

THE ADMIRALTY, POPULAR NAVALISM, AND THE JOURNALIST AS
MIDDLEMAN, 1884-1914

A Dissertation

by

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ABSTRACT

The three decades before the First World War were a period of intense militarism, and in the United Kingdom this meant navalism. By the late Edwardian period the navalist movement had captured Britain's attention – a movement that paradoxically claimed the Royal Navy was weaker than at any point in its history while presiding over a total revolution in British naval technology and a concurrent unprecedented rise in naval budgets. This dissertation explores the creation, propagation, success and failure of directed navalism between 1884 and 1914. Directed navalism, for the purposes of this project, refers to the cooperation between and support of navalism among three elite national groups: serving naval officers at the level of captain and above (professionals), naval correspondents and editors working for large-circulation national newspapers and periodicals (press), and members of Parliament in both houses, from backbenchers to high Cabinet-level officials, who dealt with navalist issues during the course of their public service careers (politicians).

Directed navalism was the bedrock upon which the more popular and ultimately more successful 'soft' navalism – penny dreadfuls, the Navy League, fundraising drives, fleet reviews – was built. The three groups of professionals, press and (to a lesser extent, particularly before 1900) politicians purposefully created and fostered the navalist movement. Navalism meant different things to each of the three, obtainable via different methods, but from 1884 onward they were able to put aside their differences in service to a broader movement. This unofficial partnership remained effective through the

majority of the Edwardian period, but after the twin upheavals of Liberal electoral victory and First Sea Lord Sir John (Jacky) Fisher's naval reforms in 1906 it began to be overtaken by partisanship, factionalism, and a general radicalization of both public and parliamentary navalism. The rise and fall of directed navalism – the backroom deals, surreptitious leaks and midnight meetings that laid the foundation for a national movement – is the story of this dissertation. Though directed navalism collapsed before the First World War, it was extraordinarily successful in its time, and it was a necessary precursor for the creation of a national discourse in which 'soft' navalism could thrive.

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Finally, thank you to my parents Robert and Susan for their unflagging moral support and ready capital.

NOMENCLATURE

BL	British Library, London
CCA	Churchill Archives Centre, Churchill College, Cambridge
CHI	West Sussex Records Office, Chichester
CID	Committee of Imperial Defence
C-in-C	Commander in Chief
DORA	Defence of the Realm Act
HRC	Harry Ransom Center, UT Austin
IML	Imperial Maritime League
KEW	(British) National Archives, Kew
MP	Member of Parliament
NL	Navy League
NMM	National Maritime Museum, Greenwich
RN	Royal Navy

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The three decades before the First World War were a period of intense militarism, and in the United Kingdom – with all due apologies to the National Service League – this meant navalism. That one single word has been used to explain a vast social, political, journalistic, and professional movement that had been sweeping both the nation and the navy for years. In 1884 First Lord of the Admiralty Lord Northbrook – the political head of the Royal Navy – confidently declared in Parliament that if the navy’s budget were increased he would not know how to spend it.¹ Twenty-five years later the novelist James Blyth, in his mass-market cautionary tale about the German menace *The Swoop of the Vulture*, offered the following advice to the nation: “Ward off war by overwhelming power. Give up all, education (a useless incubus to 50% of the children), poor rates, old age pensions, what you will, give up all to the preservation of a navy which can terrorise the world.”²

What had changed? How had such fears of naval disaster overtaken a nation that prided itself on its hearts of oak? The navalist movement had captured Britain’s attention – a movement that paradoxically claimed the Royal Navy was weaker than at any point in its history while presiding over a total revolution in British naval technology

¹ Roger Parkinson, *The Late Victorian Navy: The Pre-Dreadnought Era and the Origins of the First World War* (Woodbridge, UK: Boydell Press, 2008), 92.

² Johan A Höglund, *Mobilising the Novel: The Literature of Imperialism and The First World War* (Uppsala, Sweden: Reklam & Katalogtryck AB, 1997), 148.

and a concurrent unprecedented rise in naval budgets. This dissertation explores the creation, propagation, success and failure of directed navalism between 1884 and 1914. Directed navalism, for the purposes of this project, refers to the cooperation between and support of navalism among three elite national groups: serving naval officers at the level of captain and above (professionals), naval correspondents and editors working for large-circulation national newspapers and periodicals (press), and members of Parliament in both houses, from backbenchers to high Cabinet-level officials, who dealt with navalist issues during the course of their public service careers (politicians).

Directed navalism was the bedrock upon which the more popular and ultimately more successful ‘soft’ navalism – penny dreadfuls, the Navy League, fundraising drives, fleet reviews – was built. The three groups of professionals, press and (to a lesser extent, particularly before 1900) politicians purposefully created and fostered the navalist movement. Navalism meant different things to each of the three, obtainable via different methods, but from 1884 onward they were able to put aside their differences in service to a broader movement. This unofficial partnership remained effective through the majority of the Edwardian period, but after the twin upheavals of Liberal electoral victory and First Sea Lord Sir John (Jacky) Fisher’s naval reforms in 1906 it began to be overtaken by partisanship, factionalism, and a general radicalization of both public and parliamentary navalism. The rise and fall of directed navalism – the backroom deals, surreptitious leaks and midnight meetings that laid the foundation for a national movement – is the story of this dissertation. Though directed navalism collapsed before

the First World War, it was extraordinarily successful in its time, and it was a necessary precursor for the creation of a national discourse in which ‘soft’ navalism could thrive.

TERMINOLOGY AND TIMELINE

Before beginning an exploration of the navalist era, two important definitions must be established. First, what is navalism? It was not a term used during the period; opponents of the movement generally called naval activists scaremongers or Jingoists, while pro-naval activists considered themselves concerned patriots. The word first appears in propagandistic mass-market literature of the First World War, and not in a positive context. Naval historian Julian Corbett wrote in his 1915 pamphlet “The Spectre of Navalism” that Britain was not and had never been a navalist nation – but he was using the term as a contrast to “Prussian militarism.” Britain had not used naval power to invade other nations, and so was not a navalist power.³ The term was utilized similarly by naval journalist Archibald Hurd in 1918; he accused Germany of being the only navalist power by virtue of purposely beginning a naval arms race.⁴

The first historian to use ‘navalism’ specifically in reference to Britain was the colossus of Edwardian and First World War naval history, Arthur Marder. In one of his earliest (1937) historical works he observed that “by the turn of the century the country

³ Julian Corbett, “The Spectre of Navalism,” Caird Library, National Maritime Museum, Greenwich, UK, Sir Julian Corbett Papers (hereafter NMM CBT), 7/7.

⁴ Archibald Hurd, *The British Fleet in the Great War* (London: Constable and Company Ltd., 1918), xxii-xxiii.

was navally-minded. All classes had, or thought they had, something to gain from the growth of the Navy, whether security, empire, trade, employment, or dividends.”⁵ This definition was simplified even further in his pioneering study of the prewar navy *The Anatomy of British Sea Power* (1940): “The term ‘navalist’ as used in this volume refers to those people, civilians and officers, who actively supported a big-navy policy. ‘Navalism’ is the big-navy movement.”⁶ That vague characterization remained the standard for decades, whether due to a reluctance to re-approach the field-defining work of Marder or simply because it was adequate enough for his successors. Historian Matthew Johnson has recently provided a more nuanced and more useful view of prewar British navalism, noting that it “cannot be understood in terms of strategic calculation alone. It was a political, indeed an *ideological*, movement, based on a conception of naval power not simply as a legitimate arm of national defence, but as the basis of national might and prestige.”⁷ It is this definition of navalism that will be used throughout the dissertation.

The second central framework of the navalist movement is its timeline. Understandably, historians have tended to identify different points at which the movement begun based on their own methodologies and historiographical approaches.

⁵ Arthur J. Marder, “The Origin of Popular Interest in the Royal Navy,” *Journal of the Royal United Service Institution* 82 (Feb 1937): 769-770.

⁶ Arthur J. Marder, *The Anatomy of British Sea Power: A History of British Naval Policy in the Pre-Dreadnought Era, 1880-1905* (Hamden, CT: Archon Books, 1964 [1940]), ix.

⁷ Matthew Johnson, *Militarism and the British Left, 1902-1914* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 69.

Cultural historian Jan Rüger dates it to the 1887 Spithead naval review, in his view the first point when the Admiralty purposefully brought forward a public relations initiative.⁸ Naval historian Shaun Grimes begins in the same year, taking the formation of the Naval Intelligence Department as the beginning of modern naval strategic thinking.⁹ Technological historians, led by Jon Testuro Sumida, generally begin with the Naval Defence Act of 1889;¹⁰ the historian of Alfred Thayer Mahan, William Livezey, perhaps predictably dates the navalist era to the publication of Mahan's works on naval history between 1890 and 1892.¹¹ The work of A.J.A. Morris on increasing journalistic distrust of Germany begins as late as 1896,¹² while Roger Parkinson's monograph on the late Victorian Royal Navy brings the periodization as early as Near East crisis of 1878.¹³

Then there are the historians who simply chose decades: 1860 for Paul Kennedy's work on Anglo-German rivalry in the broader sense, 1870 for John Beeler's technological history of warship design and Mary Conley's important cultural study of naval masculinity, 1880 for Marder's essential *Anatomy of British Sea Power*, 1890 for

⁸ Jan Rüger, "Nation, Empire and Navy: Identity Politics in the United Kingdom 1887 – 1914," *Past & Present* 185 (November 2004), 164.

⁹ Shawn T. Grimes, *Strategy and War Planning in the British Navy, 1887-1918* (Rochester, NY: Boydell Press, 2012), 1.

¹⁰ Jon Tetsuro Sumida, *In Defence of Naval Supremacy: Finance, Technology and British Naval Policy, 1889-1914* (Boston: Unwin Hyman, 1989), 3.

¹¹ William E. Livezey, *Mahan on Sea Power* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1981 [1947]), 63.

¹² A.J.A. Morris, *The Scaremongers: The Advocacy of War and Rearmament, 1896-1914* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1984), 13.

¹³ Parkinson, *Late Victorian Navy*, viii.

Lisle Rose's comparative study of world navalism, and as late as 1900 for Peter Padfield's research on the Anglo-German naval race.¹⁴ This project takes 1884 as its starting point, and the "Truth About the Navy" campaign in the *Pall Mall Gazette* as the first substantive example of long-term cooperation between serving naval officers and the periodical press.

HISTORIOGRAPHY

This project examines three major groups within British society, each with its own historiography. The existing literature as regards each will be examined somewhat out of order, as works on the professional Royal Navy – both the largest and most current of the three – will be covered last. First to be examined are histories of the periodical press, generally the oldest and most traditional in terms of methodology. Many are biographies of various editors and journalists, with navalist issues being covered only in passing; one contemporary work in this subcategory, Laurel Brake et al.'s 2012 edited collection on the life of W. T. Stead, makes no reference to the navy

¹⁴ See Paul Kennedy, *The Rise of the Anglo-German Antagonism 1860-1914* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1980); John Beeler, *Birth of the Battleship: British Capital Ship Design 1870-1881* (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 2001); Mary Conley, *From Jack Tar to Union Jack: Representing Naval Manhood in the British Empire, 1870-1918* (Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press, 2009); Marder *Anatomy of British Sea Power*; Lisle A. Rose, *Power at Sea. Volume 1: The Age of Navalism, 1890-1918* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2007); Peter Padfield, *The Great Naval Race: The Anglo-German Naval Rivalry, 1900-1914* (New York: David McKay Company, Inc., 1974).

whatsoever.¹⁵ The oldest of these is by far the most valuable: Alfred Gollin's *The Observer and J.L. Garvin* (1960), though a study of traditional high politics and biography, is the only work to explore in detail First Sea Lord Jacky Fisher's relationship with J. L. Garvin, an influential editor and strong navalist supporter.¹⁶ Also of note is Harvey Blumenthal's unpublished dissertation on the "Truth About the Navy" campaign, a valuable resource on the earliest links between journalists and serving officers, and Iain O'Shea's thesis exploring the result of elite public opinion on Admiralty war planning.¹⁷

There are also offshoots of press history relevant to this project, including a handful of broader histories of the press itself. By far the most germane to this dissertation is A. J. A. Morris' *The Scaremongers: The Advocacy of War and Rearmament, 1896-1914* (1984), with its focus on the breakdown of journalistic relations towards Germany.¹⁸ There is similarly a thriving literature on elements of the press beyond traditional newspapers and dailies. I. F. Clarke has published multiple works on

¹⁵ See Laurel Brake et al., *W.T. Stead: Newspaper Revolutionary* (London: The British Library, 2012); John A. Hutcheson Jr., *Leopold Maxse and the National Review, 1893 – 1914: Right-Wing Politics and Journalism in the Edwardian Era* (New York: Garland Publishing Inc., 1989); David Ayerst, *Garvin of the Observer* (London: Croom Helm, 1985); Raymond Schults, *Crusader in Babylon: W.T. Stead and the Pall Mall Gazette* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1972); Richard Brooks, *Fred T Jane: An Eccentric Visionary* (Alexandria, VA: Jane's Information Group, 1997).

¹⁶ See Alfred Gollin, *The Observer and J.L. Garvin, 1908-1914: A Study in a Great Editorship* (London: Oxford University Press, 1960).

¹⁷ See Harvey Blumenthal, "W.T. Stead's Role in Shaping Official Policy: The Navy Campaign of 1884" (Ph.D. diss., George Washington University, 1984); Iain O'Shea, "Selling 'The Scheme': The British Periodical Press and the Discourse on Naval Reform, 1900-1910 (M.A. thesis, University of New Brunswick, 2010).

¹⁸ See also Stephen Koss, *The Rise and Fall of the Political Press in Britain: The Nineteenth Century*, 2 vols. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1981, 1984).

invasion literature, the Victorian and Edwardian subgenre of foreign invasion that most famously included H. G. Wells' *The War of the Worlds*; there was a great deal of navalist invasion literature, which Clarke abundantly demonstrates.¹⁹ The impact of popular fiction on both adult and juvenile audiences has been a topic of research since the 1980s, generally in the context of the army and imperialism;²⁰ however, a recent and extremely useful short study by Max Jones has brought navalism into the discussion of children's literature in particular.²¹

The category of press histories must also include works on the two major navalist pressure groups, the Navy League and the Imperial Maritime League, which both utilized the press as much as possible to spread their ideals and ideologies. Work on pressure groups is scarce: a short chapter in Paul Kennedy's *Rise of the Anglo-German*

¹⁹ See I. F. Clarke, ed., *Voices Prophesying War, 1763 – 1984* (London: Oxford University Press, 1966); I. F. Clarke, ed., *The Tale of the Next Great War, 1871 – 1914: Fictions of Future Warfare and of Battles Still-to-come* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1995); I. F. Clarke, ed., *The Great War with Germany, 1890-1914: Fictions and Fantasies of the War-to-come* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1997).

²⁰ See John M. MacKenzie, *Propaganda and Empire: The Manipulation of British Public Opinion, 1880-1960* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1984); John M. MacKenzie, ed., *Imperialism and Popular Culture* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1986); John M. MacKenzie, ed., *Popular Imperialism and the Military, 1850-1950* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1992); Jeffrey Richards, ed., *Imperialism and Juvenile Literature* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1989); Cecil Degrotte Eby, *The Road to Armageddon: The Martial Spirit in English Popular Literature, 1870-1914* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1987); Steve Attridge, *Nationalism, Imperialism and Identity in Late Victorian Culture: Civil and Military Worlds* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003); Kelly Boyd, *Manliness and the Boys' Story Paper in Britain: A Cultural History, 1855-1940* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003); Michael Paris, *Warrior Nation: Images of War in British Popular Culture, 1850-2000* (London: Reaktion Books, 2000).

²¹ Max Jones, "'The Surest Safeguard of Peace': Technology, the Navy and the Nation in Boys' Papers, c. 1905-1907," in *The Dreadnought and the Edwardian Age*, eds. Robert J. Blyth, Andrew Lambert, and Jan R uger (Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2011).

Antagonism, a comparative article by Anne Summers in Paul Kennedy and Anthony Nicholls' *Nationalist and Racialist Movements* (1981), and the only modern work on the Imperial Maritime League in Frank McDonough's *The Conservative Party and Anglo-German Relations* (2007).²² The one monograph on the creation and lifespan of the Navy League is W. Mark Hamilton's *The Nation and the Navy* (1986), a valuable source on League activities and one that dovetails quite well – with important caveats that will be discussed presently – with the dissertation.²³

Histories of high politics have experienced a late resurgence in works focusing on entire parties rather than specific individuals or departments, although traditional biographies remain a large portion of the literature. The historiography of Edwardian British politics can be divided into two major categories. The first, as with press history, is biography – and here it is no surprise to see Winston Churchill's name feature prominently, with a significant amount of material on his role at the Admiralty from

²² Kennedy, *Anglo-German Antagonism*, in particular 87-102; Anne Summers, "The Character of Edwardian Nationalism: Three Popular Leagues," in *Nationalist and Racialist Movements in Britain and Germany Before 1914*, eds. Paul Kennedy and Anthony Nicholls (London: Macmillan Press Ltd, 1981); Frank McDonough, *The Conservative Party and Anglo-German Relations, 1905-1914* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2007), in particular 105-126.

²³ W. Mark Hamilton, *The Nation and the Navy: Methods and Organization of British Navalist Propaganda, 1889-1914* (New York: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1986).

1911 onward,²⁴ though a recent work on the life and career of First Lord of the Admiralty Reginald McKenna must also be mentioned.²⁵

The second major category of political history is works focusing on entire parties and how they dealt with the larger issue of national security or the narrower focus of either naval topics or public relations. Each of the major parties has received their fair share of historiographical attention: Nigel Keohane, Frank McDonough, Frans Coetzee and Rhodri Williams for the Conservatives and A. J. A. Morris, Matthew Johnson, and Bernard Semmel for the Liberals.²⁶ For this project McDonough and Coetzee are the most useful sources on Conservative navalism, with Johnson providing a valuable new perspective on Liberal navalism and Liberal members of the Navy League in particular.

²⁴ See Richard Hough, *Former Naval Person: Churchill and the Wars at Sea* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1987); Geoffrey Best, *Churchill and War* (London: Hambledon and London, 2005); Carlo D'Este, *Warlord: A Life of Winston Churchill at War, 1874-1945* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2008); Christopher M. Bell, *Churchill and Sea Power* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2013).

²⁵ Martin Farr, *Reginald McKenna: Financier among Statesmen, 1863-1916* (New York: Routledge, 2008).

²⁶ See Nigel Keohane, *The Party of Patriotism: The Conservative Party and the First World War* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2010); McDonough, *Conservative Party and Anglo-German Relations*; Frans Coetzee, *For Party or Country: Nationalism and the Dilemmas of Popular Conservatism in Edwardian England* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990); Rhodri Williams, *Defending the Empire: The Conservative Party and British Defence Policy 1899 – 1915* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1991); A.J. Anthony Morris, *Radicalism Against War, 1906-1914: The Advocacy of Peace and Retrenchment* (Totowa, NJ: Rowman and Littlefield, 1972); Matthew Johnson, *Militarism and the British Left*; Matthew Johnson, "The Liberal Party and the Navy League in Britain before the Great War," *Twentieth Century British History* (2011); Bernard Semmel, *Liberalism and Naval Strategy: Ideology, Interest, and Sea Power during the Pax Britannica* (Boston: Allen & Unwin, 1986). Histories of the Labour Party do not generally cover navalism or naval policy issues, but for recent research on the prewar Labour Party see Paul Bridgen, *The Labour Party and the Politics of War and Peace, 1900-1924* (Rochester, NY: Boydell Press, 2009) and Paul Ward, *Red Flag and Union Jack: Englishness, Patriotism and the British Left, 1881-1924* (Rochester, NY: Boydell Press, 1998).

By far the largest relevant historiography is that of the professional Royal Navy, a category that encompasses everything from technological to cultural history. As always, it begins with biography, and here the major figures are Admiral Fisher, with three biographies, and his great rival Lord Charles Beresford with one.²⁷ There are even two works dealing specifically with the feud between the two admirals, which became a major point of contention within navalist movements.²⁸ The entire subfield of prewar British naval history owes its modern existence to Arthur Marder; besides his *Anatomy of British Sea Power* he completed a magisterial five-volume history of the navalist era, *From the Dreadnought to Scapa Flow* (1961-1970) and a three-volume collection of Fisher's papers with commentary, *Fear God and Dread Nought* (1952-1959).²⁹

Studies of the professional navy have undergone a renaissance, albeit in rather technical subfields. Led by a broad technological and cultural history in Peter Padfield's *Rule Britannia* (1981) and a more focused examination of fiscal policy and technological development in Jon Tetsuro Sumida's *In Defence of Naval Supremacy* (1989), more recent works have explored the relationship between naval technology, Admiralty policy

²⁷ See Admiral Sir R. H. Bacon, *The Life of Lord Fisher of Kilverstone*, 2 vols. (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, Doran & Company, Inc., 1929); Richard Hough, *Admiral of the Fleet: The Life of John Fisher* (New York: Macmillan Company, 1969); Ruddock F. Mackay, *Fisher of Kilverstone* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1973); Geoffrey Bennett, *Charlie B: A Biography of Admiral Lord Beresford of Metemeh and Curraghmore, G.C.B., G.C.V.O., LL.D., D.C.L.* (London: Peter Dawnay Ltd., 1968).

²⁸ See Geoffrey Penn, *Infighting Admirals: Fisher's Feud with Beresford and the Reactionaries* (Barnsley, UK: Leo Cooper, 2000); Richard Freeman, *The Great Edwardian Naval Feud: Beresford's Vendetta against Fisher* (Barnsley, UK: Pen & Sword Maritime, 2009). Freeman's is the more useful of the two.

²⁹ Arthur J. Marder, *From the Dreadnought to Scapa Flow: The Royal Navy in the Fisher Era, 1904-1919*, 5 vols. (London: Oxford University Press, 1961-1970); Arthur J. Marder, *Fear God and Dread Nought: The Correspondence of Admiral of the Fleet Lord Fisher of Kilverstone*, 3 vols. (London: Jonathan Cape, 1952-59).

and war planning, and economic history.³⁰ Technological developments have been traced throughout the period by Sumida, Roger Parkinson, and Nicholas Lambert.³¹ John Beeler, C.I. Hamilton, Matthew Seligmann, Nicholas Lambert, Barry Gough, Shawn Grimes, Nicholas Black, and Stephen Cobb have all examined British grand strategy through lenses as varied as economic warfare and the development of the naval staff system.³² The related historiography, which turns mainly on debates over exactly what British naval strategy was during the Edwardian era and how it developed, is extremely contentious and not particularly relevant to popular navalism; a detailed breakdown of the current arguments for all sides can be found in Matthew Seligmann et al., *The Naval Route to the Abyss* (2015), and Christopher Bell's review article of the literature in *War in History*.³³

³⁰ Peter Padfield, *Rule Britannia: The Victorian and Edwardian Navy* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1981); Sumida, *In Defence of Naval Supremacy*.

³¹ Parkinson, *Late Victorian Navy*; Nicholas Lambert, *Sir John Fisher's Naval Revolution* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1999).

³² See John Beeler, *British Naval Policy in the Gladstone-Disraeli Era, 1866-1880* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1997); C.I. Hamilton, *The Making of the Modern Admiralty: British Naval Policy-Making 1805-1927* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2011); Matthew S. Seligmann, *The Royal Navy and the German Threat, 1901-1914: Admiralty Plans to Protect British Trade in a War Against Germany* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2012); Nicholas Lambert, *Planning Armageddon: British Economic Warfare and the First World War* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2012); Barry Gough, *Pax Britannica: Ruling the Waves and Keeping the Peace before Armageddon* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014); Grimes, *Strategy and War Planning*; Nicholas Black, *The British Naval Staff in the First World War* (Rochester, NY: Boydell Press, 2009); Stephen Cobb, *Preparing for Blockade 1885-1914: Naval Contingency for Economic Warfare* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2013).

³³ Matthew S. Seligmann, Frank Nägler, and Michael Epkenhans, eds., *The Naval Route to the Abyss: The Anglo – German Naval Race 1895 – 1914* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2015), xxii – xxxv; Christopher M. Bell, “Contested Waters: The Royal Navy in the Fisher Era,” *War in History*, 23:1 (Jan. 2016).

Contemporary studies of the professional navy also encompass sociocultural history, and here a flourishing subfield has been jumpstarted by a single historian, Jan Rüger. Rüger has expounded upon his concept of the ‘cult of the navy’ – nonpartisan low-level Admiralty support of navalist causes through public outreach such as fleet reviews and the resultant public support of the navy as a general concept, what this dissertation refers to as ‘soft’ navalism – in his own *The Great Naval Game* (2007) as well as a variety of articles and chapters in edited collections.³⁴

Where does this project fit within the extant literature? It aims to bridge the gap between the three concurrent yet disparate historiographies of press, political and professional navalism, and as such answers questions posed by all three. From political historiography comes Matthew Johnson’s definition of navalism and his useful reminder that it “was a complex and multifaceted phenomenon” that meant different methodologies, goals and outcomes to the different groups involved.³⁵ From the historiography of the professional Royal Navy comes Jan Rüger’s reassessment of officially-sanctioned navalism: “The Admiralty’s attitude towards the press and the

³⁴ Jan Rüger, *The Great Naval Game: Britain and Germany in the Age of Empire* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2007); Jan Rüger, “Nation, Empire and Navy;” Jan Rüger, “The Symbolic Value of the *Dreadnought*,” in Robert J. Blyth, Andrew Lambert, and Jan Rüger, *The Dreadnought and the Edwardian Age* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2011); Jan Rüger, “In the imaginative fashion of Teutons’: Anglo-German History and the Naval Theatre,” in Dominik Geppert and Robert Gerwarth, eds., *Wilhelmine Germany and Edwardian Britain: Essays on Cultural Affinity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008); Jan Rüger, “Insularity and Empire in the Late Nineteenth Century,” in Miles Taylor, ed., *The Victorian Empire and Britain’s Maritime World, 1837-1901* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013); Jan Rüger, “The last word in outward splendour”: the cult of the Navy and the imperial age,” in David Stevens and John Reeve, eds. *The Navy and the Nation: The Influence of the Navy on Modern Australia* (Crow’s Nest, NSW: Allen & Unwin, 2005).

³⁵ Johnson, “The Liberal Party and the Navy League,” 163.

public has attracted very little attention. Indeed, there seems to be a historical consensus that the Admiralty, and the British government in general, were incapable of something as disreputable as propaganda.” Rüger has called for “this official and historiographical orthodoxy [...] to be corrected. Contrary to the image of a ‘silent service’, the Admiralty followed a well-defined publicity policy and did not hesitate to influence the press directly through a number of measures.”³⁶ This dissertation answers that call, but from the perspective of directed navalism rather than Rüger’s ‘cult of the navy.’

Most importantly, from the historiography of the British press comes W. Mark Hamilton’s analysis of prewar navalism: “a concerted attempt has been made to establish clear links between the naval activists and Navalist organizations, and such institutions as Parliament, the Navy, and the Press. A central argument of the thesis asserts that there was a strong core of highly motivated individuals and associations behind the Navalist agitation.”³⁷ This is absolutely true – but Hamilton’s work attempted to establish close connections between navalist organizations such as the Navy League and the three categories of press, professional and political navalists, while this project demonstrates that the navalist leagues were not able to maintain these connections (as elite navalists closed their ranks against them) and instead came to their greatest success only after directed navalism had collapsed into factionalism. It has been decades since Arthur Marder wrote that it was merely “an academic point whether newspapers,

³⁶ Rüger, *Great Naval Game*, 72-74.

³⁷ Hamilton, *Nation and the Navy*, 11.

periodicals, and organizations voice public opinion or make it” and Paul Kennedy believed “government-press relations in Britain were usually managed in a ‘gentlemanly’ fashion” and “only occasionally does one discover written evidence of attempted manipulation of public opinion.”³⁸ The Edwardian Royal Navy is enjoying a historiographical resurgence. It is time to bring the study of directed navalism, its considerable scale, and its importance to the broader movement into the light.

ORGANIZATION

This dissertation is divided into five body chapters plus an introduction and conclusion. Chapter II explores the early years of cooperation between serving officers and journalists from the “Truth About the Navy” campaign of 1884 to the Spencer Programme in 1894. During this tentative decade, captains and commodores were able to achieve what admirals could not: long-term links of communication with pro-naval elements of the press in order to support naval reforms. In this early period the navalist movement was nonpartisan, and inclined to view all forms of party politicians as enemies: a secret letter and a quiet meeting against the world. By 1894 navalists had scored three major victories, each leading directly to increases in the yearly naval estimates that determined the Royal Navy’s budget, and the future looked bright.

Chapter III examines the period between 1894 and 1902, which saw the creation of the first navalist pressure group in the Navy League. The Navy League attempted to

³⁸ Marder, *From the Dreadnought to Scapa Flow I*, viii; Kennedy, *Anglo-German Antagonism*, 366.

associate itself with professional and press navalists, and found itself rejected by both; as a result it began to turn to partisan navalism, though there were a multitude of internal debates as to how far the League should go in opening this potential Pandora's Box. At the same time the Navy League inadvertently helped to cause the first major crisis of directed navalism, as the League-affiliated journalist Arnold White was caught up in a breach of official secrecy with then-rear admiral Charles Bersford, leading to an official investigation; the result was a near-complete severing of the relationship between the League and serving naval officers for a decade.

The fourth chapter covers the rise to power of the most influential and most well-known professional navalist, Jacky Fisher, between 1902 and 1907. Where Beresford had been incautious in his relations with journalists, Fisher mastered the art of clandestine communications and plausible deniability, and the 'Fisher system' developed into the most powerful single outlet of directed navalism. Great naval reforms took place in this period, from the reorganization of the officer training system to the complete redistribution of British fleets at home and abroad and the introduction of the revolutionary HMS *Dreadnought*. Fisher bulldozed these reforms through with the assistance of a sympathetic press and – for the first time – a sympathetic Cabinet. As committed navalists climbed the chain of command, they had to work within the political framework of Parliament as much as the familiar world of the Mediterranean or Channel fleets, and while maintaining cordial relations with one's political colleagues helped Fisher in particular to revolutionize the Navy, it deprived the general body of navalists, particularly in the press, of a valuable scapegoat. With navalists at the highest

levels of the Admiralty, the pro-naval press could no longer clamor to throw the Admiralty out – unless the Admiralty was *politically* unacceptable, which became a real concern for navalists after the Liberal electoral victory of 1906. Fisher did not help matters by purposefully creating the ‘Fishpond’ system of loyal subordinates and doing his best to ensure they received choice appointments within the service. Directed navalism was at its most effective and its widest extend during this period, but its increasing favoritism and politicization were ominous signs for the movement’s continued survival.

Chapter V looks at the crisis of directed navalism between the critical years of 1907 and 1908. Relations between Fisher and Beresford, the most influential and most well-known public faces of the Royal Navy, had soured entirely – and both men were more than willing to use the press to their advantage. While Fisher struggled to maintain journalistic allies across the political spectrum, Beresford and his ‘Syndicate of Discontent’ turned to the Conservative press, themselves increasingly frustrated after their great defeat in 1906. The result was a radicalization of navalist rhetoric from reasoned support of reforms both large and small to frankly vicious personal attacks slung back and forth in the London dailies on behalf of admirals who could no longer maintain even a façade of collegiality. This period saw the Imperial Maritime League form as a splinter group of the Navy League, dedicated entirely to forcing both Fisher and the Liberal government from office. By 1908 directed navalism was mainly being directed towards the personal feuds and political goals of an influential handful of high-ranking officers and Cabinet-level politicians; the partisan press was selling papers at

unprecedented rates, but the vast majority of mid-rank serving officers – who had been so important in the formation of the navalist movement – were growing disillusioned with the entire system.

The fifth and final body chapter, chapter VI, reveals reasons for the rapid initial collapse (via official investigation) and ensuing slow demise of directed navalism between 1908 and the beginning of the First World War in 1914. It had become entirely too wrapped up in the personal animosities and journalistic connections of Jacky Fisher, and when his career was unceremoniously ended as an indirect result of the 1909 Beresford Inquiry the three groups of professionals, press and politicians fractured entirely. Serving officers refused to have anything further to do with the press, developing a widespread distrust of naval journalists that would cause myriad public relations problems during the war. At the same time the navalist press became increasingly more partisan, and those who replaced Fisher at the Admiralty wanted nothing to do with journalistic allies who could not be relied on to support them in any debate over the effective use of naval funds. Yet as directed navalism fell apart, ‘soft’ navalism expanded rapidly. By August of 1914 the old networks between the Admiralty and Fleet Street and between Whitehall and the House of Commons had disintegrated under nearly a decade of increasing radicalization and partisanship – but they left behind them a Navy League 120,000 strong and a yearly naval estimate of £50 million, both developments unthinkable in 1884.

PREFACE: PROTO-NAVALISM TO 1884

Few national movements arise in a vacuum, and the practice of naval officers and politicians communicating unofficially with journalists has a long history. As early as the Napoleonic Wars John Wilson Croker, the First Secretary to the Admiralty, wrote for and edited the *Quarterly Review* when not dealing with naval matters and maintained a relationship with the editor of *The Times*; Cabinet members recommended he strike deals with “friendly papers” for naval exclusives.³⁹ In the early 1840s Lord Palmerston, while Foreign Secretary, published Admiral Robert Stopford’s dispatches from the Levant to “meet the public’s desire for information, win goodwill for the Royal Navy, and head off Tory newspapers.”⁴⁰

These connections, however, were isolated events at moments of crisis. The Royal Navy in the nineteenth century did its utmost to remain aloof from both political and press entanglements. George Goschen, First Lord of the Admiralty from 1871 to 1874, spoke out against “panic shipbuilding” and the politicization of naval issues: “It would indeed be a bad thing for one set of politicians to cry down the ships built by another party and *vice versa*, because in that case the country would come to the conclusion that there were no ships worth having.”⁴¹ In 1868 the Conservative

³⁹ Hamilton, *Making of the Modern Admiralty*, 98.

⁴⁰ Rebecca Berens Matzke, *Deterrence through Strength: British Naval Power and Foreign Policy under Pax Britannica* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2011), 231.

⁴¹ Arthur Elliot, *The Life of George Joachim Goschen, First Viscount Goschen, 1831-1907*, 2 vols. (London: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1911) I, 140-141; Thomas Brassey, *The British Navy: Its Strength, Resources, and Administration*, 5 vols. (London: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1882-3) IV, 34.

Parliamentary Secretary to the Admiralty, Henry Lennox, was confident that it would be both “reasonable and popular” to reduce the yearly estimates.⁴² Henry Campbell-Bannerman, a Liberal successor to the same office, felt that although “we have been invited by writers of great authority in the public Press to [...] open up a new era of great Naval Expenditure [...] we are not disposed to follow that advice.”⁴³ In 1884, as previously noted, Lord Northbrook could find nothing further for the navy to spend its money on.

By the 1870s this attitude was shifting, particularly among the navy’s younger officers. Captain John Fisher began organizing displays of the latest naval technology for visiting MPs and reporters aboard his various commands; Commander Charles Beresford later recalled in his memoirs how he had only been able to acquire required machine parts for his ship HMS *Thunderer* in 1878 by threatening to reveal the vessel’s decrepit condition to the public.⁴⁴ These young officers were also beginning to communicate with the press directly, marking the beginning of relationships between journalists and naval officers below the highest commands. Beresford wrote to T. G. Bowles, founder of *Vanity Fair*, in 1882: “If I have told you anything you did not know I

⁴² Beeler, *British Naval Policy*, 78.

⁴³ F. W. Hirst, *The Six Panics, and other Essays* (London: Methuen & Co. Ltd., 1913), 44.

⁴⁴ William Jameson, *The Fleet that Jack Built: Nine Men who Made a Modern Navy* (London: Rupert Hart-Davis, 1962), 97-98; Bennett, *Charlie B*, 64. Fisher in particular had no time for the hoary traditions of the navy. As early as 1871 he had published a pamphlet for internal Admiralty use on naval tactics that had recommended officers “encourage the men at their exercises by swallowing sword blades [and] eating wine glasses;” this was omitted from the final circulated version. MacKay, *Fisher of Kilverstone*, 93.

am so glad. *But do not let my name appear [...] our orders are that we are not to appear as having written to any paper.*⁴⁵ Captain Cyprian Bridge admitted in 1881 that he had been in contact with editor of the *Pall Mall Gazette* John Morley and had even encouraged him to speak with Rear Admiral Richard Vesey Hamilton about their mutual concern over “the ‘denavalisation’ of Britain.”⁴⁶

The idea that the press could be a valuable ally as opposed to a nuisance took hold after the Royal Navy’s bombardment of Alexandria in 1882. The immediate precursor to the British invasion of Egypt, the offensive was not short of gallantry; Beresford in particular became a household name in Britain after his daring and successful assault on an Egyptian shore installation in his tiny gunboat *HMS Condor*. But the actual naval operations were not particularly successful, British gunnery was extremely poor, and a bombardment that ended with sailors and officers disembarking and fighting in the streets of Alexandria did not offer a great deal of confidence about the navy’s effectiveness in battle.⁴⁷

The Admiralty was not inclined to devote funds to improving ships that had proven perfectly adequate – so what were captains and commodores who saw a need for increased naval expenditure and modernized warships to do? Beresford’s example provided the answer. His actions at the bombardment had certainly been heroic, but

⁴⁵ Bennett, *Charlie B*, 77.

⁴⁶ Bridge to J.K. Laughton, 23 Oct 1881, in Andrew Lambert, ed., *Letters and Papers of Professor Sir John Knox Laughton, 1830-1915* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2002), 29.

⁴⁷ Bennett, *Charlie B*, 82-85.

Britons knew his name due to the happy accident that Moberly Bell, Egyptian correspondent of *The Times*, had been aboard the *Condor* that day. As a result it was Beresford's story, out of a multitude of courageous undertakings at the bombardment, that was splashed across the pages of the most influential newspaper in the country.⁴⁸ If the power of the press could create a national hero out of a day's work, what could it do for naval reform? Surely the nation would not idly stand by and watch its naval preeminence slip away – not if it knew the true situation. Could not naval officers and the London dailies find common ground over the issue of national defense? Introductory letters were sent, tentative meetings were arranged. The age of directed navalism was dawning.

⁴⁸ Freeman, *Great Edwardian Naval Feud*, 24.

CHAPTER II

GETTING AT 'THE TRUTH:' THE RISE OF NAVALIST AGITATION, 1884-1894

On September 15, 1884, readers of the *Pall Mall Gazette* opened their newspapers to find a rather shocking headline. The *Gazette* was edited by the social reformer William Thomas Stead, who had recently shifted the periodical's editorial focus in a Radical direction with a series of articles on the conditions of life among London's poorest residents. Now the *Gazette* was embarking on a new project – to reveal to London “The Truth About the Navy.” And the truth, according to Stead, was that Britain's navy was in a much more precarious position than the general public suspected, for “the scramble for the world has now begun in earnest. In face of that phenomenon, how far are we able to prevent our own possessions being scrambled for by our neighbors?” The answer “depends upon the condition of our navy. If it is as strong as it ought to be, we have nothing to fear. If, on the other hand, it is no longer in a position of incontestable superiority to the navies of the world, we are in a position of peril too grave to be capable of exaggeration.”¹ Keeping the Royal Navy in a state of robust health, Stead argued, was not a matter for Liberal or Conservative politics – it was an essential issue of national security.

But was the navy adequate? Stead's article of the 15th was the first salvo in what became a multi-month campaign intended to demonstrate to the British public that the

¹ *Pall Mall Gazette*, 15 Sep 1884, quoted in Harvey Blumenthal, “W.T. Stead's Role in Shaping Official Policy: The Navy Campaign of 1884” (Ph.D. dissertation, George Washington University, 1984), 69.

Royal Navy was, in fact, desperately in need of increased funding, and Stead had valuable allies on his side. Three days later the *Pall Mall Gazette* ran another column on the state of the service. Written by an anonymous author – the article was signed “by one who knows the facts” - it was nevertheless clear from the specific facts and figures quoted that the writer had access to internal Admiralty documents, and that the international situation was apparently grim; Stead had noted in his editorial that his source’s revelations were “so alarming [...] that we hesitated in making it public.”² True, the British fleet had more ironclad battleships than any other power. But as the *Gazette*’s anonymous correspondent demonstrated, Britain would come up short against a combination of two or more potential enemies – and the country also appeared to be deficient in both smaller ships and overseas bases. The *Gazette* recommended a series of immediate shipbuilding and dockyard construction initiatives, and called for increasing the naval estimates – which stood at approximately £12.3 million per year in 1884³ - by at least £4 million.⁴

Within just a few days of the first *Gazette* articles, worry about the state of the navy had begun to spread to other newspapers. The influential Sunday newspaper the *Observer* worried that “the English Navy has no longer command of the sea, because France has outbuilt England in effective fighting ironclads,” and blamed the problem on

² F. W. Hirst, *The Six Panics, and other Essays* (London: Methuen & Co. Ltd., 1913), 47-48.

³ Roger Parkinson, “The Origins of the Naval Defence Act of 1889 and the New Navalism of the 1890s” (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Exeter, 2006), 328.

⁴ Blumenthal, “Navy Campaign of 1884,” 71-77.

the fact that “since 1870 the English people have let the Navy become the prey of political factions.”⁵ The *Tablet* thanked the *Gazette* for its hard work, and noted that more periodicals were taking up the call: “The hammer-sound of alarm has gone out into the land, and now almost every organ of public opinion in the kingdom is ringing with that first and last of all questions – the safety of Britain. What strikes us as most strange is the unanimity there has been in the press.”⁶ Stead happily pointed out that newspapers across the political spectrum were becoming involved in the *Gazette*’s agitation. On September 23 he wrote that “the Rip Van Winkles of the London Press are awakening at last, and the readers of the [Conservative] *Daily Telegraph* learn with astonishment this morning that ‘a cry of patriotic anxiety is rising in the country to which no ministry dare close its ears.’”⁷

Some commenters were more cynical. The Liberal columnist F. W. Hirst believed “like a good journalist, Mr. Stead had arranged that his own cries of horror and astonishment should be well echoed, and there immediately appeared letters from Admiral This and Vice-Admiral That, couched in the most gloomy phraseology. On September 20, only two days after ‘the Truth’ had leaked out, the *Gazette* was able to inform its readers that ‘the unanimity of assent is bewildering and appalling.’”⁸

⁵ *Pall Mall Gazette*, 22 Sep 1884, quoted in Parkinson “Naval Defence Act,” 140.

⁶ *Pall Mall Gazette*, 27 Sep 1884, quoted in “Navy Campaign of 1884,” 101.

⁷ *Pall Mall Gazette*, 23 Sep 1884, quoted in Raymond Schults, *Crusader in Babylon: W.T. Stead and the Pall Mall Gazette* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1972), 97.

⁸ Hirst, *Six Panics*, 51.

Regardless of how orchestrated Stead's campaign had been, it soon began to bear fruit. Edward Hamilton, secretary to Prime Minister William Gladstone, wrote in his diary near the end of September that "the Navy panic continues in the papers headed by the *Pall Mall Gazette*. Stead is becoming an alarmist."⁹ But Hugh Childers, the Chancellor of the Exchequer, recognized that "the *Pall Mall Gazette*'s furious demand for more naval expenditure has been received with considerable approval,"¹⁰ and parliamentary secretary to the Admiralty Henry Campbell-Bannerman wrote in early October that "although I do not believe the hysterical excitement of the *Pall Mall Gazette* extends far beyond London, there is sufficient interest and anxiety felt in the country to prevent the question being shelved or poohpoohed."¹¹

Stead and his fellow journalists placed strong emphasis on this interest of the 'nation as a whole' as a necessary catalyst for increased naval expenditure. Stead, who had written earlier in the year that Britain was "now well on our way to government by the Press,"¹² contended that "if public opinion does not make itself felt, [the Government] will probably dawdle on until some great disaster teaches the nation the terrible significance of the treachery of neglect."¹³ His colleague and collaborator, H. O.

⁹ Blumenthal, "Navy Campaign of 1884," 112.

¹⁰ Arthur J. Marder, *The Anatomy of British Sea Power: A History of British Naval Policy in the Pre-Dreadnought Era, 1880-1905* (Hamden, CT: Archon Books, 1964 [1940]), 121-122.

¹¹ Blumenthal, "Navy Campaign of 1884," 124-125.

¹² Blumenthal, "Navy Campaign of 1884," 16.

¹³ Blumenthal, "Navy Campaign of 1884," 136-137.

Arnold-Forster, whose role in the *Pall Mall Gazette* articles will be examined below, also wrote in the *Nineteenth Century* that “all that is necessary for the English people is to act while they have still the power and still the time. If they once get a real hold of the facts, I have not the slightest doubt that they will show that they possess the will.”¹⁴ It was the press’s task to make sure the British public had the facts.

“The Truth About the Navy” became a regular feature in the *Pall Mall Gazette*, and by November of 1884 five more articles had appeared in the journal which, with the help of “one who knows the facts,” continued to shed light on perceived deficiencies in the Royal Navy.¹⁵ By this point questions about the Navy had also been asked in the halls of Parliament (first raised by W. H. Smith, the Conservative First Lord of the Admiralty¹⁶ under the previous administration, thus immediately involving navalism in partisan politics). The ensuing debate was not recognized for its decorum; Liberal MP Wilfred Lawson claimed that it was of “a humiliating character for both sides of the House,” and found it “a pity that the government could not withstand the hysterical shrieks of a certain portion of the press.”¹⁷ Yet, by the end of 1884 First Lord of the Admiralty Lord Northbrook and Gladstone had given in. Stead had asked for an extra

¹⁴ Blumenthal, “Navy Campaign of 1884,” 156.

¹⁵ Iain O’Shea, “Selling ‘The Scheme’: The British Periodical Press and the Discourse on Naval Reform, 1900-1910” (M.A. thesis, University of New Brunswick, 2010), 19.

¹⁶ The First Lord of the Admiralty was the political and civilian head of the Admiralty, appointed by the PM. The Naval Lords, of whom there were four, were all serving officers and the professional heads of the Admiralty.

¹⁷ Blumenthal, “Navy Campaign of 1884,” 148, 238-239.

£4 million, and in December the Navy received a supplementary estimate of £5.5 million, although much of that money was earmarked for new dockyard facilities.¹⁸ A gleeful Stead called his campaign a “very striking illustration of the new method of government”¹⁹ – that is, by the press. Disgruntled Liberals found it “the beginning of a most disastrous expansion in naval armaments.”²⁰ *The Times* commented that one result of Stead’s agitation was a growing lack of trust in the Admiralty: “The country must henceforth take the matter [of the Navy] into its own hands; it must judge for itself whether the Navy is efficient and sufficient, and if it finds that it is not, it must insist on the Board of Admiralty making it so forthwith, and, what is more, it must not rest until it finds a Board of Admiralty that is ready to do its bidding.”²¹

The “Truth About the Navy” campaign was the first *journalistic* effort (as opposed to internal Admiralty budget conversations) to raise public awareness of perceived deficiencies in the Navy – it would not be the last. But why would W. T. Stead, to this point a Radical and social reformer, decide that the Navy would be his next target? And who were his allies within the Admiralty and the government – those who knew the facts? Stead’s first associate was his fellow navalist, the future politician and

¹⁸ Richard Freeman, *The Great Edwardian Naval Feud: Beresford’s Vendetta against Fisher* (Barnsley, UK: Pen & Sword Maritime, 2009), 31.

¹⁹ Blumenthal, “Navy Campaign of 1884,” 242.

²⁰ Hirst, *Six Panics*, 41-42.

²¹ *The Times*, 17 Mar 1885, quoted in John Beeler, *British Naval Policy in the Gladstone-Disraeli Era, 1866-1880* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1997), 276.

current defense expert H. O. Arnold-Forster. Arnold-Forster had been concerned about what he saw as Admiralty inadequacy for some time, and had published a series of articles calling for increased shipbuilding throughout 1883 and 1884. But the articles had appeared in the literary magazine *Nineteenth Century*, and never reached the broad general audience the *Pall Mall Gazette* enjoyed.²² Northbrook's 1884 speech on the navy's comfortable budgetary situation so worried Arnold-Forster that the next month he dropped by Stead's office to impress upon him the dangers the Royal Navy faced. When Arnold-Forster laid out a view of the "panic, disorder, suffering, [and] starvation among our overcrowded population" that would result if naval funding was not increased, Stead found himself a rapid convert to the navalist cause; as he wrote later, from that point on "for a month or more I lived and moved and had my being in what may be called the world of the Navy."²³

Stead already had friends in high places, the most valuable of whom was Reginald Brett, later Lord Esher, who in 1884 was secretary to Lord Hartington, Gladstone's Secretary of State for War. In this role Brett had access to the records of the Carnarvon Commission, which in the early 1880s had compiled detailed charts of Britain's international trade routes and balances; Brett seems to have sent a good deal of this on to Stead, who used the information to call for an increase in the use of warships

²² Blumenthal, "Navy Campaign of 1884," 55.

²³ Schults, *Crusader in Babylon*, 88-89.

for commerce protection.²⁴ But Arnold-Forster was able to provide Stead with a list of Admiralty personages and serving naval officers who shared his concern about the Navy and who were willing to speak with the journalist,²⁵ and these high-ranking officers became Stead's first interviewees.

Stead started at the top; he first spoke with First Naval Lord Admiral Sir Astley Cooper Key, the professional head of the Navy. Stead later recalled this meeting, remarking that Cooper Key "received me kindly at the Admiralty, listened to me with a certain sympathetic compassion, and assured me that it was all of no use. There was indeed in the old Admiral's eye a certain feeling of incredulous wonder at the supreme audacity of the young journalist, who cheerily declared that if only he could secure his facts, he would compel any Government, even Mr. Gladstone's, to grant as many millions as were necessary, to restore the sea power of the Empire." Cooper Key was blunt with Stead, and asked: "So you think that you could succeed where all the Sea Lords have failed, and move Mr. Gladstone?" Stead thought he could, "if you will give me my facts." Cooper Key's answer was dismissive: "I have already given them to Mr. Gladstone. We have all done everything short of resigning our offices to awake the Government to a sense of the deadly peril in which we stand. But it is no use [...] we can get nothing for the Navy; not a penny."²⁶

²⁴ Parkinson, "Naval Defence Act," 138-139.

²⁵ Blumenthal, "Navy Campaign of 1884," 61.

²⁶ The preceding is taken from an account of his 'Truth' campaign Stead wrote in the late 1890s. Frederic Whyte, *The Life of W.T. Stead*, 2 vols. (London: Jonathan Cape Limited, 1925), I 148-149.

The next Admiralty official Stead interviewed was Admiral Frederick Beauchamp Seymour, the Second Naval Lord. When Stead asked him how the Royal Navy would perform if a war with France broke out, Seymour's response was pessimistic. "Sir Cooper Key and I, and all the rest of us at the Admiralty, would be swinging by our necks from the lamp-posts in front of Whitehall, where we should be strung up, every man Jack of us, by the nation whom we had betrayed, and it would serve us right too. Seymour also informed Stead that he and his fellow Board members had gone so far as to threaten resignation unless Gladstone's government devoted more funding to the Navy.²⁷ Stead then visited the Royal Naval dockyards at Portsmouth, where he spoke with the commander, Admiral Sir Geoffrey Phipps Hornby, about more technical concerns.²⁸ Rear-Admiral Anthony Hoskins, Superintendent of Naval Reserves, also surreptitiously provided Stead inside information about Admiralty debates over funding during the campaign.²⁹

The high-ranking Admiralty figures Arnold-Forster introduced to Stead proved to be valuable sources for the latter as he composed his articles; Stead had managed to gain journalistic access to the highest corridors of power. Hoskins even proofread Stead's articles before they appeared, commenting that they were not harsh enough towards the

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ W. Mark Hamilton, *The Nation and the Navy: Methods and Organization of British Navalist Propaganda, 1889-1914* (New York: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1986), 46-47.

²⁹ Blumenthal, "Navy Campaign of 1884," 197-198. At one point Hoskins perhaps over-enthusiastically told Stead he had succeeded in getting the Navy an additional £11 million.

navy.³⁰ But reaching the top of the service's professional ladder, particularly in the 1880s, also meant that one had reached an advanced age; Cooper Key and Seymour would be retired by 1886. Stead needed younger informants, captains and lieutenants who would be willing to work with him for years to come – and preferably who were as concerned as he was about the state of the navy. He found his man in Jacky Fisher.

John Arbuthnot Fisher, known to all as Jacky, would eventually rise to the top of his profession and implement a series of reforms that would shape the Royal Navy that fought the Great War. But in 1884 he was in his early forties and held the rank of captain commanding HMS *Excellent*, the shore establishment dedicated to gunnery training. He was everything Stead needed – a young officer on the rise who had serious doubts about the preparedness for the Royal Navy for war, a gift for language, and a willingness to share information, particularly technical information. In short, Fisher was 'one who knew the truth.' Historians have never reached a consensus on who exactly introduced Stead to Fisher, although they seem generally to agree that their first meeting occurred as part of Stead's research for his 'Truth' campaign.³¹

³⁰ Stead to Reginald Brett, 18 Sep 1884, quoted in Ruddock F. Mackay, *Fisher of Kilverstone* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1973), 180.

³¹ Richard Hough in his biography of Fisher claims that Reginald Brett introduced the two; W. Mark Hamilton in his history of navalism names Geoffrey Phipps Hornby; Harvey Blumenthal in his history of Stead's naval campaign believes it was Anthony Hoskins. Only Hough makes any mention of Stead having known Fisher before 1884, but offers no details; he also asserts that "it was widely known that Fisher was behind the *Pall Mall Gazette* exposures," but again without evidence. Richard Hough, *Admiral of the Fleet: The Life of John Fisher* (New York: Macmillan Company, 1969), 83.

In later years, Stead was happy to advertise his connections with admirals and first sea lords – but he kept his communication with Fisher secret for some time, likely because Fisher’s career would have been severely damaged if his role as an informer had been revealed.³² In his 1890s recap of the naval campaign, Stead spoke only of “one good captain, to whose patriotism and courage I was immensely indebted, who met me surreptitiously in byways and highways, and always concluded his conversation by pledging me to the most solemn secrecy as to the source of my information, ruthfully [sic.] adding: ‘You have got enough in your wallet to break half the officers in Her Majesty’s Service if you split.’”³³ It was only in 1903 that Stead was able to relate how “I used to go to Captain Fisher, like Nicodemus, at night-time, meeting him at wayside railway stations;”³⁴ Fisher recalled later in life how “Stead used to pay me surreptitious visits.”³⁵ Even Stead’s biographer, Frederic Whyte, noted that any correspondence that took place between the two men had disappeared from Stead’s papers by the 1920s.³⁶ Apparently all that remains is a letter from Fisher to Stead dated March 8, 1885 – and thus after the initial press agitation – where Fisher sent his comments on a future *Pall Mall Gazette* article back to Stead with a warning: “I attach the pencil corrections of a

³² Schults, *Crusader in Babylon*, 90.

³³ Whyte, *Life of Stead I*, 149-150.

³⁴ Freeman, *Great Edwardian Naval Feud*, 31.

³⁵ From a 1918 article by Fisher on Stead, “The Greatest of Journalists,” Churchill Archives Centre, Churchill College, Cambridge, 1st Lord Fisher of Kilverstone Papers (hereafter CCA FISR), 9/15.

³⁶ Whyte, *Life of Stead I*, 153.

friend and a Yankee repartee is attached to end of proof for your consideration [...] I must keep clear of you as my friends tell me an eye is upon me. Still I hope to come & see you the week after next....”³⁷ A long and expansive network of Admiralty-press contacts would spring from this first scrap of communication.

Yet even though Stead had productively brought what he saw as Admiralty weaknesses to the public eye, he was having less success in convincing his peers that this achievement was due entirely to the powers of the *Pall Mall Gazette*. Stead believed that his Navy campaign had been an exemplar of the power the British press now had to move MPs and Cabinet Ministers, and found it “notable that in this last great Imperial work of the century neither the Commons nor the Lords rendered any service worth speaking of. The work was done from first to last by the Press. All that the Commons did was to vote the money which the newspapers had taught the public to demand.”³⁸ Stead also downplayed the contribution of naval officers, emphasizing the fact that it was *he* who had sought *them* out: “So far from the specialists and experts setting to work to use the press to get up a scare, the initial impulse was not in any sense administrative: it was purely journalistic, and no one did so much to discourage and dishearten us in the agitation which we initiated as the experts and specialists....”³⁹ He viewed the connections made with Admiralty officials as merely a successful working

³⁷ Fisher to Stead, 8 Mar 1885, Churchill Archives Centre, Churchill College, Cambridge, William T. Stead Papers (hereafter CCA STED), 1/27.

³⁸ Whyte, *Life of Stead* I, 151.

³⁹ Blumenthal, “Navy Campaign of 1884,” 240-241.

relationship between journalist and informant, writing of “the ablest men in the Navy:” “They supplied me with my facts; I supplied them, as my share, with a buoyant faith in the possibility of rousing public opinion by the vigorous use of the *Pall Mall Gazette*.”⁴⁰ Stead’s claims were backed up by Fisher, who recalled later in his career that the ‘Truth’ campaign “was again an unexampled feat of journalism. Imagine! a penny London evening paper by itself quite unaided, indeed contemned, so swayed the Empire as to compel a most unwilling and reluctant Ministry to do its duty by the Navy....”⁴¹

However, some of Stead’s colleagues were skeptical from the beginning that he had planned the ‘Truth’ campaign entirely of his own volition. The previously-mentioned F. W. Hirst blamed the entire agitation on the Conservative Party as “a professional agitation for taxpayers’ money”⁴² – and this would certainly not be the last time that navalism would stand accused as the pawn of party politics. More damning for Stead, Liberal MP (and former editor of the *Pall Mall Gazette* himself) John Morley wrote in an open letter to the *Gazette* in December 1884, while Stead’s articles were still appearing, that he believed Stead had been used by younger members of the Admiralty to put pressure on the Board and Parliament: “What we have seen for the last three months has been the spectacle of the Departments working the oracle through the newspapers.” Stead immediately deprecated Morley’s comments, believing all they

⁴⁰ Whyte, *Life of Stead* I, 151.

⁴¹ From a 1918 article by Fisher on Stead, “The Greatest of Journalists,” CCA FISR, 9/15. That Fisher explained how he secretly aided Stead later in the article makes his praise seem somewhat insincere.

⁴² Hirst, *Six Panics*, 46-47.

proved was that Morley “has hardly kept touch with the journalism of the day.”⁴³ In doing so he was technically correct, since the ‘Truth’ campaign was originally planned by Stead and Arnold-Forster – but the serving Naval Lords would hardly have bashed their own department in interviews if they had no inkling of Stead’s plans, to say nothing of Fisher’s involvement (although as previously mentioned, Stead managed to keep the latter hidden until the early 1900s).

And even if Stead denied direct Admiralty involvement in the planning of his articles, the debate on increasing naval funding quickly grew beyond his control and involved more service personages than he had originally consulted. Captains and admirals both retired and on active duty were soon contributing their thoughts on the matter to the London press, and not just to the *Pall Mall Gazette*; the retired Admirals Sir Thomas Symonds and Sir George Elliot both sent multiple letters to *The Times* supporting Stead’s proposals.⁴⁴ Many of Stead’s contemporaries did not share his dim view of unsolicited advice from naval personnel. Sir John Henry Briggs, chief clerk of the Admiralty, wrote in his memoirs that “in this controversy the most distinguished admirals and naval experts soon took a part, and, in their numerous contributions to the

⁴³ Blumenthal, “Navy Campaign of 1884,” 240-241.

⁴⁴ Geoffrey Bennett, *Charlie B: A Biography of Admiral Lord Beresford of Metemmeh and Curraghmore, G.C.B., G.C.V.O., LL.D., D.C.L.* (London: Peter Dawnay Ltd., 1968), 131.

Press, gave ample proof of the great ability and skill with which they were able to defend their cause....”⁴⁵

Some naval officers, instead of making their support for Stead known through public letters, took the opportunity of increased attention towards naval issues to work behind the scenes. When W. H. Smith raised the issue of increased Admiralty funding in Parliament, he was soon contacted by Lord Charles Beresford – who was at the time serving in Egypt with the Gordon Relief Expedition, demonstrating how quickly news of Stead’s navalist agitation spread across the Empire – with an urgent appeal to press the matter further and demand more money, as “the public are now aroused.”⁴⁶ Beresford recalled in his memoirs that he was not the only naval officer to seize the moment: “Not only a number of my brother officers, but many students of the subject, did their best to enlighten the nation. We were of course told that we were creating a scare; but a study of the Press of those days shows that nearly every great newspaper, irrespective of its politics, demanded the strengthening and reorganisation of our defences.”⁴⁷ It can be seen from Beresford’s account that a circular process was already developing in which some naval officers, working behind the scenes, helped to drive press interest that then inspired other naval officers to join in. Beresford noted that he “received great support

⁴⁵ Sir John Henry Briggs, *Naval Administrations, 1827 to 1892: The Experience of 65 Years* (London: Sampson Low, Marston & Company Limited, 1897), 215.

⁴⁶ Beresford to W.H. Smith, 20 Oct 1884, quoted in Blumenthal, “Navy Campaign of 1884,” 148.

⁴⁷ Lord Charles Beresford, *The Memoirs of Admiral Lord Charles Beresford*, 2 vols. (Boston: Little, Brown, & Company, 1914), II 338-339.

from the Press,” which he attributed to his staunch claim that he was interested only in the health of the Navy: “Writers on the subject of national defence were at least sure that I had, personally, nothing to gain by publishing the truth.”⁴⁸

W. T. Stead’s “The Truth About the Navy” campaign represented the initial flourishing of directed navalism. Naval officers who felt the Admiralty was being shortchanged by the Government of the day now had recourse to the growing popular press, rather than using official channels or risking their careers with open letters under their own names; reforming journalists such as Stead took on the mission of defending Britain and the Empire and – perhaps more realistically – a ready-made reason to sell more papers with exposés and accusations. Stead was the first journalist to cultivate direct semi-clandestine press relations with high-ranking members of the Admiralty, although his colleagues James Thursfield and Arnold White would not be far behind. In doing so, he did benefit both parties – and it seemed that both the Admiralty and the press would continue to benefit as long as they worked towards a common goal. At the same time, the first crack in the barrier between professionals and the public made it highly likely that others would follow. Everyone managed to pull together in 1884, despite many of the actors being unaware of what others were doing – Beresford, for example, was serving his own interests and would soon be elected to Parliament on a platform of increasing naval funding.⁴⁹ This harmony would not continue – but in early

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

1885 Stead was able to write that since his campaign “everything has been smooth sailing. A multitude of willing and able pens carried on the work with a zeal and a knowledge which left nothing to be desired.”⁵⁰

Stead and his associates had succeeded in securing more funding for the Navy, but the ‘Truth’ campaign was not an end to press agitation but a beginning. The spring of 1885 brought the Penjdeh crisis in Afghanistan, which greatly increased tensions between Britain and Russia; the Royal Navy was put on an active footing, and although the political situation was quickly defused it took nearly three months for the RN to gather an effective fleet.⁵¹ This led to immediate press criticism. The humor magazine *Punch* composed a verse for the occasion: “Sing a song of millions / Voted then and there, / Eight-and-forty war-ships / Promised in a scare. / Now the scare is over, / Not a plank is laid. / Isn’t that a precious way / To see a trust betrayed?”⁵² Stead leaned on his acquaintance Alfred, Lord Tennyson, for assistance in keeping the public’s eyes on naval concerns; Tennyson responded with his poem “The Fleet,” published simultaneously in *The Times* and the *Pall Mall Gazette* in April 1885.⁵³ In this work, the Poet Laureate sounded a word of warning to naval administrators who failed to live up to their country’s expectations: “You, you, that have the ordering of her Fleet, / If you

⁵⁰ Blumenthal, “Navy Campaign of 1884,” 270.

⁵¹ Blumenthal, “Navy Campaign of 1884,” 266.

⁵² Hamilton, *Nation and the Navy*, 35.

⁵³ Andrew Lambert, “The Magic of Trafalgar: The Nineteenth-Century Legacy,” in *Trafalgar in History: A Battle and its Afterlife*, edited by David Cannadine (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), 167.

should only compass her disgrace, / When all men stare, the wild mob's million feet /
Will kick you from your place, / But then too late, too late."⁵⁴

Stead, however, was now happy to leave much of the job of keeping navalist pressure on the government to his colleagues. For his part, Stead devoted much of the next eighteen months singing the praises of himself and the *Pall Mall Gazette* for successfully alerting the public to an imminent danger. He tied the success of the 'Truth' campaign back to his earlier claims about the power of the press, believing "in a democratic age no position is comparable for permanent influence and far-reaching power to that of an editor...."⁵⁵ Stead even pushed his ideology in other periodicals such as the *Contemporary Review*, for which he wrote in 1886: "I have seen Cabinets upset, Ministers driven into retirement, laws repealed, great social reforms initiated, Bills transformed, estimates remodeled, programmes modified, Acts passed, generals nominated, governors appointed, armies set hither and thither, war proclaimed and war averted, by the agency of newspapers."⁵⁶ Less admiring observers such as the poet and critic Matthew Arnold, who saw Stead as the epitome of the disdainful 'new journalism,' believed that the "one great fault" of a campaign such as Stead's was "that it is *feather-brained*. It throws out assertions at a venture because it wishes it true; does not correct

⁵⁴ Hamilton, *Nation and the Navy*, 175.

⁵⁵ Paul Kennedy, *The Rise of the Anglo-German Antagonism 1860-1914* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1980). 362. Blumenthal, "Navy Campaign of 1884," 13-14.

⁵⁶ Stephen Koss, *The Rise and Fall of the Political Press in Britain: The Nineteenth Century*, 2 vols. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1981-84) I, 14.

either them or itself, if they are false; and to get at the state of things as they truly are seems to feel no concern whatever.”⁵⁷

Here Arnold was incorrect on at least one aspect. Stead believed that the state of things as they were was not up to snuff, and he took pains to maintain the connections developed during the ‘Truth’ campaign. Though Stead insisted in a much later article that he had cut off contact with Fisher for a period of years after 1885,⁵⁸ the correspondence between the two did continue for a time and even broadened to draw in more naval figures. Fisher was still proofreading Stead’s naval articles in 1886 when he wrote to the editor: “You will not do wrong if you insert the corrections I have made. I should have been glad to add some original matter but having been in confidential and private communication with Lord Ripon [First Lord of the Admiralty] you will understand that I am bound in honor to refrain.” He went on to declare his “unabated admiration of your efforts on behalf of the Navy and sincere sympathy with you,” although he cautioned Stead “never to allude to this.”⁵⁹ Fisher even let Stead know later in the year that “I am so overwhelmed with work at present as to be quite unable to assist you in the way you desire but I suggest your applying to Captain Bridge of H.M.S. Colossus [...] who I think the best able to assist you.”⁶⁰ (Perhaps unbeknownst to Stead,

⁵⁷ Alan J. Lee, *The Origins of the Popular Press in England, 1855-1914* (London: Croom Helm, 1980 [1976]), 118.

⁵⁸ From a 1910 article by Stead on Fisher, “Lord Fisher,” CCA FISR, 10/9.

⁵⁹ Fisher to Stead, 10 Mar 1886, CCA STED, 1/27; emphasis in original.

⁶⁰ Fisher to Stead, 6 Aug 1886, CCA STED, 1/27.

Fisher was also at this time subverting the chain of command by sending information directly to Geoffrey Phipps Hornby to aid his campaign for increased naval funding.)⁶¹ However, Fisher's continued correspondence with Stead remained behind the scenes – it seems to have been more the maintaining of a successful journalistic relationship than any strategy with a set goal of increasing naval funding – and large-scale public navalist agitation did die down for a time.

The Admiralty learned some lessons of its own about the value of the press from Stead's campaign; if naval news was now in demand, perhaps the flow of information could be regulated through official rather than informal channels. To this end the large naval review held in 1887 was much more open to the press than previous such events, largely thanks to two naval officers who knew the value of public relations; Fisher coordinated a series of naval displays for the benefit of journalists at Portsmouth, while Beresford brought 120 MPs to the review “to see for themselves how the money they voted was spent.”⁶² Following the successful review, journalists were invited on board warships during the annual maneuvers for the first time in 1888;⁶³ by 1889 the majority of London newspapers sent multiple special correspondents.⁶⁴ And in Parliament, the

⁶¹ Fisher to Phipps Hornby, 20 May 1886, quoted in Mackay, *Fisher of Kilverstone*, 186.

⁶² *The Times*, 9 Jun 1887, quoted in Mackay, *Fisher of Kilverstone*, 193-194; Jan Rüger, *The Great Naval Game: Britain and Germany in the Age of Empire* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 74.

⁶³ Hamilton, *Nation and the Navy*, 238-239. Journalists would remain aboard RN ships – not without politicking of various types – until the First World War.

⁶⁴ Richard Brooks, *Fred T Jane: An Eccentric Visionary* (Alexandria, VA: Jane's Information Group, 1997), 27.

naval estimates were accompanied from 1887 by an official explanatory statement – instead of merely a list of figures, every naval expense was now justified for the eyes of curious MPs and reporters.⁶⁵

But it did not take long for the inevitable corollary of the ‘Truth’ campaign to rear its head. Stead had taken pride in the fact that he had gone looking for the Navy. Now the Navy was going to come to him in the personage of Lord Charles Beresford. Beresford had returned from Egypt as a commander in the navy, but in 1886 he was serving for the second time as a Conservative MP, having run on a platform of naval reform.⁶⁶ He was also at this time a close companion of the Prince of Wales, who enquired why he did not “go at the Admiralty in the...Commons? I really believe our Navy now is worse than it has ever been.”⁶⁷ A changing political situation gave Beresford an even greater opportunity, as Gladstone’s Liberal government was replaced in July 1886 by a Conservative ministry under Lord Salisbury; Beresford found himself in the Admiralty, serving as Fourth Naval Lord – in charge of supplies for the RN – under First Lord of the Admiralty George Hamilton.

⁶⁵ Bryan Ranft, “Parliamentary Debate, Economic Vulnerability, and British Naval Expansion, 1860-1905,” in *War, Strategy, and International Politics: Essays in Honour of Sir Michael Howard*, edited by Lawrence Freedman, Paul Hayes, and Robert O’Neill, (Oxford, UK: Clarendon Press, 1992), 83.

⁶⁶ Beresford, *Memoirs* II, 338-339. He had previously been an MP 1874-1880.

⁶⁷ Bennett, *Charlie B*, 135. Beresford and the Prince broke their ties in 1889 after discovering the complexities of sharing a mistress.

Beresford was certainly dedicated to his campaign platform; he believed strongly that increased naval funding meant nothing if the Royal Navy itself was run in an archaic manner. His particular passion was naval strategy, or the lack thereof. Disappointed by the slow mobilization in 1885 and the lack of any significant war planning at the Admiralty, he spent much of his time composing a long memorandum calling for the creation of what he called a naval intelligence division for the Navy.⁶⁸ Beresford took his completed memorandum to his colleagues at the Board of Admiralty, who were unimpressed and chose to take no further action. A frustrated Beresford then went over the head of his direct superiors to the Prime Minister, who shared Beresford's concerns but whose hands were officially tied – the entire point of having a professional Board was that their decisions could not be overridden for political purposes, and they had to be trusted to make the best decisions for the Navy.⁶⁹

Unable to continue further through traditional channels, Beresford instead took advantage of the Navy's biggest supporter in the press. In October 1886 Stead obtained a copy of the memorandum and duly published it in the *Pall Mall Gazette*. Beresford claimed it had been stolen and leaked to the paper by an Admiralty messenger,⁷⁰ which seems unlikely at best. No correspondence between Beresford and Stead survives; Beresford had managed to cover his tracks, a feat for an officer who would eventually

⁶⁸ Marder, *Anatomy of British Sea Power*, 133.

⁶⁹ Parkinson, "Naval Defence Act," 144.

⁷⁰ Beresford, *Memoirs II*, 338-339.

end his career with twenty-three official reprimands.⁷¹ The memorandum apparently had a wide enough circulation thanks to Beresford's efforts that the original archival file has been edited by a clerk to read "not confidential." Nevertheless, the appeal to the public had its effect; after a rush of press criticism, the Board of Admiralty approved the creation of the Naval Intelligence Division later that year.⁷²

Navalist successes were often fleeting; there was no guarantee that voted monies would be spent on a particular project, and new battleships in particular, with their long development time, could be obsolete before they were launched. But the Naval Intelligence Division was a particular disappointment. By 1887 the naval estimates, increased so greatly in 1884, were quietly being cut.⁷³ The new Naval Intelligence Division was especially hard hit. The salaries of its commanding officers were reduced to the point that the efficiency of the nascent department was effected; there was no money to consult outside experts, and no willing officers to draw up war plans.⁷⁴ Beresford, troubled by these developments, attempted to resign in protest in 1887 but Salisbury refused to allow it, writing that the Queen wanted Beresford to remain,

⁷¹ Freeman, *Great Edwardian Naval Feud*, 239.

⁷² Roger Parkinson, *The Late Victorian Navy: The Pre-Dreadnought Era and the Origins of the First World War* (Woodbridge, UK: Boydell Press, 2008), 95.

⁷³ Nicholas Lambert, *Sir John Fisher's Naval Revolution* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1999), 17.

⁷⁴ Eric J. Grove, *The Royal Navy since 1815: A New Short History* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 73-75.

although regretting “that the affair got into the newspapers;”⁷⁵ this was likely Beresford’s doing, as besides his earlier dealings with the *Pall Mall Gazette* he had been allowing the *Standard* to use his name as a supporter of naval reform since earlier in the year.⁷⁶

His resignation on hold, Beresford turned to his Parliamentary constituency to try and bring public attention back to the navy – to the irritation of his fellow officers. Fisher told Phipps Hornby in November that Beresford “has circulated the draft of a speech he proposes to make his constituents in which he wants 5 more ironclads and a heap of other vessels, etc., etc., and this I think is causing annoyance to his colleagues.” Fisher noted that Beresford had asked him to proofread the speech, but he “declined, knowing what happens to the fender when you come alongside with too much weigh on!”⁷⁷ Finally, Beresford decided that the court of public opinion offered better options than continuing to work from within the Admiralty, and he officially tendered his resignation as Fourth Sea Lord – which was this time accepted – in January of 1888.⁷⁸ Some of his political superiors privately welcomed this development. The Prince of Wales recorded that Beresford “has resigned his seat in the Admiralty for the hundredth

⁷⁵ Salisbury to Beresford, 28 Jul 1887, British Library, London (hereafter BL ADD MS), Beresford Correspondence 1887 – 1896, 63117.

⁷⁶ Letter from Beresford, 22 Mar 1887, BL ADD MS, 63117.

⁷⁷ Fisher to Phipps Hornby, 2 Nov 1887, quoted in Mackay, *Fisher of Kilverstone*, 194.

⁷⁸ Robert E. Mullins, “In the Shadow of Marder: a New Perspective of British Naval Administration and the Naval Defense Act of 1889,” in *New Interpretations in Naval History: Selected Papers from the Fourteenth Naval History Symposium, Held at Annapolis, Maryland, 23-25 September 1999*, edited by Randy Carol Balano and Craig L. Symonds (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 2001), 65.

time, and it has been accepted, as I fancy his colleagues could not get on any more with him....”⁷⁹ Salisbury was more on point when he maintained that “Beresford is too greedy of popular applause to get on in a public department. He is constantly playing his own game at the expense of his colleagues.”⁸⁰ The Prime Minister was soon proven correct; Beresford immediately used his status as a serving MP to once again bring the issue of increased naval funding before the public – and, portentously, soon found a great deal more success in this endeavor than he had achieved while serving with the Board of Admiralty.

Navalist press campaigns were beginning to spread beyond Stead and the *Pall Mall Gazette*; in fact, Beresford did not contact Stead during his 1888 push for reform.⁸¹ Instead, he shifted his focus from saving the Naval Intelligence Department to once again increasing funding for the Navy as a whole, and turned to other allies in the press. Pro-naval articles began appearing in more established outlets such as *The Times*, whose editor George Buckle wrote in May that “the country will not now be satisfied until the Government is able to assure it that, whatever plan of defense may be ultimately adopted, the Navy is strong enough to carry it into effect.”⁸² *Blackwood’s Edinburgh*

⁷⁹ Geoffrey Penn, *Infighting Admirals: Fisher’s Feud with Beresford and the Reactionaries* (Barnsley, UK: Leo Cooper, 2000), 44.

⁸⁰ Freeman, *Great Edwardian Naval Feud*, 34.

⁸¹ Beresford would offer to assist Stead in a later navalist campaign in 1893. Beresford to Stead, 30 Oct 1893, CCA STED, 1/27.

⁸² Mullins, “Shadow of Marder,” 71-72.

Magazine believed Beresford's new tactic was the true path to success: "the only way in which it was possible to get money out of the country, to keep the navy anything like up to the mark in the matter of modern ships and modern ordnance, was by the fortuitous recurrence of periodical war scares, which so frighten the people, in consequence of our unprepared condition, that they are ready to lavish money as long as the scare exists."⁸³ Beresford himself was so in demand with the press that when *Murray's Magazine* contacted him with an offer "to enlighten the public on the subject" of the Navy, he politely declined: "I think excellent suggestion, but if I do write myself I have already promised another periodical."⁸⁴

Beresford still maintained his connections with many naval reformers within the service, and did his best to enroll many of his colleagues in his push for public awareness. He held a series of public meetings in London dedicated to national defense, and even created an 'executive committee' for his movement that comprised a mix of retired naval officials (Vice-Admiral Philip Howard Colomb), serving naval personnel (Captain C. C. Penrose-Fitzgerald and Admiral Geoffrey Phipps Hornby), and pro-naval journalists (William Laird Clowes and the naval strategy expert Captain John Colomb). This Committee rapidly began firing off letters to London periodicals, particularly *The Times*, both calling for increased naval funding and criticizing those who disagreed with

⁸³ *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine* 143 (Feb 1888), quoted in James Bernitt, "The Political Career of Admiral Lord Charles Beresford" (M.A. thesis, University of Cincinnati, 1969), 26.

⁸⁴ Edward A. Arnold to Beresford, 21 Jan 1888, BL ADD MS, 63117; emphasis in original.

their “unpatriotic agitation.”⁸⁵ Penrose-Fitzgerald later recalled his time with “a gang of conspirators known as the ‘panic-mongers and chronic alarmists,’ who were trying to awaken their countrymen to the fact that for some years past our Navy had been allowed to fall into a state of weakness;” after learning how many prestigious naval officers were already aiding the cause, he “joined the gang and set to work.”⁸⁶

Although Beresford’s committee was ostensibly non-partisan, he also attempted to broaden his agitation in the political arena. Conservative politician Lord Dunraven asked Beresford to “let me know later on what revolution or whatever it is I shall have to spread [...] Whatever you do don’t fail us as they are so anxious to get you.”⁸⁷ And Beresford’s success was inspiring some of his naval contemporaries to try their hands at writing to the press as well. An officer aboard HMS *Invincible* wrote to the naval journalist William Laird Clowes that “we had the pleasure of meeting at the early meeting of the Naval Agitation at Conservative Club in 1888, with Captain Fitzgerald & Lord Charles Beresford, & this is my excuse for writing to you on the subject” of the need to increase the size of the Mediterranean Fleet. The officer realized that openly criticizing the Admiralty “requires an independent person like yourself to be able to carry it through, as in our position of full pay naval officers we are gagged [...] I truly

⁸⁵ Howard Moon, “The Invasion of the United Kingdom: Public Controversy and Official Planning 1888 – 1918” (Ph.D. dissertation, University of London, 1968), 31 – 33.

⁸⁶ Parkinson, “Naval Defence Act,” 317.

⁸⁷ Dunraven to Beresford, 27 Apr 1888, Caird Library, National Maritime Museum, Greenwich, UK, Charles Beresford Papers, Miscellaneous correspondence 1880 – 1912 (hereafter NMM AGC), 22/10.

want to be of any small assistance to you that I can.” He also suggested that Beresford speak with Arnold-Forster, calling the navalist “useful in preaching this doctrine.”⁸⁸

This combination of political and press agitation was beginning to antagonize the Admiralty and the Government, coming as it did from a brother officer (and from Conservative politicians criticizing a Conservative government). Salisbury angrily protested in Parliament “against the tones of panic which prevail and the language which is used, as though the Government were passing by all these matters in utter apathy.”⁸⁹ Yet Salisbury was concurrently under pressure from the Queen, who was now convinced that George Hamilton, the First Lord of the Admiralty, was “not near strong enough” and should be removed.⁹⁰ Matters came to a head in late 1888 when Beresford paid a visit to George Goschen, the Chancellor of the Exchequer. Beresford’s account of this meeting is worth quoting at length:

‘Do you know what I am shortly going to propose to Parliament?’ said I. ‘No? I’ll tell you. I am going to ask for seventy ships to cost twenty million sterling.’ Mr. Goschen became really angry. He said the notion was preposterous. ‘You won’t get them,’ he said. ‘You wouldn’t get even three ships, if you asked for them. And for a very simple reason. They are not wanted.’ ‘Mr. Goschen,’ said I, ‘I shall bring in that programme, and it will cost twenty million; and you will all object to it and oppose it; and yet I’ll venture to make a prophecy. Before very long you will order seventy ships at the cost of twenty million. And for a very simple reason. Because you must.’⁹¹

⁸⁸ Unknown sender (likely Rear-Admiral James Bruce) to Laird Clowes, n.d, Caird Library, National Maritime Museum, Greenwich, UK, William Laird Clowes correspondence (hereafter NMM MSS 93), 001/2.

⁸⁹ Mullins, “Shadow of Marder,” 60.

⁹⁰ Mullins, “Shadow of Marder,” 63-64.

⁹¹ Beresford, *Memoirs* II, 359.

Goschen and the Government called Beresford's bluff. When Beresford did bring the issue before Parliament in December, Hamilton repeated Goschen's claim that the RN did not need any further battleships – and added that he “obtained his information from authoritative sources and not from newspapers,”⁹² while Beresford “was described in the House as an enthusiastic seaman given to exaggeration and generally not to be taken seriously by serious people.”⁹³ Beresford, forced to retreat but undaunted, informed Salisbury early in 1889 that he would be bringing the matter up again in Parliament that year.⁹⁴ This second effort was accompanied by a flurry of supportive articles in the press. The *Morning Post* asserted “that the Fleet must be strengthened without delay is conceded by the vast majority of the people of this country,” and *The Times* sounded a warning: “let the Navy be managed by those who are competent, and if the Admiralty is unequal to the task the country must take the matter into its own hands.”⁹⁵ One of those writing to *The Times* was the old navalist campaigner Phipps Hornby, to whom Fisher wrote that those who supported Beresford “owe you a deep debt of gratitude for pegging away as to the increase of the Navy. It

⁹² R.A. Burt, *British Battleships 1889-1904* (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 1988), 58.

⁹³ Admiral Lord Charles Beresford, M.P., *The Betrayal: Being a Record of Facts Concerning Naval Policy and Administration from the Year 1902 to the Present Time* (London: P.S. King & Son, 1912), 130.

⁹⁴ Parkinson, *Late Victorian Navy*, 98-99.

⁹⁵ *Morning Post*, 25 Mar 1889; *The Times*, 2 Feb 1889, quoted in Hamilton, *Nation and the Navy*, 273, 57.

promised to bear good fruit but the pressure must be maintained up to the last moment. One of my proverbs has come out well: ‘*Re-iteration is the secret of conviction.*’⁹⁶

The Admiralty still resisted Beresford’s campaign. But in February of 1889, bad news arrived from another quarter, as a report was put before Parliament by three admirals – Sir William Dowell, Sir Richard Vesey Hamilton, and Sir Frederick Richards – that revealed the naval maneuvers of the previous year had been an utter debacle, largely due to a lack of available smaller ships. This report held more weight as none of the admirals who had composed it were known as navalist agitators (Vesey Hamilton would become one later in his career).⁹⁷ Faced with attacks on multiple fronts, Hamilton and Goschen were forced to yield. In March of 1889 Hamilton put before Parliament what would become the Naval Defence Act, which called for adding 10 battleships, 42 cruisers and multiple support units to the Royal Navy. The cost was staggering. Four years earlier Stead’s ‘Truth’ campaign had been seen as a runaway success by adding £5.5 million to the estimates; the Naval Defence Act would increase the estimates by £21.5 million over the next five years.⁹⁸

⁹⁶ Fisher to Phipps Hornby, 26 Jan 1889, quoted in Mackay, *Fisher of Kilverstone*, 197.

⁹⁷ Beeler, *British Naval Policy*, 268.

⁹⁸ Jon Tetsuro Sumida, *In Defence of Naval Supremacy: Finance, Technology and British Naval Policy, 1889-1914* (Boston: Unwin Hyman, 1989), 13.

The Naval Defence Act also officially committed the Royal Navy to what was known as the two-power standard for the first time.⁹⁹ From 1889, by legislative fiat, the RN was required to be equal in size to the next two largest navies in the world (at the time this was France and Russia). If the RN ever slipped below this threshold, more money would have to be allocated to rectify the situation. This was not a partisan decision – the Liberals officially accepted the standard in 1890.¹⁰⁰ In his speech before Parliament introducing the act, Hamilton finally said publically what Beresford and his supporters wanted to hear: “If there are any nations abroad who do wish to compete with us in naval armaments, the mere enunciation of this scheme will show to them the utter futility of their desire.”¹⁰¹ Privately, Hamilton commented in his memoirs that an additional effect of the Naval Defence Act was a new appreciation by the Admiralty of the power agitation could wield, and the public relations benefits (never mind the country’s economy) of yielding: “The outcome of the Naval debates in Parliament [...] tended to rehabilitate the Admiralty in public opinion, and those of us who were engaged in this work were pleased to find that not only had we succeeded in giving a real substantial increase to the strength of the Navy, but that in doing so we had added to the

⁹⁹ The two-power standard had been implicitly adhered to since the 1830s, but as it was an unofficial rule the Admiralty was vulnerable to navalist claims that the standard was not being met in various forms of calculation.

¹⁰⁰ Lambert, *Sir John Fisher’s Naval Revolution*, 18-19.

¹⁰¹ 7 Mar 1889, quoted in Marder, *Anatomy of British Sea Power*, 162.

popularity of that Service, and at the same time enhanced the confidence of the public in those who were in charge of it.”¹⁰²

But a more dangerous lesson was being learned concurrently by the press. The last two naval agitations, those of 1884 and 1889, had been greatly aided by journalists; as far as the general public knew, Beresford was the only serving officer to play a large role in increasing naval funding, and even this was more in his role as an MP. Was the press becoming necessary to safeguard the Navy from its own masters? H. O. Arnold-Forster, one of the original navalists, thought so. He penned an article for the *Nineteenth Century* in 1889 on the aftermath of the Naval Defence Act and the lessons it held for the Admiralty: “The British public will not listen to its sailors and soldiers [...] Practically nearly everything of importance with respect to the services is settled by civilians, and whatever slight knowledge the public may have of naval and military affairs comes to them through civil channels.” Public alarm in 1885 and 1889 had saved the RN, not its own leaders in Parliament and Portsmouth. Arnold-Forster continued: “The fine fleet which left Spithead a few weeks ago [for a recent naval review] is, on the admission of every expert authority, at least seventy ships short of what it ought to be; and nearly every vessel of importance in it is an ‘agitation ship,’ the result, not of the wisdom and forethought of a minister, but the outcome of popular pressure.”¹⁰³

¹⁰² Hamilton, *Nation and the Navy*, 55.

¹⁰³ ‘Parliamentary Misrule of Our War Services,’ *Nineteenth Century* (Sep 1889), BL ADD MS, H.O. Arnold-Forster Pamphlet Collection, 50355.

The Admiralty did make a respectable effort to harness this popular pressure for its own use. Journalists continued to be carried on naval vessels during maneuvers, and their reports would appear yearly in the London dailies. Larger projects were also undertaken, such as the 1891 Royal Naval Exhibition in Chelsea. This celebration of Britain's naval past (featuring a full-size replica of the deck of Nelson's *Victory*) and present was put on, in the words of the Prince of Wales, because "it was the duty of every Englishman to do his utmost to increase the popularity of the Navy, an object which he considered the proposed exhibition was well calculated to fulfill." Upon viewing the exhibition, each visitor "would feel a personal interest in maintaining the supremacy of the country on the seas."¹⁰⁴ The Exhibition was a major success, attracting around 2.3 million visitors during its five-month run.¹⁰⁵ The *Royal United Services Institution Journal* reported First Lord Hamilton's thoughts on the exhibition and any future similar naval events: "He hoped the result of all the Exhibitions would be to bring home to all sections of the community the absolute necessity of maintaining their Navy in an effective state of strength, and that they might be instrumental in forming among men of all political parties the policy which would ensure" that the Navy would forever remain sufficiently funded.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰⁴ Hamilton, *Nation and the Navy*, 90, 94.

¹⁰⁵ Lambert, "The Magic of Trafalgar," 168.

¹⁰⁶ A. Jephson, "The Royal Naval Exhibition, 1891," *Royal United Services Institution Journal* 36 (1892), quoted in Hamilton, *Nation and the Navy*, 99.

Navalists not directly associated with the RN, meanwhile, were finding their own channels to reach their intended audience. Music halls rang with naval-themed revues, and naval memoirs and popular histories enjoyed a newfound popularity.¹⁰⁷ Dozens of articles on every aspect of naval life appeared in various journals, although sailors sometimes wrote in to complain about various inaccuracies committed by overzealous authors.¹⁰⁸ Fictional tales of naval war began appearing, first as serials in the periodical press and later in book form. These included works written by navalist journalists such as Fred T. Jane's *Blake of the 'Rattlesnake'* (1895) and William Laird Clowes' *The Captain of the 'Mary Rose'* (1892), both involving derring-do in the contemporary Navy; Laird Clowes also collaborated with his fellow Beresford supporter P. H. Colomb on 1892's *The Great War of 189-*, which highlighted the dangers that faced a Britain insufficiently protected by its fleet.¹⁰⁹ Behind the scenes, naval officers were still slipping information to their journalistic allies regarding various pet causes. While he was writing his popular naval books, Laird Clowes – by this time also the naval correspondent for *The Times* – was in surreptitious contact with young naval personnel. Swinton Holland offered Laird Clowes a place on board his ship the HMS *Northampton* during a training exercise as long as the latter agreed to “abide by the conditions which

¹⁰⁷ Peter Padfield, *Rule Britannia: The Victorian and Edwardian Navy* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1981), 196.

¹⁰⁸ ‘Verite’ to Lionel Yexley, 22 Jul 1891, Caird Library, National Maritime Museum, Greenwich, UK, Lionel Yexley Correspondence (hereafter NMM MSS 80), 098/5.

¹⁰⁹ Moon, “The Invasion of the United Kingdom,” 101-102.

you suggest in your note to me – viz. that you will write from the ship nothing about the cruize to any newspaper & that you will undertake to write nothing either during or after the cruize [sic.] to indicate that you have made it.”¹¹⁰ After the publication of Laird Clowes’ two books, the up-and-coming officer Dudley de Chair contacted him to suggest the author focus next on the Navy’s need for more torpedo boats, and sent him details of recent naval maneuvers for his use.¹¹¹

Navalism was also beginning to expand in a more intellectual direction. The naval historian John Knox Laughton, with encouragement from Laird Clowes, founded the Navy Records Society in 1893.¹¹² Dedicated to reprinting historical naval documents for an upper-class professional and political audience, the Society was always small – never containing more than 500 members during the period – but it counted the naval correspondents of many London papers among them, and navalist money certainly flowed into the organization’s coffers.¹¹³ Mention must also be made here of the American Alfred Thayer Mahan’s famous *The Influences of Sea Power Upon History*, published in two volumes in 1890. Although this was a work of history and not contemporary strategic thought, Mahan’s focus on the importance to national success of a powerful navy won many adherents. Beresford, P. H. Colomb, and Captain Gerard

¹¹⁰ Swinton Holland to Laird Clowes, 11 Jul 1891, NMM MSS 93 001/2.

¹¹¹ De Chair to Laird Clowes, 9 Aug 1893, NMM MSS 93 001/2.

¹¹² Marder, *Anatomy of British Sea Power*, 45.

¹¹³ Andrew Lambert, ed., *Letters and Papers of Professor Sir John Knox Laughton, 1830-1915* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2002), 72.

Noel all wrote Mahan admiring letters; Noel believed Mahan's work could "have great effect in bringing home to our statesmen and legislators the vast importance of sea power to England," while Colomb admired Mahan's success in "getting people to understand what they never understood before" about the inner workings of naval strategy.¹¹⁴ Taken together, this increase in official Admiralty support for public engagement and surge in pro-naval literature of both the mass-market and upper-class varieties greatly amplified the Navy's profile in the public eye. The vast increase in the Admiralty's budget and the consequent money spent on display and theater meant that within a few years of the Naval Defence Act, in the words of historian Roger Parkinson, "there was a well-organised propaganda machine in position, able to publicise the Navy and its place in society."¹¹⁵ Journalists and naval officers were still working in harmony to ensure that the Navy was both well-funded and well-appreciated.

This new age of cooperation seemed to have no downsides. By July of 1893, when the first of the half-dozen new Naval Defence Act battleships were entering the Fleet, the *St. James's Gazette* was able to report the Navy as a whole had a new "spirit of swagger; and its signs are a love of ostentation and of theatrical showing off."¹¹⁶ Yet when this article appeared the next navalist crisis had already begun with a tragic

¹¹⁴ Hamilton, *Nation and the Navy*, 181-182. Noel to Mahan, 23 Dec 1890; Colomb to Mahan, 26 Apr 1891, quoted in William E. Livezey, *Mahan on Sea Power* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1981 [1947]), 63.

¹¹⁵ Parkinson, *Late Victorian Navy*, 161.

¹¹⁶ 4 Jul 1893, quoted in Andrew Gordon, *The Rules of the Game: Jutland and British Naval Command* (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 1996), 174.

accident in the Mediterranean. On June 22, while on maneuvers in the Mediterranean, Vice-Admiral Sir George Tryon called for a turn that would put his flagship HMS *Victoria* on a collision course with another British battleship. His calculations were obviously in error, but none of his subordinates were willing to question their admiral. The two ships collided; *Victoria* quickly sank, taking with her over 350 officers and crew including Tryon. Public outcry led to an Admiralty inquiry, which found fault with no one other than the deceased admiral; orders were orders, after all. The *United Service Gazette* featured an article by Phipps Hornby and Beresford on the incident where the two professional agitators rather ironically summed up the Admiralty's view: that "unconditional obedience, no matter at what cost, is, in brief, the only principle on which those in the Service must act."¹¹⁷ Still, an incident like the *Victoria* sinking shook public faith in the new, and expensive, Navy. In August, when news reached London that Russia was planning to create a permanent Mediterranean fleet,¹¹⁸ fears of British weakness in the Mediterranean – particularly now that the RN in the Mediterranean was temporarily short two battleships – led to another uproar in the periodical and daily press.

Initially, the 1893-94 naval scare followed the same pattern as its 1884 and 1889 predecessors (historian Frans Coetzee has pointed out that these early agitations occurred

¹¹⁷ Gordon, *Rules of the Game*, 247, 281.

¹¹⁸ Sumida, *Defence of Naval Supremacy*, 16.

at fairly regular five-year intervals).¹¹⁹ Officers with inside knowledge of what they saw as Admiralty failures harangued the public – in this case it was once again Charles Beresford, who addressed the London Chamber of Commerce in July with a demand for an immediate £25 million for the Navy.¹²⁰ Professional figures wasted no time in turning to the press and the public for help in airing their views. The military administrator Sir George Clarke wrote in *The Times* under the pseudonym of ‘Civis’ that only public pressure, applied “steadily, persistently, and uniformly,” could achieve “continuity and sufficiency” in naval budgeting.¹²¹ Another letter appeared that same day from Sir William White, head of naval construction for the Admiralty. White editorialized under his own name, and was fierce in his support for continued agitations: “The only way to secure continuity and sufficiency in our naval policy, to overcome the native inertness of governments and their fatal tendency to that misplaced economy which is the worst form of extravagance, is to apply the force [of public opinion] required steadily, persistently, and uniformly.”¹²²

But unpleasant news continued to surface about the Navy’s apparent state of turmoil amid an increasingly hostile international climate, and the situation worsened. In October Laird Clowes reported in *The Times* that the French navy was again

¹¹⁹ Frans Coetzee, *For Party or Country: Nationalism and the Dilemmas of Popular Conservatism in Edwardian England* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), 11-12.

¹²⁰ Marder, *Anatomy of British Sea Power*, 168; Bennett, *Charlie B*, 189.

¹²¹ 22 Jan 1894, quoted in Coetzee, *For Party or Country*, 15.

¹²² 22 Jan 1894, quoted in Hamilton, *Nation and the Navy*, 115-116.

expanding, with the result that the RN was not living up to the two power standard.¹²³ Later that year the four Naval Lords – Frederick Richards, Jacky Fisher, Walter Kerr, and Gerard Noel – sent an official memorandum to the First Lord of the Admiralty, the Earl Spencer, calling for more warships and more funding.¹²⁴ But just *who* the Naval Lords were writing to was equally as important. Following the national election of 1892, the arch-Liberal Gladstone was again Prime Minister. George Hamilton was out at the Admiralty, replaced by Spencer. Ominously, navalist agitation was becoming a question of party politics.

Gladstone never wavered in his dislike of naval expenditures; he had been forced to give in to popular pressure in 1884 and would not do so again, and he was currently more involved with his great mission to grant the Irish Home Rule. The Prime Minister made clear in a series of speeches before Parliament that he was “perfectly satisfied as to the adequacy and capacity of the British Navy to perform all the purposes for which it exists.”¹²⁵ Sir William Harcourt, the Chancellor of the Exchequer, thought it “perfectly evident that the whole thing is the sudden outcome of an ignorant newspaper scare.”¹²⁶ Yet already *The Times* was accusing Gladstone of “playing Irish melodies and Home

¹²³ Coetzee, *For Party or Country*, 11.

¹²⁴ Parkinson, “Naval Defence Act,” 284. Fisher, Noel and Kerr had all previously been in contact with members of the press.

¹²⁵ Coetzee, *For Party or Country*, 12.

¹²⁶ Harcourt to Spencer, 28 Dec 1893, quoted in Marder, *Anatomy of British Sea Power*, 199-200.

Rule ditties while England is sinking in the respect and estimation of the civilized world.”¹²⁷

More vicious attacks soon appeared. An anonymous pamphlet blamed Gladstone himself for the increasing politicization of navalism, in a section entitled “Who Keeps the Navy Weak:”

Hitherto the question of the Navy has always been considered a non-party one. Mr. Gladstone has, for the first time, chosen to break the rule, and to use the whole strength of his party to support him in KEEPING THE NAVY WEAK. Mr. Gladstone’s present allies have always been the avowed enemies of the British Sailor, have claimed credit for blowing up the ships he sails in, have abused the Service to which he belongs, and have rejoiced over every calamity which has overtaken him and the country which he serves. It was by the votes of this gang that Mr. Gladstone carried his motion in favour of keeping the British Navy weak.¹²⁸

At the close of 1893 the four Naval Lords officially threatened to resign if more money was not dedicated to the Navy.¹²⁹ The press and the Admiralty were again working towards the same purpose, although Admiralty officials could not have been happy with the partisan screeds now appearing through avenues such as the above pamphlet. Spencer, like Northbrook before him in 1885, submitted to the Lords’ demands and presented a greatly increased naval budget to Gladstone in January 1894. The pamphleteers were skeptical of its success without an accompanying change of

¹²⁷ *The Times*, 20 Nov 1893, quoted in Marder, *Anatomy of British Sea Power*, 190.

¹²⁸ Anonymous pamphlet, “The Welfare of Every Man and Woman in this Country, Rich and Poor Alike, depends upon the Absolute Supremacy of the British Navy at Sea” (1894), BL ADD MS, H.O. Arnold-Forster Pamphlet Collection, 50356.

¹²⁹ Bennett, *Charlie B*, 189.

government: “Luckily, the feeling of the Country has shown itself to be very strongly in favour of strengthening the Navy, and the Government has been compelled to plan a new programme whether it liked or not [...] we must remember that the programme has been forced upon a reluctant Government by public opinion, and against the will of Mr. Gladstone.”¹³⁰

Gladstone dug in his heels immediately, claiming that further increases in the estimates would lead only to a “race towards bankruptcy by all the powers of Europe.”¹³¹ “I cannot and will not,” he said, “add to the perils and the coming calamities of Europe by an act of militarism which will be found to involve a policy, and which excuses the militarism of Germany, France or Russia.”¹³² But Gladstone was in his eighties, leading a minority government, and greatly disillusioned by the second failure of Home Rule the previous fall. On March 2, 1894, he officially retired from the office of Prime Minister. Six days later the Cabinet, now under the leadership of Lord Rosebery, passed what came to be known as the Spencer Programme: seven new battleships, thirty cruisers, and over a hundred smaller craft at the cost of more than £31 million.¹³³

¹³⁰ Anonymous pamphlet, “The Welfare of Every Man and Woman in this Country, Rich and Poor Alike, depends upon the Absolute Supremacy of the British Navy at Sea” (1894), BL ADD MS, 50356.

¹³¹ Blumenthal, “Navy Campaign of 1884,” 234.

¹³² Mary Conley, *From Jack Tar to Union Jack: Representing Naval Manhood in the British Empire, 1870-1918* (Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press, 2009), 26.

¹³³ Bennett, *Charlie B*, 189; Sumida, *Defence of Naval Supremacy*, 16.

Many navalists were overjoyed at a third major success in a little over a decade. Beresford attributed the success of the Spencer Programme in his memoirs to “the great body of public opinion in the country,” and humbly claimed that “whose of us who had been toiling to educate it, may at least claim to have set in motion a force lacking which it is almost impossible, under a pseudo-democratic government, to accomplish any great reform whatever.”¹³⁴ But some who supported naval reforms were less enthused about the latest additions to the Admiralty’s coffers. H. O. Arnold-Forster, it will be recalled, had convinced Stead to write the ‘Truth’ articles a decade earlier in his capacity as a pro-naval author. Now he represented a different constituency as a Liberal Unionist MP and ally of Salisbury. It was in this capacity that Arnold-Forster stood before Parliament in April of 1894 to register his displeasure with the press:

I cannot but greatly regret the circumstances under which this programme has been put forward. This programme has been put forwards, as we all know, subsequently to active public agitation. Of course we shall be told that agitation had nothing whatever to do with the production of the programme. It has been my fate to take part on three separate occasions in an agitation which has had for its object an increase of the Navy, and on each occasion I have heard a statement of that kind; I greet it therefore with the respect to which it is entitled as an old friend, but I do not attach any exaggerated importance to it. [...] It seems to me a matter for infinite regret that this method of procedure should be necessary, but experience has taught us that it is necessary.¹³⁵

Arnold-Forster’s speech struck at the heart of what popular navalism had become by 1894. In some ways, navalist agitation was at the height of its power – Gladstone’s

¹³⁴ Beresford, *Memoirs* II, 390.

¹³⁵ 10 Apr 1894, BL ADD MS, 50356.

resignation was the last time navalists directly played kingmaker, and naval budgets had increased from £12 million a year in 1884 to £18 million a decade later. But the inherent contradiction in navalism was already becoming apparent. In 1884 and 1889, there were only two groups fighting against what they saw as governmental neglect – naval officers and the press. Both of these could work together, one behind the curtain and one in front, to pressure the Admiralty for increased funding. But the crisis of 1893-94 introduced a third actor by making navalism an issue of party politics. Navalists could wear two hats, but they could not wear three. A middling officer unhappy with his superiors could justify writing to a special correspondent pleading for a bigger budget, but most would balk at calling for their superiors to be tossed out of office entirely – and those that did not would run roughshod over the Admiralty in the years to come. Over the next few years large national navalist organizations would spring from the seeds planted in the agitations of the 1880s and 1890s; each of these would have to decide whether to remain officially non-partisan or dive fully into the political fray. At the same time professional naval figures began to become more and more active behind the scenes, and the relationship between them and their clandestine journalistic correspondents grew closer and closer. Within a decade naval correspondents and pro-naval journalists would be receiving a steady stream of everything from confidential technical information to Admiralty gossip, as cliques within the Navy itself began to compete for the favor of the largest national papers. The fight for the future direction of navalism had just begun.

CHAPTER III

LEAGUES AND LIARS, 1894-1902

The last five years of the nineteenth century seemed to herald a new age of navalist political success. William Gladstone had resigned as prime minister over his inability to prevent the passage of the Spencer Programme, and as a result navalists could celebrate both a large increase in warship construction and the advent of a Conservative government sympathetic to increased naval funding. Yet many pro-naval journalists had taken to heart the words of H. O. Arnold-Forster in Parliament. Despite three major navalist victories in a decade, the future of the Royal Navy would depend on how successfully they could continue to manipulate public opinion. As the last Gladstone ministry fell, a major effort spearheaded by members of the press arose in a concerted effort to keep navalist agitation in the public eye. This led to the formation of what would grow to become the most successful general-interest naval pressure group in Britain, the Navy League. Within a decade, the League boasted a strong membership of pro-naval journalists and legislators and had made inroads into the Admiralty, the London press, and the national political conversation. But it also made enemies among all three of these important groups, and in attempting to win over every relevant subset of navalist society found itself master of none. The Navy League – though it made a valiant effort – could not direct naval officers, party politicians and naval journalists towards the same end.

Like W. T. Stead's 'Truth' campaign, the League's foundational moment was a series of articles in the *Pall Mall Gazette*. However, this second influential *Gazette*

series sprang from a much different pen than Stead's. Spenser Wilkinson had served in the thankless post of military and naval correspondent for the *Manchester Guardian* in the 1880s before being dismissed for holding insufficiently Liberal views; he later held the same position for the Conservative *Morning Post*. In his position as a navalist private citizen, however, he wrote a series of articles titled "The Command of the Sea" for the *Pall Mall Gazette* in the fall of 1894.¹ The articles focused mainly on the danger posed to British seaborne commerce in a foreign war without an adequate Royal Navy to defend it – a criticism that had been leveled at the Admiralty since the 'Truth' campaign. Wilkinson was also a firm believer in Lord Charles Beresford's call for a naval general staff.

Where Wilkinson differed from his predecessors was in his methods. Half a decade earlier Beresford, although he certainly had made overtures to the general public through newspaper and magazine interviews, had preferred to work for change within the framework of either the Admiralty itself or Parliament. As Wilkinson wrote in the *Gazette* on October 11, he instead believed that an effective navy could "only be obtained by taking the proper means – that is, in this country, by organizing votes."² Wilkinson's recipe for naval success did not involve what he termed 'details' or 'fads;' rather, the British voting public should "say to the Government; 'You shall prepare the

¹ W. Mark Hamilton, "The 'New Navalism' and the British Navy League, 1895 – 1914," *Mariner's Mirror*, 64:1 (1978), 37-38.

² Frans Coetzee, *For Party or Country: Nationalism and the Dilemmas of Popular Conservatism in Edwardian England* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), 16.

navy for war or we shall turn you out. We will have no vague assurances. We insist on your doing what common-sense dictates.”³ He also called for the development of a non-party resolution supporting the Royal Navy that prospective Parliamentary candidates could sign, demonstrating their support for both a strong navy and a greater focus on proactive national naval strategy.³

Wilkinson’s call for public action had near-immediate results. On the 16th of October an open letter appeared in the *Pall Mall Gazette*. Signed by ‘Four Average Englishmen,’⁴ it called for a non-professional and non-political pressure group whose goal would be to educate the general public about the navy’s position and needs. Donations and correspondence were welcomed. These were soon forthcoming, and in December a preliminary conference of navalists was held in London. Chaired by Harry Cust, Conservative MP and editor of the *Pall Mall Gazette*, the meeting led to the official formation of a navalist organization that would be formally known as the Navy League.⁵ After some debate, the career reformer Admiral Phipps Hornby was chosen as

³ Spenser Wilkinson, *The Command of the Sea* (Westminster, UK: Archibald Constable and Company, 1894). The direct quote is from pp. 117-118. This was a published version of Wilkinson’s *Pall Mall Gazette* articles.

⁴ The ‘Average Englishmen’ were H. Lafone, A. W. Lafone, W. L. Ainslie, and E. N. Shackle. They were not major public figures, and none would go on to play any significant role in the Navy League or the political scene.

⁵ Hamilton, “British Navy League,” 37-38.

the League's first president.⁶ The League also chose the up-and-coming naval journalist H. W. Wilson to edit its official *Navy League Journal*. The first issue of the *Journal*, which appeared in July of 1895, featured letters of support from Wilkinson, Admiral Sir Richard Vesey Hamilton, and the naval advocate and retired admiral Frederick Maxse.⁷ Beresford, Arnold-Forster, and the radical politician Sir Charles Dilke also expressed their approval of the new League.⁸

What were the political and public goals of the Navy League were, and how did the League and its members plan to carry out these goals? The first question to examine is why the League felt it had to exist at all – after all, many navalists saw the political events of 1894 as proof positive that navalism was a growing ideology among MPs and Cabinet ministers. But the League sought to reach a broader audience, particularly after an increased franchise and the parliamentary reforms of 1884 and 1885 made public organizations acutely aware of the new power of middle and working-class voters. Its members realized that it would be “no easy task to convey to the man in the street the

⁶ Gerald Jordan, “Admiral Nelson and the Concept of Patriotism: The Trafalgar Centenary, 1905, in *Naval History: The Seventh Symposium of the U.S. Naval Academy*, general editor William Cogar (Wilmington, DE: Scholarly Resources Inc., 1988), 144. It is uncertain whether Phipps Hornby held the position in his capacity of Admiral; the Navy League was officially founded in January of 1895, Phipps Hornby retired in February of 1895, and the elderly admiral died in March. The Liberal Unionist Lord Lansdowne was first considered for the position, but declined.

⁷ Arnold White, “The Navy League and the Public” (1914), Caird Library, National Maritime Museum, Greenwich, UK, Arnold White Papers (hereafter NMM WHI), 142. White claims that H.W. Wilson was chosen for the position in part for his successful navalist work *Ironclads in Action*, but this was not released until 1896. Maxse was the father of Leo Maxse, editor of the *National Review* and himself an active navalist.

⁸ Hamilton, “British Navy League,” 37-38. Dilke was almost certainly the most prominent Liberal member of the League.

reasons why a Navy League had become a necessity if the Navy was to be cured of the cankers of a long peace. Captain Mahan's books and the late Vice-Admiral P. H. Colomb had roused interest on the subject of Sea Power; but their books were read only by the few."⁹

The League was an early attempt to bring navalist ideals and ideology to the general voting public rather than the upper echelons of power. The debut issue of the *Navy League Journal* recognized the difficulties inherent in reaching out to the contemporary British working man: "His clubs echo with socialistic denunciations and detractions of an imperial policy. He is only half convinced of the value of our Empire and but a lukewarm supporter of larger naval budgets."¹⁰ The solution was for the League's members to "be at him and teach him. It is the duty of the better educated amongst us to go down into the market place and refute the sophistries of the blind leaders of the blind. The lower classes can be led, but they want leaders, men with the courage of their opinions, men with devotion to the great ideals at which this nation should aim."¹¹ "The working man is to day the arbiter," observed another League

⁹ Arnold White, "The Navy League and the Public," NMM WHI, 142.

¹⁰ *Navy League Journal*, July 1895, quoted in Coetzee, *For Party or Country*, 23.

¹¹ *Navy League Journal*, July 1895, quoted in Mary Conley, *From Jack Tar to Union Jack: Representing Naval Manhood in the British Empire, 1870-1918* (Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press, 2009), 139.

pamphlet. “He should not be slow, then, to vote for an all powerful fleet, above all, when he remembers that to prepare for war is to avoid it.”¹²

Reaching and teaching the common man would be one of the League’s major goals, and it was to be accomplished using whatever means were available. The *Navy League Journal* recommended a course of action: “Where our members can, let them hold small meetings and put the facts before their audience. Where they cannot hold meetings, let them attack the workingman in the train or on the omnibus.”¹³ The League’s leadership also recognized the value of a successful publicity campaign. Arnold White, naval journalist and member of the League’s executive council, wrote that “the task of the League was to advertise the articles of its faith. [...] Every good idea and sound institution is in peril that is not wisely and continuously advertised. [...] The secret of securing conviction is the incessant repetition of truth freshly clothed in words fastidiously chosen to suit the audience and the readers whose support is desired.”¹⁴

The League was advertised early and often, both through its own journals and pamphlets and more generally through press statements. In the wider press, it was presented as the most constructive outlet for a national outpouring of navalist agitation:

¹² Navy League pamphlet, March 1896, quoted in W. Mark Hamilton, *The Nation and the Navy: Methods and Organization of British Navalist Propaganda, 1889-1914* (New York: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1986), 133.

¹³ *Navy League Journal*, Jan 1896, quoted in Arthur J. Marder, *The Anatomy of British Sea Power: A History of British Naval Policy in the Pre-Dreadnought Era, 1880-1905* (Hamden, CT: Archon Books, 1964 [1940]), 52-53.

¹⁴ Arnold White, “The Gospel of Sea Power,” from “The Navy League and the Public” (1914), NMM WHI, 142. Although written in 1914, White was specifically referring to the early years of the League in this selection.

“Government by periodical panic is the only substitute for the Navy League; a policy of alarms and excursions instead of one of steady progress.”¹⁵ Admiral Vesey Hamilton sent an open letter to the *Times* in June 1896 recapitulating the League’s reason for being, explaining that “in recent years [...] the raising of the Navy to the point of strength which is considered indispensable for national safety has only been approached in deference to public opinion [...] to convince all subjects of Her Majesty that these matters are their vital personal interest, as well as their obvious public concern, is the object of the Navy League.”¹⁶ Royal Navy Captain Sydney Eardley-Wilmot wrote privately to the *Pall Mall Gazette* that “if ever there was a necessity for a Navy League, now is that time. All experience shows that if the present effort is not to be spasmodic, public attention must be kept rivetted on the great issues involved.”¹⁷

In its own publications, the League painted itself as a noble organization whose singular focus was the defense of Britain and the Empire. In the very first issue of the League’s journal, editor H. W. Wilson claimed the group’s goal was “to strengthen that England which has made us what we are” and “to retain the inheritance of greatness which our fathers bequeathed to us;” this would be accomplished “by making the Navy

¹⁵ ‘Ignotus’ (likely Vesey Hamilton) to the *Pall Mall Gazette*, March 1895, quoted in Cynthia Fansler Behrman, *Victorian Myths of the Sea* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1977), 149.

¹⁶ Vesey Hamilton, “Letter to the Press,” 24 Jun 1896, Caird Library, National Maritime Museum, Greenwich, UK, Lionel Graham Horton-Smith Papers (hereafter NMM HSM), 1, “The Old Navy League and its failures, 1895-1912.”

¹⁷ Hamilton, *Nation and the Navy*, 299-300.

strong. For by the Navy we stand or fall.”¹⁸ Wilson’s editorial took a poetic turn: “With passion not, we hope, misguided, with enthusiasm not miscredited, with courage unabated, we press towards the goal. [...] We may be tiresome, but our object is to make our countrymen uneasy.”¹⁹ A later article in the League’s journal admitted that “no one can have a desire for panics,” but asked whether “a knowledge of the plain truth, and possibly a consequent panic” would be more welcome than “ignorance, a fool’s paradise, and [...] the anxiety and ridicule of the world.”²⁰ In other authorized League materials the association’s efforts were likened to the Anti-Corn Law League of the mid-nineteenth century.²¹ Above all the League was determined to appear nonpartisan, as in an official pamphlet from 1895: “It is because the Navy League trusts the people, because it believes that you are honest and patriotic, when you know the truth, that it appeals to you....Sink your party feelings for a day; be neither Conservatives nor Liberals, but something greater and better, be ENGLISHMEN.”²² Arnold White went so

¹⁸ *Navy League Journal*, July 1895, quoted in Conley, *Jack Tar to Union Jack*, 124.

¹⁹ Arnold White, “The Navy League Journal,” from “The Navy League and the Public” (1914), NMM WHI, 142.

²⁰ ‘The British Navy,’ *Navy League Journal*, September 1901, Churchill Archives Centre, Churchill College, Cambridge, 1st Lord Fisher of Kilverstone Papers (hereafter CCA FISR), 11/11.

²¹ *Navy League Journal*, April 1898, quoted in Coetzee, *For Party or Country*, 24-25.

²² Anne Summers, “The Character of Edwardian Nationalism: Three Popular Leagues,” in *Nationalist and Racialist Movements in Britain and Germany Before 1914*, edited by Paul Kennedy and Anthony Nicholls (London: Macmillan Press Ltd, 1981), 77; emphasis in original.

far as to claim the “Navy League is a peace society” that existed chiefly to explain the importance of a large navy to Britain’s continued existence.²³

This commitment to a broad political and social base of public support was laid out in the League’s first constitution in 1895. The second clause was significant: it pledged that the League would “spread information” about the “vital importance” of the Royal Navy, point out that the RN was not currently equipped to meet the demands of a naval war, “secure adequate preparation for the maritime defence of the Empire,” and – importantly – “to urge these matters on public men, and in particular upon candidates for Parliament.”²⁴ The third clause declared the League “absolutely distinct from all Party politics.”²⁵ The League’s constitution was revised in 1898. The second clause was amended to: “convince every taxpayer and every politician that judicious expenditure upon the Navy is, for the nation, only the ordinary insurance, which no sane person grudges in private affairs....” Party politics were still anathema to the League, which preferred a constant general maintenance of naval support: “continuity of preparation is the essence of national security, and the only preventative of ruinous and discreditable scares.” The 1898 revised constitution was also more specific regarding how the League

²³ Arnold White, *The Navy League Guide to the Naval Review* (1897), quoted in Hamilton, *Nation and the Navy*, 86.

²⁴ Arnold White, “The Original Constitution,” from “The Navy League and the Public’ (1914),” NMM WHI, 142.

²⁵ Ibid. Capitalization in original.

meant to spread pro-naval information: “by lectures, by the dissemination of literature, by meetings, and by private propaganda.”²⁶

Just how successful the early League was in achieving its stated goals is open to interpretation. Its earliest members often claimed the organization had been subjected to a near-constant barrage of criticism from anti-navalists. Arnold White later recalled that “the young League was assailed with vituperation which would have been appropriate had the strengthening of the British Navy been a criminal act.”²⁷ In 1896 the *Navy League Journal* congratulated itself on a full year of survival in the face of being “regarded with absolute disfavour by the greater part of the English Press” and meeting with “ridicule and opprobrium of every kind. Its founders and first members were assured that they were meddlesome busybodies or pushing self-advertisers.”²⁸ In something of a defensive move, the very first issue of the *Navy League Journal* (July 1895) recalled that “we have been called a ‘sickly bantling’; we have been christened fools, enthusiasts, busybodies, prigs. But, moved by the right spirit, sickly bantlings have before now gravled their names upon history and won imperishable renown.”²⁹

The League likely protested too much, for what the organization’s contemporaries noted most was its rapid success. As early as March of 1895 the *Pall Mall Gazette* believed “the Navy League is to be congratulated on the influence it has

²⁶ “The Objects of the Navy League” (1898), NMM HSM 1.

²⁷ White, “The Navy League and the Public,” NMM WHI, 142.

²⁸ *Navy League Journal*, Dec 1896, quoted in Marder, *Anatomy of British Sea Power*, 50.

²⁹ White, “The Navy League Journal,” from “The Navy League and the Public” (1914), NMM WHI, 142.

already acquired.”³⁰ Charles Beresford credited the League in a speech at Oxford: it “woke up the country, got the Press to work, had meetings, made statements, and invited arguments” on the role of British naval power.³¹ The League distributed navalist pamphlets and literature to Parliamentary candidates, mayors, chambers of commerce, newspaper editors, colonial governors, and workingmen’s clubs throughout the United Kingdom and the Empire.³² League members also gave lectures and held essay contests at elementary schools with an eye on winning over a future generation of navalists, and the League claimed some responsibility for inspiring the surge of late-century popular literature on naval themes.³³ Although it was difficult, at least initially, for the League to capture the working class support it concluded was necessary, by 1900 the group could boast a strongly middle class membership of over 14,000.³⁴

Yet the League, despite its continued claims of nonpartisanship and working-class support, could not avoid high-level politics if it sought to be a presence in the corridors of power in London – the executive committee was raising its supposed army of working-class navalists for a purpose, after all. One of the organization’s first official acts was to make good on its spiritual founder Wilkinson’s call for a pro-naval pledge

³⁰ Hamilton, *Nation and the Navy*, 295.

³¹ Hamilton, *Nation and the Navy*, 152.

³² Arnold White, “Early activity of the League,” from “The Navy League and the Public” (1914), NMM WHI, 142.

³³ H.W. Wilson in the *Navy League Journal*, Jan 1898, NMM WHI, 1, “Important Naval Documents.”

³⁴ Jordan, “Trafalgar Centenary,” 144.

for Parliamentary candidates of any party. By June of 1895 concerned League members could ask candidates for any constituency in the United Kingdom to “pledge yourself, if elected to parliament, to urge upon Government, irrespective of party, the necessity for Naval Estimates adequate in the opinion of the admiralty....”³⁵ This pledge unsurprisingly made the League vulnerable to charges of partisanship, as it was released just days before that summer’s Parliamentary elections which resulted in a large Conservative and Liberal Unionist victory.³⁶ As early as August H. W. Wilson was defending the League in the *Navy League Journal*, where he differentiated between the ‘two senses’ of political action: “In the first sense it means ‘relating to public affairs,’ in the second ‘relating to party.’ In the first sense the Navy League is, and always must be, political, since after all the Navy is a public affair [...] In the second, and now more accepted use of the word, the Navy League is non-political.”³⁷

Wilson’s justification was apparently not widely believed, for early the next year the League revised its definition of non-partisanship in an open letter sent to the press. “We desire it to be understood,” according to the League’s executive council, “that the main object of the Navy League is not to interfere in the organisation of a Government Department like the Admiralty.” Rather, the League worked “to spread information as

³⁵ Arnold White, “Parliament and the Navy League,” from “The Navy League and the Public” (1914), NMM WHI, 142.

³⁶ Then as now, prevailing political wisdom stated that the Conservative party could always be counted on to ensure national defense. This would become a much larger issue after 1906.

³⁷ Coetzee, *For Party or Country*, 19.

to the vital importance to the British Empire” of the RN, “and thereby to insure to the Government the support of the people for the expenditure necessary for providing an adequate Navy.”³⁸ Chairman of the League’s Executive Committee H. Seymour Trower wanted the country to recognize that the League “are neither Jingoists nor alarmists, but when our pastors and masters talk of war [...] we should point out that it is all-important that the public should face the situation fairly and squarely....”³⁹

This policy could be difficult to follow in a non-partisan fashion. Trower proudly announced in January of 1898 that Charles Beresford, “although the Tory member for York, and probably a very good Tory member, is first and foremost a member for the Navy.”⁴⁰ Beresford himself had given a speech to the Oxford branch the previous year where he had declared that “the object and justification of the Navy League” was not to “dictate to Government in whom they had confidence, or to the Lords of the Admiralty, but to educate the community....”⁴¹ Yet a mere six months later Trower had to clarify that Beresford and his fellow politician Sir Charles Dilke, despite being quite active in navalist circles, were not actually members of the League: “They speak on their own initiative, and they may propound views and ideas which the Navy League does not share. Therefore please to understand that the Navy League is not

³⁸ This letter was sent on 14 Feb 1896; White, “Parliament and the Navy League,” from “The Navy League and the Public” (1914), NMM WHI, 142.

³⁹ Minutes of Navy League Conference, 23 Jun 1898, NMM HSM 1.

⁴⁰ Coetzee, *For Party or Country*, 35.

⁴¹ *Navy League Journal*, July 1897, quoted in Hamilton, *Nation and the Navy*, 88.

responsible for what the speakers may say [at the League's annual conference], and that the speakers on their part are not implicated in the works of the Navy League."⁴² In 1900 the executive council turned down a proposal to agitate for the removal of George Goschen – now First Lord of the Admiralty – in favor of Beresford, as “any attempt on the part of the League to interfere in such a matter, would not only be ill-judged, but mischievous....”⁴³

The attempt to find a working balance between popular navalist agitation and partisan political activity proved difficult for the League from its earliest days. By the late 1890s some of the League's better-known strategic thinkers – among them John Knox Laughton, Philip Colomb, and John Colomb – had left the organization, condemning its executive committee as scaremongers. At the same time other high-profile members such as Fred T. Jane, Rudyard Kipling and Arthur Conan Doyle expressed concern that the League was not devoting enough attention to the failures of the Admiralty's naval policy;⁴⁴ Jane would eventually leave the group after deprecating it in a private publication as the ‘Gravy League,’ more concerned with what he saw as trifling publicity stunts than with real sustained naval improvements.⁴⁵ It must be emphasized that many of the members who believed the League was becoming too

⁴² Minutes of Navy League Conference, 23 Jun 1898, NMM HSM 1.

⁴³ Hamilton, *Nation and the Navy*, 76-77.

⁴⁴ Conley, *Jack Tar to Union Jack*, 134.

⁴⁵ Richard Brooks, *Fred T Jane: An Eccentric Visionary* (Alexandria, VA: Jane's Information Group, 1997), 45.

tingoistic had been connected with earlier upper-class navalist movements such as the Navy Records Society, while those pushing for increased public criticism of the government had often come to the movement from popular literary circles. It was already becoming difficult to keep all the League's supporters under one umbrella.

However, perhaps the League's most valuable early defector left for entirely different reasons. One of Spenser Wilkinson's original demands for his proposed navalist pressure group in 1894 had been a stronger naval general staff. But the League's early popular success meant that there were many serving naval officers among its membership, and it soon became impolitic to push for changes within the structure of the Admiralty. The League's original 1895 constitution made no provision for "providing a brain for the Navy,"⁴⁶ and W. L. Ainslie wrote to Wilkinson early in 1896 that "public opinion is not yet ripe" for any more specific focus on a naval advisory staff.⁴⁷ Wilkinson quietly left the League he had helped begin in 1896, only a year after its founding.⁴⁸

The ongoing tension among at least three factions of League members – those who wanted open partisan agitation, those who wanted to remain distinct from the political scene, and those like Wilkinson and the Colombs who stood for a more 'technical' navalism – was nevertheless kept in check for the first half-decade of the

⁴⁶ White, "The Navy League and the Public," NMM WHI, 142.

⁴⁷ Ainslie to Wilkinson, 12 Feb 1896, quoted in Coetzee, *For Party or Country*, 17-18.

⁴⁸ Summers, "Edwardian Nationalism," 69.

League's existence, albeit at the expense of Wilkinson and many of his like-minded adherents. The Boer War, especially after 1900, threw the League's delicate balance of approaches into disarray. During the South African conflict the Royal Navy's biggest role was the continued ferrying of troops around the Empire, and the Boers never possessed a navy – but the performance of the British army, particularly during the early stages of the fighting, led the League to push once again for increased naval estimates. To the League, the army had proven itself deficient in the field, which merely placed a greater emphasis on the importance of the navy as the ultimate protector of the home islands.⁴⁹ This new campaign reached its peak in October of 1900 when the League released a public manifesto calling for further growth in naval spending, for if “Britannia rules the waves, she rules them by virtue of occult laws unknown to the members of the Navy League.”⁵⁰ It was no coincidence that this manifesto appeared just before the general election of 1900, the ‘Khaki election’ fought and won by the Conservatives under Lord Salisbury essentially as a referendum on the success of the Boer War. This rather aggressive act of electioneering led to criticism of the League from such figures as Joseph Chamberlain, who declared in a public speech on the eve of the vote that “Britannia still rules the sea, and, with humble excuses to the Navy League, I think that she will continue to do so.”⁵¹

⁴⁹ Rhodri Williams, *Defending the Empire: The Conservative Party and British Defence Policy 1899 – 1915* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1991), 28-29.

⁵⁰ Marder, *Anatomy of British Sea Power*, 390.

⁵¹ Williams, *Defending the Empire*, 29.

The open disapproval of Chamberlain did nothing to dissuade the League, and after 1900 the balance of power within the organization began to shift towards those who wanted to take more direct political action. Although working to remove members of the Board of Admiralty was still seen as a step too far, the League began to debate the idea of pushing for specific Parliamentary candidates, rather than calling for all candidates to support a larger navy.⁵² There was a former member of the Board and current associate of the League who was more than happy to be nominated: Charles Beresford. After his resignation in protest from the Admiralty in 1888, Beresford's career had been a busy one. It was not forbidden for naval officers to serve in Parliament even if on active duty,⁵³ and Beresford had alternated between professional assignments and the House of Commons for much of the previous decade. Since 1900 Beresford, now a rear-admiral by rank, had served as second in command of the Royal Navy's Mediterranean Fleet. He still considered himself a force for the promotion of navalist interests in Parliament, claiming in 1897 that 40 separate constituencies had approached him to "represent the interests of the Navy."⁵⁴

⁵² The idea of a 'member for the Navy' had been previously attempted. In 1895 the publisher Alfred Harmsworth ran for Parliament as a Conservative for Portsmouth, certainly a city dependent upon the Navy. His campaign strategy entailed purchasing the *Portsmouth Mail* and commissioning William Laird Clowes to serialize in the paper a tale of Portsmouth being invaded by sea due to a weak navy. Harmsworth was not elected. I. F. Clarke, *Voices Prophesying War, 1763 – 1984* (London: Oxford University Press, 1966), 128-130.

⁵³ Geoffrey Bennett, *Charlie B: A Biography of Admiral Lord Beresford of Metemeh and Curraghmore, G.C.B., G.C.V.O., LL.D., D.C.L.* (London: Peter Dawnay Ltd., 1968), 281. Active duty officers were allowed to run for Parliament until 1907.

⁵⁴ Lord Charles Beresford, *The Memoirs of Admiral Lord Charles Beresford*, 2 vols. (Boston: Little, Brown, & Company, 1914), II 415.

Beresford's political machinations were not always appreciated by his superior officers: that same year the First Naval Lord, Admiral Sir Frederick Richards, found it to be "very bad form" when the same day Beresford was promoted to rear-admiral he "resigned an appointment, in which he was doing good service, for the avowed object of stumping the Country as a political talker on Naval subjects, and the proceeding is characteristic."⁵⁵ But he had always supported the Navy League, in some cases more overtly than was prudent. In 1900 Vice Admiral Sir John Fisher – himself no stranger to the intersections between publicity and professionalism, and now Beresford's direct superior in the Mediterranean Fleet – observed to a fellow captain that First Lord of the Admiralty Goschen had expressed concern over a "strong Mediterranean flavour" in recent Navy League campaigns, implying that Beresford, whose membership in the League was no secret, had been passing the group information (Fisher deflected Goschen with the comment that the League's criticisms "are patent to everyone who takes the trouble to enquire").⁵⁶

In short, Beresford was exactly the sort of Parliamentary candidate the high councils of the League could rally around – a staunch navalist who moved in high professional and political circles and was amenable to serving once again as a 'member for the navy.' As early as January 1901 Beresford told Arnold White that he "had a talk

⁵⁵ Minute by Sir F. Richards, 25 Sep 1897, National Archives, Kew, Admiralty Record Office Cases (hereafter KEW ADM), 116/3108, "Antagonistic Comments of Lord Charles Beresford."

⁵⁶ Fisher to Captain Wilmot Fawkes, 12 Dec 1900, in Arthur J. Marder, ed., *Fear God and Dread Nought: The Correspondence of Admiral of the Fleet Lord Fisher of Kilverstone*, 3 vols. (London: Jonathan Cape, 1953 [1952]), I 169-170. Fisher would himself be accused of the same improprieties less than a year later.

with several straight, honest men and see my way to lead a party out on a bold clear line of reform in the near future.”⁵⁷ In late 1901 Beresford was again considering leaving active naval service and returning to Parliament.⁵⁸ For the first time the Navy League agreed to play a direct role in a Parliamentary campaign. When a seat opened in Hampstead, the League’s executive committee pushed for Beresford’s candidacy as the Conservative candidate for the coming by-election. R. A. Yerburgh, president of the League and a Conservative MP himself, offered personal financial support and secured the services of a local election agent. In January 1902 the entire executive committee resolved to “take an active part in the Hampstead election on behalf of Rear-Admiral Lord Charles Beresford, and invite[d] the healthy co-operation of all members to provide cash, canvassers, and speakers required.” The committee also contributed £50 towards any expenses Beresford might incur.⁵⁹

Officially, even this direct support of a Conservative candidate was non-partisan. In the statement announcing Beresford’s candidacy, the League’s executive committee claimed they had a duty to directly support navalist parliamentarians, as “any failure on their part to bring the influence of the League to bear on contested Elections, not as party politicians but as patriots, would deprive the League of its most valuable lever in public affairs, and impair, if not destroy, its influence for good upon the only true National

⁵⁷ Beresford to White, 21 Jan 1901, NMM WHI, 18.

⁵⁸ This may have been because his immediate superior Fisher had just been promoted to full admiral, making it unlikely that Beresford would succeed him as commander in the Mediterranean.

⁵⁹ The preceding paragraph is condensed from Hamilton, *Nation and the Navy*, 151-153.

policy.”⁶⁰ Unofficially, an authorized League campaign for a Conservative candidate raised eyebrows – and it must be stated that although Beresford was not even officially a member of the League his opponent, Liberal G. F. Rowe, was.⁶¹ In any event the League’s efforts were for naught. In mid-January Beresford withdrew his name from the contest; he would return to Parliament later that year in another by-election as Conservative member for Woolwich.⁶²

The first foray of the League into direct political action had misfired. More ominously for the League, it had continued an ongoing tarnishing of the organization’s reputation among serving naval officers, who were loath to publicly associate with partisan politics – Jacky Fisher wrote to the First Naval Lord, Walter Kerr, that he had forbidden Beresford from “either quoting me or using my name in any way in his approaching campaign [...] I much fear he will put his foot in it.”⁶³ This severing of contact had begun with the League’s pre-election declaration of 1900, which Fisher referred to as “the stupid exaggerations of the Navy League”⁶⁴ – although Fisher also

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Matthew Johnson, “The Liberal Party and the Navy League in Britain before the Great War,” *Twentieth Century British History* (2011): 143.

⁶² Hamilton, *Nation and the Navy*, 153.

⁶³ Admiral Sir R. H. Bacon, *The Life of Lord Fisher of Kilverstone*, 2 vols. (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, Doran & Company, Inc., 1929), I 155.

⁶⁴ Fisher to Wilmot Fawkes, n.d. [Oct 1900], in Marder, *Fear God and Dread Nought* I, 162-163. However, Fisher also believed that his employer had “dealt most unwisely with the Navy League (in my humble opinion), for instead of utilizing it and controlling it, the Admiralty have always considered the Navy League its natural enemy!” Fisher’s ideas on how public agitation could be controlled will be examined in much greater detail later.

wrote to James Thursfield, naval correspondent of *The Times*, that the “Navy League admittedly exaggerated in their manifesto, but there is much truth in what they say.”⁶⁵

Fisher did contact League representatives himself on occasion. Early in 1901 he thanked Arnold White for the League’s recent agitations: “I am anxious you and Mr. Yerburgh should know that your joint endeavours have produced much more effect than either of you probably have any idea of and I am most desirous you should both fully realize the great services you have both rendered.” Fisher then admitted that the “Navy Estimates would not have been at the figure they are had it not been for the influence brought to bear from outside.”⁶⁶ He wrote again to White the very next day with a wish that “you would kindly tell [Yerburgh] when opportunity offers how personally grateful I am to him.”⁶⁷

Other officers who corresponded with or about the League, such as Admiral Sir Sydney Fremantle, were more ambiguous in their views. Fremantle wrote to Archibald Hurd, naval correspondent of the *Daily Telegraph*, to register his displeasure with a series of letters on supposed naval deficiencies that appeared in League publications early in 1901: “I am very angry with the League for allowing such letters to appear. It is regular nuisance mongering [...] they are also gross & unpatriotic exaggerations.” The

⁶⁵ Fisher to Thursfield, 6 Nov 1900, in Marder, *Fear God and Dread Nought I*, 164.

⁶⁶ Fisher to White, 15 Feb 1901, CCA FISR, 15/2/1/1.

⁶⁷ Fisher to White, 16 Feb 1901, CCA FISR, 3/1. This letter appears to be in reference to a call the League had made for increased naval spending in February 1901, not the election manifesto of the previous October.

admiral also “told the Editor [of the *Navy League Journal*] that if any member of the house asked a question” on naval affairs in Parliament, “he would get an answer which would discredit the NL Journal as publishing absurd & unpatriotic panic statements.”⁶⁸ Yet Fremantle still wrote an article for the League on the navy’s need for more warships, realizing that although “reluctant to show how weak so many of our cruisers are [...] the only way to call attention to special needs is through the press.”⁶⁹

Eventually the Admiralty refused any connection with League business, no matter how slight. Near the end of 1901 the League contacted the Admiralty seeking permission to offer a 50-guinea prize to the best-shooting ship in the fleet at the annual maneuvers. The letter was apologetic, expressing “the hope that the Lords Commissioners of the Admiralty will believe that however misguided, injudicious, or violent the efforts of the Navy League in the past may have been considered to have been the action of the League has been dictated by considerations of patriotism alone.”⁷⁰ Nevertheless the Admiralty declined the League’s offer – as the reply pointed out, the Naval Lords “have not in the past been always convinced that the attitude adopted by the Navy League on questions of naval policy has been advantageous to the Navy.”⁷¹

⁶⁸ Fremantle to Hurd, 14 Jan 1901, Churchill Archives Centre, Churchill College, Cambridge, Sir Archibald Hurd Papers (hereafter CCA HURD), 1/20.

⁶⁹ Fremantle to Hurd, 26 Nov 1901 and 26 Dec [n.y.], CCA HURD, 1/20.

⁷⁰ Secretary of the Navy League to the Admiralty, 19 Nov 1901, NMM WHI, 5.

⁷¹ Admiralty to the Secretary of the Navy League, 7 Dec 1901, NMM WHI, 1.

Beresford's abortive election campaign in 1902 only widened the gap between the League and many of its professional supporters. The League was unshaken, and in March Arnold White sent a form letter to a group of serving naval officers on the organization's behalf.⁷² The letter's intent was to gauge interest in a second League-supported Parliamentary campaign on behalf of another veteran navalist officer: "Vice-Admiral C. C. Penrose Fitzgerald is, I believe, willing to stand if his expenses were paid. If he could be helped to obtain a seat with the view of furthering naval interests in Parliament he would be prepared to do his best in that direction." White made it clear that the League wanted a serving officer, as "an officer on the active list would have more weight in the House than one who had retired."⁷³ He also noted that Fitzgerald was a Conservative, and "he justly requires freedom to speak or vote on all subjects other than naval questions according to his own convictions."⁷⁴

White's form letter was not published, and was for internal League use. The responses were mixed – while the majority of replies supported the idea, those who did not were vehement in their disapproval. G. H. Atkinson-Willes spoke for those officers who had grown weary of the League's tactics: "The Navy League, which began its life as a most useful and patriotic institution, has now lost the confidence of the Naval

⁷² Recipients included R.F.H. Henderson, N. Bowden-Smith, E.C. Drummond, John Dalrymple-Hay, Alexander Buller, W.F.S. Mann, Digby Morant, R.H. Hamond, Ernest Rice, G.H. Atkinson-Willes, John Hext, and E.H. Seymour.

⁷³ This specification held true for Beresford but not for Fitzgerald, who had retired the previous year. Why White included it is unclear.

⁷⁴ The original form letter was sent by White to multiple recipients on 8 Mar 1902, NMM WHI, 137.

Service to a great extent by parading about the streets exaggerated statements on boards, carried by sandwich men.” Atkinson-Willes did write that he welcomed any return of Beresford to the Commons, and supported Fitzgerald’s campaign but not his backers: “I should like to see [Fitzgerald] in Parliament, but not returned by any body of men such as the Navy League is composed of, because then, we should not have Admiral Fitzgerald’s opinions unadulterated but warped to suit the views of the League.”⁷⁵

By mid-1902 the Navy League appeared to have irrevocably poisoned its relationship with both the Admiralty and most serving naval officers, although it retained the admiration and support of Beresford. The near-concurrent rift between the League and many of its allies in the daily press, which eventually deprived the League of another major base of support, can be traced to a specific moment in June 1901 when the League navalist Arnold White inadvertently laid the relationship between League-related activists and serving officers before the public in the *Daily Mail*.

It is important to emphasize that the League, despite its publication of the *Navy League Journal*, did not consider itself part of the London Press, the collection of daily and weekly newspapers and magazines that played a major role in shaping upper-class public opinion. But it did strive for recognition from the major papers, and considered getting any League article or manifesto printed in a London daily a success. League publications certainly credited much of the organization’s early success to the wider press. At an 1898 conference an official speaker declared that “the influence the League

⁷⁵ Atkinson-Willes to White, n.d. but in reply to White’s letter of 8 Mar 1902, NMM WHI, 137.

has exerted and the effects it has produced could scarcely have come about but for the immense assistance of the Press, the conductors of which, appreciating the great importance of our cause, have always given our articles and letters and proceedings a wide and generous publicity.”⁷⁶ In 1901 the *Navy League Journal* specifically thanked *The Times* for running a leading article on the League’s latest campaign: “The Press is so well conducted, and such a power in this country, especially *The Times*, that its assistance in making known the views of the League is a great support to the Committee.”⁷⁷

These achievements are not as significant as they might first seem. Many of the League’s leader-writers also worked for the London press – H. W. Wilson and Arnold White, two of the League’s most prolific authors, were both naval correspondents for the *Daily Mail*. And the League’s attempts to gain press support could go awry. The early departure of the League’s first journalistic supporter, Spenser Wilkinson, has been discussed previously – in 1896 he left the organization ostensibly over differences as to the League’s future direction. However, it is likely that there were other factors behind Wilkinson’s departure. H. W. Wilson wrote to his navalist colleague William Laird Clowes in December of 1896 that “I am beginning to think that opportunism was a mistake on our part. We sold Spenser Wilkinson [who was by now at the *Morning Post*] for [James] Thursfield [naval correspondent for *The Times*], & Thursfield has never

⁷⁶ Lewis Edmonds, “Navy League Immensely Assisted by Press,” minutes of Navy League Conference, 23 Jun 1898, NMM HSM, 1.

⁷⁷ “The British Navy,” *The Navy League Journal*, September 1901, CCA FISR, 11/11.

lifted a hand to help us.”⁷⁸ Still, the League generally maintained close relations with as many major periodicals as possible.

Naval journalists’ roles as reporters and League members were hard to separate, meaning that dealing with official visits could be a headache for the Admiralty. In 1900 Arnold White and Yerburgh visited the Mediterranean Fleet as Beresford’s guests.⁷⁹ Both men came in their capacity as high-ranking members of the Navy League, though Yerburgh was an MP and White was a naval correspondent for the *Daily Mail* at the time. Beresford introduced the two men to Jacky Fisher, who asked White why he wrote for a mere halfpenny paper; White’s response that “the price of a paper had less effect upon the future of mankind than its circulation among people who could think and wished to know the truth”⁸⁰ would begin a working relationship with Fisher that far outlasted either’s connection with the League.

The League’s political manifesto of late 1900 had marked the organization’s entry into the realm of party politics, and when Beresford proposed bringing White and Yerburgh back as his guests during the summer of 1901 some of his fellow officers had grown suspicious of the organization in the interim. Fisher wrote to the Admiralty in an unsuccessful attempt to either have their visit prohibited or to have them accompanied

⁷⁸ Wilson to Laird Clowes, 12 Dec 1896, Caird Library, National Maritime Museum, Greenwich, UK, William Laird Clowes correspondence (hereafter NMM MSS 93), 001/2. *The Times* had recently (21 October) accused the League of having “misguided aims;” Coetzee, *For Party or Country*, 21.

⁷⁹ Ruddock F. Mackay, *Fisher of Kilverstone* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1973), 249.

⁸⁰ Bacon, *Life of Lord Fisher I*, 136.

by Thursfield of *The Times*, a journalist he may have seen as a more moderate influence; as Fisher remarked to the First Lord, “you will observe [...] in view of the previous action of the Navy League that these two gentlemen were not coming as ‘tame cats’ to purr away as if all was very comfortable.”⁸¹

He was right to be concerned. In the weeks leading up to the League’s proposed visit, Beresford had been in contact with White about what both men saw as continued Admiralty unpreparedness – “The Admiralty are all wrong, not only in their estimates but in their policy.”⁸² It appears White was pushing Beresford to bring his claims to the public’s attention, which Beresford was hesitant to do. Just days before the scheduled visit the admiral wrote to the navalist: “You and I only differ as to the question as to whether my time has come yet, to do good? I think not just yet and will convince you when you come to me I hope.”⁸³ White and Yerburgh’s second visit to the Mediterranean Fleet took place in early June of 1901 – both men spoke with Fisher and Beresford, as they had done the previous year. On his return to London, White discussed his interviews with the League’s executive committee. Impressed, the committee decided to “endeavour to bring before the public certain information which was thus placed in their possession.”⁸⁴ This information took the form of three articles

⁸¹ Hamilton, *Nation and the Navy*, 234.

⁸² Beresford to White, 4 May 1901, NMM WHI, 18.

⁸³ Beresford to White, 18 May 1901, NMM WHI, 18; emphasis in original.

⁸⁴ Richard Freeman, *The Great Edwardian Naval Feud: Beresford’s Vendetta against Fisher* (Barnsley, UK: Pen & Sword Maritime, 2009), 62-63.

by White that appeared during the summer of 1901, two in the *Daily Mail* and one in the longer monthly, the *National Review*. Two dealt with Fisher, one with Beresford.

Together they would redefine the relationship between navalists and the Admiralty.

Fisher was initially cautious in dealing with White and Yerburgh. Just after the two had concluded their visit, Fisher wrote to both separately. He gave Yerburgh permission to show the letters the two had exchanged to former Liberal Prime Minister Lord Rosebery and Secretary of the Committee of Imperial Defence Sir George Clarke, but requested that Yerburgh avoid “any personal allusion to me especially in the way of commendation. I don’t want it and it will harm the cause we have at heart.” Still, the two were kindred spirits when it came to increasing naval budgets. The admiral thought highly of Yerburgh’s plans for navalist agitation: “I do earnestly hope that you will succeed in convoking a Pan-Parliamentary Synod and that you will establish a House of Commons Vigilance Committee on the Navy. Outside pressure is most urgently necessary [...] it may even wear away the Board of Admiralty and compel the Government to recede from their un-English position of a big army and a little Navy.” Fisher ended his letter with the optimistic comment that “if you succeed your chances of going to heaven will be immeasurably increased [...] and Patriotism like Charity will cover a multitude of sins.”⁸⁵

Fisher’s missive to White contained more of a concrete plan for future navalist political action. He agreed with the journalist that a “Psychological Moment” was

⁸⁵ Fisher to Yerburgh, 10 Jun 1901, NMM WHI, 1.

approaching where the government, reluctant to spend more on defense, would be forced to choose between increasing the army or the navy budget – this point is similar to the Yerburgh letter. But Fisher realized that “if Mr. Yerburgh or you or Lord Rosebery were to make certain statements they might be officially categorically denied.” His solution was to suggest that if Beresford was “to be in a position of greater freedom and less responsibility than at present [...] and were to get up in the House of Commons or at any public meeting in England and make the following statements as coming within his own knowledge, it would be impossible for any official, however supple, to wiggle out of an admission that his statements were correct.”⁸⁶ Thus Fisher suggested – albeit indirectly – that the League support a Beresford political campaign six months before they actually did. This was how Fisher generally dealt with the navalist press, surreptitiously and behind the scenes.

Arnold White ignored all of Fisher’s advice (though not all of his letter, a point which will be examined further). Soon after his visit to the Mediterranean Fleet, White sent a memorandum directly to King Edward VII decrying the weakness of the fleet and calling for more political support of Fisher.⁸⁷ He then published a short character sketch of Fisher in the *Daily Mail* of June 25 – anonymously, though it was easy for Fisher to guess the identity of the author. The admiral angrily wrote to his wife that the “scoundrel Arnold White contrary to my most distinct request has put in a sort of journal

⁸⁶ Fisher to White, 9 Jun 1901, CCA FISR, 3/1.

⁸⁷ Hamilton, *Nation and the Navy*, 210.

of my days work &c. & he promised me faithfully not to mention my name as it does far more harm than people generally suppose & does me personally no good at all.” He worried that “this last article in the *Daily Mail* will set all the Admiralty and the Admirals by the ears & I shall have most abusive letters appearing in the papers in consequence,” and even blamed “that scoundrel Beresford” for being White’s impetus, as White told Fisher he had spoken to the second in command about Fisher’s reforming interests.⁸⁸ Fisher even wrote to White, feigning ignorance of the article’s author and claiming that “the oil would have been heated seven times hotter for the writer of the article could I have got him! However he would have been delivered [...] as the cause was righteous and it was written for the good of the cause and certainly not for the good of the person described.”⁸⁹

Fisher also expressed his disappointment pointedly to another sympathetic naval correspondent, James Thursfield: “I was assured by a mutual friend of the absolute trust that could be placed in Mr. Yerburch and Mr. White, and they, having asked me in confidence my views, I gave them freely, but *quite privately*, in view of their enthusiasm on behalf of the Navy.” He had made both men “aware how especially distasteful to me personally it would be if I were in any way ‘boomed’ or alluded to, so you may imagine

⁸⁸ Fisher to Kitty Fisher, 29 Jun 1901, CCA FISR, 2/2. Beresford does not seem to have known about the Fisher article before the fact – as will be seen, he was currently dealing with the results of White’s pen himself.

⁸⁹ Fisher to White, 16 Jul 1901, CCA FISR, 3/1.

my disgust at being trotted out in the *Daily Mail*.”⁹⁰ For his part, White sent an extraordinary letter to Fisher’s wife. He took credit for the article (confirming Fisher’s suspicions), but claimed it was merely the beginning of a broader plan:

One result has followed this agitation. Sir John Fisher is now a distinct personality to the public, and the fact that he is a silent personality does not tell against him in these blatant days. What I hope to see is that he should be made Minister of Marine, with a Seat in the Cabinet and unremovable for five years. It seems to me that his day will come when the public recognize the fact that the navy can no longer be entrusted to an ignorant politician. In the meantime we are doing all we can at home to forward his views and get for him the place in the people’s thoughts which he deserves.⁹¹

Public praise of this sort was distasteful to Fisher. But Fisher’s mood improved when a second article on his Mediterranean career authored by White – this time officially – appeared in the Conservative journalist Leo Maxse’s *National Review* for July 1901. Entitled “A Message from the Mediterranean,” it covered the same general ground as most contemporary navalist arguments – the Royal Navy, particularly in the Mediterranean, was weak. It needed more cruisers and auxiliary units, but the public did not realize the danger because they were too caught up in both the general belief that the navy was supreme and contemporary arguments within the defense community that what Britain really needed was a stronger army.⁹² The essay proved popular – the Navy League’s executive council was so impressed that they immediately authorized £200

⁹⁰ Fisher to Thursfield, 13 Jul 1901, in Marder, *Fear God and Dread Nought I*, 198. Fisher concluded his letter with an update for Thursfield on Admiralty war orders in the Mediterranean – hence his pointed reference to secrecy.

⁹¹ White to Kitty Fisher, 7 Jul 1901, CCA FISR, 2/2.

⁹² Arnold White, “A Message from the Mediterranean,” *National Review* (July 1901): 677 – 689.

“for an immediate agitation by hand bills or otherwise” upon the article’s major points.”⁹³ Only weeks after Fisher had denounced White’s first article, he headily commended the second: “you have done the State some service,” he wrote the journalist. “Nearly every point [raised in the article] has been officially though very secretly conceded.”⁹⁴

There was good reason, besides his general support for navalist agitation, for Fisher to be so supportive of White’s *National Review* article. He had essentially written it. In the previously discussed letter the admiral sent to White immediately following the latter’s visit to the Fleet, Fisher had also enclosed what he called a “‘fragment’ written offhand just now,” which became the basis for White’s effort in the *National Review*. White even retained many of Fisher’s characteristic scriptural references, and generally confined himself to tidying up much of Fisher’s literary exuberance; for example, “[Britons] are languidly indifferent as to who governs them” in the finished product had been “We don’t care a damn what set of idiots are governing us” in Fisher’s original. But the thrust remained the same.⁹⁵

White’s second article, although successful in turning Parliamentary attention back to the navy, also once again brought suspicion on the Mediterranean Fleet and Fisher in particular (Beresford was experiencing his own concurrent struggles with

⁹³ Freeman, *Great Edwardian Naval Feud*, 66.

⁹⁴ Fisher to White, 27 Jul 1901, CCA FISR, 3/1; emphasis in original.

⁹⁵ Fisher to White, 9 Jun 1901, and attached “A Fragment – Notes on the Navy,” NMM WHI, 1.

Parliament and the press). One of Fisher's particular causes was the rather esoteric issue of a lack of gyroscopes in the Mediterranean, and the admiral asked that either White or Yerburgh "make certain statements" on the matter. The statements were made, but it was too technical an issue for a non-professional arena, and they met with scorn in Parliament. One MP asked whether "the League know what a gyroscope is? They ought not to prevent people sleeping in their beds at night by telling them there are no gyroscopes in the Mediterranean, unless they first of all explain what a gyroscope is."⁹⁶ Around the same time Kerr wrote to the First Lord of the Admiralty, Lord Selborne, that Fisher was suspected of having leaked information to "Navy Leaguers and kindred spirits," which had led to "discussion in public of the most delicate questions."⁹⁷ Kerr specifically mentioned the *National Review* article, calling it merely a restatement, "in many instances in identical terms, of the views expounded to the Board by the C-in-C."⁹⁸

Fisher replied to Kerr's secretary that he was "sorry words and phrases of mine are quoted, as you mention, but with a large Fleet like this the Admiral cannot hide his views and opinions, and mine, as you know, are very strong."⁹⁹ Yet his actions had not gone unnoticed among his fellow officers. Fisher's chief of staff, George King-Hall,

⁹⁶ Fisher to White, 9 Jun 1901; E. Robertson MP, 3 Jul 1901, quoted in Hamilton, *Nation and the Navy*, 318-319.

⁹⁷ Kerr to Selborne, n.d. (Jun 1901), in George D. Boyce, ed., *The Crisis of British Power: The Imperial and Naval Papers of the Second Earl of Selborne, 1895-1910* (London: The Historians' Press, 1990), 138.

⁹⁸ Mackay, *Fisher of Kilverstone*, 250.

⁹⁹ Richard Hough, *Admiral of the Fleet: The Life of John Fisher* (New York: Macmillan Company, 1969), 132-133.

noted in his diary that he did “not think Sir John has acted loyally to his superiors, for he disclosed to Arnold White and Mr. Yerburgh, at two visits for two at a time, all our plans.”¹⁰⁰ Fisher received an uncomfortable letter from Beresford: “he hears that unless Arnold White had not written those personal articles on me the agitation would not have gone ahead.” Fisher was, at least briefly, convinced that White’s articles had permanently damaged his career: “It certainly has done away with any idea of my going to the Admiralty! Nor do I think it likely I shall ever get anything else after this. However I feel I have done the right thing, and I daresay I shall get along all right on half pay!”¹⁰¹

Soon after this discomfiture Fisher again contacted White: “I think for various reasons and for the good of the cause that I had better not write to you further, but you must not suppose from this that I do not appreciate your self-sacrifice in this matter and your splendid patriotism, and I have the same to say in regard to Mr. Yerburgh.”¹⁰² He would not deal closely with either Yerburgh or the League again in any major capacity – possibly the gyroscope fiasco had led him to avoid groups composed mainly of enthusiastic amateurs, or perhaps the League was becoming too partisan for a serving

¹⁰⁰ Freeman, *Great Edwardian Naval Feud*, 64.

¹⁰¹ Fisher to Kitty Fisher, 23 Jul 1901, CCA FISR, 2/2. Bacon, *Life of Lord Fisher I*, 153 reprints this letter but cites Arnold White as the recipient; it is certainly possible that Fisher sent copies of his thoughts on the matter to multiple recipients.

¹⁰² Fisher to White, 16 Jul 1901, CCA FISR, 3/1.

officer.¹⁰³ But the working relationship between Fisher and White would continue for many years, because while White had angered Fisher by publishing a hagiographic sketch of the admiral, he had also taken Fisher's talking points and given them a nationwide audience with the *National Review* article.

From White's perspective, he truly believed that Fisher was the reformer the navy needed. At the height of the agitation he wrote to Fisher's wife that Fisher's "silent devotion to country is what appeals so strongly to my imagination. There is a Spanish proverb 'he who would be a Christ must expect crucifixion.' [...] You may rely upon it that the heart of England is with Sir John Fisher. Speaking personally I would gladly go to prison to help him in the very slightest degree."¹⁰⁴ Fisher's back-channel methods were certainly better for a navalist's job security than Beresford's. For White's reference to prison was no joke – because while White's articles on Fisher had captured the attention of the Admiralty, his simultaneous article on Beresford had captured the attention of Parliament, and White and Beresford stood accused of revealing classified naval information to the public.

Although White had interviewed Fisher on his recent visit to the Mediterranean Fleet, he was there at Beresford's invitation and stayed on Beresford's flagship HMS

¹⁰³ In his capacity as MP Yerburgh had just proposed a protest motion to lower the First Lord's salary, which could not have done wonders for his relationship with Fisher; Freeman, *Great Edwardian Naval Feud*, 66-67.

¹⁰⁴ White to Kitty Fisher, 25 Jul 1901, CCA FISR, 2/2.

Ramillies.¹⁰⁵ Beresford, like Fisher, was a strong believer in navalist agitation being necessary for increased naval funding and, as he had not yet embarked on his Hampstead parliamentary campaign, he chose to work through the League. Initially Beresford shared the same reticence as his fellow admiral; he wrote to White that “it would be most improper and prejudicial to discipline if I were to give you details as to why” he had concluded the British Fleet in the Mediterranean was ill-prepared for war.¹⁰⁶ But White apparently convinced the rear-admiral of the importance journalism could play in naval budgets. As he recorded in a later letter setting down the history of the controversy, White “had obtained permission to write certain letters to the *Daily Mail* with the object of rousing public opinion on the subject of the Fleet.” But he worried “as to whether my unassisted efforts to rouse the public by means of the Press to a sense of the danger of the situation would be successful,” and asked Beresford to “write a short letter for publication which should contain one sentence indicating that the Mediterranean Fleet was not organised for war. After considering the matter for two days [Beresford] wrote the draft of a letter in which I suggested some alterations.”¹⁰⁷

Beresford accepted White’s alterations – his only suggestion was for White to send the document to the entire Press Association rather than simply the *Daily Mail*,

¹⁰⁵ For more details on the Beresford *Daily Mail* controversy see Richard Freeman’s *The Great Edwardian Naval Feud*, particularly chapter 4. Freeman focuses on how the leak affected Beresford and Fisher.

¹⁰⁶ Beresford to White, 10 Jun 1901, NMM WHI, 18.

¹⁰⁷ White to Beresford (unsent), 16 May 1902, NMM WHI, 19.

which White looked into but found the organization unreceptive.¹⁰⁸ When White left the fleet he carried with him Beresford's letter, which criticized the "want of strength and the want of proper organization" within the fleet in the rear-admiral's own hand.¹⁰⁹ Beresford wrote to White on June 21 that "everyone will agree with us once they know [...] I am entirely with you in your views that to get at 'the people' it is necessary to ventilate matters in the papers which they read."¹¹⁰ That same day his letter was published in the *Daily Mail*. White's name was not attached to the article. Beresford's was. It was considered highly unusual for a high-ranking officer on active service to publish a direct attack on Admiralty policy using his own name,¹¹¹ and although this was not the first time Beresford had taken up his pen in support of the navy,¹¹² Parliament as well as the press immediately took notice.

The Beresford letter quickly became a topic of conversation in the daily press. Early opinions were split on Beresford's tactics, but the majority of pro-naval periodicals and dailies supported the letter, some with more reservations than others. Many commentators were willing to overlook Beresford's transgressions if they had been undertaken out of a sincere desire to improve conditions in the Mediterranean Fleet. The

¹⁰⁸ Hamilton, *Nation and the Navy*, 212.

¹⁰⁹ Marder, *Anatomy of British Sea Power*, 409.

¹¹⁰ Beresford to White, 21 Jun 1901, NMM WHI, 18.

¹¹¹ Iain O'Shea, "Selling 'The Scheme': The British Periodical Press and the Discourse on Naval Reform, 1900-1910" (M.A. thesis, University of New Brunswick, 2010), 64-66.

¹¹² Beresford claimed that he had been accused by the Admiralty of improperly leaking classified information four times before the *Daily Mail* incident. *The Times*, 15 May 1902.

debate often centered on the navalist idea – now approaching its second decade of national relevance – that only public support could save the navy. The *Daily Express* claimed that “it is the custom of our Government to stigmatise all who cry for reform as alarmists,” but saw Beresford’s letter as containing “statements that cannot be denied, here is a danger to the Empire patent to all. [...] If Ministers will not act it is to their masters, the people of Britain, that we look for aid.”¹¹³ Correspondence poured in to the *Daily Mail*. “We have grown weary of Administrations that cry peace when there is no peace,” wrote one editorialist.¹¹⁴ Another believed it was “time that the Government were reminded by ‘the man in the street’ of their responsibilities in regard to the reinforcing of our ‘crack’ fleet in the Mediterranean.”¹¹⁵ A column in *The Referee* was more poetic in its support for Beresford: “[L]et us tell our rulers plainly that The Meanest Pro-Boer that Crawls, and leaves his trail of treason as he goes, is not such a traitor to England as would be the Minister who risked the existence of the British Empire by his crass neglect of the British fleet.”¹¹⁶ The *Westminster Gazette* believed that if Beresford knew about the letter’s publication he should be investigated by the

¹¹³ “Matters of Movement,” *Daily Express*, 24 Jun 1901, CCA FISR, 11/11.

¹¹⁴ “Long Tom” to the *Daily Mail*, 26 Jun 1901, CCA FISR, 11/11.

¹¹⁵ “A Birmingham Conservative” to the *Daily Mail*, 27 Jun 1901, CCA FISR, 11/11.

¹¹⁶ “Mustard and Cress” in *The Referee*, 7 Jul 1901, CCA FISR, 11/11.

Admiralty, but if the rear-admiral's charges were true the only solution would be to immediately install Beresford as First Lord of the Admiralty.¹¹⁷

The Navy League strongly supported the Beresford letter and sent public statements to a variety of newspapers, including the *Morning Post* and the *Daily Mail*, pushing for a full investigation into Beresford's claims; "In these circumstances there is no other course to pursue than to continue the agitation," read one League editorial.¹¹⁸ *The Times*, however, took a dim view of the League's involvement with the Beresford controversy: "It is not at the bidding of a few 'sea-gallopers' [...] that the country will disestablish the Admiralty and install the Navy League in its place. It is not because some of them choose to publish letters they have received from officers in high command that the country will give itself over to panic."¹¹⁹ *The Times* strongly condemned the publication of Beresford's letter from the outset, and its editors deliberately "dissociate[d] ourselves entirely from the too transparent attempt which is being made in certain quarters to represent the two very capable and distinguished officers who command our naval forces in the Mediterranean [Fisher and Beresford] as parties to the agitation which appears to be impending."¹²⁰

¹¹⁷ "Still!," *Westminster Gazette*, 25 Jun 1901, CCA FISR, 11/11. It is interesting to note that the *Gazette* called for Beresford to fill the political post of First Lord rather than the professional post of First Naval Lord.

¹¹⁸ "Reply to Lord Selborne," *Morning Post*, 11 Jul 1901; "The Outlook: Why Our Fleets are Weak," *Daily Mail*, 27 Jun 1901, CCA FISR, 11/11.

¹¹⁹ *The Times*, 6 Jul 1901, CCA FISR, 11/11.

¹²⁰ *The Times*, 3 Jul 1901, CCA FISR, 11/11.

One of the ‘capable and distinguished officers’ could not have been happier with the initial response to the letter’s publication. “Well done,” wrote Beresford to White on June 27, “you are manipulating things well.” Beresford was only sorry that White could not “have got my letter taken up by Press Assoc. instead of one paper (Daily Mail) then it would have been in every single paper in England on the same day with comments....” He had not publicly denied his authorship of the letter, and even had a plan if Parliament or the Admiralty asked any inconvenient questions: “If they write to me to know if I wrote the letter I shall reply that I have written hundreds of the same sort. I do not see that I have done anything short of complete discipline or prejudicial to the Service....”¹²¹

Beresford soon found himself defending his concept of ‘complete discipline.’ Most press representatives supported the publication of Beresford’s correspondence; even the *Naval and Military Record* wrote that while “technically this may be a dire offence, [...] it is impossible to doubt the excellent motives of the gallant rear-admiral, and he is far too popular in the country to be made the scapegoat of the Admiralty.”¹²² But the technicality was an important one. Article 682 of the King’s Regulations, which bound every serving member of the Royal Navy, stated that “all persons belonging to the Fleet are forbidden to write for any newspaper on subjects connected with the Naval Service, or to publish or cause to be published directly or indirectly in a newspaper or

¹²¹ Beresford to White, 27 Jun 1901, NMM WHI, 18.

¹²² “The Mediterranean Fleet,” *Naval and Military Record*, 11 Jul 1901, CCA FISR, 11/11.

other periodical any matter or information relating to the Public Service.”¹²³ If Beresford had purposely written his letter for general publication, he could be court-martialed. Of course he *had* written it specifically for White’s use, but now Beresford and White had to convince the Admiralty that Beresford had not done so. To do so, they would have to satisfy the Parliamentary Secretary to the Admiralty – H. O. Arnold-Forster, who as a veteran navalist himself knew a great deal about the dangers posed by enthusiastic admirals.

As soon as Beresford’s letter was published in the *Daily Mail*, a Parliamentary debate commenced over what the rear-admiral’s motivation had been. Initially Admiralty officials were loath to believe that Beresford would have purposefully committed such a blatant breach of discipline. Arnold-Forster, as the Admiralty’s voice in Parliament, stated before the House of Commons that “there was nothing in Lord Charles Beresford’s letter to show that it was intended for publication and it seemed highly improbable that the Rear Admiral would take a step so contrary to the discipline of the Navy....”¹²⁴ There were rumblings that the letter was a forgery¹²⁵ and even that it

¹²³ A.J.A. Morris, *The Scaremongers: The Advocacy of War and Rearmament, 1896-1914* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1984), 154.

¹²⁴ White to Arnold-Forster, 25 Jun 1901, British Library, London (hereafter BL ADD MS), Arnold-Forster Papers vol. XIV, 50288. White quoted Arnold-Forster’s Parliamentary statement of the previous day.

¹²⁵ This was the opinion of Lord Clanwilliam in the House of Lords; *The Times*, 6 Jul 1901.

had been stolen from the Admiralty.¹²⁶ The fault must lie, so the Admiralty believed, with the letter's anonymous recipient.

Then, less than a week after the letter's publication, Arnold White wrote to Arnold-Forster claiming responsibility for its appearance in the *Daily Mail* – it had been sent to him, and it was entirely his decision to print it. Rather than begging forgiveness, White's letter was brash and combative. First, he emphasized to Arnold-Forster, the Admiralty had no right to complain – after all, it had approved White and Yerburgh's visit to the Fleet as representatives of the League (despite Fisher's dissatisfaction with the arrangement, which White was not aware of). "The situation [of the Mediterranean fleet] is disquieting and in the opinion of a large number of people well qualified to judge of the situation from a national point of view requires vigorous and immediate action. Where is the impulse towards vigorous action to come from except from public opinion?" White believed he was merely aiding the Admiralty's fight for increased funding, claiming "the object of those with whom I am acting is in the first place to strengthen the hands of the present Board of Admiralty in providing the Mediterranean Fleet with such essentials as the responsible authorities know to be necessary...." He promised more disclosures to come, telling Arnold-Forster that "a preliminary statement of the facts will be published by the Navy League tomorrow or next day. Those facts are undeniable and that they cannot be refuted is known to nobody better than yourself."¹²⁷

¹²⁶ Arnold-Forster postulated a theft in the House of Commons; *The Times*, 6 Jul 1901.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.* A copy of this letter can also be found in NMM WHI, 19.

Arnold-Forster's reply was milder than expected. "Of course I am not so stupid as to think or pretend that agitation and newspaper attacks are out of place or useless in such a matter as the condition of the Navy," he wrote to White. "I think I should obviously be one of the last persons to take such a line [...] I know we are both interested in the same matter and both trying to arrive at the same result, namely, the strengthening of the Navy, though we are compelled to do so by somewhat different means." With regards to the real issue, whether Beresford had told White to print his letter, Arnold-Forster only commented that he was "not surprised to know that Lord Charles' letter was sent to you; indeed I supposed that was the case. Whether or not he instructed you to publish it I do not know, nor do I ask."¹²⁸

He did not ask, and White did not answer – he merely pointedly replied that he was "not in the habit of publishing private letters or giving publicity to any communication without the permission or knowledge of the writer."¹²⁹ Why did White not directly implicate Beresford? He explained his motivations in a letter written, but never sent, to Beresford after the original furor had died down: "the publication of this letter, if brought home to you [Beresford] at that time, might have necessitated the hauling down of your flag. In my judgment your degradation would have been injurious to the country. [...] On this ground I took the only course that was honourable."¹³⁰

¹²⁸ Arnold-Forster to White, 27 Jun 1901, NMM WHI, 19.

¹²⁹ White to Arnold-Forster, 29 Jun 1901, BL ADD MS, 50288.

¹³⁰ White to Beresford, 16 May 1902 (letter unsent), NMM WHI, 19.

Arnold-Forster was not convinced by White's claim that he acted alone. He wrote to Fisher his "hope that I am mistaken about the whole business, and the publication of the letter which appeared here may have been altogether contrary to Lord C's. wishes. But thanks I am bound to say to some of his friends, an impression was created which has added to the difficulties of the situation, and has I know aggravated a great many people whose good will and esteem are well worth retaining."¹³¹

However, White's word was good enough for the Admiralty, and Arnold-Forster duly announced in Parliament that the letter had been printed without Beresford's knowledge; it was merely a "private letter, written without any intention of its being published, and that its publication was unauthorized." Beresford would not be questioned in the matter.¹³² White then sent his letter of the 25th claiming responsibility to *The Times*. It appeared in early July along with an additional preface by the journalist claiming the Admiralty would never have let White and Yerburgh visit the Mediterranean Fleet if it "was not willing to be strengthened by an expression of public opinion."¹³³ If the veteran navalist was expecting the letter to vindicate him, his plan was not a success. *The Times* in particular, although it did publish White's admission, believed White "must surely feel by this time that he has done Lord Charles Beresford a very grave disservice; and his distinguished correspondent must probably feel, too, that

¹³¹ Arnold-Forster to Fisher, 4 Jul 1901, BL ADD MS, 50288.

¹³² *The Times*, 10 Jul 1901.

¹³³ *The Times*, 6 Jul 1901, BL ADD MS, 50288.

officers in high command must needs be very careful in future how they write private letters to persons who cannot be trusted not to publish them.”¹³⁴

This immediate criticism struck a nerve with White. He confided to Leo Maxse, the editor of the *National Review*, that “Beresford’s letter was of course written for publication & handed to me for that purpose as I did not at that time think that anything I could do would arouse the country to the facts [...] it seemed to me only fair to him to leave him to avow or disavow the publication of a telegram which might end his sea career.” White also asked Maxse for the opportunity to publish another article on the Mediterranean Fleet in an upcoming *National Review*.¹³⁵ Beresford neither avowed nor disavowed the letter; he would make no public statement on the matter until the next year. Although it is uncertain what White – who certainly knew the danger Beresford would be in if he admitted culpability – thought that Beresford would be willing to say in his defense, he clearly decided that Beresford should be doing more. He sent a telegram to the rear-admiral shortly after *The Times* published his confession in hopes that Beresford would explain himself to the Admiralty, if not to the general public.¹³⁶

Beresford’s response must have come as a shock to the embattled navalist. His encouragement of the previous month had vanished entirely; now Beresford wrote

¹³⁴ *The Times*, 8 Jul 1901; the newspaper also upbraided Arnold-Forster, who “once declared in his days of greater freedom and less responsibility that nothing was ever got out of the Admiralty without an agitation. He probably knows better now.”

¹³⁵ White to Maxse, 8 Jul 1901, Chichester, UK, West Sussex Records Office, Maxse Papers, Letters to Leopold J. Maxse (hereafter CHI MAXSE), 448.

¹³⁶ White to Beresford, 16 May 1901 (letter unsent), NMM WHI, 19.

sternly that White “would have made a stronger case if you had not let Mr. Forster or anyone know to whom my letter was addressed.” As to White’s appeal for an official explanation from Beresford to Arnold-Forster:

[Y]ou evidently seem to think I ought to wire home that you published my letter either with my authority or by my desire. As far as I am personally concerned it is immaterial to me what line I take with regard to my letter being published but if one is fighting an uphill game it is always as well not to build up obstacles to our advance. If I had sent you a wire to say you published my letter by permission or desire from me I put myself palpably in the wrong with authority and after having done an act which certainly is against the customs, traditions and even orders of the Service I aggravate the offence by publishing a further remark which infers that I not only did an act of indiscipline but glory in having done it. Such a proceeding would put a very large number of my brother officers against me, who are now strongly in support of my views. Why volunteer anything.

Beresford went on to say that he would only confess if the Admiralty directly asked him whether or not he had sent the letter – which Arnold-Forster had already announced the Admiralty would not do. He concluded with a stinging rebuke to White: “You must work the agitation your own way and you believe in using names. I do not. Using Fisher’s and my own names creates an enormous amount of jealousy and opposition amongst our brother officers in the Navy [...] You will remember that I told you that when you were with me.”¹³⁷

Beresford’s rebuff of White came near the end of the public controversy over the *Daily Mail* letter. As far as the Parliamentary representatives of the Admiralty were concerned, the whole episode had merely been an unfortunate combination of a rear-admiral who talked too much and too loudly and a fervent journalist who took a private

¹³⁷ Beresford to White, 9 Jul 1901, NMM WHI, 1.

conversation into the public sphere. As a result the Admiralty was modifying its public relations policy behind closed doors. A high-level meeting was held early in 1902 to discuss how to deal with “erroneous criticisms” of the Royal Navy appearing in the nation’s newspapers. First Naval Lord Kerr summed up the apprehension of those in power: “So far as this country is concerned I doubt these fables carrying much weight, but if the malicious lies that appear in our gutter Press are taken up seriously on the Continent and reproduced in respectable journals, no doubt harm is done.” Eventually the decision was made to continue with a reactive strategy, with the Admiralty officially contradicting in Parliament any information it deemed inaccurate that had appeared in the periodical press.¹³⁸ The Admiralty also banned press representatives from speaking to anyone in the Admiralty offices except the Permanent Secretary.¹³⁹

Press interest died off without any new news to report. Fisher, who already knew the value of keeping communication anonymous, continued to work with navalists more tactfully than his colleague; Beresford was soon involved in his election campaigns for Hampshire and Woolwich. Only Arnold White, who was still searching for a more amenable answer from Beresford as to why he had not supported the journalist further, was still keeping the issue alive. In an August 1901 article on the Mediterranean Fleet for the *National Review*, White again claimed that in publishing Beresford’s letter the

¹³⁸ Marder, *Anatomy of British Sea Power*, 60-61. This meeting was held in April 1902 and also included First Lord of the Admiralty Selborne.

¹³⁹ Jan Rüger, *The Great Naval Game: Britain and Germany in the Age of Empire* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 74.

ends had justified the means: “It will be generally admitted that the publication of this letter was a disgraceful and even criminal act unless the fact stated in it was literally true. Since, however, it is true, as is officially admitted, it would have been dastardly to have shrunk from the consequences of responsibility for its publication.”¹⁴⁰

Privately, White was continually in contact with an increasingly distant Beresford throughout the summer of 1901, always attempting to persuade the rear-admiral to admit his connection with the letter. Beresford generally replied that he would set the matter straight when his personal circumstances allowed him to return to London: “When I come home and then am in a position to do so I will put the letter incident all right;”¹⁴¹ “So far as the letter goes you will see that I will turn it to good account when I get home;”¹⁴² “You need not be uneasy in any way as to the incident of the letter. I will put that exactly as it occurred.”¹⁴³ He also recommended that White “sit quite still and do or say nothing about the letter.”¹⁴⁴ Beresford remained with the Mediterranean Fleet during his brief Navy League-aided Parliamentary campaign for Hampstead, but did haul down his flag and return to London on half pay in order to run for the Woolwich seat. At this time he wrote to White that – as recorded by the latter –

¹⁴⁰ Arnold White, “Shall the Mediterranean Fleet Remain Unready?”, *The National Review* (August 1901): 845-854. 852. This was the article White had discussed with Maxse in July.

¹⁴¹ Jul 21, 1901.

¹⁴² Aug 14, 1901.

¹⁴³ Jan 18, 1902.

¹⁴⁴ Jul 26, 1901.

“unless I [White] asked you to [admit responsibility for the letter] you did not intend to take action,” which White interpreted to mean that Beresford would deal with the matter after his Parliamentary contest.¹⁴⁵

Beresford’s second campaign of 1902 was easier than the first, as he ran unopposed in a by-election to fill the vacated seat for Woolwich. He still delivered a series of campaign speeches, and true to form they focused on the idea that the Mediterranean Fleet was woefully unprepared for a future naval engagement. The public airing of Admiralty laundry, particularly on subjects that cannot much have interested the voters of Woolwich – one of his main criticisms was an insufficient supply of Welsh coal at Malta – led to condemnation of Beresford from some of his oldest and most strongly navalist colleagues. Retired admiral E. R. Fremantle found “the subject chosen by Lord Charles [...] not one I venture to think suitable for popular discussion, and, to make it interesting, it was necessary to exaggerate largely our deficiencies.”¹⁴⁶ C. C. Penrose Fitzgerald, perhaps smarting from his own recent misguided attempt at a navalist Parliamentary campaign, contended that Beresford’s speech was “contrary to the best traditions of the Navy, injurious to its true interests, and consequently to those of the country, subversive of all discipline, and absolutely destructive of the noble lord’s reputation as a serious critic of naval affairs.”¹⁴⁷ Jacky Fisher wrote to the former First

¹⁴⁵ White to Beresford, 16 May 1902 (letter unsent), NMM WHI, 19.

¹⁴⁶ Fremantle to *The Times*, 28 Mar 1902, BL ADD MS, 50288.

¹⁴⁷ Penrose Fitzgerald to *The Times*, 2 Apr 1902, BL ADD MS, 50288.

Lord, Earl Spencer, that Beresford “could do so much good for the Navy with the public, for there is no doubt the ‘oi polloi’ [sic.] believe in him and listen to him like no one else,” but “his uncontrolled desire for notoriety alienates his brother officers! He promised me faithfully [...] that he would be circumspect and judicious in what he was going to say in public. He has been neither! and has forced me much against my will to disavow him....”¹⁴⁸

Still, there was no doubt that Beresford would return to the House of Commons. When he did, in late April of 1902, White wrote to him immediately. “While you were on full pay or seeking a seat in the House of Commons I held my hand and suffered in silence under the infamous charge [that he had published Beresford’s letter without permission]. Now that you are a free man and in Parliament I am sure that you will see that justice is done to me in this matter.”¹⁴⁹ Finally, White’s plea was heard. A short letter – just two sentences – appeared in *The Times* of April 29, and Beresford had finally come clean. “The publication of that letter was a very grave mistake, but all blame (which I own is thoroughly deserved) for that mistake should be laid on my shoulders as I am the person solely responsible.”¹⁵⁰ The newly-minted parliamentarian also wrote rather defensively to White: “There was no direct charge ever made against you, it was all by insinuation. I hope now the whole affair may be dropped as if it is

¹⁴⁸ Fisher to Spencer, 28 Mar 1902, in Marder, *Fear God and Dread Nought* I, 237.

¹⁴⁹ White to Beresford, 25 Apr 1902, quoted within a letter from White to Beresford (unsent), 16 May 1902, NMM WHI, 19.

¹⁵⁰ *The Times*, 29 Apr 1902.

revived again [...] that will nullify if not entirely destroy any power I may possess for getting an improvement in the Administration of the Services.”¹⁵¹

So Arnold White found himself vindicated after nearly a year of being impugned in the London press, particularly by *The Times*. Indeed, the newspaper published an official retraction of its previous anti-White editorials, writing that “in all this deplorable business Mr. Arnold White has been much more loyal to Lord Charles Beresford than Lord Charles Beresford has been to Mr. Arnold White – or to his own superiors at the Admiralty.”¹⁵² White also attempted to obtain an official apology from Arnold-Forster and the Admiralty, which was not forthcoming.¹⁵³ He met with Beresford at the latter’s home, where Beresford displayed an alarming lack of tact by telling White that while “the only point that gives me some satisfaction in the whole of this affair is that no doubt we shall mutually suffer for the cause that we have at heart [...] there is no doubt on the face of it I shall suffer more acutely than you.”¹⁵⁴

Privately, Beresford was seething. He told his fellow officer George King-Hall that he had been “a fool to trust Arnold White.”¹⁵⁵ And when Beresford had to explain himself to Arnold-Forster – for a public admission demanded, finally, an explanation –

¹⁵¹ Beresford to White, 29 Apr 1902, NMM WHI, 19.

¹⁵² *The Times*, 2 May 1902.

¹⁵³ White to Yerburgh, n.d., BL ADD MS, 50288.

¹⁵⁴ Beresford to White, 13 May 1902, NMM WHI, 19.

¹⁵⁵ King-Hall’s diary, 6 May 1902, quoted in Freeman, *Great Edwardian Naval Feud*, 74.

he wrote to Arnold-Forster that “Arnold White is one of the most dangerous men that I have had anything to do with. [...] I told him he could do what he liked with the letter when he asked me ‘might he publish it’, and I said there was nothing in it.” He also emphasized that if he had claimed responsibility for the letter’s publication while still on active duty, he likely would have been forced to resign.¹⁵⁶

This letter was discussed in the House of Commons, and although Arnold-Forster omitted lines “so offensive to Mr. Arnold White that I thought [Beresford] would not wish me to publish it”, Beresford in his role as MP asked to speak and reiterated his conviction that White was not to be trusted. He then claimed to “know I was wrong, but I can prove to this House that though I was wrong I did right”¹⁵⁷ – as concise a statement of Beresford’s views towards public relations as ever there was. Beresford was officially reprimanded by the Admiralty, and as far as the navy was concerned the matter was ended.¹⁵⁸ After the report of this Parliamentary exchange appeared in *The Times*, White composed a long and detailed message to Beresford laying out the entire history of the *Daily Mail* controversy from his point of view. It concluded with a final statement of wounded innocence from White: “You stated that I am ‘a dangerous man’ and you give as an explanation a comparison to yourself that I sometimes blurt out things which I regret. I am unaware of any episode in our relations which justify you even in hinting

¹⁵⁶ Beresford to Arnold-Forster, 2 May 1902, BL ADD MS, 50288.

¹⁵⁷ *The Times*, 15 May 1902.

¹⁵⁸ He was officially reprimanded on 22 May 1902, BL ADD MS, 50288.

that I have not exercised proper reticence in regard to either your interests or those of the Fleet.”¹⁵⁹ White never sent the letter, though he kept it with his personal files.¹⁶⁰ And he never again dealt with Beresford in a personal or professional capacity.

White had also recently stepped down from the executive committee of the Navy League – a surprising decision for a committed navalist who had been one of the League’s earliest supporters. His motivation may be explained by a letter Jacky Fisher sent to the embattled journalist shortly after his resignation:

To tell you the truth (between ourselves) I’m glad you have left the executive of the Navy League, simply because its efficacy is vitiated by having retired Naval officers amongst its members. First because a purely civilian executive carries more weight with the public, as then there is no professional bias! Second because these retired Naval Officers did nothing to remedy the deficiencies they complain of now, when they were on the active list and had then the power more or less to do so! However all this is between you and me, and in view of my shortly going to ‘a certain place’ it is not desirable I should be in any way quoted. One of my first visits on reaching England will be to [White’s home], to pay my respects and offer my thanks to a much abused but real patriot who notwithstanding all sneers to the contrary has substantiated his assertions and sees them gradually acquiesced in and has done a great service, regardless of personal inconveniences and personal abuse!¹⁶¹

The ‘certain place’ Fisher referred to was the Admiralty. In June 1902 he was appointed Second Naval Lord, in charge of personnel decisions for the entire Royal Navy.¹⁶² He

¹⁵⁹ White to Beresford (letter unsent), 16 May 1902, NMM WHI, 19; the original typescript copy has ‘Press’ substituted for ‘Fleet’ in the last sentence quoted above.

¹⁶⁰ White did send copies of multiple letters in which Beresford counseled him to say nothing further about the *Daily Mail* article to *The Times*; nothing appears to have come of this.

¹⁶¹ Fisher to White, 1 Mar 1902, CCA FISR, 3/1; emphasis in original.

¹⁶² Roger Parkinson, *Dreadnought: The Ship that Changed the World* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2015), 46. Fisher had previously served as Third Naval Lord (head of procurement) from 1892-97, but had very little contact with journalists during this period.

brought – unofficially – his closest journalistic allies with him into the halls of power. In 1902 these were Arnold White and James Thursfield, but Fisher’s circle would soon expand.

When the Navy League began in 1895, its original members strove to set themselves apart from the contemporary navalist circles of power. They aimed to create an organization that included members of the press as well as serving naval officers; both of these groups, along with a concerned citizenry motivated to take action by League organization, would be able to lobby the Admiralty and Parliament for increased naval funding. In a perfect world, the League would involve all pre-existing navalist groups while being beholden to none. By 1902 the League had successfully disentangled itself from the Admiralty, Parliament, and much of the press, but in a manner the League’s earliest champions had never intended.

For the League had attempted to do too much too quickly, and in doing so had turned friends into critics. Its misguided foray into partisan politics, with the election manifesto of 1900 and the attempt to support Beresford in 1902, had alienated many serving officers who could only support a *non-partisan* League in good conscience. The *Daily Mail* fiasco had severely damaged relations between Arnold-Forster, the Parliamentary voice of the Admiralty, and Arnold White – and it must be remembered that White visited the Mediterranean Fleet in the first place as an agent of the League. Arnold-Forster’s dislike of White’s methods may have also been related to the Parliamentary Secretary’s previous successful navalist agitation in the 1880s – Arnold-Forster knew how the game was played, and seems not to have appreciated White’s less

discreet approach.¹⁶³ The result was that the League sacrificed the services of White to keep those of Beresford. Beresford was certainly a major asset for the League. He was the only high-ranking naval officer who could move almost effortlessly between the Mediterranean Fleet and the House of Commons and performed a valuable service for navalists by disseminating technical details from the former amongst the latter. But White was a highly credentialed naval journalist, and the League needed as many capable pens as it could obtain – by 1902 it had already lost Fred Jane, the Colombs, J. K. Laughton, and Spenser Wilkinson.

In terms of its ability to affect naval policy, the League had little to offer potential allies. Its executive committee wanted speeches and articles by politicians and admirals to bolster the League's navalist credentials. Yet an admiral could not send in letters under his own name to the *Navy League Journal*,¹⁶⁴ or he risked facing discipline. There were more effective ways for a navalist officer to make his views known, as Jacky Fisher well knew. The League's allies in Parliament were more concerned with supporting their party – generally the Conservatives, despite the League's best efforts to have a broad base of support – than in the nebulous concept of a 'member for the navy.' And the departure of specialist public intellectuals like Laughton and the Colombs

¹⁶³ Throughout the entire *Daily Mail* controversy, Arnold-Forster was the major mouthpiece of the Admiralty's views to the public. First Lord Selborne only noted that he found Beresford's letter to be "about the funniest thing I have ever seen." Selborne to Arnold-Forster, 26 Jun 1901 [the letter is dated 1902, but context indicates it was sent in 1901], BL ADD MS, 50288.

¹⁶⁴ Though Beresford in particular gave many navalist speeches at League-sponsored events.

placed the League in an uncomfortable position as neither a dedicated policy periodical like the *Royal United Services Journal* nor a partisan outlet.

In the previous chapter, the problem of naval reformers attempting to wear three hats arose – a navalist agitation could not enjoy the support of the press, the professional navy, and Parliament at the same time. The Navy League ended up with none of these groups' support. Focusing too strongly on technical issues aggravated Parliament (and generally meant sensitive information had leaked, leaving the Admiralty none too pleased), running candidates for Parliament implicitly meant a degree of partisanship unacceptable to most serving officers, and its inability to formulate a coherent public relations strategy other than sending constant screeds to the London papers fractured many of its relationships with other periodicals, particularly *The Times*. This is not to say that the Navy League was moribund by 1902 – it remained the largest navalist pressure group in the nation until the First World War. But its fingers had been singed by its early forays into parliamentary campaigns and high-level clandestine communication, and the League shifted its focus much more towards public outreach – school lectures, essay contests, community naval history addresses (it was the League, in an effort spearheaded by Arnold White, that first popularized the celebration of Trafalgar Day as a national event).¹⁶⁵ When the League split in 1907, it would be over internal criticism that the organization was not being navalist *enough*.

¹⁶⁵ Marianne Czisnik, *Horatio Nelson: A Controversial Hero* (London: Hodder Arnold, 2005), 125.

Charles Beresford and Arnold White had also learned an important lesson about successful navalist agitation. It could not take place in the open. The Admiralty had criticized White in Parliament and reprimanded Beresford for the publication of a single concise letter. Jacky Fisher had written an entire article for White; as the next chapter will demonstrate, it was neither the first nor the last time he had done so. But Fisher had covered his tracks. He dealt with multiple journalists over multiple years, and – as Arnold White famously told Fisher’s son many years later – encouraged his journalistic allies to “publish as widely as possible, but don’t give me away.”¹⁶⁶ The second clause was equally as important as the first. For Beresford, White, and the Navy League their troubles had arisen from *overt* navalist cooperation. Navalist politicians, journalists, and officers did not differ a great deal in their overall goals, at least in the first years of the twentieth century. Most simply wanted increased naval funding and more auxiliary craft, particularly in the Mediterranean, but official regulations and press decorum prevented direct collaboration. *Covert* cooperation was the answer. Beresford’s public pronouncements and vocal support of navalists in both Parliament and the Fleet had met a rocky end. Jacky Fisher’s more subtle system would prove to be a major success in intertwining the interests of the Admiralty and the press during the next few years – all under the protection of plausible deniability.

¹⁶⁶ Hough, *Admiral of the Fleet*, 128-129.

CHAPTER IV

THE SUCCESS OF THE FISHER SYSTEM, 1902-1907

Sir John Fisher's appointment as Second Naval Lord in June of 1902 ushered in an era of great reforms in the Royal Navy, the majority of which were organized and directed by Fisher himself. It also marked the most influential period of covert cooperation between journalists and the uppermost commands of the Admiralty. The three major navalist groups again coalesced into a two-versus-one scenario, with serving officers and their supporters in the press guiding a series of naval reorganizations through a changing political climate. However, this collaboration differed from previous navalist efforts. The Admiralty efforts were guided almost entirely by Fisher, who had his own specific vision of the role navalist journalists could play in supporting his reforms and worked tirelessly to ensure the cooperation of like-minded editors and authors. Through early 1907 Fisher's system proved extremely effective even in an increasingly partisan political and professional atmosphere. During this period Fisher rose to the highest echelons of the navy and brought his closest press allies with him. Initially, these were mainly his old compatriot Arnold White, naval correspondent for *The Times* James Thursfield, and the naval historian Sir Julian Corbett. His circle, however, would continue to grow. As Fisher wrote to White soon after their first

meeting in 1900, he was searching for the “league of preaching friars required for a new Crusade!”¹

Shortly after the two were introduced by Beresford in the summer of 1900, Fisher and White began a correspondence that would last over a decade. The vice admiral initially wrote to thank the journalist for both his visit and his “disinterested and powerful efforts to help on the Navy.” He expressed a hope that White’s writings “might have the more extended circulation of the ‘Times,’” but cautioned White “that no names should be quoted even secretly as of course it would be a breach of discipline for any one on Service to make any communications of a public nature what ever his private opinions might be.”²

However, Fisher was determined to air his own private opinions through White. The Fisher-inspired “A Message from the Mediterranean” was still nearly a year away. Yet the first visit between Fisher and White inspired an article of its own. Titled “Shall Britain be “Ladysmithed”?” – a reference to the siege of a British-held town during the Boer War – this early article by White appeared in *Cassell’s Magazine* in September of 1900.³ Unlike White’s *National Review* article discussed in the previous chapter, Fisher

¹ Fisher to White, 17 Jul 1900, Churchill Archives Centre, Churchill College, Cambridge, 1st Lord Fisher of Kilverstone Papers (hereafter CCA FISR), 15/2/1/1.

² Fisher to White, 30 Jun 1900, CCA FISR, 15/2/1/1. Fisher often suggested that White should work for a more prestigious national newspaper; in 1900 White generally wrote for the *Daily Mail*. The pledge of secrecy was related to White’s bringing Fisher’s concerns about naval efficiency in the Mediterranean to the attention of the Duke of Bedford.

³ Ruddock F. Mackay, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1973), 242-243.

did not write the majority of the *Cassell's* piece. But he certainly saw and approved an initial proof copy, calling it “the most eloquent and graphic exposition I have ever read” of the idea that the British army would be useless if the navy was first defeated in a battle at sea. This was a concept to which Fisher would return throughout his career, and he wanted White to spread the message. “The intense ignorance of the men at the head of affairs is what frightens and appals [sic.] me,” Fisher wrote to White. “Our curse is the parochial politician in Parliament and the ineptitude of our Foreign Office, and our ill-informed democracy! Can you reach them with this splendid article you have sent me?” Fisher hoped that both White and R. A. Yerburgh, president of the Navy League, would “keep on preaching this same Missionary Sermon,” and reminded White that “repetition is the secret of conviction [...] you must keep on telling people the same thing and of course this is the secret of advertisement.”⁴

Before White’s *Cassell's* article appeared, Fisher did have some suggestions to make on the proof. He removed four lines, noting to White that if left in “the lines would rather indicate an acquaintance with details which it is desirable you should avoid as you only want to put forward what is open to the ‘Man in the Street’ to know as well as you do!”⁵ He also recommended that White include quotes from Alfred Thayer

⁴ Fisher to White, 17 Jul 1900, CCA FISR, 15/2/1/1.

⁵ Fisher to White, 18 Jul 1900, CCA FISR, 15/2/1/1.

Mahan's recent work.⁶ White's article did not have a major impact on the contemporary political scene, especially contrasted to the uproar his "Message from the Mediterranean" would generate a year later. But Fisher was satisfied, and thanked White for getting the Mediterranean Fleet mentioned through his *Cassell's* work in larger-circulation papers such as *The Times* and the *Standard*. For his part, Fisher resolved to bring the article to the attention of the powerful Liberal Unionist politicians Joseph and Austen Chamberlain – due for a visit to Fisher's current home port of Malta – and "go through it with them line by line."⁷

Fisher also encouraged White to continue writing articles and editorials on the theme that the Royal Navy must always be prepared for war. He was not yet prepared to send confidential documents directly to White; as he wrote to the journalist, "I should very much like to give you some recent facts [...] but it is impossible to do so without transgressing official secrecy." But he understood, in contrast to other navalist admirals, that a strong argument could do more for the pro-naval cause than a list of figures. "Do not be drawn into discussing details or modus operandi," he warned White. "Simply state the undeniable requirement that the Mediterranean and Channel Fleets should be kept organised for war in every detail [...] keep harping on that one subject."⁸

⁶ Fisher to White, 17 Jul 1900, CCA FISR, 15/2/1/1; Fisher did not specify which of Mahan's works he wanted White to quote, but considering the subject matter it may have been his *Story of the War in South Africa* (1900).

⁷ Fisher to White, 6 Nov 1900, CCA FISR, 3/1.

⁸ *Ibid.* Emphasis in original.

At the same time, Fisher was cultivating another valuable press ally in James Thursfield, naval leader writer for *The Times*. Like White, Thursfield had been involved in the navalist movement before Fisher knew him, and was a ready friend to reform-minded naval officers. Captain Reginald Bacon, an associate of Fisher's, remembered that despite the Navy's "instinctive horror of newspaper correspondents" Thursfield "disarmed all mistrust and earned the complete confidence of the authorities. He did more than any man alive, or dead, to make the Navy look on the Press as a friend and not as a prying busybody."⁹ He had famously hidden under a dinner table and been secretly fed by two officers in order to obtain the first report of a naval visit to the Kaiser in 1895.¹⁰ Thursfield came to Fisher's attention in 1897 when the vice admiral wrote that in the Mediterranean Fleet "we all fully recognize what splendid work you have done for the Navy;"¹¹ Fisher also assured Thursfield that he would obtain a place for the journalist's son, a young naval officer, in his flagship HMS *Renown*.¹²

Fisher did not attempt to write articles or correct proofs for Thursfield as he had for White. He did make suggestions as to what direction Thursfield could take in his naval editorials. Chancellor of the Exchequer Sir Michael Hicks Beach irritated Fisher

⁹ Admiral Sir Reginald H. Bacon, *A Naval Scrap-Book: First Part, 1877-1900* (London: Hutchinson & Co., 1925), 157.

¹⁰ Lord Chatfield, *The Navy and Defence: The Autobiography of Admiral of the Fleet Lord Chatfield*, 2 vols. (London: William Heinemann Ltd, 1942), Vol. I 24.

¹¹ Fisher to Thursfield, 3 Dec 1897, CCA FISR, 1/27.

¹² Fisher to Thursfield, 10 Aug 1897, in Arthur J. Marder, ed., *Fear God and Dread Nought: The Correspondence of Admiral of the Fleet Lord Fisher of Kilverstone*, 3 vols. (London: Jonathan Cape, 1953 [1952]), I 137-138.

repeatedly between 1900 and 1902 with attempts to lower the naval estimates. In response, Fisher wrote to Thursfield in 1900 complaining that his colleagues “are all greatly dreading a relaxation of Naval Shipbuilding in the next Estimates. This will be nearly fatal. Sir M. Hicks Beach has terrorized the Admiralty.”¹³ The next year Fisher had more specific advice, calling for Thursfield to encourage first lord of the Admiralty Lord Selborne to push for increased estimates against the economizing tendencies of “that unmitigated cold-blooded rude brute Hicks-Beach” with “a little ‘stiffening’ from outside in the shape of one of those unmistakable ‘do-your-duty-or-you’ll-catch-it’ leading articles in *The Times*.”¹⁴ Later in 1901 he warned Thursfield to be prepared for the year ahead: “You don’t want to be reminded that this is the time of year a leading article has the most effect in keeping the Admiralty up to the mark and the Chancellor of the Exchequer in his proper place.”¹⁵ And while Fisher was as unwilling to send official documents to Thursfield as he was to White, he had no compunction in sending the journalist officially released Admiralty material along with his own ideas for its use. He showed a 1900 Admiralty report on the use of cruisers to Thursfield, calling it “a valuable text to preach upon and by taking & quoting this report as your text you would prevent suspicion falling upon those it is undesirable should be suspected.”¹⁶

¹³ Fisher to Thursfield, 20 Feb 1900, Caird Library, National Maritime Museum, Greenwich, UK, Sir James Thursfield Papers (hereafter NMM THU), 1/1; emphasis in original.

¹⁴ Fisher to Thursfield, 8 Jan 1901, in Marder, *Fear God and Dread Nought I*, 179-180.

¹⁵ Fisher to Thursfield, 16 Nov 1901, NMM THU, 1/1.

¹⁶ Fisher to Thursfield, 22 Feb 1900, NMM THU, 1/1.

Of course, Fisher was not the only naval officer communicating with journalists at this time. Charles Beresford's rocky relationship with Arnold White in particular has been previously discussed, and he made no secret of his belief in cooperation with the press. When the *Morning Post* incorrectly reported in 1900 that Beresford, not Fisher, was the commander-in-chief of the Mediterranean Fleet, Fisher requested an explanation from his subordinate. It had been a mere misunderstanding, replied Beresford. "The great British Public are accustomed to the name of Lord Charles Beresford, but as yet ignorant of the name of Sir John Fisher. I would suggest that the remedy lies entirely in your own hands."¹⁷ To Beresford, public attention was an important factor in advancing navalist ideas – a lesson that Fisher took to heart, with suitable modifications.

In fact a number of naval officers were in contact with journalists, although Fisher and Beresford were certainly the most prolific. Fisher referenced the prior navalist Admiral Sir Frederick Richards to both Thursfield and White, lamenting that the Admiralty had "missed in the last few years that clear, broad old back of Sir F. Richards set against the wall! It was no good politicians [...] arguing with him!"¹⁸ Admiral Sir Edmund Fremantle maintained a correspondence with Archibald Hurd, naval correspondent for the *Daily Telegraph*, that was entirely separate from Fisher and Beresford's dealings. Like his colleagues, Fremantle "believe[d] in publicity in the

¹⁷ William Jameson, *The Fleet that Jack Built: Nine Men who Made a Modern Navy* (London: Rupert Hart-Davis, 1962), 85.

¹⁸ Fisher to Thursfield, 8 Jan 1901, in Marder, *Fear God and Dread Nought I*, I 179-180. Fisher also referenced Richards to White on 6 Nov 1900, CCA FISR, 3/1.

hands of those who are capable of making a good use of their information”¹⁹ and hoped to “encourage non service men like yourself [Hurd] to write about the Navy and I am willing to help them if I think they are writing in the interest of the Service.”²⁰ But his relationship with the press soured after daily newspapers committed a series of minor technical errors when referring to Royal Navy warships, and Fremantle regretfully curtailed his messages: “I am sorry to fall out with the correspondents who I know generally do us good service, but my hands were forced to a great extent & for the reasons given above I was very angry with the press, who I think acted in a very impolitic manner.”²¹

So there were a variety of ways serving navalist officers could approach cooperation with journalists, from Fremantle’s technical focus to Beresford’s bombastic private letters intended for public consumption. Initially Fisher too did not seem certain as to how the press could most efficiently be dealt with; he suggested that both White and Thursfield should run for Parliament, even offering to contribute £1000 to a prospective Thursfield campaign.²² However, by 1902 Fisher’s letters to various journalists had begun to coalesce into a defined system of communication featuring

¹⁹ Fremantle to Hurd, 21 Feb 1899, Churchill Archives Centre, Churchill College, Cambridge, Sir Archibald Hurd Papers (hereafter CCA HURD), 1/20.

²⁰ Fremantle to Hurd, 31 Dec 1900, CCA HURD, 1/20.

²¹ Fremantle to Hurd, 7 Jan 1899, CCA HURD, 1/20. Fremantle was specifically concerned with the crew complement of various warships being reported incorrectly. He did resume his correspondence with Hurd in 1902 when the journalist was looking for sources for a work on Beresford. Fremantle to Hurd, 8 Jul 1902, CCA HURD, 1/20.

²² Fisher to Thursfield, 28 Nov 1901, NMM THU, 1/3; Fisher to White, 6 Nov 1900, CCA FISR, 3/1.

several aspects. First, as previously discussed, Fisher preferred to simplify naval issues as much as possible for a general audience. There was no reason for a mass-market newspaper to deal with technical matters, for “if you want to attract the attention of the public you must lay the colour on thick with broad lights and shadows!”²³

Second, Fisher’s cooperation with navalist authors was calculated as often as possible to benefit both parties. Fisher regularly acted as a sort of information broker, disseminating articles and editorials he thought worthwhile throughout his networks and introducing authors to political figures he felt could aid the cause. For example, Fisher directed White’s attention to a navalist letter sent to *The Times* by the retired admiral and MP Sir John Hay in late 1901. Though neither Fisher nor White had had anything to do with the letter, Fisher suggested White write to *The Times* to thank the paper “for giving such prominence to his letter in big type as it tends to prevent the public imagining you are airing your own personal views,” thus using Hay “to fight your battles.”²⁴ In early 1901 Fisher read an article by Rudyard Kipling in the *Navy League Journal* he considered “splendid,” but complained to White – perhaps embarrassingly, as White was still on the League’s executive committee – that it “has no circulation where it could do good!” Fisher’s solution was for White to combine Kipling’s article with his own recent work for *Cassill’s Magazine* and send the whole assembly to *The Times* under the

²³ Fisher to White, 6 Nov 1900, CCA FISR, 3/1.

²⁴ Fisher to White, 26 Nov 1901, CCA FISR, 15/2/1/1.

signature of Navy League president Yerburgh.²⁵ When Beresford was preparing a speech in Parliament in support of higher naval estimates, Fisher even suggested that his subordinate should “consult Thursfield before you make your speech – indeed I should ask him to revise your speech were I in your place.”²⁶ To hedge his bets, Fisher sent the draft of Beresford’s speech to Thursfield on his own accord but warned the journalist to keep the matter a secret, as he only wanted Thursfield to help Beresford “to keep his head straight.”²⁷

Dealing with Fisher furthered journalists’ causes as well. Navalist authors and editorialists firmly believed that the Royal Navy had to be constantly supported publically, and the information Fisher sent to them could be used – always unofficially – in navalist campaigns. As early as 1900 Fisher’s dictum of always possessing “fleets on a war footing” appeared in Navy League material authored by Arnold White.²⁸ When Fisher became concerned that an MP was going to “make himself extremely disagreeable” in Parliament on the subject of the Navy, he drafted a response to the projected criticisms and sent it to White with the note that “I would be glad if you would show it confidentially to Mr. Yerburgh and alter the wording in any way either of you

²⁵ Fisher to White, 8 Jan 1901, CCA FISR, 3/1.

²⁶ Fisher to Beresford, 27 Feb 1902, quoted in R.A. Burt, *British Battleships 1889-1904* (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 1988), 229, 231.

²⁷ Fisher to Thursfield, 27 Feb 1902, quoted in Mackay, *Fisher of Kilverstone*, 271.

²⁸ Arthur J. Marder, *The Anatomy of British Sea Power: A History of British Naval Policy in the Pre-Dreadnought Era, 1880-1905* (Hamden, CT: Archon Books, 1964 [1940]), 398.

consider to be expedient as it is just as well to be prepared beforehand and to make sure that I have your approval in anything I may be called upon to say.”²⁹

Third, Fisher had learned a valuable lesson about secrecy even before Beresford’s *Daily Mail* fiasco. Although Fisher certainly became less cautious about confidential material as his career progressed, he always reminded his allies in the press “to keep our correspondence and any peculiar phrases I may use as your own private property”³⁰ in order to ensure plausible deniability that he had corresponded with the press at all. He wrote, as he told Arnold White, “only for your private eye, to put you on the right tack!”³¹ At the same time, Fisher warned those he communicated with to “have nothing to do with half-pay Admirals or sailors of any kind.”³² Those who supported Fisher were making a conscious choice to deal with him and him alone, and Fisher had little time for the opinions of officers who had retired decades earlier. He wanted fresh faces dedicated to reform both in the Admiralty and in the newsroom. Among his naval contemporaries and subordinates, this would eventually lead to the ‘Fishpond’ system of favoritism and a popularity-based schism in the uppermost ranks of the service. But in 1902, as Fisher first rose to a position where he could affect national naval policy, it

²⁹ Fisher to White, 9 Nov 1901, CCA FISR, 15/2/1/1. The MP was a “Mr. Robertson,” likely the Conservative Thomas Herbert Robinson.

³⁰ Fisher to White, 8 Jan 1901, CCA FISR, 3/1.

³¹ Fisher to White, 6 Nov 1900, CCA FISR, 3/1.

³² Fisher to White, 8 Jan 1901, CCA FISR, 3/1.

meant an ever-growing circle of journalistic associates focused on “purely civilian advocacy” with “no technicalities.”³³

His promotion to Second Naval Lord meant that Fisher was for the first time in a position of real administrative power at the Admiralty. Soon after his appointment, Rear-Admiral Reginald Custance, no fan of Fisher’s modernization efforts, wrote to his colleague Vice Admiral Cyprian Bridge that “Heaven only knows what Fisher may not attempt to run. Any wild-cat scheme finds a supporter in him.”³⁴ Custance was right to be concerned, as Fisher, long a believer in keeping abreast of developing naval technologies, immediately used his new office and rank – he became a full admiral that same summer of 1901 – to set in motion a series of naval reforms. The Second Naval Lord traditionally controlled personnel decisions throughout the navy, but Fisher went a step further and assumed responsibility, essentially on his own authority, for the appointment of all officers below the rank of captain.³⁵ He retreated from his journalistic allies for much of the rest of the year, though not without purpose: as he wrote to Arnold White, “I have a very big work on hand, and I think success seems

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Custance to Bridge, 3 Jun 1902, quoted in A.J.A. Morris, *The Scaremongers: The Advocacy of War and Rearmament, 1896-1914* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1984), 165; both Custance and Bridge would become staunch opponents of Fisher’s reforms.

³⁵ Richard Hough, *Admiral of the Fleet: The Life of John Fisher* (New York: Macmillan Company, 1969), 146.

assured, but it is essential that no inside personal antagonism should be evoked by any outside personal allusions to what may be in progress.”³⁶

The first knowledge any source outside Admiralty corridors had of Fisher’s initial major reform was the release of a memorandum to the Cabinet on Christmas Day of 1902 setting out a proposed complete overhaul of the methods by which prospective officers would enter the Royal Navy.³⁷ There were three aspects of Fisher’s plan. The first two were comparatively minor: the age of incoming cadets was to be reduced from 14 to 12½ and the elderly wooden battleships HMS *Britannia* and HMS *Hindustan*, which had housed and trained cadets since the 1850s, were to be replaced with shore establishments. The third was much more far-reaching. In 1902, cadets enrolling in the three branches of the Royal Navy – executive, engineering, and the marines – entered the navy and underwent training entirely separate from each other. Fisher proposed a system of common entry that would give all cadets the same general seamanship and engineering training until they became lieutenants, at which point they would enter their chosen specialty.³⁸ Although the training reforms were Fisher’s creation, they were

³⁶ Fisher to White, 8 Aug 1902, in Marder, *Fear God and Dread Nought I*, 263.

³⁷ Lieut.-Commander P. K. Kemp, ed., *The Papers of Admiral Sir John Fisher*, 2 vols. (London: Spottiswoode, Ballantyne and Co. Ltd., 1960), I xv; details of the plan were released to the general public in January of 1903.

³⁸ Marder, *Fear God and Dread Nought I*, 243-244.

collectively known as the Selborne Scheme, named after First Lord of the Admiralty Lord Selborne.³⁹

When the Selborne Scheme became public knowledge in early 1903, Fisher's brief withdrawal from his journalistic allies came to an end almost overnight. Soon Fisher was encouraging White and Thursfield to spread the supposed benefits of the Scheme far and wide in what amounted to a public relations campaign. But he did not want his own name associated with any reforms, and wrote to White that it was "better for the great main object we both have at heart (the efficiency of the Navy) that we should appear to be revolving in different orbits!"⁴⁰ To Fisher, the Scheme would be most effective if it appeared as a joint effort by all the Naval Lords, but *only* them; Fisher warned White that critics of the scheme would claim the Admiralty had not consulted outside experts, and that the Admiralty's response would be "we ain't fit to be here if we have to ask advice! We are doing what we believe to be right and we fear no one!"⁴¹

Fisher cautioned Thursfield to not even mention other officers' views on the Selborne Scheme, as "public opinion has far more weight than the strongest

³⁹ Hough, *Admiral of the Fleet*, 147; it is uncertain why Fisher did not want his first major reform to be put forward under his name. Hough suggests that Fisher either was attempting to peremptorily strengthen Selborne's hand for what was expected to be a fight for Cabinet approval or merely shielding himself from criticism if the scheme failed.

⁴⁰ Fisher to White, 5 May 1903, CCA FISR, 15/2/1/2; in this letter Fisher also turned down a meeting between the two proposed by White.

⁴¹ Fisher to White, 15 Dec 1902, in Marder, *Fear God and Dread Nought I*, 267-268. White agreed with Fisher, telling him in a letter "how wise you were not to consult outsiders on your scheme. Had you done so a foetus, not a child, would have been the result." White to Fisher, 29 Jan 1903, CCA FISR, 3/1.

representatives of even the fighting admirals and 3 lines in a newspaper produces more effect than an ultimatum from the Admiral in Command of the Mediterranean.”⁴² And “to quote any way present Admirals is to lead the public astray, because they are the men of the past! So pray don’t encourage them.”⁴³ The admiral did inform his colleague Commander Herbert Richmond, currently serving in the Mediterranean Fleet, that Thursfield should be provided with “all help and advice” if he came calling.⁴⁴ Generally, Fisher continued his earlier policy of proposing to his press contacts the direction they should take on naval matters and passing along articles he considered effective. He suggested that Thursfield read a letter sent to *The Times* in January by a pseudonymous author and then “in your own inimitable style [...] recapitulate the chief features of the scheme and perhaps paraphrase the letter of the anointed scoundrel (whoever he was!) who signed himself ‘Tria Juncta in Uno’, because that letter certainly stiffened up many in the inner circle! So perhaps it did in outer circles!” Fisher recommended that Thursfield rework the *Times* article into either a pamphlet or a series of further articles supporting the Scheme.⁴⁵

⁴² Fisher to Thursfield, 31 Mar 1903, quoted in W. Mark Hamilton, *The Nation and the Navy: Methods and Organization of British Navalist Propaganda, 1889-1914* (New York: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1986), 230-231.

⁴³ Fisher to Thursfield, 1 Jan 1903, NMM THU, 1/1.

⁴⁴ Fisher to Richmond, 5 Jul 1903, Caird Library, National Maritime Museum, Greenwich, UK, Admiral Sir Herbert Richmond Papers (hereafter NMM RIC), 1/6.

⁴⁵ Fisher to Thursfield, 22 Jan 1903, in Marder, *Fear God and Dread Nought I*, 269; the letter appeared in *The Times* on 14 Jan 1903.

What Thursfield did not know at the time was that Fisher had written the article and sent it to *The Times* himself under the Latin pseudonym, a reference to the combining of the three branches of officers under the Scheme. But Fisher had not covered his tracks well. Arnold White knew of his authorship, calling the article “just the ‘pointer’ required by lay disciples whose faith is greater than their knowledge,” perhaps a dig at Thursfield.⁴⁶ And Fisher’s writing style was so distinct, peppered with exclamation points and biblical allusions, that Thursfield soon deduced who had written to *The Times*.⁴⁷ At any rate, the proposed pamphlet on the Scheme never appeared.

Fisher was playing a dangerous game. His letter to *The Times* was the second time he had written anonymously for the public press in less than two years, following his article that had been revised by Arnold White and had appeared in the *National Review*. Worse, Fisher’s tactics were creating difficulties for supporters of the Scheme. He refused to be directly quoted in the newspapers but frowned upon his press allies dealing with other admirals. The end result was that journalistic supporters of the Scheme such as White and Thursfield, although really quite well informed by Fisher behind the scenes, could not reveal that they even had sources; it appeared to the reading public as if there was nothing behind their optimistic predictions of the Scheme’s success. And the Scheme’s overturning of traditional cadet training – which also upset

⁴⁶ White to Fisher, 9 Feb 1903, CCA FISR, 3/1.

⁴⁷ Fisher to Cecil Fisher [his son], 16 Jan 1903: “the man who writes the leading article in *The Times* spotted it at once!” In Marder, *Fear God and Dread Nought* I, 360.

traditional unofficial class distinctions between executive and engineering officers⁴⁸ – was beginning to produce enemies within Parliament and the Admiralty.

Early opponents of the Scheme were not in a position of strength, as all the Naval Lords ostensibly were backing the personnel reforms. Naval officers could still complain; Rear Admiral Hedworth Lambton wrote to Selborne that he was “prepared with tongue and pen (and sword) to denounce you [...] and I must not forget Thursfield [...] or rather the theories which the latter ‘expert’ (God help us) has bullied you all into accepting through his remarkably foolish letters in the Times.”⁴⁹ But politicians and concerned (Fisher would say meddlesome) citizens unable to voice their concerns directly to the Admiralty took to the press to air their grievances. George Stewart Bowles was a former naval officer, a future Conservative MP, and the son of the founder of *Vanity Fair* – theoretically, a model navalist. But he found the Scheme “h—l, and Fisher is the devil,” and in early 1903 was “gingering up my Father to make a great row” against it.⁵⁰ He also contacted Leslie Cope-Cornford, naval journalist for the *Morning Post* and an active member of the Navy League, for assistance in speaking out against the Scheme. To Stewart Bowles the very existence of the Scheme was a result of “the Country’s devastating ignorance of the Navy,” and “it is upon that ignorance, solely, that

⁴⁸ Hough, *Admiral of the Fleet*, 148.

⁴⁹ Lambton to Selborne, 10 Jun 1904, in George D. Boyce, ed., *The Crisis of British Power: The Imperial and Naval Papers of the Second Earl of Selborne, 1895-1910* (London: The Historians’ Press, 1990), 178-179.

⁵⁰ Stewart Bowles to Leslie Cope-Cornford, 5 Mar 1903, Caird Library, National Maritime Museum, Greenwich, UK, Leslie Cope-Cornford Papers (hereafter NMM CPC), 1.

the Admiralty reposes.” Journalists like “that prize ass Thursfield” were misleading the public by “slobber[ing] with joy in ‘that organ of knaves and oracle of fools’ the Times and say[ing] that another great Naval Reform had been carried.”⁵¹ “These gentlemen who write for the Papers are really too much,” wrote Stewart Bowles. With Cope-Cornford’s help he would “have some of them by the nose, & explain to them clearly what I think of them.”⁵²

Cope-Cornford did his best, penning a series of anti-Scheme articles in the *Spectator* and *Morning Post*. They focused on the idea that the Admiralty, through its secrecy and official silence, was not allowing the relevant information on personnel reform to be placed before the public: “the House of Commons and the country are studiously kept in ignorance of the true posture of naval affairs and of the details of naval administration ashore and afloat.”⁵³ Instead, as retired Rear Admiral Edward Field wrote to *The Times*, the Admiralty had “gone out of [its] way to introduce a needless and uncalled-for change, in deference to an agitation put forward by a small minority in Parliament and the Press in recent years.”⁵⁴

⁵¹ Stewart Bowles to Cope-Cornford, 6 Mar 1903, NMM CPC, 1.

⁵² Stewart Bowles to Cope-Cornford, 12 Mar 1903, NMM CPC, 1; besides Thursfield, Stewart Bowles mentioned Archibald Hurd as a journalist who was misleading the public. He hoped, through Cope-Cornfield, to bring fellow member of the Navy League Rudyard Kipling to his defense on the issue.

⁵³ Cope-Cornford in the *Morning Post*, 9 Mar 1903, NMM CPC, 7.

⁵⁴ “The Admiralty Scheme,” *The Times*, 19 Jan 1903, quoting a previous letter to *The Times* by Field on 10 Jan, NMM THU, 2/1.

Supporters of the Scheme within the Admiralty did their best to downplay these press criticisms. When Admiral Field sent his disparaging missive to *The Times*, Fisher wrote to his colleague Commander Bryan Godfrey-Faussett: “You see the Mandarins are coming out in the open in the ‘Times’ today! We propose to give that fine old sailor Admiral Field the Yellow Jacket and the Peacock’s feather!”⁵⁵ To do so, Fisher called upon Thursfield and “some more of your sledge hammer leading articles to smash up these silly asses.”⁵⁶ “The great harm such writers do,” according to Fisher, “is they criticize without knowing the details of the scheme which they perversely will not study!”⁵⁷ Charles Beresford – who had been approached by anti-Scheme officers and “told them they ought to be stuffed and put in the British Museum”⁵⁸ – painted with a broad brush when he called the Scheme’s opponents “those who are too old, or whose brains are not receptive enough [...] I have often observed that the most obstinate, violent, and passionate anti-reformers are men who in no case whatever have ever even distinguished themselves by adopting the old methods which they wish to leave untouched.” He reassured Fisher that “a reformer’s life is only to be compared to that of

⁵⁵ Fisher to Godfrey-Faussett, 10 Jan 1903, Churchill Archives Centre, Churchill College, Cambridge, Sir Bryan Godfrey-Faussett Papers (hereafter CCA BGGF), 2/3; the ‘yellow jacket’ likely referred to Field’s status as a ‘yellow admiral,’ an officer no longer on active duty who continued to be promoted due to seniority. Although Field was a rear admiral, he had retired from active service in the 1880s as a captain.

⁵⁶ Fisher to Thursfield, n.d. [1903], NMM THU, 1/3.

⁵⁷ Fisher to Godfrey-Faussett, 19 Jan 1903, CCA BGGF, 2/3.

⁵⁸ Fisher to Godfrey-Faussett, 3 Jan 1903, CCA BGGF, 2/3.

an Early Christian, and both, perhaps, receive the honour and respect due to them a trifle late.”⁵⁹

Fisher was confident that his reforms would succeed. There was, he wrote, “universal approval of the new scheme except amongst some of the ‘old ones,’”⁶⁰ and with his tight control over official appointments the number of officers supporting the Scheme could only rise; he told Thursfield that the Scheme boasted the support of two dozen captains and commanders who would command Britain’s fleets in a future conflict, whose backing he preferred over “any 24 Admirals now existing but who are passing away.”⁶¹ He was carrying his point with some of the ‘old ones’ as well. Retired Admiral Thomas Le Hunte Ward wrote to *The Times* on the dilemma that “the public at large” approved of the Scheme, while its critics were generally “Naval Officers, especially the old ones.” Yet Ward felt that an officer who disapproved of the Admiralty’s reorganizations was merely struggling with “strongly ingrained ideas which have grown up with him and become part of his nature,” and chose to “side with the public against my brother Officers.”⁶²

⁵⁹ “Extract from a Letter written by Lord Charles Beresford to Sir John Fisher in April 1903,” NMM THU, 2/3.

⁶⁰ Fisher to Godfrey-Faussett, 3 Jan 1903, CCA BGGF, 2/3.

⁶¹ Fisher to Thursfield, 1 Jan 1903, NMM THU, 1/1. He also wrote ‘Remember Lot’s wife’ on the door of a hesitant colleague as a warning to those who would look backward instead of forward; Fisher to Thursfield, 26 Dec 1902, quoted in Hough, *Admiral of the Fleet*, 153.

⁶² Admiral Thomas Le Hunte Ward to *The Times*, n.d. but from a collection titled “Reprint of some Press Notices and Letters on the New Admiralty Scheme,” NMM THU, 2/1.

The challenge to the Scheme posed by what Arnold White called the “Blue Funk School”⁶³ proved to be slight. But it was there, and Fisher was planning on pushing forward with a second stage of his personnel reforms. He wrote to his son in 1903 he had “got a new big scheme hatching next year” that was “interesting some very influential people,” including the editor of the *Monthly Review*,⁶⁴ and to his colleague Godfrey-Faussett that he was working on expanding the Scheme to other branches of the Royal Navy but “at present only Lord Selborne knows the outlines.”⁶⁵ He had to answer his critics, and officers and MPs were less likely than most to be swayed by an editorial in *The Times*. Instead, Fisher turned to the well-respected naval historian Sir Julian Corbett.

Corbett was an intellectual naval historian with a wide audience both popular and professional, one of Britain’s answers to Alfred Thayer Mahan. In 1903 he was known in navalist circles as a major figure in the Navy Records Society and a lecturer at the Royal Naval College. Fisher was searching for a learned public figure to push the Scheme, and had originally come to Henry Newbolt, navalist poet and editor of the *Monthly Review*; by early 1903 Newbolt had put the admiral in contact with Corbett. Fisher supplied him with Admiralty documents supporting the Scheme⁶⁶ and warned him

⁶³ Fisher to White, n.d. [1903], CCA FISR, 15/2/1/2.

⁶⁴ Mackay, *Fisher of Kilverstone*, 286.

⁶⁵ Fisher to Godfrey-Faussett, 30 Jan 1903, CCA BGGF, 2/3.

⁶⁶ Donald M. Schurman, *Julian S. Corbett, 1854 – 1922: Historian of British Maritime Policy from Drake to Jellicoe* (London: Royal Historical Society, 1981), 34.

that C. C. Penrose Fitzgerald, Richard Vesey Hamilton, and “other ‘pre-historic’ admirals [were] trying to make mischief.”⁶⁷ Fisher also sent Corbett his notes from lectures on naval policy the admiral had delivered to his subordinates in the Mediterranean, but reminded the historian that for the Scheme it was not naval technology that should be focused on but “the best men! Preach that gospel!”⁶⁸

Fisher’s support additionally meant Corbett had access to any officer in Fisher’s circle of professional friends who supported the Scheme, many of whom were still on active fleet duty and also happily sent Corbett privileged information. Captain Edmond Slade provided notes from his Mediterranean station that Corbett revised into two leaders for *The Times*,⁶⁹ and W. H. Henderson aided Corbett with another article on naval education.⁷⁰ Herbert Richmond, whom Fisher had already asked to assist Thursfield, also worked with Corbett – leading to at least two more articles – but went a step further. He lent a copy of the correspondence between himself, Corbett and Henderson on naval strategy to the Liberal MP Charles Trevelyan, who was a supporter

⁶⁷ Fisher to Corbett, 3 May 1903, Caird Library, National Maritime Museum, Greenwich, UK, Sir Julian Corbett Papers (hereafter NMM CBT), 12.

⁶⁸ Quoted in Schurman, *Julian Corbett*, 36.

⁶⁹ Andrew Lambert, “The Naval War Course, *Some Principles of Maritime Strategy* and the Origins of “The British Way in Warfare,” in *The British Way in Warfare: Power and the International System, 1856-1956. Essays in Honour of David French*, edited by Keith Neilson and Greg Kennedy, (Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2010), 232; Slade was a firm believer in Fisher’s reforms and would go on to be Commander of the Naval War College and Director of Naval Intelligence.

⁷⁰ Herbert Richmond’s journal, 26 Mar 1903, NMM RIC, 1/6; Henderson would go on to help found the service periodical dedicated to strategy, the *Naval Review* – but it must be noted here that the connection between Henderson and Corbett was Richmond’s surmise and was not based on any direct communication between the two.

of the Scheme; soon afterwards “Jacky sent for me & told me he heard I had been doing good ‘missionary work’ & thanked me very cordially.”⁷¹

Corbett must have thought his articles were having some benefit, for he wrote to Henry Newbolt that “it’s good to think we have really helped.”⁷² While producing his articles, Corbett found that his “opinion of the Navy has risen to the highest,” which he credited to “the exuberant stirring of the Jack-Fish spirit.”⁷³ Fisher certainly gave Corbett credit for his role in publicizing and popularizing the Scheme, writing to the historian – and providing a glimpse into his own internal circle of correspondents in the process – that “I have my emissaries and missionaries on every station. I admit they are all enthusiasts and fanatics! Nevertheless, they tell me what makes me certain of a most magnificent success, and your terse and delightful articles deserve a lion’s share in what by-and-by will be the whole country’s gratitude.”⁷⁴ Privately, Fisher was bothered by a Corbett article in the *Monthly Review* that mentioned him by name, telling Thursfield “Corbett has done me an ill turn in dragging in my name. It really is very annoying as I think his article is good as objecting the [...] objectors of the scheme.”⁷⁵ Still, he wrote

⁷¹ Ibid. Richmond also asked Henry Oliver, navigation officer on the Mediterranean Fleet’s flagship HMS *Majestic*, for an article on navigation to be sent to Corbett, but the resultant work proved so technical that Richmond instead sent it directly to Fisher. Lambert’s “Naval War Course” credits Richmond with inspiring three articles (220-221) – this may include the article attributed to Henderson above.

⁷² Corbett to Newbolt, 3 Mar 1903, NMM CBT, 3/7.

⁷³ Corbett to Newbolt, 20 Aug 1903, NMM CBT, 3/7.

⁷⁴ Fisher to Corbett, 6 Jul 1903, in Marder, *Fear God and Dread Nought I*, 274-275.

⁷⁵ Fisher to Thursfield, 5 Jul [n.y.], NMM THU, 1/1.

to Corbett that the articles must continue, and “we mustn’t stop! You must please come and stay with me when I am Admiral at Portsmouth, and I hope to make your mouth water when unfolding further plans...”⁷⁶

The move to Portsmouth was part of the next phase of Fisher’s reforms. In late 1903 he stepped down from his post of Second Naval Lord to serve as Commander-in-Chief Portsmouth, a position that ensured he could directly oversee the rollout of the Scheme in September at the RN’s largest dockyard. The new office also put a safe distance between himself and First Naval Lord Walter Kerr, who had required a great deal of convincing as to the necessity of the Scheme; Fisher recalled that he “never knew that Admirals could be so rude to one another” until a heated meeting with his superior.

⁷⁷ But Fisher did not retreat entirely into the day to day business of overseeing the personnel reforms. Naval officer Reginald Bacon recalled Fisher’s short tenure at Portsmouth: “Fisher did much towards bringing the modern developments in the Navy to the notice of prominent public men. He frequently invited persons of influence in Parliament or the country to stay at Admiralty House [...] These statesmen at all events left with some knowledge about the Navy and its work in war.”⁷⁸

⁷⁶ Fisher to Corbett, 6 Jul 1903, in Marder, *Fear God and Dread Nought I*, 274-275.

⁷⁷ Hough, *Admiral of the Fleet*, 156-157, 151.

⁷⁸ Admiral Sir R. H. Bacon, *The Life of Lord Fisher of Kilverstone*, 2 vols. (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, Doran & Company, Inc., 1929), I 217-218. Bacon was a biographer of Fisher and also a member of Fisher’s inner circle of naval reformers; he was heavily involved with the development of the first British submarines, another project Fisher supported.

Around the same time Fisher was appointed as one of the three members of the Esher Committee, formed by the new Conservative Prime Minister Arthur Balfour in late 1902 in an attempt to reform the War Office and increase cooperation between the Army and Royal Navy after the struggles of the Boer War. Fisher, chosen as the Admiralty representative to the committee, used this new platform to preach his gospel of naval reform. He had a strong ally in his old friend Reginald Brett, who had aided the admiral in the 1884 “Truth About the Navy” campaign. Brett – now Viscount Esher, the ranking member of the committee and a close advisor to King Edward VII – eagerly supported Fisher’s reforms, and the two rekindled a dormant professional relationship that would last for more than a decade. The two spent most of their time united in opposition to Colonel Sir George Clarke, the Army’s representative on the Committee.⁷⁹

Fisher had never been a strong believer in the value of the army, and believed that any proposed army budget increases would not convince the “British Public” that the Royal Navy was “anything less than “the 1st, 2nd, 3rd, 4th, ad infinitum line of defence;” he went so far as to write to Esher that any growth in the Army estimates would simply lead to the fall of the government.⁸⁰ If the Army was to make any improvements, it must follow the lead of the Navy: “a root & branch reform” and a press

⁷⁹ R. J. Q. Adams, *Balfour: The Last Grandee* (London: John Murray, 2007), 182-183; Hough, *Admiral of the Fleet*, 162-163.

⁸⁰ Fisher to Esher, 17 Aug 1904, Churchill Archives Centre, Churchill College, Cambridge, Viscount Esher (Reginald Brett) Papers (hereafter CCA ESHR), 10/41.

campaign.⁸¹ Fisher wrote to the prime minister of his disappointment with high Army officials' refusal to consider the importance of public opinion.⁸² Journalistic agitation had helped the Navy, as Fisher told the army reformer and *Times* correspondent Leopold Amery: "It was the Press & the Press alone that has enabled us to carry through a revolution in the Navy of which the British Publics have as yet very little conception of!" The admiral believed that any similar reforms undertaken under the broader administrative umbrella of the Committee of Imperial Defence "shall require the whole influence of the Press very strenuously exerted."⁸³ Clarke evidently agreed with Fisher's argument, for he met with Julian Corbett, "despairing of getting anything done unless people like ourselves [Corbett and Henry Newbolt, to whom the letter was addressed] can get up a public opinion," and left Corbett with enough internal documents to create two articles pushing army retrenchment and reform.⁸⁴

Still, the Esher Committee and resultant communications with the CID were not major aspects of Fisher's career at this time – the Committee's most valuable contribution to his own system of press and public alliances was putting him back in

⁸¹ Fisher to Esher, 20 Dec 1903, CCA ESHR, 10/41.

⁸² Fisher to J.S. Sandars (Balfour's private secretary), 26 Oct 1903, in Marder, *Fear God and Dread Nought III*, 15.

⁸³ Fisher to Amery, 16 Dec 1903, Churchill Archives Centre, Churchill College, Cambridge, Leopold Amery Papers (hereafter CCA AMEL), 1/1/14.

⁸⁴ Corbett to Newbolt, 17 May 1904, NMM CBT, 3/7.

touch with both Esher and his first journalistic ally W. T. Stead.⁸⁵ By the time he was appointed to the Committee, there were already rumors circulating that he was destined for bigger things. Fisher's acceptance of the Portsmouth position was at best a lateral move from Second Naval Lord, and he took it on the conditional understanding from Balfour that he would become First Naval Lord, the professional head of the Admiralty, when Kerr reached retirement age in the fall of 1904; Balfour officially offered the promotion to Fisher in May 1904.⁸⁶

Balfour and First Lord of the Admiralty Selborne promoted Fisher for what may seem a surprising reason – Fisher had promised to save the Admiralty money. Naval estimates had risen from £27.5 million in 1900 to nearly £37 million in 1904, and even Balfour's Conservative government was beginning to face pressure to reduce the numbers.⁸⁷ Fisher had been writing to both his professional colleagues and journalistic allies for nearly a year that he could bring about “a *very great reduction*”⁸⁸ in the estimates. During his time at Portsmouth he had also become a frequent correspondent of King Edward VII, who wrote to Selborne in support of Fisher's economizing. Fisher

⁸⁵ Fisher to Esher, 21 Dec 1903: “I’ve been bombarded by Stead. I tried to boom him off but the scoundrel said if I didn’t see him, he would have to invent! [...] So I implored Stead to keep me out of the *Magazine Rifle* [this was my name for *The Review of Reviews*] or he will interfere with my professional career of crime.” Quoted in Lord Fisher, *Memories* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1919), 171.

⁸⁶ Kemp, *Papers of Sir John Fisher I*, xv.

⁸⁷ Mary Conley, *From Jack Tar to Union Jack: Representing Naval Manhood in the British Empire, 1870-1918* (Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press, 2009), 29.

⁸⁸ Fisher to Thursfield, 5 Jul 1903, quoted in Rhodri Williams, *Defending the Empire: The Conservative Party and British Defence Policy 1899 – 1915* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1991), 63; emphasis in original.

was less clear on *how* he would lower the estimates, and Balfour's private secretary warned the prime minister that promoting Fisher could lead to more "revolutionary schemes."⁸⁹ But Balfour and Selborne were convinced Fisher was the man for the job, and the backing of the King removed any doubts. Fisher received news of his promotion and a memorandum from Selborne calling for "a substantial decrease" in the 1905 estimates in the same envelope.⁹⁰

Of course, Fisher had already worked out a new set of reforms intended to both modernize the Royal Navy and save money in the process – he was simply unwilling to tell anyone else what those reforms would be. His colleague Sir Robert Arbuthnot recorded a meeting with Fisher when the latter was still C-in-C Portsmouth: Fisher claimed he was "not such a born idiot as to tell all those chaps at the Admiralty what I'm going to do before I go there. [...] Wait till I get up there, then I'll burst it on the Navy, and it shall all be done. [...] When I get up there I'll alter it all, and those who get in my way had better look out. I've ruined about 8 men in the last 18 months, and I'll ruin anyone else who tries to stop me."⁹¹ He wrote to Arnold White that "even you will want an extra whack of jam to swallow the powder" when he revealed his new plans, but asked White nevertheless to support "the new great scheme of reform which will emerge

⁸⁹ Sandars to Balfour, 14 Sep 1904, quoted in Williams, *Defending the Empire*, 63.

⁹⁰ Williams, *Defending the Empire*, 62; the preceding paragraph is based upon Williams, *Defending the Empire*, 62-64.

⁹¹ Memorandum by Robert Arbuthnot, "Interview with Sir John Fisher, G.C.B., 1 Jan 1904," Harry Ransom Center, University of Texas at Austin, James Louis Garvin Papers, recipient collection (hereafter HRC JLG R), Fisher 10.

from the Admiralty like Minerva from the brain of Jupiter, full grown and armed against all objectors!”⁹² Only Selborne had any inkling of Fisher’s new proposed policies. Fisher met with the First Lord in August, claiming he: “sat him in an arm-chair in my office and shook my fist in his face for 2¼ hours without a check! Then he read 120 pages of foolscap, and afterwards collapsed!” Besides acquiescing in Fisher’s new program, Selborne also granted the admiral even greater leeway to appoint his own subordinates than he had enjoyed as Second Naval Lord and a place on the warship design committee.⁹³ Fisher had made great strides towards achieving his second wave of reforms before he ever walked through the doors of the Admiralty as First Naval Lord.

When the time came for him officially to assume office, Fisher chose an auspicious date – he would begin his tenure as First Naval Lord on October 21, 1904, the 99th anniversary of the Battle of Trafalgar. Characteristically, he actually began work the day before.⁹⁴ His first act of official business was to change his title, reverting from First Naval Lord to the office’s original title of First Sea Lord.⁹⁵ One of his earliest Admiralty memorandums set the tone for the Fisher regime: Fisher “propose[d] a lecture to all the C-in-Cs and Admiral Superintendents whom I am going to have at the Admiralty for an amiable and conciliatory setting-forth of their damned stupidity,

⁹² Fisher to White, 21 Aug 1904, in Marder, *Fear God and Dread Nought I*, 325-326.

⁹³ Fisher to Esher, 21 Aug 1904, in Marder, *Fear God and Dread Nought I*, 324-325.

⁹⁴ Hough, *Admiral of the Fleet*, 181.

⁹⁵ Nicholas Lambert, *Sir John Fisher’s Naval Revolution* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1999), 97.

pessimism and effete-ness, of which I have full and authenticated particulars, and which I shall read out to them and rub their noses in it.”⁹⁶ Yet Fisher did not implement his next set of major reforms immediately. Only hints were dropped throughout the last months of 1904, the equivalent of what might be called a trial balloon. Fisher had written to his compatriots of his plan to ‘Copenhagen’ an enemy fleet in a hypothetical future war by destroying it in harbor via a surprise attack.⁹⁷ In November 1904 the same idea appeared in a handful of newspapers and magazines, including the *Sun*, *Vanity Fair*, and the *Army & Navy Gazette*.⁹⁸ But this was too extreme a tactic for most naval officers – that same month Charles Beresford had vowed to attack an enemy fleet with only half of his ships “on the grounds of chivalry”⁹⁹ – and such an extreme strategic shift was shelved after Balfour said that Arnold White, who had written some of the articles, “ought to be hanged.”¹⁰⁰

Real details of Fisher’s latest plan began to emerge in December and, as was usual with Fisher’s reforms, his press allies knew of them before any other group, save the board of Admiralty itself. Fisher informed the Board of Admiralty of the next phase

⁹⁶ Andrew Gordon, *The Rules of the Game: Jutland and British Naval Command* (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 1996), 342.

⁹⁷ The term refers to an incident in 1807 during the Napoleonic Wars, when a British fleet destroyed the neutral Dutch fleet in Copenhagen harbor to prevent them from allying with the French.

⁹⁸ Peter Padfield, *The Great Naval Race: The Anglo-German Naval Rivalry, 1900-1914* (New York: David McKay Company, Inc., 1974), 120-121.

⁹⁹ Gordon, *Rules of the Game*, 322; Beresford was referring to the Russian Baltic Fleet, passing through the Channel on its way to defeat at the Battle of Tsushima.

¹⁰⁰ Hamilton, *Nation and the Navy*, 211.

of his reforms on December 6. The same day he wrote to Leslie Cope-Cornford that he had “arranged the memorandum of the new scheme will be sent to the Editor of the Morning Post next Saturday afternoon so you will have all Sunday as well to write your article. You must tell no one this not even the Editor.”¹⁰¹ He asked James Louis Garvin, a new press ally who at the time was editor of *The Outlook*, to “come to the Admiralty and see ‘the collected works of the First Sea Lord’ and choose out some of them to meditate upon!” He explained to Garvin why he was so willing to part with sensitive information: “I am ready to furnish you and all other patriots with the best of my time and what I have of brains to maintain that proud and splendid heritage won by our forefathers [...] To do that we must fight (or be ready to) on the slightest provocation.”¹⁰²

The reforms themselves were far-reaching even compared to the Selborne Scheme. Again there were three aspects, each as large in scope as the entirety of the previous Scheme: the nucleus crew system, the scrapping of outdated warships, and the redistribution of the fleet. Nucleus crews replaced the current manning system, under which a ship was either fully manned or laid up in reserve, with a new procedure where any warships not on active duty permanently carried 40 percent of their full crew complement. Fisher’s argument was that this system meant that ships in reserve could be ready for war much more quickly, creating a fleet as strong in reality as it was on

¹⁰¹ Fisher to Cope-Cornford, 6 Dec 1904, NMM CPC, 1; Fisher had previously (28 Nov) told Cope-Cornford to write to him with any special requests. Emphasis in original.

¹⁰² Fisher to Garvin, Dec 1904 [n.d.], HRC JLG R, Fisher 8; emphasis in original.

paper. But manning all the Navy's ships required crews, which was the justification for the scrapping policy. The RN was a global force, and Victorian-era gunboats and cruisers were spread around Britain's global possessions in twos and threes.

Technological advances had made most of these smaller, older ships unnecessary, and Fisher planned to scrap them and transfer their crews to the new nucleus system. As a result, by early 1905 over 150 warships had been condemned to the scrapyard.

The third phase was the wholesale redistribution of British fleets, as the Royal Navy retreated somewhat from its midcentury role as the 'world's policeman.' The geopolitical world was changing; by 1904 the alliance with Japan had made the Eastern fleets unnecessary, it was becoming obvious that there was no threat of war with the United States, and the recent Entente with France had reduced the role of the traditionally vital Mediterranean Fleet. The Victorian-era policing fleets and cruising squadrons in the Pacific, West Indies and South Atlantic were done away with (the China Squadron would follow the next year), and naval power closer to the United Kingdom was reorganized into three major fleets: Channel, Atlantic (based at Gibraltar), and Mediterranean, which was reduced in size from its former glory. Unspoken in these fleet reorganizations was the result that the majority of British naval power could now be

quickly and easily aimed at Germany.¹⁰³ The end result was a savings in the 1905 naval estimates of £3.5 million.¹⁰⁴

Such restructuring was contentious, even more so than the Selborne Scheme. At the outset Fisher was not concerned about official opposition; Selborne and Balfour approved of the new policies, and no other serving officer outranked Fisher. It was the retired admirals, he believed – those who had criticized the personnel reforms – who must be quieted before they could raise an uproar in the press and in Parliament. Fisher again turned to his press allies – and with his power to influence national policy at its zenith, more allies made themselves known every day. The admiral’s contemporaries and modern historians alike have commented on the reach of Fisher’s journalistic network after 1904. The ‘Fishpond’ system of official favoritism within the Navy can be traced to the introduction of the Selborne Scheme and Fisher’s increased authority in controlling appointments,¹⁰⁵ and Fisher was concurrently creating a similar system among authors and editors. The roles played by W. T. Stead, Arnold White, James Thursfield, and Julian Corbett have already been discussed. By 1905 Fisher had added J. A. Spender, editor of the *Westminster Gazette*, A. G. Gardiner, editor of the *Daily News*,

¹⁰³ The debate over when exactly the Admiralty began planning for a war against Germany is contemporary and contentious. For the latest scholarship on the issue see Matthew S. Seligmann, Frank Nägler, and Michael Epkenhans, eds. *The Naval Route to the Abyss: The Anglo – German Naval Race 1895 – 1914* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2015), particularly chapter 2. The description of Fisher’s reforms is taken from Marder, *Fear God and Dread Nought II*, 22-25; any history of the period will have the same general account.

¹⁰⁴ Conley, *Jack Tar to Union Jack*, 30.

¹⁰⁵ Hough, *Admiral of the Fleet*, 155; ‘Fishpond’ was a contemporary term, used by Fisher’s opponents by 1906.

and J. L. Garvin, editor of the *Outlook* and after 1908 the *Observer*, to his list of correspondents. Both Conservative and Liberal papers were thus used to disseminate Fisher's ideas. He also maintained communications with naval journalists John Leyland (*The Times*), Archibald Hurd (*Daily Telegraph*), and Gerard Fiennes (*Observer*), among others, and his status as First Sea Lord came with the implicit backing of the service periodicals *Army and Navy Gazette* and *Naval and Military Record*.¹⁰⁶

The specific information Fisher sent to journalists and editors was always a well-kept secret between the two parties (at least until the articles appeared), but his naval colleagues were certainly aware that Fisher was in contact with the papers. Reginald Bacon was Fisher's first biographer but also his subordinate, and wrote that Fisher "was the first of our Admirals to make an intelligent use of the Press for the benefit of the Navy. He was convinced that, in order to get his various reforms understood and appreciated by the country, it was necessary to have the Press primed with the whole truth about them, and not merely with a smattering of half-truths" and educated guesses by journalists on a deadline.¹⁰⁷ Editor of the *Westminster Gazette* J. A. Spender gratefully recalled Fisher, time at the Admiralty, when the admiral "cultivated the Press unblushingly...He gave with both hands to each in turn, and we rewarded him with such

¹⁰⁶ Arthur J. Marder, *From the Dreadnought to Scapa Flow: The Royal Navy in the Fisher Era, 1904-1919*, 5 vols. (London: Oxford University Press, 1961), I 77-78.

¹⁰⁷ Bacon, *Life of Lord Fisher* I, 180.

an advertisement of himself and his ideas as no seaman ever received from newspapers, and probably none ever will again.”¹⁰⁸

Initially, the orchestrated push for acceptance of the latest policy shifts was successful. Fisher wrote to Arnold White that “all is going splendid! That general outside feeling of perfect confidence in what we are doing is and has been of inestimable value.”¹⁰⁹ To his recent associate Garvin, the message was “we have done much! We are going to do more! But we must have Public Opinion as an Avalanche to hurl and dash the pessimists into the bottomless pit of perdition out of our way of progress!”¹¹⁰ By May 1905, Arnold White was able to declare in the *National Review* “the reformed Admiralty is now the object of a chorus of praise from an enchanted and adoring press,”¹¹¹ which was to public eyes entirely separate from any official encouragement.

As always with Fisher’s reforms, there were criticisms. Initially many of these came from those who could speak out without fear of angering the Fishpond, which generally meant disapproving retired naval officers. The veteran navalist C. C. Penrose Fitzgerald, now retired, wrote to the editor of the *National Review*, Leo Maxse, with a plea to print his article criticizing the Selborne Scheme and the scrapping plan. He believed Fisher “is now suffering from a bad attack of what the Yankees call swelled

¹⁰⁸ Marder, *Dreadnought to Scapa Flow* I, 82.

¹⁰⁹ Fisher to White, 1 Feb 1905, CCA FISR, 15/2/1/2.

¹¹⁰ Fisher to Garvin, 6 Mar 1905, HRC JLG R, Fisher 1; emphasis in original.

¹¹¹ Williams, *Defending the Empire*, 67.

head. The adulation of the Press and the personal patronage of Royalty have quite upset his balance.” Penrose Fitzgerald was concerned that Fisher’s influence was already too strong: “Lord Selborne cannot check him, he is completely under his thumb, and the other members of the Board are Fisher’s creatures, so it is autocracy, pure and simple, or at any rate simple.” Perhaps his concerns were justified – his article had already been rejected both by *Blackwood’s Magazine* (the editor expressed concern that “it might be picked up and used as a political weapon to damage the government”) and by the Royal United Service Institution, which Penrose Fitzgerald attributed to “the awe inspired by Sir John Fisher!”¹¹²

Fisher worked swiftly to marginalize his critics. When Carlyon Bellairs, a retired member of the RN turned politician, penned a series of articles critical of Fisher in the *Daily Express* Fisher went immediately to the highest circles, writing the Prince of Wales that Bellairs was a mere malcontent who proved “utterly useless as a sailor, so he has taken to the pen and politics – the usual refuge of naval duffers! [...] I imagine, Sir, the feelings of the old women of both sexes on reading this!” Fisher recommended that Bellairs lose his £300 a year naval pension “for fouling his own nest!”¹¹³ The First Sea Lord was not the only member of the Admiralty upset by burgeoning criticisms in the press. Charles Ottley, the Director of Naval Intelligence, wrote to Sir George Clarke of the Committee of Imperial Defence asking him to pressure Valentine Chirol, head of the

¹¹² Penrose Fitzgerald to Maxse, 18 Feb 1905 Chichester, UK, West Sussex Records Office, Leo Maxse Papers (hereafter CHI MAXSE), 453.

¹¹³ Fisher to the Prince of Wales, 28 Apr 1905, in Marder, *Fear God and Dread Nought II*, 60-61.

Foreign Department of *The Times*, noting that it would be “very desirable, if practicable, to put a stopper to the published hysteria with which some of our newspapers at present (in a time of peace) regale their readers....Could we tell Chirol, or some other sane newspaper authority, our views and beg him to work the oracle in such wise as to moderate the rhetoric and the transports of our less responsible journalists?”¹¹⁴ Clarke did write to Chirol, but took the opportunity to denigrate “the attitude of the Admiralty and War Office to the press” as “most stupid and impolitic [...] When hard up they try to use it. Ordinarily they keep you at a distance and wrap themselves in a cloud of silly mystery.”¹¹⁵

Still, Fisher and his allies could keep criticism from men like Penrose Fitzgerald and Bellairs under control. What Fisher could not tolerate was internal dissent that spilled into the halls of Parliament and the offices of Fleet Street – but in 1905 Fisher uncovered a powerful new opponent to his reforms and inadvertently created another. The foe he created came first, and the antagonism arising from a personnel decision in 1905 would grow privately and publicly for over a decade. It was Fisher’s old ally Lord Charles Beresford.

Beresford had resigned his parliamentary seat at Woolwich in 1903 and returned to active duty as Commander-in-Chief of the Channel Squadron after being promoted to

¹¹⁴ Ottley to Clarke, 25 Mar 1905, quoted in Morris, *Scaremongers*, 105-106; Clarke had been a war correspondent for *The Times*, which is likely why Ottley asked for his assistance.

¹¹⁵ Clarke to Chirol, 4 Apr 1905, quoted in Morris, *Scaremongers*, 106.

the rank of admiral.¹¹⁶ It was in this role that Beresford, as previously discussed, offered to fight the Russian fleet with half of his ships as an act of honor in late 1904. To a pragmatic First Lord like Fisher this was an absurdity, and he apparently believed Beresford should be taught a lesson. Beresford's tenure in command was scheduled to end in March of 1905, but Fisher ordered Beresford to haul down his flag a month early. Fisher compounded the slight by rather tactlessly not informing Beresford himself – instead Beresford's successor, Sir William May, delivered the news. Beresford informed May that “he would be very glad to give him lunch or fight him, but he would not be superseded.”¹¹⁷

Beresford then took his case to Selborne, who sent him to Fisher. When the two met the situation rapidly degenerated. Fisher's chief of staff, George King-Hall, kept a diary, and he recorded the outcome of the meeting. “Beresford said: ‘You dare to threaten me, Jacky Fisher. Who are you? I only take my orders from the Board. If I have to haul my flag down on the 7th February, I will resign the Service, go down to Birmingham, get into the House and turn out both you and Selborne.’” Beresford won the day and was allowed to remain in command the extra month.¹¹⁸ But it was a dangerous precedent for fleet commanders to be quarrelling openly with the Admiralty,

¹¹⁶ Richard Freeman, *The Great Edwardian Naval Feud: Beresford's Vendetta against Fisher* (Barnsley, UK: Pen & Sword Maritime, 2009), 85.

¹¹⁷ Freeman, *Great Edwardian Naval Feud*, 98.

¹¹⁸ King-Hall's diary, 3 Mar 1905; the conversation itself apparently took place sometime around the turn of the year and is quoted in Hough, *Admiral of the Fleet*, 209; Mackay, *Fisher of Kilverstone*, 346.

and for Fisher matters became worse when Beresford was appointed Commander-in-Chief of the Mediterranean Fleet later that year¹¹⁹ – the position from which Fisher had risen to head the Admiralty and the fleet in which Beresford, as second in command, had caused so much mischief with Arnold White in 1901.

From this point onward relations between the two most influential (and perhaps most egotistical) admirals in the Royal Navy were never more than officially cordial. Each believed that he could see directly through the other's schemes. Henry Oliver, serving in Beresford's Mediterranean Fleet, recalled in his memoirs that "Beresford had been a political man for many years and crowds of M.P.s and newspaper men came to see him and it was difficult to get access to him about service matters."¹²⁰ He used this to his advantage early and often. Beresford claimed that "the Press was used to delude the public as to the efficacy of certain reforms which were pressed through without debate, thought or consideration by Sir John Fisher, aided by [...] espionage, intimidation and favouritism in order to silence Naval opinion in the Fleet on these mad schemes."¹²¹ The irony that Beresford wrote this to John St Loe Strachey, editor of *The Spectator*, was apparently lost on him. For his part, Fisher protested directly to the

¹¹⁹ Freeman, *Great Edwardian Naval Feud*, 99.

¹²⁰ James, *Great Seaman*, 100.

¹²¹ Beresford to Strachey, quoted in Morris, *Scaremongers*, 123.

prime minister that he did not “want to be egotistical, but that blatant, boastful ass Beresford has been writing the most utter bosh I ever read in my life.”¹²²

Beresford would continue to hound Fisher throughout his tenure at the Admiralty, but there was another more pressing threat to Fisher’s system in early 1905. An anonymous anti-Selborne Scheme article titled “A Retrograde Admiralty” appeared in the May issue of *Blackwood’s Magazine*. Fisher, always curious as to who his opponents were, made inquiries as to the article’s author and was unpleasantly surprised to discover it had been written by Vice Admiral Sir Reginald Custance. Although he was currently not assigned to a command, Custance was a high-ranking member of the Admiralty who had been second in command of the Mediterranean Fleet until the previous year and heavily involved in gunnery reform – another model navalist whose dislike of Fisher’s methods and reforms had turned him away from the Fishpond. He was also still a *servant* vice admiral, and thus a much more relevant threat to Fisher’s reforms than a retired officer like Penrose Fitzgerald.¹²³ There were also disciplinary issues inherent in publishing anonymous anti-Admiralty articles, although Fisher held back from any official reprimand on this point, perhaps wisely considering his own history with the same. He did, however, initially dismiss Custance as merely another disgruntled subordinate who had not lived up to expectations: “Admiral Custance who wrote the Blackwood Article hates me like poison because I gave him a bit of my mind

¹²² Fisher to Balfour, 12 Sep 1905, in Marder, *Fear God and Dread Nought* III, 27.

¹²³ Kemp, *Papers of Sir John Fisher* I, 300.

when I was Second Sea Lord and capsized his apple cart. He is not a Sea-officer he is a Quill-driver!”¹²⁴ For his part, Custance had begun to collect allies. He wrote to Admiral Sir Gerard Noel – whose position as Commander-in-Chief of the China Station had lost a great deal of influence with Fisher’s fleet reorganization – that “we shall get [Fisher] out of Whitehall before his five years expire if we only persist in exposing his methods and errors. Single-handed it is hard work, but I hope that in time others will join in the hunt.”¹²⁵

Fisher’s immediate response was to close ranks around his press and professional allies, trusting them to deflect any criticisms. He wrote to Archibald Hurd that “they say the First Sea Lord will want all his friends but I have no fear with you and a few others ‘to stand by the right’ regardless of the ‘Sanhedrin of Admirals’!”¹²⁶ But his clandestine maneuvering could annoy subordinates. When Captain Doveton Sturdee was sent to the Mediterranean Fleet as Beresford’s chief of staff in 1905, Fisher called Sturdee into his office with a request. Sturdee recalled later how Fisher “specially told me to keep Charlie [Beresford] in order as he was inclined to be rash and rather wild in service matters, he asked me to write him privately about my Chief etc. This request I never complied with, such a disloyal act was so obvious that it did not require any second thought....” Fisher also asked Sturdee to leave a forwarding address in case he needed

¹²⁴ Fisher to White, 16 May 1905, CCA FISR, 15/2/1/2.

¹²⁵ Custance to Noel, 31 Aug 1905, quoted in Schurman, *Julian Corbett*, 64.

¹²⁶ Fisher to Hurd, 25 May 1905, Churchill Archives Centre, Churchill College, Cambridge, Sir Archibald Hurd Papers (hereafter CCA HURD), 1/13; emphasis in original.

to contact the captain personally through unofficial channels. Later during Sturdee's service in the Mediterranean, Reginald Bacon – well-known to be a strong Fisher supporter – arrived on station to captain a battleship. According to Sturdee, it quickly became obvious that Bacon often communicated privately with Fisher; at one point many of the details Bacon sent back to the Admiralty appeared in the *Globe*, which “did not read well” to those in the Mediterranean Fleet who were not in the Fishpond.¹²⁷

Fisher was also concurrently dealing with upheavals in the political climate. The first was comparatively minor. In March of 1905, Earl Selborne was replaced as First Lord of the Admiralty by Earl Cawdor; he had no prior naval experience, having become wealthy as a railroad director, and essentially served as a rubber stamp for Fisher's policies during his short term in office.¹²⁸ The second was major. The Conservative Party had been in power since 1895, first under Lord Salisbury and since 1902 under his nephew Arthur Balfour – and there was no danger of a Conservative prime minister resigning in protest over naval estimates, as the Liberal Gladstone had the previous decade. In December of 1905 Balfour resigned, hoping the ensuing election would

¹²⁷ Doveton Sturdee, typed notes regarding service with Fisher [n.d.], Churchill Archives Centre, Churchill College, Cambridge, Admiral Sir Doveton Sturdee Papers (hereafter CCA SDEE), 1/17; Sturdee would become a strong opponent of Fisher. In his *Great Edwardian Naval Feud* Richard Freeman believes that Sturdee may have embellished his story but notes that Fisher also asked Bacon and Captain Ernest Troubridge to act as informants (106-107).

¹²⁸ Rhodri Williams, “Campbell, Frederick Archibald Vaughan, third Earl Cawdor (1847–1911),” *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, 2004; online edn, May 2006 [<http://www.oxforddnb.com.lib-ezproxy.tamu.edu:2048/view/article/32262>], accessed 11 Aug 2015.

divide the Liberal Party over tariff reform and Ireland.¹²⁹ Around the same time, Fisher's term as First Sea Lord was set to expire; he would reach the mandatory retirement age of 65 in January 1906. This concerned Cawdor, who wrote to Balfour in early December: "(1). What would be the effect just now if he went? Would it not be considered a victory on the part of Charlie B.? and might not that have a *very* bad effect? (2). Who would we put in J.F.'s place?"¹³⁰

Balfour and the Admiralty had a solution to the issue of Fisher's impending retirement. In December 1905 Fisher was promoted to Admiral of the Fleet. In terms of actual influence the promotion meant little, as Fisher was already at the top of his profession. But it carried with it an increased retirement age of 70. Now Fisher was secure in his position as First Sea Lord – as long as he retained the support of the Admiralty and the government – until 1911. It also meant that Beresford, who had long had eyes on the position, was effectively barred from the post (he would reach retirement age in 1911) unless Fisher could be removed.¹³¹ At the same time the Admiralty released a "Statement of Admiralty Policy," known as the Cawdor Memorandum, which committed the Admiralty to the continuance of the Fisher reforms.¹³² Both promotion

¹²⁹ Ruddock Mackay and H. C. G. Matthew, "Balfour, Arthur James, first earl of Balfour (1848–1930)," *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, 2004; online edn, Jan 2011 [http://www.oxforddnb.com.lib-ezproxy.tamu.edu:2048/view/article/30553, accessed 11 Aug 2015.

¹³⁰ Marder, *Dreadnought to Scapa Flow I*, 90.

¹³¹ Gordon, *Rules of the Game*, 366.

¹³² Fisher showed the "Statement of Admiralty Policy" to Thursfield before it was released, and asked him "whether you think the time is opportune to make it public in this dark time before the dissolution [of the government]," Fisher to Thursfield, 27 Dec 1905, CCA FISR, 1/27.

and policy were announced during the short period of time between the official resignation of the Balfour government and the January 1906 election.¹³³ If the Conservatives had won the next election, the awkward timing of Fisher's promotion would have been a mere bureaucratic hiccup. But when the Liberals won in a landslide, Fisher found himself caught between a new Liberal government intent on slashing naval budgets and a growing minority of Conservatives who were convinced another half-decade of Fisher's reforms would lead the Navy to ruin.

For those who were opposed to either the Fisher reforms or Fisher himself, to see him suddenly granted essentially a second term in office was a major blow. Thus, around this time some of the anti-Fisher elements in both the press and the RN began to coalesce around a more defined goal to prevent Fisher from, as they saw it, damaging the Royal Navy for either personal or political reasons. This group has come down to history as the 'Syndicate of Discontent,' which is rather unfair – it was Fisher's term for anyone who disagreed with him. Most were committed reformers themselves who disagreed with Fisher's methods and his reliance on the press. Still, the term Syndicate will be used, as it has become the common nomenclature.

Professionally, the Syndicate included many of the earliest navalists. Besides the previously-mentioned C. C. Penrose Fitzgerald and Carlyon Bellairs, naval officers Cyprian Bridge, Sir Edmund Fremantle, Sir Richard Vesey Hamilton (who had been First Naval Lord himself in the late 1880s), Sir Frederick Richards (First Naval Lord in

¹³³ Williams, *Defending the Empire*, 69.

the 1890s), and Sir William Henry White, former Chief Constructor of the Admiralty and designer of many British warships, were all retired (Bellairs was a special case, as he would be elected to Parliament in 1906).¹³⁴ This made it relatively simple for Fisher's allies to dismiss their criticisms as those of men who had simply been bypassed by progress.

More troubling from a professional standpoint were *active* officers who publicly spoke out against Fisher. Beresford (when out of Parliament and on active service) and Custance were the leaders of this cadre, which also included high-ranking officers Sir Lewis Beaumont, Sir Arthur Moore, Sir Assheton Curzon-Howe, Sir Hedworth Lambton, and Sir Gerard Noel.¹³⁵

There were also the Syndicate's allies in the press – while not as numerous as Fisher's supporters, they still controlled a respectable (and partisan – unlike Fisher's circle, nearly all journalistic members of the Syndicate were staunch Conservatives) number of papers. This group was comprised of both editors, chiefly John St Loe

¹³⁴ Matthew Johnson, "The Liberal Party and the Navy League in Britain before the Great War," *Twentieth Century British History* (2011), 146.

¹³⁵ In late 1905 Beresford was C-in-C Mediterranean, Custance had no permanent sea-going assignment, Beaumont was C-in-C Plymouth, Moore was about to be appointed C-in-C China, Curzon-Howe was second in command of the Channel Fleet, Lambton commanded a cruiser squadron in the Mediterranean, and Noel was the outgoing C-in-C China. This was certainly no gathering of unhappy lieutenants.

Strachey¹³⁶ of *The Spectator*, H. A. Gwynne of *The Standard*,¹³⁷ and Leo Maxse of the *National Review*,¹³⁸ and leader writers such as H. W. Wilson of the *Daily Mail*, Spenser Wilkinson of the *Morning Post*, Charles à Court Repington of *The Times*,¹³⁹ and Leslie Cope-Cornford of *The Standard*.¹⁴⁰

The Syndicate came together slowly, but Fisher treated its members as a threat from the beginning, as usual falling back upon his journalistic and governmental contacts for support. With some acquaintances he was flippant. He wrote to Archibald Hurd that he was “look[ing] forward to a big fighting year with huge delights and no doubt you will lead ahead in tackling the fossils!”¹⁴¹ Fisher contended that even though “the whole Press is being organized against me in particular & the Admiralty Policy in

¹³⁶ Strachey was a Liberal Unionist.

¹³⁷ Gwynne was a defector from the Fishpond; in late 1905 Fisher wrote to him that “the Empire floats on the Navy, and the Navy floats on the ‘Standard.’” Quoted in Morris, *Scaremongers*, 131. Gwynne wrote in return: “Always remember that whatever you do, you can count on this old Standard backing you up.” Gwynne to Fisher, 8 Dec 1905, CCA FISR, 3/2.

¹³⁸ Maxse’s *National Review* went so far as to refuse any articles from Arnold White after 1906; Hamilton, *Nation and the Navy*, 203.

¹³⁹ Repington was an unusual case, as he was the military correspondent for *The Times* and did not think highly of naval power in general. He was never deeply involved with the Syndicate’s intrigues but was certainly anti-Fisher.

¹⁴⁰ Lists of Syndicate members can be found in many histories of the period, and most vary slightly. This roster was compiled from Williams, *Defending the Empire*, 68; Marder, *Dreadnought to Scapa Flow I*, 77; Gordon, *Rules of the Game*, 366; Bernard Semmel, *Liberalism and Naval Strategy: Ideology, Interest, and Sea Power during the Pax Britannica* (Boston: Allen & Unwin, 1986), 140; Stephen Cobb, *Preparing for Blockade 1885-1914: Naval Contingency for Economic Warfare* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2013), 110.

¹⁴¹ Fisher to Hurd, 13 Oct 1905, CCA HURD, 1/13.

general [...] I hardly think it will be a success,”¹⁴² for “we have the country, Parliament & the Cabinet at our back.”¹⁴³ He wrote to Arnold White that “I have been informed I am going to be ruined by the Cabal of Mandarins but I don’t fear. [...] I told the King yesterday that these reforms in the Navy can no more be stopped than you can stop a glacier!”¹⁴⁴

On other occasions he was more cautious. Fisher warned Arnold White: “Bellairs has written a most insolent private letter” to the First Lord, “and in it he attacks you as having confidential documents sent you which you quote [...] Please do not allude to this in any way, only it’s as well you should know.”¹⁴⁵ He recommended that White not respond to anti-reform articles recently published in *Blackwood’s Magazine*, but noted “if you do – don’t sign your name as I was told the other day that you would sell your immortal soul to serve me so your witness on my behalf tainted [sic.] with the devil!”¹⁴⁶ Fisher even wrote to the Prince of Wales anticipating an upcoming meeting between the two, where he hoped to discuss “the poisonous things being said. For instance, Hedworth Lambton gently writes to me that I am working the Press – about the grossest calumny ever propagated. [...] The British Public is on the side of the

¹⁴² Fisher to Hurd, 16 Jan 1906, CCA HURD, 1/13.

¹⁴³ Fisher to Hurd, 2 Oct 1905, CCA HURD, 1/13.

¹⁴⁴ Fisher to White, 4 Feb 1906, CCA FISR, 15/2/1/3.

¹⁴⁵ Fisher to White, 26 Apr 1906, in Marder, *Fear God and Dread Nought II*, 81.

¹⁴⁶ Fisher to White, 7 Feb 1906, CCA FISR, 15/2/1/3.

Admiralty, and our triumph is assured, because the whole business, Sir, is common sense!”¹⁴⁷ Besides, Fisher told the Prince, if he had been sending journalists information their articles would not have had so many errors in them.¹⁴⁸ Essentially Fisher believed, as he wrote to Hurd, that “the enemies may be few but they are d—d noisy!”¹⁴⁹

Still, the critics could be effectively silenced for the moment. Fisher was in the midst of his last great reform – a new type of warship that would render every major fighting unit in the world’s navies unfit for front-line service in a naval engagement. Fisher had been appointed to the warship design committee in 1902, and his ideas were bearing fruit. The first to appear in the builder’s yard was HMS *Dreadnought*, with an array of revolutionary design features. The *Dreadnought* was the first all-big-gun battleship, mounting only a uniform armament of ten 12-inch guns as opposed to the mixed large- and medium-caliber armament of previous warships. It also was the first large fleet unit to be powered by turbine engines, allowing the ship to steam at 21 knots (previous British battleships had not exceeded 18 knots). Essentially, *Dreadnought* was faster and more powerful than any ship that had come before, and every similar battleship launched afterward would be known as a dreadnought. Although Fisher did not create the all-big-gun battleship – the original concept was Italian and the U. S. Navy

¹⁴⁷ Fisher to the Prince of Wales, 15 Apr 1906, in Marder, *Fear God and Dread Nought II*, 78-79.

¹⁴⁸ Freeman, *Great Edwardian Naval Feud*, 103.

¹⁴⁹ Fisher to Hurd, 2 Apr 1906, CCA HURD, 1/13. He expressed the same sentiments in a letter of the same day to Thursfield, but specifically named Bridge and Fitzgerald as the ‘enemies,’ Fisher to Thursfield, 2 Apr 1906, CCA FISR, 1/27.

was also known to be working on similar ships¹⁵⁰ – his unique position as essentially a one-man approval board meant the Royal Navy was the first naval force with both the resources and the administrative will to see the project to fruition.¹⁵¹

Fisher took great pains to ensure the *Dreadnought* was constructed as quickly as possible. It was laid down in October 1905, launched the following February, and commissioned in December 1906.¹⁵² The great ship's launch, in February 1906, was accompanied by a calculated Admiralty press offensive. Journalists of note were sent a pamphlet with details about the ship's construction and an accompanying letter that read in part: "As the First Lord is anxious that the Press should be able to know something of the main features of this new development in warship building, he is glad to put this statement in your hands, but he particularly wishes that in commenting on it, you should not quote it or any part of it verbatim." It also specified the Admiralty's desire to "prevent anything being published which has an official character;" to this effect, the warning "this statement is not for official publication, but to serve as a guide to the press, and is not to be quoted *verbatim*" was printed in bold on the pamphlet's front

¹⁵⁰ Roger Parkinson, *Dreadnought: The Ship that Changed the World* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2015), 92.

¹⁵¹ Many books have been written on the *Dreadnought* and the 'dreadnought revolution' it inspired. The most recent is Roger Parkinson's *Dreadnought* (2015), while the best technical history is Jon Sumida's *In Defence of Naval Supremacy* (1989). The material in this paragraph is compiled from Marder, *Dreadnought to Scapa Flow I*, 57-59, which provides a longer list of the ship's technological innovations.

¹⁵² Robert K. Massie, *Dreadnought: Britain, Germany, and the Coming of the Great War* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1992[1991]), 477-482.

cover.¹⁵³ Fisher seems to have given favored journalists even more details on the construction; he wrote to Archibald Hurd advising him not to mention any specific dimensions nor to “quote revelations” from any official reports. However, Fisher was anxious that Hurd “rub it in against [William] White as slyly as you can as he deserves it” – the former naval constructor had already spoken out strongly against the *Dreadnought* – but he reminded Hurd “to let me see your article before being put in type.”¹⁵⁴

To those who had already decided Fisher was recklessly damaging traditional British naval power with his reforms, the *Dreadnought* simply added fuel to the fire. Fisher was now coming under attack from various strategic and technical directions. But, due to the danger to one’s career that could result raising concerns through official Admiralty channels, most of these criticisms were disseminated through the press.¹⁵⁵ Cyprian Bridge wrote to *The Times* that he had “never known such elaborate attempts to influence the newspapers” as those being undertaken by pro-Fisher journalists,¹⁵⁶ while

¹⁵³ The pamphlet is dated 7 Feb 1906 and is quoted in Jan Rüger, “The Symbolic Value of the *Dreadnought*.” In *The Dreadnought and the Edwardian Age*, edited by Robert J. Blyth, Andrew Lambert, and Jan Rüger (Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2011), 13. Thursfield’s copy is preserved in NMM THU, 2/6.

¹⁵⁴ Fisher to Hurd, 4 Apr 1906, CCA HURD, 1/13.

¹⁵⁵ This point is concisely made in Jon Tetsuro Sumida, “Sir John Fisher and the *Dreadnought*: The Sources of Naval Mythology,” *Journal of Military History*, 59:4 (Oct. 1995): “Parliament was not the scene of extended or penetrating discussion of the dreadnought policy because it enjoyed support from the leadership, if not the rank and file, of both parties. Fisher’s critics were thus compelled to mount their main attacks in the press. These efforts were intended to inflame public opinion, which it was hoped would then galvanize either the government or opposition into taking action” (624).

¹⁵⁶ Bridge to *The Times*, 19 Feb 1907, quoted in Morris, *Scaremongers*, 128.

Edmund Fremantle stated to the *Daily Express* that he was merely speaking out against the “chorus of Admiralty apologists” who had turned “those who are sounding a warning note” about reforming too quickly into “Cassandras, or political opponents of the present Government.”¹⁵⁷ Officers on active duty had their own ways of avoiding what they saw as Fisher’s meddling. Sir Arthur Wilson, C-in-C of the Channel Fleet, was a supporter of Fisher’s reforms but not of his journalistic allies. He refused to allow newspaper correspondents on board his ships during the annual maneuvers, prompting an angry letter from Thursfield to Fisher: “I wonder where the Navy & the Admiralty would have been now if [Wilson’s] views had prevailed even since correspondents were first admitted to the manoeuvres in 1888.” Thursfield believed that such a “large question of policy ought to be decided, not by this or that C in C, but by the Board of Admiralty itself [essentially, Fisher]. It was so decided in 1888 & decided in favour of the Press. If that decision is now to be reversed I think Parliament & the country, to say nothing of the Press,” would need to have their own input on “a change of policy so unexpected & so questionable.”¹⁵⁸

Members of the press also tried to pull others into pro- or anti-Admiralty camps. Syndicate supporter H. W. Wilson made various overtures to J. L. Garvin, editor of *The Outlook*, in late 1906. “I began with faith in Fisher, but alas, have lost it long since,” he

¹⁵⁷ Fremantle to the *Daily Express*, 1 Jan 1907, CCA FISR, 8/20.

¹⁵⁸ Thursfield to Fisher, 25 Feb 1906, CCA FISR, 3/2; Fisher demurred on any official pronouncements on the role of the press. Thursfield went to sea with a different British fleet for the 1906 maneuvers, and his fleet was ‘attacked’ by Wilson’s, who had triangulated its position by intercepting Thursfield’s wireless reports back to *The Times*. Cobb, *Preparing for Blockade*, 210.

began; “it is facts which have disillusioned me [...] Fisher’s defenders as you say are passionate and honestly believe in him. But their belief is idolatry, and many of their contentions are ridiculous.” Wilson had spoken with the British naval attaché at Berlin, who “tells me this country is marching straight to defeat, and that there is great depression and uneasiness in the Navy outside the Fisher clique.” But without the help of editors like Garvin “I am powerless to do anything, and Bellairs is probably in the same condition. Our hand is weakened by those who agree with the new Admiralty policy, and we see with alarm the reduction of the fleet [...] Fisher is doing what Peel and Balfour did, betraying his friends and supporters in the supposed interests of policy.”¹⁵⁹

Wilson also contacted Arnold White, with whom he took a more conciliatory tone. “It must be perfectly well known at the Admiralty that we who criticise have no axes to grind, and are not seeking to make political capital.” He noted that if “men so dissimilar in their views” as himself, Strachey, Bellairs, Cope-Cornford, and Wilkinson all disagreed with the new Admiralty policies, there must be something amiss with the policies themselves. White offered to arrange a meeting between Wilson and Fisher, but Wilson declined, for “I feel as I may have to continue criticising his policy it is better that we should not meet [...] such a situation might be awkward on both sides.”¹⁶⁰

¹⁵⁹ Wilson to Garvin, 25 Oct 1906; 1 Nov 1906; 8 Nov 1906, HRC JLG R, Wilson. Wilson also believed that Fisher had “collared the Navy League,” which does not seem to have been the case; this point will be further discussed below.

¹⁶⁰ Wilson to White, 5 Dec 1906, Caird Library, National Maritime Museum, Greenwich, UK, Arnold White Papers (hereafter NMM WHI), 200.

Neither Garvin nor White proved a willing ear, and Wilson instead turned to Beresford, preparing a memorandum on naval weaknesses which he sent to the admiral.¹⁶¹

Beresford was so opposed to many of the ongoing reforms that he was again considering returning to Parliament. After consulting with Sir Thomas Brassey, who had been parliamentary secretary to the Admiralty in the 1880s and had assured him that “J.F. would not remain in Office 48 hours if it was not for the King,” Beresford had been mulling another run. “I am not at all sure that the present moment or next month would not be a very good time for me to go with a manifesto to the Country. I do not want money so much as I want organisation, and to expose the wicked frauds that have been perpetrated on the Country by false statements and wrong deductions.”¹⁶² A promotion in late 1906 to Commander-in-Chief of the Channel Fleet mollified Beresford, who afterwards confined his agitation to writing angry letters to the First Lord.¹⁶³ Still, as the anti-Fisher paper the *Daily Express* reported of Beresford, “rumour freely credits him with following Sir John Fisher as First Sea Lord, and assuredly no selection would be more popular in the eyes of the nation.”¹⁶⁴

¹⁶¹ Wilson to Northcliffe, 16 Jan 1907, British Library, London (hereafter BL ADD MS), Lord Northcliffe Papers, 622201.

¹⁶² Beresford to Walter Long, 5 Dec 1906, BL ADD MS, Beresford correspondence 1908-1915, 62407.

¹⁶³ Marder, *Dreadnought to Scapa Flow I*, I 91. Beresford was particularly angry that a pamphlet on the recent Admiralty reforms was sent to ships’ libraries; this controversy is covered in Freeman, *Great Edwardian Naval Feud*, 111-112.

¹⁶⁴ *Daily Express*, 28 Dec 1906, CCA FISR, 8/20.

Fisher, meanwhile, was dealing with political as well as professional pressure. The Liberal victory in 1906 meant a new Prime Minister, Henry Campbell-Bannerman, and a new First Lord of the Admiralty, Lord Tweedmouth. Tweedmouth, like Cawdor, had no prior naval experience,¹⁶⁵ and Fisher quickly won his support for the ongoing naval reforms. Together the two defended the RN from large budget cuts in the face of Liberal retrenchment. Fisher's general argument was that his reforms were saving the country a great deal of money. For all its revolutionary developments, the *Dreadnought* cost only £181,000 more than the previous generation of battleships.¹⁶⁶ The estimates had gone down by £3.5 million in 1905, the last year of Conservative government, and the savings continued – a further £1.5 million in 1906 and £450,000 in 1907.¹⁶⁷ These savings, attributable mainly to the scrapping policy and the nucleus crew system, prevented more onerous cuts, although one proposed battleship was dropped from the 1906 estimates to the great dismay of the Conservatives.¹⁶⁸

¹⁶⁵ J.R. Thursfield, "Marjoribanks, Edward, second Baron Tweedmouth (1849–1909)," rev. H. C. G. Matthew, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, 2004 [<http://www.oxforddnb.com.lib-ezproxy.tamu.edu:2048/view/article/34878>], accessed 14 Aug 2015.

¹⁶⁶ Morris, *Dreadnought*, 477.

¹⁶⁷ Marder, *Dreadnought to Scapa Flow I*, 25. There is a historiographical debate on the lowered estimates; Nicholas Lambert in his *Sir John Fisher's Naval Revolution* (7-8) believes that Fisher was purposely misleading the Cabinet as to the role of the RN, while Jon Tetsuro Sumida in "Fisher's Naval Revolution," *Naval History*, 10:4 (July 1996): 21, believes that Fisher was 'forced' to accept the lower estimates. Fisher was, however, a strong supporter of an efficient cost-saving RN, and if he was forced to accept anything it does not appear in his writings.

¹⁶⁸ Marder, *Fear God and Dread Nought II*, 32.

Of course, Fisher always had backup plans for keeping the Navy solvent. He supported Secretary of State for War R. B. Haldane's reforms of the army, hoping to save money for the navy by keeping the army's budget down. He wrote to Arnold White his opinion of Haldane: "He is my friend and I want him supported by public pressure. [...] Don't unwittingly betray me, but we want to get the Army Estimates down to 20 millions [...] and Arnold White & Co., if they will savagely go to work and rise, the Country will do it and the First Sea Lord can be a potent power, but he must be supported against the blatant asses that bray so loud...."¹⁶⁹

Fisher also defended his latest reforms by accusing his opponents of partisanship.¹⁷⁰ As he told the Prince of Wales: "Pure party feeling solely dictates the present press agitation, and the angel Gabriel would not be believed if he tried to convince the Tory press that the sole object of the Board of Admiralty was to increase the fighting efficiency of the Fleet and its instant readiness for war!"¹⁷¹ He also compiled an Admiralty memorandum entitled "Admiralty Policy - Replies to Criticisms," for internal use. Besides collating a variety of pro-Admiralty newspaper articles, the memorandum pointed out that, first, the entire process of creating and then modifying the 1905 estimates had been carried out under both a Conservative and a

¹⁶⁹ Fisher to White, 12 Oct 1906, in Marder, *Fear God and Dread Nought II*, 99-100.

¹⁷⁰ Making such accusations did not trouble Fisher, who never subscribed to any specific ideology himself; he once wrote that he had "voted consistently for both sides, whichever did most for the Navy!" Fisher to Francis Knollys, 23 Oct 1906, in Marder, *Fear God and Dread Nought II*, 39.

¹⁷¹ Fisher to the Prince of Wales, 23 Oct 1906, CCA FISR, 8/20.

Liberal government, and, second, large ships had been removed from the estimates recently without a corresponding outcry: “but it seems that party spirit is too deeply engrained in some minds for them to see in these events, what they obviously point to, a continuous process of modification, due to strictly naval considerations, and quite unconnected with party politics.”¹⁷² It also contained a characteristically Fisher-esque defense of the Admiralty’s position worth quoting at length:

The most brilliant preacher of our generations has said what a stimulus it is to have always some friends to save us from that ‘Woe unto you when all men shall speak well of you’! When criticism goes, life is done! You must squeeze the fragrant leaf to get the delicious scent! Hence, it may be truly said that the Board of Admiralty should just now heartily shake hands with themselves, because Korah, Dathan, and Abiram¹⁷³ (in the shape of the ‘National Review,’ ‘Blackwood’ and the ‘Daily Mail’) are trying to raise a rebellion, but the earth will now open and swallow them all up quick as in the days of Moses! they and all their company, with their small battleships and their slow speeds, and their invasion fright and foreign shipbuilding houses of cards are each and all capable of absolute pulverization! Why people don’t laugh at it all is the wonder! [...] There is undoubted authority for stating that a skillfully organised ‘Fleet Street’ conspiracy aided by Naval Malcontents is endeavouring to excite the British public against the Board of Admiralty, but it has fallen flat.¹⁷⁴

Accusations of partisanship did cause some of Fisher’s opponents to back down, for it was a gentler age of politics. Fisher was also able to call on some of his Conservative allies for aid. When Conservative politician George Wyndham spoke out

¹⁷² This portion of the memorandum was written by Charles Ottley, the Director of Naval Intelligence.

¹⁷³ This is a reference to Numbers 1:40; Korah, Dathan and Abiram rebelled against Moses and were swallowed by an earthquake.

¹⁷⁴ “Admiralty Policy. Replies to Criticisms” (October 1906), CCA FISR, 8/9; a pair of very similar letters from Fisher to Tweedmouth, 26 Sep 1906 and 11 Oct 1906, can be found along with a series of drafts and proofs of the memorandum in NMM THU, 2/2. It is safe to say language of this sort had not previously appeared in official Admiralty documents.

against the Admiralty in 1906, Fisher wrote to his old friend Balfour that Wyndham had done the Navy “a bad turn;” Wyndham subsequently retracted his statements.¹⁷⁵ But admonishing one’s personal enemies for their supposed partisanship in a professional setting was not the way for Fisher to disarm any of his critics, and he was told so by one of the few friends to whom he would unfailingly listen. Viscount Esher gave the embattled admiral some advice: “I deprecate, if you will allow me to say so, your method, in dealing with these opponents.” They “should be answered – and argued with. Not by you personally, but by people properly coached to do it. You need not fear ‘Fleet Street cabals,’ you will never go a la lanterne¹⁷⁶ that way. In a country like ours, governed by discussion, a great is never hanged. He hangs himself.” Fisher’s role, according to Esher, was to “be Machiavellian and play upon your delicate instrument with your fingers and not with your feet – however tempting the latter may be.”¹⁷⁷

Fisher took this advice to heart, and backed away from direct denunciations of Syndicate members. Instead, he returned to his traditional method of operating through journalistic allies. Some he encouraged; Arnold White was told to “carry the ‘Fiery Cross’ through the British Empire!”¹⁷⁸ Julian Corbett was again enlisted to pen a more

¹⁷⁵ Williams, *Defending the Empire*, 86-87.

¹⁷⁶ “To the lamp posts,” a radical slogan during the French Revolution.

¹⁷⁷ Esher to Fisher, 21 Oct 1906, CCA ESHR 10/42; emphasis in original.

¹⁷⁸ Fisher to White, 12 Oct 1906, in Marder, *Fear God and Dread Nought II*, 99-100.

technical explanation of the new Admiralty shipbuilding policies,¹⁷⁹ with Fisher's assistance: "a mouse once helped a lion (*vide* Aesop's Fables) so if I can be of any help I hope you will command me."¹⁸⁰ When Corbett's article "Recent Attacks on the Admiralty" appeared in the February 1907 *Nineteenth Century*, Fisher called it "just the thing 'to meet the present distress', as St. Paul would say!"¹⁸¹ He asked Thursfield for a "Justification Paper" defending the Admiralty, and allowed Thursfield to show the official documents Fisher had lent him to George Buckle, editor of *The Times*: "trust him implicitly, *show him everything*, and let *The Times* prepare its own series of articles [...] This *infinitely* better than any Admiralty minute or official *exposé des motifs*, and *The Times* is the *only vehicle* and the *only authority that will be accepted*..."¹⁸²

Other Fisher allies were warned away from continued attacks. The admiral complained that J. L. Garvin in particular "wouldn't [...] write conscientiously."¹⁸³ In a letter to Archibald Hurd, Fisher included a note of caution for a colleague: "If you see Arnold White you might warn him about Beresford who I think must be fought."¹⁸⁴ Fisher even officially wrote to Beresford, in a conciliatory gesture, that "we must stamp

¹⁷⁹ Lambert, *Sir John Fisher's Naval Revolution*, 137.

¹⁸⁰ Fisher to Corbett, 2 Jan 1907, CCA FISR, 1/5; transcribed as written.

¹⁸¹ Fisher to Corbett, 15 Jan 1907, in Marder, *Fear God and Dread Nought II*, 113.

¹⁸² Fisher to Thursfield, 25 Dec 1906, in Marder, *Fear God and Dread Nought II*, 108; emphasis in original.

¹⁸³ Fisher to White, 13 Aug 1906, CCA FISR, 15/2/1/3.

¹⁸⁴ Fisher to Hurd, 20 Jan 1907, CCA HURD, 1/17.

out any signs of antagonism or partizanship which I have regrettably noticed but have so far let pass. We can't have amateur Admiralties outside – nor the tail wagging the head – and in all these sentiments I know I have your cordial assent.”¹⁸⁵

Essentially, Fisher was frustrated. His reform program had been approved by the Admiralty and by successive governments of both parties, so why was it not meeting with universal acceptance? And he felt handicapped by having to operate under Admiralty regulations on dealing with the press. A long selection from the “Admiralty Policies – Reply to Criticisms” memorandum perhaps best encapsulates Fisher’s feelings at this time:

Bridge in the *Glasgow Herald*, Fremantle in the *Express*, FitzGerald in *The Times*, and Custance, in the most malignant and erroneous of all his articles in the January *Blackwood's* (he was going to be such a good boy if he got an appointment!!!); one and all of these are rabid in their attacks. [...] We don't hit back, or if we do we apologise! (A negative attitude is *never* successful! An attacks should always be met by a counter attack!) We pander to traitors in our own camp; we subsidise our critics at the Royal United Service Institution, and we fawn on our foes and give them barley sugar instead of a black eye! I am getting very sick of this ‘*taking it lying down*’ apologetic line of policy! *The Admiralty policy has not failed in any one single point and will not fail! Success is absolutely assured!* But this timorous line of conduct is very disheartening! There should be no doubt allowed to exist anywhere of our unflinching determination to have Admiralty orders obeyed and Admiralty policy cordially and even enthusiastically supported!¹⁸⁶

¹⁸⁵ Fisher to Beresford, 8 Mar 1907, National Archives, Kew, Admiralty Record Office Cases (hereafter KEW ADM), 116/3108.

¹⁸⁶ “Navy Reforms,” 3 Jan 1907, in “Admiralty Policy. Replies to Criticisms” (October 1906), in Kemp, *Papers of Sir John Fisher* I, 392. This letter is part of the ‘Replies to Criticisms’ memorandum dated October 1906 and must have been a later addition; it is anonymous in the original but Hamilton’s *Nation and the Navy* (235) believes it was originally sent to Thursfield. A copy of the memorandum can be found in CCA FISR, 8/20.

By 1907 Jacky Fisher had presided over a series of naval reforms that had, quite literally, revolutionized the Royal Navy. In a five-year period he had instituted five major reforms – the Selborne Scheme of training, the nucleus crew system, the scrapping policy, fleet redistribution, and the launch of the *Dreadnought*. All five had major impacts on British naval strategy, and it is no exaggeration to say the *Dreadnought* changed how the entire naval world approached warship design. And while there is well-justified reluctance to engage in ‘great man’ history, these were Fisher’s reforms – he had himself appointed to the warship design committee, he increased the control over personnel decisions his rank as Second Naval Lord merited before the Selborne Scheme, and so on. They were Fisher’s reforms because he purposely consolidated power in a manner not seen by any First Sea Lord before or since.¹⁸⁷

Fisher was able to sway successive governments and First Lords to support his reforms; he was always a friend to Balfour, and essentially ran roughshod over Cawdor and Tweedmouth, neither of whom were naval experts. He also owed a great deal to the support of King Edward VII and the Prince of Wales.¹⁸⁸ To influence public and parliamentary opinion, he turned to his network of journalistic contacts. The ‘Fisher

¹⁸⁷ Of course, Fisher did not devise all the reforms himself. The *Dreadnought* and the redistribution of the fleets in particular were contemporary strategic ideas co-opted by Fisher’s Admiralty.

¹⁸⁸ Fisher’s antagonistic relationship with Walter Kerr when he was Second Naval Lord has been previously discussed. When Fisher was First Sea Lord, the other members of the board quietly assented to his reforms. Second Sea Lord Charles Carter Drury and Fourth Sea Lord Frederick Inglefield left no papers; the papers of Third Sea Lord Henry Jackson, in the Caird Library at the National Maritime Museum in Greenwich, are purely professional and Jackson does not appear to have had any sustained contact with the press.

system' was at its most extensive and most effective during this period. Correspondents and editors whom Fisher considered trustworthy received information on upcoming or ongoing naval developments from the admiral; they in turn reworked official documents (often with Fisher's notes to guide them) into broad policy overviews, while removing anything that would lead directly back to the Admiralty.

However, cracks were beginning to appear in Fisher's system by 1907. One issue was that journalists and editors were not duty-bound to obey Fisher as his subordinates were. Sometimes they simply ignored him. After Fisher asked Thursfield to compile a 'Justification Paper' on the Admiralty's reforms, he wrote again to call the project off. But Thursfield was hesitant, writing to his superior at *The Times* that he could not tell "whether [Fisher's] reluctance is genuine or whether he thinks its assumption is likely to urge you on." Eventually Thursfield decided to continue the project without Fisher's assent: "I think we should be doing a public service by going on. [...] I don't want to follow [Fisher's] lead or to work upon his plan but his notes at any rate indicate the several directions in which to look for authentic information & his syllabus of topics to be discussed is both suggestive & instructive."¹⁸⁹ And journalists could abandon the Fishpond at any time. H. W. Wilson wrote apologetically to Arnold White: "If Fisher is angry with us, I am sorry. He is angry with those who might have

¹⁸⁹ Thursfield to George Buckle, 30 Dec 1906, NMM THU, 1/3. A series of 8 articles based on the information Fisher had sent to Thursfield did appear in *The Times* in early 1907; Marder, *Fear God & Dread Nought II*, 108.

been, and were prepared to be, his best friends; who would have fought for him through thick and thin; and who believed in him two years ago as you do now.”¹⁹⁰

The second major issue that had arisen by 1907 was the so-called Syndicate of Discontent. Fisher characterized its members as malingerers, but that was an unfair and inaccurate exaggeration. What they were was more dangerous to Fisher’s future plans: they were his colleagues. Fisher had the government and an enviable percentage of the press on his side, but he had alienated the professional men – many of them committed reformers themselves – he should have numbered among his closest allies. He had the Fishpond, but the majority of its professional members were junior officers he had appointed himself. Serving officers in the Syndicate such as Beresford, Lewis Beaumont, Arthur Moore, Assheton Curzon-Howe, Hedworth Meux, and Gerard Noel had all achieved at least the rank of least rear admiral by 1905, and journalists eager for details of the RN’s inner workings were equally as happy to receive guidance from them as from Fisher. Fisher’s ruthless reforming policy, undertaken in nearly every instance without the advice of his fellow admirals, had left him in the worst sense of the term a man without peer.

That was where the naval situation stood in early 1907. Fisher was at the height of his official power; his reforms were creating a Royal Navy that was faster, more heavily gunned, more specialized, and still somehow cheaper than the RN of a mere five years earlier. His network of sympathetic journalists and editors was being put to use

¹⁹⁰ Wilson to White, 18 Jan 1907, NMM WHI, 200.

furthering a wide variety of navalist causes, but they were Fisher's causes. He had taken the system favored by the earliest navalists in the 1880s, personal covert communication between journalists and serving officers, to its logical extreme, but in the process he had created the Fishpond and inadvertently created the antagonistic Syndicate. Navalism and the entire process of naval reform were becoming more personal and more political. Fisher confidently wrote to Esher before a meeting between the two that even though the "Admiralty is at a great disadvantage in dealing with its critics because limited to the truth & they are not [...] we are not going to fail on a single point!"¹⁹¹ After the meeting, Esher revealed the reality of the situation to his son: "Jackie feels that he is standing on the edge of a precipice to which all great reformers are led, and over which they ultimately fall. But, in spite of the numerous enemies whose darling wish is to hurl him down, it is essential that for a while he be kept up. If he survives another year, the Navy will be safe."¹⁹²

¹⁹¹ Fisher to Esher, 2 Jan 1907, CCA ESHR, 10/42; emphasis in original.

¹⁹² Esher to M.V.B. [Maurice Vyner Brett], 3 Jan 1907, in Brett, *Journals and Letters of Reginald, Viscount Esher II*, 215.

CHAPTER V

PARTISANS AND PRESSURE GROUPS, 1907-1908

In 1907 the Royal Navy appeared stronger than it had ever been during the navalist era, a condition attributed by most of its supporters to First Sea Lord Sir John Fisher. Yet dissension within the Navy and its journalistic supporters was at an all-time high, as personal and professional feuds broke out on quarterdecks throughout the fleet and across offices on Fleet Street. This chapter explores how such a conflict arose throughout 1907 and 1908. Essentially, the three-tiered system of navalist agitation that had proven successful to this point – with two of the three groups of professional officers, politicians, and the press working together against the third for a specific naval cause – was fragmenting.

The Liberal government and its increasing focus on social reform led to a Cabinet torn between a pro-naval Admiralty and pro-retrenchment officials, notably David Lloyd George and H. H. Asquith; at the same time the Admiralty faced ever-louder cries from opposition Conservatives that it was derelict in its duty to defend the nation. Members of the press had their own difficult choices to make, especially the subset of Conservative papers that supported Fisher's reforms. Popular pressure groups also played a more significant role in the public discourse during this period, re-entering the political arena – and there were more of them, including the self-avowedly partisan and anti-Fisher Imperial Maritime League.

The most significant point of fracture was in the professional sphere. During this period the Syndicate of Discontent launched an all-out assault on Fisher's naval reforms

and on Fisher himself. What had begun as a legitimate professional dispute over the efficacy of Fisher's naval reorganizations soon degenerated into a personal contest between Fisher and Lord Charles Beresford, with various lesser luminaries as supporters of both men in the press, the Admiralty and the Cabinet. By the last days of 1908 the system of directed navalist agitation so carefully assembled by Fisher throughout his career was nearing collapse.

The personal animosity between Fisher and Beresford dated to at least 1905 when, as discussed above, Fisher had attempted to hasten Beresford's removal from command of the Channel Fleet.¹ In late 1906 Beresford raised such a fuss over the issuing of a pamphlet on the recent naval reforms to ships' libraries that Fisher had to explain himself to the Board of Admiralty, which he did by downplaying the pamphlet and proceeding to denigrate Beresford severely: "The fact is that Lord Charles Beresford has consistently and persistently thwarted Admiralty Policy at every opportunity and hardly ever does he receive an order without some private or public representation on his part of an improper character." Fisher believed that the only reason Beresford had retained any level of high command was "for the simple reason that it has been rightly decided in the past that to take the proper steps would have been to make him a martyr," and ended his letter to the Board with a summation of the view he would continue to

¹ Historians differ as to when the feud between the two men began, with two recent monographs – Geoffrey Penn's *Infighting Admirals* (2000) and Richard Freeman's *The Great Edwardian Naval Feud* (2009) – written concerning the matter. Their professional differences dated from at least 1900 when Fisher was in command in the Mediterranean, but most historians date their personal animosity to around 1905.

hold in regards to his troublesome subordinate: “It’s a sheer impossibility to administer the Navy efficiently or to control effectively the war organization of the Fleet if every single order emanating from the Admiralty is to be continuously criticized by an officer in the high position of Lord Charles Beresford with the inevitable effect already apparent of those below him evincing an equally insubordinate spirit.”²

Fisher’s frustration stemmed from a concurrent point of contention between himself and Beresford. In late 1906 the latter had been appointed to the prestigious post of C-in-C of the Channel Fleet. But between his initial acceptance of the command and his arrival on station, another of Fisher’s fleet reforms had greatly diminished the number of ships in the Channel Fleet from 66 to 21, infuriating Beresford.³ Beresford initially refused to take up his command, but a meeting with Fisher defused the situation. As Fisher wrote to the Civil Lord of the Admiralty, Sir George Lambert: “I had three hours with Beresford yesterday, and all is settled, and the Admiralty don’t give in one inch to his demands; but I had as a preliminary to agree to three things: I. Lord Charles Beresford is a greater man than Nelson. II. No one knows anything about naval war except Lord Charles Beresford. III. The Admiralty haven’t done a single d—d thing right!”⁴

² Sir John Fisher, “Statement Explanation of Lord Charles Beresford’s telegram of Dec. 8. 1906,” National Archives, Kew, Admiralty Record Office Cases (hereafter KEW ADM), 116/3108.

³ Richard Freeman, *The Great Edwardian Naval Feud: Beresford’s Vendetta against Fisher* (Barnsley, UK: Pen & Sword Maritime, 2009), 113.

⁴ Admiral Sir R. H. Bacon, *The Life of Lord Fisher of Kilverstone*, 2 vols. (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, Doran & Company, Inc., 1929), II 33.

Fisher had won the battle but lost this particular war, as Beresford took command of the Channel Fleet in April 1907 with his feelings towards the First Lord in no way mollified. He had made public statements through Bellairs claiming that Fisher's fleet reorganizations had left the Navy dangerously weak, and that Fisher's Admiralty was purposely misleading the British public.⁵ Behavior this insubordinate could not be tolerated, and Beresford was summoned to a meeting with Fisher and Tweedmouth in July 1907. Fisher minced no words and directly challenged Beresford's recent behavior: "You talk in a very open fashion. Do you mean to say you have not said to anybody that the Home Fleet is a fraud and a danger to the Empire?" Beresford denied the allegations, claiming that "not privately or publicly have I ever said anything against the Admiralty, no, not even in my old days, when I had a much stronger fight on than now." He characterized reports that he had been critical of Fisher as mere rumors, and pointedly remarked that Fisher had his own trouble with press speculation: "I am told an enormous lot of things that you say about me, but I never believe them – I have been much too long a public man to believe what people say."⁶ This meeting, like the previous, did little to settle the issue.

The failure of the July gathering was due at least partly to the fact that Beresford had been less than forthcoming. He *had* been in contact with the press. Only a week before the meeting H. A. Gwynne, editor of the *Standard*, wrote to Beresford that in

⁵ Freeman, *Great Edwardian Naval Feud*, 115.

⁶ Minutes of Admiralty Meeting between Tweedmouth, Fisher, and Beresford, 5 Jul 1907, KEW ADM, 116/3108.

Fisher “we are confronted with the most astute cunning devil who ever sat at the Admiralty,” and as a result “the campaign has now to be organised. We must no longer beat the air with unnecessary questions but concentrate the whole of our efforts towards definite objects”⁷ – namely, Fisher’s removal. Fisher eventually obtained evidence of the Gwynne-Beresford connection and wrote to King Edward VII that he now had “a nice exposé of our chief Admiral afloat in collusion with an organized journalistic attack on the Board of Admiralty,” and planned to use the information “to bring the matter to a direct issue at a meeting of the Board and flatten out Beresford once and for all. [Sir Hedworth] Lambton said to me the other day, ‘*Seize Beresford by the scruff of the neck and he will collapse like every Irishman who ever breathed – he is a blusterer.*’”⁸ Yet this meeting never took place, as by late 1907 Beresford’s command of the Channel Fleet was embroiled in a new controversy involving a subordinate – one that also, as was becoming common with naval affairs, involved the press.

In October 1907 Beresford welcomed a new officer to the Channel Fleet, as Rear Admiral Sir Percy Scott arrived to take command of the first cruiser squadron. Scott was already known as a gunnery reformer, a strong supporter of technological

⁷ Gwynne to Beresford, 28 May 1907, quoted in A.J.A. Morris, *The Scaremongers: The Advocacy of War and Rearmament, 1896-1914* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1984), 132.

⁸ Fisher to King Edward VII, 4 Oct 1907, in Arthur J. Marder, ed., *Fear God and Dread Nought: The Correspondence of Admiral of the Fleet Lord Fisher of Kilverstone*, 3 vols. (London: Jonathan Cape, 1952-9), II 141-142; emphasis in original. The attribution of Fisher’s quote to Hedworth Lambton is conjectural, as Lambton was a member of the Syndicate himself. Fisher told the King he had received the information from an anonymous correspondent, which is likely not true – but whatever Fisher’s evidence was, it has not survived.

innovation within the service, and a prickly personality who had no time for those who did not agree with his methods.⁹ None of these aspects agreed with Beresford, of whom a subordinate recorded that “by the year 1907 [...] the peak of his curve of service had then passed. He was sixty-two, and little but his famous personality remained to recall the ‘Charlie B’ of past days.” Moreover, “the Channel Fleet High Command had not moved forward with the instruments it wielded, and its attitude was rather reactionary, and inclined to dwell upon past days.”¹⁰ Beresford and his second in command Admiral Reginald Custance were more concerned with their burgeoning feud with Fisher. As Scott recalled, “it soon became apparent to me that the two senior Admirals were animated by a very hostile spirit towards the present Board of Admiralty. The Commander-in-Chief thought fit at this time to convey to me his contempt for the First Sea Lord, and the necessity for his speedy removal.” Scott turned down “certain overtures from Lord Charles Beresford to join in the campaign against the authorities at Whitehall,” and as a result soon realized “that an early attempt would be made to weaken my position and, if possible, replace me by an Admiral more in sympathy with the views held by my two Seniors.”¹¹

⁹ Geoffrey Bennett, *Charlie B: A Biography of Admiral Lord Beresford of Metemneh and Curraghmore, G.C.B., G.C.V.O., LL.D., D.C.L.* (London: Peter Dawnay Ltd., 1968), 290.

¹⁰ Captain Lionel Dawson, *Gone For a Sailor: Being Fixes of Memory* (London: Rich & Cowan, Ltd., 1936), 130-131.

¹¹ Scott to C-in-C Atlantic Fleet, Feb 1909 (confidential memorandum, n.d.), Churchill Archives Centre, Churchill College, Cambridge, 1st Lord Fisher of Kilverstone Papers (hereafter CCA FISR), 5/16.

The first weakening of Scott's position occurred in November 1907 when Beresford ordered all ships under his command to be freshly repainted before a state visit from the Kaiser. Scott, whose cruiser squadron was undergoing gunnery trials, begrudgingly complied by signaling to his command that "paintwork appears to be more in demand than gunnery so you had better come in to make yourself look pretty." This was an insubordinate signal, and Scott must have expected a reprimand from Beresford. What he could not have expected was for Beresford to dress him down in front of the Channel Fleet's flag officers and then send an open message to the entire fleet negating Scott's "contemptuous" message. This incident reflected poorly on both Scott and Beresford, but it was purely an internal Navy matter. However, when the Channel Fleet returned to Portsmouth, a fleet's worth of sailors – since Beresford's condemnation had been transmitted openly to all ships under his command – now had scandalous evidence of internal division within Beresford's command, and local naval correspondents provided a willing ear.¹²

Many newspapers published details of the Scott-Beresford feud, but one went further than a simple half-column notice. *John Bull*, a jingoistic popular magazine run by the muck-raking Horatio Bottomley, published a full report on the incident titled "Grave Indictment of Lord Charles Beresford." Posters advertising the article appeared throughout Portsmouth, and copies were sent in sealed envelopes to every officer in the

¹² Bennett, *Charlie B*, 290-291.

Channel Fleet.¹³ There is no evidence that *John Bull*'s editor or reporters had any connection with Fisher or any ranking officers; the incident itself was common knowledge throughout the fleet, and Bottomley was a known eccentric with whom Fisher had no common reforming ground to justify any correspondence. But Beresford was certain Fisher was behind the *John Bull* article. He wrote to his lawyer, Sir Edward Carson, that there could be "no doubt it is one of the most determined, audacious, treacherous and cowardly attacks on me, inspired by the gentleman from Ceylon."¹⁴ Beresford considered suing *John Bull* for libel,¹⁵ and when he was advised against such a course of action by both the Admiralty¹⁶ and his political supporters¹⁷ he took sick (some of his critics, Lord Esher in particular, doubted the veracity of his illness)¹⁸ and retired to London.

This was not the last time Scott and Beresford would find themselves at odds. In July 1908, while on a routine training cruise, Scott countermanded an order from Beresford on the grounds that he believed it would have led to a collision between two

¹³ Peter Padfield, *The Great Naval Race: The Anglo-German Naval Rivalry, 1900-1914* (New York: David McKay Company, Inc., 1974), 76-177; Richard Hough, *Admiral of the Fleet: The Life of John Fisher* (New York: Macmillan Company, 1969), 224.

¹⁴ Beresford to Carson, 21 Jan 1908, in Arthur J. Marder, *From the Dreadnought to Scapa Flow: The Royal Navy in the Fisher Era, 1904-1919*, 5 vols. (London: Oxford University Press, 1961-70), I 99; Fisher was born in Ceylon, and Beresford often referred to him as 'Asiatic' or 'mulatto.'

¹⁵ Padfield, *Great Naval Race*, 194.

¹⁶ Marder, *Dreadnought to Scapa Flow* I, 98-99.

¹⁷ Morris, *Scaremongers*, 185-186, recording a series of letters between Beresford, Balfour and Cawdor.

¹⁸ Freeman, *Great Edwardian Naval Feud*, 138. Fisher told Arnold White that Balfour also believed Beresford was faking his illness "to upset the Board of Admiralty." Fisher to White, 6 Jan 1908, CCA FISR, 15/2/1/3.

ships. This was certainly less dramatic than the previous impasse between the two. But soon after the fleet's return to port, an anonymous article appeared in *The Times* concerning the "Strange Occurrence in the Channel Fleet." It praised Scott for saving two ships from Beresford's dangerous order, and was followed the next day by a second article that claimed Beresford had "set a deplorable example of indiscipline and insubordination to the Fleet" and "must be confronted with the historic alternative *se soumettre ou se démettre*."¹⁹ This French phrase, calling for Beresford to 'submit or resign,' was a favorite of Fisher's.²⁰ Beresford, who had blamed Fisher's influence in his previous feud with Scott when there was no evidence, reacted angrily. He wrote to Ralph Blumenfeld, editor of the *Daily Express*, that it was known in London that Fisher had met with "Thursfield of the TIMES" the day before the article appeared; it had obviously been planted in a manner "worthy of the time of the assassins of the Doges of Venice."²¹

This second Scott-Beresford incident had a much longer life in the press than the first. Any issue originating in a paper as influential as *The Times* was fair game for public debate, and soon pro- and anti-Beresford letters and editorials appeared in various periodicals. Each side accused the other of manipulating the press. *John Bull*, again of its own accord, pilloried Beresford for "the multiplication of cliques, naval camarillas,

¹⁹ *The Times*, 7 Jul and 8 Jul 1908, quoted in Freeman, *Great Edwardian Naval Feud*, 159-161.

²⁰ Padfield, *Great Naval Race*, 196.

²¹ Beresford to Blumenfeld, 29 Jul 1908, quoted in Freeman, *Great Edwardian Naval Feud*, 163.

cabals, disputes, insults, fights, and every variety of bad blood” in a Navy “hopelessly divided against itself,” which the periodical blamed on Beresford’s “press bureau.” The author ended by claiming that in a previous era Beresford might have been shot.²² More reputable papers also came out against Beresford, including the *Observer*, for which Fisher halfheartedly rebuked its editor J. L. Garvin: “You’ve ‘struck oil’ for the ‘Observer’ but you’ve brought a hornet’s nest [*i.e.* accusations of influencing Garvin] to my door! *Never mind. I Forgive you!*”²³

Beresford’s supporters were also taking to the newspapers. The *Globe* called *The Times* “guilty of a wretched piece of sensation-mongering.”²⁴ Harold Fraser Wyatt, a navalist whose involvement in the Imperial Maritime League will be discussed later, wrote to the *Morning Post* demanding an immediate investigation into the Admiralty for allowing such “Asiatic” attacks, another pointed reference to Fisher.²⁵ He blamed Fisher directly for the leak of Scott’s signal, calling the First Sea Lord “the autocrat of the Admiralty, and of the Admiralty press bureau;” Fisher and Scott were both accused of being “mortal foes of Lord Charles Beresford.”²⁶

²² “Prisoners at the Bar,” *John Bull*, 1 Aug 1908, CCA FISR, 11/14; there is no evidence that Fisher ever contacted Bottomley, though he like the article enough to preserve it in his files.

²³ Fisher to Garvin, 5 Jul 1908, quoted in Alfred Gollin, *The Observer and J.L. Garvin, 1908-1914: A Study in a Great Editorship* (London: Oxford University Press, 1960), 59; emphasis in original.

²⁴ *The Globe*, 31 Jul 1908, quoted in Geoffrey Penn, *Infighting Admirals: Fisher’s Feud with Beresford and the Reactionaries* (Barnsley, UK: Leo Cooper, 2000). 197.

²⁵ Wyatt to the *Morning Post*, 9 Jul 1908, quoted in Penn, *Infighting Admirals*, 195.

²⁶ Wyatt to an unknown recipient, 8 Jul 1908, British Library, London, Imperial Maritime League pamphlets (hereafter BL IML), 08805.

For his part Fisher denied knowing anything of the incident. He wrote to both the First Lord and the Board of Admiralty repudiating any “knowledge of [the article] whatever till I saw it in *The Times*, any contact with Thursfield,²⁷ and any personal contact with either Scott or Scott’s wife²⁸ – although Scott later said in a speech that Fisher had encouraged him “to twist Charlie B.’s tail.”²⁹ Fisher’s explanation mollified the Board, and he was never under any suspicion of collusion. Privately, he fumed to Garvin: “Beresford says he hopes to prove I sent the signal incident to the ‘Times’ [...] also he hopes to prove I dictated the ‘Times’ leading article!!! I think he’ll at last hang himself!”³⁰

The biggest loser in the Scott-Beresford feud was Scott, who by the end of both incidents found himself little more than a proxy for the growing conflict between two men very much above his pay grade. Scott attempted to defend himself against the Syndicate’s accusations of disloyalty, but when he came to the First Lord for help he was merely told that it was “dangerous to get mixed up with the Press, Admiral”³¹ – a tacit admission that the First Lord believed at least part of Beresford’s claims that Scott and Fisher had leaked the signals. Scott’s career would not recover; he was immediately

²⁷ Fisher to McKenna, 28 Jul 1908, quoted in Marder, *Fear God and Dread Nought II*, 184.

²⁸ Fisher to “N” 29 Jul 1908, KEW ADM, 116/3108.

²⁹ Bennett, *Charlie B.*, 290.

³⁰ Gollin, *The Observer and J.L. Garvin*, 60.

³¹ McKenna to Scott, quoted in Penn, *Infighting Admirals*, 196.

detached from the Channel Fleet to lead a goodwill cruise to South Africa and was not offered another command after his tenure with the Channel Fleet ended in early 1909.³² He could not attempt a vindication until after his retirement, although he would eventually pen a piece for the *British Review* summarizing his thoughts on the matter: “Calumny is rather a strong expression for Lord Charles Beresford to use against the Press, simply because they adversely criticised him; it was only natural that they should fall on him with a heavy hand when they discovered how he had misled them.”³³ As to whether Scott and Fisher had conspired to plant anti-Beresford articles in *The Times*, the evidence remains strong, though only circumstantial. Fisher would have had access to Scott’s official communiques, including reports of signals, and he was certainly a frequent correspondent of Thursfield’s – but *The Times*’ use of Fisher’s distinctive phraseology merely indicates that Thursfield and Fisher had been in contact, not that Fisher had *instructed* Thursfield to write the article. The end result was plausible deniability for Fisher and a ruined career for Scott, who joined a growing list of officers whose reluctance to choose sides was proving detrimental to their prospects as the Navy grew ever more polarized.

For Fisher the two clashes between Scott and Beresford were little more than a sideshow, although Beresford’s complaints of an ‘Admiralty press bureau’ would

³² Andrew Lambert, “Scott, Sir Percy Moreton, first baronet (1853–1924),” *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, 2004; online edn, Jan 2008 [http://www.oxforddnb.com.ezproxy.library.tamu.edu/view/article/35993], accessed 14 Sept 2015.

³³ Scott in the *British Review*, n.d., CCA FISR, 11/15; the article is not dated but discusses Beresford’s book *The Betrayal*, which was published in 1912.

resurface in the future. Fisher was concerned mainly with continuing his reforms and maintaining his relationship with the press. His latest reform was the battlecruiser, the first of which was HMS *Invincible*, launched in April 1907. The battlecruiser was a development of the revolutionary dreadnought class of battleship, intended to be even faster and carry even larger guns at the expense of nearly all armor.³⁴ The technological development of the battlecruiser is beyond the scope of this project, but from the standpoint of naval-journalistic relations it put Fisher back in the role of promoter. Julian Corbett's 1907 article "Recent Attacks on the Admiralty," discussed above, was one result of this collaboration and contained a justification of the battlecruiser policy as well as a defense of Fisher against those who were "crying out that the constitution of the Admiralty has been turned into a dictatorship."³⁵

Fisher's acceptance of this role as unofficial Admiralty publicist expanded during this period, as the First Sea Lord began to put journalists and editors he considered reliable in touch with each other. Sir James Knowles, the editor of *Nineteenth Century and After*, asked Fisher if Garvin would write him an anti-Syndicate article. That Knowles came to Fisher rather than the other way around is telling, and Fisher

³⁴ Ronald Bassett, *Battle Cruisers: A History, 1908-1948* (London: Macmillan, 1981), 14; William Jameson, *The Fleet that Jack Built: Nine Men who Made a Modern Navy* (London: Rupert Hart-Davis, 1962), 114. The current historiographical debate on what role the battlecruiser was intended to fill is a contentious one; the most recent overview can be found in Matther S. Seligmann, Frank Nägler, and Michael Epkenhans, eds., *The Naval Route to the Abyss: The Anglo – German Naval Race 1895 – 1914* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2015), xxii-xxxv.

³⁵ Julian Corbett, "Recent Attacks on the Admiralty," *The Nineteenth Century and After* 61 (January 1907): 199.

encouraged Garvin to take up the offer: “don’t imagine I wish to influence you but of course I agree with Knowles that 3 pages from you would sink the Adullamites with red-hot shot and no doubt of course dear old Knowles want [sic.] to magnify his Magazine with your name.”³⁶ When Garvin agreed, Fisher rushed to Knowles’ home and turned the elderly editor out of his hammock to present him with the good news, later apologizing to Garvin for his forwardness: “of course I don’t understand Journalistic Etiquette.”³⁷ Such blatant communication did not go unnoticed. The veteran navalist H. O. Arnold-Forster, by this time retired from the position of Secretary of State for War, complained to Fisher’s long-time supporter Arthur Balfour that “Sir John has put himself entirely in the wrong by his methods, his newspaper log-rolling, his ‘confidential’ documents communicated under the seal of secrecy to the Town Crier!”³⁸ He raised the issue with Fisher, whose only rejoinder was that he found himself “absolutely compelled to use the press so as to get public opinion with him to carry through such far-reaching reforms.”³⁹

Through all the pro- and anti-Admiralty commotion Fisher remained certain that his ‘far-reaching reforms’ were both improving the navy and saving the nation a great

³⁶ Fisher to Garvin, 24 Nov 1907, Harry Ransom Center, University of Texas at Austin: James Louis Garvin Papers, recipient collection (hereafter HRC JLG R), Fisher 2. The Adullamites, both a Biblical and Victorian-era political reference to those who opposed reform, was one of Fisher’s terms for members of the Syndicate of Discontent.

³⁷ Fisher to Garvin, 28 Nov 1907, HRC JLG R, Fisher 2.

³⁸ Arnold-Forster to Balfour, 28 Nov 1907, quoted in Morris, *Scaremongers*, 129.

³⁹ Arnold-Forster diary, 5 Dec 1907, quoted in *Ibid*.

deal of money, which had been a major factor in his initial appointment as First Sea Lord: the same year the *Invincible* was launched he wrote that “lavish naval expenditure, like human high-living, leads to the development of latent parasitical bacilli which prey on and diminish the vitality of the belligerent force.”⁴⁰ He wanted the navalist press to focus on increasing efficiency, not tales of hidden enemy fleets and unprepared dreadnought crews. Yet the attitude of many of Fisher’s governmental and journalistic supporters was shifting on the financial aspects of his reforms. Saving money was taking on negative political connotations, particularly in an age of naval scares and continued pushes by the Conservative Party for increased naval budgets.

Fisher annoyed his budgetary critics with one of his few public speeches, given at the London Guildhall in late 1907. He ended his short remarks on naval improvements by calling for “my countrymen” to “sleep quiet in your beds [...], and do not be disturbed by these bogies – invasion and otherwise – which are being periodically resuscitated by all sorts of leagues.”⁴¹ The Syndicate of Discontent was predictably unimpressed by the speech; Harold Frazer Wyatt wrote to the *Standard* that “all those who love their country and know her peril are now entitled to make Sir John Fisher the mark for public scorn.”⁴² Even Fisher’s closest supporters were unsettled by the

⁴⁰ Fisher to an unknown recipient, n.d. [1907], quoted in Marder, *Fear God and Dread Nought II*, II 123-124.

⁴¹ Fisher at the London Guildhall, 9 Nov 1907, quoted in Ruddock F. Mackay, *Fisher of Kilverstone* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1973), 385.

⁴² The *Standard*, 12 Nov 1907, quoted in Harold Frazer Wyatt and L. Graham Horton-Smith, *The Passing of the Great Fleet* (London: Sampson Low, Marston & Co., Ltd., 1909), 259.

admiral's apparent blindness to naval threats. Arnold White wrote to Fisher that his speech "makes me shudder. It is not that it was flippant or that it was untrue, but, speaking for the average d—d fool in the street, I must say that you seemed wholly to misunderstand what it is that your countrymen want from the Head of their Navy."⁴³ Fisher bemusedly replied that he was "extremely sorry I've disappointed you because I do know all you have done for me & all you have sacrificed but what is it I've done wrong?"⁴⁴

The First Sea Lord was also facing financial pressure from the Committee of Imperial Defence, which found itself increasingly concerned with demands for increased military funding in general. In 1907 the CID established a subcommittee to examine the evidence behind the increasing press outcry over a supposed planned German invasion. Fisher blamed anti-Admiralty journalists for the latest scare, particularly Charles à Court Repington of *The Times*. Fisher asked his Committee colleague Sir George Clarke to "fire a broadside at Repington,"⁴⁵ but Clarke demurred: "I fear I can't fight again just now [...] R.'s influence with the 'Times' is much too great."⁴⁶ Fisher sent copies of his correspondence with Clarke to another member of the Committee, Lord Esher. One of

⁴³ White to Fisher, 13 Nov 1907, CCA FISR, 15/2/1/3.

⁴⁴ Fisher to White, 14 Nov 1907, CCA FISR, 15/2/1/3; emphasis in original.

⁴⁵ Fisher to Clarke, 12 Sep 1907, KEW ADM, 116/3108.

⁴⁶ Clarke to Fisher, 14 Sep 1907, KEW ADM, 116/3108; Clarke did lament that he was no longer with the paper, as "for some years I kept the 'Times' straight on these questions."

the only men willing to rebuke the admiral directly, Esher wrote in return that Fisher was missing an opportunity by attempting to stamp out the latest invasion scare:

You may think your time wasted in discussing what to you is the obvious with [...] Repingtons. But you are wrong. It is the discussions which keep alive popular fears and popular interest upon which rest the Navy Estimates. A Nation that believes itself secure, all history teaches, is doomed. Anxiety, not a sense of security, lies at the root of readiness for war. [...] An Invasion Scare is the mill of God which grinds you out a Navy of Dreadnoughts, and keeps the British people warlike in spirit. So do not be scornful, and sit not with Pharisees! Your functions are not only to believe that you possess a Navy strong enough to defeat the Germans at all points, but to justify the belief that is in you, whenever and wherever required! Tiresome perhaps but part of your day's work. So don't be querulous!⁴⁷

A hurt Fisher replied that it was difficult to harness naval scares for his own ends with journalists such as "Mr. Leo Maxse gibbet[ing] Sir John Fisher every month in the National Review [sic.] as a traitor to his country and a panderer to Germany & who 'ought to be hung at his own yard arm'!"⁴⁸ This prompted a second verbal lecture from Esher, who pointed out a serious flaw with Fisher's style of directed navalism:

You very naturally believe that Sir John Fisher can rule the Navy and secure this country against invasion, without assistance from outside the walls of the Admiralty. But are you so confident about Sir John Fisher's successors? i.e. Lord Charles Beresford and C. Bellairs? Invasion may be a bogey. Granted. But it is a most useful one, and without it, Sir John Fisher (Captain Fisher as he then was) would never have got the Truth about the Navy into the heads of his countrymen. [...] Was it the Board of Admiralty, or the [*Pall Mall Gazette*] that got Mr. Gladstone's Cabinet to increase the Navy? Your pitfall is that you want to carry your one man rule from War into Peace, and all history shows the fatal track along which One Man has walked to disaster. Over and over again I have said to you that Sir John Fisher requires the support of about half a dozen men – and no more

⁴⁷ Esher to Fisher, 1 Oct 1907, Churchill Archives Centre, Churchill College, Cambridge, Viscount Esher (Reginald Brett) Papers (hereafter CCA ESHR), 10/42; emphasis in original.

⁴⁸ Fisher to Esher, 7 Oct 1907, CCA ESHR, 10/42.

– but that these are indispensable. Newspapers, politicians, mobs, all these are useful enough. But the support of the half dozen men or so – who count – is vital.⁴⁹

Esher's missive, besides demonstrating that Fisher's role in the "Truth about the Navy" campaign was no longer a secret, raised salient points. Fisher, whose initial navalist agitations and journalistic connections had been undertaken with a cadre of like-minded officers in the 1880s, was by his tenure as First Sea Lord in an opposite role as a committed defender of Admiralty policy. The more he dug his feet in on preserving his reforms, the more his opponents within the Royal Navy clamored for their removal – and they would inevitably be in power at some point. Esher's emphasis on finding a small group of those 'who counted' to counteract his opponents implicitly meant that Fisher would have to work with these allies (Esher certainly counted himself among them), which would mean co-opting naval scares and Committee defense debates for his own ends. Fisher refused to do so, to his continued detriment. By the time the CID subcommittee on the invasion threat wrapped up in 1908, those present at the meetings noticed that "J.F. was getting more and more outrageous and harder to control," and "all the ministers laughed" at the admiral behind his back.⁵⁰ His increasing isolation among his professional peers would remain an issue. But in late 1907 and early 1908 Fisher was dealing concurrently with two other major developments – a newly-created and

⁴⁹ Esher to Fisher, 15 Oct 1907, CCA ESHR, 10/42; emphasis in original.

⁵⁰ Julian Corbett's diary, 29 May and 19 Jun 1908, relating conversations with Director of Naval Intelligence Sir Edmond Slade, quoted in Donald M. Schurman, *Julian S. Corbett, 1854 – 1922: Historian of British Maritime Policy from Drake to Jellicoe* (London: Royal Historical Society, 1981), 97.

avowedly partisan anti-Fisher naval pressure group and another change in both the national and Admiralty political landscape – that would soon occupy much of his time.

As discussed in an earlier chapter, the Navy League had pulled back from direct involvement in the political sphere after its botched involvement with Beresford's parliamentary campaign in 1902. The League was still a national force in terms of its membership, with 20,000 members in 1908.⁵¹ However, the League had obtained many of these members through small-scale local activities – public lectures on naval history, trips to local dockyards, sea training offered to children and the like.⁵² Despite the League's healthy membership, many of its more involved associates were becoming uneasy about their organization's future by the Fisher era. They were concerned – perhaps myopically, as the League did a great deal of work with the young and could not expect overnight results – that the general public was as apathetic as ever about the importance of popular navalism to keeping the Royal Navy adequately funded.

As early as 1904 the League was soliciting advice as to its future direction. That year saw the publication of a pamphlet entitled *Our Silent Navy: Is It Forgotten?* that asked well-known navalists their thoughts on how to foster “amongst the General Public

⁵¹ Frans Coetzee, *For Party or Country: Nationalism and the Dilemmas of Popular Conservatism in Edwardian England* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), 138.

⁵² Gerald Jordan, “Admiral Nelson and the Concept of Patriotism: The Trafalgar Centenary, 1905, in *Naval History: The Seventh Symposium of the U.S. Naval Academy*, general editor William Cogar (Wilmington, DE: Scholarly Resources Inc., 1988), 148; Paul Kennedy, *The Rise of the Anglo-German Antagonism 1860-1914* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1980), 375.

a real interest and sympathy towards the Navy.”⁵³ Some respondents contended that the League’s current policy of focusing on public outreach did not go far enough. Naval correspondent Archibald Hurd believed the Navy League “has done a splendid work, but its operations have hitherto been on a very small scale, and the mass of ignorance has not been very appreciably lessened.” Although “the work of the Navy League in arranging lectures and prize essays at the public schools is admirable,” it did not reach “the lower middle and lower classes, and it is these sections of the community who should be reached. How this is to be done I fear I cannot suggest....”⁵⁴

Many of the navalists featured in *Our Silent Navy* – particularly those who were journalists themselves – saw continued use of the press as one way for the League to attract attention. The editor of *United Service Magazine* wrote that “it seems to me that the Press fails lamentably in its patriotic duty to the United Services. Knowing the apathy of the public, the Press devotes itself rather to meeting the demand for so-called ‘news,’ than to attempting to cultivate in its readers an intelligent interest in” policy matters.⁵⁵ A correspondent for *The People* found it “astonishing how few newspaper editors and proprietors are patriotic enough to yield up a column, or even half a column, of their space to either naval news or popular comment on naval matters.” He preferred a push to place naval stories in as many periodicals as possible: “the more newspapers

⁵³ *Our Silent Navy: Is it Forgotten?* (London: The Westminster Press [Gerrards, Ltd.], 1904), Front matter.

⁵⁴ *Our Silent Navy*, 10-11.

⁵⁵ Lt.-Col. Alsager Pollock, *Our Silent Navy*, 36-37; Pollock optimistically opined the public would prefer Clowes’ *Naval History* and the works of Mahan to ‘frivolous’ popular works.

there are to open their columns to such contributors the more general will be the naval knowledge diffused, and the more will be the sympathy and interest created in naval matters.”⁵⁶ Even the Marquess of Graham, who commanded a division of the navy’s volunteer reserve force, believed “it only remains with the Press and the pen-men to keep the people posted up with material for intelligent study.”⁵⁷

The lack of press support was not due entirely to League indifference. In 1906 a proposed meeting between representatives from the periodical press and the staff of the *Navy League Journal* on how best to promote the navy was cancelled after only the *Standard* and Carlyon Bellairs agreed to appear. More naval journalists were invited, but according to League documents many, including James Thursfield, Julian Corbett, and Archibald Hurd, “begg[ed] us not to go too far” with any naval agitations. League representatives then “had an hour with Fisher at Admiralty [...] & J.F. was able to convince our Chairman that there is at present no need” for further public action in support of the RN.⁵⁸ Thus Fisher’s Admiralty was attempting to clamp down on unsanctioned navalist action, although the general membership of the League would have been unaware of these meetings. Other branches of the British government were

⁵⁶ “The Man Behind the Gun,” *Our Silent Navy*, 39-40.

⁵⁷ *Our Silent Navy*, 42; the Marquess, later the Duke of Montrose, had been a major influence in the founding of the volunteer reserve.

⁵⁸ Henry T.C. Knox to L.G.H. Horton-Smith, 27 Nov 1906, Caird Library, National Maritime Museum, Greenwich, UK, Lionel Graham Horton-Smith Papers (hereafter NMM HSM), 8, Volume of pamphlets and/or newspaper cuttings: Great split of the O.N.L. (Old Navy League), 1906-7 and the rise of the I.M.L.(Imperial Maritime League), 1906-7. Emphasis in original.

equally unhelpful. By 1908 the Metropolitan Police would not even allow League musicians to commemorate the death of Nelson in Trafalgar Square, writing in an internal memorandum that “everyone can reverence the memory of Nelson and Trafalgar without the assistance of a brass band.”⁵⁹

It was true that the League dissuaded its more enthusiastic members from organizing their own navalist activities. When a small group proposed sending letters to chambers of commerce and mayors offering to bring in speakers on naval topics, the League voted their plan down. The rather dejected minutes of the Executive Committee Meeting where the plan was vetoed record that “our formal opinion carries next to no weight. It will carry none whatever if Mr. Horton-Smith and Mr. Wyatt have their way and keep us in a chronic state of puerile agitation.”⁶⁰ This was the internal dilemma facing the League after 1902, and it only became more pressing during the Fisher era at the Admiralty. The League was certainly effectively working towards one major aspect of its constitution: its supporters were spreading navalist ideas “by lectures, by the dissemination of literature, by meetings, and by private propaganda.”⁶¹ But what about its other constitutionally-defined objective, “to urge these matters on public men, and in

⁵⁹ Metropolitan Police memorandum, 1 Aug 1908, National Archives, Kew, Metropolitan Police: Office of the Commissioner: Correspondence and Papers (hereafter KEW MEPO), 2/1296.

⁶⁰ Minutes of Executive Committee Meeting, 6 May 1907; Sir F. Pollock, NMM HSM, 8.

⁶¹ “The Objects of the Navy League” (1898), NMM HSM, 1, The Old Navy League and its failures, 1895-1912.

particular upon candidates for Parliament?”⁶² By 1907 many influential League members contended that “though it is of high importance to train the children of Britain in patriotism and in the principles of sea-power, that work is entirely subsidiary to the chief purpose of the League, which is (as expressly in its Constitution declared) to influence National Policy.” That policy “is not *fulfilled* by lantern lectures to school-children.”⁶³

A related impasse for the League was how to approach political agitation after the Liberal victory of 1906. The League was avowedly non-partisan, and had rededicated itself to this philosophy after 1902. This was perfectly acceptable to some of its branches: the Liverpool office believed that the support of both Liberals and Conservatives was necessary for any effective “patriotic, charitable and educational work.”⁶⁴ And it must be remarked upon that the League’s political supporters were not all Conservative. In 1908 114 sitting MPs were League members, and 36 of these were Liberals.⁶⁵ The League even praised the Liberal foreign secretary Sir Edward Grey at an

⁶² Arnold White, “The Original Constitution,” from “The Navy League and the Public” (1914), Caird Library, National Maritime Museum, Greenwich, UK, Arnold White Papers (hereafter NMM WHI), 142.

⁶³ Imperial Maritime League handbill, 22 Jun 1907, NMM HSM, 8; emphasis in original. Paradoxically, as school-children counted as members for official enrollment figures they strongly bolstered the League’s numbers and thus its perceived power. The League had 20,000 members in 1908 but only 2700 *full voting* members in 1907. Anne Summers, “The Character of Edwardian Nationalism: Three Popular Leagues,” in *Nationalist and Racialist Movements in Britain and Germany Before 1914*, edited by Paul Kennedy and Anthony Nicholls (London: Macmillan Press Ltd, 1981), 69.

⁶⁴ Summers, “Character of Edwardian Nationalism,” 79-80; the nascent Labour party, however, had no place in the League’s ideology.

⁶⁵ Matthew Johnson, “The Liberal Party and the Navy League in Britain before the Great War,” *Twentieth Century British History* (2010): 144.

annual meeting, pronouncing him “a worthy guardian of the rights and honour of the country.”⁶⁶ The closest it came to direct criticism was a threat that if the Admiralty reduced the number of battleships in commission the League would be forced to protest a policy “likely to prove disastrous to the service and the country” – but even then “in the absence of any official confirmation of this rumoured new departure, the Navy League withholds comment.”⁶⁷

Yet as both the Liberal government and the Fisher Admiralty continued in office, partisanship became a larger issue. Many members cynically felt that neither party could be trusted to adequately fund the navy. Leo Maxse, no friend to the Liberal Party or Fisher, nevertheless opined at the League’s 1907 annual meeting that “either front bench, when in power, whatever may be their vigorous protests in Opposition, always try to sneak a battleship or to steal a pound from the Navy whenever they think the public is not looking.”⁶⁸ However, a vocal subset of the League was increasingly coming to believe that any official support of a Liberal government was by definition a betrayal of the navy – and that the League could not remain nonpartisan and continue in good conscience to exist. As historian Anne Summers writes, Conservative members of

⁶⁶ Matthew Johnson, *Militarism and the British Left, 1902-1914* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 71. Matthew Johnson has written a great deal on navalism as a form of militarism that was acceptable to the British Liberal party; while the current author does not entirely agree with his conclusions, Johnson’s new perspective is certainly worth examining.

⁶⁷ Navy League open letter to the press, 19 Oct 1906, quoted in Wyatt & Horton-Smith, *Passing of the Great Fleet*, 12.

⁶⁸ *Navy League Annual*, Aug 1907, quoted in Coetzee, *For Party or Country*, 83.

the League began to contend that “tacit support for the Liberal naval programme was in itself a party political act.”⁶⁹ F. T. Jane spoke for these emerging hardliners when he declared that “every man, whatever he may call himself [...] who cuts down the Navy is to be regarded as a public enemy, and should be treated as such.”⁷⁰

Those who asserted that the League had to re-enter the political arena did have press support, notably from League member Leo Maxse and his *National Review* as well as the *Standard*. But using these connections could be difficult as both publications were Conservative, which laid “open every impartial critic of the naval policy of the Government to the accusation of being inspired by partisan motives.”⁷¹ This was not a tightrope that could be walked effectively for long; there were certainly no Liberal outlets that felt the Navy was underfunded, and if the Conservative press was the League’s only option to increase its public influence, then so be it. By late 1906 this more politicized splinter group, though still small, was beginning to coalesce around the activist navalists Harold Frazer Wyatt and L. Graham Horton Horton-Smith.

The League’s original founders had not been politicians, and both Wyatt and Horton-Smith fit that mold; they were lawyers who had been heavily involved with League business almost from its beginning, and sat on its executive committee. But they had been disillusioned by the League’s hands-off approach to politics since 1906, when

⁶⁹ Summers, “Character of Edwardian Nationalism,” 78-79; A.J.A. Morris makes much the same point in his *Scaremongers*, 418-419.

⁷⁰ Summers, “Character of Edwardian Nationalism,” 79.

⁷¹ *Standard*, 7 Dec 1906, quoted in Wyatt & Horton-Smith, *Passing of the Great Fleet*, 38.

Wyatt wrote to the *Standard* calling for the Board of Admiralty to resign in protest at naval budget cuts and despairing that “never was there a time when there was greater need for the arousing of public sentiment in regard to the Navy than the present.”⁷²

In May 1907 the two men announced their resignations from the League’s leadership as a protest “against the apathy of the Executive Committee” and to rally support for an amendment to the League’s constitution they had put up for a vote at that month’s annual general meeting.⁷³ The Wyatt and Horton-Smith amendment - which was also heavily backed by League members and navalist journalists Leo Maxse and H. W. Wilson – was essentially a laundry list of increased funding demands for the Royal Navy, capped off with a call “that the Navy League throughout the United Kingdom should do its utmost by every kind of legitimate agitation to rouse British citizens to a sense of the danger involved in these economies.”⁷⁴ When Wyatt took to the pages of the *Standard* to explain his proposed amendment further, it became clear that his goal was also to move the League towards open political agitation. Despite the recent reductions in naval expenditure, he wrote, “no endeavour has been made by the League as a whole to call public meetings to discuss this great and vital question. This inertness

⁷² Wyatt to the *Standard*, 23 Nov and 29 Nov 1906, quoted in Wyatt & Horton-Smith, *Passing of the Great Fleet*, 27-29; this work, published in 1909, is a collection of Wyatt and Horton-Smith’s speeches and newspaper articles involving the creation of the Imperial Maritime League and the following discussion is heavily based on this valuable compilation.

⁷³ Wyatt and Horton-Smith’s joint resignation, 13 May 1907, quoted in Wyatt & Horton-Smith, *Passing of the Great Fleet*, 52-53.

⁷⁴ Proposed Navy League Amendment, 15 May 1907, quoted in Wyatt & Horton-Smith, *Passing of the Great Fleet*, 50, 61-62.

on the part of the League becomes the more strange when we remember its past. In the days when a Unionist Government was in power, the League never shrank from public criticism and public agitation.” But since 1906 “the League’s failure boldly to resist measures by a Liberal Government [...] contrasts ill with its readiness to oppose the acts of Unionist Administrations in former days. This contrast must inevitably bring upon the League in an acute shape the very reproach which it has previously striven most carefully to avoid, namely, that of being influenced by ‘party.’”⁷⁵

Wyatt and Horton-Smith’s amendment proved contentious. Although H. W. Wilson dropped his support of the plan – which Wyatt and Horton-Smith attributed to outside pressure from the rest of the executive committee⁷⁶ – the large role that both the *National Review* and the *Standard* played in supporting the amendment led to charges that the League was becoming a tool of the Conservative press.⁷⁷ Leo Maxse attempted to neutralize these accusations by sending an open letter to the League’s annual general meeting wherein he claimed “the main issue, of course, is [...] whether the Navy League is to remain what it used to be, a vigilant, independent, and critical association [...] or whether it shall become a semi-official echo of Whitehall, with the motto, ‘The

⁷⁵ Wyatt to the *Standard*, 13 May 1907, quoted in Wyatt & Horton-Smith, *Passing of the Great Fleet*, 55-56.

⁷⁶ Wyatt & Horton-Smith, *Passing of the Great Fleet*, 64.

⁷⁷ Seymour Trower in the *Standard*, 16 May 1907, quoted in Wyatt & Horton-Smith, *Passing of the Great Fleet*, 84.

Admiralty, right or wrong.”⁷⁸ But he was not widely believed, and at the general meeting both League president (and former Conservative MP himself) Robert Yerburgh and Arnold White, whose navalist credentials were impeccable, denounced the amendment, which was duly voted down.⁷⁹

This failure to politicize the League’s mission, however, produced a very important unintended consequence. Wyatt and Horton-Smith’s cadre of supporters had initially been careful to explain that, while certainly more politically-oriented than the League in general, they were against the *government* as a nebulous entity rather than against any *specific* Cabinet or Admiralty figures. This was the argument advanced by Maxse in his letter to the executive committee, and by the veteran navalist Fred Jane in a London speech: “It is not the business of the Navy League to say whether Admiral Fisher is good or bad. The general opinion in the Navy is that he has done very well with the money provided. The Navy League’s duty is to fight the economists and not to bother about Admiral Fisher.”⁸⁰

Following the defeat of Wyatt and Horton-Smith’s amendment, those in favor of more direct political action began to launch personal attacks against the Admiralty and against Fisher in particular – and here it must be emphasized that Wyatt and Horton-

⁷⁸ Maxse to Robert Yerburgh, 15 May 1907, quoted in Wyatt & Horton-Smith, *Passing of the Great Fleet*, 80-81.

⁷⁹ Wyatt & Horton-Smith, *Passing of the Great Fleet*, 80-81.

⁸⁰ Richard Brooks, *Fred T Jane: An Eccentric Visionary* (Alexandria, VA: Jane’s Information Group, 1997), 119.

Smith's press supporters were avowed members of the Syndicate of Discontent. A series of opinion columns and open letters appeared in newspapers hostile to the Admiralty. The *Observer* believed "the Navy League, the proper guardian of our interests, is lulled to sleep by the siren, Sir John Fisher, and economy seems a weightier argument than patriotism."⁸¹ A letter to the *Standard* specifically mentioned Arnold White's conduct at the League's general meeting, writing that his "defence of the Board of Admiralty, has, as appears inevitable with every defender of Sir John Fisher and his colleagues, strayed away from the paths of rectitude...."⁸² The *Morning Post* editorialized that "the Navy League at its recent annual meeting anathematised those of its members who expressed uneasiness and proclaimed its mission to be to stand between the Admiralty and its critics [...] the Navy League has become nothing but a soporific to the public doubts."⁸³

The most vehement critic of Fisher was Leo Maxse, whose veneer of nonpartisan navalism was shed almost immediately after the general meeting. Maxse's *National Review* blasted Fisher's Admiralty two months in a row. In a June 1907 article entitled "'Nobbling' the Navy League," Maxse referred to Fisher as "*deus ex machina* of the Admiralty and supreme boss of two Governments," who had "hypnotised a series of Parliamentary politicians belonging to both political parties" and "practically reduced

⁸¹ The *Observer*, 30 Jun 1907, quoted in Wyatt & Horton-Smith, *Passing of the Great Fleet*, 147-148.

⁸² "Thirty Years R.N." to the *Standard*, 24 May 1907, quoted in Wyatt & Horton-Smith, *Passing of the Great Fleet*, 99-100.

⁸³ The *Morning Post*, 29 Jun 1907, quoted in Wyatt & Horton-Smith, *Passing of the Great Fleet*, 146.

Parliamentary criticism to silence, save for the plucky persistence of Mr. Carlyon Bellairs [...] Now apparently the Navy League has succumbed to the charmer.”⁸⁴ Maxse denounced Fisher and praised his own journalistic allies to an even greater degree the following month in a revealing article:

At last there are signs that the [...] eyes of the purblind public, who have refused to see what they did not want to see, are being gradually opened to the danger of the present naval administration. Sir John Fisher, who has done good work in his time, for which he deserves and has received full credit, has grown altogether ‘too big for his boots.’ He has become dazzled and demoralised by social success, and has been so long on shore as to have forgotten of the sea. He has fawned on the great, and has ingratiated himself with the politicians of both parties by anticipating their craving for cheeseparing, while he bamboozles his journalistic dupes by a judicious mixture of swagger and flattery.⁸⁵

Alongside this press campaign, Wyatt and Horton-Smith were able to convince the League’s executive committee to call an extraordinary general meeting in July 1907. Its purpose, in the eyes of the two rebels, was to free themselves from what Wyatt called the committee’s unfair belief “that my Amendment was really aimed against the Admiralty and Sir John Fisher.” He used the second general meeting to deliver an impassioned speech declaring that it was the Liberal government which truly deserved the League’s condemnation: “I recognise behind Sir John Fisher and behind the Admiralty another force, and a potent force. It is the force of party spirit, the force of the

⁸⁴ Leo Maxse, “‘Nobbling’ the Navy League,” *National Review* (June 1907), quoted in Wyatt & Horton-Smith, *Passing of the Great Fleet*, 116-117.

⁸⁵ Leo Maxse, “What of the Navy?,” *National Review* (July 1907); quoted in Wyatt & Horton-Smith, *Passing of the Great Fleet*, 145.

whole Government, of a Government which has been returned to power not seriously believing in the possibility of war.”

Wyatt did not hide that his political views were more radical than the majority of the League. “The Navy League is generally, alas! erroneously, regarded as representing the extreme forward party in regard to naval policy of this country. I wish that were true. It is not.” Rather, by not speaking out against Admiralty reductions in expenditure, the League was “stifling public opinion. It is stifling those who might otherwise have succeeded in airing their views.” Wyatt then accused the League’s executive committee, by “declaring that its principal aims should be educational,” of having “thrown overboard the main aims of the League [...] I would therefore charge them [...] with the most tremendous error, with the most lamentable weakness, with utter failure to carry out the ends for which the League was founded as defined in its Constitution.”⁸⁶

Wyatt’s ardent speech was followed by another from Fred Jane upbraiding the League for its reluctance to engage in political attacks: “They do not want to step on anybody’s toes or hurt anybody’s feelings. But that is not the duty of the Navy League. Their duty is to hurt people’s feelings and to fight little Englanders in every possible way.” Jane then nearly incited a riot within the hall by comparing the League to the Boers of the previous decade.⁸⁷ The end result was the same for the supporters of Wyatt

⁸⁶ Quotes in the preceding two paragraphs are taken from Wyatt’s speech before the Navy League General Meeting, 19 Jul 1907, quoted in Wyatt & Horton-Smith, *Passing of the Great Fleet*, 191 – 196.

⁸⁷ Fred Jane before the Navy League General Meeting, 19 Jul 1907, quoted in Wyatt & Horton-Smith, *Passing of the Great Fleet*, 197.

and Horton-Smith: the League refused to modify its constitution, and would continue to stand apart from politics.

After being rebuffed for the third time in less than a year, Wyatt and Horton-Smith came to the conclusion that there was no longer a place for them in the League. Shortly after the second general meeting of 1907 the two officially split from the League and formed a competing navalist pressure group known as the Imperial Maritime League.⁸⁸ They did so, as they claimed in the sympathetic *Morning Post*, because “anti-militarism and anti-patriotism are at this present moment raging like the veritable breath of pestilence throughout Britain. They are putrefying the very springs of our national life. They are killing that love of country which is at the root of all noble self-sacrifice for country’s sake.”⁸⁹

The Imperial Maritime League was openly political from its founding. Its mission statement laid out the short- and long-term goals of the organization. In the long term, the IML strove to “set an example of courage before public men” by “call[ing] the spawn of ‘little-England,’ whether Radicals or Socialists, or a nauseous mixture of the two, by their proper names, and to hold them up to contempt.” Its short-term goal was

⁸⁸ Wyatt and Horton-Smith broke from the Navy League on 20 Jul 1907; the Imperial Maritime League (henceforth referred to as the IML) was officially founded on 27 January 1908. Wyatt & Horton-Smith, *Passing of the Great Fleet*, 215, 317. The IML was ostensibly more focused on the imperial context than the Navy League, which is beyond the scope of this project. For the latest research on imperial navalism see John C. Mitcham, “Of the Blood of Sea Peoples: Navalism and Greater Britain,” in *Maritime History and Identity: The Sea and Culture in the Modern World*, edited by Duncan Redford (London: I. B. Tauris, 2014).

⁸⁹ Wyatt and Horton-Smith to the *Morning Post*, 23 Jul 1907, quoted in Wyatt & Horton-Smith, *Passing of the Great Fleet*, 216.

more specific: to defeat “Sir John Fisher and the ‘little-England’ government of which he has made himself the tool.” The IML believed that “whatever changes, for good or ill, have been effected in the Navy during the period named [since 1904], are the product of two forces, and two forces only – (1) Finance; (2) Sir John Fisher.”⁹⁰

The nascent Imperial Maritime League quickly found allies among both other navalists dissatisfied with the League’s response to contemporary political issues and journalists more directly opposed to both the Liberal government and Fisher’s Admiralty. Fred Jane and Rudyard Kipling, both well-known public figures, defected from the Navy League to become early supporters of the IML.⁹¹ The IML’s greatest strength was its support in the periodical press. Besides Leo Maxse’s *National Review*, which had backed Wyatt and Horton-Smith from the beginning, the IML received favorable coverage from Spenser Wilkinson in the *Morning Post*, H. A. Gwynne and Leslie Cope-Cornford in the *Standard*, and Ralph Blumenfeld in the *Daily Express*.⁹²

Many of these journalists were merely continuing a campaign against the Admiralty begun much earlier under the guise of supporting the IML. The *Standard* printed a letter from an anonymous naval officer purporting to uncover “a system of espionage” that had “grown up in the British Navy [...] since the present First Sea Lord has been at the Admiralty. [...] I believe that the methods of Sir John Fisher are ruining

⁹⁰ Wyatt & Horton-Smith, *Passing of the Great Fleet*, xvi – xviii.

⁹¹ Coetzee, *For Party or Country*, 84.

⁹² Wyatt & Horton-Smith, *Passing of the Great Fleet*, 265-266; Coetzee, *For Party or Country*, 84.

the tone and moral of that corps.”⁹³ Maxse disdained Fisher’s “unspeakable contempt for ‘scaremongers,’” for the First Sea Lord “would hardly deny that the present British Navy, which *ex hypothesi* is *nulli secundus*, owes its existence exclusively to the efforts of ‘scaremongers.”⁹⁴ Wyatt and Horton-Smith themselves struck a hard blow at the Admiralty by accusing Fisher of the “indefensible practice of providing organs of the Press with Admiralty briefs, which are then published, not as mere emanations from authority, but as representing the unbiased thoughts of editors.” The two founders of the IML concluded that “this application to Britain of the method of the late Prince Bismarck, though it has been repeatedly denounced, has yet gone unpublished”⁹⁵ – and they made it their goal to find and publicize evidence of Fisher’s contact with journalists, which would come to haunt the First Sea Lord.

However, Wyatt and Horton-Smith struggled to find MPs and other political personages willing to back their cause. The Navy League’s dedication to nonpartisanship proved more attractive to Conservative MPs (the IML made no attempt to attract Liberal politicians) than a new rival organization that from its very formation called for an official inquiry into Fisher’s tenure as First Sea Lord⁹⁶ and declared its

⁹³ ‘Naval Officer’ to the *Standard*, 19 Oct 1907, quoted in Wyatt & Horton-Smith, *Passing of the Great Fleet*, 253; emphasis in original.

⁹⁴ Maxse to the *Standard*, 12 Nov 1907, quoted in Wyatt & Horton-Smith, *Passing of the Great Fleet*, 261; this was a more reasonable argument than many used by the IML, and it was the same argument – as seen previously – used by Esher.

⁹⁵ Wyatt and Horton-Smith to the *Standard*, 9 Nov 1907, quoted in Wyatt & Horton-Smith, *Passing of the Great Fleet*, 256.

⁹⁶ Morris, *Scaremongers*, 188.

purpose was “to use the Navy as a stick for the present Government’s back.”⁹⁷ Unionist MP and former secretary of state for war, H. O. Arnold-Forster, was sympathetic to the IML but asserted that the “incompetence of the leaders” of the Navy League was counterbalanced “by the violence and want of judgement shown” by Wyatt and Horton-Smith.⁹⁸ Even IML assurances that Conservative MPs who agreed to join would be “unburdened with any work” proved fruitless.⁹⁹

This is not to say that the IML had been lax in *attempting* to win over both political and naval figures. Wyatt and Horton-Smith dispatched a flurry of correspondence to those they believed could be enlisted in the fight against Fisher’s Admiralty. Most of it was returned brusquely, and many of those contacted by the IML brought the matter to Fisher’s attention. Julian Corbett let Fisher know that “these two weak-headed gentlemen pestered me with their application till at last I too was moved to reply [...] I trust they did not find there pleasant reading. They have no following of any account & are too hair-brained [sic.] even for Bellairs.”¹⁰⁰

Lord Redesdale dryly thanked the IML for its “invitation to join a League which considers itself to be capable of teaching the Board of Admiralty, with Sir John Fisher as

⁹⁷ A.J.A. Morris, *Radicalism Against War, 1906-1914: The Advocacy of Peace and Retrenchment* (Totowa, NJ: Rowman and Littlefield, 1972), 123.

⁹⁸ Arnold-Forster to Maxse, 27 Jul 1907, Chichester, UK, West Sussex Records Office, Leo Maxse Papers (hereafter CHI MAXSE), 457.

⁹⁹ The MP in question was W.V. Faber, whom the IML contacted on 8 Jan 1908, quoted in Frans Coetzee and Marilyn Coetzee, “Rethinking the Radical Right in Germany and Britain before 1914,” *Journal of Contemporary History* 21:4 (October 1986): 515-537.

¹⁰⁰ Corbett to Fisher, 31 Jan 1908, CCA FISR, 1/6.

their chief adviser, their business. Until further advised as to your superiority to that distinguished Officer I much prefer putting my trust in him.”¹⁰¹ Redesdale sent a copy of his reply to Fisher, who passed it along to editor of the *Observer* Gerard Fiennes. Fiennes reassured Fisher that the press remained on his side. Fisher’s “enemies, reckless of anything but their spite, do not hesitate to belaud certain malcontents in the Service while they vilify you.” In contrast, Fiennes and “your friends who write in the Press cannot adopt a similar course, because they are, in the main, people of sober judgement [...] But Hold-fast is the best doing in the end, and the triumphant vindication is perfectly sure.”¹⁰² J. L. Garvin was so aggravated by the IML’s anti-Fisher stance that he joined the Navy League and was appointed to its executive committee.¹⁰³

Yet the IML’s greatest error was inviting Lord Esher to join its campaign against the Admiralty. Esher was willing to criticize Fisher in private, but publicly he stood firmly behind the First Sea Lord. His reply to Wyatt and Horton-Smith as sent was actually milder than the first draft, which included the following: “What harm is there, gentlemen, and would it not be more straightforward, if the admission were boldly made, that the object of the ‘Maritime League’ is to upset Sir John Fisher [...] Then we know

¹⁰¹ Redesdale to the Imperial Maritime League, 5 Mar 1908, CCA FISR, 10/9. Redesdale was a Conservative peer whose father-in-law was the founder of *Vanity Fair*, which was likely why the IML contacted him. A copy of this letter can be found in CCA FISR, 1/6, with Fisher’s notation: “Some slanderers of mine not knowing how close a friend to me was Redesdale wrote to ask him to join a League then forming with the delightful object of ruining me.”

¹⁰² Fiennes to Fisher, 9 Mar 1908, CCA FISR, 3/2; in the same letter Fiennes referred to Fisher’s opponents in the press as “a set of useless gobemouches [flycatchers], largely Irishmen, who guzzle down all the stuff which the ‘Standard’ and its little gutter-sister [...] provide.” Emphasis in original.

¹⁰³ Navy League to Garvin, 14 Jul 1908 and 5 Nov 1908, HRC JLG R, Navy League.

exactly where we are.” But it was still severe, and concluded with a wholesale denunciation of the new Maritime League:

The Board of Admiralty may occasionally make mistakes, but that they have by word or act appeared to doubt the vital necessity for Naval supremacy, or that they would stoop to subordinate the Naval superiority of this country to any personal or political exigency does not require to be proved by a ‘public enquiry’. There is not a man in Germany from the Emperor downwards who would not welcome the fall of Sir John Fisher. And for this reason only, apart from all others, I must beg to decline your invitation to join the Council of the Maritime League.¹⁰⁴

Esher’s reply would have been scathing enough had the viscount merely sent it privately to Wyatt and Horton-Smith. But for reasons known only to himself – he certainly did not consult Fisher on the matter – Esher also sent his reply to *The Times*, which published it in February 1908.¹⁰⁵ The resultant commotion prompted various pro- and anti-Fisher missives to both Esher and the periodical press. The retired Admiral Sir John Hopkins congratulated Esher: “I don’t think the existence of the Imperial Maritime League will be of any duration, but it’s a good thing for men like yourself to open fire on it before it deludes others who don’t know. [...] The dead set made at Fisher is simply disgraceful.”¹⁰⁶ Admiral F. S. Inglefield was still serving afloat, and wrote directly to Fisher of his views on the Esher letter. “I am of opinion that should this mischievous campaign against yourself and the Admiralty continue, it will in time become serious and dangerously undermine the authority of the Admiralty [...] Agents of the

¹⁰⁴ Esher to Wyatt and Horton-Smith, 22 Jan 1908, HRC JLG R, Fisher 12.

¹⁰⁵ Hough, *Admiral of the Fleet*, 261.

¹⁰⁶ Hopkins to Esher, 7 Feb 1908. Churchill Archives Centre, Churchill College, Cambridge; John Arbuthnot Fisher Papers (FISR) 15/3/3/4.

‘Insubordinates’ will gather round them disciples from amongst the ‘Discontents!’” This was exactly what Fisher wanted to hear in his ongoing battle against the Syndicate of Discontent, particularly when Inglefield added that “the antagonistic attitude of Lord Charles Beresford may be partly due, possibly, to the fact that he is at heart more of a politician than a Naval Officer!”¹⁰⁷ – a mortal sin to an old admiral of the Victorian Royal Navy.

The IML did reply to Esher in an open letter sardonically thanking him for proving at least one of their points, that Fisher was solely responsible for all changes at the Admiralty since 1904 and was thus guilty of “a degree of autocratic authority exceeding anything hitherto suspected.”¹⁰⁸ However, the most unexpected voice to weigh in on the Esher letter was the most influential. For the Kaiser himself, angered at Esher’s assertion that there was ‘not a man in Germany from the Emperor downwards’ who would not welcome the fall of Fisher, wrote a personal letter – not to Esher, but to First Lord of the Admiralty Lord Tweedmouth – calling Esher’s letter “a piece of unmitigated balderdash.”¹⁰⁹ With this direct correspondence between the German Emperor and Fisher’s administrative superior the *press* controversy stirred up by the formation of the Imperial Maritime League suddenly became a *political* issue, where it joined a number of other political developments that were bedeviling Fisher.

¹⁰⁷ Inglefield to Fisher, 9 Mar 1908. FISR 1/6.

¹⁰⁸ Open letter from Wyatt and Horton-Smith to the press, 7 Feb 1908. Harry Ransom Center, University of Texas at Austin: James Louis Garvin Papers, recipient collection, Fisher 3.

¹⁰⁹ Hough, *Admiral of the Fleet*, 262.

Fisher's ability to enact major reforms while still keeping the annual naval estimates low had enabled him to remain in office during the transition from Conservative to Liberal rule, but by 1907 he was beginning to face pressure from both sides of the aisle. The dominance of the Liberal Party after the 1906 election meant there were many traditional anti-armament and pro-retrenchment Liberals in Parliament, chief among them President of the Board of Trade David Lloyd George and Chancellor of the Exchequer H. H. Asquith. This voting bloc was determined to reduce naval expenditure; in November 1907 more than 130 Liberal MPs petitioned the prime minister to cut military funding in general,¹¹⁰ and the following February a further 82 called for additional cuts to the naval budget.¹¹¹

At the same time Fisher was under attack from Conservatives, who – while they were certainly less vehement than their more radical associates in the Imperial Maritime League – believed that the Admiralty was violating the spirit if not the letter of the 1905 Cawdor Memorandum. As discussed in the previous chapter, this document committed the Admiralty to carrying out the full Fisher reform program. It also implicitly authorized the Admiralty to construct *up to* four new dreadnought battleships (including battlecruisers) per year. Under the Liberal government, the Admiralty had laid down

¹¹⁰ Roger Parkinson in his *Dreadnought: The Ship that Changed the World* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2015) states that 138 Liberals called for decreased military funding (137), while Paul Kennedy puts the number at 136 in his *Anglo-German Antagonism* (334).

¹¹¹ Kennedy, *Anglo-German Antagonism*, 334.

three in both 1906 and 1907 and were planning to lay down two in 1908.¹¹² Liberals argued the four ships per year were a theoretical maximum, while Conservatives believed the Cawdor Memorandum established a minimum benchmark for new construction. Fisher was able to thread this particular needle. He placated Liberals by pointing out that the naval estimates had gone down by over £5 million during his tenure in office,¹¹³ and Conservatives conceded that only two new battleships would be acceptable for 1908, as they would both be dreadnoughts.¹¹⁴

The fragile naval funding situation nearly caused an open revolt within both the Admiralty and the Cabinet during debates over the 1908 estimates. In late 1907, the initial Admiralty proposal had been for an increase of more than £2 million, which was unacceptable to Asquith in his role as chancellor of the exchequer. By early 1908 it had been trimmed to an additional £1 million,¹¹⁵ despite protests from a vocal subset of the Liberals who demanded a complete cessation to new dreadnought construction, although even this increase led to threats of resignation from the entire Board of Admiralty. But the deal had been struck with Campbell-Bannerman, and as the prime minister was

¹¹² Rhodri Williams, *Defending the Empire: The Conservative Party and British Defence Policy 1899 – 1915* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1991). 84-85.

¹¹³ Kenneth L. Moll, "Politics, Power, and Panic: Britain's 1909 Dreadnought 'Gap'," *Military Affairs* 29:3 (Autumn 1965): 135-136.

¹¹⁴ Williams, *Defending the Empire*, 84-85; Fisher also successfully argued that the very existence of dreadnoughts negated the need for the Cawdor Memorandum, as it would take years for other navies to construct their own.

¹¹⁵ Morris, *Radicalism Against War*, 125.

progressively incapacitated by a series of heart attacks it was removed from the table.¹¹⁶ Asquith made the majority of executive decisions from late 1907 onward, though Campbell-Bannerman did not officially retire until April 1908.

In early February 1908, Fisher was called to an urgent meeting with Liberal MP Lewis ‘Loulou’ Harcourt. Harcourt informed the First Sea Lord that his agreement with Campbell-Bannerman was no longer valid, and that the estimates for 1908 were to be reduced by £1.3 million. Fisher immediately protested: the estimates had already been approved, and only Campbell-Bannerman’s illness had prevented their being put to the required parliamentary vote. Harcourt flatly stated that if Fisher would not accept the revised estimates the entire Board of Admiralty would be allowed to resign. If the Board chose this drastic step, the new First Sea Lord would almost certainly be Lord Charles Beresford, who had already agreed to accept the position if it was offered. Fisher, observing that the Cabinet “seem to have settled it all, and [...] I can do no good here,” returned to the Admiralty. He was visited in his office by Lloyd George, who threatened him further with the possibility of a Beresford-run Admiralty and informed him that Beresford had promised to reduce the estimates to an even greater degree.¹¹⁷ But Fisher stood his ground, and eventually – without any further input from the Board of Admiralty – the Cabinet accepted £900,000 of the original £1 million increase.¹¹⁸

¹¹⁶ Parkinson, *Dreadnought*, 137-138.

¹¹⁷ The preceding account is compiled from Esher’s journal, 7 Feb 1908, Maurice V. Brett, ed., *Journals and Letters of Reginald, Viscount Esher*, 2 vols. (London: Ivor Nicholson & Watson, 1934), II 280 – 284.

¹¹⁸ Parkinson, *Dreadnought*, 138.

The 1908 estimates satisfied no one. Liberals had to comfort themselves with the mere two dreadnoughts and the idea that the estimates had not increased even further.¹¹⁹ The thoughts of many Conservatives on the matter can best be summed up by the *Daily Mail*, which believed “the time has come to remind the Admiralty and the Government that the nation gave no mandate to weaken its Navy for the sole purpose of providing funds for doles to its Socialists.”¹²⁰ The entire incident severely damaged Fisher’s relationship with the more radical elements of the Liberal Cabinet. He was in contact with his journalistic allies throughout the brief crisis, and although this was not a matter that could be discussed openly in the periodical press, Fisher made no secret of his displeasure. As he wrote to Garvin: “I believe Harcourt is lying to bounce me into surrender. If he is not lying than ineptitude beyond words in Cabinet Ministers thus bargaining with Beresford – but here every day I get conclusive evidence of his pursuing a path of Absalom’s cunning in feasting journalists & parliamentarians to make him King...”¹²¹

The private clash over the 1908 estimates took place nearly simultaneously with Esher’s public denunciation of the Imperial Maritime League. An Admiralty facing internal turmoil was not adequately prepared to deal with the additional external

¹¹⁹ Howard Weinroth, “Left-Wing Opposition to Naval Armaments in Britain before 1914,” *Journal of Contemporary History* 6:4 (1971): 106.

¹²⁰ Moll, “Politics, Power and Panic,” 135-136.

¹²¹ Fisher to Garvin, 7 Feb 1908 [dated 1909 in original], HRC JLG R, Fisher 3; Absalom was a son of the biblical King David who revolted against his father.

attention that arose from the Kaiser's letter to the First Lord, Lord Tweedmouth. The political climate was rapidly made worse when the First Lord chose to respond directly to the Kaiser in a second private letter. Officially, Tweedmouth only informed Foreign Secretary Grey, who in a lapse of judgement compounding Tweedmouth's, authorized the First Lord to reply to the Kaiser – and to include in his reply copies of the 1908 naval estimates, which had not yet been published. Unofficially, Tweedmouth was delighted to receive correspondence directly from the German emperor. He was not shy about showing the letter to interested parties, including journalists; Rowland Blennerhasset, correspondent for the *National Review*, wrote to Garvin: "I fear Tweedmouth has been talking about the letter all over London."¹²²

There was an unspoken agreement among the London press not to publish details of either the Kaiser's letter or Tweedmouth's reply. But one influential journalist, Charles à Court Repington of *The Times*, chose to bring the matter to the public's attention despite a strong effort by Esher to dissuade him.¹²³ Repington had his reasons. He was a dedicated supporter of the British Army in its constant battle for funding with the Admiralty and was involved with Lord Roberts' conscription movement, which Fisher had disparaged at Committee of Imperial Defence meetings.¹²⁴ Repington's

¹²² Blennerhasset to Garvin, 7 Mar 1908, quoted in Morris, *Scaremongers*, 409.

¹²³ The preceding two paragraphs on the Tweedmouth – Kaiser letter are compiled from Morris, *Scaremongers*, 141-142.

¹²⁴ Howard Moon, "The Invasion of the United Kingdom: Public Controversy and Official Planning 1888 – 1918" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of London, 1968), 367.

“calculated indiscretion” in publicizing the First Lord’s correspondence was intended to make Tweedmouth “regret his impertinence [...] and his description of our little party as a ‘ring of wild and self-convinced alarmists.’”¹²⁵ In any event the First Lord’s breach of protocol was a serious enough matter that he was quietly asked to retire, with the public explanation of a Cabinet shuffle under the new Asquith administration given to assuage any hurt feelings.¹²⁶ His loss was not mourned; Esher, who had begun the furor with his letter to the IML, felt it “was well worth all this bother (not very much of that) to have done anything however little for the Navy.”¹²⁷

Tweedmouth’s replacement as First Lord of the Admiralty was Reginald McKenna, who had served under Asquith at the Treasury and was thus expected to support naval retrenchment. Whatever McKenna’s initial thoughts on naval funding – like his predecessors he had no prior naval experience – after his first three-hour meeting with Fisher he was committed to maintaining the estimates at a healthy level. McKenna would become a valuable ally of Fisher, as the latter continued to prove adept at working with his political superiors. McKenna also adopted two major aspects of Fisher’s

¹²⁵ Repington to Earl Roberts, 7 Mar 1908, Morris, *Scaremongers*, 143, 410. Archival evidence indicates that if Repington had not been allowed to publish his article in *The Times* he would have published it in the *National Review*. Repington to Maxse, 12 Mar 1908, CHI MAXSE, 458.

¹²⁶ Hough, *Admiral of the Fleet*, 262. Tweedmouth would die the next year of a ‘cerebral complaint;’ many historians attribute his erratic behavior over the Kaiser letters to the onset of this medical issue.

¹²⁷ Esher to Fisher, 25 Mar 1908, in Brett, *Journals and Letters II*, 298.

personal administrative style: a rapid distrust of Beresford¹²⁸ and an appreciation for the value of the press. Soon after taking office he wrote to J. L. Garvin to reassure the editor “as regards my views on the Navy it is perfectly safe to say that I mean to be in every sense Minister for the Navy [and] to maintain the unconditional supremacy of the Navy.” However, the new First Lord added a warning: “while these are my views I should not like to be quoted as having expressed them, nor do I understand you to mean that you wish to write as one who has been in communication with me. Expressions of opinion by ministers for communication to the Press are against all precedent in this department.”¹²⁹

Fisher himself had not curtailed his journalistic correspondence during the recent political reshuffles. He was still on the lookout for new recruits to the Fishpond. When he read an article in the *Naval and Military Record* criticizing Syndicate member Gerard Noel, he contacted Archibald Hurd at the *Daily Telegraph* with a request: “I should love to know who the writer is so that I could give him ‘a leg up’ without his ever knowing it!”¹³⁰ But as previously evidenced by his meeting with James Knowles, Fisher was having to go further and further to effectively spread his message. He briefly considered

¹²⁸ Freeman, *Great Edwardian Naval Feud*, 149-150. This was prompted by Fisher, for example Fisher to McKenna, 16 May 1908: “You & I cannot have secrets from each other about the Navy [...] I received yesterday via a reliable source in the Channel Fleet that Beresford was about to cause ‘a great upheaval’ and force the resignation of the First Sea Lord....” Churchill Archives Centre, Churchill College, Cambridge, Reginald McKenna Papers (hereafter CCA MCKN), 3/4.

¹²⁹ McKenna to Garvin, 28 May 1908, HRC JLG R, McKenna.

¹³⁰ Fisher to Hurd, 20 Dec 1908, Churchill Archives Centre, Churchill College, Cambridge, Sir Archibald Hurd Papers (hereafter CCA HURD), 1/14.

anonymously contributing his own articles to the *Observer*, only to conclude “I should be found out as I can’t disguise.”¹³¹ Instead Fisher focused on circulating articles he found useful. He sent copies of the *Manchester Guardian* and the *Westminster Gazette* to Sir William May, C-in-C of the Home Fleet, and instructed May to forward them to Director of Naval Intelligence Sir Edmond Slade to aid in “refut[ing] the arguments” against naval spending in Parliament.¹³²

Fisher’s political allies did their best to aid his cause. When *The Times* was for sale in early 1908, London rumor tabbed founder of the *Daily Express* Arthur Pearson as the prospective buyer. Esher brought Pearson to Fisher’s office, where the First Sea Lord and the press magnate had a long meeting on naval policy.¹³³ Esher explained his reasoning for introducing the two in his diary: “It is important that *The Times*, under new management, should take the right line about naval affairs. Why should any patriot wish to upset Jackie? Only the old-fashioned fogey, the personal foe, or the political wrecker would want to destroy him.”¹³⁴

The First Sea Lord was also concerned with securing promotions for those he considered his closest allies. By 1908 he had built a strong working relationship with J. L. Garvin of the *Observer*; the latter’s children often visited the Admiralty, where Fisher

¹³¹ Gollin, *The Observer and J.L. Garvin*, 37.

¹³² Fisher to May, 28 Sep 1908, CCA ESHR, 10/42.

¹³³ Morris, *Scaremongers*, 188.

¹³⁴ Esher’s journal, 17 Jan 1908, in Brett, *Journals and Letters II*, 276.

sent them home with small gifts and confidential papers for Garvin.¹³⁵ After Arthur Pearson declined to purchase *The Times*, Fisher asked Garvin's permission to speak with Lord Northcliffe, the venerable newspaper's next potential owner, on the subject of hiring Garvin. Garvin reluctantly agreed, which was for the best as Fisher both already knew that Northcliffe had acquired the paper and had already been in contact with the latter, suggesting that Northcliffe go so far as to install Garvin as editor.¹³⁶ Although Northcliffe declined Fisher's advice, it demonstrated the lengths to which the First Sea Lord would go to support his journalistic associates.¹³⁷

These backroom maneuverings did not go unnoticed, particularly by the Syndicate of Discontent. Beresford's brief attempt to sue Fisher for libel over the *John Bull* article of January 1908 has been previously discussed, but one of Beresford's stated aims was to "subpoena the Editors of papers who have not been got hold of by the Admiralty and who I find are prepared to swear that they were shewn State Papers of most confidential and secret nature in order to bias them to write up the Admiralty and

¹³⁵ David Ayerst, *Garvin of the Observer* (London: Croom Helm, 1985), 81. Their meetings could also assume the qualities of a farce. Garvin told Northcliffe of an occasion where a suspicious Fisher "left his motor car in a distant land and rejoined it by going round three corners or probably so since he disappeared in the dark" after a meeting with the editor, quoted in Gollin, *The Observer and J.L. Garvin*, 54.

¹³⁶ Gollin, *The Observer and J.L. Garvin*, 163-164. Fisher's correspondence with Northcliffe on the subject (23 Jul 1908) can be found in the British Library, London (hereafter BL ADD MS), Lord Northcliffe Papers, 62159. Perhaps Northcliffe did not want to expose himself to charges of tampering; he had known for months that Fisher supplied Garvin with "magnificent secret stuff, chapter and verse." Garvin to Northcliffe, 2 Feb 1908, quoted in Stephen Koss, *The Rise and Fall of the Political Press in Britain*, 2 vols. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1981-4), II 107.

¹³⁷ It must also be noted that if Garvin had obtained the position, *The Times* – which still featured long-time member of the Fishpond James Thursfield as its senior naval correspondent – would have been an extremely powerful ally.

Admiralty methods.” He intended to bring to light both “the criminally wicked, treacherous, mean and cowardly action that has been taken with regard to several officers of the Service [i.e. himself] by the inspired Press” and “proof that official secrets have been given to the Press in order to make them support the Admiralty methods for the last two or three years.”¹³⁸ The admiral was discouraged from pursuing legal action by Earl Cawdor, who wrote privately to Balfour that while “Fisher is, I think, unwise in the way he sends about confidential documents [...] nothing can justify CB’s disloyalty.”¹³⁹

Rebuffed by his political compatriots, Beresford dropped the possibility of a lawsuit – though he portentously wrote to Cawdor of his “wish that I was free and that this was not a personal question” so he could “thoroughly swab the floor of the House of Commons with Fisher & Co.”¹⁴⁰ – and turned elsewhere for acolytes in his latest crusade. He was certainly sympathetic to the aims of the Imperial Maritime League, though exactly how closely he worked with the organization remains unclear,¹⁴¹ and the IML sent an open letter to 100 British newspapers in 1908 decrying “the secret press

¹³⁸ Beresford to Cawdor, 5 Jan 1908, quoted in Morris, *Scaremongers*, 186.

¹³⁹ Cawdor to Balfour, 8 Jan 1908, quoted in Morris, *Scaremongers*, 186.

¹⁴⁰ Beresford to Carson, 2 Feb 1908, quoted in Padfield, *Great Naval Race*, 194.

¹⁴¹ Anne Summers in her “Character of Edwardian Nationalism” writes that Beresford “provided inspiration and support” for the IML (78-79). Geoffrey Penn in his *Infighting Admirals* believes Beresford sent official Admiralty documents to the *Standard*, which published them along with letters from the IML (174). Wyatt and Horton-Smith were certainly admirers of Beresford and sent multiple letters defending him to the *Morning Post* – examples include 9 Jul 1908 and 31 Jul 1908, quoted in Wyatt & Horton-Smith, *Passing of the Great Fleet*, 416, 445 – but there is no evidence of Beresford *directly* supporting the IML until 1912.

bureau which that instrument of the present Government, the First Sea Lord, Sir John Fisher, has practically established at the Admiralty.”¹⁴² Beresford preferred to deal with his naval colleagues or the press. He complained to Walter Kerr, Fisher’s predecessor at the Admiralty and no fan of Fisher himself, that the “system created in the last 4 years of working the Press” had “ruined the Service.”¹⁴³ Beresford took a different tack with Ralph Blumenfeld of the *Daily Express*, claiming the First Sea Lord was merely a creature of the newspapers: “He has altered his policy times innumerable through the Press making him do so – in fact, the Press has dictated his policy for sometime [sic.], these constant changes causing great expense.”¹⁴⁴

Beresford’s most vocal supporter in his push to expose the Admiralty was Leo Maxse of the *National Review*. In a series of letters to J. L. Garvin, Maxse claimed to have “had absolutely no prejudice against Fisher” until the latter had abandoned the Cawdor Memorandum, a common Conservative argument. Maxse attributed Fisher’s supposed failings as First Sea Lord to his “simply trying to please a particularly contemptible clique of politicians,” and believed “the wicked bombast which he talks on all occasions encourages the English in their besetting sin of self-complacency, and makes him a great danger, especially as the servant of a Radical Government.” Fisher, according to the editor had, used his “very able friends in the Press” to serve the “apathy

¹⁴² Open Letter from Wyatt and Horton-Smith, 20 Oct 1908, BL IML, 08805.

¹⁴³ Beresford to Kerr, 9 Mar 1908, BL ADD MS, Beresford correspondence 1908-1915, 62407.

¹⁴⁴ Beresford to Blumenfeld, 7 Mar 1908, quoted in Morris, *Scaremongers*, 133.

and indifference of a cheeseparing Admiralty [...] against such forms of insanity the Gods fight in vain.” A disillusioned Maxse did “not know where to look for help,” as Fisher was “so damned cunning in nobbling the Press. He has got the ‘Times’, the ‘Daily Telegraph’, more or less the ‘Daily Mail’, several Service journals, and of course the whole Liberal press, who don’t care 2d. about the Navy, in his pocket [...] all done by nauseating flattery, ours being the vainest of all the professions.”¹⁴⁵ Maxse’s belief that his *National Review* was nearly alone in the fight against Fisher’s Admiralty led the editor to support both Beresford and the Imperial Maritime League.

Fisher, as he had done successfully since coming to the Admiralty, painted his detractors as mere unsuccessful subordinates and story-chasing journalists who were rapidly running out of ammunition to use as Fisher’s reforms proved successful.¹⁴⁶ But the public criticism of Fisher was becoming so vocal and so frequent that the highest levels of the Admiralty and the government were forced to respond. Parliamentary members of the Syndicate of Discontent interrogated McKenna soon after his appointment as First Lord on the question of “who sees Press representatives at the Admiralty” and “whether special information is verbally given to the representatives of some papers which is not imported to those of others, and whether Sir John Fisher gives interviews to Press men of persons taking part in public controversy respecting naval

¹⁴⁵ Maxse to Garvin, 8 Feb 1908, 13 Jan 1908, 31 Jan 1908, 10 Jan 1908, HRC JLG R, Maxse.

¹⁴⁶ Fisher’s political supporters did the same; Esher blamed anti-Fisher articles in the press on “Jews and Yankees.” Esher to Fisher, 18 Aug 1908, CCA ESHR, 10/42.

matters.”¹⁴⁷ McKenna could only reply that as far as his office was concerned, it was “always desirable to avoid communication with the Press.”¹⁴⁸

Concern over both the specific breakdown of cordial relations between Fisher and Beresford and the general increasing politicization of navalist journalism reached the highest echelons of the British government. Fisher had maintained a connection with King Edward VII throughout his service as First Sea Lord, but when the King “said something of how I worked the Press [...] I didn’t follow that up,” as Fisher later recalled to Esher. Instead Fisher “did venture a humble remark to the King ‘Has anyone ever been able to mention to Your Majesty one single little item that has failed in the whole multitude of reforms in the last 3½ years’ No! he said no one had! So I left it there.” Confidentially, however, Fisher wrote to Esher that “no one knows except perhaps yourself that unless I had arranged to get the whole force of public opinion to

¹⁴⁷ Undated press cutting (between 24 Jul and 31 Jul 1908). MP Stavely Hill asked this question of McKenna; Carlyon Bellairs asked McKenna during the same parliamentary session whether it was permissible for naval officers to sue newspapers for libel. HRC JLG R, Fisher 5.

¹⁴⁸ McKenna to Bellairs, 30 Jul 1908, quoted in Freeman, *Great Edwardian Naval Feud*, 165. Beresford cited this Parliamentary debate in his memoir as an example of his mistreatment by the Admiralty. Admiral Lord Charles Beresford, M.P., *The Betrayal: Being a Record of Facts Concerning Naval Policy and Administration from the Year 1902 to the Present Time* (London: P.S. King & Son, 1912), 179. Privately, the Admiralty was so concerned about leaks to journalists that it considered simply sending details of all forthcoming maneuvers to national newspapers with a warning not to publish sensitive information; this plan was rejected as “it would only serve as an incentive to those which make it their object to embarrass the Admiralty in every possible way.” Director of Naval Intelligence memoranda, 9 Dec and 21 Dec 1907, KEW ADM 116/1058.

back up the Naval Revolution it would have been simply impossible to have carried it through successfully for the vested interests against me were enormous....”¹⁴⁹

Yet Fisher was finding it more difficult simply to dismiss all of his critics. Although Fisher had concentrated an immense amount of personal authority around himself as First Sea Lord, he was still directly subordinate to one man – the First Lord of the Admiralty. While Fisher generally enjoyed good relations with both Tweedmouth and McKenna, they had a responsibility to investigate any claims of leaked information from the Admiralty. Surreptitious disclosures of information could be explained away, but blatant misuse of classified information could not. During the brief crisis over the naval estimates in early 1908, most of the internal debate over naval funding was kept private – but in February a series of anonymous articles containing details on the Admiralty’s planned expenditures appeared in J. L. Garvin’s *Observer*. This was no accident. The previous month Garvin had asked Fisher to provide details on the year’s estimates, and Fisher had readily complied, despite reservations: “There is not the slightest difficulty in providing you with clear – explicit – and convincing statements

¹⁴⁹ Fisher to Esher, 19 Apr 1908, CCA ESHR, 10/42. This letter was reprinted in full in Fisher’s memoirs, published in 1919. The specific word choice of “public opinion,” as opposed to any reference to journalists or newspapers, may be why Fisher considered this letter fit for publication. Lord Fisher, *Memoirs* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1919), 185.

[...] My one difficulty is – how about my contravening Cabinet secrecy and trust in me?”¹⁵⁰

The First Sea Lord was right to be nervous. When the *Observer* articles appeared it was obvious to both Tweedmouth and the King – who sent copies to the Admiralty with a request to find the “writers of the navy-news” – that they had been written with the assistance of internal documents. Fisher would only say that “he could not quite tell” who had written them, but he knew Garvin had an experienced staff at the *Observer* when it came to naval reporting.¹⁵¹ The First Sea Lord also, in a brazen admission, told both the King and the Prince of Wales that as Garvin also had run articles involving classified material under the purview of the Committee of Imperial Defence, that was where the government should begin its search for leaks¹⁵² (of course any CID material in Garvin’s possession would have been given to him by Fisher, but the maneuver deflected attention from an Admiralty source). The admiral then invited Garvin to his home for discussion of “a vital matter please keep secret that you are coming to see me.”¹⁵³

¹⁵⁰ Fisher to Garvin, 24 Jan 1908, quoted in Gollin, *The Observer and J.L. Garvin*, 38. Fisher supported Garvin, as he could “see your difficulties and don’t want to embarrass you.” This may be a reference to Garvin’s assuming the editorship of *The Observer*, a position he had held for less than a month; Fisher attempted to aid Garvin multiple times during his career, as previously seen with the case of *The Times*’ editorship.

¹⁵¹ Gollin, *The Observer and J.L. Garvin*, 41-43; Fisher wrote to Garvin that some of his colleagues believed the First Sea Lord had written the articles himself.

¹⁵² Fisher to Garvin, 10 Feb 1908, HRC JLG R, Fisher 3.

¹⁵³ Fisher to Garvin, 4 Feb 1908, HRC JLG R, Fisher 3.

No record has survived of the meeting between Fisher and Garvin, but historian Alfred Gollin believed it was an occasion for the two to corroborate their accounts. This explanation carries a great deal of weight, for the next week the *Observer* ran a public letter from Fisher to Garvin that inquired “(1) Who wrote the articles? (2) Who inspired them? (3) What papers were placed at the writer’s disposal?” Fisher wrote that “as the inference is that the writer of these articles has been given secret and confidential facts, improperly obtained, and been given the fullest information in regard to private discussions and decisions at the Admiralty, I hope you may see your way to transgress, if necessary, any journalistic rules to the contrary” and publicly reveal the author.¹⁵⁴

Garvin immediately responded to Fisher’s letter with a public response addressed to both Fisher and Tweedmouth. The editor claimed sole responsibility for both conceiving of and writing the articles, and claimed that he had seen no confidential material: “I am much amazed by the suggestion that they reflect ‘private discussion and decisions of the Admiralty.’ That, if I may respectfully say so, is not only a mistaken, but a fantastic inference.” Instead, wrote Garvin, “every statement I made with respect to official opinions and intentions can be substantiated by data accessible to anyone who has my privilege of being in close touch with three or four of the ablest naval experts not within the Admiralty nor upon active service....” Garvin concluded with a broader denigration of the Admiralty’s attempt to search for leaks: “The extent to which newspapers of standing are dependent upon official sources of information is very

¹⁵⁴ The *Observer*, 9 Feb 1908, quoted in Gollin, *The Observer and J.L. Garvin*, 44, 47.

commonly exaggerated. What is thought at first to be the disclosure of official secrets is very often the result neither of inspiration nor divination, but only of great care in sifting facts.”¹⁵⁵

The public reply to Fisher’s letter mollified Tweedmouth and the Admiralty. It also appeased much of the press. The *Morning Post*, which was no fan of the Admiralty and had called for an inquiry into the *Observer* articles, “venture[d] to congratulate Lord Tweedmouth upon the complete removal of any suspicion of what we thought would have been ‘not playing the game’.”¹⁵⁶ The radical *Daily News* went so far as to rebuke Fisher, as “it is emphatically no business of any First Sea Lord to write to newspapers demanding the source of the information they publish.”¹⁵⁷ Fisher likely happily accepted this criticism as the cost of neutralizing the possibility of a deeper investigation into his journalistic connections.

Thus, Fisher had escaped the possibility of official censure and had saved a valuable ally from the same. But the incident had apparently taught him nothing about covering his tracks. The First Sea Lord made light of the incident; he suggested Tweedmouth take up a career as a business agent, since the First Lord’s attention had driven up the *Observer*’s circulation.¹⁵⁸ He certainly did not cease his communication

¹⁵⁵ Garvin to Fisher, 5 Feb 1908. Harry Ransom Center, University of Texas at Austin: James Louis Garvin Papers, letters collection (hereafter HRC JLG L), Fisher.

¹⁵⁶ *Morning Post*, 10 Feb 1908, quoted in Gollin, *The Observer and J.L. Garvin*, 50.

¹⁵⁷ Gollin, *The Observer and J.L. Garvin*, 50.

¹⁵⁸ Fisher to Garvin, 7 Feb 1908, quoted in Gollin, *The Observer and J.L. Garvin*, 45.

with Garvin, and went as far as to privately thank the editor: “You certainly have manipulated the Tweedmouth letter in a masterly manner. The ‘Beresford Boomerang’ I call it now as I have ascertained that it was through him Tweedmouth so ill-advisedly wrote me the letter he did - & how it has recoiled!!! [...] Indeed all round it’s heavenly & I hope the circulation of ‘Observer’ will go up a million!”¹⁵⁹ Within a week, as the political situation in the Cabinet developed, Fisher was sending Garvin additional information on the estimates. “My mission is to keep you from pitfalls,” he reassured the editor. “I will enclose a suggested paragraph which you can put into your own lovely words, and will keep up your spreading fame....”¹⁶⁰

The change in First Lords from Tweedmouth to McKenna did not prevent further suspicion from falling on Fisher’s press correspondents. Running an article in July 1908, “Disunion in the Navy,” *The Times* cast doubt upon Beresford’s ability to lead the Channel Fleet. Beresford suspected the article to have been written by James Thursfield and inspired by Fisher and wrote McKenna requesting an investigation into the matter.¹⁶¹ His press allies used stronger language; the *Morning Post* demanded McKenna discover

¹⁵⁹ Fisher to Garvin, 10 Feb 1908, HRC JLG R, Fisher 3; here is no evidence that Beresford had anything to do with the incident. Emphasis in original.

¹⁶⁰ Fisher to Garvin, 14 Feb 1908, HRC JLG R, Fisher 4; a portion of this letter is quoted in Gollin, *The Observer and J.L. Garvin*, 53.

¹⁶¹ W. Mark Hamilton, *The Nation and the Navy: Methods and Organization of British Navalist Propaganda, 1889-1914* (New York: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1986), 249. This article appeared in the same newspaper the same week as the anonymous exposé on the second Beresford-Scott feud, previously discussed.

who wrote the article “and to punish him so as to make it probable that the like offence will not be committed again. The public wants the cur dragged to light and whipped.”¹⁶²

Unlike Garvin, Thursfield replied to McKenna’s initial questions privately, but he minced no words: “It is quite true that I did see Sir John Fisher at the Admiralty in the forenoon of July 7 and had a conversation of some duration with him. There is of course nothing unusual in this.” Thursfield noted that “for many years past I have been in the habit of going to the Admiralty to obtain such information as I needed about naval affairs [...] very frequently calling on Sir John Fisher with whom I have been on intimate terms for many years.” But Thursfield would not claim authorship of the article (he had indeed written it), and he was adamant that Fisher had not shared confidential information. He ended by warning McKenna about Beresford: “I am quite at a loss to understand how Lord Charles Beresford can pretend to know what passed at an interview at which no one was present but Sir John Fisher and myself. [...] If Lord Charles Beresford’s allegations were allowed to pass unnoticed by me they might easily operate very greatly and very unjustly to my discredit.”¹⁶³ Thursfield sent a copy of the letter to Fisher, letting the First Sea Lord know that he should be free of suspicion: “You will see that it commits no one but myself.”¹⁶⁴

¹⁶² “Entire Vindication of Lord Charles Beresford,” *Morning Post*, 31 Jul 1908, quoted in Wyatt & Horton-Smith, *Passing of the Great Fleet*, 433.

¹⁶³ Thursfield to McKenna, 14 Aug 1908, CCA FISR, 3/2.

¹⁶⁴ Thursfield to Fisher, 14 Aug 1908, CCA FISR, 3/2.

Thursfield's proactive reply satisfied McKenna, who essentially apologized to the journalist for his trouble: "I have always regarded you, and since my experience at the Admiralty have known you, as the soul of discretion."¹⁶⁵ This did not satisfy Thursfield, who came to Fisher "in a great state of mind at wild accusations circulating against him;" the First Sea Lord unsympathetically replied that he "was a hundred times more maligned" than the journalist.¹⁶⁶ Fisher and his supporters in the press had once again escaped censure. But the inquiries and official questions were becoming more frequent, and the outside pressure more adamant. Clandestine emergency meetings were not an efficient way to run the Admiralty. In 1908, Fisher was not concerned for his *own* position as First Sea Lord, despite increasing calls for an investigation into his reforms. There were, however, two related issues attracting his attention. First, Fisher was expending a great deal of effort to keep his journalistic connections free from suspicion or official reprimand. With tensions between Fisher's supporters and the Syndicate of Discontent running high, Fisher cautioned many of his press allies to refrain from publishing navalist articles for the time being. To Julian Corbett: "I think absolute silence is the best."¹⁶⁷ On Thursfield: "I've declined to see Thursfield & many others much higher who are seeking me so as to be absolutely beyond suspicion of giving any

¹⁶⁵ McKenna to Thursfield, 18 Aug 1908, KEW ADM, 116/3108.

¹⁶⁶ Fisher to McKenna, 20 Aug 1908, CCA MCKN, 3/4.

¹⁶⁷ Fisher to Corbett, 22 Jun 1908, CCA FISR, 1/6.

information.”¹⁶⁸ On W. T. Stead: “Stead came to see me last night full of blood & fury on my behalf (Bless him!) but I begged him to keep quiet.”¹⁶⁹ Fisher would not even write to Arnold White directly, but informed him through his secretary “how important it is at this stage to use the greatest discretion, because (no doubt with good reason!) everyone associates you with the support given to Sir John in his campaign of the last four years.”¹⁷⁰ He also warned Garvin, Garvin’s colleague at the *Observer* Gerard Fiennes, and even the imperial navalist F. T. Bullen away from publishing any articles or sending any editorials on his behalf.¹⁷¹

The second aggravation affecting the First Sea Lord, as it had been for some time by 1908, was Charles Beresford. Beresford’s skill in both working towards his own agenda at the Admiralty and corralling his press associates has been much maligned by historians – Arthur Marder calls him “the acknowledged leader of the ‘Syndicate of Discontent’, though hardly the brains”¹⁷² – but the C-in-C Channel was adroit at internalizing the lessons learned from both his own failed attempts at journalistic

¹⁶⁸ Fisher to Garvin, 24 Dec 1908. , HRC JLG R, Fisher 5.

¹⁶⁹ Fisher to Garvin, 31 Jul 1908 [corrected by archivist to 31 Aug], HRC JLG R, Fisher 5.

¹⁷⁰ Fisher’s secretary [W.F. Nicholson] to White, 6 Jul 1908, NMM WHI, 76. Fisher was finding it difficult to restrain White. White was not effectively rewriting material Fisher sent to him: “Any d—d fool could [...] see those were my words!” And Fisher confessed to Garvin that he was “having great trouble in muzzling dear Arnold White who is flourishing his tomahawk wanting to scalp Beresford!” Fisher to Garvin, 19 Aug [1908]; Fisher to Garvin, 10 [12?] Dec 1908, HRC JLG R, Fisher 5.

¹⁷¹ Fisher to White, 8 Dec 1908, CCA FISR, 15/2/1/4; F.T. Bullen to Fisher, 12 Jul 1908, HRC JLG R, Fisher 5.

¹⁷² Marder, *Fear God and Dread Nought II*, 39.

alliances early in the century and the growing public suspicion of Fisher's. Press notices regarding possible leaks and Admiralty probes were becoming commonplace, which gave Beresford *carte blanche* to maintain his own journalistic connections. When Beresford himself was questioned regarding Channel Fleet memoranda which had appeared in the press, he replied to the Admiralty that "the editors of newspapers should be aware that the publication of such matter is prejudicial to the country, but I do not think that the press can be blamed after the encouragement it has received of late years in publishing really important documents, apparently with official sanction."¹⁷³ If Fisher could make an open secret of his dealings with journalists and avoid Admiralty condemnation, so could other high-ranking officers. And Fisher could not discipline or sanction them without opening himself up to a variety of accusations from favoritism to misuse of official documents.

Beresford was most successful at antagonizing Fisher in this manner during the 1907 fleet exercises. Fisher offered Beresford the opportunity to sail with members of the press: "Will you let me know, in view of inquiries now being made at Admiralty, whether you see any objection to Correspondents being put on board the various ships [...] I see no objection myself." Fisher also assured Beresford that he "could arrange for any degree of censorship you deemed desirable."¹⁷⁴ Nevertheless, Beresford vehemently rejected the Admiralty's offer and banned correspondents entirely from his fleet during

¹⁷³ Beresford to the Admiralty, 20 Jan 1908, in "Secret. Extracts from Official Correspondence, &c, between the Admiralty and Lord C. Beresford, April 1907 to January 1908," CCA FISR, 8/44.

¹⁷⁴ Fisher to Beresford, 8 Aug 1907, KEW ADM, 116/3108.

the maneuvers.¹⁷⁵ One can imagine Fisher's surprise when Beresford was found to have invited *his* journalistic allies as personal guests, not as reporters. As Fisher grumbled to Arnold White, Beresford had "proceed[ed] to fill up the ships, so far as we can gather, with his own friends – not as correspondents of course but as private friends! And not to report on the manoeuvres, presumably, but to assist in a big agitation afterwards!"¹⁷⁶

The First Sea Lord briefly considered sneaking White aboard a ship at the Firth of Forth so as to have a sympathetic journalist on board during the exercises,¹⁷⁷ but settled for directing the Board of Admiralty to "send a peremptory note to Lord Charles that all 'guests' & civilians &c are to be disembarked from all his ships before the manoeuvres commence;" he hoped that "either the order will be disregarded by Lord C.B., and the crisis precipitated, or else a dirty low game is foiled & the players will be deposited in the reeds of Norway."¹⁷⁸ Beresford's gamble had not paid off, but he had demonstrated to Fisher that he was willing to use Fisher's tactics to his own advantage.

By the end of 1908 Fisher was losing control of his carefully-maintained system. This is not to say that it had entirely ceased to function. The First Sea Lord had built upon the dreadnought with the launch of the *Invincible*-class battlecruiser. He had rapidly developed a successful relationship with the new First Lord of the Admiralty

¹⁷⁵ Freeman, *Great Edwardian Naval Feud*, 4.

¹⁷⁶ Thomas Crease [Fisher's assistant] to White, 23 Jun 1908, NMM WHI, 76.

¹⁷⁷ W.F. Nicholson to White, 18 Jun 1908, NMM WHI, 76.

¹⁷⁸ Thomas Crease to White, 23 Jun 1908, NMM WHI, 76.

McKenna, and had managed to save the majority of his naval budget from diminution at the hands of Lloyd George and other economizers in the Cabinet. Most importantly for the continuation of his system, he had survived enquiries into the conduct of his journalistic friends and professional colleagues without ever being directly implicated in any way (and support from Fisher could certainly help the accused themselves – *vide* the case of Percy Scott, who received no assistance from the Admiralty and whose career was essentially ended by his feud with Beresford).

The Fisher system still existed, but it was becoming ever more fragile and ever more personal. The Fishpond had been intended to ensure the success of Fisher's naval reforms within the Admiralty and publicize them in the periodical press. By 1908 Fisher was directing his press allies to attack the Syndicate of Discontent, particularly Beresford, rather than to promote any ongoing Admiralty reorganization – although it must be said that many, particularly Arnold White, were perfectly happy to attack the Syndicate of their own accord. Beresford and the Syndicate were following his example. Suspicion of clandestine contact between the press and the Admiralty had devolved into what amounted to open paranoia on both sides; this chapter has featured multiple examples of Beresford blaming Fisher and Fisher blaming Beresford for any published work criticizing them in any way. The *covert* cooperation between naval officers and journalists that had defined Fisher's rise had vanished entirely, and each additional barely-averted inquiry brought the system closer to collapse. Professionally, the First Sea Lord was spending more and more time attempting to get his political superiors from McKenna to the King to remove Beresford from active duty and very little time at

all concentrating on further reform.¹⁷⁹ Fisher had lost sight of the goal; instead of fighting to save the Royal Navy from its enemies in Fleet Street and Parliament, he was fighting to save himself. Arnold White reassured Fisher that the growing public support for Beresford was merely an illusion: “The mob is fickle but not the people who always remain faithful to a silent worker [...] the public dearly love a man who is against the powers-that-be [...] & C.B. works this for all he is worth.”¹⁸⁰ He conveniently failed to remember that standing against the ‘powers-that-be’ was exactly how Fisher had come to the Admiralty in the first place.

However, it was not only Fisher who had conflated himself with the Admiralty. His opponents had as well. Any group with a professional, personal or political axe to grind with the Royal Navy or the Liberal Cabinet could frame its conflict through the lens of Fisher and his ‘Admiralty press bureau.’ David Lloyd George, Charles Beresford, and the Imperial Maritime League viewed the issues of Liberal governance and naval funding very differently, but found themselves allies in name if not creed against the Fisher system.¹⁸¹ That the name ‘Fisher’ is nearly synonymous with the

¹⁷⁹ It should be noted here, as in the conclusion to the previous chapter, that Fisher had few allies among his *professional* colleagues in the Admiralty. His Fishpond system was designed to create like-minded subordinates who would *eventually* continue Fisher’s system, but would have required years to fully come to fruition.

¹⁸⁰ White to Fisher, 15 Nov 1908, CCA FISR, 3/2; emphasis in original.

¹⁸¹ One of the most striking examples is the 1908 estimates crisis, when the staunch Conservative Beresford struck a deal with Lloyd George to cut naval funding if he was made First Sea Lord.

concept of navalism itself during this period speaks both to the possibilities of and inherent danger within the over-centralization of reform around a single figure.

The increasing politicization of navalism was another issue that Fisher could not hope to control. The First Sea Lord disdained politics entirely, and refused to commit himself to either of the major parties.¹⁸² Personally this proved a great success, and allowed Fisher to work easily with successive Conservative and Liberal governments. But the political climate of Britain in 1908 was not the same as it had been in 1904. Each party – though it must be said the Conservatives in particular suffered from this malady when it came to navalism – was becoming more radicalized. Striking a middle ground between Conservative calls for greatly increased naval spending and Liberal calls for heavy retrenchment was seen as a failure by both sides, not an acceptable compromise.

Despite all these setbacks, Fisher believed that he could still maintain control of his journalistic and political networks. He retained the all-important support of King Edward VII: “I’ve just had 2 hours with the King telling me to hang on like grim death no matter what the calumnies public or private!”¹⁸³ Behind the scenes, he was also working on a plan to remove the threat Beresford posed to his position. Through his assistant he cautioned Arnold White “that at the present juncture it is very vital that there should be no further press controversy on the Beresford question, if a satisfactory

¹⁸² For one example of this see “Admiralty Policy. Replies to Criticisms” (October 1906), where the entirety of the Board of Admiralty is advised to avoid politics, CCA FISR, 8/9.

¹⁸³ Fisher to Garvin, 4 Jun 1908, HRC JLG R, Fisher 4.

solution is to be arrived at. Things are proceeding well, and I think the end is in sight.”¹⁸⁴ But unlike previous years, when Fisher confidently approached the challenges ahead, he found himself “getting really wearied out with all the flabby ‘blue funkens’ all around one [...] I am getting sick and mediating a sudden and unexpected departure *à la* Elijah.”¹⁸⁵

Fisher’s concern was justified, though the latest threat to his standing at the Admiralty came from an unexpected source. As 1908 turned to 1909 internal Foreign Office and Admiralty documents were showing an alarming increase in the number of foreign, particularly German, dreadnoughts under construction. They were kept secret – but Fisher’s entire career had demonstrated that ‘secret’ was a nebulous term within the British government. By October 1908 there were whispers in the London dailies that the Royal Navy was being surpassed by its German competition. In January 1909, the entire Cabinet was officially informed that there were grave concerns about British shipbuilding rates. When the proposed 1909 naval estimates were brought before Parliament in March, Asquith was forced to admit publicly the “fatal and most serious fact” that the estimates would either have to be greatly increased or the navy would find itself greatly outnumbered over the next five years.¹⁸⁶ The result was an immediate national panic that swept up both major parties, Beresford and the Syndicate of

¹⁸⁴ Crease to White, 22 Jul 1908, NMM WHI, 76.

¹⁸⁵ Fisher to White, 2 Nov 1908, quoted in Marder, *Fear God and Dread Nought II*, 200.

¹⁸⁶ Morris, *Scaremongers*, 178; this brief timeline is compiled from pp. 175-178.

Discontent, nearly the entirety of the British press, including many of Fisher's oldest supporters, and both the Navy League and the Imperial Maritime League. Their furor was directed at the man who had spent half a decade installing himself as the sole professional representative of the Royal Navy. It would mark the beginning of the end for Jacky Fisher.

CHAPTER VI

DEFEATS AND VICTORIES, 1908-1914

The years 1909-10 marked the high point of public and private naval agitation in Britain. The great naval scare of late 1908 and early 1909 was followed by an official governmental inquiry into Sir John Fisher's tenure at the Admiralty. The result was the apparent end of Lord Charles Beresford's and Fisher's professional careers and the conscious expansion of partisan navalism. After 1910, the 'Fisher system' of directed journalistic-official navalism was severely curtailed, with political navalism as a campaign strategy, particularly with the first general election of 1910, rising to replace it. Nonpartisan naval agitation in the Navy League mold also enjoyed a resurgence after the 1909 panic, with Admiralty efforts being redirected towards public relations. This increased the general popularity of the Royal Navy greatly, but at the expense of the traditional directed navalist support networks involving professionals, politicians and the press. British navalism was more widespread than ever in the final years before the First World War. It was also less directed, more partisan (with important exceptions), and less effective at actually influencing Admiralty policies.

The political turmoil within the Admiralty through 1908 had remained for the most part an internal governmental issue; only Tweedmouth's letter to the Kaiser had prompted a major newspaper response. After the appointment in 1908 of Reginald McKenna as First Lord of the Admiralty, Liberal politicians worked to quiet any further political navalist pressure. MP Lewis 'Loulou' Harcourt publicly disparaged organizations such as the Imperial Maritime League as springing from the "diseased

imagination of inferior minds.”¹ Winston Churchill, then President of the Board of Trade and a staunch economizing Liberal, gave a series of speeches denigrating “the braggart call for sensational expenditure upon armaments” caused by the “Dreadnought fear all school” as “a false lying panic started in the party interests of the Conservatives.” Churchill declared that the Liberal Party would “stand as a restraining force against an extravagant policy” and “keep a sour look for scaremongers of every kind and size,” never “wasting the public money upon armaments” proposed by the “windy actions of ignorant, interested and excited hotheads.”²

Churchill’s views of ‘scaremongers’ were supported publicly by colleagues such as long-serving Liberal MP John Brunner, who believed the Liberal Party should also be prepared to formulate its own naval strategy without the aid of public policy specialists such as Julian Corbett and the Colombs; the government “should be strong enough to keep the experts quite out of sight and prevent them from dropping confidential documents about and popping in and out of newspaper offices.”³ Privately, Prime Minister Asquith warned McKenna that he wanted the party to have nothing to do with the “propaganda of extravagance.”⁴

¹ 2 Oct 1908, quoted in Arthur J. Marder, *From the Dreadnought to Scapa Flow: The Royal Navy in the Fisher Era, 1904-1919*, 5 vols. (London: Oxford University Press, 1961), I 142.

² Churchill, quoted in A.J.A. Morris, *Radicalism Against War, 1906-1914: The Advocacy of Peace and Retrenchment* (Totowa, NJ: Rowman and Littlefield, 1972), 144-145.

³ Brunner, quoted in Morris, *Radicalism Against War*, 130.

⁴ Asquith to McKenna, 14 Nov 1908, quoted in Martin Farr, *Reginald McKenna: Financier among Statesmen, 1863-1916* (New York: Routledge, 2008), 152.

However, as early as May 1908 the Admiralty was beginning to receive intelligence that the German shipbuilding program was quietly and rapidly increasing. Initially, corroborating accounts of German acceleration proved difficult; most originated from unofficial sources and vested interests, and were not immediately given credence by Admiralty officials.⁵ Ignored by the Admiralty, they then appeared in the London papers, including *The Times*.⁶ Eventually Fisher, who knew more about the inner workings of the periodical press than most in the Cabinet, expressed concern over the reports; as they came from “steady and consistent” newspapers like the *Westminster Gazette* and not unreliable publications such as the *Standard* or the *Morning Post*, they were not likely part of a larger scheme to undermine the Admiralty and should be taken seriously.⁷

Concern over the German program became a Cabinet-wide issue during the debate over the 1909 naval estimates in January. While the 1908 estimates had been acrimonious, the proposed 1909 expenditures opened a major fissure within the Liberal

⁵ The current historiography on the Admiralty’s response to German shipbuilding from a policy-making perspective is ably summarized in Matthew S. Seligmann, Frank Nägler, and Michael Epkenhans, eds., *The Naval Route to the Abyss: The Anglo – German Naval Race 1895 – 1914* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2015); Chapter 6 is particularly relevant to the 1909 crisis. The editors note the government’s suspicion that news of the German acceleration was first broken by H.H. Mulliner, who directed the Coventry Ordnance Works and stood to gain a great deal from a commensurate increase in British construction (350).

⁶ *The Times* raised the issue on 15 Oct and 30 Nov 1908. A.J.A. Morris, *The Scaremongers: The Advocacy of War and Rearmament, 1896-1914* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1984), 174, 416.

⁷ Fisher to McKenna, 19 May 1908, Churchill Archives Centre, Churchill College, Cambridge, Reginald McKenna Papers (hereafter CCA MCKN), 3/4; McKenna made no reference to Fisher’s implicit separation of the periodical press into ‘trustworthy’ and ‘untrustworthy’ categories.

Party. The largest sticking point turned whether the Admiralty would lay down four dreadnought battleships for the 1909 fiscal year – the plan favored by Churchill and Chancellor of the Exchequer David Lloyd George – or six, as recommended by McKenna and Fisher. The Admiralty’s fear of German acceleration caused Fisher to demand a further increase to eight major ships while the issue was under consideration.⁸

Lloyd George and Churchill were convinced the call for eight dreadnoughts was a ruse. “I feared all along this would happen,” wrote Lloyd George to his colleague. “Fisher is a very clever person and when he found his programme was in danger he wired Davidson⁹ for something more panicky – and of course he got it. [...] Frankly I think the Admiralty are procuring false information to frighten us.”¹⁰ Lloyd George also blamed McKenna, who “feels his personal position and prestige is at stake,”¹¹ for calling for the eight ships to rescue his career at the Admiralty. Churchill and Lloyd George threatened to resign if additional dreadnoughts were approved but were talked from the precipice by Lord Esher: “I pointed out to them that the great majority of the country is

⁸ Morris, *Scaremongers*, 175.

⁹ Likely Sir Arthur Davidson, assistant private secretary to King Edward VII.

¹⁰ Lloyd George to Churchill, 3 Jan 1909, quoted in Peter Padfield, *The Great Naval Race: The Anglo-German Naval Rivalry, 1900-1914* (New York: David McKay Company, Inc., 1974), 204. Lloyd George even recommended contacting the German Embassy for further information on their dreadnought building program, which was not seriously considered.

¹¹ Lloyd George to Churchill, 3 Jan 1909, quoted in Farr, *Reginald McKenna*, 155.

against them. [...] To resign upon the point would ruin them. No one has ever resigned with personal triumph on a negative policy.”¹²

The Chancellor of the Exchequer may have thought that he had been misled by the Admiralty, but his response during the Cabinet-level budgetary meetings did nothing to endear him to Fisher or McKenna. When Fisher explained that increased German shipbuilding was behind the proposed additional warships, Lloyd George responded that “it shows extraordinary neglect on the part of the Admiralty that all this should not have been found out before. I don’t think much of any of you admirals, and I should like to see Lord Charles Beresford at the Admiralty, and the sooner the better.”¹³ Fisher was incensed. He broke off relations with Lloyd George’s principal colleague Churchill, especially after the latter revealed in Cabinet meetings that he was supporting the smaller four-dreadnought program on the advice of Reginald Custance and William White, two longtime members of the Syndicate of Discontent. Fisher immediately suspected a conspiracy: “The baseness of that is that they (Custance & White) know that only 4 Dreadnoughts would compel my resignation! That is the object & not the safety of the country.”¹⁴ He also expressed his displeasure directly to Churchill: “I never expected you to turn against the Navy after all you have said in public and private (*et tu,*

¹² Vice-Admiral Sir Peter Gretton, *Winston Churchill and the Royal Navy* (New York: Coward McCann, Inc., 1969 [1968]), 27-28.

¹³ John Jellicoe to McKenna, 24 Jan 1909, quoting Lloyd George, quoted in Frederic Dreyer, *The Sea Heritage: A Study of Maritime Warfare* (London: Museum Press Ltd., 1955), 68-69.

¹⁴ Fisher to Garvin, 17 Feb 1909, Harry Ransom Center, University of Texas at Austin: James Louis Garvin Papers, recipient collection (hereafter HRC JLG R), Fisher 7; emphasis in original.

Brute!)."15 The First Sea Lord immediately prepared for battle and told his journalistic allies to be ready. "I will let you know how things go," he wrote to J. L. Garvin of the *Observer*. "I feel like winning in both Dreadnoughts & Beresfords."16

Politically, the clash over the 1909 estimates put Asquith in a bind. Lloyd George reminded the prime minister of "the emphatic pledges given by all of us before and at the last general election to reduce the gigantic expenditure on armaments," and raised the legitimate concern that "the discussion of the Naval Estimates threatens to re-open all the old controversies which rent the party for years and brought it to impotence and contempt."17 But his position was becoming less tenable as other Cabinet members were swinging towards Fisher's call for eight new warships, or at least the compromise of six. Foreign Secretary Edward Grey admitted to Asquith that although he "like others advocated retrenchment at the last election [...] I always excepted the Navy from my promises, and in any case promises must be subordinate to national safety."18 With the naval estimates due before Parliament in March, Asquith and the Liberal Party had quickly to cobble together a workable budget for the Royal Navy and present it to the nation.

¹⁵ Fisher to Churchill, 28 Feb 1909, quoted in Admiral Sir R. H. Bacon, *The Life of Lord Fisher of Kilverstone*, 2 vols. (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, Doran & Company, Inc., 1929) II, 90; emphasis in original.

¹⁶ Alfred Gollin, *The Observer and J.L. Garvin, 1908-1914: A Study in a Great Editorship* (London: Oxford University Press, 1960), 71.

¹⁷ Lloyd George to Asquith, 2 Feb 1909, quoted in Morris, *Radicalism Against War*, 151.

¹⁸ Grey to Asquith, 5 Feb 1909, quoted in *Ibid.*

Asquith offered his solution to Parliament on March 16, 1909. It was not optimistic. McKenna was forced to declare the government “do not know, as we thought we did, the rate at which German construction is taking place.”¹⁹ Asquith followed by revealing “the fatal and most serious fact” that Germany was thought to be able to construct warships faster than British shipyards.²⁰ The proposed estimates were a compromise. Officially, they included only the four dreadnoughts supported by Lloyd George and Churchill – and even this meant an increase of £3 million over the previous year.²¹ But a mere four dreadnoughts would mean that by 1912 Britain would have twenty dreadnought battleships – by now the only class of warship considered effective in the line of battle – to a theoretical seventeen German. Former Conservative prime minister Arthur Balfour then rose and announced his calculations predicted twenty-one German dreadnoughts and a numerically inferior British fleet by 1912.²² The naval estimates had accounted for this possibility; though they provided for only the four capital ships, an additional four (for a total of eight to be laid down in 1909) would be

¹⁹ Quoted in Kenneth L. Moll, “Politics, Power, and Panic: Britain’s 1909 Dreadnought ‘Gap’,” *Military Affairs* 29:3 (Autumn 1965): 140.

²⁰ Morris, *Radicalism Against War*, 156-157.

²¹ Morris, *Scaremongers*, 177; ‘Dreadnoughts’ included both dreadnought battleships and battlecruisers.

²² Moll, “Politics, Power and Panic,” 140. Balfour’s projection was based on the most pessimistic estimates from the January Cabinet discussions and information received from the previously mentioned H.H. Mulliner. Morris, *Scaremongers*, 178.

immediately begun “if required.”²³ The 1909 estimates passed easily on their first vote.²⁴ The public debate that immediately followed turned on whether or not the nation required the four contingent ships, and how effectively navalists and economists could plead their case in the matter.²⁵

Liberals who favored a smaller shipbuilding program registered their displeasure at the possibility of an eight-ship fiscal year. Liberal MP Thomas Lough contended the nation was “being continually alarmed” by the latest agitations.²⁶ Grey found “plenty in the press to make people anxious – plenty which ought never to be there, for the attempt to fix the Navy estimates by press controversy, in which each side inspires its own journalists, is not dignified.”²⁷ Asquith himself spoke out against the “unscrupulous” and “unpatriotic [...] absurd and mischievous legends” raised by Conservatives

²³ Morris, *Scaremongers*, 177. Arthur Marder points out the creative accounting of the contingent four ships: if they were required, regardless of when they were laid down, their cost would be automatically applied to the 1910 estimates. Arthur J. Marder, ed., *Fear God and Dread Nought: The Correspondence of Admiral of the Fleet Lord Fisher of Kilverstone*, 3 vols (London: Jonathan Cape, 1952-59) I, 207.

²⁴ Moll, “Politics, Power and Panic,” 140; the actual vote was 322-83 in favor.

²⁵ It must also be noted that neither the four- nor eight-ship plans included two Dominion dreadnoughts, already funded by Australia and New Zealand – thus the debate was really six versus ten. Phillips Payson O’Brien, “The Titan Refreshed: Imperial Overstretch and the British Navy before the First World War,” *Past & Present* 172 (August 2001): 163.

²⁶ 18 Mar 1909, quoted in W. Mark Hamilton, *The Nation and the Navy: Methods and Organization of British Navalist Propaganda, 1889-1914* (New York: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1986), 342-343; Lough also blamed the current panic on the Navy League.

²⁷ Grey to Henry Newbolt, 10 Feb 1909, quoted in K. G. Robbins, “The Foreign Secretary, the Cabinet, Parliament and the parties,” in *British Foreign Policy under Sir Edward Grey*, edited by F.H. Hinsley (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977). 11, 548.

regarding Britain's supposed naval deficiencies.²⁸ Liberal backbenchers accused Asquith of "walk[ing] into the trap of the *Daily Mail*," believing the German shipbuilding increase was merely a creation of the partisan press.²⁹ *The Times* took a more resigned tone, recognizing that navalist panics could be accurately dated by the release of each year's estimates: "The public always goes like this in March."³⁰

For Conservatives, the fight for eight dreadnoughts was immediately politicized. Conservative MP Arthur Lee accused Asquith's government of wasting time with "pilgrimages to The Hague and in travelling through Elysian fields dreaming of universal disarmament." Asquith's reply in Parliament, which further antagonized the Lloyd George-Churchill wing of his party, was to declare "the first care of every British statesman who is worthy of the name is to maintain intact, unassailable, unchallengeable, that naval supremacy on which our independence and our freedom depend."³¹ This did not stop Balfour from calling for a vote of censure just days after the estimates were announced, accusing the Liberal government of dereliction of duty; when it failed,

²⁸ 22 Mar 1909, quoted in Rhodri Williams, *Defending the Empire: The Conservative Party and British Defence Policy 1899 – 1915* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1991), 166-167.

²⁹ *The Economist*, 20 Feb 1909, quoted in Howard Weinroth, "Left-Wing Opposition to Naval Armaments in Britain before 1914," *Journal of Contemporary History* 6:4 (1971): 109.

³⁰ 22 Mar 1909, quoted in Morris, *Scaremongers*, 168.

³¹ 17 and 23 Mar 1909, quoted in G.J. Marcus, "The Naval Crisis of 1909 and the Croydon By-Election," *Journal of the Royal United Service Institution* 103 (Nov. 1958): 504.

Conservatives in Parliament loudly demanded a national election.³² A second parliamentary motion calling for additional warship construction also failed, albeit with the ominous portent that a group of Navy League-associated Liberals voted with the Conservatives against Asquith's wishes.³³ Soon the national rallying cry for any disapproval of the 1909 estimates was the one coined by Conservative MP George Wyndham: "We want eight, and we won't wait."³⁴

The Admiralty and those in the government who supported Fisher were initially very supportive of the 'we want eight' campaign. Viscount Esher, whose political views were always difficult to categorize but was no die-hard Conservative, had been in contact with Balfour and recorded in his diary that "*We* have done well with the Navy. And we shall get our ships."³⁵ Esher believed Lloyd George and Churchill's insistence on the four ships would lead to their political destruction; for his part he told his son he was "going to try and put the fear of God into Jackie [...] unless the B. of Admiralty get their 8 ships ordered *at once* they ought to be hanged."³⁶ Fisher himself, who had no use

³² Moll, "Politics, Power and Panic," 140-141; Marcus, "The Naval Crisis of 1909," 511. Marcus' article deals with a by-election immediately following the introduction of the 1909 estimates where a Conservative candidate won on a platform of increased dreadnought construction.

³³ Matthew Johnson, "The Liberal Party and the Navy League in Britain before the Great War," *Twentieth Century British History* (2011): 150.

³⁴ Morris, *Radicalism Against War*, 159. W. Mark Hamilton notes that while the Navy League took credit for the slogan, there is no evidence the League played any role in its creation. W. Mark Hamilton, "The 'New Navalism' and the British Navy League, 1895 – 1914," *Mariner's Mirror* 64:1 (1978): 42.

³⁵ 28 Mar 1909, in Maurice V. Brett, ed., *Journals and Letters of Reginald, Viscount Esher*, 2 vols. (London: Ivor Nicholson & Watson, 1934) II, 378.

³⁶ Esher to Francis Knollys, 5 Apr 1909; Esher to Maurice Vyner Brett, 18 Mar 1909, in Brett, *Journals and Letters* II, 377, 380.

for an undirected agitation, was willing to use the 1909 scare to his advantage: “There is no necessity for panic really and yet panic has its uses as we have advantageously experienced – we all think now in Dreadnoughts! It’s odd how unrecognized is our gain by this!”³⁷ Although “the Radicals swear I engineered it to ‘dish’ them,” Fisher “welcome[d] this scare! [...] The Public wants pepper always to make them wake up!”³⁸ The First Sea Lord wrote to J. L. Garvin that although “I myself feel secure [...] I don’t want to allay the deep feeling in the public mind of the immensity of all that is at stake – we have engineered 8 Dreadnoughts this year, they can’t be prevented! We have engineered the great radical majority into an obedient flock.”³⁹ Garvin agreed, and recommended a measured response to the panic to the powerful newspaper proprietor Lord Northcliffe: “The only course is to defend Admiralty interests [...] and to denounce all political hanky-panky in connection with the Navy.”⁴⁰

³⁷ Fisher to Arnold White, 18 Mar 1909, Churchill Archives Centre, Churchill College, Cambridge, 1st Lord Fisher of Kilverstone Papers (hereafter CCA FISR), 15/2/1/5. Rhodri Williams believes Fisher’s goal was to use the 1909 scare to force the government to accept the contingent 4 ships over the objection of Liberal backbenchers (Williams, *Defending the Empire*, 164). This is supported by a letter from Fisher to Garvin, 11 Mar 1909, where Fisher assured the editor the country would get its 8 ships despite how “the Government to blind their own extremists [...] cloud the new Dreadnoughts in Estimates....”. Quoted in Gollin, *The Observer and J.L. Garvin*, 73. However, Matthew Seligmann believes the Admiralty information on German shipbuilding was accurate and the ‘we want eight’ campaign was a measured response to a legitimate crisis. Matthew Seligmann, “Intelligence Information and the 1909 Naval Scare: The Secret Foundations of a Public Panic,” *War in History*, 17: 1 (2010): 37.

³⁸ Fisher to Arthur Davidson, quoted in William Jameson, *The Fleet that Jack Built: Nine Men who Made a Modern Navy* (London: Rupert Hart-Davis, 1962), 127.

³⁹ Fisher to Garvin, 19 Mar 1909, HRC JLG R, Fisher 7; emphasis in original.

⁴⁰ Garvin to Northcliffe, n.d. [16 Mar 1909], quoted in Morris, *Scaremongers*, 177-178; emphasis in original.

What Fisher and his allies within the government did not anticipate was the immediate partisan reaction to the estimates from the Conservative press. Privately, many Conservatives agreed with Fisher that the additional four ships would come in time; when Austen Chamberlain told Admiral Sir William May, C-in-C of the Home Fleet, that waiting out Liberal opposition was the correct strategy, he received a note from Fisher within the hour promising to wait “till Hell freezes.”⁴¹ The public reaction was a great deal more spirited. Editor of the *National Review* Leo Maxse personally sent Lloyd George a £200 check for his share of the four additional dreadnoughts, which the chancellor promptly returned.⁴² Fisher also received his share of press abuse. The *Daily Express* blamed the admiral for British construction lapses: “The time for shilly-shallying and soft speeches has gone. We must have the eight Dreadnoughts, and we must have much more. Sir John Fisher must go, and all that Fisherism means.”⁴³ Fisher was “responsible for the starving of the Navy during the last three years,” the paper claimed. “We arraign Sir John Fisher at the bar of public opinion, and with the

⁴¹ Fisher to Chamberlain, 23 Feb 1909, quoted in Morris, *Radicalism Against War*, 153. Fisher was not concerned about Radical opposition, and thought his previous money-saving efforts at the Admiralty would make him “a real asset with the Little Navy Party! They look on me as a heavenly cheese-parer!” Moll, “Politics, Power and Panic,” 143.

⁴² Lloyd George thanked the editor for his “good faith” and “willingness to bear your share of the burden,” but deprecated “the ‘jumpy’ patriotism which [...] cannot fail in my opinion to detract from our national dignity and prestige.” Lloyd George to Maxse, 5 Apr 1909, Chichester, UK, West Sussex Records Office, Leo Maxse Papers (hereafter CHI MAXSE), 445. Maxse’s ‘jumpy patriotism’ was well-known enough for *Punch* to print a parody wherein the editor assured British superiority by personally invading Germany and capturing the Kaiser; Cecil Degrotte Eby, *The Road to Armageddon: The Martial Spirit in English Popular Literature, 1870-1914* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1987), 75-76.

⁴³ Marcus, “The Naval Crisis of 1909,” 512.

imminent possibility of national disaster before the country, we say again to him, ‘Thou art the man!’”⁴⁴ The Imperial Maritime League attributed the lack of naval construction to the “presence and omnipotence of Sir John Fisher,” and returned to its familiar call for political change: “The present Government has betrayed the nation, and [...] there is but one organisation in the country which may possibly yet be able to save it, and that is the Unionist party.”⁴⁵

As was becoming common with navalist agitation, supporters of both the four- and eight-warship programs each accused the other of leaking confidential material to the press – and with good reason. Fisher was certainly supplying his journalistic allies privileged information, as will be seen, but Lloyd George was also suspected of using classified figures to bolster his case for four dreadnoughts. Asquith believed both Lloyd George and Churchill had been using “combined machinations” to turn the *Liberal Daily News* and *Daily Chronicle* against the Admiralty.⁴⁶ The prime minister warned Lloyd George that he “greatly deplore[d] the leakages into the press...of matters which at this stage ought clearly to be kept under the seal of the strictest confidence.” Lloyd George impertinently agreed, observing it was indeed deplorable that the *Conservative Observer*, *Daily Telegraph* and *The Times* “seem to have been fully informed as to what

⁴⁴ 20 Mar 1909, quoted in Geoffrey Penn, *Infighting Admirals: Fisher’s Feud with Beresford and the Reactionaries* (Barnsley, UK: Leo Cooper, 2000), 220.

⁴⁵ “The Crisis: Its Cause and Its Remedy,” Open letter from Wyatt and Horton-Smith to the press, 7 Apr 1909, British Library, London, Imperial Maritime League pamphlets (hereafter BL IML), 08805.

⁴⁶ Asquith to Margot Asquith, 20 Feb 1909; Asquith to Haldane, 5 Feb 1909, quoted in Farr, *Reginald McKenna*, 156.

was going on inside the Cabinet weeks ago [...] most unfortunate.”⁴⁷ More seriously, McKenna informed the King that he suspected Lloyd George of purposefully sending Charles Beresford classified information in an effort to remove Fisher from the Admiralty.⁴⁸

Yet it was Fisher, whose reputation preceded him, who came under the most suspicion. In early 1909 it was his relationship with Garvin and the *Observer* that was under investigation, and from a most unwelcome source – not McKenna and the Board of Admiralty but Edward Grey and the Foreign Office. Garvin had been attempting to win assurances from Fisher that the large dreadnought building program was safe since the beginning of the year. In February, when the internal Cabinet debate was between four or six ships, Fisher assured the editor the nation would have its dreadnoughts: “Well you want me to tell you ‘May I assume absolutely that the six are secured’? Yes you may! I have had to hunt for the red ink so as to emphasize that! I nearly wrote it in my own blood!”⁴⁹ The First Sea Lord also offered Garvin advice on how to present the still-private material to the press: “I suggest to you on consideration to leave out the words

⁴⁷ Asquith to Lloyd George, 8 Feb 1909; Lloyd George to Asquith, 8 Feb 1909, quoted in Morris, *Scaremongers*, 176.

⁴⁸ Knollys to King Edward VII, 27 Mar 1909, quoted in Farr, *Reginald McKenna*, 161. Lloyd George had indeed threatened Fisher that Beresford would be happy to replace him as First Sea Lord, but Beresford’s motivations for inserting himself into the ‘we want eight’ controversy were more pragmatic. Beresford told the Conservative politician Walter Long that if the Liberal government fell but Long (who took an interest in naval issues and had nearly been appointed First Lord in 1905) was *not* able to get Beresford appointed as First Sea Lord due to the latter’s not taking a position on the 1909 crisis, he could be of no use to the party. Beresford to Long, 14 Jan 1909, British Library, London (hereafter BL ADD MS), Beresford correspondence, 1908-1915, 62407.

⁴⁹ Fisher to Garvin, 11 Feb 1909, HRC JLG R, Fisher 7.

‘Cabinet inspired’ in my proposed words to you because though true, it gives me away as of course what you say will unfortunately be put down as emanating from me.”⁵⁰ And before the option of an eight-ship program had even been put before Parliament, Garvin had been alerted to the possibility: “Secret. We shall build 8 if necessary when next March comes!”⁵¹

To this point, Garvin had written nothing publicly objectionable about the 1909 estimates. He was careful to hide Fisher’s words as the admiral had requested, and the *Observer* had not been the first paper to report on the issue of the proposed larger program. It was when the debate shifted to the ‘we want eight’ campaign that the relationship between Fisher and Garvin became a matter of concern to the government. In late March 1909 the *Observer* ran an article claiming that Grey, who was known to support the four contingent ships, was prepared to resign if they were not approved by the Cabinet. This was true – but it was also manifestly privileged Cabinet-level information. Grey had not spoken with any journalists on the matter, and he was determined to find out who had leaked the information to Garvin.⁵² On 22 March Garvin received a portentous dispatch from Fisher, which contained an ominous letter sent to the latter earlier that day by Grey:

⁵⁰ Fisher to Garvin, 5 Feb 1909, HRC JLG R, Fisher 7; Fisher also requested that Garvin omit references to the Board of Admiralty and focus his push for the larger warship program specifically on McKenna and Asquith.

⁵¹ Fisher to Garvin, 8 Feb 1909, HRC JLG R, Fisher 7; emphasis in original.

⁵² Morris, *Scaremongers*, 180.

It is reported to me that Garvin is telling people that he has it direct from you that I shall insist on the second four ships being ordered this year. I don't think this can be true, & if so it is very unfair to you, & Garvin should be made to retract the statement. As to the substance [...] I very much resent any individual member of a Cabinet making his own opinions public before the Cabinet has come to a decision & I should resent [...] my own opinions being published, even if they were correctly given. I haven't seen Garvin, so he hasn't got anything from me: if he is making a sheer guess he may be kept to himself, but he must be brought to book on the statement that he got it from you.⁵³

Fisher immediately realized the danger posed by the foreign secretary's accusation. "Here is a letter from Grey which is very awkward indeed," he wrote the editor. "I have replied to him that I am sure you will disclaim any idea of quoting me to anyone in the sense he mentions. [...] Perhaps you could kindly send me a letter to Sir E. Grey to disclaim me as an authority for your statements."⁵⁴ Of course, Fisher had been the authority behind the statements. The previous week he had seen a draft of the *Observer* article, for which he congratulated Garvin: "I think your article *just the thing!* You have unwittingly used exact phrases of mine to Grey & the Prime Minister – They'll say 'collusion'! – I shall reply 'the coincidence of common sense'! [...] Burn this & don't give me away!"⁵⁵ But the foreign secretary could not know. Grey's letter posed another difficulty for both Garvin and Fisher – who had told Grey of their meetings? Garvin readily admitted to Grey that he had both spoken with Fisher and told two journalistic colleagues of their meeting. One was Lord Northcliffe, whom both

⁵³ Grey to Fisher, 22 Mar 1909, HRC JLG R, Fisher 7.

⁵⁴ Fisher to Garvin, 22 Mar 1909, HRC JLG R, Fisher 7.

⁵⁵ Fisher to Garvin, 14 Mar 1909, quoted in Gollin, *The Observer and J.L. Garvin*, 74; emphasis in original.

Garvin and Fisher considered above all reproach in terms of maintaining confidence. The other was Valentine Chirol, head of *The Times*' Foreign Department.⁵⁶ Chirol believed that Fisher had been aware of the German threat for months, and had previously written privately to Garvin that Fisher "is not to be trusted as the head of the Navy [...] what makes his responsibility exceptionally heavy is the exceptional position which he enjoyed & which no other Sea Lord before him enjoyed – coupled with the exceptional support he had secured for himself from the chief organs of public opinion."⁵⁷ Fisher had likewise already warned Arnold White to be "more on your guard against making any covert allusion to anything in our conversation or any mention whatever of Sir E. Grey as I last night discovered that a scoundrel called Chirol who I don't know but is influential on the 'Times' management is trying to get me wrong with Sir E. Grey."⁵⁸ Yet Garvin either did not appreciate or ignored Chirol's hostility towards Fisher and openly discussed Fisher's take on high-level Cabinet meetings with the *Times* correspondent.

Fisher and Garvin believed the best defense was a good offense. The First Sea Lord mildly rebuked the editor, pointedly writing to "remember Chirol is false [...] well, I told you so!" But the more pressing issue was cleaning up the mess that had been created: "It looks as if we were going to have a repeat of the famous Tweedmouth

⁵⁶ Gollin, *The Observer and J.L. Garvin*, 80-81. Garvin, according to Gollin, had told the two because "it was in the public interest that the policy of *The Times* should be based upon true information."

⁵⁷ Chirol to Garvin, 20 Mar 1909, HRC JLG R, Chirol.

⁵⁸ Fisher to Arnold White, 12 Mar 1909, CCA FISR, 15/2/1/5; emphasis in original.

correspondence when I had to write to you to smash up a lie!”⁵⁹ Garvin replied to Grey,⁶⁰ acknowledging that he had been in communication with Fisher but claiming any breach of professional or journalistic etiquette lay with Chirol; Garvin had spoken with the latter “in the most strictly confidential intercourse, upon the assurance of both [Northcliffe and Chirol] as a matter of honour and the public interest that confidence would be absolutely kept.” In return Chirol had severely misrepresented Fisher’s argument – particularly the idea that Grey had threatened resignation – to the foreign secretary. Garvin ended on an aggrieved note: “The report to you is an outrage really unexampled of its kind in my experience; and when even you write in such terms upon such evidence I feel as though the air in these difficult circumstances was getting filled with a mania for prejudgment. If you can communicate to me the name of your informant I shall know how to deal with him.”⁶¹

Essentially, Garvin was deflecting any blame from himself by openly admitting that he had spoken with Fisher, but claiming the First Sea Lord had spoken only of his *own* thoughts on the contingent ships; if Garvin had successfully deduced Grey’s motives it was due entirely to his knowledge of Grey’s “character & all the

⁵⁹ Fisher to Garvin, 22 Mar 1909, HRC JLG R, Fisher 7; this letter also references a popular rumor, told to Fisher by McKenna, that Garvin and Fisher had written the *Observer* article together.

⁶⁰ Fisher had asked Garvin to reply to *him* with a statement that he could then send on to Grey; Garvin cut out the middleman by writing to the foreign secretary directly. Fisher to Garvin, 22 Mar 1909, HRC JLG R, Fisher 7.

⁶¹ Garvin to Grey, 22 Mar 1909, HRC JLG R, Fisher 7. Garvin was perfectly aware Chirol was the informant.

circumstances of this crisis.”⁶² Surprisingly, this aggressive approach worked. Grey apologized to the editor, hoping that the incident would not “make mischief between you and anyone else.” He did warn Garvin that it was “intolerable” for the “confidential relations” of “a man in a position of responsibility” to be bandied about in the press. “If that rule breaks down the safe conduct of public opinion by the men entrusted with them becomes impossible. That is why I wanted to clear the matter up at once as between Fisher and me; and it could only be done by his clearing it up as between you and himself.”⁶³ This was a victory for Garvin, but a much more tenuous triumph for Fisher. He believed that he had earned the enmity of Chirol, and for some months afterwards warned Garvin, Arnold White and James Thursfield to beware the sinister machinations of the foreign correspondent.⁶⁴ He had angered Grey much more demonstrably. As Fisher wrote to Garvin, “I fear [Grey] & I are estranged but it can’t be helped [...] the lukewarm and the waverers will now cast in their lot against me.”⁶⁵ Each internal investigation Fisher survived weakened his ability to deflect or handwave away future inquiries, and the circumstantial evidence of his mishandling classified information was growing ever stronger.

⁶² Garvin to Grey, 22 Mar 1909, quoted in Gollin, *The Observer and J.L. Garvin*, 79.

⁶³ Grey to Garvin, 22 Mar 1909, quoted in Morris, *Scaremongers*, 180.

⁶⁴ Fisher to Garvin, 2 Apr 1909; Fisher to Arnold White, 12 Mar 1909; Fisher to Thursfield, 23 Mar [n.d.]. HRC JLG R Fisher 7; CCA FISR, 15/2/1/5; CCA FISR, 1/27. Chirol did print a series of anti-Admiralty articles in *The Times* in March and April with the assistance of managing editor C.F. Moberly Bell; Gollin, *The Observer and J.L. Garvin*, 81.

⁶⁵ Fisher to Garvin, 26 Mar 1909, HRC JLG R, Fisher 7.

Still, Fisher and the Admiralty were able to win battles on the field of public opinion. The Admiralty got its eight ships in April when the four contingent dreadnoughts were approved, ostensibly in response to accelerated warship construction by the Italian and Austro-Hungarian navies.⁶⁶ Fisher had one last major personal victory with the early dismissal of Charles Beresford from command of the Channel Fleet in March 1909 at the height of the ‘we want eight’ crisis. Beresford’s dismissal was not directly related to the 1909 estimates; Fisher had been pushing for it for nearly a year to high-ranking ears. In June 1908 he informed King Edward VII that Beresford and his supporters in the press were creating a “pronounced attitude of antagonism to Admiralty policy and administration” that “rendered it impossible for the present state of affairs to continue.”⁶⁷

Fisher wavered on whether he preferred Beresford afloat or at home. He initially told Francis Knollys, the king’s private secretary, that it would be better to have Beresford “in the Mediterranean than in Parliament. In the Mediterranean we can sit upon him – in Parliament no one can!”⁶⁸ Yet a month later he complained to Esher that Knollys had requested a lighter touch with Beresford: “*It’s impossible!* You can’t let

⁶⁶ Moll, “Politics, Power and Panic,” 140-141; how concerned the Admiralty was about increased shipbuilding in the Mediterranean is debatable, particularly after the Entente Cordiale. A cynical observer might see Austro-Hungarian naval construction as a useful excuse to bow to public pressure for more British ships.

⁶⁷ Fisher to McKenna, 15 Jun 1908, CCA MCKN, 3/4.

⁶⁸ Fisher to Knollys, 8 Sep 1908, quoted in Richard Freeman, *The Great Edwardian Naval Feud: Beresford’s Vendetta against Fisher* (Barnsley, UK: Pen & Sword Maritime, 2009), 170. Freeman notes that Fisher was incorrect; Beresford commanded the Channel Fleet, not the Mediterranean.

authority be flouted as he continually flouts the Admiralty. Daily he is doing something traitorous and mutinous.”⁶⁹ Fisher also worked to shore up opposition to Beresford within the Admiralty. Vice Admiral Francis Bridgeman, C-in-C Home Fleet, had written to Fisher complaining of Beresford’s high-handed anti-Admiralty behavior. Fisher agreed with Bridgeman in his reply, stating that he had “seen the First Lord and my colleagues and they all greatly resent Beresford’s line of conduct in criticising the management of any part of your command.” Fisher recommended Bridgeman send an official letter to the Admiralty, as opposed to private correspondence, expressing his displeasure with Beresford’s “disparaging and unsubstantiated criticisms and reflections [...] which may lead to serious consequences.” He also reassured Bridgeman that McKenna would support such a letter, noting the First Lord “told me to tell you privately that he [...] would have told Beresford ‘to go to hell.’”⁷⁰ In late 1908 an official decision was made on Beresford’s future employment. It was not *per se* a forced resignation, but Beresford’s tenure as C-in-C of the Channel Fleet would last two years instead of the traditional three.⁷¹

⁶⁹ Fisher to Esher, 8 Oct 1908, in Marder, *Fear God and Dread Nought II*, 43; emphasis in original.

⁷⁰ Fisher to Bridgeman, n.d. [1909], CCA FISR, 15/2/1/5; emphasis in original. Fisher would gain an ally when Bridgeman was promoted to Second Sea Lord in March 1909.

⁷¹ Freeman, *Great Edwardian Naval Feud*, 169-172. Officially, Beresford’s command ended early due to more of Fisher’s administrative reconstructions – the Channel Fleet was merging with the Home Fleet. This could not have improved Beresford’s mood; nor could the fact that he found out about his own departure in *The Times*.

Beresford knew his command would be terminated prematurely by September of 1908, and he had no doubts as to who was behind the resolution. Arthur Pollen, a naval author and inventor who was friendly with the admiral, wrote him agreeing that “those who knew you and the facts knew that there was only one condition on which the hatchet could be buried, and that is that our Oriental friend had surrendered to you and not you to him.”⁷² Beresford refused to surrender, choosing to wait out the remaining six months of his seagoing command. Although he feared that remaining with the Channel Fleet instead of making a show of early retirement would only give Fisher, with his “unlimited control of the Press,” more control over naval policy,⁷³ Beresford decided to “stick to my post as Commander-in-Chief until I was relieved.” As he told his colleague and like-minded officer Rear Admiral Doveton Sturdee, “if I had gone voluntarily [...] I should have had the whole of the Fisher press pointing out that I thought I knew more than the Admiralty, the Cabinet, and both Front Benches, all of whom I should have had against me to fight single-handed.”⁷⁴

Beresford used his remaining months to plan his future in politics and public life in London. He made no secret that he would spend the majority of his time harassing Fisher. Such vehemence made some of his potential political allies uncomfortable.

⁷² Pollen to Beresford, 7 Sep 1908, quoted in Jon Tetsuro Sumida, *In Defence of Naval Supremacy: Finance, Technology and British Naval Policy, 1889-1914* (Boston: Unwin Hyman, 1989), 181.

⁷³ Beresford to John de Robeck, 6 Aug 1908, Churchill Archives Centre, Churchill College, Cambridge, Admiral Sir John de Robeck Papers (hereafter CCA DRBK), 3/26.

⁷⁴ Beresford to Sturdee, 21 Oct 1910, Churchill Archives Centre, Churchill College, Cambridge, Admiral Sir Doveton Sturdee Papers (hereafter CCA SDEE), 3/2.

Conservative politician Walter Long, while he was “indignant at the treatment [Beresford] had received” at the hands of the Admiralty, believed the “public mind” found “your views, however well founded, [...] probably too much coloured by your personal opinion of Sir J.F.” He informed Beresford that the Conservative Party was “determin[ed] to do nothing” on the admiral’s behalf “which is calculated to drag the Navy into the whirlpool of Party politics or to weaken us in our efforts to bring the country to a true appreciation of the [naval] situation.”⁷⁵ Former foreign secretary Lord Lansdowne warned Arthur Balfour, leader of the Conservative Party, that “it would not surprise me if Beresford were to break openly with the Admiralty. He [...] cannot expect to do much more afloat but he probably looks forward to a brilliant spell of notoriety at home.” Although Beresford was known to have “very intimate relations with the Press,” Lansdowne would “not like to have him as an ally.”⁷⁶ Thus warned, Balfour would not have been surprised when Beresford came to him requesting assistance early in 1909. Still, the former prime minister could not have anticipated the admiral’s demands. Beresford expected that the Liberal government would presently fall, and in exchange for the position of First Sea Lord under a theoretical Conservative ministry he would agree to abstain from publicly attacking Fisher. Without such a

⁷⁵ Walter Long to Beresford, 20 Oct 1908, BL ADD MS, 62407.

⁷⁶ Morris, *Scaremongers*, 185.

promise from Balfour, Beresford threatened to “stump the country and agitate” against the Admiralty.⁷⁷

Major figures in the Conservative Party were not overly enthusiastic about Beresford’s post-command plans, but the popular admiral maintained a broad base of support among both the press and, importantly, portions of the Admiralty. Captain David Beatty, commanding a battleship in the Atlantic Fleet, was part of a growing group of younger officers not in the Fishpond who welcomed any attempt to knock Fisher off his pedestal at the Admiralty. Beatty expected Beresford would quickly return to politics, where he would “be a sore thorn in Jacky Fisher’s side, which won’t be any harm.”⁷⁸ Beatty wrote to his wife that “old J.F. has not a bed of roses in front of him, and C.B. intends to stir him up properly before he has finished with him. And I think, in consequence J.F. will likely go before it gets too hot.”⁷⁹ This suited Beresford’s press allies. When he officially hauled down his flag in March 1909, the admiral was greeted by cheering crowds on his return to Portsmouth.⁸⁰ The *Standard* declared Beresford had

⁷⁷ Richard Hough, *Admiral of the Fleet: The Life of John Fisher* (New York: Macmillan Company, 1969), 290-291. Balfour declined Beresford’s offer, and in any event the Liberal government did not fall. Beresford recalled this exchange as follows: “I wrote to Mr. Balfour and pointed this out and said that matters had now arrived at a crisis, and that unless support was coming from the leaders of my own Party I should have to reconsider my position or retire from public life.” Beresford to Sturdee, 21 Oct 1910, CCA SDEE, 3/2. It is interesting to note that Beresford attempted to win promises of future employment from Balfour and Lloyd George almost simultaneously.

⁷⁸ Beatty to Ethel Beatty, 13 Feb 1909. Quoted in Chalmers, W.S. *The Life and Letters of David, Earl Beatty* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1951). 92.

⁷⁹ Beatty to Ethel Beatty, 20 Feb 1909, in B. McL. Ranft, *The Beatty Papers: Selections from the Private and Official Correspondence of Admiral of the Fleet Earl Beatty*, 2 vols. (Aldershot, Hants, UK: Scolar Press, 1989) I, 20.

⁸⁰ Freeman, *Great Edwardian Naval Feud*, 173-174.

been forced into retirement “because he has fearlessly told the truth.”⁸¹ The Imperial Maritime League, with the assistance of Leo Maxse, held a “Public Demonstration against the Passing of our Naval Supremacy and The Dismissal of Lord Charles Beresford.”⁸² The festivities included naval shanties and musical accompaniment; Fisher sent a copy of the program to McKenna, warning the first lord that it would “make you shake in your shoes!”⁸³

Fisher, who had shrugged off attacks against his policies so many times previously, was mistaken to be so indifferent towards Beresford’s departure from active service. As an acquaintance of Beresford had written the previous year, the admiral had remained afloat until his forced departure because “his one object (and he has been working up to it from a boy) has been the command of the Channel Fleet.” With this opportunity taken from him, Beresford was free to publicly express his views on the state of the navy – and he “would hold himself a traitor if he cannot bring home to the Country the demoralisation and dry-rot which has set in and is ruining the Navy.”⁸⁴ Balfour had declined to offer Beresford the position of First Sea Lord at their previously

⁸¹ 24 Mar 1909, quoted in Geoffrey Bennett, *Charlie B: A Biography of Admiral Lord Beresford of Metemeh and Curraghmore, G.C.B., G.C.V.O., LL.D., D.C.L.* (London: Peter Dawnay Ltd., 1968), 299. This was not entirely correct; although Beresford had stepped down from active command, he remained in the Royal Navy until 1911.

⁸² Imperial Maritime League handbill, 3 Mar 1909, BL IML, 08805.

⁸³ Fisher to McKenna, 27 Feb 1909, in Marder, *Fear God and Dread Nought II*, 225.

⁸⁴ Unknown correspondent to Garvin, 16 Jan 1908, CCA FISR, 3/2; the letter’s author was attempting to set up a meeting between Garvin and Carlyon Bellairs to discuss ways the two could support Beresford, but Garvin was not interested.

discussed meeting; when Beresford then claimed he would begin a public campaign against the Admiralty, Balfour suggested he at least raise his concerns about naval effectiveness to Asquith first. In late March 1909, less than a month after leaving the Channel Fleet, Beresford and Asquith spent a long meeting discussing the latter's thoughts on the state of the navy. Surprisingly, Asquith was of a similar mind – Beresford's charges were legitimate enough to “call for prompt and thorough examination.” The Committee of Imperial Defence would conduct an investigation of Fisher's tenure at the Admiralty to ensure the navy's resources were being effectively utilized.⁸⁵ Officially, it was the “Sub-Committee of the Committee of Imperial Defence appointed to inquire into certain questions of Naval Policy raised by Lord Charles Beresford.”⁸⁶ The public knew it as the Beresford Inquiry.

The Inquiry met sporadically from April to July 1909. The actual proceedings, which have been ably covered in great detail in multiple monographs, are beyond the scope of this study. Most contemporary observers concluded (1) that it was somewhat biased towards Beresford – he was allowed to submit his own list of serving officers to be called in support of his claims, and they included such avowed members of the

⁸⁵ Morris, *Scaremongers*, 192. Beresford was also able to get Esher removed from the investigation, as the latter's avid support of Fisher was widely known. Fisher believed (thanks to an anonymous tip) that Beresford had forced the prime minister's hand by threatening to publish his version of events at the Admiralty in “every newspaper of importance in the country” if an inquiry was not forthcoming. Anonymous letter to Fisher, n.d. [Apr 1909], CCA FISR, 15/2/1/5.

⁸⁶ “Report and Proceedings of a Sub-Committee of the Committee of Imperial Defence appointed to inquire into certain questions of Naval Policy raised by Lord Charles Beresford, 1909,” CCA MCKN, 3/33.

Syndicate of Discontent as Reginald Custance and Doveton Sturdee, while Fisher was barred from speaking with the committee unless in response to questioning – and (2) that Beresford made a poor impression regardless, repeatedly forgetting details of his own service history when faced with McKenna’s pointed inquiries.⁸⁷

Fisher initially regarded the inquiry in the same manner as the earlier investigations of his contact with the press – as an unnecessary annoyance that would nevertheless be quickly overcome. He realized the power the Committee of Imperial Defence held, however, and did not engage in any schemes with his journalistic allies. Instead he counseled calm, even though – as he wrote to W. T. Stead – “the atmosphere of this enquiry is pro-Beresford! [...] The Admiralty being dislocated & the Navy in revolution because fearful of a windbag!”⁸⁸ Still, as Fisher told Arnold White, “silence is the thing – throw a stone at a yelping cur & he only barks the more!”⁸⁹ He was determined not to let the inquiry affect him; as he declared to Julian Corbett, “I will not flee. I will not be kicked out!”⁹⁰

⁸⁷ This paragraph is compiled from the most detailed account of the inquiry, chapter 9 of Richard Freeman’s *The Great Edwardian Naval Feud* (175-220); however, Freeman is a strong supporter of Fisher and this comes through in his account. Geoffrey Bennett in his *Charlie B* notes that there was at least one verbal altercation between Beresford and Fisher that was not recorded in the minutes (303).

⁸⁸ Fisher to Stead, 6 May 1909, Churchill Archives Centre, Churchill College, Cambridge, William T. Stead Papers (hereafter CCA STED), 1/27; emphasis in original. Fisher did maintain steady contact with Garvin throughout, at one point writing to ask the editor: “Have I sent you too much? Will it betray you as being in collusion with me? I only mean what I send as finger-posts to ensure your taking the right road.” Fisher to Garvin, 15 Jul 1909, HRC JLG R, Fisher 8.

⁸⁹ Fisher to White, 6 Apr 1909, CCA FISR, 15/2/1/5.

⁹⁰ Fisher to Corbett, 3 Apr 1909, CCA FISR, 1/8.

Many of Fisher's press allies supported this plan of campaign, and they kept both Fisher and one another privately informed as to progress of the investigation while refraining from alarmist leading articles. Arnold White wrote to Garvin that Beresford's "balloon is deflating and is nearly on the ground."⁹¹ Garvin was an extremely enthusiastic supporter of Fisher during the inquiry, and wrote multiple letters of support to the First Sea Lord: "You are stronger on the whole than you have been for three years and after July [when the inquiry was predicted to conclude] you will become a popular legend. That is what is required to get rid once for all [sic.] of the music-hall myth that has given so much trouble." Garvin confessed that it was "a personal happiness for me, my dear Admiral, to feel that things have turned, and the wicked imp in me that is always watching everybody, even myself, rolls over with fun to think of solemn persons who will now explain they were with you all the time."⁹² As the inquiry wound to a close the editor suggested a dinner in support of Fisher, with himself, Esher, Stead, White, and Thursfield among the guests;⁹³ as for those within the Admiralty who would disagree with Fisher's inevitable vindication, Garvin suggested finding "some means of

⁹¹ White to Garvin, 13 May 1909; White continued that Beresford was so near defeat he felt it would be unnecessary for Garvin to publish further details of Percy Scott's feud with Beresford, which White had in his possession. HRC JLG R, White. Arnold White also fully briefed Garvin on his own feud with Beresford in 1902, covered in a previous chapter. See White to Garvin, 3 May 1909, in the same archival folder.

⁹² Garvin to Fisher, 14 Jun 1909, Harry Ransom Center, University of Texas at Austin, James Louis Garvin Papers, miscellaneous collection (hereafter HRC JLG M), Marder. It was also believed that Garvin played a role in the Northcliffe papers' generous treatment of Fisher during this period; Morris, *Scaremongers*, 181.

⁹³ Garvin to Fisher, 1 Jul 1909, Harry Ransom Center, University of Texas at Austin, James Louis Garvin Papers, letters collection (hereafter HRC JLG L), Fisher.

cashiering every officer who will not accept the Inquiry as final and who tries in any way to keep up mutiny.”⁹⁴

Some of Fisher’s oldest allies did express concerns about the increasing calls for an investigation into Fisher’s Admiralty and the national feeling it represented. In a reversal of the usual contact between the two, James Thursfield warned Fisher: “I don’t want any information you get from me to go beyond yourself.” If the correspondence between the two men was discovered, worried Thursfield, the only result could be both men’s dismissal; while Fisher would find “an asylum in the House of Lords [...] if I were kicked out there would be nothing but the Workhouse or an Old Age Pension.”⁹⁵ Just before the Beresford Inquiry – which could only have confirmed his views on the matter – Arnold White sent Fisher a long letter in which he attempted to explain to the admiral why many influential voices in parliament and the press wanted a change:

For some years you have been the Navy. Your personality has dominated minds of every type, from the metaphysician to the schoolmaster, from the tenant farmer to the professional politician. People trusted you because you compelled their trust. Latterly, however, Custance & Co have made a breach in this trust, mainly because the public do not understand the violent contrast between the almost theatrical claims to supremacy at sea with which they have been regaled and the facts of recurrent scares. I am not speaking of your enemies, but of the solid and weighty opinion, deliberately formed and, when formed, acted on with resolution. The fact that the drawing rooms and the clubs are chiefly against you is immaterial. What is not immaterial is the abiding sense of some of the best minds of our time that you have far too much power, and that you have not used your

⁹⁴ Garvin to Fisher, n.d. [1909], HRC JLG L, Fisher.

⁹⁵ Thursfield to Fisher, 6 Apr 1909, CCA FISR, 3/3. One ally Fisher did ask for assistance in the form of an article defending Admiralty policy was Julian Corbett – and the naval historian refused, pointing out the last time he had written an article on Fisher’s behalf – in 1907 – it had made him only a single friend, the admiral himself. Donald M. Schurman, *Julian S. Corbett, 1854 – 1922: Historian of British Maritime Policy from Drake to Jellicoe* (London: Royal Historical Society, 1981), 73-74.

power well. If I could use one word that sums up the opposition to you of impartial and serious men, it would be their belief in its ‘theatricality.’ [...] To grasp all is to lose all, and I am afraid that a very determined effort will be made to recover the Admiralty from your strong grasp. The English always pull up their seeds to see how they are growing and they don’t mind crucifying their Christs in any walk of life. If you have read this far without anger at such presumption let me entreat you not to be driven from office, but to leave as Elijah left with his policy established and his cloak on the shoulders of his Second in Command.⁹⁶

Arnold White was to be proven correct. The Beresford Inquiry, even while still underway, opened the floodgates of Fisher criticism from journalistic, professional and political sources. With Fisher’s tenure at the Admiralty now officially under investigation, anyone who had reason to speak out against the First Sea Lord could tell their story publicly – including naval officers.⁹⁷ By total coincidence, almost simultaneously with Beresford’s demand for an investigation came another accusation of the First Sea Lord. George Armstrong, editor of the *Globe*, was running for Parliament as a Conservative. Part of his campaign was a focus on cleaning up the Admiralty, and to this end he claimed to have documents proving that Fisher was running essentially a network of informers within the Navy. Unfortunately for Fisher, Armstrong had evidence backing up his claims; a series of letters between Fisher and Captain Reginald Bacon in 1905 and 1906 (discussed previously) had fallen into Armstrong’s hands.

⁹⁶ Arnold White to Fisher, 28 Mar 1909, CCA FISR, 15/2/1/5.

⁹⁷ Accusations of misdeeds within the Admiralty came so thick and fast during 1909 that at one point Fisher received entirely by accident correspondence from Frank Harris (editor of *Vanity Fair*) that dealt with a concurrent case Percy Scott was building against the Admiralty; Fisher politely returned the letter and its enclosures. Harris to Fisher, 6 Jul 1909, CCA FISR, 3/3.

It is unclear how Armstrong obtained the Fisher-Bacon correspondence, or even if he had copies at all. If he did it was due to Fisher's poor judgment in having them printed and circulated for internal Admiralty use.⁹⁸ Fisher saw the entire incident as yet another conspiracy to remove him from power, particularly as Armstrong had served in the Royal Navy in the 1890s and had been dismissed after a vague run-in with Fisher.⁹⁹ He was confident that any investigation into the matter would not resonate with the general population: "I don't think my countrymen will stand the blackmailer & publisher of private letters [...] I think the public will go on the big issue & forgive the abundance of the heart in my private letters however hot & imprudent but I don't remember writing one word I regret!"¹⁰⁰ And he was right. Although McKenna was forced to admit in the House of Commons that Fisher and Bacon had indeed maintained a correspondence, he and Fisher both maintained that it was entirely professional, and no further action was taken.¹⁰¹

⁹⁸ Winston Churchill, *The World Crisis*, 5 vols. (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1951 [1923-31]) I, 74-75. At various times Fisher believed Armstrong had been given the letters by Beresford supporters, stolen them, or had even obtained them from Fisher himself as "I haven't the faintest remembrance of who saw the letters. I was fighting night & day then and no time to think of consequences!" Fisher to Stead, 26 May 1909, CCA STED, 1/27; Hough, *Admiral of the Fleet*, 293. There is doubt as to whether Armstrong actually had the letters because in October of the same year he threatened Fisher with the release of letters between Fisher and Scott that spoke ill of Beresford; Armstrong apparently did not actually possess any of these. Fisher to Garvin, 3 Jul 1909, HRC JLG R, Fisher 8.

⁹⁹ Freeman, *Great Edwardian Naval Feud*, 182. Fisher also suspected the naval journalist Arthur Pollen of conspiring with Armstrong to spread the story of the letters; Fisher to McKenna, 5 Apr 1909, quoted in Sumida, *Defence of Naval Supremacy*, 181.

¹⁰⁰ Fisher to Garvin, 3 Jul 1909, HRC JLG R, Fisher 8; emphasis in original.

¹⁰¹ Chalmers, *Life and Letters of Beatty*, 94. The most important result of the Armstrong revelations was that the Prince of Wales became a strong opponent of Fisher due to what he saw as the latter's underhanded methods. Bennett, *Charlie B*, 309.

Yet the Armstrong controversy occurring simultaneously with the Beresford Inquiry made Fisher's Admiralty, in the eyes of many, seem untrustworthy. There were other, lesser incidents, some of which involved serving naval officers who had become disillusioned with Fisher's leadership. Captain John de Robeck, a Beresford ally posted to the Channel Fleet, accused Fisher of sending confidential material to the *Naval and Military Record*.¹⁰² Fellow captain Herbert Richmond wrote in his diary that Fisher was dealing with the inquiry by bringing an entire yacht's worth of journalists along to a fleet review: "Fisher must have the Press men to himself: he must be the centre of the show: he must get his réclame [advertisement]. He was disgusting[;] there he was, right in his element in the middle of the mob of people none of whom knew anything about the Navy [...] entertaining them prodigiously I have no doubt." Richmond found "the whole show disgusting, & a degradation of the office of the 1st Sea Lord." Significantly, he was not perturbed by Fisher's dealing with the press. Rather, he took issue with Fisher "so lowering himself as to think it necessary that he alone should [be] the one & only star in the firmament: that his colleagues are nothing: that all attention must be attracted to him, as though his office was not high & dignified enough without these adventitious aids to attention."¹⁰³

This was a complaint that Fisher could not have foreseen – that young officers who should have been comfortably in the Fishpond would accept the methods but reject

¹⁰² Hamilton, *Nation and the Navy*, 247.

¹⁰³ Richmond diary, 22 Jun 1909, Caird Library, National Maritime Museum, Greenwich, UK, Admiral Sir Herbert Richmond Papers (hereafter NMM RIC), 1/8; emphasis in original.

the man. It was echoed by David Beatty – who sincerely felt that if the Inquiry “will only make a scapegoat to stamp out this accursed spirit of espionage, jealousy, and time-serving initiated by Fisher, they will earn the gratitude of the country as a whole and the Navy in particular”¹⁰⁴ – and Captain Rosslyn Wemyss, who less charitably believed Fisher was “blending his own and the Services’ interest to his detriment of his powers [...] I really think the whole lot of them should be put in a sack and drowned.”¹⁰⁵

As the Inquiry proceeded throughout the spring and summer, the majority of Fisher’s journalistic allies followed his advice and maintained a stoic silence. The Syndicate of Discontent was bound by no such rules. Beresford claimed at regular intervals that he was out to “expose the most powerful Press bureau in the world” and “call evidence as to who [Fisher’s] friends are in the press,”¹⁰⁶ and he made sure that news of these threats made it back to Fisher. This was a bluff, but Beresford did pressure H. A. Gwynne of the *Standard* for aid in tying Beresford’s personal dislike of Fisher to the larger Conservative debate over naval administration.¹⁰⁷ Beresford’s other

¹⁰⁴ Beatty to Ethel Beatty, 29 Apr 1909, quoted in Chalmers, *Life and Letters of Beatty*, 96.

¹⁰⁵ Rosslyn Wemyss to his wife, 29 Jul [n.y.]; Wemyss to his father, 3 Aug [n.y.], Churchill Archives Centre, Churchill College, Cambridge, Admiral of the Fleet Lord Wester Wemyss Papers (hereafter CCA WMYS), 7/6.

¹⁰⁶ Fisher to Garvin, 26 May 1909 and 23 Apr 1909, quoted in Gollin, *The Observer and J.L. Garvin*, 86; HRC JLG R, Fisher 8.

¹⁰⁷ Keith McLay, “Swimming in the ‘Fishpond’ or Solidarity with the ‘Beresfordian Syndicate’: An Analysis of the Inquiry by the Subcommittee of Imperial Defence into Naval Policy, 1909,” *International Journal of Naval History Online* (2015), [<http://www.ijnhonline.org/2015/01/15/swimming-in-the-fishpond-or-solidarity-with-the-beresfordian-syndicate-an-analysis-of-the-inquiry-by-the-subcommittee-of-imperial-defence-into-naval-policy-1909/>], Accessed 20 Jan 2015.

press allies needed no urging to agitate. The Imperial Maritime League released a series of pamphlets calling for a wholesale reorganization of the Admiralty and the removal of Fisher, “the evil genius of the Navy.”¹⁰⁸ Leo Maxse’s *National Review* had always strongly supported Beresford, but Charles à Court Repington still chastised the editor: “you have scarcely gibbeted Fisher sufficiently.” Repington helpfully offered to aid Maxse by sending him an article on “the hypnotism which Fisher continues to exercise upon politicians & much of the press.”¹⁰⁹ It was obvious to attentive observers that “a large proportion of the Press, including the stolid & correct *Times*, appear to be waking to the conclusion that they in general, and the Navy in particular, have had about enough of John Fisher [...] it is quite extraordinary that a man who has jumped and bounced himself into such a position should have derived so much notoriety of an objectionable character.”¹¹⁰

The final report of the Beresford Inquiry, after nineteen meetings, was released in early August. It was extremely technical, and none of Beresford’s supposed insights into the ‘Admiralty press bureau’ were represented. Fisher and his allies were optimistic that the report would nullify all of Beresford’s claims. Garvin was sure the result would be “the bursting of the biggest of all recorded gasbags” and the end of the “flatulent mass of

¹⁰⁸ “The Imperial Maritime League: What it stands for and the Old Navy League does *NOT*” (May 1909), Caird Library, National Maritime Museum, Greenwich, UK, Lionel Graham Horton-Smith Papers (hereafter NMM HSM), 20.

¹⁰⁹ Repington to Maxse, 3 Apr 1909, CHI MAXSE, 459.

¹¹⁰ Beatty to Ethel Beatty, 6 Apr 1909, in Ranft, *Beatty Papers I*, 21.

self-contradictory humbug” that was Beresford.¹¹¹ Yet the committee’s findings satisfied neither side in full upon their publication. Essentially, the Inquiry found that the vast majority of Beresford’s accusations as to the state of naval preparedness were unfounded; the real issue was that the Admiralty had become splintered into cliques, led by Fisher and Beresford, that had not been communicating effectively with each other for some time (this carried with it an implicit criticism of Beresford for not accepting the authority of his superior officers). Fisher was mildly censured for not maintaining an effective naval war staff, which had been a favorite project of Beresford’s since the 1880s.¹¹²

Due to the climate of suspicion and finger-pointing becoming ever more prevalent within the Admiralty, a report that could really only be taken at face value as a minor victory for Beresford became a major defeat for Fisher. By not squelching all of Beresford’s criticisms, the committee had allowed him to continue his anti-Admiralty campaign unabated – although to be fair to the committee it could not have effectively reproved Beresford to a greater degree, as he had already been forced to give up his command. Fisher was not officially reprimanded in any way, and the King reiterated his strong support for the First Sea Lord.¹¹³ But Fisher knew, as he wrote to his assistant T. E. Crease, that anything less than total victory left the door open for Beresford’s

¹¹¹ Garvin to Fisher, 1 Jul 1909, HRC JLG M, Marder.

¹¹² Freeman, *Great Edwardian Naval Feud*, 220.

¹¹³ Freeman, *Great Edwardian Naval Feud*, 223.

continued agitation: “I am bitterly disappointed by the Committee’s report. It’s a most cowardly production [...] I am very sick about it all, considering what each member of the Committee had previously said to me.”¹¹⁴ To the Committee of Imperial Defence’s secretary, Charles Ottley, Fisher complained that the committee, by “not squashing Beresford when they had the chance,” had “given Beresford a fresh leash of insubordination.”¹¹⁵

Beresford almost immediately proved Fisher’s fears justified. In October he published his correspondence with Asquith dating back to early in the year, which dealt mainly with what he called the “intimidation on the one hand and favouritism on the other for which the Admiralty have of late years been notorious,” in *The Times*.¹¹⁶ His reason for doing so, as he wrote to both his political and naval allies, was to “prove [...] by the correspondence that blackmail was going on in order to enable the mulatto to carry out his autocratic and dangerous administration [...] it is this system of blackmail that has enabled him, or as I shall say, the Board, to put the Navy into its present position of complete disorganisation....”¹¹⁷ He was joined by Syndicate supporters like the

¹¹⁴ Fisher to Crease, 22 Aug 1909, CCA FISR, 1/8. Fisher wrote to Thursfield that the committee’s “courage oozed out of their fingertips,” and then accused the press – rather hypocritically, as he had asked for his press allies’ silence – of not doing enough to support his point of view; Fisher to Thursfield, 21 Aug 1909, CCA FISR, 1/27.

¹¹⁵ Fisher to Ottley, 29 Aug 1909, quoted in Freeman, *Great Edwardian Naval Feud*, 222.

¹¹⁶ *The Times*, 25 Oct 1909, quoted in Marder, *Dreadnought to Scapa Flow I*, 201.

¹¹⁷ Beresford to Sturdee, 28 Oct 1909, CCA SDEE, 3/2. Beresford made nearly the same point, without the disparaging remarks about Fisher’s heritage, to Balfour; Beresford to Balfour, 29 Oct 1909, quoted in Bennett, *Charlie B*, 308.

retired admiral and veteran navalist C .C. Penrose Fitzgerald, who wrote to Leopold Maxse that he had also been a victim of Fisher's favoritism, as Fisher had "blighted and embittered the last five years of my service on the active list [...] because I refused to be one of his jackals." Fitzgerald asked Maxse not to quote him by name as his sons were serving naval officers, but suggested to the editor that if he searched out others who "could speak up you could get dozens of letters."¹¹⁸

Beresford knew that attacking Fisher through press channels would not lead to the First Sea Lord's dismissal; still, he was determined "to let the country know the mischievous cowardly scoundrel [Fisher] is."¹¹⁹ His solution was to return to Parliament. In November 1909 Beresford announced his candidacy as a Conservative for a by-election at Portsmouth one of the traditional homes of 'members for the Navy.' Fisher was not prepared to face a barrage of Parliamentary questions from Beresford. He asked Garvin to write Balfour and attempt to have the Conservative Central Office refuse to certify Beresford as a candidate, forcing him to run as an independent and barring him from accepting party funds.¹²⁰ Balfour demurred, responding through his secretary: "don't make our headquarters position difficult. Remember where the decision as to candidate really rests, and on party grounds don't make C.B.

¹¹⁸ Fitzgerald to Maxse, 25 Oct 1909, CHI MAXSE, 460; Fitzgerald mentioned Sturdee by name as another officer who had been denied promotion under Fisher.

¹¹⁹ Beresford to Sturdee, 24 Nov 1909, CCA SDEE, 3/2.

¹²⁰ Morris, *Scaremongers*, 211; another concern of Fisher's was that if Beresford returned to Parliament he would be eligible to serve as First Lord of the Admiralty in a future Conservative government.

impossible.”¹²¹ Thus thwarted, Fisher turned to the naval reformer Lionel Yexley.

Yexley was dedicated to improving the lot of the common sailor, and ran the lower-deck journal *The Fleet*; Fisher seems to have promised him privileged information on areas of emphasis for his journal and increased Admiralty attention towards his personal causes if Yexley would run against Beresford at Portsmouth. Yexley turned down Fisher’s offer, although he remained a correspondent of the admiral; in any event the Portsmouth by-election never took place due to the general election of January 1910.¹²²

Beresford did win the Portsmouth seat as a Conservative in January.¹²³ By the time he took office, however, his great battle had already been won. Fisher never recovered from what he viewed as the betrayal of the Beresford Inquiry. Although he maintained the support of McKenna and the king, he was devoting more and more of his time in office to fighting rearguard actions and less to further naval developments; it had been nearly four years since the launch of the *Dreadnought*, and Fisher believed even the king’s confidence was ineffective if Asquith refused to deal directly with Beresford’s continued agitations.¹²⁴ His support among his press allies was wavering; although

¹²¹ Jack Sandars [Balfour’s secretary] to Garvin, 5 Nov 1909, HRC JLG R, Sandars.

¹²² Anthony Carew, *The Lower Deck of the Royal Navy, 1900-39: The Invergordon Mutiny in Perspective* (Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press, 1981), 60, 83; Richard Brooks, *Fred T Jane: An Eccentric Visionary* (Alexandria, VA: Jane’s Information Group, 1997), 166. Beresford believed Fisher was writing articles for *The Fleet*, which does not seem to have been the case; Beresford to Leslie Cope Cornford, 2 Dec 1909, Caird Library, National Maritime Museum, Greenwich, UK, Leslie Cope-Cornford Papers (hereafter NMM CPC), 1.

¹²³ Freeman, *Great Edwardian Naval Feud*, 233.

¹²⁴ Bennett, *Charlie B*, 308.

Garvin remained dedicated, Thursfield, White and Corbett were having serious doubts as to his continued ability to remain effective as a reformer in office. The entire idea of the Fishpond had collapsed into internal politics before it had a chance to mature into a functioning system. Fisher decided quietly to retire.

Though he had been a fanatic writer of letters during his career, Fisher managed to maintain a relatively discreet silence as to both his decision and his motivations. A surviving message from Fisher to W. T. Stead casting aspersions on Asquith – who was “reaping the fruits of his cowardice in failing to flatten out Beresford” as the latter began his latest campaign against the Admiralty – sheds some light on his decision,¹²⁵ as does a confession to Arnold White that he was “getting tons of kindly advice. I am invited to perform hara-kiri!”¹²⁶ By late October 1909 he had agreed to accept a peerage, becoming Lord Fisher of Kilverstone, and announced his retirement on 25 January 1910, his sixty-ninth birthday.¹²⁷ The Fisher era was over.

News of Fisher’s impending retirement was met with an outpouring of public and private support from his allies. W. T. Stead, Fisher’s oldest backer in the press, compiled a frankly hagiographic pamphlet on Fisher’s career. “No man has been more fiercely assailed,” wrote Stead of Fisher. “The most monstrous accusations were hurled

¹²⁵ Fisher to Stead, 20 Oct 1909, CCA STED, 1/27.

¹²⁶ Fisher to Arnold White, 12 Oct 1909, quoted in Freeman, *Great Edwardian Naval Feud*, 225.

¹²⁷ Freeman, *Great Edwardian Naval Feud*, 225-227; Hough, *Admiral of the Fleet*, 284. Fisher actually left office on the 18th of January. London gossip suggested Fisher would turn down the peerage and stand for Parliament as a Liberal, presumably to defeat Beresford; undated newspaper clipping in Fisher’s official correspondence from 1909-10, CCA FISR, 3/3.

against him by men who were not worthy to black his boots.” And yet these “envious libellers and unscrupulous traducers are serviceable in creating a background of shadow against which the radiant central figure of the hero stands out in clearer relief.” Stead also pointedly observed that Fisher had been failed by Campbell-Bannerman, Asquith, and Edward Grey, who “ought to have insisted upon trying by court-martial those officers who during the whole period of his administration did their best or worse to organise mutinous discontent in the Service over which he presided.”¹²⁸ Fisher considered having a similar summary of his career (which he had written and Thursfield had edited) published in *The Times*, but was dissuaded from doing so when Thursfield informed him it would have to be printed under his own name and not anonymously.¹²⁹

Navalists too privately congratulated Fisher on his tenure in command.

Historians often quote the anonymous friend of W. T. Stead who felt “as if Nelson had stepped down from his monument in Trafalgar Square,” but he was not alone.¹³⁰ Naval journalist F. T. Bullen believed that “history would record” Fisher’s services to his country “despite the incessant and malignant attacks of envious homunculi unworthy to be your errand boys.”¹³¹ Julian Corbett also spoke of the judgement of history: “What a glorious command it has been! No one, I think, has ever had such a five years [...] it

¹²⁸ W.T. Stead, “Lord Fisher” (Jan 1910), CCA FISR, 10/9; this pamphlet also included an account of Fisher’s first meeting with his “loyal and devoted supporter,” Garvin.

¹²⁹ Thursfield to Fisher, 14 Jan 1910, CCA FISR, 3/3.

¹³⁰ Bacon, *Life of Lord Fisher* II, 105.

¹³¹ Bullen to Fisher, 25 Jan 1910, CCA FISR, 3/4.

will mark an epoch as clearly and indisputably as Nelson did his.”¹³² Archibald Hurd merely hoped he had been “of any slight service [...] I owe to you so much. I was a child in naval matters until you educated me.”¹³³ Fisher accepted the thanks of many with aplomb, but he had no time for blandishments from anyone who had opposed his tenure at the Admiralty or his reforms. When he received a congratulatory letter from Admiral Sir George Egerton, he scribbled in the margin that it had come from “Admiral Egerton Judas Iscariot. He sold me to Beresford for 30 pieces of silver. In reply to this letter I told him to hang himself.”¹³⁴

The Syndicate of Discontent saw Fisher’s retirement as a major victory. Captain Oswald Frewen was happy to see the “Fisher regime, damn it, totter [...] to its fall.” Leo Maxse’s *National Review* declared that Fisher, now a civilian, was “entitled to the nearest lamp post” for endangering the nation.¹³⁵ Naval journalist Fred Jane was more succinct: “Thank God he is gone.”¹³⁶ Beresford himself was unable to attend the celebratory dinner held by his supporters, but suggested a suitable toast via telegram:

¹³² Corbett to Fisher, 25 Jan 1910, Caird Library, National Maritime Museum, Greenwich, UK, Sir Julian Corbett Papers (hereafter NMM CBT), 12.

¹³³ Hurd to Fisher, 25 Jan 1910, CCA FISR, 3/4.

¹³⁴ Egerton to Fisher, 25 Jan 1910 (Fisher’s copy), quoted in Ruddock F. Mackay, *Fisher of Kilverstone* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1973), 424.

¹³⁵ Freeman, *Great Edwardian Naval Feud*, 224.

¹³⁶ Brooks, *Fred T Jane*, 118.

“To the death of fraud, espionage, intimidation, corruption, tyranny, self-interest, which have been a nightmare over the finest service in the world for four years.”¹³⁷

Many of Fisher’s allies encouraged him to take a page from Beresford’s book and use his retirement to conduct a public campaign against his political and naval enemies. Esher, Thursfield, and Arnold White all pushed him to speak in his own defense, which Fisher refused to do; White went further and recommended Fisher “consult those who love you, like Garvin and myself, as to the effect on public opinion of what you say” before reaching out to the populace.¹³⁸ There was a personal motivation for White; he had also written to John St Loe Strachey, editor of the *Spectator*, asking that the paper refute its previous accusations as to the very existence of an ‘Admiralty press bureau,’ as they “had wounded me to the quick [...] I think in this way oblique light will be thrown on the fact that the support you have received from the Press has been not corrupt but disinterested and legitimate, and this will make people think of the true dimensions of your work.”¹³⁹ Strachey did not reply, but Fisher did, offering a final justification of his methods over the previous twenty-five years: “I can truthfully say I never sought the Press, but I recognized it as the one and only engine that could effect the vast revolution [...] as *without the Press it could not all have been done.*

¹³⁷ Beresford to H.H. Molyneux, 25 Jan 1910, quoted in Robert K. Massie, *Dreadnought: Britain, Germany, and the Coming of the Great War* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1992 [1991]), 541.

¹³⁸ White to Fisher, 21 Jan 1910, HRC JLG R, Fisher 9; Fisher to Thursfield, 30 Mar 1910, CCA FISR, 1/27; Freeman, *Great Edwardian Naval Feud*, 227.

¹³⁹ White to Fisher, 6 Feb 1910, CCA FISR, 3/4.

It may not be politic to say this, but it is true.” But Fisher purposely separated himself from those who “gave *dejeuners* [lunches] to the Press like Beresford and Co at Claridge’s or in [his] flagship.” Fisher had maintained a correspondence with White for decades, but he believed he had nothing to apologize for: after all, they had lunched together only twice.¹⁴⁰ Fisher claimed that he had used facts, not bravado and glamor, to win the press over to his side, which made all the difference.

Fisher sought to reassure his journalistic allies that although he was gone, his reforms would continue. He was still involved with the Committee of Imperial Defence (he confidently assured Thursfield that he had turned down their offer of the committee’s presidency so as not to attract undue attention), but “my mission as I once told you is that of the mole – my existence only to be known by upheavals.”¹⁴¹ He also made vague allusions to his future return. “I am buried for a year,” he wrote to Arnold White. “But in the tomb I am not wasting time.”¹⁴² At the Admiralty, Fisher confidently assured Garvin “my 4 sea friends on the Board of Admiralty are not going to let things down! I’ve left a memo [...] that no Cabinet would dare to see published if they tried to let things down.” He ended with a reminder to the editor that at the end of the day it was the Royal Navy’s administration that had pushed for the warships that were defending

¹⁴⁰ Fisher to White, 10 Feb 1910, quoted in Bacon, *Life of Lord Fisher II*, 120; emphasis in original.

¹⁴¹ Fisher to Thursfield, 30 Mar 1910, CCA FISR, 1/27; this was an absolute falsity, as the Prime Minister was the official head of the CID.

¹⁴² Fisher to White, 23 Feb 1911, quoted in Bacon, *Life of Lord Fisher II*, 127.

the nation: “Who got the 8? Do you really believe that any outside pressure did it? but let it be thought it did!”¹⁴³

Would Fisher’s successor at the Admiralty indeed live up to his legacy? The incoming First Sea Lord was Admiral Sir Arthur Knyvet Wilson. He was not the youthful protégé that Fisher had hoped for; in fact he was only a year younger than the departing admiral, and his tenure could not be long. But he was a firm believer in Fisher’s reform program, and was purposely chosen to ensure the Fisher reforms would endure.¹⁴⁴

Arthur Wilson may have been dedicated to Fisher’s program, but he was not willing to maintain the same contact with the press that had been so essential to the public relations success of Fisher’s Admiralty. The press noticed. Arnold White wrote to Fisher that Wilson was “running a serious & dangerous risk both in switching off public interest from the Navy, and in leaving the formation of public opinion to men like Sir G. Armstrong & Co.”¹⁴⁵ Garvin worried that due to Wilson’s lack of self-promotion “the country has forgotten again that there is a First Sea Lord. It is this utter lack of

¹⁴³ Fisher to Garvin, 6 May 1910, HRC JLG R, Fisher 9; emphasis in original. Garvin had been concerned that the Royal Navy would not maintain its construction policies after Fisher’s departure. Fisher put no stock into Garvin’s worries: “such effeminate bleatings of fear play into the hands of Lloyd George & Winston! [...] 2 keels to 1 in March 1912 & still you yelp like a beaten cur!” It can be seen in this letter that although Fisher certainly appreciated the value of the press, he felt all naval reforms ultimately owed their origin to the Admiralty.

¹⁴⁴ Shawn T. Grimes, *Strategy and War Planning in the British Navy, 1887-1918* (Rochester, NY: Boydell Press, 2012), 157.

¹⁴⁵ White to Fisher, 26 Jul 1910, HRC JLG R, White; White reminded Fisher that Wilson had made no secret of his “aversion from newspapers” as early as 1906.

present interest in naval personalities and things that I don't like.”¹⁴⁶ Fisher stressed to his supporters that none of his reforms were in danger, but he was concerned as well.¹⁴⁷ He wrote to Gerard Fiennes, assistant editor of the *Pall Mall Gazette*, that Wilson had just informed him the annual maneuvers had gone quite well. Wilson had not informed the London papers, which had reported the fleets had struggled: “the natural consequence of an unintelligent ban on the Press,” Fisher believed.¹⁴⁸ Characteristically, he bolstered his allies' spirits not by emphasizing Wilson's fitness for the position but by reassuring them that “if there was war I should be back.”¹⁴⁹

Even in retirement, Fisher was determined to keep the navy in the public consciousness. With Wilson proving to be an unhelpful ally, Fisher turned to McKenna, who remained as First Lord of the Admiralty after Fisher's departure. Fisher respected McKenna as “a born fighter and a good hater,” and was determined to keep him from being toppled either at the hands of Conservatives or Radicals.¹⁵⁰ He encouraged his

¹⁴⁶ Garvin to Fisher, 25 Oct 1911; Garvin to Fisher, 1 Jul 1909, HRC JLG M, Marder.

¹⁴⁷ Fisher to Yexley, 16 Aug 1910, CCA FISR, 3/4.

¹⁴⁸ Fisher to Fiennes, 2 Aug 1910, CCA FISR, 15/2/2/1. On the rare occasions when Wilson did deal with the press, he was not a practiced hand. He waded into the contemporary debate over conscription by contributing a chapter to Ian Hamilton's book against the idea, which both went against precedent and allied him with inveterate Fisher enemy H.A. Gwynne; Morris, *Scaremongers*, 262-263. He also contributed information to a March 1911 article in the *National Review*, but when the article appeared it featured his initials; Fisher called it “artless,” Fisher to Sydney Eardley-Wilmot, 3 Mar 1911, CCA FISR, 3/5.

¹⁴⁹ Fisher to Garvin, 17 Oct 1911, HRC JLG R, Fisher 12. Just as characteristically, Fisher soon seemed to regret his departure. As he wrote to Arnold White: “The true secret of successful administration is the intelligent anticipation of agitation – ‘control the whirlwind & direct the storm’. Another 2 years would have done it but perhaps I left at the right time.” Fisher to White, 8 Mar 1910, CCA FISR, 15/2/1/6.

¹⁵⁰ Fisher to Esher, 18 Feb 1910, quoted in Farr, *Reginald McKenna*, 207.

supporters in the press to throw their weight behind McKenna, for example in this letter to Garvin: “I have just had a visit here from McKenna. [...] He has had clear notice that Lloyd George & Winston are going to do their utmost possible to Jonah him. So agitation must not cease.”¹⁵¹

The former First Sea Lord also put McKenna into direct contact with many prominent navalists. He had introduced McKenna to Lionel Yexley shortly before his retirement, and Arnold White met with McKenna of his own accord.¹⁵² After his departure from the Admiralty, Fisher set up meetings between the First Lord and the naval journalists John Leyland, Gerard Fiennes and Archibald Hurd. His letter to Hurd typifies how these connections were made. Fisher had spoken highly of Hurd to McKenna, and recommended that Hurd “go on & cultivate him as he will be a very useful & valuable friend for you to have.”¹⁵³ McKenna also made his own contacts,

¹⁵¹ Fisher to Garvin, 4 Aug 1910, HRC JLG R, Fisher 9. Similar letters went out to Thursfield, Stead, and Hurd. Fisher to Thursfield, 21 Jan 1911, CCA FISR, 1/27; Fisher to Stead, 4 Aug [n.y.], CCA STED, 1/27; Fisher to Hurd, 8 Aug 1910, Churchill Archives Centre, Churchill College, Cambridge, Sir Archibald Hurd Papers (hereafter CCA HURD), 1/14. It is interesting to note that Fisher specifically asked Thursfield to shield McKenna from the *radical* criticism of F. W. Hirst (editor of the *Economist*) and Henry Massingham (editor of the *Nation*).

¹⁵² Carew, *The Lower Deck of the Royal Navy*, 16; White to Fisher, 1 Feb 1911, CCA FISR, 3/5.

¹⁵³ Fisher to Hurd, 19 Jun 1910, CCA HURD 1/14; Fisher to Leyland, 12 Oct 1910, CCA FISR, 15/3/2/4; Fiennes to Fisher, 19 Jan 1911, CCA FISR, 3/4. Fisher had spoken of Hurd to McKenna as early as February: “I won’t deny I played card for you with McKenna. Keep the ball rolling with him it will repay you.” Fisher to Hurd, 10 Feb 1910 [dated 10 Jul by archive], CCA HURD, 1/14.

including working with journalists such as Charles à Court Repington who had held no influence in the Fisher administration.¹⁵⁴

The journalists favored by McKenna were grateful for their continued access to Admiralty information; Gerard Fiennes vowed to “do my utmost to support [McKenna] against the attacks made upon him by his own side.”¹⁵⁵ But navalism was a two-way street, and McKenna was not as willing to disclose privileged information as Fisher had been, even when pressed; Garvin, for example, wrote that “if I could say that you [...] desired to maintain the unconditional supremacy of the Navy, *cost what it may*, I should be delighted.”¹⁵⁶ A great deal of correspondence passed between McKenna and editor of the *Daily Telegraph* Archibald Hurd, whom the First Lord used as a point of contact with other journalists, but although McKenna was willing to meet with the editor at the Admiralty he still did not allow Hurd to publish his parliamentary speeches as “a naval manifesto.”¹⁵⁷ James Thursfield became disillusioned with McKenna’s hesitancy, and

¹⁵⁴ Repington to Garvin, 26 Apr 1910, HRC JLG R, Repington. Fisher, who knew of the meeting, refused to trust Repington: “Repington has just been to McKenna to sell him his pen if McKenna will give him information & he promises to damn Thursfield & the idea of a general staff for the Navy – he says he has 4 influential papers in the palm of his hand. He sounded McKenna if he (Repington) could attack me – he got hell in reply to that – McK played with him to get all he could out of him & then showed him out.” Fisher to Leyland, 23 May 1910, CCA FISR, 15/3/2/4.

¹⁵⁵ Fiennes to Fisher, 19 Jan 1911, CCA FISR, 3/4.

¹⁵⁶ Morris, *Scaremongers*, 164.

¹⁵⁷ McKenna to Hurd, 26 Nov 1910, CCA HURD, 1/35; see also McKenna to Hurd, 24 Jun 1910, 31 Oct 1910, and 7 Dec 1911, in the same archival folder, and McKenna to Hurd, 17 Jun 1910, CCA HURD, 4/2.

complained to Fisher that “I never see anyone at the Admiralty now [...] it was very different when you were here.”¹⁵⁸

Fisher’s continued influence on the Admiralty after his departure involved more than simple letters of introduction, and it did not go unnoticed by his former colleagues. Fisher continued to prepare McKenna’s weekly briefings from his home, ensuring that the admiral’s strategic vision remained in place.¹⁵⁹ He was widely suspected of influencing personnel decisions through his relationship with both the King and McKenna.¹⁶⁰ And to be fair to Fisher’s critics, he did enjoy thinking of himself as a sort of on-call problem solver for the Admiralty. When he was summoned back from a holiday on the Continent to meet with the First Lord, he wrote happily to Arnold White: “it was a very good thing that I went as I was able to ‘direct the whirlwind and control the storm’! but it does sicken me to cross the trail of these pimps and intriguers and unabashed liars still as McKenna truly says I’m bound to do my best for the Navy and so I went and saw and conquered!”¹⁶¹

¹⁵⁸ Thursfield to Fisher, 30 Apr 1911, CCA FISR, 3/5.

¹⁵⁹ Nicholas Lambert, *Sir John Fisher’s Naval Revolution* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1999), 236. Fisher remained so close to McKenna that a rumor spread, as Fisher wrote to Esher, “that the McKenna baby is the image of me!!!” Fisher to Esher, 23 Mar 1910, Churchill Archives Centre, Churchill College, Cambridge, Viscount Esher (Reginald Brett) Papers (hereafter CCA ESHR), 10/43.

¹⁶⁰ John Hattendorf, “Admiral Prince Louis of Battenberg (1912-1914),” in *The First Sea Lords, From Fisher to Mountbatten*, edited by Malcolm H. Murfett (Westport, CT: Praeger, 1995), 77; H.R. Hulbert to Maxse, 6 May 1911, CHI MAXSE, 463.

¹⁶¹ Fisher to White, 26 Nov 1911, CCA FISR 15/2/1/7.

These behind-the-scenes maneuvers were taking place against the backdrop of yet more political upheaval. The year 1910 saw two general elections, the first in January and the second in December. Both centered around an issue not directly related to navalism, Lloyd George's 'people's budget' and the resultant reform of the House of Lords, and both saw the diminution of the large Liberal majority from 1906 to near-equality with the Conservatives in Parliament. Naval issues played a larger role in the January election, which occurred less than a year after the national debate over 'we want eight.' *The Times*, the *Observer*, and the *Daily Mail*, all Northcliffe papers, placed special emphasis on naval funding; Northcliffe encouraged Garvin (who needed little encouragement on these matters) to focus on increased battleship construction, and even hired the category-defying socialist, nationalist, and supporter of conscription Robert Blatchford to pen a series of articles on the damage the Liberal Party was doing to the navy.¹⁶² These tactics were effective; as McKenna campaigned for re-election in North Monmouthshire he was surrounded by crowds shouting for more dreadnoughts,¹⁶³ while Beresford won easily at Portsmouth.¹⁶⁴

¹⁶² Gary S. Messinger, *British Propaganda and the State in the First World War* (Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press, 1992), 149.

¹⁶³ Farr, *Reginald McKenna*, 187. A similar scene had taken place the previous year at a by-election for Croydon, held to replace the deceased H.O. Arnold-Forster; in this instance the Conservative candidate won handily. Hamilton, *Nation and the Navy*, 110-111.

¹⁶⁴ However, Syndicate member Carlyon Bellairs, whom Beresford publicly endorsed, was defeated and would be defeated again in December. Matthew Johnson, *Militarism and the British Left, 1902-1914* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 73-74.

Supporters of both parties viewed naval agitation rather more cynically in 1910 than they had in the previous election of 1906. Fisher believed “the Navy is the Tories’ only chance in an Election,”¹⁶⁵ but the Tories themselves were campaigning on other issues while still relying on the navalist press; Leo Maxse wrote to Garvin that although “we can win on Joe [Chamberlain] and on nothing else [...] I must say the very legitimate alarm aroused as regards the Navy is going to help us as it should.”¹⁶⁶ The four contingent dreadnoughts from the ‘we want eight’ controversy were even seen as a Liberal electioneering ploy.¹⁶⁷

The split election (274 Liberals and 272 Conservatives were returned to Parliament) left neither party satisfied, and it was immediately obvious that the issue of the Lloyd George budget was not solved; meanwhile, naval issues retreated to the background throughout the summer of 1910. Navalism and the political sphere did cross in isolated incidents. Captain Robert Arbuthnot was removed from his position after criticizing the Liberal Party in a public speech and warning of the imminent threat posed by Germany – he had read the evidence in the *Daily Mail*.¹⁶⁸ Later in the year W. T. Stead obtained an interview with Lloyd George on naval policy. He attempted to push

¹⁶⁵ Fisher to J.A. Spender, 22 Apr 1910, in Marder, *Fear God and Dread Nought II*, 324. Fisher was referring to the January election: “a clever man told me it did wonders for them last time!”

¹⁶⁶ Maxse to Garvin, 24 Dec 1909, HRC JLG R, Maxse; the reference to Chamberlain is an allusion to tariff reform.

¹⁶⁷ H.W. Wilson to Maxse, 14 Oct 1909, CHI MAXSE, 460.

¹⁶⁸ Julian Thompson, *The Imperial War Museum Book of the War at Sea, 1914-1918* (London: Sidgwick & Jackson, 2005), 17.

the Chancellor of the Exchequer into officially supporting the ‘two keels to one’ strategy favored by navalists – the policy that Britain would build two dreadnoughts for every single dreadnought constructed by a foreign power. Although Stead “got him further than anybody else has been able to do,” Lloyd George stopped short of endorsing the idea – so Stead simply wrote in his article that Lloyd George *had* pushed for two keels to one. Unfortunately for Stead (and fortunately for international relations), he showed Lloyd George a prepublication copy of the interview and the chancellor “struck it out much to my regret.”¹⁶⁹

December 1910 brought a second general election, fought over proposed restrictions to the House of Lords’ veto power on legislation stemming from the earlier struggle to pass the Lloyd George budget. King Edward VII had died in May, giving the major parties a useful justification to hold another election under the new King George V in an attempt to break the January deadlock. Disappointment again followed, with the parties closer than ever before: 272 Liberals and 271 Conservatives. Although Fisher remained concerned that navalist agitation would throw the election to the Tories and bring in Beresford as First Lord of the Admiralty, naval policy as a whole did not play a major part in either party’s election strategies.¹⁷⁰

¹⁶⁹ Stead to Garvin, 18 Oct 1910, HRC JLG R, Stead.

¹⁷⁰ Fisher to Pamela McKenna, n.d. [Dec 1910], in Marder *Fear God and Dread Nought* II, 345; Williams, *Defending the Empire*, 177-178. Frank McDonough, *The Conservative Party and Anglo-German Relations, 1905-1914* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2007), 89 points out that Balfour and the Conservative Central Office purposely prioritized both the Lloyd George budget and tariff reform over naval concerns.

In fact Beresford, who had been in office for nearly a year with plans to bedevil Fisher and any Liberal administration, was having his own troubles in Parliament. His speeches on behalf of the Royal Navy were frequent, enthusiastic, and rambling. He called Stead and Garvin “wild men” on the floor of the House of Commons, but tried to mend fences with Arnold White after years of mutual dislike; White thought he was “not mentally sound.”¹⁷¹ Winston Churchill referred to him as “one of those orators who before they get up, do not know what they are going to say, when they are speaking do not know what they are saying, and when they have sat down do not know what they have said.”¹⁷² His most harmful attack on Fisher came about entirely by accident when King George V, no admirer of Fisher’s, suggested that Beresford be promoted Admiral of the Fleet before his official retirement in early 1911. Asquith and McKenna vetoed the suggestion, but Garvin strongly supported it in the *Observer*; as a result the working relationship between him and Fisher was severely damaged.¹⁷³

McKenna won reelection in both 1910 contests and remained as First Lord of the Admiralty as the Liberal majority dwindled. The last major change in Admiralty leadership before the First World War would come in October 1911. As a result of the

¹⁷¹ Fisher to Fiennes, 14 Apr 1910, CCA FISR, 15/2/2/2; Thomas Crease to Fisher, 15 May 1910, HRC JLG R, Fisher 9.; White to Fisher, 23 Mar 1910, CCA FISR, 3/4.

¹⁷² Churchill, quoted in Violet Bonham Carter, *Winston Churchill: An Intimate Portrait* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, Inc., 1965), 205.

¹⁷³ Farr, *Reginald McKenna*, 182-183; Garvin to Sandars, 12 Jan 1911, in Marder, *Fear God and Dread Nought II*, 350. The two would reconcile – Fisher had no issue making permanent enemies among his subordinates and colleagues but knew the wisdom of never cutting all ties with a journalist.

Agadir crisis between France and Germany in Morocco, the Committee of Imperial Defence met to discuss war plans, particularly regarding whether Britain could utilize its army or navy more effectively in a general European conflict. First Sea Lord Wilson was as ineffective as ever before the committee; he advocated a close blockade in the style of the Napoleonic Wars, was seen as “pliant” by his subordinates, and “never asserted himself as First Sea Lord.”¹⁷⁴ Fisher, who had supported Wilson so strongly upon his appointment, complained to his daughter-in-law that his successor “was not a Machiavelli, and these lawyers in the Cabinet just walked round him. When a cunning rogue talks at you, you must talk back! Dear old Wilson only smiled!”¹⁷⁵ Wilson’s presentation was so disastrous that the CID chose to pursue the War Office strategy based on sending elements of the army to France. Asquith sensed it was time for a change, but rather than replacing Wilson he replaced McKenna. He would swap Cabinet-level positions with the Home Secretary, effective immediately. The new First Lord of the Admiralty would be Winston Churchill.¹⁷⁶

On paper, Churchill was an unexpected choice to lead the Admiralty. But McKenna had been an unexpected choice who had worked out well, and Churchill had

¹⁷⁴ Sandars to Balfour, 14 Feb 1911; Jellicoe to Hamilton, 19 May 1915, quoted in Nicholas Lambert, “Admiral Sir Arthur Knyvett-Wilson, V.C. (1910-1911),” in *The First Sea Lords, From Fisher to Mountbatten*, edited by Malcolm H. Murfett (Westport, CT: Praeger, 1995), 47. Knyvet Wilson and Knyvett-Wilson were both acceptable spellings of the admiral’s name.

¹⁷⁵ Fisher to Mrs. Cecil Fisher, 2 Dec 1911, quoted in Lambert, “Admiral Sir Arthur Knyvett-Wilson,” 38.

¹⁷⁶ Details on the CID in this paragraph are compiled from Duncan Redford and Philip D. Grove, *The Royal Navy, A History Since 1900* (New York: I. B. Tauris, 2014), 33; in any event Wilson lasted less than two months before Churchill appointed Admiral Sir Francis Bridgeman in his place.

previously been offered the position in 1906 before it had gone to McKenna.¹⁷⁷ In the intervening years he had only become, as Lloyd George observed, “more and more absorbed in boilers.”¹⁷⁸ The day after accepting the position as first lord, he wrote to Fisher to set up a meeting between the two as soon as possible. Although the two had not communicated at length since the fight over the 1909 naval estimates, Churchill wanted Fisher back at the Admiralty – initially as First Sea Lord for a second term, though this idea was quickly dropped. Instead, Churchill requested that Fisher act as an unofficial advisor: “I shall most sedulously endeavour to carry you with me in my administration at the Admiralty and I have good hope that I shall succeed, and that you will feel free to be a ready and constant counsellor.”¹⁷⁹

Fisher’s political allies suggested he take Churchill up on his offer. As Esher wrote to Fisher: “Winston is clever – but he is young. I think it would be better if he had you always at his elbow.”¹⁸⁰ Fisher also knew that Churchill was searching for naval policy advice wherever he could find it, and he had put out feelers to Beresford to gauge the latter’s interest in a similar advisory role.¹⁸¹ Fisher could not allow Beresford to

¹⁷⁷ Bonham Carter, *Winston Churchill*, 123. Churchill had turned the position down and then attempted to get it back at Fisher’s urging, but McKenna had already accepted Asquith’s offer.

¹⁷⁸ Gretton, *Winston Churchill and the Royal Navy*, 1.

¹⁷⁹ Churchill to Fisher, 2 Nov 1911, quoted in Hough, *Admiral of the Fleet*, 305. The preceding paragraph is compiled from Hough, *Admiral of the Fleet*, 311-312.

¹⁸⁰ Esher to Fisher, 31 Dec 1911, in Oliver, Viscount Esher, ed., *Journals and Letters of Reginald, Viscount Esher* (London: Ivor Nicholson & Watson, 1938) III, 76-77.

¹⁸¹ Gretton, *Winston Churchill and the Royal Navy*, 71; Gretton notes that these early Churchill-Beresford contacts are recorded in Beresford’s papers but not in Churchill’s.

return to the Admiralty in any capacity, and he told Churchill he must choose between them: “Winston wants to ride two horses at the same time – Beresford & self – I told him to try it – nothing like a nasty fall!”¹⁸² So Churchill chose Fisher, due both to Fisher’s experience with Admiralty policy and his press connections. The admiral had already “suggest[ed] for your consideration those who I know and can guarantee to serve you well. If you take the advice there given I can ensure absolute and brilliant success in your administration – but they all inter-weave with each other so it’s a case of all or none!”¹⁸³ Accepting Fisher’s aid implicitly meant accepting the entire Fisher system, including the admiral’s journalistic allies.

Initially this was a sacrifice Churchill was willing to make. Fisher happily wrote to the journalist Gerard Fiennes that Churchill’s “association with [Alan] Burgoyne [Conservative MP and editor of the *Navy League Journal*] is all to the good, and if he sent for Hurd, that is good also, and if you lunch with him it will be better.”¹⁸⁴ But Churchill had his limits. Archibald Hurd had a contentious meeting with the First Lord at the Admiralty early in the latter’s tenure – the details have not survived, but Hurd apologized to Churchill afterward: “I am exceedingly sorry that my first – and last – visit to the Admiralty since your accession to office should have been so unfortunate. I have

¹⁸² Fisher to Fiennes, 3 Nov 1911, CCA FISR, 15/2/2/2.

¹⁸³ Fisher to Churchill, 28 Oct 1911, Churchill Archives Centre, Churchill College, Cambridge, Sir Winston Churchill Papers, Chartwell Collection (hereafter CCA CHAR), 13/1; emphasis in original. The letter specifically mentioned J.A. Spender, editor of the *Westminster Gazette*.

¹⁸⁴ Fisher to Fiennes, 8 Feb 1912, in Marder, *Fear God and Dread Nought II*, 429-430.

been interested in naval affairs for over 20 years & this is my first experience of any unpleasantness.” Churchill had apparently asked Hurd to serve as an informant of sorts; Hurd “should have liked to have complied with your request, but on a matter of principle I cannot give way [...] I cannot join in an inquisition.”¹⁸⁵ Churchill’s reply was mildly threatening: “The lack of secrecy, which prevails in this country in regard to naval matters, & the levity with which disclosures are regarded, appear to me to amount to a very considerable national evil, and unless by co-operation between the newspapers & the Admiralty some protection can be secured for public interests, legislation will undoubtedly become necessary in the near future.” He also asked Hurd to “see me personally in regard to the publication of any matter of which you have reason to be in doubt.”¹⁸⁶

This was not how successful connections between the press and the Admiralty were forged. Churchill was willing to work with Fisher, but not within his system. He favored making use of supportive journalists only for his own ends, as when he asked Garvin to deal with inflammatory statements Beresford had been making in Parliament: “I don’t intend to reply to Beresford, or to contradict his statements publicly [...] I think perhaps you will like to deal with the subject.”¹⁸⁷ He generally left everyday press communication to Fisher, which brought with it two inherent risks. First, Fisher

¹⁸⁵ Hurd to Churchill, 4 Dec 1911, CCA CHAR, 13/1.

¹⁸⁶ Churchill to Hurd, 13 Dec 1911, CCA HURD, 4/1.

¹⁸⁷ Churchill to Garvin, 8 Aug 1912, HRC JLG R, Churchill.

generally promoted his own theories of naval policy over Churchill's. On one occasion he wrote to Garvin that "Winston is weak on the 2 keels to 1 [...] you and Stead and Alan Burgoyne and Fiennes are all right in hammering away at the 2 keels to 1 – as it strengthens and backs up Winston in his own camp!"¹⁸⁸ Secondly, retirement had not mellowed Fisher's famously temperamental personality. When Churchill promoted longstanding Syndicate member Admiral Sir Reginald Custance to command of the naval base at Devonport, Fisher was scathing: "I fear this must be my last communication with you in any matter at all. I am sorry for it but I consider you have betrayed the Navy."¹⁸⁹ Fisher expressed his concern that "in the last few weeks [Churchill] has begun to wobble again and I have had to tell him some d—d nasty things."¹⁹⁰ Yet the latest feud between the two was resolved within weeks; Fisher could not bear to be away from the levers of power for long.

Even as Fisher continued to influence Admiralty decision making, one major navalist group was playing less of a part in Churchill's Admiralty – serving naval officers themselves. Those who had welcomed Fisher's departure were disappointed to see him return, and as Fisher's consultations with Churchill were not publicized (and officially not happening) they could not even air their grievances in the press. At one point Churchill took the Admiralty yacht to Naples to visit Fisher at his summer home.

¹⁸⁸ Fisher to Garvin, 9 Jan 1912, HRC JLG R, Fisher 12.

¹⁸⁹ Fisher to Churchill, 22 Apr 1912, CCA CHAR, 13/14.

¹⁹⁰ Fisher to Ranksborough, 26 Apr 1912 [dated 1911 by archive], CCA FISR, 3/5.

David Beatty commanded the yacht, and complained about the various detours necessary for Churchill to consult with “that old rascal Fisher.” He warned his wife to “not mention in conversation with *anyone* that Fisher is in close confidence with Winston. It would be most injurious to the Service, if it ever got out, and the Navy would hate it.”¹⁹¹

Some elements of the Conservative Party saw this reluctance to work with the First Lord as a result of Churchill’s politics. Walter Long believed “the best men *in* the Navy regard W.C. and all his works with profound suspicion & grave misgiving: they look to us [i.e. Conservatives], to see through W.C.’s trickery & be ready to fall upon his misdeeds.”¹⁹² In reality – and in contrast to the situation even two years previously – it was the presence of journalists within the Admiralty’s highest circles that unsettled many officers. Fisher apologetically wrote to naval correspondent John Leyland that he would not be able to meet with Admiral William May: “I don’t think it would help you as he is a weak spirit as regards journalists & does not realize their great value to the Navy.”¹⁹³ Prince Louis of Battenberg, as Second Sea Lord one of the highest ranking figures in the Admiralty, informed Churchill in 1912 that he would no longer be allowing reporters to attend the annual maneuvers, as “we have had bitter experiences

¹⁹¹ Beatty to Ethel Beatty, 24 May 1912, in Chalmers, *Life and Letters of Beatty*, 114. Beatty was also soundly disgusted by Filson Young’s (editor of the *Outlook*) admiring article on him that had been published without Beatty’s knowledge: “I suppose he thinks he is making me [...] it does me harm in the Navy, who can’t abide the advertisement of a newspaper.” Beatty to Ethel Beatty, 11 Apr 1913, in Chalmers, *Life and Letters of Beatty*, 123.

¹⁹² Long to Bonar Law, 4 Sep 1912, quoted in Williams, *For Party or Country*, 214.

¹⁹³ Fisher to Leyland, 31 Oct 1912, CCA FISR, 3/6.

with them in the past & I hope never to see them allowed on board ship again! they are most mischievous.”¹⁹⁴ Gestures like this, while they may have seemed very noble to the officers involved, deprived the Royal Navy of what had become an extremely effective public relations tool.¹⁹⁵

The period between 1911 and the beginning of the First World War saw more than just the split between press and professional navalists. The entire system of cooperation that had led to so many naval reforms over the previous quarter-century was fragmenting. With both serving officers and Churchill’s Admiralty retreating from their journalistic supporters, there was no reason for authors and editors to pen favorable articles on naval matters unless they were personally invested in the issue, and while some were – Arnold White and Archibald Hurd in particular continued to publish navalist works – it was a more difficult sell for editors without the possibility of exclusive Admiralty information. The last opportunity many journalists had to gain access to the corridors of power was through Fisher, but he was increasingly unreliable – often at odds with Churchill, and increasingly willing to cut out old acquaintances over perceived slights.¹⁹⁶

¹⁹⁴ Battenberg to Churchill, 22 Apr 1912, CCA CHAR, 13/9; Battenberg did apologize for sending this letter two days later, and the correspondents were sent.

¹⁹⁵ After the departure of Fisher as First Sea Lord in 1910 none of his pre-war successors – A.K. Wilson (1910-1911), Francis Bridgeman (1911-1912), and Prince Louis of Battenberg (1912-1914) – devoted really any effort whatsoever to press relations.

¹⁹⁶ Besides his brief coolness with Garvin, Fisher cut ties with James Thursfield in 1910 after the latter questioned the wisdom of building only dreadnought battleships in *The Times*; Fisher to Fiennes, 19 Feb 1910, CCA FISR, 15/2/2/2. Stead was killed in the *Titanic* disaster of 1912, depriving Fisher of his oldest ally.

As for party politics, navalism became less of a national concern following the 1909 scare and the January 1910 general election. This is not to say that navalists had lost any of their political influence – in fact the lessening of national agitation was a paradoxical navalist victory, as evidence of a political consensus that navalism was broadly acceptable. The yearly estimates were increasing at a record pace. In 1908, before the ‘we want eight’ crisis, they had been £32 million. They topped £40 million for the first time in 1910, and the final pre-war estimates of 1914 came in at a record £51.5 million.¹⁹⁷ There were more dreadnoughts every year. By 1914 Britain boasted twenty-nine dreadnoughts and battlecruisers afloat, supplemented by a further thirteen under construction.¹⁹⁸ Each was more expensive than the last; the cost for each dreadnought increased by twenty percent and each battlecruiser by twenty-five percent between 1909 and the outbreak of war.¹⁹⁹ These increases were mitigated for a time by

¹⁹⁷ David French, *The British Way in Warfare, 1688-2000* (London: Unwin Hyman, 1990), 164; Morris, *Radicalism Against War*, 166; Richard Hough, *The Great War at Sea, 1914-1918* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983), 46. Part (albeit a small part) of the expanding naval budget was due to the Royal Navy’s increasing popularity. In 1911 the royal fleet review for George V’s coronation cost £31,000, ten times what it had in the 1880s. From 1912 the estimates included an entire section on Ceremonies and Visits. Jan Rüger, “Nation, Empire and Navy: Identity Politics in the United Kingdom 1887 – 1914,” *Past & Present* 185 (November 2004): 164; Jan Rüger, “‘The Last Word in Outward Splendour’: the Cult of the Navy and the Imperial Age,” in David Stevens and John Reeve, eds., *The Navy and the Nation: The Influence of the Navy on Modern Australia* (Crows Nest, NSW: Allen & Unwin, 2005), 48-49.

¹⁹⁸ Lawrence Sondhaus, *Naval Warfare 1815-1914* (New York: Routledge, 2001), 205; navalists who felt the RN also needed more smaller fleet units such as destroyers, who were dismissed by Fisher as anti-dreadnought reactionaries, would be vindicated during the First World War.

¹⁹⁹ Holger H. Herwig, *“Luxury” Fleet: The Imperial German Navy 1888-1918* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1980), 71; Herwig additionally notes that the percentage of the British military budget spent on the navy as opposed to the army went from a 54/46 split in 1905 to 64/36 in 1914.

additional revenue from Lloyd George's 1909 budget, but by 1913 the navy was inexorably adding to the national debt.²⁰⁰

What made these unpleasant numbers such a triumph for navalism was that few were complaining. In 1910 the radical *Daily News* bemoaned the "appetite of this monster of armaments," while the journal *Concord* called the estimates "a betrayal [...] of the traditional principles of the Liberal and Labour parties," claiming they never would have passed "were it not for the constitutional crisis."²⁰¹ By 1913 only the *Concord* was still lamenting the yearly increases in the estimates, and in a resigned manner: "We have to wince now under the hard blow that war 'scares' are 'made' to order by a subsidised Press; that alarmist rumours are cynically edited and put into circulation in order to stimulate public opinion to make a clamour for more ships and more guns."²⁰² This was a statement both eloquent and true, but the *Concord* was merely 'discovering' a system that had been in place for decades and was an established part of the British political landscape. In 1914 only thirty-five MPs, most of them members of the nascent Labour Party, voted against the estimates. A simultaneous Conservative measure to increase the naval budget further – when the estimates were higher than they had ever been – won 190 adherents.²⁰³

²⁰⁰ Jon Sumida, "Fisher's Naval Revolution," *Naval History* 10:4 (July 1996): 23.

²⁰¹ Massie, *Dreadnought*, 709; *Concord*, March 1910, quoted in Morris, *Radicalism Against War*, 166.

²⁰² *Concord*, June 1913, quoted in Morris, *Radicalism Against War*, 335.

²⁰³ Weinroth, "Left-Wing Opposition to Naval Armaments," 94-95.

Navalism, particularly directed navalism, was no longer the divisive issue of the day for any of the major groups of politicians, professionals or the press. Yet navalism as a concept had become firmly embedded in the framework of all these disparate factions. In 1914 everyone from the First Lord of the Admiralty, to the commander of a dreadnought in the Home Fleet, to the editor of *The Times* had to engage with navalist ideas and principles as a matter of course. Navalism merged into an integral part of British nationalism, but as it became larger and more influential as a concept those who had brought it to life to solve focused and often technical problems had lost their hold over it. As a movement grows in size its edges inevitably blur, and directing navalism toward specific political or professional causes was no longer feasible. What *was* feasible – and quite successful – will be discussed below.

CHAPTER VII

CONCLUSION

Naval pressure groups had taken their own lessons from the panic of 1909 and the resultant turmoil at the Admiralty. Where Jacky Fisher saw dangerous opposing forces and Charles Beresford saw perhaps his last opportunity for redemption, the Navy League and the Imperial Maritime League saw opportunity. This push for recognition continued during both 1910 general elections. The Imperial Maritime League remained as partisan as ever, asserting that a vote for any candidate “who comes forward as a supporter of the Liberal Government, no matter what his election pledges may be [...] amount[s] to a vote in favour of a little Navy.”¹ It took the split election of January as a victory, claiming credit for “contribut[ing] materially towards the semi-destruction of the Party which has itself proved so destructive” of national naval superiority. The IML predicted a second election would be rapidly forthcoming (which turned out to be correct), and that it would turn on naval issues (which did not); the organization hoped it could “give decisive assistance towards the wresting of the reins of office from a Party which, from the moment of its accession to power in December 1905, has shown itself incapable ever of appreciating [...] the duty of safeguarding the National Defences.”² During the second election of 1910 the IML continued its electioneering campaign, releasing a series of handbills calling for the nation to “**turn out the radicals** and

¹ Open letter from Wyatt and Horton-Smith to the press, 7 Jan 1910, Caird Library, National Maritime Museum, Greenwich, UK, Lionel Graham Horton-Smith Papers (hereafter NMM HSM), 20.

² “The Imperial Maritime League and the Next General Election,” pamphlet, April 1910, NMM HSM, 20.

socialists or, when War comes You will **starve**”³ and an election manifesto professing “every vote given to a Liberal candidate is a vote given for National Starvation in War.”⁴

Essentially, the Imperial Maritime League abandoned both any pretense of impartiality and any attempt to reach the general British public *à la* the Navy League after 1910, admitting in 1912 it “cannot [...] reach by itself the ears of the masses throughout the British Isles. To achieve that end, an enormous organisation, comprising millions of members, and handling revenues of hundreds of thousands a year, will be requisite. There is no such organisation except the Unionist Party.”⁵ The IML continued its crusade against both the Liberal Cabinet – reporting in 1912 that “this Government will be known in history as ‘The Betrayers’ and ‘The Starvers of the Poor’”⁶ – and the Navy League, which was denigrated as “an Admiralty Lap-Dog destined to receive the official gratitude of a so-called Liberal Party for its quiescence in the face of [...] that Party’s schemes of political and party economy.”⁷

Yet as the IML’s rhetoric became harsher, its own ability to affect public policy became feebler. By 1911 official publications were rather desperately claiming that a

³ Imperial Maritime League handbill, 2 Dec 1910, British Library, London, Imperial Maritime League pamphlets (hereafter BL IML), 08805; emphasis in original. The archival collection includes a price list for similar handbills – for example, £2 for 1,000 copies of “Throw out the Government.”

⁴ “General Election Manifesto of the Imperial Maritime League,” 2 Dec 1910, BL IML, X.631 742.

⁵ Harold Frazer Wyatt and L.G.H. Horton-Smith, “Britain’s Imminent Danger” (Oct 1912), NMM HSM, 26.

⁶ Open letter from Wyatt and Horton-Smith to the press, 13 Mar 1912, BL IML, 08805.

⁷ W. Mark Hamilton, *The Nation and the Navy: Methods and Organization of British Navalist Propaganda, 1889-1914* (New York: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1986), 162-163.

donation of £3000 to the IML would enable Britain to “go forward on her path of Empire and fulfil that task which history and Providence seem to have allotted to her.”⁸ The Imperial Maritime League had supported the Conservative Party in hopes the latter would accept it as an official or semi-official party apparatus, but its leaders were disappointed; Arthur Balfour never supported the IML either publicly or privately.⁹ In 1912 the extreme Conservative Lord Willoughby de Broke was appointed president of the IML. He assured Leo Maxse that he “only took the Presidency in order to have a weapon in our hands to make an attack when necessary on Fisher and Churchill [...] I should be grateful if you would tell me when to strike.”¹⁰ A disillusioned Wyatt and Horton-Smith both left the League, and by 1914 it had fewer than 1500 members. The Imperial Maritime League disappeared quietly during the First World War; its last contribution to the public discourse was the mass production of a poster accusing German soldiers of eating babies on the front lines.¹¹

The Navy League, meanwhile, was still facing an internal struggle as to how partisan its official actions could be while still remaining acceptable to the voters of both

⁸ Harold Frazer Wyatt and L.G.H. Horton-Smith, “The True Way to Celebrate the Coronation” (25 Apr 1911), BL IML, 08805.

⁹ Frank McDonough, *The Conservative Party and Anglo-German Relations, 1905-1914* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 124.

¹⁰ Willoughby de Broke to Maxse, 16 Jun 1912, Chichester, UK, West Sussex Records Office, Maxse Papers, Letters to Leopold J. Maxse (hereafter CHI MAXSE), 466.

¹¹ Frans Coetzee and Marilyn Coetzee, “Rethinking the Radical Right in Germany and Britain before 1914,” *Journal of Contemporary History* 21:4 (October 1986): 534; McDonough *Conservative Party and Anglo-German Relations* 124-125.

major parties. It approached the precipice in 1910, editorializing in its official journal, *The Navy*, that “unless the electorate fulfills its duty at the polls in January 1910, it is very unlikely that England as a free country will see another parliamentary election.”¹² Yet during the same election the NL called on voters to “drop party for once and vote for a supreme fleet,” and the organization’s official takeaway from the split result was a noncommittal claim that “one of the great factors in effecting the reduction of the Radical majority has been the feeling throughout the country that the Government has not done its duty by the Royal Navy.”¹³ The NL even appointed the socialist navalist Robert Blatchford to join its executive committee, which he did only to step down quietly months later after an uproar from more traditionalist committee members.¹⁴ When the Navy League published a list of 83 candidates for Parliament who had signed the League’s pledge supporting the two-power standard, 77 were Conservatives – but the 6 Liberals were just enough of a nod towards bipartisanship to keep the Navy League from following the Imperial Maritime League down the path toward becoming a purely political organization.¹⁵

¹² *The Navy*, Jan 1910, quoted in Frans Coetzee, *For Party or Country: Nationalism and the Dilemmas of Popular Conservatism in Edwardian England* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), 122; the *Navy League Journal* had changed its title to *The Navy* in 1909.

¹³ Matthew Johnson, *Militarism and the British Left, 1902-1914* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 71; Matthew Johnson, “The Liberal Party and the Navy League in Britain before the Great War,” *Twentieth Century British History* (2011), 152.

¹⁴ Johnson, “The Liberal Party and the Navy League,” 143.

¹⁵ Coetzee, *For Party or Country*, 121.

The Navy League also managed to emerge from the wilderness and receive official political and professional support for the first time in over a decade. This could be difficult, as the League's reputation preceded it. When the former Liberal MP Lord Nunburnholme was offered the presidency of the NL's Yorkshire branch, he wrote to then First Lord of the Admiralty McKenna to inquire if he should accept the position. McKenna recommended he turn it down, as it would be "unavoidable that unfair criticism would be made of the Liberal government" by the League.¹⁶ Churchill went further and banned any member of the Board of Admiralty from accepting "any hospitalities" from the Navy League, as "on several recent occasions speeches have been delivered at Navy League dinners [...] which have been of a controversial & partisan character wholly unsuited to a professedly non-party gathering."¹⁷ But the NL was adamant that its speakers "should be entirely non-party in character." League general secretary P. J. Hannon assured Churchill that "no officer or official of the League has ever used on these occasions any criticisms of either the Board of Admiralty or of yourself as First Lord."¹⁸ Hannon went so far as to guarantee that the NL would "select speakers whom we can trust not to offend in this respect" in the future.¹⁹ And the NL

¹⁶ McKenna to Nunburnholme, 20 Apr 1909. Quoted in Coetzee, *For Party or Country*, 122.

¹⁷ Edward March [Churchill's secretary] to the Navy League, 10 Dec 1913, Churchill Archives Centre, Churchill College, Cambridge, Sir Winston Churchill Papers, Chartwell Collection (hereafter CCA CHAR,) 13/20.

¹⁸ Hannon to Churchill, 10 Dec 1913, CCA CHAR, 13/20.

¹⁹ Hannon to Churchill, 11 Dec 1913, CCA CHAR, 13/20.

scored an important victory when the Board of Education officially allowed, albeit implicitly, the formation of League branches in public schools.²⁰

Hannon and his colleague Alan Burgoyne, Conservative MP and member of the Navy League's executive council, did secure a valuable ally in their fight for increased official recognition – Jacky Fisher. Though Fisher could no longer guarantee the NL access to the highest-ranking members of the Admiralty, he was certainly more useful as a friend than an enemy. On the surface this seemed like a victory for both Fisher and the League, and Fisher did aid the League by putting its executive committee in touch with the navalist and sailors' advocate Lionel Yexley, encouraging the League to work with him to improve conditions for the lower decks.²¹ However, the decision was a pragmatic one by both parties. Fisher claimed Burgoyne was “a *patriot!*” who “was so sympathetic and so steadfast [...] that I have a tender feeling for him!”²² Yet privately he thought it “amusing to find [the Navy League] now discovering that we were not d—d fools [...] but which of them all is Man enough to own up & take back some of the lying calumny

²⁰ Board of Education minute, 5 Jul 1912, National Archives, Kew, Board of Education Private Office Papers (hereafter KEW ED), 24. ‘Implicitly’ is specified because the Board found that although “the Navy League is undoubtedly tarred with the political and Party brush” it had no jurisdiction to prevent League branches “unless the Branch is obviously made the means of Party or political propaganda.”

²¹ Fisher sold the idea to Yexley as a means of bringing sailors' issues to Parliament from the Conservative side of the aisle through Burgoyne and former NL president Robert Yerburch, also a Conservative MP. Fisher to Yexley, 12 Oct 1911, Churchill Archives Centre, Churchill College, Cambridge, 1st Lord Fisher of Kilverstone Papers (hereafter CCA FISR), 3/5. Two years later Fisher recommended (on Churchill's advice) that Yexley run as a Liberal against Beresford at Portsmouth. Fisher found this “Machiavellian cunning;” it is not likely Yexley felt the same. Anthony Carew, *The Lower Deck of the Royal Navy, 1900-39: The Invergordon Mutiny in Perspective* (Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press, 1981), 84.

²² Fisher to Yexley, 12 Oct 1911; Fisher to Fiennes, 17 Apr 1910, in Arthur J. Marder, ed., *Fear God and Dread Nought: The Correspondence of Admiral of the Fleet Lord Fisher of Kilverstone*, 3 vols. (London: Jonathan Cape, 1952-9) II, 378; emphasis in original.

heaped on the poor devil who took the whole thing on his own shoulders? Such is life.”²³ He also admitted to using Navy League membership lists to search out new navalist contacts.²⁴

For his part Burgoyne seems to have maintained contact with Fisher for two reasons: first, to establish a relationship with J. L. Garvin and, as he wrote the editor, establish “a solid backing from your most influential paper;”²⁵ second, simply because Charles Beresford, longtime supporter of the Imperial Maritime League, had “successfully alienated my friends in high places from me”²⁶ and the NL needed an influential source close to the Admiralty. Still, the Navy League under Burgoyne did its best to be apolitical. Burgoyne declared to Fisher that he would shutter the League rather “than have it a partisan organisation, run to obtain revenge,” and even expressed a desire to act as a Conservative supporter of McKenna in Parliament;²⁷ he was happy for the NL to be “closely associated with Whitehall in all we do.”²⁸

²³ Fisher to Arnold White, 28 Oct 1910, CCA FISR, 15/2/1/6.

²⁴ Fisher to Yexley, 24 Oct 1911, quoted in Hamilton, *The Nation and the Navy*, 242.

²⁵ Burgoyne to Garvin, 10 Oct 1910, Harry Ransom Center, University of Texas at Austin (HRC), James Louis Garvin Papers, recipient collection (hereafter HRC JLG R), Burgoyne. This relationship appears to have been successful; in late 1911 the *Pall Mall Gazette*, whose editorship Garvin had also assumed, ran an interview with Burgoyne in which the latter declared his full confidence in Admiralty policy. “Britain’s Navy,” *Pall Mall Gazette*, 20 Nov 1911.

²⁶ Burgoyne to Fisher, 20 Oct 1911, CCA FISR, 3/5; Burgoyne referred specifically to Leslie Cope-Cornford and Carlyon Bellairs in his letter.

²⁷ Burgoyne to Fisher, 17 Oct 1909, CCA FISR, 3/3.

²⁸ Burgoyne to Fisher, 20 Oct 1911, CCA FISR, 3/5.

Yet all these backroom deals and surreptitious agreements, so long essential to the propagation of navalist ideas, were ancillary to the Navy League's true strength after 1909. In 1909 *The Navy* had expressed concern that the NL had been "too aristocratic, too far above the level of the crowd," thus failing "to establish a firm hold upon the interests of [...] the lower middle and the wage-earning classes."²⁹ But that same year the Navy League's membership began to expand rapidly, from 20,000 members in 1908 to 100,000 in 1912 and 125,000 by the outbreak of war in 1914.³⁰ In 1913 the NL called for a million members, and for the first time such a number did not seem entirely outside the realm of possibility.³¹

Several factors brought about the sudden surge in Navy League membership. The great 'we want eight' agitation of 1909 likely played a major role, as it was the last occasion before the war where naval issues were a national concern and received coverage in all major periodicals and dailies; concerned citizens with little prior interest in politics would have been far more likely to join the Navy League than its extraordinarily partisan competitor. On a broader scale, the lantern-lectures to children so disparaged by the IML were bearing fruit. The Navy League had been in existence for nearly two decades, and had established almost a cottage industry of navalist material

²⁹ *The Navy*, Aug 1909, quoted in Coetzee, *For Party or Country*, 111.

³⁰ Coetzee and Coetzee, "Rethinking the Radical Right," 522.

³¹ Anne Summers, "The Character of Edwardian Nationalism: Three Popular Leagues," in *Nationalist and Racialist Movements in Britain and Germany Before 1914*, Paul Kennedy and Anthony Nicholls (London: Macmillan Press Ltd, 1981), 76.

to distribute or sell throughout the nation. The League produced a maritime version of the famous pink map of the British Empire, with trade routes and fleet coaling stations highlighted, that could be found posted throughout London.³² It distributed history textbooks with a naval theme to schools throughout the country and held prize essay competitions on sea power for students.³³ The Trafalgar Day celebration begun by Arnold White remained popular enough that it was expanded into a Trafalgar Fund, through which the League raised more than enough to remain solvent even after the required outlay on wreaths and flowers each October 21st.³⁴ When Leo Maxse's *National Review* accused the Navy League of neglecting its duty, long-time League member Henry T. C. Knox proudly responded that the NL "thinks it is better employed in educating the ignorant masses about the Navy than in getting up Petitions to the House of Lords."³⁵

The Navy League was (inadvertently) aided in this public relations mission by the Admiralty – not in the corridors of power by Fisher and Churchill, but on a much wider institutional level. Historian Jan R ger terms this broad-scale community

³² W. Mark Hamilton, "The 'New Navalism' and the British Navy League, 1895 – 1914," *Mariner's Mirror*, 64:1 (1978), 42.

³³ John M. MacKenzie, *Propaganda and Empire: The Manipulation of British Public Opinion, 1880-1960* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1984), 183.

³⁴ Marianne Czisnik, "Commemorating Trafalgar: Public Celebration and National Identity," in *Trafalgar in History: A Battle and its Afterlife*, David Cannadine, ed. (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), 145.

³⁵ Knox to Maxse, 11 Oct 1909, CHI MAXSE, 460; emphasis in original.

outreach the “cult of the Navy.”³⁶ Taking another approach, this project uses the term ‘soft navalism,’ as opposed to directed navalism, for the same type of nonpartisan pro-naval activity.³⁷ The Admiralty had absorbed Fisher’s lessons on the value of sympathetic journalism and expanded greatly upon them. While Fisher gathered a small cadre of influential columnists and editors around him, the Admiralty offered credentials to 217 correspondents, including 50 from provincial newspapers, at the 1911 fleet review. At a 1909 fleet review on the Thames four million Britons turned out to see what the great scare had bought their nation; police had to be called in after 20,000 enthusiastic Londoners rushed the *Dreadnought* at its pier. The Admiralty followed this up with a second fleet assembly specifically for journalists, both local and imperial, the same year. The Royal Navy offered children’s programs aboard warships at reviews³⁸ and sent cruisers on ‘hurrah trips’ around the country on recruitment drives; this was a far cry from the 1890s, when enthusiastic captains with no organizational guidance cycled around the countryside distributing recruiting pamphlets.³⁹ Even the test

³⁶ Jan Rüger, ‘Nation, Empire and Navy: Identity Politics in the United Kingdom 1887 – 1914,’ *Past & Present* 185 (November 2004), 160.

³⁷ However, Rüger believes the Navy League played a “relatively insignificant” role in soft navalism, focusing instead on “the mass media, entertainment and tourist industries;” see Rüger, Jan, *The Great Naval Game: Britain and Germany in the Age of Empire* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 96-99. It is somewhat difficult to claim a movement of 100,000 played no role in spreading navalist ideas and ideals.

³⁸ Rüger, *Great Naval Game*, 13, 50, 55, 179.

³⁹ Mary Conley, *From Jack Tar to Union Jack: Representing Naval Manhood in the British Empire, 1870-1918* (Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press, 2009), 27; B. M. Chambers, *Salt Junk: Naval Reminiscences, 1881-1906* (London: Constable & Co Ltd, 1927), 233.

mobilization of July 1914, so essential in the Royal Navy's response to the outbreak of war, was conducted only because the Treasury refused to pay for yet another full-scale review.⁴⁰

Thus, the navalist organization that had for so long stood apart – the pressure group – emerged in the last years of peace as the true success story of the navalist era. But what became of the traditional directed navalist relationships between journalists, parliamentarians and the Admiralty's upper echelons? As with so many other seemingly permanent institutions of British life they were destroyed by the First World War, essentially at their own hands. The various governmental investigations into breaches of confidentiality going back over a decade frightened the London dailies so sufficiently they implemented a voluntary system of self-censorship, the Admiralty, War Office and Press Committee – funded by the Newspaper Proprietors' Association – in 1912. The outbreak of war made voluntary censorship obsolete almost overnight. Just days after Britain declared war came the official Press Bureau, headed by the Conservative politician F. E. Smith; its mission was to ensure that “a steady stream of information supplied both by the War Office and the Admiralty can be given to the press.” Next came the Defence of the Realm Act, or DORA, banning upon threat of military justice any release of information “as is calculated to be or might be directly or indirectly useful to the enemy.” J. L. Garvin of the *Observer*, J. A. Spender of the *Westminster Gazette*, and John St Loe Strachey of the *Spectator*, editors all, joined the War Propaganda

⁴⁰ Rüger, *Great Naval Game*, 45.

Bureau; their war efforts would be devoted outward towards neutral nations, not inward to the old partisan squabbles.⁴¹ Naval correspondents were immediately banned from British fleets, and the combined Grand Fleet disappeared into obscurity in Scapa Flow for the remainder of the conflict.⁴²

The great titans of professional navalism, Charles Beresford and Jacky Fisher, found themselves thrust into a political and operational landscape in which their usual methods of journalistic cooperation and surreptitious dealings were no longer effective. Beresford played a small but notable role in Britain's decision to enter the war. In early August 1914 Beresford was part of a delegation of far-right Conservatives dispatched to bring Conservative Party leader Andrew Bonar Law, who had been meeting with party luminaries in the countryside over the matter of Home Rule, back to London. When Beresford set upon Bonar Law "purple with rage and shouting" about naval issues, Bonar Law rapidly headed to the capital to more effectively shift his party's focus towards the international situation.⁴³

Beresford was involved in a much uglier incident soon afterwards. The office of First Sea Lord had experienced a great deal of upheaval under Churchill. In the three

⁴¹ M. L. Sanders and Philip M. Taylor, *British Propaganda during the First World War, 1914-18* (London: Macmillan Press, 1982), 8-9, 20, 39.

⁴² Captain John Wells, *The Royal Navy: An Illustrated Social History 1870-1982* (Dover, NH: Alan Sutton Publishing Inc, 1994), 110.

⁴³ Nigel Keohane, *The Party of Patriotism: The Conservative Party and the First World War* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2010), 13; R. J. Q. Adams, *Bonar Law* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1999), 169-170. The deputation also included Leo Maxse, Leo Amery, and Henry Wilson.

years since his appointment Admiral of the Fleet Arthur Wilson and Admiral Francis Bridgeman had come and gone, and since late 1912 the position had been held by Admiral Prince Louis of Battenberg. Battenberg was related to the Royal Family, and had lived in Britain since the late 1860s – but he was Austrian by birth, and in the tense climate of 1914 a vicious newspaper campaign soon sprang up against him. Beresford was suspected of involvement – he had called Battenberg “a d—d German who had no business in the British Navy” in 1906 and his opinion had not improved in the intervening years.⁴⁴ Beresford was accused by the Conservative politician Arthur Lee of repeating similar slanders almost immediately upon the British declaration of war, leading to a scathing letter from Churchill: “In times of war the spreading of reports likely to cause mistrust or despondency is a military offense [...] the interests of the country do not permit the spreading of such wicked allegations by an officer of your rank, even though retired.”⁴⁵ In response the admiral subjected Lee to “a torrent of violent abuse” via telephone, culminating in threats to “make some kind of scene” in Parliament.⁴⁶ In any event Beresford’s plan backfired spectacularly. Battenberg stepped down under great public pressure in October of 1914. His replacement, called from a quiet retirement, was Jacky Fisher.⁴⁷

⁴⁴ Battenberg to Fisher, 24 July 1906, quoted in Richard Freeman, *The Great Edwardian Naval Feud: Beresford’s Vendetta against Fisher* (Barnsley, UK: Pen & Sword Maritime, 2009), 105.

⁴⁵ Churchill to Beresford (draft), 29 Aug 1914, CCA CHAR, 13/43.

⁴⁶ Lee to Churchill, 29 Aug 1914, CCA CHAR, 13/43.

⁴⁷ Freeman, *Great Edwardian Naval Feud*, 237.

But the Jacky Fisher of 1914 was not the Jacky Fisher of 1904 or even of 1910. He held grudges dating back decades. Soon after taking office he attempted, though not particularly seriously, to have the *Morning Post* shut down and its editor H. A. Gwynne jailed under the Defence of the Realm Act after Gwynne implied he was senile.⁴⁸ He could still be visionary, and believed the Admiralty should adopt oil-fueled battleships, submarine warfare and bombing campaigns. But he could not push through reforms like these on his own during a war, and he found himself “in the position of playing a game of chess very badly begun by fools I hated.”⁴⁹ He was uncomfortable without the support of his journalistic allies, and claimed “neither Press or Parliament represent the real thought of the People.”⁵⁰ Fisher and Churchill’s time together at the Admiralty generally ranged from unproductive to absurd. Admiral Sir Henry Oliver, Chief of the Admiralty War Staff and Churchill’s secretary, recorded in his memoirs that the massive nautical chart in Churchill’s office marking the positions of every British ship at sea was

⁴⁸ Fisher to Churchill, n.d. (1914), CCA CHAR, 13/28; Fisher to Hurd, 8 Dec 1914, Churchill Archives Centre, Churchill College, Cambridge, Sir Archibald Hurd Papers (hereafter CCA HURD), 1/14.

⁴⁹ Fisher to Mrs. Randal Morgan (mother of his daughter-in-law), 4 Dec 1914, quoted in Richard Hough, *Admiral of the Fleet: The Life of John Fisher* (New York: Macmillan Company, 1969), 325-326. As a result of Fisher’s work with the Royal Commission on Fuel Oil in 1912, supposedly a peaceful sinecure, the British government purchased the Anglo-Persian Oil Company (later British Petroleum). It can be argued that this constitutes Fisher’s greatest legacy, for better or for worse. Hough, *Admiral of the Fleet*, 319.

⁵⁰ Fisher to George Lambert (Civil Lord of the Admiralty), 28 Aug 1914, CCA FISR, 16/1.

entirely fake – Fisher and Churchill each brought too many “club gossips and editors” to see the chart for any actual intelligence to be marked on it.⁵¹

Fisher and Churchill’s tumultuous partnership at the Admiralty lasted less than seven months, during which time Fisher attempted to resign nine times over various perceived slights, snubs and Admiralty missteps.⁵² The ninth resignation, over the contentious and eventually unsuccessful Dardanelles campaign in May 1915, stuck. For a brief period Fisher’s career was in limbo as the government debated whether to accept his latest departure, while major newspapers including *The Times*, the *Daily Telegraph* and the *Daily Express* called for Fisher either to stay or to replace Churchill as First Lord of the Admiralty.⁵³ When he submitted a bizarre list of demands he considered prerequisite to his remaining in office, including full control over all personnel decisions, the government instead accepted his resignation.⁵⁴ Fisher was rapidly hustled off to Scotland, because – as secretary to the Committee of Imperial Defence Maurice Hankey recorded – he was known to be “intriguing with journalists” and the Cabinet

⁵¹ Admiral Sir William James, *A Great Seaman: The Life of Admiral of the Fleet Sir Henry F. Oliver* (London: H.F. & G. Witherby Ltd., 1956), 143. Oliver kept the accurate chart in his office.

⁵² Vice-Admiral Sir Peter Gretton, *Winston Churchill and the Royal Navy* (New York: Coward McCann, Inc., 1969), 222.

⁵³ Richard Hough, *Former Naval Person: Churchill and the Wars at Sea* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1987), 112. Neither the *Telegraph* nor the *Express* had supported Fisher previously, and this may be as much an expression of their dislike of Churchill as any enthusiastic support of Fisher.

⁵⁴ Hough, *Admiral of the Fleet*, 344.

wanted him “away from journalistic influences, as he may do himself and the nation great harm by an indiscretion in his present excited state.”⁵⁵

The system of directed navalism Fisher guided to its greatest extent did not long survive his departure. With no naval correspondents aboard the Grand Fleet, the first news Britain received of the great clash at Jutland in May 1916 was from German reports. The London dailies, lacking information to the contrary and frustrated with a close-lipped Admiralty, declared the battle (which had been a stalemate and would turn out to be a strategic British victory) a near-disaster. This earned the press, in the most general sense of the term, the enmity of the Royal Navy for the remainder of the war.⁵⁶ Admiral John Jellicoe, commander of the British fleet at Jutland, asked both the Board of Admiralty and Fisher’s replacement as First Sea Lord, Sir Henry Jackson, if the press could be censored, as their “articles are most hurtful to discipline and morale and discouraging to the officers and men of the fleet.”⁵⁷ When Jellicoe later became First Sea Lord himself he was advised by Reginald Bacon, no stranger to the danger of journalistic communication, to “put all admirals and generals through a short course of being strafed by the Press” so they could “cultivate a callous contempt for them and their

⁵⁵ Ruddock F. Mackay, *Fisher of Kilverstone* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1973), 504.

⁵⁶ Wells, *Illustrated Social History*, 110.

⁵⁷ Jellicoe to the Admiralty, 6 Jun 1916; Admiralty to Jellicoe, 6 Jun 1916; Jellicoe to Jackson, 6 Jun 1916, in A. Temple Patterson, ed., *The Jellicoe Papers*, 2 vols. (London: Spottiswoode, Ballantyne and Co, Ltd., 1966-68) II, 272-274. The Admiralty’s response was that it “has been thought wise to give as wide a latitude as possible to the Press, relying on their not abusing the indulgence.”

deeds.”⁵⁸ Young officer Douglas King-Harman typified the Royal Navy’s reaction to Jutland: “They’re funny people these journalists – they’ve been howling half the war to be told the ‘truth’, and when the unfortunate Admiralty tells it, or as much as they knew at the time, there was a bigger howl than ever.”⁵⁹

Both Beresford and Fisher avoided the public and professional spotlight for the remainder of the war. Beresford never forgave Fisher or any of Fisher’s allies for what he saw as a wholesale betrayal of naval interests via influencing journalists and cutting budgets a decade prior. As late as December 1918 he was planning an article for Leo Maxse’s *National Review* detailing how Fisher “instituted a press bureau at the Admiralty for attacking any officers he did not like, and had a system of espionage of a most treacherous character throughout the service [...] a private in the Army, a bluejacket in the Navy, would have been shot for what he did.”⁶⁰ In 1919 Beresford confessed to Archibald Hurd that he still held Fisher, McKenna and Churchill responsible for “my gallant dead shipmates.”⁶¹ He passed away later that year. Fisher refrained from any writing projects of his own while the war continued, and although he continued to support his old navalist allies he had grown cynical; as he wrote to Archibald Hurd, “your article is delicious! but no one reads Articles now-a-days.

⁵⁸ Bacon to Jellicoe, 26 Aug 1917, quoted in Patterson, *Jellicoe Papers II*, 202.

⁵⁹ Julian Thompson, *The Imperial War Museum Book of the War at Sea, 1914-1918* (London: Sidgwick & Jackson, 2005), 323.

⁶⁰ Beresford to Maxse, 5 Dec 1918, CHI MAXSE, 475. This article was never printed.

⁶¹ Beresford to Hurd, 5 Apr 1919, quoted in Freeman, *Great Edwardian Naval Feud*, 236.

Criticism is at an end – Parliament is gagged – the Press is frightened – the Public apathetic.”⁶² In 1919 he contributed a series of articles to *The Times* on his career, writing for the public under his own name for perhaps the first time in his life,⁶³ and followed this up with his esoteric memoirs; he died in 1920.

The traditional navalist era in Britain, consisting of private and generally surreptitious relationships between serving naval officers, politicians, and the periodical press, essentially ended in August 1914 and had certainly ended by the Armistice. So the final question must be asked: was British navalism before the First World War a success? In a word, yes – but a great deal of nuance is inherent in that brief answer. This project has been centered around the twin ideas that (1) navalism, beyond being a catch-all term for a variety of official and unofficial movements, meant specific goals and specific methodologies for various groups within the British state and (2) directed navalism resulted from the often-contentious relationship between three of these groups – serving naval officers, politicians, and the press – with navalist pressure groups an important secondary category which attempted to maintain contact with all three at various points. Each of these groups found directed navalism, which could not have existed without them, both a hindrance and a help at various points between 1884 and 1914.

⁶² Fisher to Hurd, 29 Mar 1916, CCA HURD, 1/16.

⁶³ Fisher’s six-part series “Lord Fisher on the Navy” appeared in *The Times* from 8-13 September 1919.

The first category, serving naval officers, is the most well-known – but the idea persists that only Jacky Fisher and Charles Beresford ever used the press to their advantage, a concept dating back to Reginald Bacon’s 1929 biography of Fisher in which the author claimed Fisher “was the first of our Admirals to make an intelligent use of the Press for the benefit of the Navy.”⁶⁴ True, Fisher and Beresford were the most prolific correspondents with journalists and editors. But this dissertation has demonstrated – if a list will be pardoned – that between 1884 and 1914 the following naval officers had *direct* contact with the British press, either via open letters under their own name to newspapers or communication with authors and editors: Astley Cooper Key, Frederick Beauchamp Seymour, Geoffrey Phipps Hornby, Anthony Hoskins, Thomas Symonds, George Elliot, Jacky Fisher, Charles Beresford, Swinton Holland, Dudley de Chair, William White, Richard Vesey Hamilton, Frederick Maxse, Sydney Eardley-Wilmot, C. C. Penrose Fitzgerald, G. H. Atkinson-Willes, E. R. Fremantle, John Hay, George Steward Bowles, Edward Field, Thomas Le Hunte Ward, Edmond Slade, W. H. Henderson, Herbert Richmond, Henry Oliver, Carlyon Bellairs, Charles Ottley, Reginald Custance, Cyprian Bridge, Percy Scott, Prince Louis of Battenberg, and John Jellicoe. The following officers had *indirect* contact with the press through writing to their naval colleagues or political superiors about ongoing journalistic communications: Frederick Richards, Walter Kerr, George King-Hall, Reginald Bacon, Hedworth

⁶⁴ Admiral Sir R. H. Bacon, *The Life of Lord Fisher of Kilverstone*, 2 vols. (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, Doran & Company, Inc., 1929) I, 180.

Lambton, Bryan Godfrey-Fausset, Gerard Noel, Doveton Sturdee, A. K. Wilson, John Hopkins, F. S. Inglefield, William May, Arthur Moore, John de Robeck, Rosslyn Wemyss, and Francis Bridgeman. This list encompasses every First Naval Lord and First Sea Lord of the Admiralty between 1879 and 1915 with the exception of Sir Arthur Hood (1885-86, 1886-89) and three of the next four Sea Lords to succeed Fisher in Jellicoe, Wemyss and Beatty. Maintaining a network of journalistic contacts was a priority at the highest levels of the Admiralty for a nearly-uninterrupted period of thirty-five years.

Were professional navalists able to achieve their goals during this period? They largely supported reforms that were both specific and nonpartisan, and were fairly successful in doing so: the “Truth about the Navy” scare of 1884 resulted in a supplemental naval estimate, Jacky Fisher’s educational reforms of 1902 modernized the system by which young cadets entered the Navy, the Naval Intelligence Division was created in 1886 due to Beresford’s agitation. Yet these reforms, though specific, could easily be generalized (a cynic might say ‘spun’) as broad positive developments and sold to the press in that manner: more ships than the French, a more egalitarian navy, proper war planning. Professional navalists ran into two issues throughout the period. The first was becoming *too* specific. Though Fisher was a master at successfully framing naval issues as national concerns, many serving officers were less able to present their pet projects as relevant to the country as a whole. Fisher’s botched effort to publicize gyroscopes through the Navy League (a rare public relations misstep), Beresford’s

electioneering campaign on the issue of Maltese coal, Percy Scott's gunnery reforms – none of these held much interest to the fabled navalist 'man in the street.'

The much larger issue for professionals, and one that essentially destroyed the effectiveness of professional navalism, was partisanship and the related problem of favoritism. Serving officers could be quite successful at assembling broad press and political coalitions. Beresford was supported simultaneously by Leo Maxse, David Lloyd George, and Robert Blatchford, while Fisher maintained excellent relations with Arthur Balfour, Reginald McKenna and Winston Churchill at various points during his tenure at the Admiralty. But internal clashes within the Navy spilled over into external relations with the press and the government, turning navalist allies into warring factions. This was a widespread issue within the Navy, particularly during the Edwardian period and after. J. H. Godfrey, who joined the Royal Navy in 1903, recalled in his memoir that "schisms there had been ever since I joined the navy. Firstly Fisher-Beresford, Beresford-Lambton, Beresford-Percy Scott, Jellicoe-Beatty, Beatty-Wemyss."⁶⁵

However, it must be said that the decade-long feud between Fisher and Beresford was by far the most far-reaching and the most damaging to professional navalism. Fisher was remarkably apolitical throughout his career, but Beresford was a staunch Conservative and brought politics into a personal dispute after 1908. Fisher's creation of the frankly nepotistic Fishpond system was equally as destructive to naval morale, and while his plan to focus solely on younger officers as protégés in theory would have led

⁶⁵ J. H. Godfrey, *The Naval Memoirs of Admiral J. H. Godfrey* (privately printed, 1961), 6, 79.

to a second generation of navalist officers by the 1920s, in practice it resulted in a large group of officers who found themselves entirely removed from any role within the power structure of the Admiralty. It is no wonder the Syndicate of Discontent turned to outside agitation.

Professional navalism was an absolutely necessary driving force behind the navalist movement. The “Truth About the Navy” campaign never would have happened if serving officers had not been willing to deal with W. T. Stead’s *Pall Mall Gazette*. But serving officers had won their greatest *navalist* victories by 1906 and the Fisher reforms. Professional activity following the 1909 ‘we want eight’ scare was almost entirely a reflection of personal animosities, and as a result naval officers trusted neither the press nor partisan politics by the last years before the war. In terms of successful agitation towards specific objects, professional navalism was the most successful group – but they collapsed the earliest as well.

What about navalists in the press? They largely supported reforms that were both partisan and designed to appeal to a wide audience. It must be remembered that it was the job of journalists and editors to sell newspapers; as historian Stephen Koss has written, “the task of politicians was to keep the political press from going wrong. That of proprietors was to keep it from going bust.”⁶⁶ While there were true navalist believers on Fleet Street, they were generally columnists: Arnold White, Archibald Hurd, James

⁶⁶ Stephen Koss, *The Rise and Fall of the Political Press in Britain: The Nineteenth Century*, 2 vols. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1981) I, 424.

Thursfield. Editors mostly took up the navalist cause to further their own interests, and the audiences they wrote for had to have at least a passing interest in navalism and naval issues; there were no navalist agitations in the *Manchester Guardian*. W. T. Stead was a Radical Liberal but also a pioneer of sensationalist journalism; his “Truth About the Navy” campaign was the second in a series of three major alarmist exposés his *Pall Mall Gazette* launched between 1883 and 1885. Leo Maxse’s *National Review* was a far right-wing Conservative mouthpiece, and Maxse took any excuse to denigrate the Liberal government after 1906, hence his willingness to work with Beresford in turning personal dispute into a partisan wedge issue.

Perhaps the best example is J. L. Garvin of the *Observer*, who was one of Fisher’s most devoted editorial allies. He was also a realist, and when defense issues became a national concern during the late Edwardian period Garvin needed an angle. *The Times* under Charles à Court Repington had the inside track on developments within the army; Cecil Spring Rice enlightened Maxse’s *National Review* and Strachey’s *Spectator* on the inner workings of the Foreign Office.⁶⁷ The Admiralty’s was the last major perspective missing from the London dailies, and Fisher was willing to talk, and so the great relationship between he and Garvin was formed. Their association also demonstrated the dangers that could befall high-ranking officers who worked with the partisan press. The *Observer* was generally acknowledged as the most influential Conservative paper after Garvin assumed editorial duties in 1908; but Garvin broke with

⁶⁷ Sanders and Taylor, *British Propaganda*, 5-6.

the party over the Lloyd George budget, and the *Observer* became increasingly marginalized as an organ of Conservative Party opinion – and Fisher’s chances to justify Admiralty policy under a Liberal government to an angry Conservative press became marginalized along with it.⁶⁸

To guard against similar accusations of partisanship, serving officers attempted to work with journalists across the political spectrum. Fisher in particular established relationships with the Liberal *Westminster Gazette* and *Daily News* as well as the generally Conservative Northcliffe press – and generally stayed away from the extremes of both parties, a lesson Beresford never learned. When operating at peak efficiency the navalist press created a self-perpetuating cycle. Once the Admiralty trusted a paper, that paper could expect a steady stream of assistance from Whitehall. But too often the papers themselves were subject to the vagaries of the market, or an editor leaving – the great example here being the *Pall Mall Gazette*, which essentially began directed navalism but had little to do with the phenomenon after Stead departed in 1890. The navalist press was extremely successful at driving and supporting naval reforms from the 1880s through the Fisher reforms, and extremely successful at selling papers through partisan agitation thereafter. This was undoubtedly the better decision for their continued national influence and their bottom line, but to naval officers it was a betrayal they never forgave.

⁶⁸ Alfred Gollin, *The Observer and J.L. Garvin, 1908-1914: A Study in a Great Editorship* (London: Oxford University Press, 1960), 321-322.

As for the third major navalist group, politicians, the question of their effectiveness is even more dependent on time period. They supported reforms that were both targeted and partisan – but non-threateningly partisan. The party in power had to justify its own naval policy, which was much more difficult for the Liberal government after 1906 than it had been for the Conservatives (that Fisher had entered office under the Conservatives as an avowed retrencher was conveniently immediately forgotten within that party), but it had to be justified to high-ranking experts, not navalist agitators, which worked to moderate their views. There was no Liberal push to disband the Royal Navy and no Conservative push to build a hundred ships per year, regardless of what each party's more extreme supporters would have preferred.

Another important role played by politicians was that of convenient scapegoat, particularly in the early years of the navalist movement. Navalist officers worked with supportive journalists to strengthen the Navy against a government viewed either as too stingy (the Liberals to 1889) or too wasteful (the Conservatives from 1902-04), in the two-versus-one model that proved so successful – and, importantly, the politicians often gave in and supported navalist reforms after a public campaign. At a time when the most active serving navalists were younger officers, the Board of Admiralty was often lumped into the broad category of 'politics' as an opponent to be rallied against, for example with Beresford's resignation in protest from the Board in 1888. It was a common tactic for newspapers to cite anonymous naval sources as proof that the government of the day was too involved with partisan issues and not supportive enough of the navy.

This tripartite division began to collapse as professional navalists moved up the chain of command. Beginning with Fisher's appointment as Second Naval Lord in 1902, navalist serving officers had to maintain working relationships with their Cabinet-level political counterparts. Fisher in particular excelled at this, easily winning over such disparate figures as Cawdor, Tweedmouth, McKenna and Churchill with his reforming ways. But he also had publicly to support all decisions made by the Admiralty (to be fair, most of them were his), which deprived his journalistic allies of an easy target for further agitation. The result was a rapidly increasing politicization of the navalist movement. Instead of professional-press cooperation *against* the government, the fight became politicians and their press supporters who were currently *out* of power against politicians, naval officers and their press supporters who were *in*. After the Liberal victory of 1906, Liberal politicians favored a very moderate navalism – reassuring their critics that the Empire was sufficiently defended and the Royal Navy's traditions were being upheld while doing their best to clamp down on public agitation. Conservative politicians (particularly backbenchers) favored an ever-more radical navalism. It was no longer sufficient to support the Navy; politicians had to demonstrate their parliamentary opponents would destroy the Navy unless they were stopped.

The three major groups involved with directed navalism – professionals, the press, and politicians – all played major roles in creating and sustaining the navalist era. Pro-naval journalists were supplied information by serving officers and used it to call for naval reforms; well-meaning parliamentarians took their lumps from the navalist press before co-opting their message and welcoming navalist officers into the corridors of

power at Whitehall. The navalist era would not have been possible without all three – and yet all three experienced their greatest success (or in the case of politicians, their most bipartisan period) early in the navalist era. After the ‘we want eight’ campaign and the Beresford Inquiry of 1909 directed navalism was almost entirely subsumed under a rising tide of politicization and radicalization, a phenomenon not unknown among other political and public movements in the last years before the First World War.

The true victor of the navalist era was soft navalism – the wives’ clubs, public speeches, primary-school essays, Trafalgar Day wreaths and lantern lectures so much maligned by those working in more partisan spheres. Navalism as a concept and a movement was a massive success. George Orwell joined the Navy League as a seven-year old; London stores sold everything from dreadnought toys to dreadnought-shaped biscuits; men and boys alike sailed homemade warships in the Trafalgar Square fountains to celebrate the declaration of war in August 1914.⁶⁹ This is the navalism so often studied, and so often accused – for better or for worse – of playing a major role in the worsening of international relations prior to the First World War. But it never would have existed without directed navalism.

The Navy League shifted its efforts to public outreach (and watched its membership rolls rise) only after attempting to win the favor of the Admiralty, the Cabinet and the Press Association and succeeding with none – but it owed its existence to those three groups all the same. Soft navalism grew quietly in the shadows for two

⁶⁹ Conley, *Jack Tar to Union Jack*, 9; Rüger, *Great Naval Game*, 13-14, 254.

decades then exploded into the spotlight as directed navalism consumed itself with partisan infighting, yet the second was a necessary precondition for the first. Navalists were not a monolithic entity, and each of the groups examined in this dissertation did win major victories early in the navalist era. After 1909 political and professional navalists were severely weakened by internal struggles, while the navalist press moved on to what they considered more urgent national issues; even without the coming of war it is unlikely the three groups would have ever fully cooperated as they had in the Edwardian period. The final word on the often effective, frequently tumultuous, and usually surreptitious relationship between the Royal Navy and the British press must go to Jacky Fisher, who left his last public thoughts on the London dailies in his memoirs: “History is so written that no end of literary gentlemen will endeavour to confute all I am saying by extracts (or, as they will call them, facts) from Contemporary Documents and Newspapers. Well now, to-day, read the *Morning Post* and *Daily News* on the same incident! (For myself I prefer the *Daily News*).”⁷⁰

⁷⁰ Lord Fisher, *Memories* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1919), 158-159.

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