

The Imperial Maritime League: British Navalism, Conflict, and the Radical Right, c.1907–1920

War in History
2016, Vol. 23(3) 296–322
© The Author(s) 2016



Reprints and permissions:
sagepub.co.uk/journalsPermissions.nav
DOI: 10.1177/0968344515580492
wih.sagepub.com



N.C. Fleming

University of Worcester, UK

Abstract

This article revises previous interpretations of the Imperial Maritime League, and adds new detail to our understanding of Edwardian patriotic leagues, by highlighting the relevance of radical right ideology. A product of division in the Navy League, the Imperial Maritime League channelled extra-parliamentary sentiment into specific navalist causes, and worked closely with likeminded newspaper editors and naval officers to challenge the Unionist leadership, Admiralty, and Navy League. The new league was ultimately undermined by British victory in the naval race, and the Navy League's preparedness to react positively to the challenge of a new navalist league.

Keywords

Royal Navy, pressure groups, conservatism, Admiral John Fisher, Edwardian politics

In April 1908 the *Navy League Journal* passed judgement on the recently formed Imperial Maritime League (IML): a 'group of malcontents to whom every official action is *ipso facto* foolish if not traitorous'.¹ Five years later, another naval journal referred to the IML's founders, Harold Frazer Wyatt and Lionel Graham Horton-Smith, as 'two well-meaning enthusiasts whose enthusiasm runs into hysteria, and, like the "Militants," they

1 *Navy League Journal* [hereafter *NLJ* until 1909, when it was renamed *Navy*] XIII/4 (April 1908), 103–4.

Corresponding author:

N.C. Fleming, University of Worcester, Henwick Grove, Worcester, WR2 6AJ, UK.

Email: n.fleming@worc.ac.uk

kill the cause by overdoing it.² These assessments reflected long-standing tensions within organized navalism. From its establishment in 1894, the Navy League contained two contending approaches to activism. A minority of members, disproportionately active at its highest levels, regarded the organization as an unofficial overseer of naval policy, and were prepared to use politics to exert pressure against the decision-making processes of naval professionals and ministers. The majority, however, were cautious of antagonizing the Admiralty and government, and preferred to concentrate on public education. An especially bitter clash between these competing visions of navalism in 1907 resulted in the formation of the IML. The new league was fired by a radical right outlook which strongly believed in the purposive and interlinked roles of the state, nation, and race, and the need to express its concerns through predictions of impending disaster that required urgent action.

The IML won over high-profile navalists, including Sir Arthur Conan Doyle and Rudyard Kipling; newspaper editors, H.A. Gwynne and Ralph Blumenfeld; defence journalists, F.T. Jane, H.W. Wilson, and L. Cope Cornford; and a number of Unionist MPs and peers.³ The new league set about vindicating the rupture of navalism through a succession of national campaigns that contrasted it with the apparent quiescence of the older league. It provided a model of campaigning that initially made the Navy League's leadership appear tired, but the IML did not convert the British population to navalism, let alone precipitate a mass exodus of members from the older organization. Patriotic leagues proliferated in Britain and Germany from the 1890s, but constitutional, political, and cultural differences between the two countries meant that British organizations remained relatively small compared with their German counterparts.⁴ Moreover, the appeal of joining patriotic leagues, according to Franz and Marilyn Coetzee, 'was not primarily ideological'; people became members for 'a wide variety of reasons', including support for specific goals, material inducements, and social attractions such as entertainment and personal prestige. Members 'did not view their participation as the basis for a comprehensive ideological and political renovation of the . . . British right. Such hopes, when they were entertained, were largely confined to the leadership.'⁵ The IML focused primarily on its campaigns and hoped that mass membership would follow. Yet, without a rival network of branches it could not offer the necessary inducements. The existence of the IML nevertheless prompted the Navy League to overhaul its organization and strategy, and declare its willingness to take on the government and Admiralty. The new league dismissed suggestions of reunification even as the Navy League reaped the benefits of reform with an expanded membership and enhanced political patronage. The IML remained a patriotic vanguard without followers, but its short life reveals the uneasy

2 *Fleet*, July 1913, Imperial Maritime League papers, British Library [hereafter IML], vol. 5.

3 H.F. Wyatt and L.G.H. Horton Smith, *The Imperial Maritime League (The New Navy League): Founded for the Maintenance of British Sea-Power* (London, 1908), 1–13.

4 P. Kennedy, 'The Pre-War Right in Britain and Germany', in P. Kennedy and A. Nicholls, eds, *Nationalist and Racialist Movements in Britain and Germany before 1914* (London, 1981), 1–20.

5 F. Coetzee and M.S. Coetzee, 'Rethinking the Radical Right in Germany and Britain before 1914', *Journal of Contemporary History* XXI (1986), 515–37.

relationship between radical right ideology and organized navalism, and how the activities of dissidents could spur the revitalization of a wider movement.

I

The IML features in a number of historical studies on navalism, patriotic leagues, and conservatism, although there is no specific study of its activities.⁶ A number of assessments present it as the product of divided opinion among navalists about the motivation and efficacy of Admiral Sir John Fisher's naval revolution.⁷ Others address the IML's political outlook and identify it with the radical right.⁸ Alan Sykes defines the radical right by its belief in the purposive and interlinked roles of property, state, nation, and race, expressed in prognoses of imminent catastrophe and diagnoses requiring urgent action.⁹ The potential imprecision of the label is evident in its application to organized navalism.¹⁰ G.R. Searle identifies both the Navy League and IML as radical right, differentiating the latter as 'extremist'.¹¹ David Thackeray prefers 'Radical Conservative', and suggests that each league represented a wider division between 'Gradualist Unionists' and 'Imperial Activists'.¹² In spite of his own assessment, Searle's analysis of the

-
- 6 A. Summers, 'The Character of Edwardian Nationalism: Three Popular Leagues', in Kennedy and Nicholls, *Nationalist and Racialist Movements*, 68–87, at 78–80; M.W. Hamilton, *The Nation and the Navy: Methods and Organization of British Navalist Propaganda, 1889–1914* (New York, 1986); F. Coetzee, *For Party or Country: Nationalism and the Dilemmas of Popular Conservatism in Edwardian England* (Oxford, 1990); R. Williams, *Defending the Empire: The Conservative Party and British Defence Policy, 1899–1915* (New Haven, 1991), 94; F. McDonough, *The Conservative Party and Anglo-German Relations, 1905–1914* (Basingstoke, 2007), 106–7, 121–4. See also A.B. Magoun, 'The Sound and the Fury of the Imperial Maritime League, 1907–1912', unpublished MA thesis, University of East Anglia, 1983.
 - 7 A.J. Marder, *From the Dreadnought to Scapa Flow: The Royal Navy in the Fisher Era, 1904–1919*, vol. 1: *The Road to War, 1904–1914* (London, 1961), 140; A.J.A. Morris, *The Scaremongers: The Advocacy of War and Rearmament, 1896–1914* (London, 1984), 141; A.S. Thompson, *Imperial Britain: The Empire in British Politics, c. 1880–1932* (London, 2000), 45; R. Freeman, *The Great Edwardian Naval Feud: Beresford's Vendetta against 'Jackie' Fisher* (Barnsley, 2009), 145–6.
 - 8 P. Kennedy, *The Rise of the Anglo-German Antagonism, 1860–1914* (London, 1980), 347, 374, 443; McDonough, *Conservative Party*, 119.
 - 9 A. Sykes, *The Radical Right in Britain: Social Imperialism to the BNP* (Basingstoke, 2005), 1–10.
 - 10 A. Sykes, 'The Radical Right and the Crisis of Conservatism before the First World War', *Historical Journal* XXVI (1983), 661–76; P. Cain, 'The Conservative Party and "Radical Conservatism", 1880–1914: Incubus or Necessity?', *Twentieth Century British History* VII (1996), 371–81.
 - 11 G.R. Searle, 'Critics of Edwardian Society: The Case of the Radical Right', in A. O'Day, ed., *The Edwardian Age: Conflict and Stability* (London, 1979), 84–5, 95.
 - 12 D.A. Thackeray, 'The Crisis of the Tariff Reform League and the Division of "Radical Conservatism", c. 1913–1922', *History* XCI/301 (2006), 45–61, at 61.

Edwardian right helps to explain why both navalist leagues were not radical right. He categorizes three overlapping groups: traditional Conservatives, proponents of national efficiency, and the radical right. The second and third were both critical of the Unionist leadership and frequently drew on social imperialism, but they differed in their attitude to party politics. Proponents of national efficiency ‘hankered after some “national government” that would combine the talents of all the “first-rate men” and shelve traditional party issues’. The radical right, in contrast, actively opposed bipartisanship, real and imagined. It claimed a monopoly on patriotism, and readily derided or undermined the patriotic credentials of Liberals and even Unionists who opposed or ignored its propaganda. The radical right professed to represent conservative principles, yet it brought together diehard Tories, such as Kipling and Wyatt, with former Liberals, such as Conan Doyle and Horton-Smith, who broke ‘with Liberalism in protest against its alleged “pacifism” and “anti-imperialism”’.¹³

The Navy League straddled all three categories identified by Searle, and succeeded also in appealing to Liberals; it was its refusal to surrender to purely radical right preoccupations which opened the breach with the IML’s founders.¹⁴ A number of prominent Navy Leaguers identified with the radical right, such as Alan Burgoyne, Patrick Hannon, and Arnold White, but they were influenced also by ‘national efficiency’.¹⁵ Wyatt and Horton-Smith, in contrast, were committed to an untempered radical right outlook and strategy, and, in this sense, can be labelled extreme.¹⁶ If the IML could not attract all radical rightists, it did succeed in recruiting one of the most prominent, Lord Willoughby de Broke, who became its president in 1912.¹⁷ Like the diehard peer, the league believed that the best way to appeal to the masses was to attract publicity through taking a strong stand, in particular to ‘awaken and rally the forces of Unionism’. Their mutual embrace was expedient for both parties. Willoughby de Broke’s outlook remained that ‘of a traditional landed aristocrat’; the IML was merely another vehicle for attacking the Liberal government and Unionist leaders.¹⁸ For its part, the league craved titled patrons, but only for decoration. Willoughby de Broke had no discernible influence over policy or tactics, and although the IML occasionally strayed from purely naval matters, it did not take up the peer’s campaigns to protect aristocratic privilege and the union with Ireland.

13 Searle, ‘Critics of Edwardian Society’, 82–4; *NLJ* XII/6 (June 1907), 151–62. See also Horton-Smith to press, 18 March 1913, IML/5; Samuel Hynes, *The Edwardian Turn of Mind* (London, 1968), 18–22.

14 M. Johnson, ‘The Liberal Party and the Navy League in Britain before the Great War’, *Twentieth Century British History* XXII (2011), 137–63.

15 L.L. Witherell, *Rebel on the Right: Henry Page Croft and the Crisis of British Conservatism, 1903–1914* (Newark, 1997), 62, 221; R. Soloway, ‘Counting the Degenerates: The Statistics of Race Deterioration in Edwardian England’, *Journal of Contemporary History* XVII (1982), 137–64.

16 N.C. Fleming, ‘Political Extremes and Extremist Politics’, *Political Studies Review* XII (2014), 395–401.

17 IML circular, 9 April 1912, IML/4.

18 G.D. Phillips, ‘Lord Willoughby de Broke and the Politics of Radical Toryism, 1909–1914’, *Journal of British Studies* XX (1980), 205–24.

The IML was almost exclusively animated by navalist preoccupations, yet it was defined by its attitude to party politics. It was one of a legion of patriotic leagues which orbited the Unionist Party in an effort to influence its policy, but unlike most others, the IML was resolutely and openly partisan. Most assessments, as a consequence, conclude that the IML wielded no political influence. Pressure groups, of course, rarely exercise high-level influence; in the period when the IML operated, ‘pressure’ tended to be directed at parliamentarians and not the government.¹⁹ Assessing the influence of navalist groups is especially difficult given the inability of the Liberal cabinet to agree a national naval policy.²⁰ Pressure groups, however, could potentially shape the ideological framework within which issues were discussed.²¹ They might enthuse ordinary voters and members of political parties, and as a consequence become a disruptive influence.²² The patriotic leagues, therefore, were an integral part of the transition to mass democracy. This is evident in their concern that Unionist leaders lacked the competence to deal with the dangers of socialism and national decline, an attitude that was related to wider resentment with political and professional elites. It led amateur commentators and pressmen – such as Wyatt and Horton-Smith – to claim wide competence in defiance of specialist professional experts. Advances in transport and information communication allowed emerging single-issue pressure groups such as the IML to present themselves as national organizations.²³

The Navy League’s allies in the Unionist Party endeavoured to block the IML’s progress at the local level, but various constituency associations allowed the renegade navalists to meet on their premises, and some even co-convened meetings. Along with advertisements for the IML in the monthly periodicals of the Tariff Reform League and Primrose League, the evidence suggests that the IML could take advantage of fissures in Edwardian Unionism.²⁴ It also benefited from the Navy League’s initial silence on the Liberal government’s Naval Prize Bill and ratification of the Declaration of London. Groping for an issue to undermine the Liberals, Arthur Balfour agreed to address an IML protest meeting, part of a campaign that culminated in the presentation of a petition to the House of Lords. The upper house’s rejection of the bill was not, as Avner Offer suggests, the result of ‘an invisible hand’ stirring up opposition, but the tireless and visible work of the IML and other opponents.²⁵ The Navy League’s eventual adoption of a more negative assessment of the bill and Declaration was a response to the IML’s campaign, and

19 G. Wootton, *Pressure Groups in Britain, 1720–1970: An Essay in Interpretation with Original Documents* (London, 1975), 6.

20 M. Humphries, ‘“Perfectly Secret and Perfectly Democratic”: Lord Esher and the Society of Islanders, 1909–14’, *English Historical Review* CXXVII/528 (2012), 1156–79.

21 D. Reynolds, *Britannia Overruled: British Policy and World Power in the Twentieth Century* (London, 2000), 39–41; K. Robbins, *Politicians, Diplomacy and War in Modern British History* (London, 1994), 125–47.

22 D.A. Hamer, *The Politics of Electoral Pressure: A Study in the History of Victorian Reform Associations* (Hassocks, 1977), 4; Thackeray, ‘Crisis of the Tariff Reform League’, 45–61.

23 K. Passmore, *Fascism: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford, 2002), 38–9.

24 Conservative Central Office, *Gleanings and Memoranda XXXIV* (July to December 1912), 149.

25 A. Offer, *The First World War: An Agrarian Interpretation* (Oxford, 1989), 276.

ultimately undermined the new league's rationale for independent action. It became clear, subsequently, that the IML had played a bridging role similar to 'the Confederacy', a militant faction of the Tariff Reform League, which 'became redundant almost as soon as it was formed', for it was designed to fill a gap left by the paralysis of the Tariff Reform League from which it soon recovered.²⁶ Like the National Service League, established in 1902 to promote compulsory military service, the IML struggled to survive the realization of its narrow goals.²⁷ The Navy League, in contrast, was able to cast itself as the respectable voice of navalism and simultaneously occupy territory hitherto left to the IML. The latter's significance, therefore, should not be judged on assessments of high-level influence that few Edwardian pressure groups could satisfy, but on its effect on the Navy League, and the cause of navalism more generally.

II

The Navy League emerged in 1894–5 in the wake of a naval scare propagated by Henry Spenser Wilkinson, military correspondent of the *Pall Mall Gazette*. He helped to organize its first formal meeting on 10 January 1895, but soon fell out with other members about whether or not the organization should give pronouncements on the Admiralty.²⁸ The league subsequently published six aims which gave primacy to public education: to inform people about Britain's reliance upon imports, encourage them to regard naval expenditure as insurance, enlist supporters from all classes, place the navy above party politics, equate naval supremacy with prosperity and liberty, and unite the British empire in this cause.²⁹ Membership grew steadily, reaching 14,000 by 1901, concentrated mainly in port towns and cities as well as public schools. It achieved a measure of fame for initiating in 1896 the annual public celebration of Trafalgar Day, and the development of training ships to prepare boys for the merchant marine and Royal Navy.³⁰ Close contacts between senior navalists and admirals disposed the league to occasionally issue public statements on naval policy, but the criticism which usually followed ultimately convinced Navy Leaguers to concentrate on public education.³¹ The resulting quiescent attitude to the government and Admiralty was placed under considerable strain by Fisher's revolution in naval organization and the return in 1906 of a Liberal government.

In pursuit of his transformation of British naval power, Fisher 'had no time to persuade the irreconcilable, and rushed because time was short'.³² He provoked a 'syndicate of

26 A. Sykes, 'The Confederacy and the Purge of the Unionist Free Traders, 1906–1910', *Historical Journal* XVIII (1975), 349–66, at 353, 355.

27 M.C. Hendley, *Organized Patriotism and the Crucible of War: Popular Imperialism in Britain, 1914–1932* (Kingston, ON, 2012), 7, 11.

28 A.J. Marder, *The Anatomy of British Sea Power: A History of British Naval Policy in the Pre-Dreadnought Era, 1880–1905* (London, 1972), 48–55.

29 *NLJVI* (December 1895).

30 M. Czisnik, 'Commemorating Trafalgar: Public Celebration and National Identity', in D. Cannadine, ed., *Trafalgar in History: A Battle and Its Afterlife* (Basingstoke, 2006), 139–54.

31 Marder, *Anatomy of British Sea Power*, 390–1, 466.

32 A. Lambert, *Admirals: The Naval Commanders Who Made Britain Great* (London, 2008), 307.

discontent' encompassing most of the Unionist press, including Wilkinson, Leopold Maxse, and Charles Repington, as well as three founding members of the IML, Gwynne, Wilson, and Cornford.³³ The admiral also faced opposition within the navy, especially from Admiral Lord Charles Beresford, which critics in the press strove to amplify.³⁴ Fisher's detractors were wide-ranging in their denunciations. His social-levelling agenda for the navy was particularly resented by officers such as Beresford and Unionist reactionaries, and he was accused of cooperating with the Liberals in a radical-inspired agenda of surrendering Britain's global power and influence at a time when it was under acute strain. Specific criticisms tended to highlight his management style, the diminution of the navy's global presence to concentrate on the North Sea, the construction of dreadnoughts, and changes to the reserve fleet. The strategic justification for Fisher's reorientation of naval strategy did not satisfy those who regarded his primary purpose as the reduction of estimates.³⁵ Those who looked to the Navy League to make a stand were disappointed.

The league's progress, by its own admission, had been slow for several years.³⁶ Its executive committee refused to share Wyatt's view that this might be arrested by commenting publicly on Fisher. At the November 1906 meeting of the executive committee, Wyatt proposed without success that the league contact mayors and chambers of commerce across the country to enlist their support in an anti-Fisher front.³⁷ Immediately afterwards, Wyatt broke ranks with the committee by publicly condemning Fisher.³⁸ The agenda of the December committee meeting included Wyatt's original proposal, alongside another inviting Balfour and Lord Rosebery to address a protest meeting. As before, the committee declined to approve Wyatt's proposals, and he continued to issue public criticisms of Fisher.³⁹

Wyatt was a long-standing member of the committee, having joined in 1895. Born in 1859, the son of a clergyman, he attended Exeter College, Oxford, graduated in 1882, and subsequently became active in Unionist politics around Southampton and Portsmouth.⁴⁰ Wyatt's income is uncertain, but he was able to devote most of his time to

33 Marder, *From the Dreadnought*, 77.

34 Freeman, *Great Edwardian Naval Feud*, 146. See also C. Beresford, *The Betrayal: Being a Record of Facts Concerning Naval Policy and Administration from the Year 1902 to the Present Time* (London, 1911).

35 P.H. Kennedy, *The Rise and Fall of British Naval Mastery* (London, 1976), 205–37.

36 E.H.G. Miller to editor, *NLJ* X/1 (January 1905), 20–1; *Navy League Report for the Year 1905* (London, 1906), 1.

37 NL executive committee agenda, 29 October 1906, Horton-Smith papers, National Maritime Museum [hereafter HSM], vol. 8.

38 Wyatt to Horton-Smith, 2 November 1906, HSM/8; *Standard*, 2 November 1906, 9.

39 NL executive committee agenda, 5, 10, 17 December 1906, HSM/8; Wyatt to editor, 19 November 1906, reprinted in Wyatt and Horton-Smith, *The Passing of the Great Fleet* (London, 1909) [hereafter *Passing*], 25–8; 'Mr Wyatt's Indictment of the Navy and the Empire', *Standard*, 29 November 1906, 7.

40 *Who Was Who: A Companion to 'Who's Who' Containing the Biographies of Those Who Died during the Period 1916–1928* (London, 1929), 1152–3; *The Times*, 21 May 1925, 9; *Jackson's Oxford Journal*, 28 October 1882, 5; *Hampshire Telegraph and Sussex Chronicle*, 22 December 1894; 17 August 1895, 1; *Southampton News*, 2 January 1895, 4; Wyatt to editor, *The Academy*, 23 December 1899, 179; *Hampshire Advertiser*, 20 June 1900, 3.

political activism. In 1894 he became honorary secretary of the central London branch of the Organisation of Speakers upon the Unity of the Empire, formed to succeed the Imperial Federation League.⁴¹ His early journalism was acerbic and grandiloquent, and revealed a radical right outlook which was preoccupied with conflict. Wyatt wrote that he lived in an 'era of national degradation'.⁴² He justified territorial acquisition on the basis of might and civilizational superiority, and warned that if:

English people under the British flag become so altruistic as to withdraw from the ceaseless competition for national existence and the means of national growth . . . they must wither away and cease to operate as a moving factor in the affairs of men.⁴³

Wyatt was an active member of the Imperial South Africa Association.⁴⁴ He had no direct military experience, yet his writing was fixated on the necessity of armed conflict for the progress of civilization and vitality of nations.⁴⁵ An article to launch the Army League in 1898 signalled Wyatt's breach with mainstream Unionism. He had previously defended the prime minister, Lord Salisbury, but Wyatt now blamed setbacks in South Africa on the 'incompetence' of the Unionist government.⁴⁶ He advocated political subservience to military leaders, expressed admiration for German government, and argued that only public pressure could force the Unionist government to improve the military. Turning out the 'magnates of the Unionist party' and replacing them with the 'magnates of the Liberal party' would not, Wyatt argued, lead to change.⁴⁷ In September 1902 the Navy League dispatched Wyatt on a 'mission to Greater Britain'.⁴⁸ He urged audiences in Canada, South Africa, and Australasia to look beyond local concerns to the Royal Navy's global role.⁴⁹ His return to England in October 1904 was celebrated by the league at its annual Trafalgar Day dinner, though it was noticeably less enthusiastic about his Unionist candidacy at the 1906 general election.⁵⁰

41 *Morning Post*, 20 November 1894, 7; *Daily News*, 21 June 1895, 5; *Pall Mall Gazette*, 23 June 1897, 8.

42 Wyatt to editor, *Morning Post*, 3 February 1898, 3.

43 W.F. Wyatt, 'The Ethics of Empire', *Nineteenth Century* (April 1897), 516–30, at 524. See also *Outlook*, 31 December 1898, 689.

44 *Bristol Mercury and Daily Post*, 17 October 1899, 5; *Morning Post*, 30 October 1899, 6; 1 November 1899; 21 November 1899, 2; 7 December 1899, 10; 25 December 1899, 7.

45 W.F. Wyatt, 'War as the Supreme Test of National Value', *Nineteenth Century* (February 1899), 216–25. Wyatt won a song competition on the theme of war: W.F. Wyatt, 'Peace and War', *Boy's Own Paper*, 26 December 1885, 207.

46 Wyatt to editor, *Morning Post*, 3 February 1898, 3.

47 W.F. Wyatt, 'The Army and the Empire', *Idler* (June 1900), 55–62; *Daily News*, 4 May 1900. See also Wyatt to editor, *Morning Post*, 1 January 1900, 7.

48 *NLJ* VII/10 (October 1902), 206–7.

49 *NLJ* IX/6 (June 1904), 178–9; Wyatt to editor, *The Times*, 6 October 1904, 12; Wyatt to editor, *The Times*, 1 December 1904, 14.

50 *NLJ* IX/11 (November 1904), 282–8; X/12 (December 1905), 301. Wyatt was beaten by Liberal incumbent of Rushcliffe, John Ellis.

Horton-Smith signalled his support for Wyatt's stand against the Navy League committee at public protest meetings on 14 December 1906 and 26 February 1907.⁵¹ The younger man had joined the league in 1896 and the committee in 1904. He had been diligent and loyal to 'the non-political nature of the League's work', yet he also hinted at an emerging unease about democracy: 'politics, in the ordinary acceptation of the term, were the curse of this country, and it was only the sense of ensuring the good of the . . . "body politic" as a whole that the Navy League was political'.⁵² He was entrusted by fellow committee members as late as November 1906 to represent the league when it met with a government minister.⁵³ Born in 1871, Horton-Smith attended Marlborough School and studied classics at Cambridge, before following in his father's footsteps at the bar.⁵⁴ He professed to be a Liberal Unionist, but unlike Wyatt, Horton-Smith does not appear to have been active in local politics. The London Scots Regiment provided him with modest military experience. A prolific writer, Horton-Smith regularly sent missives to the press on naval matters, but his more substantive literary contributions dealt with the classics, antiquarianism, and Scottish culture.

III

Wyatt and Horton-Smith developed their attack in May 1907, at the committee meeting which preceded the Navy League's annual general meeting. Horton-Smith tabled two motions asking the organization to issue statements about international disarmament and the shortage of naval vessels in the Caribbean.⁵⁵ Another committee member, Sir Frederick Pollock, a prominent figure in several imperialist groups, protested about 'constant questions raised about matters outside the proper work of the Navy League'. The two dissidents, Pollock went on, appeared to believe:

that all the Governments of Europe are engaged in watching the action of our Committee . . . our action is very little noticed in England, and our formal opinion carries next to no weight. It will carry none whatever if Mr Horton-Smith and Mr Wyatt have their way and keep us in a chronic state of puerile agitation.⁵⁶

The committee's refusal to consider the motions prompted Wyatt to propose a further motion for the forthcoming annual general meeting. It deplored the abandonment of naval stations across the globe, reductions to naval and royal dockyard personnel, changes to coastal stations and bases, the failure to construct a North Sea naval base, and the relative decline of the torpedo flotilla and naval construction. Horton-Smith subsequently offered a 'compromise' in which the president, Robert Yerburgh MP, would read to the meeting the points raised in Wyatt's amendment, indicate the committee's

51 *Passing*, 39–40, 47.

52 'Skye and the Navy League', 3 September 1906, HSM/8.

53 *Passing*, 2–3, 22; NL executive committee agenda, 5 November 1906, HSM/8.

54 *Morning Post*, 21 December 1889, 3; *Standard*, 20 June 1893, 7; 18 June 1894, 6.

55 NL executive committee agenda, 6 May 1906, HSM/8.

56 Pollock to Crutchley, 3 May 1907, HSM/8.

intention to discuss them in the ensuing year, and allow the proposer to address the issue.⁵⁷ The committee declined, prompting Wyatt and Horton-Smith to stand down and set about winning over support in advance of the AGM.⁵⁸ The editor of the league's journal, H.W. Wilson, sided with the dissidents, and they received favourable coverage from Gwynne at the *Standard*.

Opening the AGM, Yerburgh claimed that he welcomed the amendment as an opportunity to 'help to clear the air'. The chairman, Seymour Trower, remarked that the:

mover and seconder of the resolution advocate attack by the pyrotechnics of the platform and letters to the Press. I am not surprised that they should choose this method, on account of their well known competence, their ready pen and their powerful oratory. But we prefer to confine ourselves to the less picturesque, and we believe more practical, steady spade-work of education.⁵⁹

Wyatt and Horton-Smith addressed the meeting at length. They provoked protest with their claim that criticisms of Fisher relied on information culled from the league's journal. Fractiousness gave way to farce as each side engaged in personal attacks. The amendment was defeated, 44 to 27, which convinced the dissidents to seek another opportunity by gathering the required 50 signatures for an extraordinary general meeting.

The *Standard* hailed Wyatt and Horton-Smith as the 'Reform Party', and the two men again took to the letters pages to advance their case.⁶⁰ Critics responded in a like manner, provoking further accusations, retorts, and rebuttals.⁶¹ The Unionist candidate for Portsmouth, Fred Jane, announced his decision 'to become a member of the Navy League with the sole object of supporting Mr Wyatt in his protest against the Navy League being turned into a political and Admiralty lap-dog'.⁶² The league's Third London Branch elected Wyatt and Horton-Smith to its committee and issued a resolution condemning the league's leaders.⁶³ After protracted delays on the part of the secretary, W.C. Crutchley, the dissidents obtained the membership list, and subsequently issued a circular with the barbed observation that: 'The national Policy of this country in regard to the Fleet is not inspired or sustained by the school-children to whom the work of the League's sole official lecturer is mainly confined.'⁶⁴ By 9 July the dissidents claimed to possess 400 signed

57 *Passing*, 49–52, 60–2.

58 Wyatt and Horton-Smith to Trower, 13 May 1907, HSM/8; Wyatt to editor, *Spectator*, 11 May 1907, 753; *Standard*, 15 May 1907, 8.

59 *NLJ* XII/6 (June 1907), 151–62.

60 *Standard*, 16 May 1907, 7; *Daily Express*, 16 May 1907, 4; *Standard*, 17 May 1907, 9; 18 May 1907, 5; 20 May 1907, 4.

61 *Standard*, 23 May 1907, 7; *Morning Post*, 23 May 1907, 4; *Standard*, 24 May 1907, 13; 25 May 1907, 9.

62 Jane to editor, *Morning Post*, 27 May 1907, 2.

63 This branch on 11 January 1908 reconstituted itself as a founding branch of the IML: *Passing*, 122–5, 288.

64 Crutchley to Horton-Smith, 19, 24 June 1907; Wyatt and Horton-Smith to NL membership, 22 June 1907, HSM/8.

requisitions for an extraordinary general meeting; Crutchley grudgingly scheduled it for 19 July.⁶⁵ Wyatt and Horton-Smith also wrote to parliamentarians, prompting the statement from Lord Tweedmouth, first lord of the Admiralty, that the navy was as strong as ever and that the scare raised in the media was 'entirely manufactured'.⁶⁶

The league's committee attempted to blunt criticisms by releasing to the press proofs of an article, intended for its journal, which questioned naval strategy and dispositions.⁶⁷ Wyatt and Horton-Smith subjected it to ridicule, and suggested it was the latest in a series of procedural irregularities which brought into question the committee's competence.⁶⁸ The dissidents similarly dismissed a last-minute compromise which supported the committee but expressed 'its serious apprehension that our present first line Fleet, the Channel Fleet, is not so maintained'.⁶⁹ As with the AGM, the EGM was tense and raucous; Jane read a letter from naval officers which accused the committee of 'imitating pro-Boers'. The compromise amendment was defeated in the poll of those gathered at Caxton Hall, 87 to 73. However, once proxy votes were tallied, the dissidents lost 897 to 559.⁷⁰ Wyatt and Horton-Smith spoke for a narrow majority of high-level activists, but not the broader movement. They nevertheless demanded that the committee resign and threatened to form their own league.⁷¹

IV

The exchange of criticisms in the press continued unabated. In communicating to Navy Leaguers, the committee had the advantage of the league's journal:

if agitation proves necessary, efficient machinery is required . . . It is quite easy to agitate by way of manifestos to the Press, by circulars, and so forth at the cost of postage . . . Real abiding results can only be obtained by speakers who know what they are talking about, and meetings, the success of which is assured by hard work and intelligent arrangement locally.⁷²

In reply the *Standard* claimed that this amounted to doing 'nothing'.⁷³ Lacking the league's resources, Wyatt and Horton-Smith relied instead on the publication of their letters in two sympathetic newspapers, Maxse's *Standard* and Gwynne's *Morning Post*. These two outlets remained crucial for publicity after the establishment of the IML in 1908, though the new league also produced a number of publications to accompany its campaigns, and received further public exposure through Wilson's connections at the Northcliffe press. It was not until January 1914, however, that the league issued its own

65 *Passing*, 136–42; Crutchley to NL membership, 1 July 1907, HSM/8.

66 *Passing*, 142–3; *Morning Post*, 2 July 1907, 6.

67 *NLJ* XII/7 (July 1907), 183.

68 *Spectator*, 16 July 1907, 16; *Passing*, 162–78.

69 'The Navy League: Amendment', 19 July 1907, HSM/8.

70 *NLJ* XII/8 (August 1907), 219–32.

71 *National Review*, August 1907, 844; Wyatt and Horton-Smith to the press, 20 July 1907, reprinted in *Passing*, 214–15.

72 *NLJ* XIII/4 (April 1908), 103–4.

73 *Standard*, 10 April 1908, 7.

quarterly publication, the *IML Record*, a mediocre news-sheet compared to the Navy League's monthly journal. Wyatt and Horton-Smith's early letters to the press relied on Beresford's public statements and on expressions of support from anonymous naval officers. Observing the exchange of insults, the secretary to the Admiralty, Edmund Robertson MP, noted that:

He never thought he would live to see the day when he would be grateful . . . for the existence of the National [sic] Navy League. He had not hitherto agreed with their policy, but he was on their side now. (Laughter.) Within the Navy League there was a 'Navier' League.⁷⁴

Wyatt and Horton-Smith cited the statement as evidence of Navy League complicity with the Liberals.⁷⁵

In November 1907 Wyatt and Horton-Smith confirmed their intention of establishing a 'new Navy League', and revived Wilkinson's 1895 call for a strategy department at the Admiralty that would be independent of political interference.⁷⁶ Wyatt also signalled his support for the former first naval lord Sir Frederick Richards, who called for an inquiry into the state of the navy.⁷⁷ A motion to this effect was passed at the first public meeting called by Wyatt and Horton-Smith following the EGM, held at Wandsworth and attended by the local Unionist MP.⁷⁸

The establishment of the IML was announced on 27 January 1908. It boasted a 'general council' of under 300 eminent persons intended to impress and encourage further support.⁷⁹ Its joint honorary secretaries, Wyatt and Horton-Smith, were accompanied by three former members of the Navy League committee, Admiral Sir Edmund Freemantle, Captain R.B. Nicholetts, and Robert Weatherburn. Some 17 Unionist MPs affiliated, a figure that rose to 23 by 1911. The presence of officers of flag and general rank was given especial prominence to rebut unflattering references to Wyatt and Horton-Smith's lack of professional naval experience. This cohort steadily rose to 184 in 1911, and continued to grow even though the general council itself shrank in size from 966 members in 1911 to 608 by 1913.⁸⁰ Prospective members of the general council were reassured that they would be 'unburdened with any work'.⁸¹ This was undertaken by the joint secretaries, assisted by a small office staff, and a regularly convened executive committee. Like many patriotic leagues, the IML did not disclose its total membership. Bombastic claims to have established branches as far afield as India probably encouraged

⁷⁴ *House of Commons Debates*, 31 July 1907, vol. 179, col. 987.

⁷⁵ *Passing*, 239–40.

⁷⁶ Wyatt and Horton-Smith to editor, *Standard*, 9 November 1907, 9; 13 November 1907, 8.

⁷⁷ *National Review*, June 1907, 516–17; Wyatt and Horton-Smith to editor, *Standard*, 13 November 1907, 8, reprinted in *Passing*, 258–9, 264, 268–9.

⁷⁸ *West London Post*, 13 December 1913, IML/5; Handwritten agenda, 20 November 1907, HSM/8; *Passing*, 236–8, 392–4.

⁷⁹ 'A First List of the General Council and Committee', HSM/14.

⁸⁰ The IML published numerous revisions of the general council: see 'General Council and Committee: Complete List with Alphabetical Index to 15 July 1911', HSM/14.

⁸¹ Wyatt and Horton-Smith to W.V. Faber MP, 8 January 1908, IML/1.

accusations that the general council constituted its total membership.⁸² The IML retorted that its membership ‘numbered in the thousands’, but in 1912 it was merely able to report the activities of a dozen branches, only two of which – Alton, Staffordshire, and Plymouth – were outside London.⁸³ A ‘Ladies Council’ was convened with Lady St Helier as president and Wyatt’s sister, Grace, as secretary. Out of this emerged a ‘Junior Branch’, which organized drill and rifle shooting for boys, and nursing skills for girls.⁸⁴

The IML’s finances give some idea of membership and indicate that agitation was a greater priority. Like the Navy League, the IML offered a range of subscriptions.⁸⁵ It collected £776 15s. 1d. in its first year, suggesting a possible membership of around 900.⁸⁶ This appears to have doubled in the period between 1 July 1910 and 31 December 1911, when it collected £1,363 1s. 2d., and an additional £257 10s. in life memberships.⁸⁷ Wyatt and Horton-Smith believed that membership would increase through agitation, hence their emphasis on the immediate results of funded campaigns over the long-term strategy of establishing branches. Requests for financial assistance were constant, not least to compensate Wyatt and Horton-Smith’s personal contributions.⁸⁸ In its first year the IML’s outgoings totalled £1,217 18s. 1d., which rose to £3,842 18s. 4d. in the first six months of 1909 and £6,186 4s. 4d. for July 1910–December 1911. For the same periods, donations increased from £181 3s. to £963 15s. 3d. In 1910 and 1911, donations outstripped subscriptions; the £100 million loan campaign received £2,257 3s. 10d., and the ‘Coronation Year’ fund received £1,621 9s.⁸⁹

V

The IML declared its five main aims to be: command of the sea as national policy, the creation of a strategy department within the Admiralty, the two-power standard plus 10 per cent, the fulfilment of the old league’s duties, and an increase in the number of British seamen working on British ships. The last aim attempted to appropriate a popular Navy League crusade, though in practice the IML did not make it the subject of a specific campaign.⁹⁰ It was the new league’s declaration on ‘Party Grounds’, however, that

82 IML announcement, 5 April 1913, IML/5; *West London Post*, 13 December 1913, IML/5.

83 ‘General Council and Committee . . . 15 July 1911’, HSM/14; W.F. Wyatt and L.G.H. Horton-Smith, *Britain’s Imminent Danger* (2nd edn, London, 1912) [hereafter *Imminent*], 171–7.

84 *The Times*, 13 February 1909, 12; *Passing*, 523.

85 £5 5s. for an honorary vice president, £1 1s. for members, 10s. 6d. for associate members, 5s. for associates, and 1s. for supporters or ‘working men and women’. See ‘The League’s Programme’, January 1908, HSM/1.

86 H.F. Wyatt and L.G.H. Horton-Smith, *Keep the Flag Flying: The Hundred Million Loan Campaign* (5th edn, London, 1910) [hereafter *Keep*], 77.

87 *Imminent*, 165.

88 They contributed £707 2s. 7d. towards the league’s first major publication, *Passing*: see *Keep*, 79.

89 *Keep*, 76–9; *Imminent*, 164–5.

90 Wyatt was evidently interested in the issue since 1898: see HSM/1; Wyatt to editor, *Pall Mall Gazette*, 2 July 1897, 9.

distinguished it from the Navy League. The IML censured socialists and Liberal 'Little Englanders' for being 'perpetually engaged in denouncing both patriotism and the fighting spirit'. The league would 'point out that these denunciations are poisonous to the life of Britain, and that those who deal in them are in effect the advance of a Foreign Power'.⁹¹

The IML suffered an early rebuke when Lord Esher, secretary to the Committee of Imperial Defence (CID), publicly declined an invitation to join its general council. The league's demand for a public inquiry, Esher wrote in an open letter, 'would indicate a want of confidence in the present Board of Admiralty' which he could not support. He was 'struck' by the lack of any 'great naval authority' on the general council, and rebutted the charge that Fisher's reforms were introduced 'for the purpose of saving money for social reforms'. He concluded, famously, that 'There is not a man in Germany, from the Emperor downwards, who would not welcome the fall of Sir John Fisher.'⁹² However, Esher's claim to have known about Fisher's plans in 1903, when the peer had no official position in the government, emboldened those like Wyatt who called for an inquiry. It also contributed to a minor diplomatic incident, when Kaiser Wilhelm II contacted Tweedmouth about Esher's status, and ultimately the first lord's dismissal two months later, following Herbert Asquith's appointment as prime minister. Unknown to the IML, this series of events had the effect of removing pressure from the navy for economies, placing it instead on the army.⁹³ Esher subsequently launched his own navalist organization, the Society of Islanders, on 25 March 1909. Unlike the IML it did not seek to rival the Navy League, but instead presented itself as a Jesuit- or Masonic-style body of elite 'workers'. Bipartisan and unwilling to demonize rival nations, Esher's group nevertheless shared with the IML the capacity to present unsubstantiated and exaggerated membership figures, and take the credit for changes in government and Admiralty policy.⁹⁴

In April 1908 the IML moved into an office at 2 Westminster Palace Gardens. In addition to a constant stream of letters to the press, Wyatt fulfilled his 1906 proposal to contact chambers of commerce.⁹⁵ On this occasion only North Staffordshire requested an IML speaker, though the reapplication of this strategy in 1911 proved to be markedly more successful. Between its foundation in January 1908 and its first major meeting the following November, IML public meetings were held at the rate of one a month. With the exception of Edinburgh, these were typically convened at locations around London. The league's general council did not turn out in force, though meetings were attended by a sprinkling of Unionist MPs and reported in the *Standard* and local press.⁹⁶ In addition, a series of 'drawing room meetings' were convened by and for its more eminent supporters.

91 IML programme, January 1908, HSM/1.

92 *The Times*, 6 February 1908, 15; see also Etrick W. Creak to editor, *NLJ* XIII/3 (March 1908), 90.

93 *Passing*, 328–31; P. Fraser, *Lord Esher: A Political Biography* (London, 1973), 200; Wyatt and Horton-Smith to press, 4 April 1908, reprinted in *Passing*, 362.

94 Humphries, 'Perfectly Secret'.

95 Wyatt and Horton-Smith to secretaries of chambers of commerce, 2 March 1908, reprinted in *Passing*, 348–9.

96 *Passing*, 321, 345, 358, 459.

The IML's distinctive approach to 'Party Grounds' was clarified in these early months. Jane claimed that the league was 'non-party', but asserted that if it became 'an anti-Radical Association, the blame lies with those 130 MPs whose anti-naval policy is so evident'.⁹⁷ Its Edinburgh organizer, Henry Tero, took issue with the *Fleet's* suggestion that the IML 'will be purely party political, and will be run by men violently in favour of Tariff Reform'. There was no 'universal connection between members of the League and Tariff Reformers', Tero replied, and cooperation would only follow if their aims happened to coincide.⁹⁸ Wyatt's approach was more direct. He participated in two Unionist by-election campaigns, in April and May, on behalf of Leopold Amery at East Wolverhampton and against Winston Churchill at Dundee. The 'Liberal Government of which [Churchill] is a member', he informed Dundonians, 'have committed the greatest crime . . . [they] have laid their deadly and paralysing hands upon the British Fleet.'⁹⁹ In the wake of the Navy League's announcement in June 1908 that 75 MPs had joined their ranks, including Liberals, Wyatt organized a 'standing committee' of Unionist MPs, later joined by peers, sympathetic to the IML.¹⁰⁰ In spite of the greater support among Unionist MPs for the Navy League, and occasional rebuffs from local Unionist clubs, Wyatt believed that 'the Unionist party alone has the means, the organisation, the number of speakers, and the prestige needed to arrest the attention of Britain and to penetrate the cloud of apathy and indifference'.¹⁰¹

Heightening anxiety about naval preparedness in the closing months of 1908 elicited from the Navy League an extraordinary call for Balfour to challenge the government on naval policy. Rather than welcome the league's intervention, Wyatt condemned it for breaking its 'supine indifference' to politics.¹⁰² The IML proceeded with its 'Great City Meeting' on 19 November at London's Cannon Street Hotel. It was graced by 33 Unionist MPs and 29 peers; Lord Amphyll took the chair, while Wyatt and Horton-Smith largely confined themselves to managing the event.¹⁰³ Its call for an inquiry placed the new league at the heart of the latest naval scare and subsequently helped it increase the frequency of its public meetings. These were still largely confined to London, but alongside the cooperation of local Unionist associations and

97 *Evening Standard*, 17 February 1908, reprinted in *Passing*, 335–6.

98 Tero to editor, *Fleet*, March 1908, 78, reprinted in *Passing*, 336–7.

99 *Passing*, 381–91. Churchill regarded this as an especially turbulent by-election campaign: see J. Lawrence, *Electing Our Masters: The Hustings in British Politics from Hogarth to Blair* (Oxford, 2009), 120.

100 *NLJ* XIII/6 (June 1908), 168–9; *Daily Express*, 22 May 1908, 2. The IML's parliamentary committee was chaired by H.S. Staveley-Hill: see *The Times*, 26 June 1912, 7; *Passing*, 419–20, 466; Staveley-Hill to press, 22 July 1908, IML/1; Wyatt and Staveley-Hill to Unionist Naval Committee, 29 October 1908, IML/1.

101 Frewen Lord to press, 2 November 1908, IML/1; Coetzee, *For Party*, 84–5; Wyatt to press, 7 August 1908, IML/1.

102 Wyatt and Horton-Smith to editor, *County of Middlesex Independent*, 4 November 1908, 1.

103 'Great City Meeting', IML/1; *Passing*, 487–507.

Primrose habitations, the IML's committee was increasingly confident about developing a network of branches.¹⁰⁴

On 12 March 1909 the government announced a massive increase to naval estimates, from £3 million to £35 million. Its decision to lay down four dreadnoughts immediately, and reserve construction of a further four, provided the IML with an opening to attack what was otherwise a remarkable change of policy. George Wyndham's famous slogan 'We want eight and we won't wait' coincided with his decision to join the IML's general council.¹⁰⁵ On 24 March the IML celebrated its role in the spectacular Unionist by-election victory at Croydon. On the same day, its joint secretaries attended Beresford's arrival at Waterloo Station following a retirement ceremony at Portsmouth.¹⁰⁶ Now a 'free man', Beresford worked on convincing Balfour and Asquith of the need for an inquiry into the Admiralty.¹⁰⁷ The government's decision to organize a CID subcommittee on the matter prompted the IML to demand an 'independent' and wide-ranging inquiry.¹⁰⁸ In the meantime Wyatt and Horton-Smith compiled and published *The Passing of the Great Fleet*. Priced 8s. 6d., the 700-page hardcover book reprinted press reports, propaganda, letters, and other ephemera.¹⁰⁹ Walter Long's Parliamentary Navy Committee expressed alarm that the new league's prominence was at the expense of the Navy League, and called on the two to reconcile their differences.¹¹⁰ The IML responded by insisting that its aims and strategy differed significantly.¹¹¹ The Navy League reacted by initiating internal discussions about reforming its structure, policies, and membership, and granting MPs a greater role in its highest councils.¹¹²

If the naval scare had given the IML a fillip, increased naval estimates and an inquiry into the Admiralty moved in the direction of its demands and threatened to undo recent progress. The IML therefore seized on David Lloyd George's 'People's Budget'. Intended partly to pay for the revised naval estimates, its tax proposals angered all Unionists, and with the Navy League declining to take a position, the IML could highlight its utility to Unionists by organizing a petition asking the House of Lords to reject the budget.¹¹³

104 Notices of public meetings at Streatham, 28 April 1909, and Sidcup, 29 April 1909, IML/1; Wyatt and Horton-Smith to IML executive committee, 11 January 1909; 26 January 1909, IML/1.

105 Mark W. Hamilton, 'The "New Navalism" and the British Navy League, 1895–1914', *Mariner's Mirror* LXIV (1978), 37–44, at 42. The IML wrote to all Unionist parliamentarians requesting their support: Wyatt and Horton-Smith, circular, 15 March 1909, HSM/1; Wyndham to Wyatt and Horton-Smith, 24 March 1909, IML/1; Wyatt and Horton-Smith to press, 29 March 1909, IML/1; *The Times*, 30 March 1909, 6.

106 Wyatt and Horton-Smith to press, 23 March 1909, IML/1; *The Times*, 25 March 1909, 9, 12.
107 Marder, *From the Dreadnought*, 188–98.

108 Wyatt and Horton-Smith, circular, 11 May 1909, IML/1.

109 The introduction was republished as *The True Truth about the Navy* (London, 1909).

110 *The Times*, 22 June 1909, 12.

111 Wyatt and Horton-Smith to editor, *Naval and Military Record*, 4 June 1909; Wyatt and Horton-Smith to press, 24 June 1909, IML/1.

112 Coetzee, *For Party*, 111–13.

113 'The Crisis and Its Cause and Its Remedy', 7 April 1909, HSM/1.

Tabled by Lord Cawdor on 22 November 1909, its total of 140,203 signatures was second only to Long's petition.¹¹⁴ The IML inevitably associated itself with the upper house's rejection of the budget eight days later, 350 to 75.

The league was inexorably drawn into the 'peers versus the people' general election of January 1910. Highlighting the large number of Liberal MPs in the Navy League, it asserted the need for strict partisanship against all Liberals.¹¹⁵ It issued its own election manifesto on 12 January:

If you truly love the land of your birth; if you have any regard for the preservation of its liberties; if you wish to protect its soil from the footstep of the invader; if you would save yourselves, your homes, your wives and your children from sheer starvation, caused by the arrest of your food-supply as it crosses the seas of the world; if you would hand down to those who come after you the heritage of Sea-Power and of Empire which our fathers bequeathed to us; then vote against the Liberal Government.¹¹⁶

In another pamphlet the league translated the situation 'into terms of football' to make it 'intelligible at once' to the average voter.¹¹⁷ This exemplified Wyatt's frustration that ordinary people cared more about England's defeat in sporting contests than the international situation.¹¹⁸ The IML's election pamphlets had utility for Unionists. A loophole in the 1883 Corrupt Practices Act allowed auxiliary organizations and interest groups to contribute to election campaigns without the need to register the costs on candidates' official expenses.¹¹⁹ Unfortunately for the IML, the Navy League was also prepared to enter the political fray. It suggested that voters at the general election had to decide whether to be a 'patriot' or a 'traitor', and claimed afterwards that it 'had no little share' in 'the reduction of the Radical majority'.¹²⁰ The IML had helped to make the naval question a feature of the poll, but its contribution was overshadowed by Balfour, the Unionist press, and more significantly by Robert Blatchford, socialist activist and newly appointed member of the Navy League's committee.¹²¹

VI

The Navy League's recent assertiveness did not prompt the IML to consider reunification; it preferred instead to discuss the possibility of an alliance with other patriotic

114 Wyatt and Horton-Smith to unknown member of House of Lords, 7 July 1909, IML/1; *House of Lords Debates, 22 November 1909, vol. 4, col. 729; Keep*, 40–3.

115 Wyatt and Horton-Smith to press, 7 January 1910, reprinted in Wyatt and Horton-Smith, *The Imperial Maritime League: The Secret of Its Success* (London, 1910), 11–13.

116 Manifesto, 12 January 1910, IML/2.

117 Wyatt and Horton-Smith to press, 14 January 1910, IML/2; *Keep*, 43.

118 Wyatt to editor, *Morning Post*, 3 February 1898, 3.

119 Lawrence, *Electing Our Masters*, 81.

120 *Navy XV/1* (January 1910), 3; *XV/2* (February 1910), 29–30.

121 N. Blewett, *The Peers, the Parties and the People: The General Elections of 1910* (London, 1972), 125–8, 311; *Navy XV/1* (January 1910), 3.

leagues.¹²² It also launched two parallel campaigns to re-engage the attention of Unionists: its alternative to the People's Budget, the £100 million defence loan campaign, and the defeat of the Naval Prize Bill. The IML argued that only through a £100 million defence loan could the two-power standard be properly maintained and the issue lifted above party strife. It launched its campaign on 25 June 1910 – during the political truce following the death of Edward VII – in the first of six public letters addressed to Asquith.¹²³ Each successive missive, through to 22 November, was appended by an ever-lengthening list of signatures, the last running to seven pages. These included the IML's usual allies in the press, as well as hundreds of former flag and general officers.¹²⁴ Wilson obtained Lord Northcliffe's agreement to publicize the loan crusade in the *Daily Mail*.¹²⁵ Beresford, however, disavowed the campaign in favour of a shipbuilding vote of £60 million.¹²⁶ The IML's first letter to Asquith referred to Richard Cobden's 1861 call for a defence loan, but the accompanying discourse about the inevitability of war was unlikely to have appealed to many Liberals.¹²⁷ In advance of the December 1910 general election, the league again attacked the Liberals.¹²⁸ Leading Unionists toyed with the idea of a defence loan, but despite the efforts of the Northcliffe press, naval matters did not feature prominently in the second poll of 1910.¹²⁹ In the wake of yet another Liberal victory, the IML was left only with the empty boast that its campaign had the support of 'no fewer than 509 officers of flag and general rank, besides nearly 1,000 other representative men'.¹³⁰

The league had greater success with its agitation against the 1909 Declaration of London. Wyatt believed that international peace agreements eroded national character and were contrary to 'biological law': ministers could no more prohibit war than they could 'abolish the winds of the heavens'.¹³¹ In 1898 he condemned Britain's abandonment of the right of capture of enemy ships given that Russia and Germany threatened to blockade food in wartime.¹³² The risk to Britain's food supply had long been a prominent theme in

122 'The Imperial Maritime League and the Middle Classes Defence Organisation', 15 December 1909, IML/1; Wyatt and Horton-Smith to Percival Hughes [Conservative Central Office], March 1910; Wyatt and Horton-Smith to W.E. Norris, March 1910, IML/2.

123 Wyatt and Horton-Smith, *Keep*, appendix 2.

124 Wyatt and Horton-Smith to IML executive committee, 4 July 1910, IML/2.

125 Morris, *Scaremongers*, 220–1.

126 *House of Commons Debates*, 29 June 1911, vol. 27, col. 646.

127 Wyatt and Horton-Smith to Asquith, 25 June 1910, reprinted in *Keep*, 91–5. The campaign attracted the hostility of veteran socialist H.M. Hyndman, Hyndman to Horton-Smith, 28 September 1910, IML/2.

128 IML general election materials, December 1910, IML/2.

129 Blewett, *Peers, the Parties and the People*, 306–8, 324, 327.

130 The list included Edward Elgar: see *Keep*, i.

131 Wyatt, 'War as the Supreme Test', 220–1.

132 Wyatt to editor, *Morning Post*, 23 April 1898, 8; A. Offer, 'Morality and Admiralty: "Jacky" Fisher, Economic Warfare and the Laws of War', *Journal of Contemporary History* XXIII (1988), 102; A. Lambert, 'Great Britain and Maritime Law from the Declaration of Paris to the Era of Total War', in R. Hobson and T. Kristiansen, eds, *Navies in Northern Waters, 1721–2000* (London, 2004), 18.

navalist propaganda, and the Navy League appears to have been satisfied that the new proposals might lessen this threat. Wyatt, in contrast, was indignant about the Liberal government's leading role at the 1907 Hague Peace Conference and 1908–9 London Naval Conference, and its determination to codify maritime law and establish an International Prize Court. He first spoke against the Declaration on 9 June 1909, echoing Beresford's concern about Germany arming civilian vessels, condemning the government's claim that maritime law required clarification, and predicting that it would lead to the return of privateering. If the government assented to the Declaration, Wyatt pronounced, 'they will have put the coffin lid on England and nailed it down'.¹³³ Tension between the government and Admiralty obliged Wyatt and other critics to navigate the resulting confusion. On the one hand, the Admiralty developed plans to blockade Germany economically regardless of the government's recent diplomacy.¹³⁴ Oblivious to this, the IML claimed that Fisher had endangered Britain's global supply lines.¹³⁵ On the other the Admiralty and government colluded in repudiating Beresford's alarm about German merchant ships converting to warships. Wyatt's assertion that 'most, nearly all German liners carry guns on board' may have been very wide of the mark, but until Beresford's recent intervention the Admiralty had concluded that this was a serious possibility.¹³⁶

The IML and Unionist press campaigned vigorously to compel the government to refer the Declaration to parliament. The former launched its agitation on 31 October 1910.¹³⁷ It contrasted itself with the neutral stance adopted by the Navy League, boasting that 'in *this* League we work for . . . the induction of the spirit of self-sacrifice for country, and of the desire to live and die in the service of the British race'.¹³⁸ On 19 November it wrote to all Unionist parliamentarians that the Naval Prize Bill 'constitutes the revival of privateering in a form more fatal and more insidious than was ever known before'.¹³⁹ Wyatt warned a meeting at Wimbledon that the government's reliance on Irish Nationalist MPs meant that British naval policy was 'at the mercy of the hireling gang of avowed enemies of England, who were in the pay of Patrick Ford and the Irish dynamiters in the

133 H.F. Wyatt and L.G.H. Horton-Smith, *Declaration of London: National Starvation in War and the Paralysis of Britain's Power and Rights at Sea* (London, 1911) [hereafter *Starvation*], 11–26.

134 Offer, 'Morality and Admiralty', 99–118; Lambert, 'Great Britain and Maritime Law', 23–34.

135 H.F. Wyatt, 'The Unguarded Spaces of the Sea', *Nineteenth Century and After* (August 1910), 370–80, reprinted in *Starvation*, 27–36.

136 M.S. Seligmann, *The Royal Navy and the German Threat, 1901–1914: Admiralty Plans to Protect British Trade in a War Against Germany* (Oxford, 2012), 33–4.

137 Wyatt and Horton-Smith to IML executive committee, 20 October 1910, IML/2; *Keep*, 131.

138 Wyatt and Horton-Smith to editor, *Vanity Fair*, 11 October 1911, 461–2, and 1 November 1911, 557, reprinted in H.F. Wyatt and L.G.H. Horton-Smith, *The Imperial Maritime League: The Navy and the Need for Agitation* (London, 1911), 1–6, 6–8. For the Navy League's neutrality, see *Navy* XV/10 (October 1910), 261; XVI/1 (January 1911), 2; XVI/2 (February 1911), 24.

139 Wyatt and Horton-Smith to members of both houses of parliament, 19 November 1910, reprinted in *Starvation*, 7–9.

United States'. Horton-Smith followed: 'Weakness invited war. The Liberals, ever professing peace, were, in fact, themselves the War Party.'¹⁴⁰

Ahead of the December 1910 general election, the IML published a lengthy pamphlet on 'national starvation and the threat of war'.¹⁴¹ It also issued a manifesto which declared: 'The Liberal Government have only allowed friendly nations the freedom to send us one kind of food when we are at war. That food is *nuts*. Monkey food for Britain! Nuts as the Liberal Diet!'¹⁴² It referred to Britain's controversial concession to continental powers that 'conditional contraband' could include food, excepting that intended for civilian consumption, and that one particular food, nuts, was exempted as part of the 'free list' of raw materials necessary for national industries.¹⁴³ Wyatt's attempt to encourage Unionists to adopt the issue at the general election was unsuccessful, but this setback was reversed dramatically the following year when the City of London, and chambers of commerce across the country, came out against the Declaration.¹⁴⁴

On 2 February 1911 the IML convened a protest meeting at London's Baltic Exchange addressed by Gibson Bowles, Unionist MP and the 'central figure' in the anti-Declaration crusade.¹⁴⁵ On St Valentine's Day it contacted a number of Navy League branches suggesting 'future unity of aim' if they agreed to oppose the Declaration and support Wilkinson's call for a strategy department.¹⁴⁶ The Navy League's continued neutrality on the Declaration allowed the IML exclusive association with the swelling numbers of those opposed to the Naval Prize Bill.¹⁴⁷ With Unionists increasingly restless too, Balfour became disposed to address the IML's 'non-party' demonstration in the City on 27 June, convened just prior to the bill's second reading in the House of Commons.¹⁴⁸ On the back foot, the Navy League blamed the government for making it a party issue, and recommended that a panel of experts examine the question.¹⁴⁹ When the measure was debated in the Commons, Liberals commented on IML influence in the chamber, which MPs associated with the league – Wyndham, Walter Faber, and its chairman, Rowland Hunt – declined to address in their contributions.¹⁵⁰

Following the Liberals' expected victory in the lower house, 301 to 231, the IML sought financial donations to support a 'Coronation Year Fund' of £3,000 to petition the king, 'praying him to defer his assent' to ratification of the Declaration 'pending its

140 'Imperial Maritime League', *Broad Arrow*, 2 December 1910, 640.

141 *Starvation*, 115.

142 'Monkey Food for the British People', December 1910, HSM/18.

143 Offer, 'Morality and Admiralty', 104.

144 H.F. Wyatt, 'The Declaration of London: A Sword for Unionists', *Morning Post*, 3 December 1910, reprinted in *Starvation*, 42–5.

145 Offer, 'Morality and Admiralty', 116; *Starvation*, 89.

146 Wyatt and Horton-Smith to Navy League branches, 14 February 1911, IML/3.

147 *The Times*, 20 June 1911, 10; 27 June 1911, 8.

148 *The Times*, 28 June 1911, 9.

149 *Navy XVI/7* (July 1911), 174.

150 *House of Commons Debates*, 28 June 1911, vol. 27, cols. 434–548; 29 June 1911, vol. 27, cols. 574–696; 3 July 1911, vol. 27, cols. 814–933. McKinnon Wood also referenced the IML in the third reading: see *House of Commons Debates*, 7 December 1911, vol. 32, col. 1702.

reconsideration by a Select Committee or Royal Commission'.¹⁵¹ The league headed a list of 310 chambers of commerce, shipping and insurance associations and companies, leagues and societies, 106 peers, 558 admirals and generals, 82 King's Counsel, over 100 privy councillors, lords lieutenant, and high sheriffs, and 197 mayors of cities, boroughs, and towns.¹⁵² It boasted that these signatories constituted a 'far greater weight of support than has ever previously been accorded to the public action of any League or Society', and claimed it as 'a truly remarkable and national volume of approval of the League's aims'.¹⁵³ The Navy League reluctantly conceded that the campaign 'has brought home to every man who reads and thinks the imminent peril in which we stand with regard to our food supplies in time of war'.¹⁵⁴ The government secured a reduced if still comfortable majority when it divided on the third reading, on 7 December, 172 to 125.¹⁵⁵ The IML wrote to Unionist peers demanding that they put aside their earlier avoidance of a division on the bill. The league declared the subsequent vote, 145 to 53, as its own victory, even though peers' speeches erred on the side of renegotiation rather than outright rejection.¹⁵⁶

VII

In January 1912 the Navy League welcomed the announcement of a new naval war staff and intelligence department. It cited approvingly Wilkinson's recommendation for a 'brain for the navy,' and claimed that it had supported such a step for the past three years.¹⁵⁷ This inevitably provoked the wrath of the IML; it launched a scathing attack on Alan Burgoyne MP, editor of the *Navy League Annual*, for supposed inaccuracies in his yearly compendium of the world's navies.¹⁵⁸ The Navy League retorted that such attacks were 'personal', though it was not beyond labelling Wyatt a 'jeremiad'.¹⁵⁹ Under its energetic new secretary, Patrick Hannon MP, the Navy League demonstrated that it had learnt lessons from the 1907 split. It participated in two well-publicized debates, on 8 and 13 February 1912, on naval supremacy, at the Oxford and Cambridge unions respectively.¹⁶⁰ The league's journal gave increasing space to the threat from Germany and

151 'Keep the Flag Flying', supplement to the *Broad Arrow: The Naval and Military Gazette*, 20 October 1911; *The Times*, 3 November 1911, 7.

152 Horton-Smith, *Perils of the Sea: How We Kept the Flag Flying: A Short History of a Long Fight* (London, 1920), 201a–x.

153 *Imminent*, i.

154 *Navy XVI/8* (August 1911), 210–11.

155 *House of Commons Debates*, 7 December 1911, vol. 32, cols. 1718–19.

156 *The Times*, 6 December 1911, 10; *House of Lords Debates*, 13 March 1911, vol. 7, cols. 432–76; *House of Lords Debates*, 12 December 1911, vol. 10, col. 895.

157 *The Times*, 9 January 1912, 6; *Navy XVII/2* (February 1912), 38–9.

158 'The Anomalous Position and Curious Inconsistency of Mr Alan Burgoyne', 8 January 1912, IML/4.

159 *Navy XVII/2* (February 1912), 43; *XVII/5* (May 1912), 131.

160 *The Times*, 8 February 1912, 9; 13 February 1912, 11; *Navy XVII/3* (March 1912), 76; *XVII/4* (April 1912), 102.

from socialists and pacifists at home. It even adopted the IML's concern about the Royal Navy having abandoned imperial lines of communication.¹⁶¹

In March 1912 the IML organized a week of meetings across west London in protest at the Liberals' commitment to the Declaration.¹⁶² These had only modest success, so the league's focus shifted from the threat of starvation to the need to arm British merchantmen. The issue had provoked some internal disagreement several months beforehand, so the league was careful to secure unanimity before publishing *Britain's Imminent Danger*.¹⁶³ Characteristically, the IML's analysis made absolute comparisons between Britain and Germany. This not only disregarded the significance of the alliance system, but it demonstrated the league's obliviousness to the fact that Britain had won the naval race.¹⁶⁴ In a desperate effort to demonstrate high-level influence, the IML made much of its meeting in July 1912 with Canada's minister for the marine, J.D. Hazen, part of a delegation then visiting London. The IML's parliamentary standing committee persuaded Hazen to issue a press statement in which he concurred 'with the view that should Canada contribute towards the British navy, that contribution should not be in reduction of what Great Britain should do, but should supplement what she did'.¹⁶⁵ As Hunt informed Hazen, the league was concerned that 'if the Dominions are continually giving Dreadnoughts to the British Government the effect will be that there will be no more Dreadnoughts built'.¹⁶⁶ The episode demonstrated the IML's poor grasp of imperial affairs: Canada had been, and continued to be, the least reliable of the dominions in contributing battleships to the Royal Navy.¹⁶⁷ When this became apparent, at the end of 1912, Wyatt denounced Ottawa as 'opportunist', and warned that all dominions 'must entertain and act upon the idea of mutual self-sacrifice in the common cause, if they are to survive in that mighty competition which has the whole earth for its stage and national victory or national death as the stake'.¹⁶⁸ Horton-Smith was more constructive, writing to Canadian parliamentarians to request that they bring pressure to bear on the British government to enact the 'highest interests of the empire as a whole'.¹⁶⁹

161 *Navy* XVII/6 (June 1912), 154–5; XVII/10 (October 1912), 259–60.

162 IML/4; *The Times*, 18 March 1912, 4; 25 March 1912, 11; IML to press, 25 April 1912, IML/4. Bowles addressed a further IML meeting: *The Times*, 6 May 1912, 11.

163 'Imperial Maritime League: Report of the Proceedings of the Conference re National Food Supply in War . . . from the Shorthand Notes of the London News Agency', IML; *The Times*, 26 June 1912, 7; Wyatt and Horton-Smith to IML executive committee, 14 May 1912, IML/4; 'The Annual Meeting of All the Branch Executives', 28 June 1912, IML/4; *The Times*, Friday, 28 June 1912, 11; Wyatt and Horton-Smith to IML executive committee, 28 June 1912, IML/4.

164 N. Fergusson, 'Public Finance and National Security: The Domestic Origins of the First World War Revisited', *Past & Present* CXLII (1994), 141–68.

165 *The Times*, 25 July 1912, 7.

166 Report, 24 July 1912, IML/4.

167 P.P. O'Brien, 'The Titan Refreshed: Imperial Overstretch and the British Navy before the First World War', *Past & Present* CLXXII (2001), 146–69.

168 Wyatt, 'Naval Strength and Party Warfare', *Outlook*, 11 January 1913, IML/5.

169 Horton-Smith to Canadian senators and MPs, 23 January 1913, IML/5.

On 10 February 1913 the press announced Horton-Smith's resignation as joint secretary on grounds of ill health; he could not 'in future contemplate the possibility of following two professions'.¹⁷⁰ Wyatt resigned soon after, also on grounds of ill health, though at his 'own suggestion the Press were not notified of his decision as he was of the opinion that his resignation following so closely after that of Mr Horton Smith might give rise to misapprehensions which might do harm to the League'.¹⁷¹ Unable to acknowledge the league's vulnerability to a rejuvenated Navy League, Wyatt instead blamed the Unionist Party for allowing the naval scare to dissipate, a result of its being 'bound by the shackles of Parliamentary convention'.¹⁷²

Hunt and the IML's committee struggled to pick up the slack in the months that followed. Wyatt departed from the league altogether; Horton-Smith remained on its committee until the AGM in May.¹⁷³ He helped Hunt to solicit financial support for a paid secretary, and kept up correspondence to the press.¹⁷⁴ These missives soon turned from propaganda to complaints that sections of the press ignored or declined to publish his letters. Ridicule followed, with the *War Office Times* informing readers that it would not respond to Horton-Smith's 'screed' as it 'would be cruel and would be, moreover, giving to it an importance it does not deserve . . . [he] has simply been suffering from a diarrhoea of words'.¹⁷⁵

The appointment on 5 May 1913 of a new general secretary, Captain O.L. Mathias, helped to stall the IML's decline. His chief task was to continue Hunt's denials that the league had become 'moribund'.¹⁷⁶ Mathias inherited the league's latest agitation, on the 'new peril of the air'; his difficulty was that it coincided with, perhaps even emulated, a similar campaign by the Navy League. Each league summoned meetings in London within days of each other, the IML at the Baltic Exchange, the Navy League at the Mansion House. The latter launched the National Aeronautical Defence Association, announced a campaign to raise £1 million for aeroplanes, and published an endorsement by Beresford.¹⁷⁷ The IML's scheme for county aeroplanes and city dirigibles, in contrast,

170 *The Times*, 10 February 1913, 5; *Hampshire Telegraph*, 14 February 1913.

171 O.L. Mathias to Mrs Hendley, 16 June 1913, IML/5.

172 H.F. Wyatt, 'The Navy and the Unionist Party', reprinted from *Outlook*, 10 August 1912, IML/4.

173 AGM agenda, 29 May 1913, IML/5. The committee consisted of W.B. Boyd-Carpenter, L. Cope Cornford, G.W.M. Dale, Arthur Du Cros MP, Col. N.P. Fowell, H.A. Gwynne, Percival A. Hislam, George W. Holtzapffel, Rowland Hunt MP, Lt G.D. MacKinnon, Sir Spencer Maryon-Wilson, T.W. Moore, Lord Muskerry, Robert Weatherburn, and H.W. Wilson.

174 Horton-Smith to Walter Morrison, 18 March 1913, IML/5; Horton-Smith to editor, *War Office Times and Naval Review*, 15 April 1913, IML/5.

175 *War Office Times*, 15 May 1913, IML/5. For mockery of the remaining committee's claims to being 'non-party', see *Daily News and Leader*, 23 September 1913, IML/5.

176 'Imperial Maritime League: Doings January to June 1913', 10 July 1913, IML/5; *War Office Times and Naval Review*, 15 March 1913; Hunt to editor, *Pall Mall Gazette*, 17 March 1913, IML/5; Mathias to the press, 25, 26 June 1913; 20 October 1913, IML/5.

177 *Daily Telegraph*, 30 April 1913, IML/5; *The Times*, 5 May 1913, 8; *Navy XVIII/5* (May 1913), 119–20.

attracted only mockery, from the *Fleet*, for ‘hysteria and violent shouting’, and for a scheme which appeared to be weighed down by local and national fundraising committees.¹⁷⁸ IML publicity made much of its success in persuading the Admiralty to accept, in principle, the gift of an aeroplane, but this was its only noteworthy success in a campaign that soon ran out of steam.¹⁷⁹

In addition to the press, Mathias reassured members that the league would continue.¹⁸⁰ A report issued in July 1913 admitted that ‘difficulties were experienced in carrying on the work of the League’, but it reassured readers of ‘steady progress . . . though in the nature of things this progress was slow’.¹⁸¹ It slowed further when Mathias became embroiled in protracted rows with Horton-Smith about access to the league’s premises, and with the Junior Branch for becoming a ‘league within a league’, which in turn led to a public row with the breakaway ‘Imperial Patriots’.¹⁸² Mathias also disagreed with Hunt about whether to issue an annual review on naval defences, but managed to resolve this amicably with the publication in October of ‘*Guard, Turn Out!*’¹⁸³ This confirmed the league’s abandonment of the aerial campaign in favour of the naval race and the attendant threat of starvation.¹⁸⁴ In November the league wrote public letters to the prime minister and leader of the opposition, but these failed to elicit a response other than further mockery from the *War Office Times*.¹⁸⁵

Chastened by recent criticisms, the IML in December 1913 signalled a departure from the partisanship which had hitherto defined the organization. Two league speakers, John Whitman and Henry Tero, gave addresses that were supportive of the first lord, Winston Churchill.¹⁸⁶ The following month Hunt shared a platform with Navy League speakers which condemned the ‘little navy’ grouping within the Liberals.¹⁸⁷ Admiration for Churchill was also evident in the first issue of the *IML Record*, published in January 1914.¹⁸⁸ This

178 *Fleet*, July 1913, IML/5.

179 Admiralty to Mathias, 7 October 1913, IML/5. The War Office declined the offer: see War Office to Mathias, 1 September 1913, IML/5.

180 ‘What the League Has Done’ [27 May 1913], IML/5.

181 ‘Doings January to June 1913’ [10 July 1913], IML/5.

182 Mathias, notice of meeting, 18 July 1913, IML/5; Mathias to unknown, 31 July 1913, IML/5; Mathias, circular, 24 July 1913, IML/5; *Daily Express*, 27 September 1913; *Evening Standard*, 29 September 1913; *Brixton Free Press*, 4 October 1913; *Clapham Observer*, 4 October 1913; and *Norwood Press*, 4 October 1913, IML/5.

183 Mathias to executive committee, 24, 25 September 1913, IML/5.

184 See ‘Mathias to the press, 16 July 1913’, IML/5; *Manchester Daily Dispatch*, 19 July 1913; *Paddington, Kensington and Bayswater Chronicle*, 2 August 1913; Mathias, circular, 11 September 1913, IML/5; Mathias to press, 9 October 1913, IML/5; Willoughby de Broke and Hunt to press, 20 October 1913, IML/5; *Chiswick Gazette*, 25 October 1913; *Kent and Sussex Courier*, 15 November 1913; ‘Imperial Maritime League: Our Food Supply in Peace and War’, March 1914, IML/6; ‘Imperial Maritime League: Why Britain Must have an Invincible Navy’, 12 March 1914, IML/6.

185 Mathias to Asquith and Andrew Bonar Law, 4 December 1913, IML/5; *War Office Times*, December 1913, IML/5.

186 *Chiswick Times*, 6 December 1913, IML/5; *Scotsman*, 9 December 1913, IML/5.

187 *Navy XIX/2* (February 1914), 38.

188 *IML Record* (January 1914), 5.

change of attitude, however, did little to arrest the league's decline, nor did the appeals to prominent women to host drawing-room meetings, regular advertisements in the *Primrose League Gazette*, and the offer of its speakers to Primrose habitations, working men's clubs, and Unionist agents.¹⁸⁹ Mathias sent increasingly desperate requests for subscriptions to life members and a 'list of people whose names appeared in Who's Who 1913'.¹⁹⁰ A wag at the *Daily News* commented that the 'maritime people . . . explain that they are in a particular need of funds because their League is so successful!'¹⁹¹

On 23 March 1914 the branch organizing secretary, G.W.M. Dale, announced the end of an ambitious plan for county branches.¹⁹² Mathias estimated that total membership, still confined to a dozen branches, stood at 1,460.¹⁹³ In a remarkable outburst, he rebuked members:

If those who are sufficiently interested to pay a subscription, do not take the trouble to read the League's publications, it can hardly be expected that the great mass of the people of the country can be roused to the state of our national defences.¹⁹⁴

The May AGM indicated a determination to stumble on; Willoughby de Broke offered a tirade against democracy, and Hunt ruled out further cooperation with the Navy League.¹⁹⁵ In the week prior to Britain's declaration of war on Germany, the IML announced that it would 'carry out a special campaign in South Devon, with the object of placing before both residents and visitors the true facts of the present naval situation'.¹⁹⁶

The IML greeted the outbreak of hostilities with propaganda vindicating its years of agitation. The war provided a useful cover to cancel all meetings and reach an agreement with the Navy League 'that both organisations should join forces and pursue united activity in promoting recruiting in response to Lord Kitchener's appeal'.¹⁹⁷ Mathias joined the staff of the Railway Transport Department and was replaced by Dale.¹⁹⁸ Wyatt did not return to the league; he lectured for Naval Intelligence during the war and stood unsuccessfully at the 1918 general election for the National Party. Horton-Smith did return to the league, enthusiastically steering its 'Villages and Rural Districts Enlightenment and Recruiting Campaign', and producing a stream of wartime tracts and letters to the press.

189 Mathias to various, October 1913, IML/5.

190 Mathias to 'list of people . . . appeared in Who's Who 1913', 15 September 1913, IML/5; Mathias to life members, 30 March 1914, IML/6. See also Mathias to 'donors', 22 April 1914, IML/6; Mathias to 'all donors except on 1914 lists', 13 July 1914, IML/6.

191 *Daily News and Leader*, 23 September 1913, IML/5.

192 Dale to members of Surrey Branch, 23 March 1914, IML/6.

193 Mathias, note, 16 July 1914, IML/6.

194 *IML Record* (April 1914), 1.

195 *IML Record* (July 1914), 2–7.

196 *Evening Standard*, 25 July 1914; *Referee*, 26 July 1914; *Western Daily Press*, 30 July 1914, IML/6.

197 'The Imperial Maritime League and the War', August 1914, IML/6; *Westminster Gazette*, 3 September 1914, IML/6.

198 *Supplement to the London Gazette*, 12 December 1919, 15554.

There was no further mention of cooperation with the Navy League. Fundraising became more challenging, and even Willoughby de Broke took to handwriting personal letters to lists of donors.¹⁹⁹ Few militaristic leagues survived the Great War. Esher's Society of Islanders effectively ceased at the end of 1913.²⁰⁰ The National Service League 'ground to a complete halt' after January 1917.²⁰¹ The Navy League managed to survive, but post-war efforts at naval disarmament led to discord among senior members, and a considerable diminution of its influence and profile.²⁰² In 1920 Horton-Smith attempted one last IML campaign, again opposing the Declaration, before abandoning agitation altogether.²⁰³ On 2 April 1921 the league's committee, chaired by Dr Sidney Williamson, announced its decision to close 'owing to a lack of public interest'.²⁰⁴

VIII

Judged solely in terms of exerting a direct influence on government policy and naval strategy, the IML's agitation is easily dismissed as irrelevant. Defined as extremist, its effects on the Navy League are overlooked, and the older organization is implicitly absolved of encouraging readiness for war with Germany. The IML's significance was lost on its own membership, which either shared Horton-Smith's delusions of grandeur or simply abandoned the organization unconvinced of its own propaganda and purpose. Its claims to have brought about increases to the Channel Fleet, the naval inquiry, and a new war staff simply coincided with decisions taken at the highest levels of the government and Admiralty. But it did exert an indirect influence on the Navy League. The initial schism, and the IML's anti-Declaration agitation in 1911, provoked the older organization to reform its structures, give greater influence in its councils to parliamentarians, and launch a reasonably successful recruitment campaign to attract working- and lower-middle-class members. The Navy League's propaganda also changed: it was more willing to criticize individual government ministers, albeit employing judicious assessments that distinguished it from the generalizing hysteria of the IML, and it more readily employed some of the IML's approaches to fundraising and propagandizing.

The IML's ideas were often muddled, unrealistic, and ignorant. It could not decide whether Fisher influenced the Liberals or vice versa. It was blind to divisions within the Liberal Party until late 1913. Its call for more dreadnoughts overlooked its initial hostility to the class. Its belief in a naval staff of experts, to be placed above party strife, both contradicted its disdain for Fisher's Admiralty and repudiated its own employment of political tactics to influence naval policy. The league's constant references to the empire, even in its own name, belied a far narrower concern for England. After the outbreak of war, it

199 See IML/7; Imperial Maritime League: Pamphlets: 1911–16, 1915–16, and 1915–17, IML.

200 Humphries, 'Perfectly Secret', 1174.

201 Hendley, *Organized Patriotism*, 64.

202 D. Redford, 'Collective Security and Internal Dissent: The Navy League's Attempts to Develop a New Policy towards British Naval Power between 1919 and the 1922 Washington Naval Treaty', *History* XCVI/321 (2011), 48–67.

203 Horton-Smith, *Perils: The Fiery Fray: The Testing of the Past and a Warning of the Future* (London, 1920).

204 *The Times*, 4 April 1921, 7.

disavowed in practice its early campaigns, and implicitly acknowledged that Britain had won the naval race, by focusing exclusively on army recruitment. What others perceived as confusion and oversimplicity, the IML recognized as the purposive and interlinked roles of the state, nation, and race, expressed through prognoses of imminent catastrophe that required urgent action. This radical right outlook fuelled its founders' decision to depart the Navy League and establish a new league committed to partisanship, in spite of the coolness or hostility of most Unionist MPs. Unable to tackle or fully understand the persistent indifference of the British public, and incapable of rivalling the social attractions of the Navy League, the IML remained a relatively small league which ultimately turned in on itself. It nevertheless made a mark on public life that exceeded its size. In common with the legion of leagues which emerged in the 1890s, the IML reflected anxiety about the democracy of which it was an intrinsic part. Like the Navy League and National Service League, the IML arose out of, and contributed to, press scares about Britain's preparedness for war between the great powers, and probably helped to increase awareness of this among the public.²⁰⁵ Modern communications enabled the IML to project its message to a national audience, even if it also deluded its propagandists into overestimating their importance and ambitions. As 'online' political activists have recently discovered, greater democratic participation in communications does not necessarily dislodge established political parties in favour of new groups and coalitions.²⁰⁶

Acknowledgements

An early version of this article was presented as a paper to the British Maritime History Seminar, Institute of Historical Research, University of London, 8 October 2013. The author would like to acknowledge the help and advice of Robert Blyth, Michael Humphries, Lizelle de Jager, Andrew Lambert, Marc Mulholland, Alan O'Day, Nigel Rigby, Martin Salmon, John Stewart, and the two anonymous referees.

Funding

This research was supported by a Caird Research Fellowship, National Maritime Museum, and the Anderson Fund, Society for Nautical Research.

205 J.D. Startt, *Journalist for Empire: The Imperial Debate in the Edwardian Stately Press, 1903–1913* (New York, 1991), 175–9.

206 M. Margolis, 'E-Government and Democracy', in R.J. Dalton and H.-D. Klingemann, eds, *The Oxford Handbook of Political Behaviour* (Oxford, 2007), 765–82.