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. . . DEBATE ON NAVY ESTIMATES, 1892-3, . . .
IN THE
House of Commons.

MR. KEATLEY (Devonport). At the outset of the remarks which I wish to make on this vote I desire to ask for an answer to a question which I have put before. It is whether under the new scheme for organizing the Naval Ordnance Department Warrant Officers will be found that employment which was promised to them many years ago. . . . Then as to promotion and rewards, we hear something said about encouraging naval volunteers. If there is to be success in this respect a different principle will have to be followed from that which is now followed in the service. I will explain what I mean. There were serving in South Africa and in China a number of Warrant Officers who distinguished themselves very much. These men were not eligible for the Distinguished Service Order because by the statutes governing that Order, it only applied to commissioned officers. It was recognised that there was a great grievance in the matter. But instead of the Order being enlarged so as to admit these men a new Order was instituted, the Conspicuous Service Order. I read in *The Times* the proceedings which took place in Council for the setting up of the new Order. The case which the Admiralty put before the King is there stated, and we learn that it was declared that there should exist some means of recognising distinguished service in connection with the army of men who by reason of their position in the Navy were not eligible for any existing Order or Distinction. Hence the new Order applicable to those Warrant Officers was set up. But I submit that it is altogether wrong that there should be a class distinction of these Orders. Why one man who shows gallantry in the field should not be as eligible for a particular distinction as another man who shows only similar gallantry I do not know. The Admiralty could surely have done better than set up a new Order which is a class distinction. Only the other day it was elicited that there was a distinction made in the provision of food on the transports for regulars and volunteers who were in the same vessels. That distinction which was really a class distinction in its way was put a stop to. But just as there should be no differentiation between soldiers and volunteers in respect to food there ought not to be distinctions between classes of men in the services for the purpose of rewards. The Distinguished Service Order should not be limited to the commissioned officers. The subject should be treated in a democratic way. The distinction is galling to men who suffer from it and degrading to the nation which exercises it. (Hear, hear.)

MR. ARCHDALE; I think that another class of men in His Majesty's fleet should receive more consideration than they do, and that is the Warrant Officers. I think that the blue jacket who by good conduct, hard work and a considerable amount of brain work, attains the position of Warrant Officer ought to be better treated as regards pay, rank and allowances than he is at

MR. KEARLEY criticising the estimates and referring to the Naval Ordnance Store Department said: I wish to ask whether the Warrant Officers will have assigned to them those positions in the Naval Ordnance Store Department which have been promised them by successive First Lords of the Admiralty for successive years? This I think is a question that is deserving of an answer.

MR. JAMES H. A. MAJENDIE (Portsmouth) said: I wish to invite the attention of the House to the position of the Warrant Officers. I hope that serious consideration will be given to a serious grievance of these officers, namely this, that whereas in the Army commissions are given over and over again to men rising from the ranks, in the Navy there is no such commission given. Few are promoted even to honorary rank. I do think that it is very absurd that no concession of this kind has yet been made. I am certainly speaking the views of Warrant Officers when I say that they would be absolutely content if the rank of honorary lieutenant were given on retirement. But what is the case now? The Warrant Officer of necessity retires as Warrant Officer. No such encouragement as I describe is given.

present. I know many men who have become Warrant Officers, and the increase of pay which they have got has not been sixpence. They come from the rank of seamen gunner and boatswain's mate, and they only get fivepence a day, and have to pay for a new uniform and a new mess, and they are really no better off than they were as petty officers. I think that they ought when they become Warrant Officers to get 6/- a day and I think that when they have been eighteen years in that rank they may fairly be given the rank of Chief Warrant Officer. I should say if you keep a man a very long time in one rank you cannot encourage him to do his best for the service. I also ask that the children of Warrant Officers should be granted compassionate allowances. The children of all the other officers of the service are granted compassionate allowances but the children of Warrant Officers are not. I also think that the Warrant Officers in charge of stores should be granted eighteenpence a day for guarding and looking after the stores on board His Majesty's ships. On the whole I think the Warrant Officers are treated in an extraordinary way and I hope their position will be improved.

MR. E. J. C. MORTON: I would also urge that the status of the Warrant Officers in the British Navy should be improved. There are two questions which we are too apt to forget in thinking of the Navy. One of them is this that it takes nearly double as long to make an able seaman as it does to build an ironclad, and the other is that during the glorious history of the British Navy the whole of our success has depended upon its *personnel* and not upon the design of the ships. It is I think admitted that from the time of the Armada down to the Napoleonic wars that we were always inferior in regard to the designs of our ships and have always won upon the excellence of our *personnel*. The *personnel* of the Navy therefore is by far the most important aspect of it, and I believe that there is no single point in which we could do so much to improve the *personnel* of our Navy than the point of improving the status of the Warrant Officers. It is by improving the career of the Warrant Officer that you will loosen promotion all the way through the Navy. At the present moment a man becomes a Warrant Officer on the average between twenty-eight and thirty years of age I suppose, and then finds a brick wall set up in the way of his career, because he then has to wait till he is over fifty years of age before he has any further chance, and then he has the chance of becoming a Chief. Contrast the man in the Navy who is certainly not inferior to the man in the Army. Trace the career of the boy who joins the Navy with that of the private soldier and there is no comparison whatever. The private soldier has a line of promotion which is reserved for him all along the line of Quartermaster rank. He can get commissioned rank and become Captain, and there is at any rate one case of a man who got the active rank of Major and retired upon the honorary rank of Colonel. The whole of the positions which may be gained in the Navy are certainly inferior to those which may be gained in the Army. There is the career offered to men who join the Army, but there is no such career offered to men who join the Navy. And yet no one can reply that the naval man is inferior to the man who joins as a private in the Army. Now the importance of this from the national point of view I may put it in the way I have put it often and often before in this House I am afraid; but I have but one opportunity in the present Parliament of doing so, and perhaps I may be allowed to allude to it again. A man becomes an ordinary seaman at the age of eighteen and the nation does not get the full value out of that man until he becomes an able seaman at the age of twenty-one. The Nation gets the full value out of him for seven years. Then his opportunity comes for leaving the Navy, or re-engaging. But the fact is this. Some five or six years ago, according to the returns then supplied by the Government, it was found that for a period of five years before that time, almost exactly one-third of the men who had an opportunity of leaving the Navy or re-

10 NAVAL WARRANT OFFICERS' JOURNAL [January, 1902.]

LIEUTENANTS FROM THE LOWER DECK.

(From the London *Daily Telegraph*.)

IN these stirring days for the British Army it is almost a literal truth that every private soldier carries a field-marshal's baton in his knapsack. Right and left commissions have been distributed among the most deserving non-commissioned officers—men who have had none of the advantages of early education or special training that were once regarded as essential. The Army has been democratized; every deserving man has his chance of raising himself to a position of honour and distinction. In the Navy there is no such possibility to gladden the heart of a bluejacket amid his hard tasks and the rough conditions of the lower deck. If he is fortunate, he may rise to be a Chief Warrant Officer, but he cannot go higher. In theory there is no such limit to his ambition, for the Admiralty advertise that deserving men may be given lieutenants' commissions. The word "may" should be italicized, for only three times have lieutenantcies been conferred. Two of these exceptions—Lieutenants James Webber and R. A. Cathie, who earned distinction in Egypt—are "Jubilee memorials," and the third, Lieut. W. Sims, will always be remembered as one of the heroes of Ladysmith. These are the only promotions in the past sixty years, a period in which 6,000 "rankers" in the Army—many of them, it is true, men of family and education who having failed at their examinations, have entered the service by the back door—have been given commissions. It cannot be and has not been, argued that during these long years there have been no men in the Navy who, by their bearing and services in peace and war, have earned this recognition. It is not pleaded that the men whom captains of men-of-war, including Lord Charles Beresford, have recommended for executive commissions, have not had tact, seamanship knowledge, and experience, or have been lacking in other desirable military qualities; but the cause, it is known, has been quite different. Men from the lower deck would not be comfortable themselves in the ward rooms of ships of war, nor would they conduce to the comfort of the other occupants. This has been the obstacle which, in a mistaken spirit of loyalty to the gentlemen who at present officer the Fleet, the Admiralty have allowed to hinder them in adequately rewarding the work of men whom the captain of the *Condor* has styled "the backbone of the Service."

There are some signs that the naval authorities are relenting and that a compromise will be arrived at. One aspect of this *modus vivendi* is a long story. When the Naval Ordnance Store Department was inaugurated eleven years ago, it was promised that the assistant officers charged with its control should be Chiefs and Gunners, with a certain number of petty officers. Almost every year since this promise was made it has been announced that the "question is under consideration," and in the meantime, the five vacancies that have occurred, and should have been filled by Warrant Officers, have gone to civilians, as though no debt were due to those men who have done gallant service afloat. Over and over again it has been officially announced that the Admiralty intend to carry out their obligations, but they have not done so. At last a practical business man, the present Financial Secretary to the Admiralty, has taken the matter in hand, and there is reason to hope that he will redeem the promises so repeatedly made and so consistently broken. But it may be asked "What has this to do with the promotion of men from the lower deck?" The work in this naval department opens up a sphere in which promoted Warrant Officers can enjoy all the dignity and emoluments of lieutenant's rank without treading on anyone's toes, though the Admiralty over-estimate sadly the tenderness of the pedal extremities of the officers of the King's Navy, many of whom are avowedly in favour of this sort of justice to the lower deck. Admiral the Hon. Sir Edmund R. Fremantle, after a long and distinguished career, during which he has seen all the good and bad in the British bluejacket and in the pick of the lower deck, the Chief and Warrant Officers, favours a reasonable scheme of promotion, as does Lord Charles Beresford. These officers represent the highest social grade in the senior Service, that which springs from the peerage, and yet they and dozens of others desire the obstacles of promotion from the lower deck to be removed.

Another sign of awakening at Whitehall is the appointment of Chief Warrant Officers to small vessels, positions previously held by a lieutenant, and the utilisation of Warrant Officers in other small vessels engaged in harbour service. It is true the Admiralty are making a virtue of necessity. In consequence of the great increase in the number of ships there is a shortage of lieutenants, which even the incursions by mercantile officers, to the number of 138, known as supplementary lieutenants, have not entirely remedied. There is ample scope for the employment in minor "commands," and ashore at the ordnance depots and coaling stations, of a large number of these officers, who should be given lieutenant's rank.

If the plea is conceded in a generous manner the country will gain financially, and as the goal of every bluejacket's ambition is made more desirable his interest in his work, his happy resignation to the rough, hard life of his earlier years will be increased, and there will be a larger number who will exert themselves to profit by the opportunities for self-education and professional improvement that come in their way. It must be remembered that not every man can rise to be Warrant Officer. Not until a Warrant Officer has been in the Fleet from a quarter of a century to thirty-five years can he hope to be promoted to be Chief. Let anyone who is acquainted in the slightest degree with naval life picture what this means. A man who would hope for such distinction must have not only proved himself professionally capable in the highest degree, as seaman, petty officer, and chief petty officer, but in all these years his conduct must have been beyond reproach. Surely, after so long a probation, the authorities would do well to concede to the most deserving of these servants of the King the commission of a lieutenant at the end of three or four years' service as Chief Warrant Officer, with employment either in some of the many smaller independent commands or at ordnance and coaling depots.

In these days, when the working man enjoys high wages and so many luxuries ashore, the bluejacket's life is hard. The Admiralty may well pause before they permit refusal of just pleas to bar from the Imperial Service afloat the best bone and muscle and intelligence that the country provides. Too late the nation discovered that the conditions of Army life were not attractive. As the prizes within the grasp of any boy who works hard at his trade ashore are increased, as they are being augmented year by year, so must the conditions of existence afloat and the prospects of the sailor be improved, if the calibre of the men who serve the King afloat is not to deteriorate.