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SPEECH

BY

MR. H. B. HIGGINS, M.P.,

ON THE

SOUTH AFRICAN WAR.

[From the "Parliamentary Debates," 14th January, 1902.]

Mr. HIGGINS (Northern Melbourne).—When I was before the electors of Northern Melbourne during last February and March, I was asked a question deliberately as to whether if another contingent were proposed to be sent to South Africa, I would support the suggestion, and I said emphatically "No." In the result, I was returned by a majority over the second candidate larger than was secured by any other Victorian representative in this House.

Mr. JOSEPH COOK.—Not because of that.

Mr. A. McLEAN.—Other representatives were returned unanimously.

Mr. HIGGINS.—At all events, it so happened that this was the only matter in which the platforms of my rivals differed from mine. I do not pretend to say that I did not secure votes from men who differed from me in their views upon the war, or from those who did not agree with me to the full extent, but I think it is plain that the people of the Commonwealth are coming to the conclusion that there is no ground for the reckless accusations of disloyalty, or unpatriotic sentiment, made against those who oppose this war.

Mr. FISHER.—Hear, hear. — Common sense.

Mr. McCOLL.—Very much ground, I think.

Mr. HIGGINS.—Although the honorable member for Echuca may be of that

opinion, he will admit that I am entitled to mine. It is also plain that I am now perfectly free to follow my own strong personal feelings in this matter; and I intend to do so. I intend to do so, now that there is a proposal for a contingent, not for the purpose of giving Uitlanders their rights—not for the purpose of driving back Boers who have invaded Natal—but for the purpose of absolutely and unconditionally subjugating the two Boer republics.

Mr. ISAACS.—Are there any Boer republics? Are they not British colonies?

Mr. HIGGINS.—I am not in the Law Courts, and I shall not discuss mere words. The Boers must either submit or be killed; that is the position which has been placed before those people.

An HONORABLE MEMBER.—That is what any war means.

Mr. HIGGINS.—No conditions whatever are offered. I oppose the sending of contingents to this war, not on the mere ground of expediency, having regard to the ideal and interests and future policy of Australia, but on the simple, old-fashioned ground of justice. I know that a number of honorable members will at least give me a fair hearing—that if they think me wrong they will bear with me knowing that I am speaking my honest convictions. Honorable members who were in the Victorian

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Parliament will recollect that I opposed the sending of a contingent, on the distinct ground that the war was unnecessary and unjust.

Mr. SALMON.—And that a contingent had not been asked for.

Mr. HIGGINS.—And that a contingent had not been asked for at that time.

Mr. SALMON.—But the honorable member said that if a contingent were asked for it would receive his support.

Mr. HIGGINS.—No. I opposed the sending of a contingent, pointing out all the grounds on which it appeared to be inexpedient, and I said then, as I have said always, that if England were in extreme need—if her existence were in danger and it were a matter of life and death—we should spend every man and every shilling in defending the Empire.

Mr. WILKS.—It might be too late then.

Mr. HIGGINS.—Now, after the disclosures which have been made since the beginning of the war, and after the developments that have taken place in the course of the war, I am not likely to have changed my opinion in the slightest degree. But I do not intend to attempt to try to convert any honorable member to my view. I know it would be fruitless to try to do so in the present state of public feeling, and in the present state of information supplied to the public. Such an attempt would be fruitless, in view of the fact that there are so many who unfortunately take up what appears to me the most immoral position of saying that even if the Boers were right in their original stand, Great Britain cannot do anything now but press the war to its ultimate conclusion. That, Mr. Speaker, appears to me to be about as immoral a position as ever a nation conceived. It means that if it were proved up to the hilt that the Boers are heroes, fighting for their hearths and homes against oppressors and tyrants, still, Great Britain, because she has once entered on the war, must fight it through—she must kill every Boer who does not choose to submit to her tyranny. That, of course, is to me a position which is inconceivable when once it is properly faced.

Mr. BARTON.—It is not the case.

Mr. HIGGINS.—I have not said that it is the case; I am using such a position as an argument. I admit that the decision as to who is right and to who is wrong must be left to time—must be left to the day

of reflection, to investigation and the sifting of evidence. It must be wrought out in the cooling chamber of history. I feel that it would be utterly impossible and absurd for a man to try to convert another on this question one way or the other. The position was the same in regard to the war against the colonies which afterwards became the United States of America. It was the same way with the opium war against China, and with the Crimean war. I may refer to the *History of Our Own Times*, by Justin McCarthy, in regard to the opium traffic.

Mr. A. McLEAN.—One factor is that the British were not prepared for war, and the Boers were.

Mr. HIGGINS.—The honorable member for Gippsland has already sufficiently advertised his views to his constituents and the outside world. With regard to the opium war, we read in the *History of Our Own Times*—

It may be safely asserted that if the same events were to occur in our day, it would be hardly possible to find a Ministry to originate a war, for which at the same time it must be owned that the vast majority of the people of all politics and classes were only too ready then to find excuse and even justification.

I may say that I am anxious at the earliest possible stage, for my own self respect, to disclaim any responsibility in regard to this motion, and in regard to this war. What has been done? The Prime Minister has submitted a certain motion. But it is not enough to make a rhetorical address about our attachment to the old country; because, I take it, we are all attached to the old country. It is not enough to show what has been done at other people's expense, out of the taxpayers' money, for the purpose of demonstrating how loyal the Ministry is. What we have to deal with is the specific motion before us. The Prime Minister has not disclosed to the House any grounds upon which the soldiers of Australia ought to be sent to kill the Boer farmers; and it must be admitted that the proposal is a very extreme step when one comes to think of it.

Mr. BARTON.—The honorable member is making a very extreme statement.

Mr. HIGGINS.—It is a very extreme step, when one thinks of it, that the Prime Minister should invite men, who are Australians, to try to kill men with whom they have no personal quarrel, with whom they have had no relations, direct

or indirect. The only ground on which the Prime Minister has urged the sending of a contingent is that Great Britain is at war, and that, therefore, we should help her. If that is to be sufficient ground, we should like to know it; but let us see how far it will lead us. I apprehend that the Prime Minister is making a very difficult position for himself and his successors in connexion with future wars—that he is making a very difficult position for Australia. Are we, without going into the causes of the wars of Great Britain, to adopt the principle that we should actively side with Great Britain, no matter what is done? The adoption of such a course will commit Australia to the principle that she must aid the Imperial Government in all wars with her young lives—and there are few young lives to spare in Australia—although she has no voice in the negotiations which precede war, and is not to be consulted in regard to its expediency or necessity. I repeat that the Prime Minister has put himself and others in a most difficult position. In other countries enjoying constitutional government it is customary for the Ministry to ask Parliament for a war vote, and to explain, in supporting that vote, how it is that the country has been drawn into war. That course, however, has not been followed here.

Mr. WILKS.—That is so when they are directing a permanent force, but here the men are volunteers.

Mr. HIGGINS.—It is quite true that they are volunteers, at 5s. per day, and the position is that they are going to fight a number of men who get nothing, who have no distinctions to which to look forward, no prospect of notices in despatches or even of notices in newspapers, no Victoria Crosses, no Distinguished Service Orders, no epaulettes, and no promotions—in short, who have nothing to hope for save the approval of their own consciences. May I also say—and I hope I shall be clearly understood—that I take up the position that the Empire is in no danger, and has been in no danger. If the Empire had been in danger the position would have been a very different one from what it is to-day. It is absolutely absurd to suppose that an Empire numbering 250,000,000 or 300,000,000 people is in danger when it is engaged in a war against only 250,000 or 300,000 Boers, and when the wealthiest country in the world is fighting

against these few farmers of the veldt. I do not wish to be misunderstood. I am one who regard it as clear that no empire in the history of the world has done so much for civilization and for liberty as has the British Empire. I may also add, if honorable members will allow me to do so, that personally I belong to a stock which is the most loyal and the most attached to England of all stocks within the wide ring of the world. Honorable members will understand my meaning when I say that no one who has not been in Ireland can realize the peculiar attachment which Protestant Irishmen have for England. They are more English than are the English themselves. They look to England for their principles, for their ideals, and for their religion; they lean upon England, and England leans upon them. There is no doubt that they are a minority planted amongst a population which is supposed to be disaffected. They regard themselves as having in their trust the maintenance of the British flag. Under these circumstances, when I was a boy I regarded with great delight the accounts which I read of the meetings which were held in England when Kossuth went through that country with triumphant demonstrations, and when the English audiences so heartily applauded him. I was delighted to find how English newspapers encouraged Garibaldi, how English statesmen upheld the independence of little Belgium, how England favoured Poland against the autocratic and imperious power of Russia. I was proud to know that England was the friend of the oppressed, and the foe of the oppressor. To me, therefore, it is a matter of the deepest pain to find that the country to which my father and forefathers were always attached has entered into a war with a nation far beneath its size, and without any sufficient justification. Mr. Gladstone, I think, died at the end of 1898, and ere another year had passed Lord Salisbury and his Ministry were at war with the Boers in South Africa. I do regret that at the present time there is not one person in England who can touch the conscience of the English people as the late Mr. Gladstone could touch it. John Bright, who opposed the Crimean war, has passed away; and he was right; Sir James Graham, who opposed the opium war, has passed away; and he was right; Fox and Burke have passed away;

the great Earl of Chatham, who opposed the war against the colonies of America, has passed away; and all of these were right. We have not now in England a Gladstone, who opposed the war with Russia, and who was successful in the elections of 1880; and who was right. We have not to-day anything like the condition of affairs which existed even in 1880. What happened in 1880? At that time the hysterical shrieks of the London press and the ribald yells of the music halls were all in favour of the war with Russia. The gabble of the clubs was in the same direction. But all these noises were silenced by the great voice of England speaking through all its provinces. Unfortunately we have not in England to-day men like those who opposed such iniquities—men of light and learning—though I am glad to know that some of the very best minds there have declared themselves unmistakably against this war. In this respect I am proud to be a follower of such men as John Morley, Herbert Spencer, Frederick Harrison, Sir Edward Clarke, Leonard Courtney, and John Burns; of men in the ecclesiastical world like Dr. Clifford, the Bishop of Hereford, the Bishop of Stepney, and the Bishop of Durham. Where they lead, surely it is not disloyal of me to follow. The announcement which has been made by the Prime Minister is that the Government has acceded to the request of Mr. Chamberlain to send 1,000 men upon such terms that Australia will not be called upon to bear the expenditure of one penny, but that even the equipment of the troops is to be paid for by the English taxpayers. I feel that there are really very few who are strongly in favour of the course which has been proposed. The position is a very curious one. I have been the recipient of confidences such as probably have been reposed in few other honorable members, because, as I was known to be an opponent of the war, a large number of people have privately confessed to me that they did not believe in it at all. But the truth is that it is a very unpleasant thing to oppose it. A number of men think it ungracious to appear to oppose any movement to help the mother country. There is a very laudable anxiety to find justice on the British side, and to show Great Britain that we are still her sons, and are still willing to help her. At all events, it is true

that there is no active opposition here to the war which is now in progress. At the same time, what is proposed? We are not to risk our own lives, or to sacrifice our own pockets. There is a damnable meanness about the whole thing. We talk about sacrifice. What do we sacrifice? We offer to sacrifice the lives of promising young fellows who want adventure—an action of a kind which brings us the praise of sacrifice, without the feeling that we have sacrificed anything. There is no doubt that this proposal would not have been made but for an article which appeared in a German newspaper. All this excitement and all this high feeling is worked up because of an article in a German newspaper.

Mr. BARTON.—I never said a word of that sort.

Mr. HIGGINS.—Well, I must have inferred it. If the Prime Minister says that he did not say a word of that sort, I misunderstood him, and withdraw the statement at once. At all events I do not think, having regard to what has been said, that this request would have been made by Mr. Chamberlain but for a certain few words in a German newspaper, the *Vossische Zeitung*. If one looks at the dates, it is perfectly clear that Mr. Chamberlain felt that he must have a trump to over-trump that article. As soon as ever he saw his way to it, he no doubt said—"Let us see what the colonies have to say. America, Europe, and the whole civilized world are against us; we must have a trump card, and we will send word to Mr. Barton." We know that certain communications have passed which the Prime Minister has said were sent in confidence, and are withheld from the House.

Mr. BARTON.—I have given the House every syllable I was in a position to give, except the minor details.

Mr. HIGGINS.—We know that there was a confidential communication from Mr. Chamberlain; but the Prime Minister is quite right in withholding it.

Mr. BARTON.—I told the honorable and learned member and the House that that communication does not alter the situation one iota.

Mr. HIGGINS.—That is a matter for the House to judge.

Mr. BARTON.—It cannot be a matter for honorable members to judge if it is a confidential communication.

Mr. HIGGINS.—I do not wish to be understood as condemning the conduct of the Prime Minister in withholding a communication which is confidential. But there is one thing which we know, and which the German newspapers will know. Everybody in the world will know that there has been something else which has not been disclosed. In what a ridiculous position we are being put! The German people are not fools, and when they learn that these resolutions have been passed by the House the first question they will ask is—"What were the circumstances?" If *Hansard* ever finds its way into Germany, and no doubt it will, they will find that the Prime Minister has had communications with Mr. Chamberlain, and that there has been a communication which has been withheld. They will also point out that Australia is not going to spend a penny, that the whole thing is to be done by the Imperial taxpayer, and that they will have to pay the Australian four times as much as Tommy Atkins in order to get him to work.

An HONORABLE MEMBER.—Five times as much.

Sir MALCOLM MCEACHARN.—The honorable and learned member is putting the words into the Germans' mouths.

Mr. HIGGINS.—My honorable friend, the member for Melbourne, must know that the Germans are as intelligent as we are at the very least.

Mr. BARTON.—They will take the tip.

Mr. HIGGINS. — They will know thoroughly well, or will find out the position of things. I say this is a position we would never have had to face but for a rash statement made by the Prime Minister—a statement made in the papers, if the right honorable gentleman is reported correctly—that if England asked for it, he would send a contingent. Of course the very next thing was to force his hand. Mr. Chamberlain did ask for it, and forthwith a contingent is sent. I admit it is a safer course for a man who wants to be a politician to keep silent in such matters—

Mr. O'MALLEY.—And go with the crowd.

Mr. HIGGINS. — Go, not with the crowd, but with the newspapers, which is a different thing. But it has come to this in these States, that if two or three newspapers in any State happen to agree upon a policy every one who opposes that policy is either a fool or a knave or both, and,

perhaps, also a traitor. I say that one of the most serious aspects of the situation to Australia is that there is really no criticism of any step of public policy, unless there is a newspaper to take it up; and if the two or three newspapers agree, where are we? I think that in many respects the Australian press is as good a press as there is in any part of the world. Their output is excellent in the leading matter and in news, and they are most enterprising. I am not saying this for the purpose of mitigating their wrath. I know that I shall be attacked, kicked about, and mauled; and I do not care. At the same time, I shall do them that justice to say that they are good papers. But there is a danger to this Commonwealth, a danger from the fact that if a man happens to be against all the city papers, he is helpless. The result is that we find that where men feel very strongly privately with regard to a particular proposal, as politicians they feel that it is better to follow the newspapers, and to appear to influence public opinion, rather than as statesmen to influence public opinion and appear to follow it. The Prime Minister referred to a statement that in a Dutch paper there was an admission that it had received money; but if the right honorable gentleman had looked into the matter more closely, he would have found that it was the *Daily Express* of London that said it had been admitted by somebody. What is the *Daily Express*? The *Daily Express* was, a year and a half ago, the author of that vile lie with regard to the massacre in China. I happened to have staying with me at the time the mother of a man who was supposed to have been massacred; and I know the agony which that lie of the *Daily Express* produced in her mind with regard to her son. I say that the whole of the origin of this statement upon which the Prime Minister relies for his motion—

Mr. BARTON.—I never relied upon that for my motion; that is an entire misstatement. There ought to be some such thing as fairness in a debate of this kind.

Mr. HIGGINS.—I do not think I have been at all unfair. I am saying that the Prime Minister referred to a statement that some Dutch editor admitted that he had received money from Dr. Leyds for the purpose of making certain statements. It all comes back to the same thing; there is no chain stronger than its weakest link,

and I take it that the *Daily Express* is one of the weakest links one could get hold of amongst the journals of the world. If there is anything which would impel me to express my sentiments upon this occasion, it is the attempt made within the last few days, by certain journals, to terrorise members from expressing their opinions. It is one of the most valuable inheritances we have from Great Britain. We intend to keep it and preserve it for our children; and when they challenge us to come out and express our real sentiments, I say, we will.

It was our ancient privilege, my lords,
To fling our thoughts, not fearing, into words.
Honorable members may be quite sure that we shall make use of this privilege. It will be a sad day, and I hope it will never come, when, in order to be considered loyal to the King of England, we must forswear our loyalty to our ideals of truth and justice.

Mr. REID.—Who wishes any one to do anything of the sort?

Mr. HIGGINS.—Apart altogether from the question of justice or injustice to the Empire, I think the honorable member for Bland was right in saying that we want our men. Australia, for some reason, is not having its normal increase of population within its own bounds; and there is no doubt whatever that these fine young fellows who go out, as they think, to serve the Empire—and, as I think, to injure the Empire—are wanted in Australia. We want men to develop Australia; we do not want men to desolate South Africa. We want men who will build homes in Australia, not men who will burn homes in South Africa. Nothing in the world galled me more than to see in a French illustrated paper, published in November last, a picture taken from a photograph, of a number of Australians—fellows with broad hats and feathers—burning Boer houses.

Mr. FOWLER.—How many Australians have been shot from those houses? That is war, and we are talking about war.

Mr. HIGGINS.—The honorable member is hardly aware of the fact that at the Hague convention, which preceded this war by a few months, the principle was re-affirmed that no private property should be attacked or destroyed in war. I do not join in the chorus of cries against our gallant army; I consider that injustice has been done to our forces, both British and Colonial. They are as kind hearted as any men could be.

We have no kinder hearted men in the world than British soldiers and Australian troops. Injustice has even been done to the tactics of British soldiers in this war; but I am not dealing with that matter now. I am simply considering the question whether the war was justified or not. Honorable members will bear me out that in addition to the havoc which has been played with our Australian young men by death upon the battle field, and still more by disease in the camp, there has been a general unsettling of some fine healthy young men who have tasted the adventures of South Africa, and who have since forsworn all interest in peaceful civil pursuits. I ask those who have had some experience to bear me out that there are many promising men who owe their ruin to—and who have brought most extreme grief to their parents—by the unsettling of mind which this war has produced in them. The interference in this war which has already taken place on the part of Australia has distinctly tended to prolong it. There were moments when Britain had very clearly the upper hand in the war—moments, which will recur to the minds of honorable members—when Pretoria was taken, when Cronje was taken, when Ladysmith was relieved, and other critical moments when England could have made peace with honour and dignity. But these opportunities were lost. And why? Simply because they raised the cry in England—“What will the colonies say unless we press to the extreme end of our rights?” This interference in the war on the part of the colonies will be an excuse to any great power, if at war with England, to strike England through Australia. Up to this time we were a peaceful people minding our own affairs, and there would have been a howl throughout the civilized world if a great power, fighting England, had hit her through her colonies. Now we have given them an excuse to some extent to attack us. The new departure is spoken of as having for its motive the cementing of the Empire. I do not believe a word of it. I wish it had. I fear the re-action, as soon as the men of Australia find that they have been grossly deceived in the cablegrams about the war. I do not think that this Empire—the greatest Empire the world has ever seen in certain respects—can ever be cemented by injustice. What blood flowed in the war with Denmark? Austrians and Prussians joined in the war against and

robbery of Denmark in 1864. Their blood flowed together, but in two years the Austrians and Prussians were at loggerheads with themselves, and fighting tooth and nail. There is nothing in it.

Mr. KINGSTON.—Is there no greater tie between the mother country and the Commonwealth than there was between Austria and Prussia?

Mr. HIGGINS.—In Austria there were a great many Germans, and they felt more attached to Germans than to the Hungarians and Slavs on the other side. The mere joint spilling of blood in a cause which is not just has not, and can never be the means of cementing an Empire like this. So far as I am concerned, I think that a flagrant error has been committed by the different States, and is now being committed by the Commonwealth. I had hoped better things of Australia as a whole. It would have been very hard for any particular State to hold out when all the other States were sending troops. There was a kind of rivalry between the States as to which should be first to despatch troops to South Africa, but I should have thought that an Australian Parliament, speaking for Australia as a whole, would have acted upon broader grounds and in a better spirit. I think that it has been a flagrant error in regard to Great Britain, and that it is a pity that the very first military step taken by this new Commonwealth should be in aiding this war—a war which to my great regret has reduced the moral prestige of the Empire more than anything else which has occurred for centuries. I do not say it has reduced the military prestige of the Empire. I think that has been overstated; but it has reduced the moral prestige of the Empire which has always been supposed to be the friend of all—and especially the friend of the small nation—the Empire that abolished the slave trade, and which has been generous in so many respects under greater leaders than it has now. Look at the shabbiness of it all. I think that here the only people who sacrifice or risk anything are the poor men who go to the war, and their families. Who are principally egging on this war? The greatest barracks for it are the wealthier classes. They ask for the war, and give nothing. There is not one penny more taxation to come from their pockets for it; but the young fellows who go to the front and risk their lives do something.

Mr. WINTER COOKE.—The wealthy classes have given a good many lives to it.

Mr. HIGGINS.—Yes; the honorable member is right. There are some who have sons or brothers in it, and there are some in this House. I recognise that very clearly, and I should be the last to cause a single pang to any one who has had a relation in this war, and has suffered from it. At the same time, I consider that the man who is a commissioned officer has hopes of distinction and other prospects, which the man in the ranks has not. There is no doubt whatever that the majority of the men who are egging on this war will not sacrifice one penny, and still they are loudest in the cry of patriotism. What is patriotism? Is it not the willingness to sacrifice one's self for one's country? Where is the sacrifice on the part of those who send others to the war, who put others in the front and stay behind, and who say they will not pay one penny towards the sending of a contingent? If we are going to do a good thing for the mother country we should do it handsomely. We should put our hands into our own pockets and help her. I should be the first to vote for any taxation or device which would preserve this great Empire from destruction if there were any danger threatening it. In spite of misrepresentation, truth is gradually coming through the chinks of the great wall which it has been sought to erect around this war, and there are many people who are beginning to doubt the justice as well as the wisdom of it. Can we not be candid with ourselves and answer candidly in our own minds? If Lord Salisbury, Sir Michael Hicks-Beach, or Mr. Balfour had known what this war would cost England in men, in money, and otherwise, would they have pressed Kruger into a corner to try and force upon him reforms in the Boer franchise? What a ridiculous position it appears to be! What? Spend £250,000,000—spend £1,250,000 a week—spend 25,000 valuable lives, and earn the contempt and hatred of the civilized world for the sake of compelling Kruger to give a different franchise to the Uitlanders? Would they have driven Kruger to bay, as they did, if they had known that other powers would be enriching themselves in the meantime in Asia, where Great Britain has far larger interests than in South Africa? Do we not know what has been going on in the Persian Gulf, in China, and indeed, al

round the world? The great rivals of England have been laughing in their sleeves, and have been making hay while the sun has shone.

Mr. BARTON.—Is that a reason why the embers of this war should not be extinguished?

Mr. HIGGINS.—While the lion has had its tail in the trap in South Africa, the eagle and the bear have been gorging themselves in the East; and the interests of England lie more in Asia than in the bleak and desolate ground of South Africa. It is the enemies of England who have had most cause to rejoice in the war; and they have rejoiced in it. It is because I love England with an hereditary affection, and from training, that I have opposed this war; and in a few years it will be seen who has been the true patriot, who has been anxious to preserve the Empire, and to prevent her from leaving the path of progress which she has hitherto followed. It will before long be discovered that the war has been forced on by traitors to England, who, for purposes of mere greed have, with their money, and by shrewd devices, got control of the greatest Imperial machinery the world has ever seen, and have worked it for all it is worth, without regard to the consequences.

Mr. SALMON.—The war is being prolonged by traitors.

Mr. HIGGINS.—Yes, by those traitors who will not offer the Boers fair terms.

Mr. JOSEPH COOK.—What does the honorable and learned member call fair terms?

Mr. HIGGINS.—The first excuse for the war was that a wider franchise was wanted. That was what was asked for by a Tory Government, which has always been against any extension of the franchise. As soon as they found out that the Boers were more prepared than they expected—because England had been pouring in troops before the war began, to the number of 70,000 or 80,000—

Mr. THOMSON.—That is not so.

Mr. HIGGINS.—The honorable member's information evidently comes from incorrect sources.

Mr. THOMSON.—From sources available to all of us.

Mr. HIGGINS.—The leader of the Opposition made a great point of the statement that Kruger declared war. But did Kruger declare war? The great evil of the whole matter is that too many people have not taken the trouble to go to the original

records, and have depended upon the statements of the newspapers. All I claim for myself is that I have taken more trouble than a good many others have taken to go to the original official documents, and to read the statements of both sides. On page 825 of volume 64 of the Parliamentary papers presented to the House of Commons during the year 1899—and the volume is in the library for any one to see—there is a copy of a letter sent by Mr. Reitz, the State Secretary, to Sir Alfred Milner, dated 10th October, 1899, just before the war began. In this letter, after a good deal of discussion, the final proposal was made—

1. That all points of mutual difference shall be regulated by the friendly course of arbitration, or by whatever amicable way may be agreed upon by this Government with Her Majesty's Government.

2. That the troops on the borders of this Republic shall be instantly withdrawn.

It is not stated in the papers, but it is perfectly clear, that during the negotiations, and when Mr. Chamberlain had announced to the Boer Republic that he would formulate his own proposals, troops were pouring in from India and from England, and occupying offensive strategic positions round about the Boer Republics. The third proposal in the letter is—

3. That all re-inforcements of troops which have arrived in South Africa since the 1st June, 1899, shall be removed from South Africa within a reasonable time to be agreed upon with this Government, and with a mutual assurance and guarantee on the part of this Government that no attack upon or hostilities against any portion of the possessions of the British Government shall be made by the Republic during further negotiations within a period of time to be subsequently agreed upon between the Governments, and this Government will, on compliance therewith, be prepared to withdraw the armed burghers of this Republic from the borders.

4. That Her Majesty's troops which are now on the high seas shall not be landed in any port of South Africa.

Therefore it is perfectly clear that up to the last the Boers were willing to have arbitration in such a way as might be agreed upon. All they insisted upon was that they could not carry on negotiations while England was planting more and more troops upon their borders. When it is said that Kruger took the initiative by declaring war, my answer is that war was virtually declared by Mr. Chamberlain when he said that he would formulate his own proposals. Every writer upon this subject who has any fairness has admitted that it is not just to

accuse Kruger of having declared war. It was simply a strategic move on his part—and it is not for me to say whether it was right or wrong—to prevent the English from making further preparations for war. As soon as it was found that the Boers were more prepared than was at first supposed, and that the war was not to be merely a parade to Pretoria, beginning with the waving of the “red, white, and blue” and ending with champagne, there was great disgust, and the cry was raised that there was an arrangement to drive the British into the sea. When the Prime Minister was speaking, I asked him for any tittle of evidence in support of that statement. He said that it was common knowledge. It is common newspaper statement, but I deny that it is common knowledge; and I challenge him to find any proof of a conspiracy to drive the British into the sea. From 1884, when the last convention was signed, until 1895, when the Jameson raid was made, there is no evidence of any attempt on the part of the Boers to make preparations for war.

Mr. JOSEPH COOK.—Their preparations for war must have cost millions of pounds.

Mr. REID.—And they were continued for years.

Mr. HIGGINS.—There were preparations, and I think that the Boers had reasonable suspicions, after the Jameson raid, but until 1895 no preparations for war were made. After 1895 there were extreme preparations for war. With an ignorant nation like the Boers, it is little wonder that they became suspicious. I do not suppose that honorable members will impugn the testimony of Dr. Jameson, who was the author of the raid, as to the state of these preparations. What did he write in the *Diamond Fields Advertiser*, of 23rd June, 1899, in justifying his raid? Referring to the end of 1895, he says—

You must remember that at that time the Transvaal was not the armed Transvaal of to-day. Apart from the rifles in the hands of the individual burghers, the whole armoury of the Transvaal was contained in the so-called Pretoria fort, guarded by, I think, three States Artillerymen, and its sole protection a broken-down corrugated iron fence. Only a few days before our crossing the border, Judge Koetze, travelling north with Mr. Newton, told the latter that, seeing and recognising the serious discontent on the Rand, he was then on his way to warn Mr. Kruger that, in his opinion, any night 150 Randites armed with sticks could march across to Pretoria, seize that fort, and have the Transvaal in their possession.

I put it expressly, so that honorable members may see how far I go, that there can be found no evidence from 1884 to 1895 of any preparation for war on the part of the Boers; and it is but natural, having regard to what was done by British subjects with British officers amongst them, that the Boers became suspicious, and they were made still more suspicious by the fiasco—I do not wish to use a stronger word—of the House of Commons inquiry of 1897, when certain letters were not produced. Right through—before the war, and since the war—Kruger and his Ministers have been for arbitration. It is utterly false, so far as I can find out, that they desired to have war. First of all the idea was that there should be arbitration by foreign powers. Britain objected, and said—“No, we shall not have foreigners interfering; we are suzerain.” “Well,” said Kruger, “if you will not have foreigners let us confine it to ourselves.” Britain would not have it.

Mr. L. E. GROOM.—Did not Kruger ask the British to give up their suzerainty?

Mr. HIGGINS.—No; the honorable and learned member will find here that Kruger was willing to the very end to allow the question of suzerainty to be in abeyance. I ask the honorable and learned member to read the state papers which were published by order of the House of Commons. The offer of mediation has always been open, and I am sorry to say it has not been accepted. The honorable member for Gippsland has spoken in attack on Mr. Gladstone. With all his faults, there is not a man of us who could hold the candle to Mr. Gladstone for moral force, for purpose, for unselfish obedience to what he thought to be right. There was nothing grander than the way in which England submitted to the *Alabama* award and quietly paid it, and there was nothing grander also—and history will show it—than Mr. Gladstone's abandoning the war against the Boers as soon as he found that the facts had been misstated to him. He had been told that the Boers wished to be incorporated with England. He found that Sir Theophilus Shepstone was wrong in the matter, and magnanimously, and to the honour and glory of England, he said—“No, I find that I have been mistaken; I find that my agents have not told me exactly what was right; I find that you do not wish to be

incorporated; I give back your independence." When we come to look with a larger focus, and with a more generous eye, when history comes to deal with it, we shall find that Mr. Gladstone's action was the wisest one; but unfortunately it has been spoiled by miserable successors. Ever since the disaster at Majuba Hill, and ever since the engagements out of which the English army unfortunately did not come with glory, the military heads of England have had an edge against the Boers, and they never will be content until they have the Boers down and licked. The military forces of England have been at the back of all this.

Mr. ISAACS.—That is severe on the military forces of England.

Mr. HIGGINS.—I have no objection to being severe on the military authorities of England. They were animated by the spirit of revenge, and any one who knows what goes on in military circles will agree with me that the military heads of England have never forgiven the Boers for the defeats at Majuba Hill and elsewhere. I have known them to say, "We shall have them down yet." They cannot forget it. Wherever you have a standing army, you will find that it is in favour of war. What happened? If honorable members will read the report of the debate in the House of Lords on the 15th March, 1901, they will see that while the negotiations were pending between Kruger and Milner in 1899, Lord Wolseley proposed to Lord Lansdowne, the Secretary of State for War, not only that he should seize Delagoa Bay, which belonged to a friendly power, Portugal, but that he should seize it in June, 1899, and subjugate the two Boer republics before November, 1899. The Orange Free State at that time had not said what position it would take. Lord Lansdowne said he did not take that course, because he did not think that public opinion was ripened enough to subjugate the two Boer republics between June and November, 1889. I have spoken with a good deal of trouble, because this is a matter on which I feel very much, and if I have aggrieved or offended any honorable member I am sorry for it. I have a right to my views, and I have not concealed them.

Mr. KINGSTON.—And the honorable member is not likely to give them up.

Mr. HIGGINS.—I am not likely to give them up, so long as they are held by the best minds in England. I confess that I rather follow men like John Morley and John Burns than the outcries of the music halls and the rabble of jingoism. If the question were left to the decision of the great population of England by plebiscite or referendum, I do not believe that they would declare in favour of the war; but, unfortunately, at present the machinery of public opinion is manipulated in a way of which we have not yet got control, though I hope, in the course of time, we shall be able to do so. I do not suppose that there is any one in England whose honour, devotion to the Empire, integrity, is more apparent than is that of Earl Spencer, a nobleman whom I remember seeing when I was a boy—at a distance, of course. What does he say?—

He did not see that the dignity and honour of the Crown would be lowered if they came to favorable terms with the gallant foe which had been opposing them.

That is just my view, and if Earl Spencer, an ex-Minister of the Crown, and a friend of Mr. Gladstone, is of that opinion, I should be at liberty to follow him. The two divisions of this motion stand on a different footing, and I thank the Prime Minister for having indicated that he has no objection to their being submitted to the House separately. With regard to the first portion of the motion, which expresses our indignation at the baseless charges made abroad against the honour of the people and the humanity and valour of the soldiers of the Empire, I do not know that there is any call for it. There is, perhaps, no objection to it; but, really, it seems to me that it would be degrading on our part to take notice of statements made in the newspapers. There have been unjust statements made in some of the German newspapers, but is it worthy of this new Commonwealth to take notice of that sort of thing? I do not agree with the charges that have been made against the people or the soldiers of the Empire. I think it is too extreme to say that the concentration camps were established for the purpose of destroying the Boer women and children. I know enough of soldiers to say that they are very stupid in managing the affairs of women and children, and that they have very likely bungled the arrangements in connexion with these camps; but they are as

humane as any one in their dealings with women and children, and are kind at bottom. I do not agree with those who say that there was any such object in establishing these camps as the destruction of women and children. Two hundred and sixty per 1,000 per annum is an awful death rate, and it is exceedingly unfortunate that the arrangements should have been so faulty. I am quite sure, however, that the British Government will do its best to remedy the existing defects. Soldiers are bunglers, but sailors are not—that is, speaking in a wide sense—and it is not to be expected that a number of men working under martial law should make proper arrangements for women and children gathered together in camps such as those in South Africa. I regret that so many deaths should have occurred, and I sincerely hope that the existing conditions will soon be

ended. I think that the proper course to adopt would be to ignore with dignified silence the slanders upon the valour and honour of our soldiers. With regard to the second part of the motion, I have no hesitation in voting against it. I do not think we ought to try to bring the war to an end in the way indicated by that portion of the motion. I say that the war is an unjust war. Many of us know that it is unjust, although perhaps we do not feel free to so express ourselves. If the motion indicated that the war should be brought to an end by extending, as Earl Spencer says, humane and considerate treatment to a gallant foe, I should vote for it; but as the motion evidently means that we should pursue the Boers to their ultimate extinction or to the surrender of their independence, I say—"No."