

Luce, S. B.

1907

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CONFIDENTIAL

Section	2
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Year 1907

No. 88

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Contents The FLEET. Lecture delivered before the Conference of Officers  
October 1, 1907.

ARCHIVES OF U. S. NAVAL WAR COLLEGE  
NEWPORT, RHODE ISLAND

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Naval Policy



THE FLEET.

That America has taken a fresh departure from the erst-while even tenor of her way is now universally acknowledged and acquiesced in. It is only by looking back a few short years that one can realize the great changes that have brought this country so prominently before the notice of the world. The accession of colonies and of battleships was synchronous. Beginning in a quiet and unobtrusive way, this wide departure from a traditional policy that had come to be regarded by many as sacred, attracted little attention. It requires no great discernment, now, to understand that both colonies and fighting ships will continue to increase and multiply until there will be an American colonial system, and, for its protection, a fully organized fleet. [ This accretion will come about, not because "we, the people," wish it; nor will it be retarded because "we, the people," do not wish it. It will come neither by accident, nor by design, but through the operation of the law of "manifest destiny;" a destiny manifest to the student of the philosophy of history and to the political seer. The unity and continuity of purpose apparent in the conduct of human affairs, bear ample evidence that the Great Lawgiver of the universe, He who marks the sparrow's fall, - will shape the country's ends, "rough-hew them how we will." ]

The colonies will need for their intelligent government a Colonial Secretary, who will be a member of the Cabinet; and the fleet will need intelligent government, not only to insure its efficiency but to keep within reasonable bounds the great expense its maintenance entails: about one hundred million dollars a year. The question is - and it is a very grave one for the country - how is the efficiency of the fleet to be kept up, and an economical expenditure of its funds ensured?

The wisdom of the framers of the Federal Constitution is not to be questioned; but, with all its advantages, the wide separation between the legislative and the executive branches of the government has, in practice, certain disadvantages. This separation is not conducive to harmony. Indeed it has led at

#Foot note. The words Fleet is used here in its general sense to signify the total number of vessels of war available for active service. In England Fleet and a navy are synonymous terms. S.B.L.



various times to what has savored of hostility on questions vitally affecting the interests of the country. Mutual understanding on naval matters is wanting. The reason for this will appear as we proceed. It is undoubtedly true that Congress has been extremely liberal in its appropriations for the navy; but as far as we can learn, this liberality has not been in accordance with any well digested plan of development.

To the lay mind it would appear that herein lies one fruitful source of trouble; there seems to be no settled plan of naval development upon which the Executive and Congress could agree. Were such a plan to be matured, and accepted, both branches of the government could act in harmony on most matters concerning the navy. There is such a thing as <sup>a</sup> naval policy. The building up of a navy, without a definite plan, is like directing a number of artisans to build some houses without stating how many houses were required, of what material to be constructed, or for what purpose they were to be used. The naval policy of England, for example, is very simple. It is known as the "two-power standard;" that is to say, the strength of the English navy must at all times be maintained at a strength equal to that of any two naval powers that may be combined against it. In the House of Commons not long since (November 12, 1906) the Prime Minister was asked if it was the policy of the Government to make equality with the two next strongest fleets the standard of England's naval strength? The Prime Minister's answer was: "The present strength of the British navy is in excess of the two-power standard." That is the naval policy, in a nutshell, of the greatest naval power of the world.

In more specific terms we find the First Lord of the Admiralty saying: (November 3rd, 1906) "The test the Admiralty applied to naval efficiency and the standard they had set up for years past, as that which must be maintained, was that we must be strong enough in battleships alone to defeat any combination of any two powers, and that we should have a margin over and above this, for contingencies of some ten per cent. This was the minimum which they had considered safe. With respect to our cruiser power,"



he added, "we needed, and must maintain far more."

It is obvious that the word "efficiency" as used here refers **only** to the strength of the line of battle.

It has been the naval policy of France since Trafalgar, as we gather from the foreign press, to keep two objects steadily in view. One, that it shall not be so far inferior to that of England as to put her diplomacy <sup>completely</sup> at the mercy of the British Government; the other that it shall be equal in strength to the navies of any two other naval powers in Europe, next in importance to those of England and her own. It has been found by experience that a proportion of battleships of the first class (which constitutes the real strength of navies) of two-thirds of those of England, satisfies, in the main, those conditions.

It is obvious that while France maintains its navy in about this proportion it can, by alliance with one or more of the other naval powers, be in a position not far short of that of England; and the British Government would, consequently, be compelled to think seriously before attempting to force the hands of France at any time when the relations between the two countries might become strained.

In this connection a distinguished statesman of England frankly admitted that, whatever confidence Englishmen may have in the sense of justice and moderation of their own Government they must admit that in any difficulty with France, their language, and attitude, on many international questions would be different, and less conciliatory, if the navy of France were reduced to a point where it would give them no concern whatever. It cannot be denied, then, that looked at by the light of experience in such matters the policy of France in this respect is wise, and gives to its diplomacy a force, which, otherwise would be wanting. Nelson said, a line-of-battleships was a great aid to diplomacy.

#### NAVAL POLICY.

The expressions "Naval Policy" and "Naval Efficiency" it may be observed, have been used by certain writers as convertible terms. This had led to no little confusion of



thought on naval matters. England's naval policy as we have seen, is to maintain the two power standard; while the naval policy of France is to keep the main body of her fleet in the Mediterranean. In the one case it is a question of the number of battleships of the first category; in the other the disposition made of those ships.

"Naval Efficiency" is construed by some authorities as meaning the number of battleships available for war, as in the case just quoted from speech of First Lord of the Admiralty; others again as the normal state of discipline of the fleet, and the judicious use made of it. There have been fleets powerful in numbers of ships and of guns, manned by a personnel of good fighting material and yet wholly inefficient for purposes of war.

From the English we get the very expressive term "fighting efficiency." Thus in "A statement of Admiralty Policy" of Nov. 30th, 1905, we gather from the Navy Estimates Committee that the following considerations obtained; "first, the whole object of the Navy Estimates <sup>is</sup> ~~are~~ to secure the fighting efficiency of the Fleet and its instant readiness for War; secondly, the least amount compatible to that end;" etc., etc.

In an alleged interview, the Hon. Jos. G. Cannon, Speaker of the U.S. House of Representatives, is represented as saying: "Our navy will be of no benefit to us unless the men know how to handle the ships, and how to work the guns. Efficiency is more important than any other consideration, and it can be gained only through practice. I feel there is a strong sentiment throughout the country in favor of maintaining an efficient navy, and, as I said before, efficiency is more important than size." These words are the words of wisdom.

Efficiency is the power to accomplish a desired end: the possessing of adequate skill for the performance of a duty. "The sword-fish can kill the whale" said an American gentleman when asked, in 1894, of the probable outcome of the War, then imminent between China and Japan. (The awakening of China, by Dr. W.A.P. Martin, p. 171.) Sound Naval policy includes: first the creation of an adequate floating force: and, secondly, its



effective use - in brief the weapon and the ability to wield it.

No American could have looked upon the fleet of battleships assembled in Hampton Roads, to assist at the Jamestown celebration, without a feeling of pride. The Navy Department is certainly entitled to some credit for this imposing display of sea power. But the credit must be shared by others - it must be shared with the iron and steel industries of the country, and by the great ship building plants now in operation.

To the Navy Department alone belongs the credit of initiating the movement which has led to this result -- a movement which has given the country a navy of which it may well feel proud. But the movement, once started, we have the great industries to thank for keeping it going.

In 1881 the first Advisory Board convened by the Secretary of the Navy, recommended the building of steel ships on the ground "that such a step would give an impetus to the steel industries of the country." That end has been accomplished far beyond what the most fervid imagination could have pictured; and it is probably due to the influence of those same steel industries that we are mainly indebted for the formidable line of battle now in Hampton Roads. The South Bethlehem Steel Works, the Midvale Steel Works, the Fore River Ship Building Co., The Cramps, and <sup>the</sup> Newport News Ship Building Co., and others on the Pacific Coast, all representing millions of dollars of capital, must not be suffered to languish for want of work. Taken together they have trained up an army of skilled artisans it would be impossible to duplicate in any part of the world. Congress is wise and far-seeing in providing them with work. It is in pursuance of this policy no doubt that Congress has recently authorized the construction of two 20,000 ton battleships.

By what means soever the fleet has been brought into being, its existence is an established fact, and its continued growth assured. The weapon has been forged, where is the hand



to wield it? Where the power to insure efficiency?  
These are very present questions and call for intelligent  
answers.

AS TO NAVAL EFFICIENCY.

In a speech delivered June 22, 1905, President Roosevelt declared that he would give up the Monroe Doctrine and the Panama Canal, rather than refuse the means which can alone render our attitude as a nation worthy the respect of mankind. "Therefore" he added, "Keep on building" (battleships) "and maintaining at the highest point of efficiency the United States Navy, or quit trying to be a big nation." That, in brief is the President's Naval Policy. It includes the power coupled with the ability to wield that power effectively.

We have seen that the building program of Congress has supplied the power. It only remains to consider the question of efficiency - the consummate ability to wield that power. Naval efficiency <sup>under wiselaws</sup> rests solely, and exclusively with the executive. This all-important factor of Naval Policy the President must, perforce, leave to his Secretary of the Navy. The latter a civilian, well versed in public affairs, but unfamiliar with naval or military matters, must, in turn defer to his advisors in the Navy Department. The latter are by no means wanting. The Secretary on assuming office finds himself associated with eight admirals, each one presiding over one of the eight bureaus of which the Navy Department is composed. Five of these admirals belong, singular to say to the non-combatant class, and three of them to the combatant class. The five non-combatant admirals naturally regard questions of naval efficiency from one point of view: the admirals of the combatant class from a totally different point of view. Moreover each one of the offices over which these admirals preside - combatant and non-combatant alike - belong to the civil branch of the Department, and have to do with material<sup>e</sup> and finance. It does not take long for the Secretary of the Navy, on assuming office, to discover that naval efficiency is a very broad and comprehensive subject,



and one which belongs exclusively to the military side of his office. With this discovery is revealed the fact that the military side of his office does not exist. There is no such thing. This fact, taken in conjunction with the fact just stated, that there is a radical and irreconcilable difference of opinion of the part of his advisers on vital questions affecting naval efficiency, would, in time of war, leave the Secretary in an unenviable position. Divided councils are fatal to military operations.

A Navy that requires time for preparation after war has been declared is far from being in an efficient condition. On the 5th of February, 1904, Japan severed diplomatic relations with Russia, and three days later she struck the first blow at Port Arthur and Chemulpo. There was no such nonsense, as at Fontenoy: "Gentlemen of the French Guard, fire." about the military movements of the Japanese. They knew the great moral and military advantages of taking the offensive and they assumed it at once and effectually.\* But they were enabled to do so only by a long and thorough course of preparation during peace. So much for the readiness to strike. The point where the first blow is to fall can be determined best by those who have made such questions the subject of long and careful study, undisturbed by administrative duties. There must be no mistake as to the true objective. To be master of the situation at the outset may prevent a war. Some of the most important strategic moves are those taken during peace. It may be stated right here once for all, without circumlocution, that naval efficiency in its true sense, is unattainable under our present form of naval administration. It is far better that the people should know this in order that the responsibility may be placed where it belongs. The truth of this statement we now <sup>purpose</sup> ~~propose~~ showing.

How the American method of governing the fleet, a military organization, works in practice may be illustrated by examples taken from official documents of recent date, documents which

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\* Compare the prompt action of the Japanese with ours when we left it to a British Colonial Governor to order Dewey to sea, April 24, 1898. See "Naval Administration II" pages 848-9, Proceedings Naval Institute, S. B. & L.



are easily accessible to all the world.

The President recognizing the inherent defects in the Constitution of the Navy Department, knowing that the efficiency he has so much at heart is not attainable under existing conditions, urged Congress to amend the law under which the Navy Department is organized with a special view to increasing the efficiency of the Navy. In his message to Congress of December, 1903, Mr. Roosevelt said: "We need the establishment, by law, of a body of trained officers who shall exercise a systematic control of the military affairs of the navy, and be the authorized advisors of the Secretary concerning it." In order to carry out the wishes of the President the Secretary of the Navy prepared and presented to the Naval Committee of the House "A bill to increase the efficiency of the Navy," the effect of which was to legalize the General Board. In presenting the bill to the Naval Committee of the House its adoption, by Congress, was ably advocated in person, by the Secretary of the Navy. He was followed by the Admiral of the Navy (Admiral Dewey) and by the Chiefs of the three Bureaus representing the combatant class of the Department. Secretary Moody's presentation of the case, on the part of the administration, was lucid, logical and learned, leaving absolutely nothing to be said in advocacy of the President's plea for naval efficiency, but the majority of the Secretary's advisors - the non-combatant admirals would <sup>not</sup> have it. The bill was vehemently opposed, by the non-combatants, represented by the Assistant Secretary of the Navy of that day, and the Chief of what are known in the navy as the five Staff Bureaus. As the bill has never been heard of since it was presented to the Naval Committee April 11, 1904, it is natural to suppose that it received its quietus then and there.

The motives of the Committee in thus turning down the General Board are not open to question. But as the record stands it would appear to the world at large that the Chiefs of the five Staff Bureaus had influence enough to defeat an urgent measure of the administration to increase the efficiency of the Navy.



In plain terms the President was defeated by Bureaucracy. This was the literal fulfilment of a prophecy. During the "Investigation of the Navy Department" in 1875-6, Commodore D. McN. Fairfax stated in his testimony before the House Naval Committee, that "the Bureau system was gradually undermining the discipline of the Navy Department and must sooner or later be changed." The time for the change has arrived.

True the General Board continues a potentiality, but this we owe to the President and not to Congress. The General Board was established by the Navy Department, General Order No. 544, March 13, 1900, which order was embodied in the Navy Regulations of 1905, thus giving it the force of law (Sec. 1547 R.S.). But as it is competent for some administration of the future to rescind this order and delete it from the Regulations, it is obvious that the character of the General Board lacks the quality of permanence which statute law alone can give. To ensure this permanency of character was the request preferred by the President, as we have seen; a request to which the House Naval Committee declined to accede.

Once more the President essayed to induce Congress to increase the efficiency of the Navy. In his special message to Congress of Dec. 17, 1906, on the Personnel of the Navy, Mr. Roosevelt made certain specific recommendations, failure to adopt which, "by judicious legislation," he adds, "the future of our Navy will be gravely compromised." "in my last three annual messages I have invited the attention of Congress to the urgent necessity of such legislation ---" but the Commander-in-Chief did not take into the account the deep-seated defection in the ranks of his own immediate command, in his own official family as it were. The Personnel Bill, so earnestly advocated by the administration, was strangled in its birth. Congress has thus, through its House Naval Committee, put itself on record as opposing measures which have for their object the increasing of the efficiency of the Navy. It is clear that the views of the administration on naval affairs carry little weight with the Naval Committees of the two houses of Congress. There is a good



reason for this. The Navy Department is divided against itself, as already explained, and the majority of the Secretary's Colleagues\* are opposed to any change in the present method of administering the affairs of the Navy. Congress has endowed them with great powers, and it is only natural that they should exert those powers to protect their vested rights--rights which must be safe-guarded though the heavens fall. "If a house be divided against itself that house cannot stand."

It will be seen from the foregoing that the Navy, a distinctively military body is governed, practically, by an ~~oligarchy~~ <sup>oligarchy</sup> of non-military men. To govern, in its original sense, means to pilot or to steer. Hence we are led to conclude that our fleet is piloted or steered, by so called admirals, who belong neither to the military nor to the seaman class. This method of governing a Navy is saved from the preposterous, only because it is in accordance with the will of the people as expressed through their representatives in Congress. <sup>Secretary</sup> Mr. Bonaparte acted wisely in recommending, as he did in effect, the total abolition of this archaic and demoralizing form of naval government by bureaus. Put none but seamen at the helm.

#### BUREAUCRACY.

"My experience during the past year" declared Secretary Bonaparte, in his annual report of Nov. 28, 1906, "has greatly strengthened my belief, as expressed in the last annual report of the Department, that the system of autonomous bureaus is open to very grave theoretical objections; and that only the very high character of the personnel employed in these bureaus x x x prevent these theoretical objections from seriously affecting the efficiency and economy of the Department's work. "It seems to me, therefore, desirable, " he adds, "that a very radical and

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\*The Secretary's Colleagues.-- This is the only Executive Department where the law places the Secretary and his associates in office on an equal footing.



thoroughgoing change should be made in the organization of the Department." He then outlines a plan which he says appears to afford a reasonable promise of satisfactory results and which in effect would, as already observed, abolish the present system of trying to govern the Navy by Bureaus. Bureaucracy aims exclusively to augment its own official powers at the expense or more extended interests. It is characterized, (asserts one authority) "by the inefficient and obstructive performance of duty through minute sub-divisions of functions, by inflexible formality and pride of place." A Bureaucrat is defined as "an official who endeavors to concentrate administrative powers in his own bureau."

*[See the testimony of Paymaster General Harris before the Naval Committee of House April 11th 1904.]*

All the privations and suffering of the English Army in the Crimean War, through lack of provisions and clothing resulting in the loss of thousands of lives, was due directly to <sup>Army</sup> ~~Army~~ bureaucracy and English <sup>Army</sup> ~~Army~~ bureaucracy repeated its mismanagement fifty years later in the Boer War. Bureaucracy greatly damaged our own military prestige during the war with Spain and would have been fatal to the navy but for the timely advent of the Strategy Board. It was Russian Bureaucracy, not Togo, that defeated Rodjestvensky in the sea of Japan. Togo simply gave the coup de grace. Villeneuve, Cervera and Rodjestvensky, each in turn was the victim of bad Naval Administration. Is there a demand for an American victim? Said Premier Stolypin: "My hope and purpose are, with the aid of the Douma, to get rid of the bureaucratic system. Such is the Emperor's firm and unshakable will." *Bureaucracy defeated the President in 1904, and* ~~Bureaucracy~~ <sup>Bureaucracy</sup> dominates the Navy of the United States today. Let this truth be pondered by that portion of an irresponsible press that so airily fans the flame of enmity between this country and ~~our good friends~~ Japan.

A decision of the U.S. Supreme Court, defining the administrative authority of the Secretary of the Navy, sanctioned the exercise, by the Secretary, of the military functions of the President, as Commander-in-Chief of the Navy. The principle enunciated in that decision has been applied to the relations



sustained by the Chiefs of the several Bureaus to the Secretary and through him to the President. Thus the Chiefs of the several Bureaus have become the representatives of the Commander-in-Chief of the Navy, and clothed with all his authority touching the affairs of their respective Bureaus. Their orders must be respected and obeyed as the orders of the Commander-in-Chief. The Act of August 31, 1842, makes this very clear. It declares explicitly that "The orders of a Chief of Bureau shall be considered as emanating from the Secretary himself, and shall have full force and effect as such." But as the orders of the Secretary are to be regarded as the orders of the President, it is plain that the orders of a Chief of Bureau must also be regarded as the orders of the President. This makes practically, nine Secretaries of the Navy, with powers in their respective spheres, equal to those of the constitutional Commander-in-Chief. All the evils of Bureaucracy are thus aggravated by the law which put it in operation. Sixty-five years experience and the testimony of numerous Secretaries of the Navy show conclusively that this unbusiness-like system, insures the greatest amount of extravagance with the least amount of accountability.

While we are vainly struggling to increase the efficiency of the Navy, Germany, regarding with ill-concealed contempt the solemn mockery of a Hague Conference for the limitation of armaments, continues building big ships according to a carefully matured plan. She remembers that the Hague Peace Conference of 1899 was the precursor to a great war. In her next conflict she does not purpose being found wanting either in ships or in naval efficiency. Japan indulges in no idle dreams of universal peace, or utopian restrictions of sea power. In the late war she demonstrated to all the world the absolute necessity of an efficient naval administration, without which naval efficiency is impossible. This she devised and perfected long in advance of the collision she saw was inevitable. Russia, also, taught us the equally valuable lesson that ~~the strength of a Navy~~ <sup>Naval efficiency</sup> does not consist in the number



of ships alone. The battle is not always to the strong. Strength, to be effective, needs intelligent direction.

Fortunately, Congress has heeded the voice of the people and has authorized the building of two 20,000 ton battleships. But on the vital question of naval government; of the power to handle the forged weapon, it is the purpose of the obligarchy which shapes our naval policy, to maintain the status quo.

*A. R. Rice,*

Newport, R.I.,

May 16th., 1907.

*Read before the Conference of officers  
at the Naval War College, Oct. 1<sup>st</sup> 1907.*

*A. R. Rice*