THE CONDUCT
OF THE
WAR BY SEA.

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SPEECH

DELIVERED BY

THE RT. HON. WINSTON CHURCHILL,

First Lord of the Admiralty,

ON THE 15th FEBRUARY, 1915.

SUPPLY—NAVY ESTIMATES, 1915-16.

Mr. Churchill's Statement.

Order for Committee read.

The FIRST LORD of the ADMIRALTY (Mr. Churchill): After the outbreak of war my Noble Friend Lord Kitchener, the Secretary of State for War, had to create an Army eight or ten times as large as any previously maintained or even contemplated in this country, and the War Office has been engaged in vast processes of expansion, improvisation and development entirely without parallel in military experience. Thanks, however, to the generous provision made so readily for the last five years by the House of Commons for the Royal Navy, no such difficulties or labours have confronted the Admiralty. On the declaration of war we were able to count upon a Fleet of sufficient superiority for all our needs with a good margin for safety in vital matters, fully mobilised, placed in its war stations, supplied and equipped with every requirement down to the smallest detail that could be foreseen, with reserves of ammunition and torpedoes up to and above the regular standard, with ample supplies of fuel and oil, with adequate reserves of stores of all kinds, with complete systems of transport and supply, with full numbers of trained officers and men of all ratings, with a large surplus of reserved and trained men, with adequate establishments for training new men, with an immense programme of new construction rapidly maturing to reinforce the Fleet and replace casualties, and with a prearranged system for accelerating that new construction which has been found to yield satisfactory and even surprising results.

I would draw the attention of the House in illustration to only three particular points. First of all, ammunition. If hon. Members will run their eye along the series of figures for this Vote, in the last five or six years, and particularly during the latter years, they will see an enormous increase in the Vote. In time of peace one gets little credit for such expenditure, but in time of war we thank God it has been made. Then, Sir, oil. Most pessimistic prophesies were made as to the supply of oil, but no difficulty has been found in practice in that regard. The estimates which we had formed of the quantity of oil to be consumed by the Fleet in war proved to be
much larger than our actual consumption. On the other hand, there has been no difficulty whatever in buying practically any quantity of oil. No single oil ship has been interfered with on passage to this country. The price of oil to-day is substantially below what it was when I last addressed the House on this topic. Indeed we have found it possible to do what we all along wished to do, but hesitated to decide upon, on account of all the gloomy prophesies and views which were entertained—we have found it possible to convert the "Royal Sovereign" to a completely oil fuel basis, so that this ship equally with the "Queen Elizabeth" will enjoy the great advantages of liquid fuel for war purposes.

Then as to manning. No more widespread delusion existed than that although we might build ships we could never find men to man them. In some quarters of this country the idea was fostered that when mobilisation took place ships could not be sent fully manned to sea; but when mobilisation did take place we were able to man, as I told the House we should be able to, every ship in the Navy fit to send to sea. We were able to man a number of old ships which we did not intend to send to sea, but which, after being repaired and refitted, were found to have the possibility of usefulness in them. We were able to man in addition powerful new vessels building for foreign nations for which no provision had been made. We were able to man an enormous number—several score—of armed merchantmen which had been taken up and have played an important part in our arrangements for the control of traffic and trade. We were able to provide all the men that were necessary for the Royal Naval Air Service which never existed three years ago, which is already making a name for itself, and which has become a considerable and formidable body. We were able to keep our training schools full to the very brim so as to prepare a continual supply of drafts for the new vessels which are coming on in such great numbers, and over and above that we were able, without injury to any of these important interests, to supply the nucleus of instructors and trained men to form the cadres of the battalions of the Royal Naval Division which have now reached a respectable total and which have developed an efficiency which enables them to be counted on immediately as a factor in the defence of this country, and very soon as an element in the forces which we can use overseas.

We have never been a military nation, though now we are going to take a hand in that. We have always relied for our safety on naval power, and in that respect it is not true to say we entered on this War unprepared. On the contrary, the German Army was not more ready for an offensive war on a gigantic scale than was the British Fleet for national defence. The credit for this is due to the House, which, irrespective of party interests, has always by overwhelming, and in later years unchallengeable majorities, supported the Government and the Minister in every demand made for naval defence. Indeed, such disputes as we have had from time to time have only been concerned with the margin of superiority, and have turned on comparatively small points respecting them. For instance, we have
discussed at enormous length what percentages of "Dreadnought" superiority would be available in particular months in future years, and we have argued whether the "Lord Nelsons" should be counted as "Dreadnoughts" or not. The House of Commons as a whole has a right to claim the Navy as its child and as the unchanging object of its care and solicitude; and now after six months of war, with new dangers and new difficulties coming into view, we have every right to feel content with the results of our labour.

Since November, when I last had an opportunity of speaking to the House on naval matters, two considerable events have happened—the victory off the Falkland Islands, and the recent successful cruiser action near the Dogger Bank. Both of these events are satisfactory in themselves, but still more are they satisfactory in their consequences and significance, and I shall venture to enlarge upon them and hang the thread of my argument upon them. The victory off the Falklands terminated the first phase of the Naval War by effecting a decisive clearance of the German flag from the oceans of the world. The blocking in of the enemy's merchantmen at the very outset and the consequent frustration of his whole plans for the destruction of our commerce, the reduction of his base at Tsing-tau, the expulsion of his ships from the China Sea by Japan, the hunting down of the "Kouisberg" and the "Emden," the latter by an Australian cruiser, were steps along the path to the goal finally reached when Admiral von Spee's powerful squadron, having been unsuccessfully though gallantly engaged by Admiral Cradock off Coronel, was brought to action and destroyed on 8th December by Sir Doveton Sturdee. Only two small German cruisers and two armed merchantmen remain at large of all their formidable preparations for the attack on our trade routes, and these vessels are at present in hiding. During the last three months—that is to say, since Parliament rose—on the average about 8,000 British vessels have been continuously on the sea, passing to and fro on their lawful occasions. There have been 4,465 arrivals at and 3,600 sailings from the ports of the United Kingdom. Only nineteen vessels have been sunk by the enemy, and only four of these vessels have been sunk by above-water craft. That is a very remarkable result to have been achieved after only a few months of war. I am sure, if we had been told before the War that such a result would be so soon achieved, and that our losses would be so small, we should not have believed it for a moment. I am quite sure, if the Noble Lord whom I see in his place (Lord Charles Beresford), who has always felt, and quite legitimately, anxiety for the trade routes and the great difficulty of defending them—if he had been offered six months ago such a prospect, he would have said it is too good to be true.

Certainly the great sailors of the past, men of the Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars, would have been astounded. During those two great wars, which began in 1793 and ended, after a brief interval, in 1814, 10,871 British merchant ships were captured or sunk by the enemy. Even after the decisive battle of Trafalgar, when we had the undisputed command of the sea so far as
it can be tactically and strategically attained, the loss of British ships went on at a rate of over 500 ships a year. In 1806, 519 ships were sunk or captured—that is, the year after Trafalgar; in 1807, 559; in 1808, 469; in 1809, 571; and in 1810, 619. Our total losses on the high seas in the first six months of the War, including all ships other than trawlers engaged in mine-sweeping—including all ships, including losses by mines and vessels scuttled by submarines—our losses in the whole of that period are only sixty-three. Of course, we must always be on the lookout for another attempt by the enemy to harass the trade routes. Although the oceans offer rather a bleak prospect to the German cruisers, and the experience of their consorts is not encouraging, the Admiralty must be fully prepared for that possibility, and we shall be able to meet any new efforts with advantages and resources incomparably superior to those which were at our disposal at the beginning of the War. The truth is that steam and telegraphs have enormously increased, as compared with sailing days, the thoroughness and efficiency of superior sea power. Coaling, communications, and supplies are vital and constant needs, and once the upper hand has been lost they become operations of almost insuperable difficulty to the weaker navy. Credit is due to our outlying squadrons and to the Admiralty organisation by which they have been directed. It must never be forgotten that the situation on every sea, even the most remote, is dominated and decided by the influence of Sir John Jellicoe’s Fleet—lost to view amid the northern mists, preserved by patience and seamanship in all its strength and efficiency, silent, unsleeping, and, as yet, unchallenged.

The command of the sea which we have thus enjoyed has not only enabled our trade to be carried on practically without interruption or serious disturbance, but we have been able to move freely about the world very large numbers of troops. I am going to give the House a figure which has no military significance because so many uncertain factors are comprised within the total, but which is an absolutely definite figure so far as the work of the Admiralty Transport Department is concerned. We have now moved by sea, at home and abroad, including wounded brought back from the front, including Belgian wounded, including Belgian and French troops, moved here and there as circumstances required, often at the shortest possible notice, with constant changes of plan, across oceans threatened by the enemy’s cruisers and across channels haunted by submarines, to and from India and Egypt, from Australia, New Zealand, Canada, China, South Africa, from every fortress and Possession under the Crown, approximately 1,000,000 men without, up to the present, any accident or loss of life.

We are at war with the second Naval Power in the world. When complaints are made that we have taken too many transports or armed too many auxiliary cruisers, or made use of too many colliers or supply ships, I must mention that fact. The statement that the Admiralty have on charter, approximately, about one-fifth of the British Mercantile Marine tonnage is correct. With that we discharge two duties, both of importance at the
present time; first, the supply, fuelling, and replenishing with ammunition of the Fleets; second, the transport of reinforcements and supply for the Army in the Field, including the return of wounded. It must be remembered in regard to the Fleet that we have no dockyard or naval port at our backs, and that the bases we are using during the War have no facilities for coaling from the shore. We are not like the Germans, living on a great naval port at Wilhelmshaven, on which £15,000,000 or £16,000,000 has been spent. Rosyth is not finished, and will not be available for some time. Everything, therefore, required to keep the Fleet in being—supplies, stores, and, above all, fuel—has to be not only carried but kept afloat in ships. What are called the "afloat reserves"—the great mobile reserves of fuel and stores maintained at the various bases used by the Fleet—are those which are fixed by the War Staff and approved by the Board of Admiralty after consultation with the Commander-in-Chief. When those amounts have been fixed the Transport Department have no choice but to supply them. It is necessary that there should be sufficient colliers to enable all the Fleet units at a particular base to coal simultaneously with a maximum rapidity twice over within a short interval, and extensive naval movements at high speed may at any moment necessitate this being put to the test. After two such coaling there must still be sufficient coal available for unforeseen contingencies, including delays in bringing further supplies through storm or foggy weather, or hostile operations leading to the closing of particular areas of water, or through the temporary suspension of coaling in South Wales, through damage to docks, railways, bridges, pits or other local causes.

We cannot possibly run any risk of having the Fleet rendered immobile. We must make assurance doubly sure. The life of the State depends upon it and it follows, having always to be ready for a great emergency, with all the Fleet steaming at once continuously for days together—having always to be ready for that, it follows that during periods of normal Fleet movements the reserves of coal are often and necessarily turned over slowly, and colliers may in consequence remain at the bases for considerable periods. That is our system. The fact, therefore, that particular vessels are noticed by shipowners to be kept waiting about for long periods is no sign of mismanagement or incapacity on the part of the Admiralty, but it is an indispensable precaution and method without which the Fleet could not act in a time of emergency. The position at every home coaling base, and of every ship, is telegraphed to the Admiralty nightly, and a tabulated statement is issued the same night. This statement is issued as the basis for a comprehensive daily criticism, with a view to securing the highest possible economy compatible with and subject to the vital exigencies of war. So much for the Fleet and its supply and its coaling.

With regard to the Army, it should be remembered that we are supplying across the sea, in the teeth of the enemy's opposition, an Army almost as large as the Grand Army of Napoleon, only vastly more complex in organisation and equipment. We are also preparing other Armies still larger in number. I do not know on what day or at what hour the Secretary of State for War will ask
the Admiralty to move 20,000 or it may be 40,000 men. It may be at very short notice. He does not know, until we tell him, how we shall move them, by what route or to what ports. Plans are frequently changed on purpose at the very last moment; it is imperative for the safety of our soldiers and the reinforcement of our Armies and the conduct of the War. We have at the present moment a powerful and flexible machinery which can move whole Armies with celerity wherever it is desired in a manner never before contemplated or dreamt of, and I warn the House most solemnly against allowing grounds of commercial advantage or financial economy to place any hampering restriction or impediment upon these most difficult and momentous operations. Careful and prudent administration does not stop at the outbreak of war. Everything in our power will be done to enforce it and avoid extravagance. We shall therefore welcome the advice of business men on points where they can help us. Gradually, as we get more and more control of the situation, higher economy in some respects may be possible, but military and naval requirements must be paramount, rough and ready although their demands often are, and they must be served fully at the cost of all other considerations. I am afraid that I cannot hold out any hope of any immediate reduction in the tonnage required by the Admiralty.

I have said that the strain in the early months of the War has been greatly diminished now by the abatement of distant convoy work and by the clearance of the enemy’s flag from the seas and oceans. There were times when, for instance, the great Australian convoy of sixty ships was crossing the Indian Ocean, or the great Canadian convoy of forty ships, with its protecting squadrons, was crossing the Atlantic, or when the regular flow of large Indian convoys of forty and fifty ships sailing in company was at its height, both ways when there were half a dozen minor expeditions being carried by the Navy, guarded and landed at different points and supplied after landing; when there was a powerful German cruiser squadron still at large in the Pacific or the Atlantic, which had to be watched for and waited for in superior force in six or seven different parts of the world at once, and when, all the time, within a few hours’ steam of our shores there was concentrated a hostile fleet which many have argued in former times was little inferior to our own; and when there was hardly a Regular soldier left at home and before the Territorial Force and the New Armies had attained their present high efficiency and power—there were times when our naval resources, considerable as they are, were drawn out to their utmost limit, and when we had to use old battleships to give strength to cruiser squadrons, even at the cost of their speed, and when we had to face and to accept risks with which we did not trouble the public, and which no one would willingly seek an opportunity to share. But the victory at the Falkland Islands swept all these difficulties out of existence. It set free a large force of cruisers and battleships for all purposes; it opened the way to other operations of great interest; it enabled a much stricter control and more constant outlook to be maintained in Home waters, and it almost entirely freed the outer
seas of danger. That was a memorable event, the relief and advantage of which will only be fully appreciated by those who have full knowledge of all that has taken place, and will only be fully appreciated by those who not only knew, but felt, what was going forward.

Now, I come to the battle cruiser action on the Dogger Bank. That action was not fought out, because the enemy, after abandoning their wounded consort, the "Blücher," made good their escape into water infested by their submarines and mines. But this combat between the finest ships in both navies is of immense significance and value in the light which it throws upon rival systems of design and armament, and upon relative gunnery efficiency. It is the first test we have ever had, and, without depending too much upon it, I think it is at once important and encouraging. First of all it vindicates, so far as it goes, the theories of design, and particularly of big gun armament, always identified with Lord Fisher. The range of the British guns was found to exceed that of the German. Although the German shell is a most formidable instrument of destruction, the bursting, smashing power of the heavier British projectile is decidedly greater, and—this is the great thing—our shooting is at least as good as theirs. The Navy, while always working very hard—no one except themselves knows how hard they have worked in these years—have credited the Germans with a sort of super-efficiency in gunnery, and we have always been prepared for some surprises in their system of control and accuracy of fire. But there is a feeling, after the combat of 24th January, that perhaps our naval officers were too diffident in regard to their own professional skill in gunnery. Then the guns. While the Germans were building 11-inch guns we built 12-inch and 13½-inch guns. Before they advanced to the 12-inch gun we had large numbers of ships armed with the 13-5. It was said by the opposite school of naval force that a smaller gun fires faster and has a higher velocity, and therefore the greater destructive power—and Krupp is the master gunmaker of the world—and it was very right and proper to take such a possibility into consideration. Everything that we have learnt, however, so far shows that we need not at all doubt the wisdom of our policy or the excellence of our material. The 13-5-inch gun is unequalled by any weapon yet brought on the scene. Now we have the 15-inch gun, with which the five "Queen Elizabeths" and the five "Royal Sovereigns" are all armed, coming into line, and this gun in quality equals the 13-5-inch gun, and is vastly more powerful and destructive.

There is another remarkable feature of this action to which I should like to draw the attention of the House. I mean the steaming of our ships. All the vessels engaged in this action exceeded all their previous records without exception. I wonder if the House and the public appreciate what that means. Here is a squadron of the Fleet which does not live in harbour, but is far away from its dockyards and which during six months of war has been constantly at sea. All of a sudden the greatest trial is demanded of their engines and they all excel all previous peace-time records. Can you conceive
a more remarkable proof of the excellence of British machinery, of the glorious industry of the engine-room branch, or of the admirable system of repairs and refits by which the Grand Fleet is maintained from month to month and can, if need be, be maintained from year to year, in a state of ceaseless vigilance without exhaustion. Take the case of the “Kent” at the Falklands. The “Kent” is an old vessel. She was launched thirteen years ago and has been running ever since. The “Kent” was designed to go $23\frac{1}{2}$ knots. The “Kent” had to catch a ship which went considerably over $24\frac{1}{2}$ knots. They put a pressure and a strain on the engines much greater than is allowed in time of peace, and they drove the “Kent” $25$ knots and caught the “Nuremberg” and sank her. It is my duty in this House to speak for the Navy, and the truth is that it is sound as a bell all through. I do not care where or how it may be tested; it will be found good and fit and keen and honest. It will be found to be the product of good management and organisation, of sound principle in design and strategy, of sterling workmen and faithful workmanship and careful clerks and accountants and skilful engineers, and painstaking officers and hardy tars. The great merit of Admiral Sir D. Beatty’s action is that it shows us and the world that there is at present no reason to assume that, ship for ship, gun for gun, and man for man, we cannot give a very good account of ourselves. It shows that a five to four in representative ships—because the quality of the ships on either side is a very fair representation of the relative qualities of the lines of battle—the Germans did not think it prudent to engage, that they accepted without doubt or hesitation their inferiority, that they thought only of flight just as our men thought only of pursuit, that they were wise in the view they took, and that if they had taken any other view they would, unquestionably, have been destroyed. That is the cruel fact, which no falsehood—and many have been issued—no endeavour to sink by official communiqués vessels they could not stay to sink in war, would have obscured.

When, if ever, the great Fleets draw out for general battle we shall hope to bring into the line a preponderance, not only in quality, but in numbers, which will not be five to four, but will be something considerably greater than that. Therefore, we may consider this extra margin as an additional insurance against unexpected losses by mine and submarine, such as may at any moment occur in the preliminaries of a great sea battle. It is for these important reasons of test and trial that we must regard this action of the Dogger Bank as an important and, I think I may say, satisfactory event. The losses of the Navy, although small compared with the sacrifices of the Army, have been heavy. We have lost, mainly by submarine, the lives of about 5,500 officers and men, and we have killed, mainly by gun fire, an equal number, which is, of course, a much larger proportion of the German forces engaged. We have also taken, in sea fighting, 82 officers and 934 men prisoners of war. No British naval prisoners of war have been taken in fighting at sea by the Germans. When they had the inclination they had not the
opportunity, and when they had the opportunity they had not
the inclination. For the loss of these precious British lives we
have lived through six months of this War safely and even
prosperously. We have established for the time being a com-
mand of the sea such as we had never expected, such as we have
never known, and our ancestors had never known at any other
period of our history.

Losses have to be incurred in war, and mistakes will certainly
be made from time to time. Our Navy keeps the sea; our ships
are in constant movement; valuable ships run risks every day.
The enemy is continually endeavouring to strike, and from time
to time accidents are inevitable. How do you suppose the battle-
cruiser squadron of Sir David Beatty was where it was when
the action of 24th January took place? How many times is it
supposed that the squadrons of the Grand Fleet, the cruiser and
battle squadrons, have been patrolling and steaming through the
North Sea, always exposed to risk by mine and torpedo before
at last they reaped their reward? If any mood or tendency of
public opinion arises, or is fostered by the newspapers, or given
countenance to in this House which makes too much of losses,
even if they are cruel losses, and even if it may be said that they
are in some respects avoidable losses, even then I say you will
have started on a path which, pressed to its logical conclusion,
would leave our Navy cowering in its harbours, instead of ruling
the seas. When I think of the great scale of our operations,
the enormous target we expose, the number of ships whose move-
ments have to be arranged for, of the novel conditions to which
I have referred, it is marvellous how few have been our losses,
and how great the care and vigilance exercised by the admirals
afloat and by the Admiralty Staff, and it appears to me, and it
will certainly be regarded by those who study this War in
history, as praiseworthy in the highest degree.

The tasks which lie before us are anxious and grave. We are,
it now appears to be, the object of a kind of warfare which has
never before been practised by a civilised State. The scuttling
and sinking at sight, without search or parley, of merchant
ships by submarine agency is a wholly novel and unprecedented
departure. It is a state of things which no one had ever con-
templated before this War, and which would have been univer-
sally reprobated and repudiated before the War. But it must
not be supposed because the attack is extraordinary that a good
defence and a good reply cannot be made. The statutes of
ancient Rome contain no provision for the punishment of parri-
cides, but when the first offender appeared it was found that satis-
factory arrangements could be made to deal with him. Losses
no doubt will be incurred—of that I give full warning—but
we believe that no vital injury can be done. If our traders
put to sea regularly and act in the spirit of the gallant captain
of the merchant ship "Laerites," whose well merited honour has
been made public this morning, and if they take the precautions
which are proper and legitimate, we expect that the losses will
be confined within manageable limits, even at the outset, when
the enemy must be expected to make his greatest effort to produce
an impression.
All losses can of course be covered by resort on the part of shipowners to the Government insurance scheme, the rates of which are now one-fifth of what they were at the outbreak of War. On the other hand, the reply which we shall make will not perhaps be wholly ineffective. Germany cannot be allowed to adopt a system of open piracy and murder, or what has always hitherto been called open piracy and murder on the high seas, while remaining herself protected by the bulwark of international instruments which she has utterly repudiated and defied, and which we, much to our detriment, have respected. There are good reasons for believing that the economic pressure which the Navy exerts is beginning to be felt in Germany. We have to some extent restricted their imports of useful commodities like copper, petrol, rubber, nickel, manganese, antimony, which are needed for the efficient production of war materials, and for carrying on modern war on a great scale. The tone of the German Chancellor's recent remarks, and the evidences of hatred and anger against this country which are so apparent in the German Press, encourage us to believe that this restriction is proving inconvenient. We shall, of course, redouble our efforts to make it so. So far, however, we have not attempted to stop imports of food. We have not prevented neutral ships from trading direct with German ports. We have allowed German exports in neutral ships to pass unchallenged. The time has come when the enjoyment of these immunities by a State which has, as a matter of deliberate policy, placed herself outside of all international obligations must be reconsidered. A further declaration on the part of the allied Governments will promptly be made which will have the effect for the first time of applying the full force of naval pressure to the enemy. I thank the House for the attention with which they have listened to me. The stresses and strains of this War are not imperceptible to those who are called on to bear a part in the responsibility for the direction of the tremendous and terrible events which are now taking place. They have a right to the generous and indulgent judgment and support of their fellow countrymen, and to the goodwill of the House of Commons. We cannot tell what lies before us, or how soon or in what way the next great developments of the struggle will declare themselves, or what the state of Europe and the world will be at its close. But this, I think, we can already say, as far as the British Navy is concerned, that although no doubt new dangers and perplexities will come upon us continuously and anxiety will make its abode in our brain, yet the danger and anxiety which now are advancing upon us will not be more serious or more embarrassing than those through which we have already successfully made our way. For during the months that are to come the British Navy and the sea power which it exerts will increasingly dominate the general situation, will be the main and unfailing reserve of the allied nations, will progressively paralyse the fighting energies of our antagonists, and will, if need be, even in default of all other favourable forces, ultimately by itself decide the issue of the War.
REPLY BY BRITISH FOREIGN OFFICE TO THE AMERICAN NOTE OF 16th FEBRUARY.

The communication made by the United States Ambassador in his note to Sir Edward Grey of the 16th instant has been carefully considered, and the following observations are offered in reply:

2. At the time when His Majesty’s Government gave directions for the seizure of the cargo of the steamship Wilhelmina as contraband they had before them the text of the decree made by the German Federal Council on January 25, under article 45 of which all grain and flour imported into Germany after January 31 was declared deliverable only to certain organizations under direct Government control or to municipal authorities. The vessel was bound for Hamburg, one of the Free Cities of the German Empire, the government of which is vested in the municipality. This was one of the reasons actuating His Majesty’s Government in deciding to bring the cargo of the Wilhelmina before the Prize Court.

3. Information has only now reached them that by a subsequent decree, dated February 6, the above provision in article 45 of the previous decree was repealed, it would appear for the express purpose of rendering difficult the anticipated proceedings against the Wilhelmina. The repeal was not known to His Majesty’s Government at the time of detention of the cargo, or, indeed, until now.

4. How far the ostensible exception of imported supplies from the general Government monopoly of all grain and flour set up by the German Government may affect the question of the contraband nature of the shipment seized is a matter which will most suitably be investigated by the Prize Court.

German Practices.

5. It is, however, necessary to state that the German decree is not the only ground on which the submission of the cargo of the Wilhelmina to a Prize Court is justified. The German Government have in public announcements claimed to treat practically every town or port on the English east coast as a fortified place and base of operations. On the strength of this contention they have subjected to bombardment the open towns of Yarmouth, Scarborough, and Whitby, among others. On the same ground, a number of neutral vessels sailing for English ports on the east coast with cargoes of goods on the German list of conditional contraband have been seized by German cruisers and brought before the German Prize Court. Again, the Dutch vessel Maria having sailed from California with a cargo of grain consigned to Dublin and Belfast, was sunk in September last by the German cruiser
Karlsruhe. This could only have been justified if, among other things, the cargo could have been proved to be destined for the British Government or armed forces and if a presumption to this effect has been established owing to Dublin or Belfast being considered a fortified place or a base for the armed forces.

6. The German Government cannot have it both ways. If they consider themselves justified in destroying by bombardment the lives and property of peaceful civil inhabitants of English open towns and watering-places, and in seizing and sinking ships and cargoes of conditional contraband on the way thither, on the ground that they were consigned to a fortified place or base, a fortiori his Majesty's Government must be at liberty to treat Hamburg, which is in part protected by the fortifications at the mouth of the Elbe, as a fortified town and a base of operations and supply for the purposes of article 34 of the Declaration of London. If the owners of the cargo of the Wilhelmina desire to question the validity in international law of the action taken by order of his Majesty's Government, they will have every opportunity of establishing their case in due course before the Prize Court, and his Majesty's Government would, in this connexion, recall the attention of the United States Government to the considerations put forward in Sir E. Grey's note to Mr. Page of the 10th instant as to the propriety of awaiting the result of Prize Court proceedings before diplomatic action is initiated. It will be remembered that they have from the outset given a definite assurance that the owners of the Wilhelmina, as well as the owners of her cargo, if found to be contraband, would be equitably indemnified.

No Interference with Food Cargoes.

7. There is one further observation to which his Majesty's Government think it right, and appropriate in the present connexion, to give expression. They have not, so far, declared foodstuffs to be absolute contraband. They have not interfered with any neutral vessels on account of their carrying foodstuffs, except on the basis of such foodstuffs being liable to capture if destined for the enemy forces or Governments. In so acting, they have been guided by the general principle, of late universally upheld by civilized nations, and observed in practice, that the civil populations of countries at war are not to be exposed to the treatment rightly reserved for combatants. This distinction has to all intents and purposes been swept away by the novel doctrines proclaimed and acted upon by the German Government.

8. It is unnecessary here to dwell upon the treatment that has been meted out to the civil population of Belgium, and those parts of France which are in German occupation. When Germany, long before any mines had been laid by British authorities, proceeded to sow mines upon the high seas, and, by this means, sunk a considerable number not only of British but also of neutral merchantmen with their unoffending crews, it was, so his Majesty's Government hold, open to them to take retaliatory measures, even if such measures were of a kind to involve pressure
on the civil population—not indeed of neutral States—but of their enemies. They refrained from doing so.

9. When, subsequently, English towns and defenceless British subjects, including women and children, were deliberately and systematically fired upon and killed by ships flying the flag of the Imperial German Navy, when quiet country towns and villages, void of defences, and possessing no military or naval importance, were bombarded by German airships, his Majesty’s Government still abstained from drawing the logical consequences from this form of attack on defenceless citizens. Further steps in the same direction are now announced, and in fact have already been taken, by Germany. British merchant vessels have been torpedoes at sight without any attempt being made to give warning to the crew, or any opportunity being given to save their lives; a torpedo has been fired against a British hospital ship in daylight; and similar treatment is threatened to all British merchant vessels in future as well as to any neutral ships that may happen to be found in the neighbourhood of the British Isles.

Reprisals Foreshadowed.

10. Faced with this situation, his Majesty’s Government consider it would be altogether unreasonable that Great Britain and her Allies should be expected to remain indefinitely bound, to their grave detriment, by rules and principles of which they recognize the justice if impartially observed as between belligerents, but which are at the present moment openly set at defiance by their enemy.

11. If therefore his Majesty’s Government should hereafter feel constrained to declare foodstuffs absolute contraband, or to take other measures for interfering with German trade, by way of reprisals, they confidently expect that such action will not be challenged on the part of neutral States by appeals to laws and usages of war whose validity rests on their forming an integral part of that system of international doctrine which as a whole their enemy frankly boasts the liberty and intention to disregard, so long as such neutral States cannot compel the German Government to abandon methods of warfare which have not in recent history been regarded as having the sanction of either law or humanity.
SPEECH
DELIVERED BY

THE RT. HON. H. H. ASQUITH,

British Prime Minister,

IN THE HOUSE OF COMMONS
ON THE 1st MARCH, 1915.

The Prime Minister: At the outbreak of the War the ordinary Supply on a peace basis had been voted by the House, and consequently the Votes of Credit for the now current financial year, like those on all previous occasions, have been taken in order to provide the amounts necessary for naval and military operations in addition to the ordinary Grants of Parliament. It consequently follows that the expenditure charged or chargeable to Votes of Credit for this financial year represent, broadly speaking, the difference between the expenditure of the country on a peace footing and that expenditure upon a war footing. The total on that basis, if this Supplementary Vote is assented to, will be £362,000,000.

For reasons the validity of which the Committee has recognised on previous occasions I do not think it desirable to give the precise details of the items which make up the total; but without entering into that, I may roughly apportion the expenditure. For the Army and the Navy, according to the best Estimates which can at present be framed, out of the total given there will be required approximately £275,000,000. That is also in addition, as I have already pointed out, to the sum voted before the War for the Army and Navy, which amounted in the aggregate to a little over £80,000,000. That leaves unaccounted for a balance of £87,000,000, of which approximately £38,000,000 represents advances for war expenditure made or being made to the self-governing Dominions, Crown Colonies, and Protectorates. In addition to that sum of £38,000,000, there has been an advance to Belgium of £10,000,000, and to Servia of £800,000. Further advances to these Allies are under consideration, the details of which it is not possible yet to make public. The balance of, roughly, £38,000,000 is required for miscellaneous services covered by the Vote of Credit which have not yet been separately specified.

I think the Committee will be interested to know what the actual cost of the War will have been to this country, as far as we can estimate, on the 31st March, the close of the financial year. The War will then have lasted 240 days, and the Votes of Credit up to that time, assuming this Vote is carried, will amount
to £362,000,000. It may be said, speaking generally, that the average expenditure from Votes of Credit will have been, roughly, £1,500,000 per day throughout the time. That, of course, is the excess due to the War over the expenditure on a peace footing. That represents the immediate charge to the taxpayers of this country for this year. But, as the Committee know, a portion of the expenditure consists of advances for the purpose of assisting or securing the food supplies of this country, and will be recoverable in whole, or to a very large extent, in the near future. A further portion represents advances to the Dominions and to other States which will be ultimately repaid. If these items are excluded from the account the average per day of the War is slightly lower; but, after making full allowance for all the items which are in the nature of recoverable loans, the daily expenditure does not work out at less than £1,200,000. I have spoken of the average: these figures are the average taken over the whole period from the outbreak of war; but at the outbreak of war, after the initial expenditure on mobilisation had been incurred, the daily expenditure was considerably below the average, as many charges had not yet matured. The expenditure has risen steadily, and is now well over the daily average that I have given. To that figure must be added, in order to give a complete account of the matter, something for war services other than naval or military. At the beginning of the year these charges were not likely to be very considerable, but it will probably be within the mark to say that on the 1st April we shall be spending over £1,700,000 a day above the normal in consequence of the War.

Perhaps I may now say something concerning the Vote of Credit for the ensuing year, which amounts to £250,000,000. This Vote of Credit has two features which I believe are quite unique and without precedent. In the first place, it is the largest single Vote on record in the annals of this House, and secondly, it provides for the ordinary as well as for the emergency expenditure of the Army and the Navy. The House may ask on what principle or basis has this sum of £250,000,000 been arrived at? Of course it is difficult, and indeed impossible, to give any exact estimate, but as regards the period, so far as we can forecast it, for which this Vote is being taken, it has been thought advisable to take a sum sufficient, so far as we can judge, to provide for all the expenditure which will come in course of payment up to, approximately, the second week in July—that is to say, a little over three months, or, to put it in another way, something like one hundred days of war expenditure. As regards the daily rate of expenditure—I have dealt hitherto with the expenditure up to 31st March—the War Office calculate that at the beginning of April, 1915, the total expenditure on Army services will be at the rate of one and a half millions per day—with a tendency to increase. The total expenditure on the Navy at the commencement of April will, it is calculated, amount to about £400,000 per day. The aggregate expenditure of the Army and Navy services at the beginning of 1915-16 is put at £1,900,000 per day—with a tendency to increase; for the purposes of our Estimate the figures we have taken indicate a level two millions per day.
The Committee will remember—I am not sure whether I mentioned the figure—that on a peace footing the daily expenditure of the Army and the Navy, on the basis of the Estimates approved last year, was about £220,000 per day. The difference, therefore, between £2,000,000 and £220,000 represents what we estimate to be the increased expenditure due to the War during the one hundred days for which we are now providing.

There are other items belonging to the same category as those to which I have already referred in dealing with the Supplementary Vote. With regard to advances to our own Dominions and other States for which provision has also had to be made, the balance of the total of £250,000,000 for which we are now asking beyond the actual estimated expenditure for the Army and the Navy will be applied to those and kindred emergency purposes.

Before I pass from the purely monetary aspect of the matter, it may be interesting to the Committee to be reminded of what has been our expenditure upon the great wars of the past. In the Great War, which lasted for over twenty years, from 1793 to 1815, the total cost as estimated by the best authorities, was £831,000,000. The Crimean War may be put down, taking everything into account, at £70,000,000. The total cost of the war charges in South Africa from 1899 to 31st March, 1903, were estimated, in a Return presented to Parliament, at £211,000,000. These are instructive figures.

In presenting these two Votes of Credit the Government are making a large pecuniary demand on the House—a demand which in itself is beyond comparison larger than has ever been made in the House of Commons by any British Minister in the whole course of our history. We make it with the full conviction that, after seven months of war, the country and the whole Empire are every whit as determined as they were at the outset—if need be at the cost of all we can command both in men and in money—to bring a righteous cause to a triumphant issue. There is much in what we see to encourage and to stimulate us. Nothing has shaken, and nothing can shake, our faith in the unbroken spirit of Belgium, in the undefeated heroism of indomitable Serbia, in the tenacity and resource with which our two great Allies—one in the West and the other in the East—hold their far-flung lines, and will continue to hold them till the hour comes for an irresistible and decisive advance. Our own Dominions and our great Dependency of India have sent us splendid contributions of men, a large number of whom are already at the front, and before very long, in one or another of the actual theatres of war, the whole of them will be in the fighting line. We hear to-day with great gratification that Princess Patricia's Canadian Regiment has been doing, during these last few days, most gallant and efficient service.

We have no reason to be otherwise than satisfied with the progress of recruiting here at home. Territorial divisions, now fully trained, are capable—I say it advisedly—of confronting any troops in the world. The New Armies, which have lately been under the critical scrutiny of skilled observers, are fast realising all our most sanguine
hopes. A war carried on upon this gigantic scale, and under conditions for which there is no example in history, is not always or every day a picturesque or spectacular affair. Its operations are of necessity, in appearance, slow and dragging. Without entering into strategic details, I can assure the Committee that, with all the knowledge and experience which we have now gained, His Majesty’s Government have never been more confident than they are to-day of the power as well as the will of the Allies to achieve ultimate and durable victory.

I will not enter in further detail into what I may call the general military situation, but I should, for a few moments, like to call the attention of the Committee to one or two aspects of the War which of late have come prominently into view. I will refer first to the operations which are now in progress in the Dardanelles. It is a good rule in war to concentrate your forces on the main theatre, and not to dissipate them in disconnected and sporadic adventures, however promising they may appear to be. That consideration, I need hardly say, has not been lost sight of in the counsels of the Allies. There has been, and there will be, no denudation or impairment of the forces which are at work in France and Flanders, and both the French and ourselves will continue to give them the fullest and, we believe, the most effective support.

Nor—what is equally important—has there, for the purpose of these operations, been any weakening of the Grand Fleet. The enterprise which is now going on, and so far has gone on in a manner which reflects, as the House will agree, the highest credit on all concerned, was carefully considered and conceived with very distinct and definite objects—political, strategic, and economic. Some of these objects are so obvious as not to need statement, and others are of such a character that it is perhaps better for the moment not to state them. But I should like to advert for a moment, without any attempt to forecast the future, to two features in this matter. The first is, that it once more indicates and illustrates the close co-operation of the Allies—in this case the French and ourselves—in a new theatre, and under somewhat dissimilar conditions to those which have hitherto prevailed. We welcome the presence of the splendid contingent from the French Navy that our Allies have supplied, and which is sharing to the full in both the hazards and the glories of the enterprise.

The other point on which, I think, it is worth dwelling for a moment is that this operation shows in a very significant way the copiousness and the variety of our own Naval resources. In order to illustrate that remark, take the names of the ships which have been actually mentioned in the dispatches we have published. First the “Queen Elizabeth,” the first ship to be commissioned of the newest type of what are called super-“Dreadnoughts,” with guns of a power and a range never hitherto known in naval warfare. Side by side with her is the “Agamemnon,” the immediate predecessor of the “Dreadnought,” and in association with them are the “Triumph,” “Cornwallis,” “Irresistible,” “Vengeance,” and “Albion,” representing, I think I am right in
saying, three or four different types of the older pre-"Dreadnought" battleships, which have been so foolishly and so prematurely regarded in some quarters as obsolete or negligible, all bringing to bear the power of their formidable 12-in. guns on the fortifications with magnificent accuracy and with deadly effect. When, as I have said, these proceedings are being conducted, so far as the Navy is concerned, without subtraction of any sort or kind from the strength or effectiveness of the Grand Fleet, I think a word of congratulation is due to the Admiralty for the way in which it has utilised its resources.

I pass from that to another new factor in these military and naval operations—the so-called German blockade of our coast. I shall have to use some very plain language. I may, perhaps, preface what I have to say by the observation that it does not come upon us as a surprise. This War began on the part of Germany with the cynical repudiation of a solemn Treaty on the avowed ground that, when a nation's interests require it, right and good faith must give way to force. The War has been carried on on their part with a systematic—not an impulsive or a casual—but a systematic violation of all the conventions and practices by which international agreement had sought to mitigate and regularise the clash of arms. She has now—I will not say reached the climax, for we do not know what may yet be to come—but she has taken a further step, without any precedent in history, by mobilising and organising, not on the surface, but under the surface of the sea, a campaign of piracy and pillage. Are we—can we—and here I address myself for the moment to the neutral countries of the world—are we to sit quiet, or can we sit quiet, as though we were still under the protection of the restraining rules and the humanising usages of civilised war? We think we cannot. The enemy, borrowing what I may, perhaps, call for this purpose a neutral flag from the vocabulary of diplomacy, describes this newly adopted measure by a grotesque and puerile perversion of language as a blockade. What is a blockade? A blockade consists in sealing up the war ports of a belligerent against sea-borne traffic, by encircling their coast with an impenetrable ring of ships of war. Where are these ships of war? Where is the German Navy? What has become of those gigantic battleships and cruisers on which so many millions of money have been spent, and in which such vast hopes and ambitions have been invested? I think, if my memory serves me, they have only twice during the course of these seven months been seen upon the open sea. Their object in both cases was the same—murder and mutilation of civilians, and the wholesale destruction of property in undefended seaside towns, and on each occasion when they caught sight of the approach of a British force they showed a clean pair of heels, and hurried back at the top of their speed to the safe seclusion of their mine-fields and their closely guarded forts.

LORD ROBERT CECIL: Not all.

MR. ASQUITH: Some of them suffered on the way. The plain truth is, the German Fleet is not blockading. cannot
blockade, and never will blockade our coasts. I propose now to read to the Committee the Statement which has been prepared by His Majesty's Government, and which will be public property to-morrow, which declares, I hope in sufficiently plain and unmistakable terms, the view which we take, not only of our rights, but of our duties. It is not very long, and I think I had better read it textually.

"Germany has declared that the English Channel, the north and west coasts of France, and the waters round the British Isles are a 'war area,' and has officially notified that 'all enemy ships found in that area will be destroyed, and that neutral vessels may be exposed to danger.' This is in effect a claim to torpedo at sight, without regard to the safety of the crew or passengers, any merchant vessel under any flag. As it is not in the power of the German Admiralty to maintain any surface craft in these waters, this attack can only be delivered by submarine agency. The law and custom of nations in regard to attacks on commerce have always presumed that the first duty of the captor of a merchant vessel is to bring it before a Prize Court, where it may be tried, where the regularity of the capture may be challenged, and where neutrals may recover their cargoes. The sinking of prizes is in itself a questionable act, to be resorted to only in extraordinary circumstances and after provision has been made for the safety of all the crew or passengers (if there are passengers on board). The responsibility for discriminating between neutral and enemy vessels, and between neutral and enemy cargo, obviously rests with the attacking ship, whose duty it is to verify the status and character of the vessel and cargo, and to preserve all papers before sinking or even capturing it. So also is the humane duty of providing for the safety of the crews of merchant vessels, whether neutral or enemy, an obligation upon every belligerent. It is upon this basis that all previous discussions of the law for regulating warfare at sea have proceeded.

"A German submarine, however, fulfils none of these obligations. She enjoys no local command of the waters in which she operates. She does not take her captures within the jurisdiction of a Prize Court. She carries no prize crew which she can put on board a prize. She uses no effective means of discriminating between a neutral and an enemy vessel. She does not receive on board for safety the crew of the vessel she sinks. Her methods of warfare are therefore entirely outside the scope of any of the international instruments regulating operations against commerce in time of war. The German declaration substitutes indiscriminate destruction for regulated capture.

"Germany is adopting these methods against peaceful traders and non-combatant crews with the avowed object of preventing commodities of all kinds (including food for the civil population) from reaching or leaving the British Isles or Northern France. Her opponents are, therefore, driven
to frame retaliatory measures in order in their turn to pre-
vent commodities of any kind from reaching or leaving
Germany. These measures will, however, be enforced by
the British and French Governments without risk to neutral
ships or to neutral or non-combatant life, and in strict observ-
ance of the dictates of humanity.

"The British and French Governments will therefore hold
themselves free to detain and take into port ships carrying
goods of presumed enemy destination, ownership, or origin.
It is not intended to confiscate such vessels or cargoes unless
they would otherwise be liable to condemnation.

"The treatment of vessels and cargoes which have sailed
before this date will not be affected."

That, Sir, is our reply. I may say, before I comment upon
it, with regard to the suggestion which I see is put forward from
a German quarter that we have rejected some proposal or sugges-
tion made to the two Powers by the United States Government,
I do not say anything more than that it is quite untrue. On the
contrary, all we have said to the United States so far is, that we
are taking it into careful consideration in consultation with our
Allies.

Now, the Committee will have observed, from the statement I
have just read out of the retaliatory measures we propose to adopt,
the words "blockade" and "contraband," and other technical
terms of international law, do not occur, and advisedly so. In
dealing with an opponent who has openly repudiated all the
principles, both of law and of humanity, we are not going to
allow our efforts to be strangled in a network of juridical niceties.
We do not intend to put into operation any measures which we
do not think to be effective, and I need not say we shall carefully
avoid any measures which violate the rules either of humanity or
of honesty. Subject to those two conditions I say to our enemy—
I say it on behalf of the Government, and I hope on behalf of
the House of Commons—that under existing conditions there is
no form of economic pressure to which we do not consider our-
sehres entitled to resort. If, as a consequence, neutrals suffer
inconvenience and loss of trade we regret it, but we beg them to
remember that this phase of the War was not initiated by us.
We do not propose either to assassinate their seamen or to destroy
their goods, and what we are doing we do solely in self-defence.
If, again, as is possible, hardship is caused to the civil and non-
combatant population of the enemy by the cutting off of supplies,
we are not doing more in this respect than was done in the days
when Germany still acknowledged the authority of the law of
nations, sanctioned by the practice of the first and the greatest of
her Chancellors, and by the express declarations of his successor.
We are quite prepared to submit to the arbitrament of neutral
opinion and still more to the verdict of impartial history in this
War that in the circumstances in which we have been placed,
we have been moderate and restrained, we have abstained from
things which we were provoked and tempted to do, and we
have adopted the policy which recommends itself to reason,
common sense, and to justice.
This new aspect of the War only serves to illustrate and to emphasise the truth that the gravity and the magnitude of the task we have undertaken does not diminish, but increases, as the months go by. The call for men to join our fighting forces, which is our primary need, has been and is being nobly responded to here at home and throughout the Empire. That call, we say with all plainness and directness, was never more urgent or more imperious than to-day. But this is a war not only of men, but of material. Take only one illustration. The expenditure of ammunition on both sides has been on a scale and at a rate which is not only without precedent, but is far in excess of any expert forecast. At such a time patriotism has cast a heavy burden on the shoulders of all who are engaged in trades or manufactures which, directly or indirectly, minister to the equipment of our forces. It is a burden, let me add, which falls, or ought to fall, with even weight on both employers and employed. Differences as to remuneration or as to profit, or as to hours and conditions of labour, which in ordinary times might well justify a temporary cessation of work, should no longer be allowed to do so. The first duty of all concerned is to go on producing with might and main what the safety of the State requires, and, if this is done, I can say with perfect confidence the Government on its part will ensure a prompt and equitable settlement of disputed points, and, in cases of proved necessity, will give, on behalf of the State, such help as is in their power.

Sailors and soldiers, employers and workmen in the industrial world are all at this moment partners and co-operators in one great enterprise. The men in the shipyards and the engineering shops, the workers in the textile factories, the miner who sends the coal to the surface, the dockyard labourer who helps to load and unload the ships, and those who employ and organise and supervise their labours, are one and all rendering to their country a service as vital and as indispensable as the gallant men who line the trenches in Flanders or in France, or who are bombarding fortresses in the Dardanelles. I hear sometimes whispers, hardly more than whispers, of possible terms of peace. Peace is the greatest of all human blessings, but this is not the time to talk of peace. Those who talk of peace, however excellent their intentions, are, in my judgment, victims, I will not say of wanton, but of grievous self-delusion. It is like the twittering of sparrows in the stress and tumult of a tempest which is shaking the foundations of the earth. The time to talk of peace is when the great tasks in which we and our Allies embarked on this long and stormy voyage, are within sight of accomplishment. Speaking at the Guildhall at the Lord Mayor’s banquet last November, I used this language which has since been repeated almost in the same terms by the Prime Minister of France, and which, I believe, represents the settled sentiment and purpose of the country. I said:—

"We shall never sheath the sword, which we have not lightly drawn, until Belgium recovers in full measure all, and more than all, she has sacrificed: until France is
adequately secured against the menace of aggression; until
the rights of the smaller nationalities of Europe are placed
upon an unassailable foundation, and until the military
domination of Prussia is wholly and finally destroyed."
What I said early in November, now, after four months, I
repeat to-day. We have not relaxed, nor shall we relax, in the
pursuit of every one and all of the aims which I have described.
These are great purposes, and to achieve them we must draw
upon all our resources, both material and spiritual. On the one
side, the material side, the demand presented in these Votes is
for men, for money, for the fullest equipment of the apparatus
of war. On the other side, which I have called the spiritual
side, the appeal is to those ancient, inbred qualities of our race
which have never failed us in times of stress, qualities of self-
mastery, self-sacrifice, patience, tenacity, willingness to bear one
another's burdens, the unity which springs from the dominating
sense of a common duty, unfailing faith, inflexible resolve.