

ON WHAT GROUNDS
DID PARLIAMENT DECIDE UPON A
CANADIAN NAVAL SERVICE ?

CANADIAN LIBERAL PARTY

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CANADA AND THE NAVY

Answers to Important Questions

On what grounds did Parliament decide upon a Canadian Naval Service?

What were the views of Hon. Geo. E. Foster who introduced the resolution?

Which Policy Should Canada Adopt?

The Conservative Policy—An immediate expenditure of \$35,000,000 for three dreadnaughts as part of a permanent policy of centralization and contribution.

The Liberal Policy—A Canadian Naval Service in accordance with the unanimous resolution of the House of Commons, of March, 1909.

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Question—On what grounds did Parliament decide on a Canadian Naval Service?

What were the views of Hon. George E. Foster who introduced the resolution?

Answer—

It was the Hon. George E. Foster who introduced the resolution of March 29th, 1909, which, as amended, was subsequently unanimously adopted by both political parties. In one of the ablest speeches he ever delivered, Mr. Foster summed up the arguments for and against a policy of contribution—the present Borden Policy—and a policy of a Canadian Naval Service—the Laurier Policy. The question at that time had not become one of party politics. Mr. Foster, therefore, spoke not as a party politician, but as a statesman. The following is a summary in Mr. Foster's own words.*

ONLY ONE OF TWO POLICIES POSSIBLE, CONTRIBUTION OR NAVAL SERVICE.

MR. FOSTER.—“When you boil down all the propositions that are made, you get down to two propositions, one or the other of which must in the end be adopted, . . . the first is a policy of a fixed annual contribution, . . . the second policy is the assuming by ourselves of the defence of our own ports or coasts.”

“The policy of a fixed annual contribution divides itself, apparently, into two branches, but it is really the same thing. One man says send \$1,000,000 or \$2,000,000 a year; another man says send a dreadnought or two dreadnoughts, and so far as Canada is concerned, these two are absolutely one. When we translate our contribution into dreadnoughts it comes down in the end to money which would be sufficient to build and equip a dreadnought and, therefore, I say they are both parts of the one proposition.”

*The speech in full will be found in the Hansard report of the debates in the House of Commons on March 29th, 1909, pages 3384 to 3503 inclusive.

I.—OBJECTIONS TO A POLICY OF CONTRIBUTION.

OBJECTION No. 1.—It gives rise to difficulty in fixing the amount.

MR. FOSTER.—“The first difficulty is that as to fixing the amount of the contribution. . . . How long shall the sum which you have fixed to-day remain the proper sum, and will it not be subject to constant revision, constant negotiation, and maybe occasional disagreement, and consequent troubles?”

OBJECTION No. 2.—It smacks too much of tribute.

MR. FOSTER.—“Another objection raised is that it smacks too much of tribute. That we are a free people and we do not want to be paying a contribution to the Old Country for this or for any other purpose.”

OBJECTION No. 3.—It is payment without control.

MR. FOSTER.—“But one says, we pay but we do not control.”

OBJECTION No. 4.—It impinges on autonomy.

MR. FOSTER.—“Another objection to be set forth is that it impinges on our autonomy.”

OBJECTION No. 5.—It may be used for purposes not approved of.

MR. FOSTER.—“Another objection that is made is that Britain may use our contribution in unjustifiable wars, and that we should guard ourselves carefully lest we make a contribution for the equipment and strengthening of a fleet which may be used in wars that we do not approve of.”

With regard to Objections 2, 3, and 4, Mr. Foster says: “These objections have some force, though, as I think, not a force that is irresistible. There are some deeper reasons which appear to me to have deeper force with reference to that method of taking our part in defence.” Here they are:

OBJECTION No. 6.—It is hiring others to perform services which should be done by ourselves.

MR. FOSTER.—“The greatest objection which I have to a fixed money contribution is that it bears the aspect of hiring somebody else to do what we ourselves ought to do. As though a man, the father of a family, in lusty health and strength, should pay his neighbor something per month for looking after the welfare and safety of his home, instead of doing that duty himself.”

OBJECTION No. 7.—It puts the country no further on in the matter of defending itself.

MR. FOSTER.—“After 10, or 12, or 20, or 30 years you will have paid out an immense amount of money. You will have been protected in the meantime, but **in Canada itself there will be no roots struck.** There will be no residue left. **There will be no preparation of the soil or beginning of the growth of the production of defence.** Yet sometime or other, no one can doubt, that with resources and with a population constantly increasing, we must and will have in this country a naval force of our own, for our coast and home defence.”

OBJECTION No. 8.—It does not inspire a national spirit.

MR. FOSTER.—“The interest that we take in a contribution made by another is not the interest that I desire for Canada. I want to see something grafted on the soil of Canada’s nationhood, which takes root and grows and develops until it incites the spirit of defence in this country, leads to a participation in the defence, leads to that quick interest in it, its glories, its duties and its accomplished work, which is, after all, the one great thing that benefits all people for great expenditures, either on land or on sea, in the way of defence and of the maintenance of the rights of the country.”

OBJECTION No. 9.—It does not properly protect commerce.

MR. FOSTER.—“Again it disjoins what has been joined together from the earliest days of the world’s existence—commerce and the protection of commerce. After all a basic idea of a naval force is the protection of the commerce of a country. A commerce side by side with its protector, and its protector side by side with the growing commerce of a country flourish best together and are the surest helpers to each other.”

OBJECTION No. 10.—It deprives Canada of benefits which she ought to derive from assisting in defence.

MR. FOSTER.—“When we make our contributions in the way of a fixed sum and it goes from us and we are not responsible for it, we have none of the inspiration arising from the growth and development of a system of future defence

in our own country. We are deprived of the larger benefit ourselves, and in the future we do no greater service to the Empire of which we form a part in this matter of defence."

OBJECTION No. 11.—It ignores the necessities and aspirations and prospects of the Canadian people.

MR. FOSTER.—"I think this method ignores the necessities and the aspirations and the prospects of a great people, such as the Canadian people are destined to become. We must have beginnings. This must at first be small, but sometime or other our country will have its naval force for the defence of this country, if for nothing else. The point with me is as to whether it is not the greater wisdom to sow the seed at once and cultivate its growth as best we can in our circumstances, and with our resources until at last we arrive at that stage of expansion which we have reached in other great lines of our country's progress."

Having set forth these objections to a policy of contribution Mr. Foster said: "My own mind tends rather towards the employment of another form than that of an out and out money contribution." That other form he then described as "the assuming by ourselves of the defence of our own ports and coasts in constant and free co-operation with the Imperial forces of the Mother Country." Mr. Foster then examined the possible objections that might be raised to a Canadian Naval Service, and concluded by giving his reasons in support of it.

II—ANSWERS TO OBJECTIONS TO A CANADIAN NAVAL SERVICE

OBJECTION No. 1.—That a beginning has to be made without plant, expert skill, trained cadets or trained sailors.

MR. FOSTER (in answer to objection).—"Under that system our first vessels would be British built, British equipped, British manned, British officered from stoker to captain . . . But the first Canadian-owned vessel built and equipped in Britain and sent out to defend our coasts would become the nucleus and the training ground of Canadian stokers, Canadian sailors, and Canadian officers, and by and by, perhaps, of a Canadian admiral on the Canadian coast. . . . The time must come when we have an Imperial adjunct to the British navy . . . in which Canada has some of her body, her bones, her blood and her mental power, her national pride. Then would come the dockyard, which would be of sufficient strength to enable us to repair the small vessels and in time build the smaller class of vessels that we need at first . . . and so in that progressive, gradual way we are working up to the fulfilment of this idea of defensive force in Canada, which would

be an auxiliary in the case of an outbreak of actual hostilities, which would be sufficient for the ordinary surveillance of our coasts and which would be, in time of war, sufficient to work in conjunction with the main portion of the fleet that would be sent to the part of our country that was menaced."

OBJECTION No. 2.—That the cost of naval service is greater than contribution.

MR. FOSTER (in answer to objection).—"An objection to this method is found in its greater cost. I doubt if the cost will be greater."

OBJECTION No. 3.—That a Canadian Naval Service would be ineffective.

MR. FOSTER (in answer to objection).—"It is said it would be ineffective. Ineffective how? As the last line of defence certainly it would. If all the battleships of the Empire were swept from the sea, the torpedo and coast defence any of the colonies might have, would make no headway against the combined fleets of the conquerors, but we do not believe that that disaster will occur."

OBJECTION No. 4.—That there are physical and mechanical difficulties to be overcome.

MR. FOSTER (in answer to objection).—"It is said also that there are physical and mechanical difficulties to be overcome. I have mentioned these—they can be overcome. Time and application of a reasonable amount of resource will overcome these difficulties and place us where we have had to place ourselves with reference to every other great line of development. We must begin at the beginning and work up gradually until we gain the skill, the plant, the machinery and the power to make for ourselves what at first it was physically impossible for us to make."

III.—REASONS IN SUPPORT OF A CANADIAN NAVAL SERVICE

REASON No. 1.—Canada will have an immense commerce by water.

MR. FOSTER.—"Canada has on the line of water development as great a future as on the line of land development . . . The imagination can scarcely grasp the commerce that waits

for Canadian vessels, manned by Canadian crews, and a mighty instrument of expansion and wealth to be held almost completely in our own hands. . . .”

REASON No. 2.—The building of warships will encourage iron and steel commercial shipbuilding.

MR. FOSTER.—“The building of warships is the strong encouragement of the steel and iron commercial shipbuilding in Great Britain to-day. The two are joined. The one works into and out of the other. I say that steel shipbuilding inaugurated in this country, developed to the capacity of turning out war vessels, would not only benefit Canada but Great Britain as well.”

REASON No. 3.—It may lead to Canada building ships for other parts of the Empire.

MR. FOSTER.—“It is no stretch of the imagination to believe that an Empire with its component parts in full accord may have at some time immense dockyards in the Dominion of Canada on the Pacific coast and on the Atlantic coast, in which will be built, not only our own vessels, distinctively Canadian, but a part of the navy of Great Britain itself.”

REASON No. 4.—Because Australia has found the policy of contribution a failure and has adopted a Naval Service of her own.

MR. FOSTER.—“In Australia the foundations of such a course are laid. That country to-day has taken that line of policy. . . . After having tried the contributory method, Australia has adopted this policy with the best of concert between the Mother Country and herself. The coast defence in time of peace, the auxiliary body to the fleet in time of war, both carried on with the co-operation and good-will which perfect trust in each other engenders and keeps strong.”

REASON No. 3.—The duty of Canadians demands a proper coast protection.

MR. FOSTER.—“Our circumstances, our manhood, our sense of gratitude, and our sense of right all demand that something should be done. Something adequate and something now. What boots it to drift from year to year? Are we proper stewards of this heritage if we allow it to go one moment longer without some proper care and provision for its defence?”

MR. FOSTER'S MOTION AND THE PRESENT POSITION

Mr. Foster's motion was as follows:

"That in the opinion of this house, in view of her great and varied resources, of her geographical position and natural environments, and of that spirit of self-help and self-respect which alone befits a strong and growing people, Canada should no longer delay in assuming her proper share of the responsibility and financial burden incident to the suitable protection of her exposed coast line and great seaports."

The resolution on Mr. Foster's motion as finally adopted unanimously by both political parties contained the following

"The House will cordially approve of any necessary expenditure designed to promote the speedy organization of a Canadian Naval Service in co-operation with and in close relation to the Imperial Navy, along the lines suggested by the Admiralty at the last Imperial Conference and in full sympathy of the view that the naval supremacy of Great Britain is essential to the security of commerce, the safety of the Empire and the peace of the world."

The question now before the people of Canada is, shall the unanimous resolution of Parliament of March, 1909, which was passed on Mr. Foster's motion be carried out? Or shall Canada abandon the beginnings already made in the construction of a Canadian Naval Service and enter upon a policy of contribution?

Shall the country adopt the arguments of Mr. Foster as a statesman, or the evasions of Mr. Foster as a party politician?

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