

LORD CROFT ATTACKS CRITICS

Following is the speech to be delivered at Colchester Warships Week at 3.30 this afternoon by the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for War.

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By now the eternal truth that our life as free men depends on sea-power must be burnt into the minds of every sane individual in this country.

But for the gallantry of our merchant seamen, we could not have maintained the struggle, and but for the protection of the Royal Navy, the ships bringing endless supplies of food, raw materials and munitions could either not have sailed or would be at the bottom of the sea. The ships of Great Britain and our Allies have saved us from starvation, and what would be even worse surrender, to servitude.

Above all in this affair of ships, we want protection for our Mercantile Marine, and every cruiser, destroyer, submarine or corvette that we can launch means the saving of precious lives. Every man and woman who is with us in this struggle should aid all they can and make real sacrifices to provide vessels for the Royal Navy.

I spoke of sacrifice, but there is no real sacrifice in investing any surplus we can spare after the legitimate needs of life have been met, in Government stock at cumulative interest. Indeed in this uncertain world, it is an obviously wise act to put by the biggest nest egg possible to meet what may be a very rainy day at the end of this war when victory has been won.

Most forms of patriotism are costly but the patriotism which I ask of you, while it may mean cutting out some of the luxuries of life in order to find the money, is after all a patriotism which also finds its direct reward for the investor and his children as well as the State.

If by investing in the Royal Navy you help yourself, your fighting men, your merchant seamen, your country and the cause of humanity, then you will find the additional reward of a clear conscience in having made your contribution at a time when our Country needs the aid of all its citizens.

Just think! the nation is spending £14,000,000 a day, a great part of which is circulating through all classes. On the assumption that three-quarters - £10,500,000 remains in this country, that is just over £3,800,000,000 a year.

Under rationing we cannot spend more than a certain amount, and surely half that vast sum could and should be invested in the hour of our country's need.

Now I learn that you are determined to invest in and build a submarine out of the savings of Colchester, your target being £250,000. That was your target in War Weapons Week and you smothered it in a great effort which yielded £900,000.

Let no man doubt that our peril to-day is far greater than last July. We now have a most powerful naval military and air foe in Japan whom we have to fight right at the other end of the world.

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This means ships, ships, ships! Ships to take our troops, their supplies, their tanks, their weapons, to the far corners of the earth; ships to carry the aircraft across the wide oceans and above all ships for the Royal Navy to protect these huge convoys and to smash the fleets of Japan, Germany and Italy when they can get at them.

May I appeal to you not to be content with one submarine, make it two, three or even four. Think what it would have meant to our soldiers in Malaya if we could have spared four additional modern submarines for service in the Eastern Pacific. The whole march of Japan might have been held up if their convoys could have been effectively intercepted, but now the need is still more urgent.

I am going to ask you not only to do your duty and invest and go on investing till it hurts, but to brace yourselves to rise to greater heights of sacrifice, to work harder and give every ounce of your strength in support of the fighting services.

I would ask you to stamp out fretful and querulous criticism which is simply playing the enemy's game. The forces of evil are now spread all over the globe, their utter defeat will demand all the force we can use, all our determination, all our will-power and above everything all our unity.

We are wounded by blows - deep and grievous, delivered 15,000 miles away by sea from these shores. It was never the habit, however, of this lion-hearted race to go soft or craven when it had received punishment. On the contrary when this lion is wounded he gets more dangerous and more fierce. His next spring is all the more violent and heroic, because of what he has suffered.

So we British people must gird up our loins. Instead of blaming it on the other fellow each one of us must swear to do more for our country.

All we have and all we are we must dedicate to the defence of this fair land and our glorious brotherhood of Empire.

The Russians, after appalling disaster when all appeared lost, suddenly turned round and hit back, and drove the enemy along the whole of their front.

We have never suffered as great a peril as that, and by heaven we British people will not be behind our Allies in resilience and determination.

When in an hour sea-power was wrested from our American friends and allies in the East, our whole strategic defence for the moment crumbled, and our small military formations seriously outnumbered, had to meet great Japanese forces landed from the sea.

I am shocked to read articles trying to lay blame on British forces - naval, military or air - when we have not as yet a tittle of evidence to prove that they failed their country. Criticism based on knowledge may be of the utmost aid, but criticism which is mere guess-work uttered in complete ignorance of facts and circumstances is as helpful to Hitler and his Japanese fellow-criminals as if the critic was a Quisling in their pay.

I will give you just one instance:-

I have seen suggestions that the troops in Singapore should not have surrendered at the end of "only seven days" fighting".



Do you realize that of our four divisions in Malaya, two of these from India had each been fighting all down the Malaya Peninsula day and night for ten weeks against great odds; that the Australian Division of two brigades had been fighting in Johore and Singapore for a solid month without rest and with their flanks continually turned from the sea; that a gallant British division which had been months on the sea, without a chance of stretching their legs, were suddenly thrown into the battle in Malaya to help their Indian and Australian comrades, and that these three divisions and one brigade out of the total four divisions had suffered severe casualties before they ever reached Singapore for those last seven days' fighting?

The full facts have not yet reached us and all judgment should be suspended, but for the honour of the Army and its leaders who fought and died, and who never yielded until cut off from water, ammunition and supplies, I hope these base calumnies will be treated not only with contempt but with righteous wrath.

The same is true of Burma, when that story is written you will feel immense pride in the heroism of the British and Indian troops, which include the Duke of Wellingtons, West Yorks, King's Own Yorkshire Light Infantry, units of the Royal Armoured Corps and Royal Tank Regiment and men from Gloucestershire and Scotland.

One more word.

Why have our Imperial Forces fought unceasingly and so brilliantly in all the Middle Eastern theatres, in campaigns spread over thousands of miles?

Because the Middle East, as you will see by your maps, is the vital shield for the defence of India and Australasia against the might of Germany and Italy. There too we have taken hard knocks but we have also won great victories in which we conquered the whole of the Italian Eastern Empire, driven the enemy out of Egypt, relieved Tobruk in front of which we stand to fight, occupied Syria after stiff resistance, broke the rebellion in Iraq and joined hands with our Russian Allies in Persia.

In these campaigns and in Greece and Crete we inflicted total casualties on Axis troops in killed, wounded, missing and prisoners of over 400,000 probably approaching 500,000 and this apart from the German and Italian reinforcements which the Navy and Air Force have deposited at the bottom of the Mediterranean. But for our achievements in Africa and the Middle East, the position of India and Australia, serious enough in all conscience under the threat of Japan, would have been indeed perilous.

The British Army has never ceased fighting and everywhere they have maintained the honour and greatness of our race and the glory of our Empire.

Why do I, a Member of the Army Council, come then to you to ask you to back the Royal Navy to your last pound and shilling?

Because only under the guns of the fleet can we get at the throats of our foes: because without the aid of our seamen we can stretch no hand to our fighting soldiers in distant theatres; because without a victorious fleet we cannot win.

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WAR OFFICE