

FOUR POWERS FAIL TO BACK BRITISH STAND

BIG POWERS TAKE UP SUBMARINE QUESTION

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bombardment or the disembarkation of a military force. It was necessary to ask, therefore, how such attacks were conducted in modern warfare. The reply was that they were conducted by powerfully armed swift moving vessels fully equipped to resist submarine attack to escort and protect the convoys of military transports. There was no branch of naval research which had more closely engaged the attention of experts than the counter-offensive against the submarine.

He was giving away no secrets when he stated that the methods of detecting, of location, as well as of destruction of submarines had progressed so much further than the offensive power of the submarines themselves that the latter had now already a real value against modern surface warships. This, however, was bringing him into somewhat technical subjects.

During the late war Germany had concentrated her efforts on the use of the U-boat and had built up the most formidable submarine fleet that the world had ever seen up to the present time. He believed that Germany had employed no less than 375 U-boats of 270,000 tons in the aggregate. Of these no less than 203 had been sunk.

Work Done by U-Boats.

What had these U-boats accomplished in legitimate naval warfare? It was almost insignificant. In the early part of the war a few obsolescent ships, which sometimes were not taking proper precautions, had been sunk but the British grand fleet throughout the war had not been affected. Not one single ship had been sunk or hit by the action of submarines, whether at sea or in harbor. Our light cruisers had even through all parts of the North Sea, and, wherever that sea had been clear of mine fields, had gone where they wished, uninterfered by the submarine.

Submarines had not prevented the passage of troops across the sea. No less than 15,000,000 British troops had crossed and recrossed the English Channel during the war, and not one man had been lost from the action of submarines except on board hospital ships, which in the twentieth century it had been deemed would be immune from the attacks of submarines and therefore had not been escorted. During the later months of the war some 2,000,000 United States troops had been brought across the Atlantic, and the submarine had proved equally powerless in their case. In fact, the U-boat, whether considered as an offensive or a defensive weapon against any sort of organized naval force, had proved almost contemptible.

It had been maintained that submarines were useful for the defense of coast lines and communications with colonies. He gathered from the press that this was one of the arguments used and so it would have to be examined

rapidly be expanded in time of war. Submarines could only be built if the industry were kept alive, and a personnel could only be provided if a trained nucleus existed. Hence it was only by means of abolition that this menace to the mercantile marine of the world could be got rid of.

He had said earlier in his remarks that the British Empire delegation was animated by no selfish motives. At the same time it would be foolish not to recognize that Great Britain was the nation most exposed to the menace of submarines. As long as submarine warfare continued it would be the greatest menace to the food supplies on which our country was depending. The British people lived in a crowded island whose soil produced only two-fifths of its supply of food.

For the remaining three-fifths they sought relief upon sea communications. On an average only seven weeks' stocks were maintained in the country. By far the greatest anxiety which the British Government had felt during the war was to prevent the reserves of food falling to zero. Was it surprising therefore if with a danger in front of them as great as any to which M. Briand had so eloquently explained France was subject the British people protested against a weapon which was the negation of humanity and civilization itself?

There are some people who said it was this vulnerability of Great Britain which justified the retention of the submarine, since it was by these means alone that the British Empire could be stricken down. The late war had shown, however, that the British Empire was not easily stricken down, and if war should ever come again he imagined that means would be found for our country to save itself from starvation. But it might be claimed if the U-boat had begun its operations earlier or had had better luck the result might have been different.

Points Out America's Danger. To this he would reply that the British Navy had constituted almost the keystone of the allied arch. But for the British Navy France would have been ruined, Belgium would have been overrun and even the United States of America, self-contained, self-supporting, with vast resources, would have been impotent to intervene and might have had to abandon its army and all that it had in France or else make a humiliating peace.

That would not have been a disaster to Great Britain alone. That was why he resented the idea, which had been

published in a part of the press, that the abolition of submarines was merely a selfish and unworthy design. It had been suggested that the conditions of the late war might never recur. Could France be sure of this? Could France run the risk of a disaster to her near neighbor only certain ally if the situation of 1914 were ever reproduced?

It was necessary to take long views in this matter, and the British Empire delegation believed that they were fighting the battle not only of the allied and associated Powers, but of the whole civilized world, in advocating the abolition of the submarine.

He felt sure that some one would ask: How can we feel sure that if we abolish submarines other Powers who are not represented will not proceed with the building of submarines? The same question might be asked as to other classes of craft mentioned in the American scheme. He found it impossible to believe that other Powers would set themselves against the opinion of the rest of the civilized world regarding this particular weapon. If, however, the great naval Powers should at some future date find themselves exposed to piracy by the action of some smaller Power, surely they would find the means of bringing Nemesis to the transgressor. World opinion was a very powerful weapon and certainly some means would be found by which the great naval Powers could protect themselves if necessary.

Cheapness Plea Belittled. It was said that submarines were a cheap method of warfare. Surely this conference did not desire that war be cheap? When war has been cheap it had been almost continuous. He hoped the submarine would not be defended because it would be a weapon within the reach of all. It might perhaps be cheap to the aggressor, but it was not so for the victim. The average number of German submarines at sea simultaneously during the late war had been more than nine or ten, but Great Britain had to maintain an average of no less than 3,000 anti-submarine surface craft in order to deal with these.

It could be seen, therefore, that it was a very expensive form of war for the defender. The British delegation was anxious to contribute toward the ideals of the present conference. They desired not only a limitation of armaments but also a limitation of expenditures, which constituted so great a burden in time of peace. That was why Great Britain, which had the tradition of possessing the greatest navy, had welcomed the proposal for curbing capital ships. What

should we gain, however, if this competition were merely transferred to submarines? Certainly not much, and meanwhile the submarine threatened our very life and existence. But if the submarine were abolished we could accept, with modifications in detail, practically the whole of the American proposals in regard to the lightening of these proposals.

Gas and Bombs Not Parallels. Lord Lee said he was not impressed with the argument that because it was found impossible to deal effectively with poison gas or air bombs, which were by-products of essential industries, we could not deal with the submarine. The submarine was not a by-product of any industry, but was essentially an offensive weapon.

He therefore said that it could be, and therefore ought to be, abolished. It was a weapon of murder and piracy and the drowning of non-combatants. It had been used to sink passenger ships, cargo ships and hospital ships. Technically the submarine was so constructed that it could not be utilized to rescue even women and children from sinking ships.

That was why he hoped that the conference would not give it a new lease of life. He had endeavored to state frankly that the submarine was only to a limited extent a weapon of defense, and that for offense it was really valuable only when used against merchant ships, and that it constituted the greatest peril to which the mercantile marine of the world was exposed. For defense he did not say it was useless, but merely inefficient, and that the disadvantages exceeded the advantages except for war on the mercantile marine.

The submarine was the only class of vessel for which the conference was asked to give—he would not say a license, but permission to thrive and multiply. It would be a great disappointment if the British Empire delegation failed to persuade the conference to get rid of this weapon, which involved so much evil to peoples who live on or by the sea.

Britain Leads in Subs, He Says. To show the earnestness of the British government in this matter Lord Lee pointed out that Great Britain possessed the largest and probably most effective submarine navy in the world, composed of 100 vessels of 80,000 tons. She was prepared to scrap the whole of this great fleet and to disband the personnel, proper to the sea.

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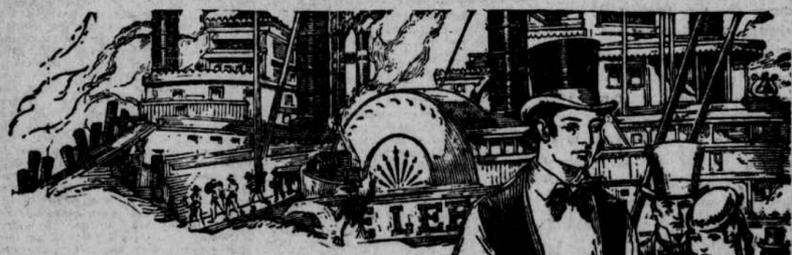
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