were, as I think he himself said, naturally enough not merely the results of his own reading and reflection, but they were conclusions arrived at through consultation with **experts and with the Defence Committee itself**. They therefore were taken, and properly taken, as representing at that time the last word, or rather the latest word, which it was possible for the authoritative advisors of the Crown to utter in regard to this all-important matter. Since the right hon. Gentleman made that speech, there have, of course, been changes—I need not particularise them, they will readily occur to the minds of hon. Members—**changes and large changes in what I may call the strategical situation of Europe and the world**. And, partly no doubt in consequence of these changes, and partly for other reasons, one of the most distinguished British soldiers, **Lord Roberts**, two years ago in a communication which was addressed in the first instance to the right hon. Gentleman opposite, himself asked in substance—I am not quoting the words—for a re-investigation of those problems in the light of the new facts and changed situation brought about since the right hon. Gentleman made his speech in 1905.

The right hon. Gentleman thought it his duty to forward that communication to my predecessor, the late **Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman**, who at once recognised its gravity and importance, and the result was that before his lamented death—the exact date was in **November, 1907**—he appointed a sub-committee of the **Committee of Imperial Defence** to go into the whole matter in the light of Lord Roberts's representation and the previous statements made upon the authority of the Government by the late Prime Minister. I was appointed chairman of that sub-committee, which included almost all the Members—all the expert Members and almost all the Members—of the Defence Committee itself, and which carried on its **investigations for the best part of a year from November, 1907, to the month of October, 1908**. We had in the course of that inquiry from the **gallant Field Marshal himself** and other military authorities who associated themselves with him, a full presentation of what I may call his case. We heard a great deal of independent evidence from other officers and from military and naval experts. We studied with great care all the changes in the strategic situation, and what I may call the potentialities of invasion, going minutely into such matters as the possible time of mobilisation of foreign armies, their facilities for transport both by land and by sea, the

organisation and distribution of their forces both naval and military, and the possibility, both as regards embarkation, the time of transit, and the disembarkation here of a successful invasion on a large scale such as Lord Roberts contemplated.

Of course, I am not at liberty—the Committee will not expect it—to go into that evidence; most of it is of a highly confidential character, nor can I refer to it. If I did I should be obliged, according to the Rules of the House, to produce the Report as actually made, but I think I am not only entitled, but bound now to state in my own language, and in general terms, what are the conclusions at which we arrived after that prolonged investigation. These conclusions were arrived at after conceding to those who were apprehensive of the possibility of invasion the most favourable hypothesis for that purpose; after conceding, for instance, that the contemplated invasion would take place at a time when the Regular forces of this country were practically absent—the great bulk of them—absent from our shores engaged in some foreign expedition; after conceding further that the attack might be, as it would not likely to be, what is called a surprise attack; that it might be, in naval and military vocabulary, a bolt from the blue, made at a time of normal diplomatic relations between ourselves and the attacking country. We took, and I think we were bound to take, for granted as against ourselves, the most unfavourable possible conditions, and in favour of the hypothetical invasion the most favourable possible conditions. The conclusion to which we unanimously arrived—all the naval as well as military Members of the Committee being at one in this matter—may be summed up under two heads. In the first place that, so long as the naval supremacy of this country is adequately assured invasion on a large scale, by which I mean invasion on such a scale as was contemplated by Lord Roberts, that is the transport to these shores of 120,000 or 150,000 men, is an absolutely impracticable operation; and on the other hand, if we were permanently to lose the command of the sea, then, whatever might be the strength and organisation of our military forces, even allowing that you had an army like the army of Germany, whatever might be its strength and whatever might be its organisation, it would not only be impossible that this country should escape invasion—invasion might not even be necessary—but the subjection of the country to the enemy would be inevitable. It followed from that proposition that it is the business of the Admiralty to maintain our naval supremacy at such a point that we cannot lose the command of the sea, and that against any reasonable possible combination that could be brought against us we must hold the sea and make invasion impracticable. That was the first proposition. Then we come to the second. I do not know whether there is any extreme disciple of what used to be called the Blue Water school, who would tell you that you can rely so entirely upon the Navy as not to require to keep a home Army at all. There may be still such people, but they are few and far between. At any rate, they did not find any supporters in the evidence given before the Committee or in the Committee itself. The second proposition is, we ought to have a home Army—I am not now speaking of an expeditionary force, but are Army for home defences—sufficient in numbers and organisation for two purposes—in the first place, to repel what are called raids, that is to say, sporadic offensive expeditions which are so small in their numbers as to evade even the best and most carefully watching fleets, but which are not intended permanently to occupy the country against which they are directed, but only to inflict such serious damage as they can. We should have a home Army not only adequate to repel raids of that description, but—a much more serious thing—to compel an enemy which contemplates invasion to come with such substantial force as to make it impossible for them to evade our Fleet. That, we believe, is the real function of the home Army. You must maintain your home Army on a scale in numbers, in condition of organisation and distribution, as would make it impossible for any opponent contemplating invasion to despatch against you anything but a very considerable army. It has often been said—I do not know how the figure is arrived at, the right hon. Gentleman himself takes that figure—it has often been said that no one would attempt the invasion of this country with less than 70,000 men. Our Admiralty believe a force of very much less than 70,000 men could not possibly evade our Fleet, but 70,000 is a number which will do as well as another. The estimate of 70,000 is small. Lord Roberts contemplated 120,000 as the number with which anyone is likely to undertake the task of invasion as distinct from a raid. No one will undertake the task of invasion with a smaller force than something like 70,000 men. I do not believe 70,000 men would ever get through at all, but you must have in these matters an ample margin of safety. It does not do to rely less or more upon nicely calculated numbers, and we must have an ample margin of safety. Our conclusion was that in order to insure that margin the force for maintaining home defence

should be one capable of dealing with an invading force of 70,000 men. Of course, you require a great deal more than 70,000 men in your home Army to cope with the possible invasion of 70,000 men from elsewhere. Those were our two general propositions. With regard to the military aspect, it is, in consequence of the findings of this Committee,, the business of the War Office to see that we have, under all circumstances, a properly organised and properly equipped force capable of dealing effectively with a possible invasion by 70,000 men. If these two conditions are satisfied, that is, **the naval condition and the military condition**, it is the opinion of the Defence Committee, after the most careful investigation that has ever been made, that this country will be **safe from invasion**. But **both those conditions must be satisfied**.

You must have an unassailable supremacy at sea, and you must maintain your home Army at such dimensions and in such readiness for its work that it will be able to cope with the force of the size I have described. I thought it right to indicate to the Committee the general conclusions at which we have arrived. I believe they will excite no serious controversy amongst those who have impartially studied the various phases of this matter. I have every reason to think that the **gallant Field-Marshal** is not altogether satisfied with our conclusions. He is, I believe, satisfied that everything he said and all the evidence which he brought in support of the allegations have been most thoroughly sifted and impartially examined. That is the deliberate conclusion to which we have come, and it is upon that conclusion that both the naval and military policy of the country, so long as our administration is responsible for it, will be carried on. I do not wish to import any element of controversy into the Debate. We may differ as to whether or not in the precise form of your naval or military preparations you are living up to that standard, but as to the standard itself being the **minimum standard which national safety requires**, and being adequate to secure that safety, I do not believe there will be any serious difference in any quarter of the House. **For investigations of this kind a body like the Defence Committee is not only invaluable but indispensable.** You could not possibly carry on an investigation like this promptly unless you had sitting side by side the representatives of the Army and Navy, and unless the whole matter had been co-ordinated and considered as a composite problem which the defence of this country and this Empire must always be. **We shall derive additional advantage from the working out of the practical details of the problem from the deliberations which are now taking place between the representatives of the Imperial Government and the delegates from the dominions over the sea.** They are now in conference together, and I am perfectly certain we shall be in a much **better position at the conclusion of that conference than we are now to arrange our material for the purpose in view**, but the governing consideration of our national strategy remains always the same, and I trust the Committee will approve of the conclusion at which the Defence Committee has come. I have nothing more to say except to apologise to the Committee for detaining it so long.

Mr. A. J. BALFOUR I suppose I shall be expected to say a few words after what has fallen from the Prime Minister. I think the Committee will also anticipate that the agreement between the right hon. Gentleman and myself is on the subject so complete that those words need be but very few. I am myself of opinion that this Vote ought not to come on at too frequent intervals, but at the same time it is desirable to do what the Government have done this year, that is to bring on this Vote periodically in order to remind the House and the country of the work which is being done with regard to the greatest of our national interests, and in order that the Government themselves may have an opportunity of explaining how any great problem which is in dispute has been dealt with by the Defence Committee. It must, perforce, be a matter of great gratification to those who sit on this Bench who were responsible for the **original creation of the Defence Committee** in its present shape, to hear that our successors have found in the instrument we have created a **very valuable means of carrying out their duty**, and nothing could be fuller or more handsome than the statement which the Prime Minister has made as to the value of the work which he has been good enough to attribute to us. I can say on my own behalf, and on behalf of my friends, that everything I have been able to learn either from such statements as that which has just been made, or from other sources as to the use which the Government are putting the machinery of the Defence Committee, leads me to think that every hope which the original authors may have entertained as to its future utility to the country and the Empire are in the hands of the right hon. Gentleman being fulfilled in the highest possible measure. I do not think anything I can say will really add to the admirable and

lucid statement of the constitution and character of the Defence Committee which has just been made. There was one thing which the Prime Minister implied, but which he did not state explicitly. He implied quite clearly that the Defence Committee exists not merely for co-ordinating the Army and the Navy, but also for co-ordinating such other departments as the military department of the India Office which deals with the military problem of India: the Department presided over by the Secretary for the Colonies, and the representatives of the self-governing Colonies who control the other parts of our Empire.

The PRIME MINISTER And the Foreign Office also.

Mr. BALFOUR Yes, and not least the Foreign Office. My experience of administration is that no office would either give or receive more assistance than the Foreign Office from such joint work as can be done by the Committee of Defence. The right hon. Gentleman referred in passing to the work which the Defence Committee are doing in connection with their investigation of Admiral Lord Charles Beresford's criticism upon the condition of our home fleet during the last few years, but as I gather from the right hon. Gentleman that the Committee of Defence have not yet completed their Report, and as I understand that that Report, when it is finally complete, will be made public in some shape or another, it is quite clear it would be in the highest degree inexpedient to criticise that matter in the course of this afternoon's discussion. Therefore, I put that question on one side. The other matter on which the Prime Minister dwelt, and in regard to which the House, I am sure, will be deeply interested in what he said, related to the question of home defence. The Prime Minister described in outline the course of the investigations and the conclusions that were arrived at in respect of the inquiry set on foot originally in consequence of an appeal which Lord Roberts made to me as the ex-head or ex-chairman of the Defence Committee. Lord Roberts differed from the original conclusions, and thought those conclusions had become antiquated through the immense change which had taken place in the strategic position of this country, and he appealed to me as the individual who had to express the opinions of the Defence Committee some years ago to explain my attitude and recant, if I was disposed to recant, any conclusions at which I had formerly arrived. What I felt was—and Lord Roberts quite agreed with me—that it was not for me to carry out all these investigations, because I had not the machinery for doing so, and unless I could speak for the Defence Committee, my opinions would not carry the slightest weight or authority with the House or the country. The Prime Minister of the day has now really taken pains to acquaint himself with experts, with whom he has discussed the matter. He has laid his difficulties before them, and has come to certain conclusions in conjunction with his colleagues, after the lesson which only debate and discussion can bring to perfection. In that position the Prime Minister can speak with the authority of the Committee. Clearly, out of office, I can speak with no authority, and I have no title whatever to modify the decisions arrived at in office with the aid of the authorities which the Defence Committee is intended to combine. Lord Roberts thoroughly concurred with my suggestion that instead of appealing to me he should appeal to the Defence Committee to reconsider the whole matter in the light of the newest developments. The Prime Minister has told the Committee how lengthy, laborious, and elaborate were the investigations which on this occasion the Defence Committee undertook. He has also told the Committee what conclusions they have arrived at. Those conclusions are in a sense somewhat less satisfactory than those at which, in different circumstances, and at an earlier period, the Defence Committee thought themselves justified in laying before the Committee. The Prime Minister suggested just now that the number of 70,000 men which has played so large a part in these discussions was a conventional figure. The origin of that figure was this: When the Defence Committee originally undertook this investigation they felt that what they had to determine was the smallest number of men with which any foreign country might attempt to invade this country, I will not say with the hope of conquering this country, but at any rate of forcing us into a discreditable and unhappy peace. We did not ask how many men were adequate for that task; we ask how few men it was with which it could be attempted, because evidently, if the Committee has followed the reasons so admirably laid before them by the Prime Minister to-day, the smaller the number of men with which that attempt could be made the more difficult will it be for the Fleet to resist it. We therefore rightly asked our military experts upon the Committee of Defence at that time—Lord Roberts then being the Commander-in-Chief, and not a member of the Defence Committee—what was the smallest number with which an

attempt—perhaps it might be a forlorn hope—could be made to seriously invade these islands, and the figure the military authorities gave the Defence Committee at that time was the figure of 70,000. That is the origin of that figure, and that is why it played such a large part in the arguments I ventured to lay before the House when I spoke for the Defence Committee.

The PRIME MINISTER When I said "conventional," I did not mean to imply that it was an obsolete figure.

Mr. BALFOUR At the time of the original investigations the conclusion at which I think I may say the whole of the Defence Committee arrived, and certainly at which I arrived, was that in the then condition of the country even 70,000 men could not be landed on the British shore. I gather from the Prime Minister that the Committee of Defence is still of opinion that that is an extremely improbable event, but they are now, I gather, forced to the conclusion that it is an hypothesis which you must not absolutely exclude as the Committee of Defence think necessary impossible. It must be taken as being on the margin of possibility and something which must be calculated for, and, from that point of view, I think the conclusions at which the Committee of Defence have arrived, to use a word to describe them, are somewhat more anxious than those was arrived at a few years earlier. I must confess that from my point of view I believe the Defence Committee are absolutely right in the new conclusion, in so far as it is new, at which they have arrived, and if any statement I have made in earlier years requires qualification in the sense of the statement I have just made, I hope everybody who reads my former speeches will make that qualification. New circumstances have arisen, and, whereas I do not think that in 1903 and 1904, when our investigations were originally made, 70,000 was really on the margin of possibility, I think it is just on the margin now, and that it is a possibility you have to contemplate. That statement has the immense advantage that it gives to the War Office and those responsible for home defence a perfectly clear end at which to aim in regard to that part of our military organisation which deals with home defence. I take it we cannot regard ourselves as in a thoroughly satisfactory position until we are able to deal with this hypothetical number of 70,000 invaders in the absence of the expeditionary force. That is really what we have got to aim at. I do not know whether the new organisation, started by the right hon. Gentleman (Mr. Haldane), is equal to that task, nor do I propose to enter upon such a discussion, but, at all events, we know at what we ought to aim. We know we must aim, if we are to be in a thoroughly satisfactory position, at a home defence force capable of dealing with 70,000 invaders landing on our shores after the expeditionary force has left these islands. I really do not think I have anything more to say on this subject, except to thank the Prime Minister for his statement. He has clearly laid down two things which have to be done, two ideals. He has clearly laid down the condition which the Fleet, in so far as it is a defensive force of these shores—I am not talking of commerce, but of the Fleet as the first line of defence against invasion—has to satisfy, and he has clearly laid down the condition which the Home Defence Army has to satisfy. Whether either the Fleet or the Home Defence Army is up to the Standard which the Prime Minister and the committee of Defence thing necessary is, of course, a matter of controversy, and in some aspects of it is a matter of acute controversy, but I do not think this is the time to raise it. On the contrary, I think, if this Committee is really satisfied with the statement which the Prime Minister has made, and if they agree with the reasons by which he has supported his conclusions, if they are prepared to accept the views he has laid before them, both as to the necessary strength of our Fleet for home defence, and as to the necessary strength of our home Army for home defence, then surely there will be an immense gain in clarity of thought, directness of action, and clearness as to the end we have to pursue, which must be of the most beneficial character in regard to our future discussions on military and naval affairs. There is one observation which has occurred to me, without making which I should not like to sit down, and it relates to and is suggested by an observation made by the Prime Minister in an earlier part of his speech. I have always hoped the Committee of Defence will more and more prove to be an instrument which will enable us to consult with the Colonies, and obtain from the Colonies advice invaluable for the defence of the Empire. It has this immense advantage. The Colonies are most jealous, and I think are rightly jealous, of anything in the nature of interference by this country with forces they raise themselves and pay for themselves. They are, I think, rightly intolerant of anything which says, "You raise a force and you maintain a force, and we will tell you what to do with it." I do not think the Colonies would ever tolerate that view, and therefore if there had been any suggestion that the

Colonies should be asked to consult with us, or take part in deliberations in a body which has executive or administrative functions, I think they would have felt great difficulty in accepting the invitation. The Defence Committee has no executive functions, and it has no authority to give a single order to a single company of soldiers, or to the smallest ship which carries His Majesty's flag. In the deliberations of such a body as that it seems to me there is great hope we shall receive Colonial assistance, and, if we do, that Colonial assistance will, I think, be invaluable. My right hon. Friend (Mr. A. Lyttelton) reminds me that a beginning has been made. **When my right hon. Friend and I were in office we had the assistance of representatives of the Colonies. I hope that will grow,** and I was extremely gratified to learn from something which fell from the Prime Minister that even in the immediate future he has some anticipation that some such growth will be made. If that is so, I congratulate the Government and the self-governing Colonies. I am sure we are on the right path in these matters. There is no use in hurrying these discussions or pressing them unduly forward, or in asking people to do that which they are not as yet prepared to do, but let us by all means encourage, by every method in our control, the full, friendly, free and unfettered discussion of Imperial problems. That cannot but conduce both to the unity of the Empire and to its strength.

Sir CHARLES W. DILKE There is one matter which the Prime Minister introduced which is so detached that I should like to get it out of the way before I come to the two speeches to which we have just listened. He referred to the historical section he has created. **"The Official History of the South African War," on which £32,000 was wasted,** compared with **"The Times' History of the War,"** shows how right the Prime Minister was in what he said. There is, however, a technical difficulty raised to which I desire to direct attention. The Public Accounts Committee went into the question of the waste of money over these histories, and they asked the War Office who was going to account for the Vote in the present case, and who in the future was going to deal with it. The War Office said "It is no child of ours. It has ceased to be our child." "Whose child is it?" asked the Public Accounts Committee. The reply was **"The Defence Committee."** **"Will they come before us?"** the Accounts Committee asked, and the War Office replied, "We do not know who can represent them." The Public Accounts Committee then left the matter, saying it was impossible that responsibility should be shuffled off in this way. I just call the attention of the right hon. Gentleman to this, because, if there is to be a historical section dealing with literary work at the Defence Committee, and also one at the War Office, which at one time was highly ambitious of spending a great deal of money, and not doing exactly the work meant, undoubtedly the Public Accounts Committee ought to be supported in a desire for a clear explanation. I should like now to deal with the speeches to which we have just listened. I will reserve till the end the question of the **constitutional composition of the Defence Committee,** and I will come straight to the matter with which the speech of the Leader of the Opposition was entirely concerned. In describing the official Members who are permanent Members of the Committee, the Prime Minister stated that there were also **two Members who were not official, Lord Esher and Sir Arthur Wilson.** We ought to have some explanation as to the **nature of the Committee in future,** and as to the effect of those appointments. I pass now to the most important matter which was raised and which affects the whole character of the military and naval situation of this country, the whole of our national strategy and the relative cost of the Services. We were prepared by the Debates on the Army this year and by the speeches of the Secretary of State for War for the announcement with regard to the 70,000 men invasion. As the Leader of the Opposition put it, it is an old friend. The Secretary for War based his Territorial Army of 300,000 men and 100,000 reserve upon this possibility of invasion by what he called "from 70,000 to 100,000 men," and this was said to be based upon a "re-examination" of the facts; that re-examination has resulted in the figure being once again brought down to 70,000 men, so that the re-examination has not affected the old condition of things.

Mr. BALFOUR I am afraid it has.

Sir C. W. DILKE You began by saying that this was a hypothesis altogether exceptional, and that you believed yourself such an invasion never would happen. I wish people to read the right hon. Gentleman's own words. I am satisfied with those words, and my case is not that it is an impossibility—the Leader of the Opposition and the Secretary for War have both said nothing is an impossibility—but that it is **not a probability;** it is not one of the things on which we in this country are called upon to spend money and energy, and you cannot do so until you have decided

the numbers and size of your expeditionary force. I am criticising one central fact in connection with this expeditionary force. You must spend more money on the fleet and the preparation of the striking force to send across the sea. If you are to have 400,000 men to deal with this most unlikely and most improbable bare possibility of invasion by 70,000 men, and if you also need a striking army of 170,000 men to send across the seas, plus nine divisions in India, and a striking force in Egypt, our money will not run to it if you are to do the thing efficiently. It is more important you should have your Navy and your striking Army efficient than it is for you to provide against this hypothesis of a bare possibility of invasion by 70,000 men.

The questions of mobilisation and transport of foreign armies were gone into very carefully by the Committee. The whole problem as to the rapidity with which an invading force could be put on board ship and transported, with all the necessary armaments, was discussed. A material point was how long it would take to cross the sea. Much depends on their not being able to do it in a single night, and, so far as looking towards Germany, instead of towards France, as formerly, goes, the change is one entirely in our favour. Everything, I confess, seems to me to point in a positive way to a reduction of any danger of that kind. The pressure is growing for an increase of our Fleet, but this other particular pressure does not seem to have been aggravated by any changes which have occurred in recent years; it has been rather diminished by them. With reference to the portion of the Prime Minister's speech calling for an ample margin of safety as regards home defence, I should be very glad to see such an ample margin in all forms—in regard to our Navy, to the striking force, and to the Home Defence Army. The least material of the three is the third. It is admitted that the pressure coming upon us with regard to naval armaments—whose fault it may be I will not stay to discuss here—that pressure is one to meet which we shall have to strain every nerve. There must be an ample margin of safety, so far as the Navy is concerned. This point is quite supreme in our minds at the present moment, even to the extent of indicating the possibility of the Territorial Army being organised not less efficiently, but on a smaller scale than is suggested by the consideration devoted to the question by the Secretary of State for War. Has this re-examination of the bare possibility of invasion by 70,000 men to-day increased the gravity as regards home defence? The Leader of the Opposition has used words to-day which almost suggest a recantation which he was asked by the Prime Minister to make. I do not think there is really any difference between the Leaders of the two parties on this matter of invasion. The Leader of the Opposition did accept the invitation of the Prime Minister in language far too modest, but which, still, some people might take to be a sort of recantation. Will the right hon. Gentleman allow me to state his argument once again? He has happily repeated it with immense force. At the Press Conference this year he repeated the old argument in an improved form, and he suggested that if naval and military experts exercised common-sense their real opinion would be that this bare possibility of invasion was not one of the most real dangers against which we have to guard. Is there any reason for suggesting that the danger has increased? Is there not a risk that it will mean an insufficient margin of safety for the Fleet, because you will have to devote to the Territorial Army the money which would provide that margin? At the Press Conference the Secretary for War followed the Leader of the Opposition in saying that naval defence, even in the case of invasion, was cheaper. He destroyed the armada which it is assumed, by an extraordinary concatenation of circumstances, had escaped the Fleet, and sunk and destroyed the transports by means of destroyers and submarines, and other arrangements for coast defence. At last he had to admit that it does not necessarily follow because the battle fleet could not keep out a force of that kind, that coastal defence could not do it more cheaply and more effectively than the Territorial Army. How is the Territorial Army going to be organised to sleep in peace by the side of quick-firing guns with which, in the hypothesis which has been laid down, we are to guard against this invasion? There have been admirable Papers prepared to show the possibility of invasion by Lord Lovat and by Professor Mackinder, although the prize essays called for in several directions have generally proved the opposite case. In all the assumptions they not only put our Fleet out of sight, but they always assumed that in time of peace you cannot provide sufficient garrisons for working the quick-firing guns. The case put by the Prime Minister was that in profound peace you cannot have a thorough defence of our coasts, and that the naval defence is the only kind of defence which is likely to be permanently effective.

I do not want to bore the Committee with suggestions as to foreign complications and changes; they are not as dangerous as some people think them. They might in some circumstances affect our strategy, but I should like to point out this one fact: that India has today been brought into this strategic calculation by both speakers, without any suggestion of the particular kind of organisation for which a striking army is required for India, under the hypothesis laid down by the Leader of the Opposition four years ago, to face dangers which have distinctly diminished and not increased during the years that have intervened. Even those who believe, though there are not many, in the possibility of Russia reaching India must admit that the **danger has diminished if it has not disappeared**. I mention that, in addition to the other circumstances which have improved our position as regards military matters in the last four years, and it is a happy position that it should be so, because our position in regard to the Navy in the next four years will be such as will show we must cease to divert our energy from the fleet to things which are of less importance. I will say nothing more about the recruiting for the Territorial Army, except that I do think that it did divert national attention a little too much from the main object. You cannot keep people equally excited about your Naval position and about the Territorial Army, and a large amount of heat is needed to keep up steam in regard to both objects. The arrangements for the Territorial are no doubt admirable, when upon a small scale, but when applied to an army of 300,000 or 400,000 they lead, I think, to a diversion from the main object which in any scheme of defence everyone agrees to, including the head of the War Office and the War Office officials themselves. The Navy stands first, even having regard to India and any other complication you may name. I think that the Leader of the Opposition will not dispute the general view that I have given of his opinions on this point. He stands by the speech which he made at the Press Conference, which is on my side and the side of all of us, including the Prime Minister's side and that of the Secretary of State for War sometimes, though sometimes the right hon. Gentleman talks about his 46 divisions and his armies, in which he mixes up together his 400,000 Territorial and his expeditionary force in such a way as to make us think that the British fleet has disappeared as a factor in the defence of the country. I think the Committee agrees very much more with what are the real views of the Leaders of the two parties—the real views of statesmen on Naval, as compared with Territorial defence, and leaving that aside I will go to the other matter that I previously mentioned. Our whole position and our whole strategy is dominated by the fact, which I should not like to put myself, but which I will quote from Professor Mackinder, that whether we like it or not, according to him, our unwitting crime is our geographical position.

The First Lord of the Admiralty told us the other day that he was going to build one new ship which was to be a big cruiser and which was to be a commerce defender. I do not quite believe in commerce destroying in the ordinary sense of the words, but I do understand what might be suggested to our minds by that consideration. It is also brought before us by a certain proposal which has been made by New Zealand, and as to the disposition of the money they offer to this country or its equivalent in "Dreadnoughts." I will not state the difficulty which is obviously before the Conference at the present time, about whether the Colonial "Dreadnoughts" ought to be added to the provision which is thought sufficient here. Circumstances, financial and other, will come before that Conference, and I will not attempt to deal with the matters which are being debated by it, but I think one might say that even those of us who do not believe in **commerce destruction**, do think that this may be a valuable asset to this country at the moment when we are straining every nerve to hold our own in naval preparation in the next three or four years in Home waters. It may be a valuable asset to this country, much more valuable than a Territorial Army, that we should have a squadron of cruisers or fast battleships in the Pacific or any portion of the globe where we have enormous interests which we have been obliged to abandon, so far as war protection goes, and we, according to the proverb, have to put the fire out which is burning next door before we think of more distant objects. I do not think this great battleship cruiser would be wanted in New Zealand at all and as the Leader of the Opposition said to the delegates, the Armageddon in which they are concerned will be fought in the North Sea, and they will not be sharers in it by having any torpedo boats in their waters. Of course it may be a valuable contribution to the British Navy in the long run, the creation of fast battleships for the Pacific service. I merely throw that out in passing, as a suggestion, which has arisen from a remark which was dropped the other day by the First Lord of the Admiralty.

I come to the composition of the Committee of Defence, which is another matter upon which I said I should like to say one word—a word which I think ought to be said, and which I will say as briefly and as mildly as I can. Debates took place here on the composition of the Committee, and its benefit, from a high Cabinet point of view, has been proved more abundantly than was the case before, in the last few months, by the publication of books about previous wars. There have been a great many—Mr. John Fortescue's book about the great war, the exposure of the strategy of Pitt and the Cabinet at that time, Lord Panmure's volumes and other volumes about the Crimean war, showing the enormous ignorance with which this country has directed war. It is a shocking revelation, but it shows the kind of danger which in a non-military country you have to guard against. We learn from them how war must be conducted to be conducted with success. This matter was argued on the Motion of the present Under-Secretary for the Colonies (Colonel Seely), who wished to reshape the Committee of Defence of the Cabinet. Although I was in the councils of my right hon. Friend, yet I did not agree with him, but I agreed with the view of the Leader of the Opposition and of the then Prime Minister. That view has been inconsistent, I think, with what has been said today, and inconsistent in respect of its official and Cabinet nature. I do not know that Sir Arthur Wilson has expressed any strong opinion of his own, but Lord Esher, in his letters and speeches, has dealt with matters differentiating his views from the aspect of the question we are discussing. These utterances have been free from official responsibility, and therefore violate the position taken up by Sir H. Campbell-Bannerman and the Leader of the Opposition. We were told in that Debate that however perfect any man might be as a member of such a Committee, he would not be a good member unless he were subject to Cabinet rule and official responsibility. But there are two views. My hon. Friend the Under-Secretary for the Colonies took one view, and I, with the House, took the other view, and that seems to be violated by this permanent appointment.

The PRIME MINISTER It was not permanent.

Sir C. W. DILKE Yes, it was permanent.

The PRIME MINISTER My right hon. Friend will allow me to say that there is no such thing as a permanent appointment.

Sir C. W. DILKE But it was so stated, it was an official announcement. Of course, the Government are not themselves responsible, because it occurred at the change of Government.

The PRIME MINISTER I am not speaking of the word; I am speaking of the fact.

Sir C. W. DILKE But I am speaking of the word, because "permanent" was the word used.

The PRIME MINISTER dissented.

Sir C. W. DILKE It was used. It was the phrase of Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman when this matter was brought before the House, and when there was a great Debate upon the whole functions of the Committee. It was thought that the effect of the appointment of this Committee would be strongly in favour of economy, because the separate demands of the Army and Navy would be brought together by the Committee, and the requirements of a single Department it was thought would be much less than those of two Departments. I think we all hold that view, but the force of a separate Department was very great, and I do not think anyone can read the Estimates and hear the defence of the Territorial Army, for example, without seeing that the Committee has failed to secure that real hold over the relative expenditure on the two services which the Foreign Secretary and others expected from it. In that Debate, which turned upon consolidating what were called these two separate demands, this question of the non-official Members was raised, and on 2nd August, 1906, the Under-Secretary for the Colonies asked that non-official experts should be appointed to the Committee, and the reasons which were given against that by Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman and the Leader of the Opposition exactly agreed, and Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman, in the strongest terms, expressed his abhorrence of the idea of adding Peers who did not belong to the party in power and were without

official responsibility. On Monday, 4th December, two days' after the last Cabinet was held, when the late Government went out, there occurred this appointment of Lord Esher, with the word "permanent," and from that time he has attended every meeting of the Committee. The first announcement appeared on the day of the last Cabinet, and it appeared in these words:—"Mr. Balfour has requested Lord Esher and Sir John French to hold themselves at the disposition of the Committee of Imperial Defence." The official announcement on the Monday contained the word "permanent" as regards the membership of these two gentlemen. That is why I insisted that the word "permanent" was used.

The PRIME MINISTER It was in Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman's power to completely reconstitute the Committee, and he deliberately continued Lord Esher's appointment.

Sir C. W. DILKE The House ought to clearly understand which doctrine is to prevail. The two doctrines were clearly stated, and as, I understand, Sir John French is an official, and was an official at the time he was appointed. Lord Esher is to be outside the Cabinet Committee composed of supporters of the party in power or of officials. This is directly in accordance with the proposals made by the hon. Member for Liverpool but counter to the doctrine which prevailed on that occasion according to the teaching of the two right hon. Gentlemen. The non-responsibility of these members allows them to take part in controversy where it is dangerous, I think, for a non-official member to take part—it is so easily misunderstood. Of course, there was the letter which was written last year which caused a great deal of feeling abroad because of the importance which was attached to that particular membership. That and the citation by Lord Esher in the case of the Fisher policy undoubtedly contributed to the ill-feeling which has led to the exaggeration of the strain of naval preparation under which we labour at the present moment.

I should like to say a word on the effect on continuity of policy of the decision which seems to have been taken outside the decisions of the Cabinet Committee, and which ought to have been referred to it, but which was not. In the last Parliament there was a great difference of opinion on both sides of the House with regard to the wisdom of keeping a large force of regular troops in South Africa. An immense amount of money—£3,655,000—was spent for hutting troops there and for other experiments; but finally, after a great deal of obvious struggling, the idea was abandoned and even publicly denounced in this House as being a great and costly mistake, and we reversed the whole policy and the idea of bringing the troops home as soon as possible was entertained. This year the Secretary of State in his speech on the Army Estimates reopened that question and assumed that the House agreed that South Africa was a good place to keep reserves for India. That is the exact opposite of what the House agreed in the last Parliament, and we have had no further Debate on the matter. If that matter, which is a most grave matter of policy, and which undoubtedly affects our Estimates and our whole strategy in the next few years, has not been brought before the Defence Committee of the Cabinet it ought to have been, because it goes outside the real functions of the War Office as a separate Department. It was debated over and over and over again in the last Parliament, and, although the arguments were well balanced, yet on the whole the view against keeping them in South Africa prevailed. I have often asked the House to consider how these attempts to be strong at all points affect the total cost of our military and naval preparations. We tax India for military purposes on the highest scale, and we make her pay even more, I think, than is her absolutely fair share. At all events, we make her pay a share which varies from double to five or six times what we make a Crown Colony pay. The total cost of our Services must be constantly held in view and especially as concerns this margin of safety, more important in the case of the Fleet than in the case either of the exaggeration or inflation of the expeditionary force or of the Territorial Army.

Mr. C. BELLAIRS The extremely instructive Debate to which we have just listened will confirm everyone in the value of having this discussion. The Leader of the Opposition, when it was proposed by the right hon. Baronet (Sir C. W. Dilke) in 1903 to have these Debates, strongly deprecated it. No one can doubt that no harm whatever can follow from a discussion such as we have had to-day, whereas the country generally and the Committee have received a great deal of instruction. The right hon. Baronet drew attention to one point on which I, too, feel very strongly, that is the presence of Lord Esher on the Committee. He bracketed him at one moment with Sir Arthur Wilson, but the

justification for bringing Sir Arthur Wilson in is that he is a great naval expert, and it is open to the Prime Minister to summon whom he likes, and really the decisions ultimately rest with the six or seven Cabinet Ministers who are on the Defence Committee. But the position of Lord Esher is entirely different. The Prime Minister referred to him as an expert, but I do not know on what question he is an expert. **He certainly is not an expert on naval or military questions.** He can only be an expert on the very questions on which the Cabinet themselves are experts, and when we choose a Cabinet we choose the best men we have in the country, and **they do not need the advice of Lord Esher on these questions.** But Sir Arthur Wilson has to advise the Defence Committee on this very question into which the Prime Minister has been carrying out a laborious investigation, the defence of the country. The Prime Minister also referred to a class of men whom **I have never discovered,** whom he called the **extremists of the Blue Water school** who do not see the need of a Home Army at all. **I have never been able to find any writing by any naval or military officer nor anyone else stating that fact,** though there was a Debate years ago in this House in which Sir Wililam Harcourt stated that we did not need an Army at all. I am sure Sir William Harcourt will not be trotted out as an exponent of the Blue Water School.

I wish to reinforce the contention of my right hon. Friend (Sir C. W. Dilke) with reference to what horse you are going to put your money on, the Territorial Army in its extreme form or the Navy. The Prime Minister has, of course, told us that 70,000 is really an outside figure. The naval experts do not believe in this figure of 70,000, but they adopt it on grounds of safety. I think the benefit of the doubt ought really to be given to the Navy, and the money should go to the Navy. The First Lord of the Admiralty, in answer to a question a few months ago, stated that the cost of a destroyer, allowing interest on first cost, allowing for replacement, allowing for cost of the crew, stores, repairs and any docking work to be done, was £17,500 per year. That is to say, if you could save on your home defence £1,750,000 and hand that money over to the Navy, you could build more than a hundred destroyers. That was the original figure given by the Admiralty, and it includes everything.

One thing struck me in listening to the Prime Minister's speech, and that was that he stated that the Committee has been very laboriously considering the standard of the Army for the defence of these islands for about a year past. We have got great value out of that in that we have a standard for the Home Defence Army, but I rather suspect that in the process of their labours they got **hypnotised by the idea of the defence of these islands,** and in that way it has led them somewhat to regulate their two-Power standard by the defence of these islands. I only throw that out as a suggestion. I know one can be hypnotised by considering one subject. It is often brought against me in this House that I am rather hypnotised on the question of the Navy. **The whole object of the Defence Committee is that the parts should not be considered until the whole has been surveyed.** The thing should be considered as a whole. It should not be the Army, Navy, or Finance alone, but the **Army plus Navy, plus finance;** and as regards England, it should be England plus the Empire. All the harm which has resulted in the past in the way of extraordinary expenditure has resulted from Committees which were given terms of limited reference, and which consequently brought in limited reports. We had a Royal Commission in Lord Palmerston's time with limited terms of reference. The Navy was ruled out, and we fortified the dockyards. We put up forts round Portsmouth, and I understand that the Secretary of State for War is now endeavouring to find a purchaser for the land. Then there was the policy of establishing coaling stations, in connection with which there was a great deal of extravagant expenditure. I was delighted to hear the Prime Minister state that the Defence Committee, which has done such splendid work, is going to take up the work of historical instruction. I am delighted to hear that the public are to get the benefit of that historical work, for I am sure it will be of great educational value, both to the general public and to the Members of this House. **We are too apt to forget that the British Army during the last 150 years has never fought in this country, but always oversea.**

Another thing which I have pointed out in the Navy Debates is that this country, when it has fought against relatively an equality in personnel and an equality in ability, has never won battles unless it had a preponderance of force. The last occasion on which this country fought an enemy equal in efficiency with ourselves was the **War of American Independence,** and in that campaign there was not a single battle which we won with a relatively inferior force. There was one occasion, and that was when the French, under Suffren, defeated a superior British force. But what I wish to

point out is that we shall not always win with a force equal to that of the enemy. May I point out also that all the wars which this country has conducted in the past were conducted by small Cabinets. Pitt's Cabinet consisted of ten or less. Then when we come to the Crimean War we find that it was fought when there was a Cabinet of 16, and it was not a brilliant success. The South African War was fought by a Cabinet of 20, and I do not think it was a brilliant success. The Cabinet, from the point of view of conducting matters in relation to Imperial defence, has become utterly unwieldy, and gradually all the functions in connection with the Army and Navy are passing from the Cabinet to the Defence Committee. I think, as time goes on, we will find that that Committee is the true Cabinet in regard to Imperial defence. Another point to which I desire to call attention is that we do really need some sort of inquiry in reference to the administration of the Admiralty and the War Office. The Secretary of State for War, in addressing the Conference in 1907, pointed to the work which the Esher Committee had done. He said:— "That scheme was adopted by the late Government, and has been carried on by the present Government. One broad feature is this, that our naval organisation has been the one with which we have been conspicuously successful in the history of this country, as distinguished from our military organisation, and therefore, as far as was possible, the naval organisation was taken as a type. But the broad feature which emerged with regard to military preparations was this—Count Moltke was able to organise victory for the Prussian and German armies in 1866 and again in 1870, because he and the general staff working under him were free to apply their minds wholly to war preparation. That he was able to do this was due to the fact that; the organisation and business administration of the Army in peace were kept entirely distinct from the service which consisted in the study of war problems and in the higher training of the staff and of the troops. That was the principle recommended by the Esher Committee, and it culminated in the provision of a brain for the Army in the shape of a General Staff. That General Staff we have been at work on for a long time past in endeavouring to get together." Four years ago all the talk was about the inefficiency of the Army administration. Now all the talk is about the inefficiency of the Navy administration. The Secretary of State for War is enjoying a quiet time, and I hope he will continue to do so. That cannot be said with regard to the Admiralty, and if hon. Members will examine what has taken place they will find that the Moltke of the Admiralty is considering questions relating to the designing and building of ships and a mass of details. In allowing him to do that we have gone in exactly the opposite direction to that of the Germans when Moltke organised a successful war. The Defence Committee should take cognisance of this fact. It is impossible for the Colonial representatives to respect the advice they get from the Government of this country if the Government one year give one piece of advice and another year give another piece of advice. The advice which Lord Selborne gave to the Colonial representatives in 1902 was dead against all forms of coast defence. He advocated the building of ships, holding that, if we were to be successful in war, it would be with battleships, cruisers and destroyers. But the advice which Lord Tweedmouth gave in 1907 was dead in favour of coast defence. He urged the building of submarines and torpedo boats. If the Defence Committee take that problem on hand they will, I believe, return to the original advice which Lord Selborne tendered, and which agrees with the conclusions of the Colonial Defence Committee, which was presented so far back as 1890.

Mr. W. W. ASHLEY In the first place, may I say that I strongly deprecate personal attacks being made on individual members of the Defence Committee. Surely it is entirely in the power of the Prime Minister to appoint whom he wishes to serve on the Defence Committee. If he thinks that outside of Government circles or the Members of this House gentlemen exist who, by their experience and abilities, are able to help the Defence Committee to carry on their deliberations, these gentlemen should not be ruled out because they are not Members of the political party in power, or Members of this House. I do not at all agree with the view of the hon. Member for King's Lynn (Mr. Bellairs) that the Prime Minister, or the Leader of the Opposition, is in any way to be censured for employing Lord Esher, or any other member of the Defence Committee. I do say that I think it would be more advisable and constitutional if a dummy Vote was put on the Estimates so that we in this House might be enabled to criticise the action of these gentlemen just in the same way as the action of others engaged in the public service is criticised. I understood from the lucid and excellent speech of the Prime Minister that the great work of the Defence Committee was to co-ordinate the work, ideas, and plans of different Government Departments, and chiefly those of the War Office and the Admiralty. But it seems to me that they have not been successful in one important point, and that is in co-ordinating the War Office and

the Admiralty as to the way in which they view the possibility of the invasion of this country. The Admiralty take up the attitude that no invasion of this country is possible. They rely entirely upon their ships to prevent it, and they think they could do so. The Secretary of State for War and the War Office take an absolutely opposite view, and they think that invasion is possible. On what do I base my contention that the view of the Admiralty is that invasion is not possible? They have, in the first place, destroyed the excellent submarine corps which the Engineers had for the defence of our ports. They have wholly or partially dismantled the forts protecting our great fortresses, and, what is even worse, they have permitted the War Office to allow all our so-called fortresses—Portsmouth, Chatham, Devonport, and other fortified towns in the United Kingdom—to fall into the condition of open towns. They have done the same thing in many places abroad. In fact, these so-called ports which are called fortresses, are absolutely open towns, and they are no more defended than Winchester, or any other county town in England.

It is absolutely clear, therefore, that the Admiralty consider that no invasion is possible. Otherwise they could not have allowed the dockyards, which are essential to the efficiency of the Fleet, to be in such a condition that they might be captured on a raid being made by an enemy in time of war. Take, for instance, Portsmouth. There some of the defences are being used as store-houses and barracks. The right hon. Gentleman last October admitted, in answer to a question, that the fixed defences had been removed, but he stated that after all it did not very much matter. The movable defences consisted of Howitzers, which the Territorials are supposed to use in the event of invasion. I wish to know whether the Government mean to defend our ports by means of Howitzers? Do you find that the French at Toulon or Cherbourg defend those places with a few Howitzers? Any hon. Member who goes there knows that they are fortified with the best modern guns, and that they are provided with modern fortifications. The German fortresses are protected in this way, and if you take the case, too, of poor Denmark you find the Government there have a large scheme of defence by fixed fortifications of the most modern kind. And yet our Admiralty, relying on the hypothesis that no invasion is possible, have allowed the War Office to remove all the defences from our great fortresses, leaving them open towns and unable to resist any attack from the land side. In the same direction has been the treatment going on at Gibraltar and Malta. There the garrisons have been reduced and the guns taken away. The infantry garrison has been reduced from three to two battalions. In Malta the Artillery has been reduced, and the infantry battalion was reduced so much that two years ago, when manoeuvres were carried out in Malta to see whether landing might be possible at the back of the island, it was proved that not only was landing possible but that there were not sufficient men left in Malta to defend the fortifications and to prevent Malta from being captured. Therefore I press my argument that obviously the Admiralty must think that no invasion of this country is possible, and that no landing of an enemy at such places as Malta is likely, or they would not have permitted the War Office to diminish the garrisons to such a serious extent. Then they must also imagine that our great trading ports are not open to any attack. Take the case of Bristol. I have here a letter addressed by the British Branch of the Navy League to the Committee of National Defence pointing out that there is absolutely no defence for the port of Bristol, where three millions sterling have been laid out on the new Royal Docks, which are in addition to the other docks, and they are quite unprotected, because the guns which were placed there owing to the petition by the citizens have now been removed. It seems a most extraordinary state of things that the Government should regard with perfect contentment the fact that the great port of Bristol is absolutely unprotected from invasion. Again it shows that the Admiralty must take the view that no defences are necessary, and that their ships would be able to protect this port from any attack by sea. What view does the War Office take? Obviously they do not agree with the Admiralty.

Mr. HALDANE All these things have been fully considered, and the action taken was on the best advice that could be got.

Mr. ASHLEY Then, very humbly, I must state my opinion, that the Committee of National Defence have not carried out their duties properly, because we must come to this conclusion: That the Admiralty do not believe that an invasion of this country is possible. The right hon. Gentleman obviously believes that an invasion or a serious raid is possible; because if he does not believe it, why does he propose to spend three and a half millions of money on having 300,000 Territorials in this country, who, by the terms of their engagement, are not allowed to serve outside the country? What

is the use of having these Territorials unless to guard against invasions? Nor does the War Office carry out this conclusion to its logical end, because if the War Office, as they must, as they have this force, imagine that invasion is possible, they would keep a force in this country which would be able at a moment's notice to deal with the enemy when he came. The right hon. Gentleman the Prime Minister said that there were other considerations, that practically 70,000 foreign troops might be landed, and that you would have a Territorial Force to meet them. What will these 70,000 foreign troops consist of? Will they consist of men who have been trained for 15 days in a year? No; they will consist of the very picked troops of men who had been trained for a minimum of two years. Yet the right hon. Gentleman, who must naturally suppose that an invasion is possible, proposes that these 70,000 men, with their minimum of two years' training, are to be met by 300,000 Territorials. But what number of Territorials will be free after garrisoning the various dockyards and all over the country and Ireland? By the time you have eliminated these men you will have very few more than 70,000 Territorials, with their training of 15 days in the year, to meet the 70,000 foreign troops with two years' service who may come here. If that is so, I hope that the advice of the right hon. Baronet the Member for the Forest of Dean (Sir Charles Dilke) will be carried out, and that we shall put our money on the Admiralty, so as to maintain a strong fleet which would prevent the possibility of these 70,000 foreign troops coming in who are so well trained and who will have to fight against men who, however brave and anxious to defend their country, cannot, owing to their training, be on an equality with these foreign troops.

We have had put forward by Lord Roberts, a man whose opinion on these matters is of more weight, and rightly so, than that of any other man living, a proposition that we should go in for compulsory service. I am not expressing any opinion as to whether that is right or not, but I have no doubt of this, that compulsory service, whatever the calculations of the National Service League may be, will cost a great deal of money. At the present moment we are spending some £60,000,000 a year upon our regular Navy and our regular Army, which, to my mind, are the two branches of the service which we must consider. First you must consider the Navy, then you must consider the regular Army, and then the Territorials. In the near future we shall have to spend a great deal more on our Navy, and at no distant time on the regular Army, owing to the undue parsimony of the present Government in cutting down the numbers by 20,000 men, land making it weaker than even before the South African War, in spite of the reserve built up by Lord Lansdowne and the late Mr. Arnold-Forster. We shall have to spend £70,000,000 instead of £60,000,000 on our Army and Navy. If Members consider that the people of this country are willing to increase the Estimate for Army and Navy to 70 millions, and to spend another 15 millions on Territorial Forces, if we can afford to do so, it will be a Council of perfection, which we shall all be in favour of; but the tendency of human nature is to rebel against all amounts of money spent on armies, and the only result of increasing the money spent on the Territorial will be that it will diminish the amount of money for the Regular Army and the Navy, and by diminishing the money spent on the Army and Navy you will diminish the efficiency of these two great Services.

Mr. H. P. BELLOC I rise to bring forward only one point that may seem to be a detail to Members of this House, but which I consider to be one of some importance, and which can only be brought forward, at any rate adequately, on this one day of the year and on this one Vote. It has been touched on in the speech which we have just heard, and just touched on only for one moment, in the speech made by the Hon. Member behind me (Mr. Bellairs). I refer to the fortifications of the land fronts of the naval bases of this country. It seems only a small point, a technical point, and one which experts would discuss better than a Member of a popular assembly. I want to try to show the House, or, at any rate, to convince the House from my own point of view, that the matter is of exceptional importance. In the first place, I ask the House to consider what any great Power does when it is fighting, and what the strategical problem is. You read in your books that he attempts to strike at the heart. That, as a metaphor, means nothing more than that the defences of this country lie in the Fleet. What an enemy attempts to do when he is striking, as the metaphor goes, at the heart of an opponent is to get at the vital organism of the defence and destroy it. Politicians have talked—I do not think any soldier has talked—of a raid on London. The idea is absurd. An enemy would have for his prime object, especially in the first stages of the war, the crippling, in some way or another, of the British Fleet; and unless the British Fleet were in some way or another crippled, although outlying portions of the Empire might be menaced and

might be lost, there would be no compulsion on this country to give way. If the Fleet were crippled, that compulsion would be felt within 24 hours. It would be felt by the simplest of all processes—the immediate rise in the price of food to famine prices. It is as an integral part of the Navy, as the most vital of all vital organisms of the Navy, that the base and a certain measure of land defences are of importance. In the first place I may say, for what my personal opinion is worth—but it is the opinion of the vast majority of those who have studied the subject—that an invasion is, I will not say impossible, because nothing is impossible in war, but so improbable that all those who are concerned in the defence of this land do well in putting it last among the possibilities of what an enemy might do to us. An invasion in force, an invasion such as have been in the past the invasions of Germany, France, Russia, or Italy means not only the transport of a great number of men and a vast amount of material, but also absolutely secure communication, and it means that to so obvious a degree, and it is so startlingly true even on land, that the greatest conquerors, if their communications during an invasion in force had been endangered, if only for a few days, would have had the whole success of their adventure imperilled.

Mr. BALFOUR Egypt.

Mr. H. BELLOC I should say that the invasion of Egypt hardly corresponds to the invasion of one Great Power by another. It was the invasion of an Eastern people, and I do not think that it can be done as between one great European Power and another. Another reason which makes me think that an invasion in force could not take place is that long before this invasion in force could be accomplished peace would have been made. Long before it would have been possible so to cripple the Navy as to maintain communication between the country being invaded and a large invading Power the pressure would have been put on the governing classes by the poor to compel peace. The price of food alone would do that. Though it is infinitely more likely, I do not believe, even in a raid by a large body of men, by a division of 10,000 men, but I do believe in the possibility, or the probability in our present condition, of a raid by a much smaller body of men, who may strike at the vital organism of the naval defence of our country. I ask the House to consider for a moment, technical as the matter is, and to some extent unfit for popular discussion, what a modern naval base is and why our naval bases at the present moment are in a sense so much more important, especially so much more important in the first days of the war, than they were, say, during the Napoleonic era. **With every step in advance in science, with the one exception of wireless telegraphy, bases are becoming more and more immediately and continuously essential to modern fleets.** In the first place, consider the rapid exhaustion of material under modern conditions of fighting. On land the problem with which all experts in tactics are most concerned just now is how to feed what we may call metaphorically the fighting line, the power in front, with sufficient material, so rapid is the exhaustion. The Navy must depend on the great depots at the naval bases. Secondly, there is the question of repairs. A modern fleet cannot keep the seas without being in touch with the naval bases for repairs, and a modern fleet, more than was the case in the past, depends for its efficiency on the co-operation of all its units. Any proportion of its units sent off for repairs must return as soon as possible to the battle line. Complete victory at sea is rare, and even in the case which occurred at the close of the Russo-Japanese War extensive repairs were necessary. It is essential to a modern fleet that repairs should be readily obtained, and they can only be got at our naval bases. A further point is the continued necessity of these things. A modern fleet must be in touch with its base to be an efficient fighting machine. In regard to fighting in the near future, it is upon our Home bases that all discussion would turn. One further argument in favour of Home defences. In the case of an attack the enemy would consider the point on which it would concentrate it, and would be certain to fall on one of the small number of points chosen. We may be absolutely certain that if there was a German invasion of French territory that there would have to be a siege of one of the four great fortresses; or, in the case of an invasion by the French of Italy, it would be absolutely necessary that the French should attempt to secure the highest passage of the Alps. The smaller the number of the points of objective the more certain is there to be concentration on one of them. In our case the four vital points of attack are Portsmouth, Plymouth, Rosyth, and Chatham, and we have to consider what an enemy would do. If war were declared between this country and a great Continental Power, it is unlikely, and, I would say, almost impossible, in the present balance of naval power, that there would be an attack by battleships against battleships. The very first thing a foreign Power would consider would

be how to get at some vital point, and undoubtedly they would decide, even with the great risk involved, to attack Portsmouth and the dockyards, probably by night, taking advantage of fog, or bad weather, in an endeavour to pierce one of these points. The hon. Gentleman opposite (Mr. Ashley) said our naval bases were practically open. They are not only "practically" open towns, they are actually open, and even with the smallest force, damage could be done. Land communication and railways could be destroyed, bridges blown up, and so forth. It would be easy to damage the vital parts of a naval base. One graving dock could be ruined in a few moments by the use of dynamite. That applies to all the complicated machinery of modern warfare.

But I do not mean to suggest that enormous expense should be incurred on strongholds. I see no reason for constructing in England such places as are seen at Spezzia, Toulon, or Cherbourg. We need fortifications on a smaller scale. No one fortifies to make a place impregnable. Napoleon's great maxim was "fortify to gain time." Every fortification is a draft on time, and is the introduction of the element of time in your favour. There can be no doubt, especially at the opening of a naval campaign, that we shall require that sense of security over very short periods of time, though I think it is extremely unwise to attempt to fortify English naval bases on the scale on which the great Continental bases are defended. Take the case of Rosyth. At the present moment it is proposed to defend that place with three batteries on the level of the water, which should be sufficient to prevent attack by destroyers or torpedo boats. But dominating these batteries is Mons Hill, which would be a suitable place for a landing. A small raiding party provided with artillery could capture Mons Hill, destroy the Forth Bridge, and disarrange the conduct of the port behind.

Portsmouth is ideally situated for defence by land. It is a peninsula cut off by Portsdown. With the present range of artillery, Portsdown could be wholly swept from one fort; nobody could live on it. We do not need have very large and expensive fortifications, we need one permanent work at Portsdown. With one, or at most, two, you could cover your base at Portsmouth, which is, I should imagine, a permanent work in the centre, or certainly two permanent works at either end of the ridge, would be sufficient. The arguments against this are the arguments of the Blue Water school, that if your Navy is sufficiently strong nothing else is needed. If anyone says that an overwhelming fleet would prevent an invasion in force, I will listen to him and I will agree. And if anyone says that a large raid is impossible, I will listen to him, and perhaps agree. But if anyone says that our supremacy would prevent a short raid at a vital point, then I do not think that anyone who has considered the matter could agree. Another argument is the argument of the Treasury: "Are we to be led into this expense? If we are to spend money let us spend it mainly on the Navy." That is a perfectly sound argument against fortification on a large scale. Fortification on a large scale of our naval bases at present would be folly. If we were to attempt a permanent and expensive fortification of our great commercial ports it would be wrong. We should have small single works—not a ring of fortifications—by which the means of approach to a base would be checked for three or four days. That would be worth our while, and is, I think, an absolute necessity. If technical details had received more attention in this House, this matter would long ago have been settled. To any man who knows the temper of this country, the type of Press which influences public opinion, and the way in which that public opinion veers round in moments of panic or excitement, one thing is certain, that if we are engaged in a European war we shall begin to fortify the land bases; and do it in a hurry, do it badly and far too expensively. I only plead that we should do it on a smaller scale and in time of peace.

Mr. ARTHUR LEE I feel very much in sympathy with the particular point which has been referred to by the hon. Member for Salford (Mr. Belloc), and also by my hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool (Mr. Ashley), and I think it is one which possibly during late years, at any rate, has been a good deal neglected. I wish to refer to a few rather more general considerations. May I say I think we listened this afternoon at the commencement of this discussion to what was incomparably the most important and the most interesting speech that has been delivered in this House during the present Session? It dealt with subjects which are absolutely vital not only to our safety here in these islands, but to the very existence of the Empire, and I cannot but think that it is a sad reflection on the House of Commons that that speech, and the speech which followed it, should have been listened to by, I believe, less than a quorum of Members. I do not think the right hon. Gentleman need suppose that the audience which he was addressing was by any means as

narrow as that. I am sure the statement which he made will be read with burning interest by British citizens in all parts, not only of this country, but of the Empire. The most interesting thing to me in his speech, and for which I should like to thank him, was the two very definite conclusions of the Defence Committee which he found able to announce to the House. Of course, I know that he dealt almost entirely with the question of Home defence—the defence of these islands. I have no doubt there is a good reason for that, because the larger question of the defence of the Empire is, to an extent, sub judice—that is to say, it is receiving the attention of a special conference and very rightly, I think, he did not anticipate in advance any decision which the Imperial Defence Committee may come to.

He did give us two main conclusions more definite than almost any which have ever been given publicly to the House of Commons, or the Country. The first was that the Defence Committee, had decided as to the business of the Admiralty and the War Office. The business of the Admiralty was, to use his actual words, "to ensure that we cannot possibly lose the command of the sea." He amplified that by saying that "we must have an ample margin of safety, and that it is not a case of a nicely calculated less or more." I need hardly say I entirely agree with that view. I think it is one which has been very largely expressed on this side of the House during the recent Debates. I do not want to go over the ground of the recent Debates, as we have already expressed our fears with regard to the actual situation. We are not satisfied that that standard which the right hon. Gentleman set up in that conclusion has, as a matter of fact, been worked up to by the Government. I do not propose to go into this more in detail now as we shall have another opportunity next week. Then he laid down as the function of the War Office that it was to have always here a force ready equipped, and sufficient to deal decisively with an invasion by not less than 70,000 men. There again I think there are a great many who have grave apprehensions as to whether the War Office have worked up to that standard which has been set before them by the Committee of Imperial Defence. I shall refer to that again, but I have no desire whatever to question the two main conclusions to which the Defence Committee has come, but what I do feel bound to question is whether the means provided to work up to those conclusions are as a matter of fact sufficient. I think the conclusions which the right hon. Gentleman announced would not cover quite the whole of the ground. At first his statement seemed to cover all the joints in our national armour. But I think there were certain contingencies which he did not specify, and which, as a matter of fact, are not provided for by any of the defensive forces which we have at the present time.

The key of our National defence, of our Home defence, appears to be, in the opinion of the Government, and in the opinion of the Defence Committee, that we must rely on forcing any invader coming to these islands to come in such a large force, 70,000 men or upwards, that it would be impossible for him to elude the Navy. That is a principle which was laid down before, I think, by my right hon. Friend at the time he presided over the Defence Committee, and the justification of that theory surely is that we must at all times have a Home Army which would be sufficient to force an invader either to come in this large force, or not to come at all. After all a better plan, and the best plan of all, seems to me not that we should force him to come in large numbers, but that we should have a sufficient Navy so that he would not have a chance of starting away from his own country, and that we should establish the command of the seas so certainly, and so beyond dispute that this question of a "forlorn hope," should really be beyond all possibility, but the Government appear to shrink from carrying out the conclusions of what I call the sane Blue Water school to the extent of making our command of the sea absolutely secure. They are providing only against certain contingencies which may or may not arise, contingencies which I venture to say are only likely to arise in the event of our command of the sea not being absolute.

For this function of protecting this country either against a small raid or against a forlorn hope of invasion they are relying upon land forces which consist of a comparatively small number of fully trained men of the regular Army, and a very much larger force which the right hon. Gentleman (Mr. Haldane) has created in the Territorial Army. He has always deemed, I mean the Secretary of State for War, that the position is safe, because whilst he admits the Territorial Army is not ready at the outbreak of hostilities, he thinks that being mobilised they will always have sufficient time in which to get trained before the regular Army is called upon to leave these shores, and that in the meantime if this bolt from the blue should come, and if there should be an attempt of any kind that the regular Army would be here, and

would be quite able to deal with any force of 70,000 men, or with anything of that kind suggested. It seems to me there is no provision being made for another contingency. Suppose, for example, that there was unhappily a repetition on a more serious scale of the state of affairs which existed in India in 1857, and that it became necessary to despatch very large reinforcements to that country. We might not be engaged in hostilities with any foreign foe, our relations might be apparently friendly all round, but if, as would be absolutely necessary, the Government decided to despatch the greater portion of our regular troops to reinforce the Army in India, then surely we should be in the position, in the event of a bolt from the blue, where there would be no time given to the Territorial Army, with a remnant of an Army left behind, to prepare for repelling, I do not say a small raid, to which we need not attach great importance, but one of those forlorn hope invasions which it has been suggested are possible. The point I am trying to make is this: that the Territorial Army of course will need time, and a great deal of time, before it is able to deal, with any possibility of success, however great its numbers, with an attack by an organised body of Continental troops. But the question of how much time can be given will not rest with us. It is the invader, it is the enemy, who is going to decide how much time the Territorial Army shall have. It is pretty certain that an invader who knows his business, if he gets his opportunity of our having had to send away our regular Army or having placed us in the position that we would have to decide to abandon India to its fate or denude these islands of their own trained defenders, if he got us in that position, then it is pretty certain the attempt against us would be made not late but soon, and before the Territorial Army could be made effective to repel it.

I do not wish to deal with the question of a raid, because it is comparatively unimportant. The Territorial Army might deal with a small raid, but it is quite clear that a small regular force could deal with it much better, and, therefore, other things being equal, and as there is only a certain amount of money available, I am inclined to agree with the right hon. Gentleman the Member for the Forest of Dean (Sir C. W. Dilke) that the money would be better spent upon forces which would be available not only for defensive purposes here in these islands, but for the still more effective defence of this country, which very often takes the form of offence in the event of war. After all, we have got to consider all eventualities. Our ultimate fear in the worst event is, I believe, not a raid or even a forlorn hope invasion of 70,000 men—against which, I believe, in any case, the most effective defence will not be the Territorial Army or any land forces, but our submarines and destroyer flotilla, the moral effect of which will be almost overwhelming against a fleet of transport—but the worst we can possibly have to fear is not necessarily the serious invasion of these islands, but what would be equally effective—a blockade of these islands in the event of our Navy ceasing to retain in an effective sense the command of the sea. I cannot help feeling that during the last few years the situation has very much changed—I do not wish to say anything too contentious—in the relative weakening of our strength compared with that of our rivals. That has materially altered the situation, and, in addition to that, there is the point raised by the hon. Member for Salford and the hon. Member for Blackpool with regard to the dismantling not merely on the land side, but on the sea side of many of our coast defences, which has thrown an additional strain upon the Navy, has given it additional defensive duties to perform, to which its strength is not, in my belief, adequate, if we are to maintain the complete and undisputed control of the sea. Therefore, I come to this. I am in general agreement with the right hon. Baronet (Sir Charles Dilke) when he says that we cannot pay for everything. We cannot have an overwhelming Navy, an overwhelming Army, endless fortifications, and all the rest of it. There must be some limit to the amount we spend, and if we have to sacrifice anything, I agree with him that the least important thing—I am not taking into account questions of national hygiene or anything of that sort—from the strictly military standpoint of national defence is the Territorial Army. Therefore, I am one of those who, if only a limited amount of money is available, would prefer to see less of it spent upon those forces which are very unlikely to be of serious use, and more of it spent not only on the Navy but on the Regular Army. I am not one of those Blue Water extremists who think that all that is necessary is a Navy. Obviously, if ever a war is to be brought to an effective conclusion, we must have an Army strong enough to proceed from these islands and make effective the position which the Navy has won. Speaking for myself, I can only repeat what I think I said on the first occasion when the Imperial Defence Committee was discussed, in 1903, that whilst I fully realise that the Defence Committee cannot be in any sense an executive body—it cannot have any functions of that kind; it cannot even be what the Prime Minister called a Court of Appeal—I had

hoped it might occupy to a certain extent the position of assessor. The situation in the past—I am not sure about the present—has been that the real assessor has been to a large extent the Treasury or the Chancellor of the Exchequer. It has been the business of the First Lord of the Admiralty, and the Secretary of State for War to press the claims of their respective Departments as hard as they can upon the Treasury. If the Secretary of State for War happens to be stronger than the First Lord of the Admiralty, the chances are that his Service gets better attention. To stop that there is required some form of allocation of funds by a body upon which the Admiralty, the War Office, and all the Government Departments concerned are represented. I had hoped that one of the functions of the Defence Committee, if there is only a certain amount available for national defence, might be to allocate between the War Office and the Admiralty how that money should be spent. I do not know whether that is done. I think it is an extension of the functions of the Defence Committee which is not altogether unreasonable, and which may possibly be developed in the future.

There are two questions on minor matters which I should like to put to the President of the Defence Committee. He referred to the inquiry which has been concluded into the question of the strategic value of the Forth and Clyde Canal. I do not know whether it is possible for him to give in a few words the conclusion which has been arrived at. It is a question which has excited a great deal of interest in the country, and in which personally I have been very much interested; and I think it would be of great value if we could know, in the most approximate manner, what general conclusions the Defence Committee have come to with regard to it. There is one other point which, I think, comes within the purview of the Defence Committee. Can the Government see their way to give any information as to the position of the new command or new post which was created quite recently, namely, the High Commissionership of the Mediterranean? That post has just been vacated, I understand, and it has been suggested in the Press—

The PRIME MINISTER That has nothing to do with the Defence Committee. It is a War Office matter.

Mr. ARTHUR LEE Then I will put a question to the War Office about it another time. I hope that in the few remarks I have made I have not dealt in any captious or meticulous spirit with the points raised by the Prime Minister. Many of us on this side feel grave apprehension as to the sufficiency of the means which the Government have provided to carry out the conclusions of the Defence Committee; but on this occasion I will only thank the Prime Minister most sincerely for his intensely interesting statement, a statement which, as are all his statements, was extraordinarily lucid, and one which, I am sure, will be read with the utmost possible interest as being of vital importance not only to the people of these islands, but to the whole of the British Empire.

The SECRETARY of STATE for WAR (Mr. Haldane). The hon. and gallant Member (Mr. A. Lee) began his speech by referring to the statement of the Prime Minister in very generous terms. While concurring entirely in his estimate of the value of my right hon. Friend's statement, I wish to add that, in my view, another speech made was equally important. I refer to the speech of the Leader of the Opposition, in which he expressed his complete concurrence with the broad standard which has been arrived at as the result of the investigations of the Defence Committee. Taking the statement of the Prime Minister, together with the concurrence of the Leader of the Opposition, who spoke with all the authority of his great position in the country, I feel that the Debate of to-day marks a stage further in the evolution of naval and military policy. If we had had 25 years ago these standards laid down and concurred in by both parties, forming a foundation of continuity, we should have saved more millions of public money than it is easy to reckon at this moment—money which has been thrown away simply for want of these standards. Nobody who is not responsible for a great Department like that over which it is my fortune to preside can realise how we are paralysed, how impossible it is to work out even the most important things for want of agreement on broad principles. No one who is not in that position can realise what a complete lack of those principles there has been in days gone by, and what an extravagance and waste of money has resulted from the constant attempt to define subordinate policies without having the chief policy in the first instance laid down. The statement of my right hon. Friend affords a clear standard which enables us to work out on a basis, which I believe is a basis of continuity, a whole set of problems which, without that standard, could not have been approached. Therefore, I think I am not exaggerating when I describe, fully appreciative

as I am of the speech of the Prime Minister, the speech of the Leader of the Opposition as of not less importance on this occasion.

The hon. and gallant Member (Mr. A. Lee), accepting the standard, expressed a doubt as to whether the Government have worked up to it. I put aside for the moment naval questions, and come to what he said about the Territorial Force. It is necessary to be very clear upon these things. If you rely upon your Regular troops or upon your Navy alone for home defence, you tend to do two things—largely to keep the Navy to these shores, which is a bad thing, and, what is still worse, to concentrate the public mind upon home defence, and home defence only. We have always succeeded in this country by taking a wider view than that. It has often been said that our frontier is the enemy's coastline. It is not a ring round these islands, and what we require are the command of the seas and the free use of the expeditionary force, which has been our most potent weapon of defence in days gone by; and the function of the Territorial Army is and can only be to leave us as free as it is possible to be for the use of our primary weapon of defence. The hon. and gallant Member threw some doubt upon the utility of the Territorial Army for repelling an invading force of 70,000 men. He put the case of the expeditionary force having gone abroad, say to India, and after it had been there for some little time, complications arising, and our coasts being left undefended from a military point of view. But if the hon. and gallant Member will bear in mind the terms of the Territorial and Reserve Forces Act, he will find that, unless the Government of the day depart from the plan laid down in that Act, the Territorial Force will be mobilised the very first day. Therefore, to take the first case, if the regular troops have left these shores, it would have taken some little time to transport them all, and the Territorial Force would be in good military training. Whether it is six months that are required to put them in proper training after mobilisation, or whether it is something less, does not matter. Assume that it is six months. The point is that the Territorial Force, under the scheme of the Act, is mobilised from the very first mobilisation of the Regulars. Whenever a Proclamation calling out the Regulars is issued, the Territorial Force is mobilised at the same time, and embodied for its war training. Therefore the war training begins at a very early stage. That disposes of the case of the Regular Force being away.

Mr. ARTHUR LEE I was assuming a case where there was a sudden emergency, say in India, where it became necessary to send with the utmost speed the whole of the available Regular troops to India, and that immediately, if you like treacherously, a bolt from the blue came in the shape of an attack upon us by a foreign Power. In these circumstances the period which might elapse from the mobilisation of the Territorial Army would be extremely short, and would not be long enough to give them any training at all.

Mr. HALDANE I was taking only the first case. I think the hon. Member is proceeding to what I was going to put as the second case. I will come to that at once. Suppose you sent your expeditionary force with the utmost despatch to India. Before you could transport the 168,000 troops some considerable time would elapse, and behind those there are It at the present time in this country some 330,000 Regulars.

Mr. ASHLEY Including the Reserves?

Mr. HALDANE Certainly. On mobilisation you call up about 330,000 Regulars, including Reserves.

Mr. BALFOUR I think there is a little confusion. The right hon. Gentleman said that after the 168,000 troops had been sent abroad we should still have 330,000.

Mr. HALDANE I meant just the other way. You have got, when you call out your Reserves, somewhere about 330,000 Regulars, out of whom, say, 168,000 are in training. Moreover, it would take a very considerable time for a force of that kind to leave these shores for India. But take another case. Suppose a bolt came from the blue—well, I need not discuss that at any length, because we have got the whole of the Regular troops at home. They are quite competent to deal with that situation. Take yet another case—a case in which the Regulars had begun to go, and, say, got to the extent of half through before the attempt at invasion took place. How would you stand then? First of all, you have taken every precaution. You would have taken care that during the period of maturing the Territorial Forces you would

have kept sufficient of the Regulars at Home. You would have dealt with the defence of the coast by the Fleet in such a fashion as to give yourself time for maturing. There are three cases of "the bolt from the blue." The case the hon. and gallant Member particularly alluded to is the intermediate case. That was the case in which your Regulars had begun to go and your Territorials had not had time to perhaps complete their war training. That is a case which must be and can be dealt with according to the circumstances. You can deal with it in two ways. You would see to it that your Fleet particularly attended to your coast I for the short time that it was necessary in order to put the Territorial Forces into proper condition, and, in the second place, you would see to it that your Regular troops had not all left these shores before the Territorial Forces were in a condition to be of some use. I have laid down over and over again that you cannot rely upon the Territorials, man to man, against the I troops whom they might be led against unless they have had at least six months' embodied training. But I have never said, and nobody who knows the use of that force has said, that you would not make some employment of the Territorials from the very first stage. Suppose that a force had landed in this country. It would find I itself surrounded by the enormous mass of troops which 12 divisions of Territorials at war strength would constitute. Any force is compelled to make detachments for observation, and a comparatively small force of Regulars would be sufficient to deal with what remains. I, for my part, believe that it would be found that the Territorial Forces would improve day by day and week by week, and would be found sufficient to cope with the emergency in conjunction with the Regulars which any prudent Administration would take care to keep at home for the purpose. I agree with the hon. and gallant gentleman that it is that intermediate case that wants the closest watching. I have only to say further that these problems have been most closely worked out, and with the utmost care by the General Staff in accordance with standards now laid down. The hon. and gallant Member spoke of another point. He referred to the dismantling of fortifications. The decisions in respect to this matter were discussed by the Sub-Committee, and submitted for review to the Committee of Imperial Defence. It is on the decisions stamped and approved by the Committee of Imperial Defence that the work has been done. I do not agree with the hon. and gallant Gentleman when he passes on to the matter of economies in the Territorial Forces. The Territorials are not an expensive force. If the hon. and gallant Gentleman had appeared in Lancashire the other day, I think he would have been impressed with the efficiency which, even in a short time, the Territorial divisions have reached. I wish the hon. Member for Blackpool (Mr. Ashley) would look at the Territorial Forces which come from his Division.

Mr. ASHLEY I never said anything against the Territorial Forces. I think they do their work extremely well. But I do say, and I adhere to it, that it is impossible to train a man in a fortnight or three weeks to be equal to a man who has been trained for three years.

Mr. HALDANE The hon. Member proposed to get rid of the Territorial Forces, because, if you are not going to spend money on them, you will do so.

Sir C. W. DILKE You are spending on too large a scale.

Mr. HALDANE My right hon. Friend seems to think that the Territorial Forces ought to have nothing spent on them. The hon. and gallant Gentleman asked a question about the Forth and Clyde Canal, as to what conclusion had been come to with regard to it. The expenditure necessary to make this canal of any use would be enormously out of proportion to the value to be got from it. That is the conclusion come to by the most distinguished Admiralty experts who have investigated the matter.

Mr. A. LEE May I ask the right hon. Gentleman before he has that point whether the conclusion was come to solely on financial grounds; assuming that the cost of constructing the canal might be borne—as I think it might be—by the commercial interests concerned; or was it come to from a strategical standpoint?

Mr. HALDANE There was no prospect of those commercially interested paying more than would provide for its upkeep. They were not in any way near providing for interest and capital. The conclusion was clear, when the

Admiralty experts came to inspect the matter, that the money would be enormously better spent in other directions. My right hon. Friend the Member for the Forest of Dean (Sir C. W. Dilke) travelled in some other regions. He spoke of the constitution of committee of Imperial Defence, and he took exception, not on personal grounds, but on what I may call technical grounds, to the presence of Lord Esher—

Sir C. W. DILKE On official grounds—on grounds previously stated.

Mr. HALDANE Well, I think one of the most useful things the right hon. Gentleman did in connection with the Defence Committee after it was constituted was to make Lord Esher a member. He has been a most valuable member, and has worked at this matter with extraordinary devotion and knowledge. He qualified himself by the work he did in reorganising the War Office, and I do not at all agree either with my right hon. Friend or with my hon. Friend the Member for King's Lynn (Mr. Bellairs) in thinking that the appointment was not one of the very best that could have been made in the circumstances.

Sir C. W. DILKE That was not my point. You took the Under-Secretary's view of the Committee, and the opposite was taken by everybody else.

Mr. HALDANE I think you ought to look at what gives you the best result, and at what is the interest of the nation. My view is that the country owes a great deal to Lord Esher for the work he has done in this and other directions. Then my right hon. Friend referred to the troops in South Africa. I think that may be said to **concern the Committee of Imperial Defence**. These troops have been reduced very much lately. I think we have as good a distribution of troops as we could get, and I should be very sorry to see that distribution altered, just as we have succeeded in getting rid of sources of unnecessary expenditure which arose from bad organisation. I am sure these troops are regarded as of great value by the statesmen of South Africa who are here at the present time. I should be very very sorry to disturb the arrangements, at all events until affairs in South Africa have got into a settled position. Other points were raised by the right hon. Gentleman. He referred to the number of troops which we keep, and said that the amount of provision we made was a provision in which we spend too much upon Army matters and too little upon the Navy, and that it would be better to spend much more largely upon the Navy than we do at the present time. My right hon. Friend did not indicate in the slightest degree any principle which was to regulate the relations of the two in the reform which he proposed, nor am I able to discover from his speeches any indication of what is in his mind. The Navy is of very little use without an Army, except for the purpose of home defence. And my right hon. Friend seemed to me to lead back to the old vicious idea that we have nothing—

Sir C. W. DILKE I never speak on the subject, and never did, without saying exactly the opposite—that we must have a small, highly efficient, highly trained, and rapidly mobilised oversea force.

Mr. HALDANE I do not clearly understand what the right hon. Gentleman means by his criticism. At any rate, generalities do not solve these things. The sum of the whole matter seems to be that if you take the speeches of private Members today you will find that almost everybody has said something different from everybody else. One plank to which they cling in the middle of all this is that we have a body which enables us to come to some sort of scientific and settled conclusions about these matters. Just for that reason I think this Debate has illustrated the value of that Committee of Defence to which such tribute has been paid on both sides of the House.

Mr. GEORGE RENWICK I wish to say how much I admire the efforts of the right hon. Gentleman in connection with the Territorial Forces. I certainly hope he will be successful in the great work he is doing. I should like to call the attention of the Defence Committee to the defenceless state of the North-East Coast of England, and especially the Tyne. We are greatly exercised at the present time owing to having the river in so defenceless a state. Part of it is absolutely in a defenceless state, although there are several arsenals and several warship engine building works situated along its front. We cannot understand why Portsmouth and other naval dockyards should be so heavily fortified while private arsenals of almost similar value are left practically in an entirely defenceless state upon the

Tyne. I hope that the right hon. Gentleman will convey to the Defence Committee of the Cabinet the importance of considering the defences of the North-East Coast, and it will try to improve them. All the important works on the North-East Coast are open to attack from cruisers or torpedoes coming up within a quarter or half a mile from the shore. That shows the importance of having some sort of fortification to guard against, I will not say invasion, for I do not for a moment fear, no one in our district fears, invasion, but to guard against a raid, and not only a raid by land troops upon the shore, but a raid from cruisers or destroyers. We have a certain number of fortifications there armed with 7-in. guns, but we cannot imagine how 7-in. guns in a fortification can cope with 12-in. guns on battleships, and we ought to have similar guns in the fortification. I hope the Defence Committee will pay some attention to the defence of this part of the coast. If they, will make inquiry into the matter they will come to the conclusion that the present defences are thoroughly inadequate for the defence of such important portions of the coast.

Mr. ROWLAND HUNT The hon. Member for Salford (Mr. Belloc) who spoke upon the other side of the House, said no soldier suggested that a raid upon London was possible. I might remind the Committee that the great blunt soldier who has just now addressed the House told us at Bristol that the first thing an enemy would do would be to try and get into London and so conquer us rapidly and easily, and I certainly think that is the first thing an enemy would do. The Prime Minister told us that as long as we keep up our unassailable supremacy of the sea that invasion was impossible. We probably all agree about that, but I do not think that anybody can say that some new invention or sudden attack might not, at all events, deprive us of the command of the sea for several days. When the last Government was in power we had considerably more than the two-Power standard of naval strength, but it was only a few days ago that we were actually discussing the question as to whether in two or three years' time we should have a one-Power standard as compared with one great nation. Germany alone has got more ocean-going torpedo destroyers in the North Sea than we have. There is not much two-Power standard about that. The same is the case with fast scouting cruisers. The minimum amount of these auxiliary ships laid down as absolutely necessary by Lord Charles Beresford have not been provided—

The CHAIRMAN The hon. Member is not allowed to discuss upon this Vote matters which ought to be discussed on the Navy Estimates.

Mr. HUNT I thought this Vote opened up a pretty wide question. Are we not allowed to discuss the "Dreadnought"? Perhaps I may say that the four extra "Dreadnoughts" are not to be laid down in April, and, therefore, they cannot possibly be ready in March, 1912. There never has been any great ship except the one "Dreadnought," and under special circumstances that was completed within two years. Therefore the Government's intimation that they are going to have these ships by March, 1912, cannot be relied on.

The CHAIRMAN This is really not in order. The hon. Member is now dealing with matter which is purely a matter for discussion on the Naval Estimates.

Mr. HUNT I am very sorry. I thought this Vote opened up the whole question of defence. I will not go further with the matter. I may, perhaps, say that the defences of this country, both from the naval and military point of view, seem very unsatisfactory, and it is seriously to be hoped that the Defence Committee will inquire into these matters and try to improve them.

Resolution to be reported upon Monday (2nd August); Committee to sit again upon Monday.

WIKIPEDIA

[Founding of MI5, MI6 on Jul. 29, 1909, six days after the founding of the Empire Press Union following the Imperial Press Conference, 1909]

Committee of Imperial Defence

The **Committee of Imperial Defence** was an important *ad hoc* part of the Government of the United Kingdom and the British Empire from just after the Second Boer War until the start of the Second World War. It was responsible for research, and some co-ordination, on issues of military strategy.

Typically, a temporary sub-committee would be set up to investigate and report at length on a specific topic. A large number of such sub-committees were engendered over the decades, on topics such as foreign espionage (a committee report in 1909 led to the founding of MI5 and MI6), food rationing, and aerial defence. It is possible to argue that the Committee of Imperial Defence was an important step in the development of national security coordination in the UK, and to see the current National Security Council as one of its descendants.^[1]

Contents

History

See also

External links

References

Further reading

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<https://api.parliament.uk/historic-hansard/commons/1909/jul/29/committee-of-imperial-defence>]

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History

The committee was established in 1904 by Arthur Balfour, then British Prime Minister, following the recommendations of the Elgin Committee, chaired by Lord Elgin.^[2] It was intended as an advisory committee for the Prime Minister, one that would be small and flexible; it replaced the Cabinet's 'weak and informal' Defence Committee (set up in 1902), which had usually only met during periods of crisis.^[1]

The original concept was to create a strategic vision defining the future roles of the two military services, the Royal Navy and the British Army, after the military reductions in the wake of the Boer War. However, no arrangements were made for it to formally pass on its conclusions to those with the ability to translate them into actions. This lack soon became obvious enough that a Secretariat was appointed, under Sir George Clarke. However, far from simply acting as a communicator, Clarke expected actually to make policy and see it implemented. With the fall of the Balfour Government in 1906, and with the military services determined to control their own futures, Clarke's plans fell through, and with no support from the incoming Prime Minister, he resigned in 1907.

A small Secretariat became permanent and provided communication between members outside of Committee meetings, and with other civil servants.

Under the guidance of Maurice Hankey, the Committee slowly gained in importance. Hankey was appointed Naval Assistant Secretary to the Committee in 1908, and became Secretary to the Committee in 1912; he would hold that position for the next twenty-six years.

By 1914, the Committee had begun to act as a defence planning agency for the whole British Empire, consequently providing advice to the Dominions on occasion. It continued to perform such a role into the 1920s. It was effectively a peacetime defence planning system, one which only provided advice; formal authority remained with Ministers and service chiefs, which helped ensure the Committee's acceptability to the existing bureaucracy.

Chaired by the Prime Minister, members were usually cabinet ministers, the heads of the military services, and key civil servants; Prime Ministers from Dominion countries were *de facto* members of the Committee in peacetime as well.

The Committee became the Defence Committee in 1947.^[1]

See also

- Imperial War Cabinet
- Joint Intelligence Committee (United Kingdom), a sub-committee of the CID
- National Security Council (United Kingdom)

External links

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EMPIRE PRESS UNION

A PERMANENT BUREAU

(FROM OUR OWN CORRESPONDENT.)

LONDON, July 23.

The result of the post-conference deliberations of the press delegates is the formation of "The Empire Press Union" as a company limited by guarantee. The objects of the company are to promote the interests of the newspaper press throughout the Empire, the holding of conferences, and the improvement of news exchange.

Any person, firm, or company publishing a daily paper or such other newspaper as may be nominated by the committee of any section of the union shall be eligible for election as a member. The subscription, meanwhile, is fixed at £5 per annum, with an entrance fee of £5 for all papers joining after June 1, 1910.

Members may nominate as associates any person engaged or interested in the press of the Empire.

The union will be managed by the president, from six to 20 elected members, and the body of deputy members. The latter shall be nominated by groups of oversea papers to represent them in London.

To begin with, the council shall consist of:—Lord Burnham, Lord Northcliffe, Mr C. Arthur Pearson, Sir John Arnot, Mr Moberley Bell, Mr Robert Donald, Mr John R. Findlay, Mr Kennedy Jones, the Hon. Harry Lawson, Mr C. D. Long, Mr Ernest Parke, Sir George Riddell, Mr C. P. Scott, and Mr J. A. Spender. Lord Burnham is first president, and Mr Pearson first chairman.

The annual general meeting will be held in July of each year, at such time and place as the union may decide at an annual meeting, subject to alteration of date and place as may be made by the council if it thinks it desirable.

The New Zealand members of the Press Conference who were present at the final meeting held to-day, to settle the memorandum and articles of association, were Mr

G. Fenwick and Mr Gresley Lukin

EMPIRE PRESS UNION

OTAGO DAILY TIMES, ISSUE
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Imperial Press Conference.



HC Deb [12 May 1909](#) vol 4 c1816

Mr. HART-DAVIES asked the Prime Minister whether the members of the Imperial Press Conference will be entertained in England at the public expense; whether he can state what authority was responsible for the selection of the representatives of the Colonial and Indian Press; and whether the Government is satisfied that all shades of political and economic opinion are represented by the delegates?

The PRIME MINISTER His Majesty's Government propose to invite the delegates to the Imperial Press Conference to be their guests at a dinner next month, but no part of the expenses incident to the Conference will be paid out of the public funds. I understand that the arrangements for the Conference have been carried out by a representative committee of British journalists and newspaper proprietors, and I have no reason to suppose—though I should add that the matter is one which does not come within the cognisance of the Government—that the various shades of political and economic opinion will not be represented by the delegates.