

*Defence of Sea Coasts*

presenting a few of the ablest men on each side or of both the three main parties—might be formed to consider this matter. I believe that the leaders of the Conservative and Progressive parties are big enough men to subordinate any possible party advantage and to act with the government members of the committee, and with the aid of experts—because the committee's deliberations would be of little use in such a highly technical matter without the aid of experts—they might be able to arrive at and enunciate a policy that would be of the very greatest benefit to Canada. That policy might be known, I was going to say, as a national policy, but I suppose that would be infringing upon a long established political trademark. It might be called, however, a "Canadian" policy, and the credit of it would enure not to the government or the opposition but to all parties in the House alike, and incidentally probably would have an additional chance of success from the very fact that it was non-partisan in its origin.

There are two phases of this question that I want to discuss as briefly as I can. The first, and the most important one by far, is: Is there necessity for such defence? Secondly, the method of furnishing such defence. The first question is by far the most important. Grant me that and I care not at all if we do not agree as to the details of furnishing such defence because it would be almost impossible for us to do so. It is a singular fact that there is no representative in this House—I think I am justified in saying so—who has any real, practical knowledge on the subject of naval defence. If it were a question of law, of medicine, or of military matters, we have plenty of experts—men qualified to speak with authority—but not in this particular instance.

Mr. HANSON: What about the minister?

Mr. NEILL: He has, I think, no personal naval knowledge.

Mr. GARLAND (Bow River): What about the hon. member for Lunenburg (Mr. Duff)?

Mr. NEILL: Fishing and naval defence are two wholly different things. Dealing with the second phase of the subject I should like to touch on this point: There is a great diversity of opinion, there must be naturally, as to how we would carry out any adequate system of defence. Some members would advocate the buying, or perhaps borrowing, of ships from Britain. Others would have us build our own ships. Others suggest we do not need capital ships but might depend on an aeroplane service, or submarines, and possibly gas—but I

[Mr. Neill.]

do not propose to invite any possible conflict of opinion by discussing any of these diversified ideas; that is a matter, as I have already said, entirely for experts. But there are two facts which I would like to mention that would have to be considered in arranging defence. The one is that we have in Esquimalt, which is close to Victoria, a dry dock which is soon to be completed at a cost, I think, of \$7,000,000. That dry dock is of very vital importance to the British navy operating in the Pacific. If that navy should meet with any mishap rendering repairs necessary, as a result of war operation, it would be of the most inestimable benefit for the vessels of that fleet to be able to go into dry dock there and the fact of there being a dry dock would avoid those ships having to return to Britain. In the case of war ships coming from Britain they might have to go round cape Horn, owing to the possibility of the Panama canal being blown up at the very inception of hostilities, and after reaching the Pacific coast of Canada it would be necessary for them to go into dry dock, because a man-of-war is a very intricate piece of mechanism and needs constant care and overhauling. It is very important therefore that this dry dock should be protected. Yet to-day that dry dock is almost open to the attacks of any man who comes along with a motor boat and a few rifles, and might readily be blown up. There are a few obsolete guns mounted on the fortifications but it would take them all their time to protect themselves let alone the dry dock in case of attack. Another point is that Barkley sound, which is on the west coast of Vancouver island, would likely be the very spear head of an attack on the Canadian positions, because it is the most westerly point of land, is the most exposed, and is particularly unprotected. It has the third biggest harbour in the world, a natural harbour, and it runs into the island, so that its head is within thirty miles of the east coast, and it happens to be the end of one of the Transcontinental lines of railway. It certainly should be protected in some way, and the dry dock ought to be protected from attack both by water and by air; land fortification is not so important.

I am dealing only with the Pacific partly because that is the part of Canada with which I am acquainted, and partly because there is where the danger of war is most to be apprehended. This is no idea or conception of my own. We have had lately the announcement of Major General MacBrien, chief of the Canadian military staff, who has stated publicly that in his measured and considered