

"HANDICAP" ON THE NAVY

SIR R. KEYES AND AIR ARM

SIR R. KEYES (Portsmouth, N., U.) said that the inadequacy and inefficiency of the Naval Air Service was a matter of great concern to the British Navy. (Hear, hear.) It was very difficult to get people outside the Service to understand how bitterly the Navy resented the handicap placed upon them. This was particularly felt by those who were striving to build up a sufficient and efficient air service. Only a few days ago a member of the Cabinet expressed great astonishment that there was this dissatisfaction, and said that if it existed why did the Admiralty not come to the Cabinet about it? Admiral Stanley, Chief of the American Naval Air Staff, who was a delegate to a recent Naval Conference, was actually told by Lord Swinton, the Secretary of State for Air, that the Navy was perfectly satisfied with the existing state of affairs, and the dual control of the naval air service was working smoothly and satisfactorily. Admiral Stanley was amazed because every officer in the American Navy knew of the unhappy experiences and tribulations and difficulties through which the British Navy was passing. In fact the United States Navy, prompted by the unhappy British experience, had insisted on being left alone and on being allowed to develop its own air service free from outside control, with the result that they were now 100 per cent. ahead of us.

It was within his (Sir R. Keyes's) knowledge that the Prime Minister had consistently declined to reopen this question. He would like to remind the right hon. gentleman of a letter written by Lord Beatty in 1923, when the Admiralty was forced to accept the compromise. Lord Beatty's letter was to the effect that the innovation was utterly opposed to all principles of naval administration and command, and could only be regarded as an experiment. The Admiralty had loyally carried out that experiment for a great many years, and the dual control of the naval air service had failed. He (Sir R. Keyes) hoped that the judicial inquiry, for which Lord Beatty appealed only a few days before his death, would be granted. He could assure the House that there was no greater gap in the naval defence of this country than the inefficiency and inadequacy of this naval air service.

PRIME MINISTER'S RESPONSIBILITY

In the debate last week Sir T. Inskip had said that he was going into this matter and taking evidence upon it. From the right hon. gentleman's remarks he (Sir R. Keyes) understood that he would go to great lengths if he considered it necessary. He did not think that it was fair to Sir T. Inskip to put him in that position. After all, the right hon. gentleman was in no way responsible for the present unhappy state of affairs, and he thought it was up to the Prime Minister to make some amends to the Navy for the great difficulties that they had suffered under for many years by appointing a committee on the matter. Sir T. Inskip should preside over that committee, which should be composed of men whom the country trusted, free from political and Service bias.

He congratulated the Government on following the advice of their naval advisers and making provision for laying down two battleships without any further delay despite the criticism of irresponsible and pretentious so-called experts who had no experience or technical knowledge to guide them. He had recently been in the Mediterranean, where the British Fleet was being maintained at sufficient strength to fulfil any obligations which it might be called upon to undertake in those waters, but only at the expense of other stations, which were paying off capital ships in order to provide crews for the numerous submarine hunting craft which were considered necessary to meet the very deliberate menace of Italian submarines. He had also visited Turkey, Greece, and Yugoslavia. He was very much struck by the friendly feeling towards Great Britain on the part of the peoples of those countries. That augured well for peace and security in the Mediterranean. (Cheers.) But

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