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CAPTAINS AND CONGRESS
A STUDY OF THE ATTITUDES OF
CONGRESS TOWARD ANNUAL NAVAL
APPROPRIATIONS
1870-1890

by

Richard Liles Holzhausen

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Major Professor

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INTRODUCTION

The United States Navy after the Civil War was certainly more modern than that of the antebellum years. In the 1850's, sailing ships comprised the majority of the services' effective force. During the war almost every ship built relied either exclusively on steam or a combination of sail and steam. At the end of the war the House Naval Affairs Committee, after an investigation of the ships constructed during the war, assured Congress that American ships were equal in speed and construction to those of foreign navies.¹ In the same year, Secretary of the Navy, Gideon Welles, stated in his annual report that the improvements in American war vessels in speed and ordinance would "greatly augment the efficiency and power" of all the postwar cruising squadrons.²

The cruisers were only one of the powerful new ships built during the war. The Civil War also produced the ironclad monitor, an armored ship that American naval experts were sure would "make all of the great wooden ships-of-the-line obsolete over night." The ironclads were primarily designed for use in the smooth waters of American harbors and rivers. However, a few monitors were built during the war that could leave the safety of the coast and proceed to sea. After the war one vessel made a voyage from the east coast to Europe while another sailed around South America to take up station in California. Naval

officers asserted during the war that American ironclads were equal to those being built by European powers, and the voyages of these monitors were designed to show Americans that they had nothing to fear from naval powers.³

The Secretary of the Navy had no intention of keeping the Navy at its expanded Civil War level. During the war, when it finally became clear that the North would win, the Secretary of the Navy began to sell many of the merchant ships that had been bought early in the war and converted into warships. Between 1865 and 1868 large quantities of marginal or unservicable ships and equipment were sold and the money returned to the Department of the Treasury.⁴ Secretary Wells was determined that the expense of the naval establishment should not be too large; yet he wanted to keep the Navy at what he considered a sufficient level. In his annual report in 1865 he stated that:

Such alleviation of the public burdens is the plain dictate of a wise policy. Yet true wisdom directs that this policy of retrenchment in the naval branch of public service must not be carried too far.

In this statement the Secretary warned Congress that it should give the Navy more support than it had in the years prior to the war.⁵ At the same time most naval officers hoped to maintain a naval establishment of approximately 100 vessels in commission plus 12,000 enlisted men and 2,000 officers to man the ships.⁶

When the war was over more than 35 armor clad monitors were

retained by the Navy. The majority were laid up at the League Island Navy Yard in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. The water in which the ships were anchored was fresh, thus the bottoms of the ships were less prone to fouling. Therefore in an emergency the ships would be ready for service in a much shorter time than European reserve vessels stored in salt water harbors. In 1886, over 2,000 cannon and ordinance stores, all valued at about seventeen million dollars, were retained by the Department of the Navy. All of the new Civil War equipment that was retained by the Navy represented a formidable supply, considering that in 1861 it consisted of only 42 warships, none of which were armored, carrying 555 guns.⁷

For a period of time in the late 1860's and early 1870's there was a general feeling in Congress that because of the monitors in reserve and the new cruisers on patrol, the country had a Navy that was strong enough to defend its interests in the event of war. Congress found no compelling reason to increase naval expenditures. Its main interests centered around an efficiently run Navy adequate for peace time operations and inexpensive to maintain. The idea of having a large Navy containing many cruisers and seagoing armored ships motivated many naval officers and a few administrators throughout the 1870's and 1880's to lobby for more money for the Navy. Seldom did they effectively influence Congressional handling of

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naval appropriations. Whereas advocates of the Navy claimed to foresee the need of a stronger Navy to meet future necessities, most Congressmen were willing to use as their standard the pre-Civil War Navy. After all the American merchant marine had virtually vanished from the sea so there was little actual shipping trade left to protect.

Inflation had occurred during the war so it was impossible in terms of dollar amounts to return to the pre-war appropriations. But it was possible to cut the number of ships and men in the Navy back to the pre-war levels and that is what Congress set about doing in the 1870's. For fiscal year 1879, Secretary of the Navy, Gideon Wells, asked for an appropriation of \$47,317,183.95 to run the Navy. In the first great cut since the war, Congress pared back the request by almost thirty million dollars.⁸ Ships had to be laid up and the enlisted force had to be cut back. Between 1870 and 1890 Congress managed to keep the annual appropriation very close to twenty million dollars per year or less.⁹

Most naval historians have treated this period of naval retrenchment in two parts. They have been highly critical of Congressional actions in the 1870's but have generally praised the actions taken in the 1880's to rebuild and expand the Navy. Charles Oscar Paullin, in one of the earliest and least critical studies of the period, has thus concluded that the policies of

the 1870's were unprogressive, but when expansion did come "in the last two decades of the nineteenth century" the Navy was able to take advantage of European developments.¹⁰

Harold and Margaret Sprout, two of the best known critics of naval policy in the 1870's have also indicated that because of political and economic developments during this ten year period and lack of "intelligent executive leadership" the Navy did "little but mark time." However, they found that in the 1880's the "process of naval reconstruction was commenced." They intimate that a number of factors stimulated the movement for naval expansion. Among them were a growing desire to "dabble in the imperial struggle", demands to put teeth into the Monroe Doctrine, and "...universal dissatisfaction with the negative policy which was destroying this branch of the national defense." 11

A more recent historian of this period, Walter Herrick, is inclined to share the Sprouts' view of the 1880's. In his book, The American Naval Revolution, he catagorizes the 1870's as years of "drift" and the 1880's as years of "direction". Herrick does suggest that in the 1870's a "...succession of apathetic secretaries allowed the fleet to deteriorate" and that Congress was not prepared to make any efforts to replace the old ships. But for the 1880's he found that "the three men in charge (of the Navy Department) from 1880 to 1889 contributed handsomely to the

enlargement and improvement of the fleet" and "Congress registered its commitment to naval rehabilitation."¹²

In The American Steel Navy, John Alden argues along the same line. Alden refers to the Congress as a "penny-pinching economizer" that held naval development back in the 1870's. But then he contradicts his argument somewhat by admitting that until the 1880's experimentation in foreign navies tended to make ships obsolete by the time they were launched, one of the reasons most often given by Congressmen for not spending a great deal of money on new ship construction.¹³ No Navy had settled on the type of ship best suited for its battle line: consequently the fleets of the world were a hodgepodge of armored, unarmored, or partially armored warships carrying a variety of guns mounted broadside in turrets or in barbettes. According to Oscar Parks many of the guns built in the late 1860's and early 1870's by England, Germany, and France had a tendency to burst and were generally unsatisfactory.¹⁴ Alden puts his criticism in better perspective and at the same time compliments the judgment of Congress when he concludes that a Navy starting from scratch could hold its "own against foreign opponents to a greater extent than a mere comparison of numbers might indicate."¹⁵

This study is not an attempt to dispute the fact that the power of the Navy declined between 1865 and 1880. In numbers

alone it could not match European Navies. However, as Alden and Paullin indicate, the lack of a large Navy and naval appropriations may not have been as serious as the Sprouts have suggested. Congress did provide for a naval establishment that was larger and stronger than the ante-bellum Navy.

It is the attitude of Congress that this study proposes to look into. Specifically it seeks to answer two questions. Was there a change between the 1870's and the 1880's in Congressional thinking about the Navy as has been suggested? Was congressional policy motivated by the demands of naval officers and the executive branch of government or *did it hold to a consistent* policy for the twenty year period? It attempts to show that there was a continuing demand for a large Navy by the Department of the Navy and naval officers on one hand while on the other it was opposed by a majority of the members of Congress who were looking for economy in the operation of the Navy which, in the end, was the deciding factor in the determination of naval policy.

INTRODUCTION
NOTES

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2. 39 Cong., 1st. Sess., House Executive Documents No. 1 XI.
3. Frank M. Bennett, The Steam Navy of the United States (Pittsburgh: Warren and Company, 1896) pp. 584-592.
4. Charles Oscar Paullin, Paullin's History of Naval Administration 1775-1911 (Annapolis: U.S. Naval Institute Press, 1968) p. 313. Bennett, The Steam Navy of the United States p. 624.
5. Navy Department, Annual Report. 1865 pp. 33-34.
6. Navy Department, Annual Report. 1866 p. 26. For the size of the pre-war Navy see: Paullin, Paullin's History of Naval Administration p. 219, 227, 239.
7. Paullin, Paullin's History of Naval Administration p. 313.
8. For the Naval estimates see Navy Department, Annual Report 1868. For the debate see Congressional Globe 40th Cong., 2nd. Sess.
9. Paullin, Paullin's History of Naval Administration p. 318.
10. Ibid., pp. 340-341
11. Harold and Margaret Sprout, The Rise of American Naval Power (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1942) pp. 184-201.
12. Walter R. Herrick, The American Naval Revolution (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1966) pp. 3-38
13. John D. Alden, The American Steel Navy (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 1972) p. 4.
14. Oscar Parks, British Battleships (London: Seeley Service and Company Limited, 1970) pp. 34-48.
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CHAPTER I

American naval authorities in this period not only clung tenaciously to the commerce-raiding system of naval warfare (without providing a single ship suited to that type of warfare), but also revived and adopted the strategy of passive coast defense, which had had such vogue under Thomas Jefferson, and which had figured recurrently in naval discussions down to the Civil War.¹

Harold and Margaret Sprout
The Rise of American Naval Power, p.171.

If I had the money I would have a good deal larger Navy, one superior to any nation. But we have proposed the Navy to be kept at one hundred and eighty vessels, which is a very small Navy for this country; but it is about as much as the people would stand. A large portion of our people cannot be made to understand the necessity of a great nation like ours keeping up a respectable Navy.²

Admiral David Dixon Porter
41st Cong., 2nd Sess., House
Report No. 28, p. 194.

Lacking intelligent executive leadership, preoccupied with internal problems, and torn by partisan strife, Congress did little but mark time.³

Harold and Margaret Sprout
The Rise of American Naval Power, p.102.

My answer to that is this: what we are appropriating now, Mr. Chairman, is not a Navy that we believe will be hurried at a day's notice into war-because if that were so we should ask for more money-it is simply for the maintenance of a prudently regulated naval establishment on the seas of the Globe.⁴

Representative Eugene Hale
U.S. Congressional Record, 43rd
Cong., 1st. Sess., p. 494.

It has been suggested that after the Civil War the American economy theoretically could have supported a naval policy similar to that of European naval development of the period. Simply because the Congress did not feel compelled to imitate European powers however, does not mean that there was not considerable interest in the naval establishment.¹

Naval officers in the 1870's were faced with a difficult task when they tried to get Congress to support the size Navy they deemed necessary. Congressmen had to deal with a huge national debt accrued during the Civil War. At the same time the country's economy fluctuated throughout the period so that public finances were uncertain. A determination by Congress to run the government like a business precluded any idea of allowing the country to increase the national debt. The combination of these two latter factors forced the federal bureaus to be stringent in their expenditures. Although the Navy continued to urge Congress to build ships, in the 1870's it fought an up hill battle.

The Navy's duty in time of peace was to protect American property, commerce and citizens abroad. In time of war it was to raid enemy commerce and protect the United States from attack. The powers that could make war on the country seemed far away to both Congress and the Navy. Only the Cuban crisis of 1874 in which the United States and Spain clashed over the capture of the Virginus seemed to bring the threat of war to this hemisphere. However, since this dispute was settled diplomatically

it increased the conviction that the United States was isolated from the war-breeding rivalries of Europe.²

A few officers tried to turn the country's momentary concerns about its lack of fighting strength to the Navy's advantage. Rear Admiral Robley D. Evans, who commanded the fleet at Key West, Florida, thought that the assemblage only served to reveal the extreme weakness of the Navy.³ David Dixon Porter in an article in the Army-Navy Journal compared the fleet to an Army equipped with "match locks or arquebuses ready to fight a modern European army equipped with needle guns or Remingtons."⁴ However, it soon became clear that their arguments addressed to the Secretary of the Navy and the Congress fell on deaf ears. Secretary of the Navy George Robeson, in his annual report to the Congress, made no mention of any definite policy of naval construction. In fact there was a great deal of speculation both in Congress and the Navy that if war had come the Navy could have handled the Spanish.

Another problem that plagued the Navy was the lack of internal agreement on naval matters. While Evans and Porter complained about the poor state of naval preparedness others set about reassuring the Congress that the squadron had not performed as badly as the Admirals suggested. In the Proceedings of the United States Naval Institute, Commodore Foxhall A. Parker spoke of the extreme disadvantage the Spanish would have had trying to operate

a fleet large enough to oppose the American fleet at such a great distance from their home bases. He also went on to say that research as yet had not proved that the rifled gun (which some of the Spanish ships were supposed to have) was superior to the smooth bore (with which American ships were armed) at close range "...and as yet no naval battle has ever been decided at long range." Rear-Admiral Rogers challenged statements that the fleet could only go at speeds of four and one-half knots. He stated that one ship due for an overhall had held the other vessels down to this speed. Otherwise the speed would have been between seven and nine knots, which was a good speed for any fleet in the 1870's.⁵

Most Congressmen responded to the arguments of Parker and Rogers rather than those of Evans and Porter. The operation in the Bay of Florida seemed to vindicate the policy they had been pursuing up to that point. The first session of the 43rd Congress spent a portion of the annual naval appropriations debate congratulating the Secretary of the Navy for his efficient work, and itself for keeping the Navy in such good shape. Congressman Eugene Hale of Maine--a Republican and generally considered pro-navy or a "navalist"--complimented Secretary George Robeson for his quick action.

The Secretary of the Navy acted with vigor, and, as I believe, with wisdom he called home from the Atlantic squadron every ship. He brought up to the North from the Southern seas vessels that were almost sinking and

needed repair and outfit, and put them in course of repair. He took from the docks and the yards the ironclads, and set to work upon them skilled mechanics, in order to put them in fighting condition. And the result was that had war struck us he would have had in Cuban waters a force of four hundred guns...a force larger than the Spanish fleet in those waters.⁶

Praise came from both sides of the aisle. Republican James Garfield and Democrats James Beck and Thomas Swann found the Secretary's action meritorious. Swann went so far as to state that Robeson and the Congress had done such a good job of preparing the Navy for action that it could have easily handled the Spanish.

Though Spaniards are fond of bluster, are fond of getting up all sorts of complications, yet the settlement of this question is a settlement, so far as I understand, and I do think they would be the last power to try to disturb the existing relations with this country. And why sir? In the first place it would wipe out Cuba. People may talk as they please; but our Navy as it stands now could take Cuba almost without a serious effort.⁷

Instead of revealing what some naval officers felt was weakness in the materiel of the Navy and false economy of reconstruction expenditure, Congress took what it believed to be the successful fleet maneuvers off the Coast of Florida as a vindication of their policy of economy and began to work for even smaller appropriations. In 1874 Congress had voted an extra four million dollars in naval emergency funds because of the capture of the Virginius by Spanish gunboats off the coast of Cuba. Rather than using the funds to build or repair more ships

both Republicans and Democrats took as much of that money as possible and included it in the next annual appropriation. This lowered the next annual bill by over two million dollars. The bitter response of many naval officers was reflected in the editorial pages of the Army and Navy Journal.

The fallacy of that argument ought surely to be made easily apparent. There is little prospect of a recurrence of the Chicago fire. Why therefore should that city maintain a fire department more than adequate to suppress the fires actually likely to take place? The prospect of peace with Spain is good, but if war were to come we should, as every naval officer knows, expose ourselves to the possibility of a national humiliation...⁸

Naval officers never gave up the fight for a large Navy. In the Proceedings they continued to express their belief that more money should be spent on research and that the Navy should be expanded. There were articles on the need for new ordinance. Numerous articles proclaimed the need for a better merchant marine while others concentrated on what type of ships should be built and how many the Navy should have in commission.⁹ Some officers went so far as to contrive what a naval disaster would be like and what the eventual result would be. In "Two Lessons from the Future" Lieutenant B. M. Mason described the results of a mythical American defeat off Cape Hatteras in 1876.

You thought the game was up, I did not. I trusted to the common sense of our people at large, untrameled by political influence. We now have a large Navy with three kinds of vessels. 18 armored 16 knot ships-of-the-line--large numbers of cruisers--rams and dispatch bonts. The people

growled a little at the necessary expense, but it was only necessary to say "Cady" to them. (the place of the supposed defeat) and the growling ceased; the pride of the American people had been touched and was bound to come to the front.¹⁰

Other officers urged the Congress to build merchant ships, that in emergencies could be used by the Navy. As early as 1869, Secretary Robeson and Admiral Porter urged Congress to subsidize the construction of merchant ships that could be converted into warships. When a house committee turned down the request in 1870 saying "merchant steamers were too light to bear the shock of heavy guns," Secretary Robeson tried to salvage something for the Navy by saying that he had not meant to give the impression that merchantmen would constitute the main body of the Navy. These ships would be adequate for auxiliaries carrying light guns. Nonetheless the House rejected any thought of granting subsidies to a merchant Navy.¹¹

Some years later even this attempt at getting more ships came back to haunt the Navy, posing a potential threat to its very existence. It eventually became necessary to deny any possibility of converting merchant ships into war ships. Some of the more economy-minded members of Congress came to the conclusion that the Navy could be reduced if the merchant marine was increased. In using the Navy's own earlier arguments they made life very uncomfortable for the Navy. If commercial shipping was the true source of naval power and in times of emergency could be used as

warships, increased appropriations for a merchant marine would mean a considerably smaller appropriation for the Navy. In 1879, Rear-Admiral Daniel Ammen suggested that all merchantmen were unsuitable for the Navy.

Merchant vessels are no longer convertible into men of war. Their engines are too high above the water line and may be put out of action with one shot. The ships are not strong enough to take the recoil of the new guns. The country must have a Navy in time of peace to guard against piracy, to exhibit the advancements of Civilization and demonstrate the advantages people derive from free intercourse. The Navy is needed to survey rivers, coast lines, and the ocean and to inspect light houses.¹²

In 1875, Lieutenant J. C. Soley in his effort to get Congress to build more ships for the Navy suggested that to look upon the vessels of the Navy as "commerce destroyers" was a grievous mistake. He thought that their main duty in time of peace or war was the protection of commerce. For "commerce protection is a duty nobler in every sense of the word and one that more exactly fulfills the idea of every true hearted sailor." He then recommended that Congress begin at once to start a yearly construction program of cruisers, 3,000 tons or larger, so the Navy would have an adequate number of ships to protect American commerce. The program was to start out by constructing four ships the first year at a cost of not more than five million dollars and two cruisers each year thereafter until a sufficient number had been built.¹³

In 1880, the Proceedings awarded its yearly Prize Essay to Lieutenant Charles Belknap for a paper entitled "The Naval Policy of the United States". In this article Belknap stated that it would be necessary in the future to place a great reliance upon the Navy for the defense of the country. He suggested that it was commonly believed abroad that the United States was compelled to acquiesce in the demands of the Spanish government for settlement of the Virginus affair because of the inability of the American Navy to cope with the Spanish warships. He reasoned that the nation was in this state of affairs because of congressional inaction.

One of the necessary commitments in the contest of political parties in the United States seems to be a demand for economy in the expense of government. This cry for economy has generally been satisfied by the decimation of the very branches of service upon which the country relies on for its protection and defense.

To prevent party demands overriding the needs of the naval service he suggested that the secretary of the navy be given a seat in both houses of Congress and a board of commissioners be established to advise him of the Navy's needs.

By this arrangement, the Secretary of the Navy who is not, ordinarily, conversant with the details of the Naval Service, would have a board of officers, selected for their professional attainments, ready at any moment to give him the benefit of their knowledge and experience; while the Navy would have what it so greatly needs, a statesman, eloquent and ready in debate, to defend it in the Houses of Congress against the attacks of unwise economy.¹⁴

The Navy was not without professional ideas in the 1870's. What the Navy was trying to do was to interest the Congress in some form of naval rejuvenation of which it wanted no part. At different times various officers urged the Congress to build commerce destroyers or commerce protectors, merchant vessels to expand commerce in time of peace and to be converted to war ships in the event of hostilities, and ships-of-the-line to gain control of the sea. Some officers went so far as to hope for a defeat at sea or tried to make it seem as though the country had been defeated because of its small Navy.

Congress during the 1870's was parsimonious in its naval expenditures. For a time it gave liberally to the maintenance of old ships of the Navy but it appropriated almost nothing for the construction of new ships. Both Democrats and Republicans were committed to the policy of economy in the management of naval affairs. Many members of Congress believed that, owing to the large national debt and the lack of any genuine threat from a foreign country, the nation had no business embarking upon a program of naval construction. The most commonly held opinion was that the United States should not adopt the policy of building seagoing war vessels in the manner of European powers but should confine its construction to vessels of defense such as cruisers, monitors, torpedoes, and marine rams.

In 1873, Congress was debating the advisability of building

a number of new wooden cruisers. In the course of the debate, Representative Severson Archer, while counseling his fellow Congressmen to hold down appropriations, expressed the general attitude of Congress for the next twenty years.

Our Navy will do to redress greivances against the small South American Republics, which have neither forts nor ships, or will answer to protect our missionaries among the South Pacific Islands...¹⁵

It was in these areas that the Congress expected the Navy to operate successfully. As for the need for a Navy to cruise in the other oceans of the world, there was some sentiment in Congress for calling home one or two of the other squadrons.¹⁶

Year after year the debate in the Congress was the same. In 1873, when the construction of eight small cruisers was approved, there were attempts to save money where possible. Congressman William Sprague, who favored building the cruisers, tried to interest the House in giving the Navy extra money to experiment with torpedo boats. He presented his arguments in favor of his amendment to the bill by saying that the development of the torpedo was a step toward economy.¹⁷ However, the appropriation, which was for only one hundred fifty thousand dollars was rejected in the name of economy. Representative Eugene Casserly spoke for the majority of the members of the House when he said "we can afford to wait. We are not in any immediate danger of having our ports visited by armed vessels with hostile intent."¹⁸

By the time of the next naval appropriations bill in 1874,

the Virginius crisis had passed; during the emergency Congress expended an extra four million dollars preparing the Navy for war. When the crisis was over, Congress attempted to reduce the appropriation. Congressman Eugene Hale, usually considered a pro naval representative or a "navalist", introduced legislation in the House to cut the bill.

Mr. Chairman, the Committee in making up this bill has planted itself on this position: wherever any part of the \$4,000,000 appropriated in December last enters into the improvement of the regular cruising Navy which we are to keep up in time of peace, corresponding deduction has been made in the appropriation for the coming year.¹⁹

On the Democratic side of the House Representative James Beck stated that he was in favor of every legitimate reduction of expenditure possible. "I am in favor, so far as I can, of standing by the committee (appropriations) in all that they do in that direction." Representative Alan Wood wanted to cut the expenditures even more. He stated that he "was willing to see expenditures of the departments brought down to the lowest minimum of economy possible." ²⁰

The subject of the reduction of Navy Yards and the number of employees in the yards often appeared to be a source of bitter debate between the two parties. Usually one side accused the other of taking on extra employees just before elections or keeping worthless yards in operation for political reasons. Yet starting in 1874, when the first attempts were made to eliminate,

in the name of economy, as many of these abuses as possible, the first effort turned into a bi-partisan move to reduce the number of employees in the yards. Representative Hale explained to the House what the appropriations committee intended to do.

We did this-and I want the attention of gentlemen to it, because it is significant, not simply for the amount saved but as a step in the path the committee mean to take. We took the appropriations for every yard and reduced them forty percent-giving only sixty percent of the appropriations which have gone on for years for their work.²¹

He was complimented for taking this step from the Democratic side of the House by Representative Beck.

If there is anything in which money is expended wastefully it is these navy yards...and I am glad to see the gentleman from Maine (Mr. Hale) is trying to cut them down.²²

The attempt failed in 1874, but in each succeeding Congress a growing number of representatives and senators moved to support a reorganization of the navy yards.

By 1876 the Congress seemed determined to eliminate the number of useless navy yards. Of course representatives and senators who had naval yards in their district made strong pleas on their behalf. But the majority seemed intent on cutting the money spent on the naval shore establishment. Congressman Benjamin Willis, a Democratic member of the Naval Affairs Committee concluded that the number of naval yards could be reduced from nine to three. Representative Washington Whitthorne, another Democrat, also favored a reduction of naval yards but he

sponsored a compromise amendment that did not go quite as far as the Willis amendment. Whitthorne proposed that in place of doing away with six of the navy yards they should be assigned a specific task and that only the number of employees needed to carry out that work be retained. Since the compromise met with general approval it was proposed that a committee be appointed to see where economies might be made reducing the number of naval yards. The committees' findings were to be completed before the next naval appropriations bill came before Congress.²³

The next year the committee reported that the New London navy yard should be abandoned while Portsmouth and Boston should be left only with a caretaker force. The committee also recommended improvement of the establishments at New York, League Island, Norfolk, Washington, Pensacola and Mare Island. Congress was disposed to carry out their recommendations for retrenchment, but little money was used to improve any of the existing facilities.

In the same session Congress also tried to reduce the number of naval officers. Representative Washington Whitthorne, Chairman of the Naval Affairs Committee, introduced an amendment on behalf of his committee calling for a general ten percent reduction in naval pay. The amendment also called for as much as a seventy-five percent reduction in some ranks of the officer corp in order to bring the number of officers in line with the number of productive jobs available in the Navy. To soften the blow the

reduction would be carried out through attrition rather than dismissal of surplus officers.²⁴ On the Republican side of the House, Representative Nathaniel Banks of Massachusetts approved the bill stating that while he realized there was a great necessity to reduce government expenditures he hoped there would not be an effort made to turn out of jobs those naval officers who had done so much to save the Union during the Civil War.²⁵ Other Congressmen such as Henry Banning of Ohio thought "that the country would find no fault with the reduction."²⁶ However, a strong colition of seaboard representatives led by Eugene Hale of Maine managed to defeat the proposition to reduce the number of officers in service. In its place an amendment was offered ordering the number of enlisted men to be reduced from 8,500 to 7,500 which cut expenditures. The amendment passed but it left the Navy even more top heavy with officers than before.

The Senate showed equal interest in reducing the size of the Navy. Senator Aron Sargent of California urged the Senate to concede every reduction possible to the House. He was not sure that the elimination of 1,000 sailors was the right thing to do without a corresponding reduction in the number of officers but he thought the Senate should concede the matter.

Nevertheless, the House insists that there shall be economy, and it can be done without the injustice that would be done by discharging the officers who have earned their promotion by gallant service. Therefore, with a desire to yield as far as possible to the demands of economy, the Senate Committee on

Appropriations, after long deliberations, determined that they would assent to the reductions made by the House.²⁷

The Senate, in spite of Sargent's urgings, wanted to reduce the size of the Navy. It therefore sought ways to get around the undesirable act of turning out Civil War veterans. Senator Allen Thurman thought it would be wise to cut down the number of cadets entering the service academy.²⁸ Senator Eli Saulsbury agreed saying that it was time to reduce all government expenditures to the lowest point possible. In the end, the Senate voted to reduce only the enlisted men but it was a minority that voted because many of the senators that were present did not vote. After the vote had been taken Senator Thurman, taking one last shot at the annual naval bill, stated that he had always been a friend of the Navy but "it must be admitted that of all the services in the country it is the service which in case of absolute necessity, could be dispensed with the easiest and the least injury to the public."²⁹

In 1877, Congress began to consider repairs being made on naval vessels. Representative Washington Whitthorne complained that during the last ten years vast sums of money had disappeared in the reconstruction of old ships.³⁰ Other members of the House, such as Eugene Hale and George Robeson, maintained that Whitthorne was exaggerating, that many of the cruisers had been entirely rebuilt and were the best in their class.³¹ Nonetheless, there

was general agreement that too much money had gone into repairs.³² Several members suggested that since money was wasted in the naval yards where the ships were rebuilt a reduction could be made without having a harmful effect on ship repairs if a closer watch was kept over the yards. After some debate over the course to follow, both the House and the Senate agreed that economy could best be achieved by cutting about fifty percent from the annual appropriation of the Bureau of Construction and Repair.³³ The budget was thus reduced from \$3,305,000 to \$1,750,000. For 1877 and the next three years, Congress kept that portion of the appropriation around \$1.6 million.

By the end of the 1870's, Congress had managed to pare almost every possible bit of fat from the naval budget. But Congress was not completely indifferent to the Navy's needs. Many members were becoming aware of the heavy expense in repairing old naval vessels. Representatives from both sides of the aisle, including James Blount and Washington Whitthorne for the Democrats and John Atkins, Frank Hiscock and Eugene Hale for the Republicans argued that it would be less expensive to build new ships than to try and maintain old ones. Whitthorne proposed to set up a committee to study improvements in the Navy. In the name of economy, he urged the Congress not to continue to repair the old ships.

To appropriate money to maintain the Navy in this way is like putting water into a rat-hole; it is of no use either to the Navy or the Country.

If you desire an economical expenditure of the public money reverse your policy, and with that object and purpose the Committee on Naval Affairs have matured and will submit to the House the amendment which has been referred to.³⁴

The Republicans were willing to go along with this economy move. Representative Benjamin Harris believed that if any money had been wasted it was because Congress had no policy to follow. He doubted there would be any member of the House who would fail to "embrace an opportunity to improve the Navy at a cheap price."³⁵

However, it was very hard to encourage the majority of the members of Congress to increase spending significantly. Members were happy to continue cutting expenditures and were reluctant to repair the old ships that were slowly falling apart. Until a way could be found to keep appropriations low and at the same time build new ships, the Navy would have to make do with what vessels it had.

CHAPTER I
NOTES

1. While most naval historians intimate that the country was a first class power they lament the fact that the Congress was only willing to maintain a twelfth-rate Navy. Alden, The American Steel Navy, p. 4. Herrick, The American Naval Revolution, pp. 18-19. Sprout, The Rise of American Naval Power, pp. 174-175.
2. Lance C. Buhl, "The Smooth Water Navy: American Naval Policy and Politics 1865-1876" (Ph.D. dissertation, Harvard University, 1968) pp. 77-97. The Virginus affaire seems to be the one major event between 1870 and 1890 that almost resulted in military action. Dr. Buhl does a very complete job of discussing the Naval enthusiasts' attempts to persuade Congress to rebuild the Navy.
3. Paullin, Paullin's History of Naval Administration, p. 336.
4. Army and Navy Journal, December 26, 1874. Admiral Porter was quite upset with Secretary George Robeson for not making a better effort to use the Virginus incident to get Congress to build more ships. "The report of the Secretary of the Navy for 1874 contains the usual information respecting the distribution of squadrons, and gives a very sanguine view of our naval efficiency, based chiefly on the results of the naval assemblage in the Bay of Florida, but we regret to say that it contains no hint of any definite policy of naval construction. The present state of naval science requires that we should have some policy if we are to expend the naval appropriation to any advantage."
5. Commodore Foxhall A. Parker, "Our Fleet Maneuvers in the Bay of Florida, and the Navy of the Future", The United States Naval Institute Proceedings, Vol. I (December 10, 1874). Rear Admiral Rogers statements are included at the end of this article in the comments section.
6. U.S. Congressional Record, 43rd Cong., 1st Sess., P. 493.

7. Ibid., p. 594.
8. Army and Navy Journal, January 6, 1874. However the Journal contributed to the complacency Congress was exhibiting. At the very height of the crisis on November 29, 1873 it ran an editorial that concluded that the United States Navy had "little reason to be disturbed at the prospect of war with Spain."
9. Lieutenant Edward W. Very, "The Development of Rifled Ordnance", Proceedings Vol. III (March 7, 1877). Captain W. N. Jeffers, "The Armament of our Ships of War", Vol. I (March 12, 1874).
10. Lieutenant Theo B. M. Mason, "Two Lessons from the Future", Proceedings Vol. II (April 13, 1876).
11. Congressional Globe 41st Cong., 1st Sess., p. 3543.
12. Rear-Admiral Daniel Ammen, "The Purpose of the Navy and the Best Methods of Rendering it Effective." Proceedings Vol. V No. 2 (1879).
13. Lieutenant J. C. Soley, "On a Proposed Type of Cruiser for the U.S. Navy" Proceedings Vol. IV No. 2 (1878)
14. Lieutenant Charles Belknap, "The Navy Policy of the United States" Proceedings Vol. VI No. 4 (1880). Lieutenant Belknap appears to be particularly distressed because powers that he considers inferior to the United States seems prepared to invest money in new ships of war. "The extraordinary attention paid of late years by leading powers of the world to the condition and efficiency of their navies leads to a belief that there is a growing tendency to greater reliance than here tofore, in case of war, upon this arm of a country's defense. It is not only among the leading powers of Europe that this change is taking place, it has spread to South America: and even in China and Japan, the Navy appears to be the weapon for offense and defence.

Under such circumstances, and when we find it commonly believed abroad that the United States was compelled to acquiesce in the demands of the Spanish Government for the settlement of the Virginius affair, on account of its inability to cope with the Spanish naval force of seven armored vessels, it is well to inquire into the condition of our Navy, and to suggest such changes in our naval policy as will best tend to the proper development of

our naval strength, in order that our again being placed in such a false position before the eyes of the world would be prevented."

15. Congressional Globe, 42nd Cong., 3rd Sess., p. 216.
16. U.S. Congressional Record, 44th Cong., 2nd Sess., p. 1576.
17. Congressional Globe, 42nd Cong., 3rd Sess., p. 1311.
Mr. Sprague: "I deem it the most important appropriation in this bill - indeed, more important than any appropriation that is made in any of the bills before Congress. It is in the direction of economy. It is for the purpose of applying a new principle in science to the destructive elements of war, and in an economical point of view.
18. Congressional Globe, 42nd Cong., 3rd Sess., p. 1311.
Also see the opinions of Willis Machen and William Sprague. Machen, pp. 315-316. "Wherefore should you drive the Government at this time into heavy expenditures? Is it that you anticipate desolation in any of your harbors? Not at all." Sprague, pp. 316. "I do not know anything about the necessity for these torpedoes, but I do know that there is a necessity to restrict the expenditures of this Government."
19. U.S. Congressional Record, 43rd Cong., 1st Sess., p. 494.
Eugene Hale explained the position of the Appropriations Committee when he introduced the bill. Hale p. 493: "In considering this bill, as well as others, the Committee on Appropriations found themselves confronted with a stern duty. Upon that committee, more than any other representing this House, was the responsibility of maintaining the policy of retrenchment in government expenses. There was no shirking, and I may truthfully say that there was no disposition on the part of the committee to shirk this duty." He later stated that he believed in a moderate naval establishment. p. 494. "My answer to that is this, what we are appropriating now, Mr. Chairman, is not for a Navy that we believe will be hurried at a day's notice into war, it is simply for the maintenance of a prudently regulated naval establishment on the seas of the globe."
20. U.S. Congressional Record, 43rd Cong., 1st Sess., p. 503.
Hale, p. 503. "I crave the gentleman's indulgence again. Can he not see that all of the vessels that are sent to sea in time of peace may be good and safe vessels, but that in the aggregate as a naval force in amount it is by no means large enough for a war footing but ample

for a peace footing. It is not that a single vessel is incomplete and unfit, but that peace means economy and smaller establishments, and that war means the expenditure of money and large establishments." On the same subject Alan Wood stated that he wanted "the expenditures of this Government in all its departments brought down to the lowest minimum of economical possibility." Hale commented on the Democrats role in economy. p. 621. "Let me tell the gentlemen a member of that Committee-a fellow Democrat-on that side of the house-stood here; and if he were here now he would hear me out in the statement that he said he, with others representing the minority of the committee, had carefully scrutinized this bill; that he believed it was a fair bill, and in the interest of economy. I can only reassert here, for the information of the House, that I know there are other gentlemen on that side of the House who look upon this bill as in the direction of economy, who feel that the reduction proposed here is large."

21. U.S. Congressional Record, 43rd Cong., 1st Sess., p. 494.
22. Ibid., p. 657.
23. Paullin, Paullin's History of Naval Administration, p. 354.
24. U. S. Congressional Record, 44th Cong., 1st Sess., p. 3254. Mr. Whitthorne seemed to feel that his ideas were in line with what the public wanted. p. 3254 "The purpose that the Committee on Naval Affairs had in directing me to report this amendment for the consideration of the House at the present time was to align itself, so to speak, with the spirit of reformation already entered upon by this House in obedience to the public sentiment of the country."
25. Ibid., p. 3256 Mr. Banks "I know very well there is great necessity for reduction in the expenditure of the Government, local as well as general, and I am willing to contribute to that end so far as I can understandingly and justly."
26. Ibid., p. 3257
27. Ibid., p. 4008.
28. Ibid., p. 4009. Mr. Thurman "Mr. President, it is admitted

on all hands that the expenses of the Government must be reduced, or there must be additional taxes levied upon the people, or we must do what no government ought to do in a time of peace, borrow money to defray the ordinary expense of the Government."

29. Ibid., p. 4010.
30. U.S. Congressional Record 44th Cong., 2nd Sess., p. 1568.
31. Ibid., p. 1570. Mr. Hale "I have not time nor have I the inclination to go into the general question about the condition of the American Navy. But I will state this, that the gentleman and I are totally at odds on his proposition that the American Navy has sunk to a lower position than it ever held before, for I believe and I think the records will show and the vessels afloat will show that since the year 1869 there has been built up a better Navy than this country ever put on the waters of the world. The appropriations for the Navy Department have, under the system of retrenchment and reform, not inaugurated by the present committee, but long years ago, been steadily and gradually reduced."
32. Ibid., p. 1569. Mr. Harris. "While I might admit the facts and figures which he has referred to in the main, I should ask what is the reason there has been waste in the expenditure of public money upon the Navy, and my answer would be because Congress has never had a policy on the subject up to this hour."
33. Ibid., p. 1867.
34. Ibid., p. 1586.
35. Ibid., p. 1570.

CHAPTER II

Cicero says "economy is itself a great revenue."
I am glad to see signs of improvement in the
administration of naval affairs. I hope it will
continue.

Representative Adoniram Warner
U.S. Congressional Record
48th Cong., 1st Sess., p. 1628.

I believe history will say that after the war,
with a Navy of all sorts left upon our hands,
and in a transition time of naval architecture,
we did the best we could to repair and make
useful what we had; and that we did it, as the
gentleman from Ohio Mr. Keifer has well said,
at less cost than that incurred by other nations
during the same time.

Representative John Long
U.S. Congressional Record
48th Cong., 2nd Sess., p. 1971.

CHAPTER II

The 1880's are generally viewed by naval historians as the beginning of the modern American Navy. In 1882, the Congress passed a naval appropriations bill with an amendment tacked on by the chairman of the House Naval Affairs Committee calling for the construction of two large cruisers. This act is usually cited as the "dividing-line between the old steam Navy and the new."¹ Matérielly speaking that is correct. The 1882 appropriations bill was the turning point in the history of American naval construction. All new ships from that date on were built from steel, armed with modern guns and equipped with good engines and enough coal capacity to be considered full steam powered vessels.

Part of this new willingness to spend more money on ship construction was based on the fact that the American economy was much healthier than it had been in the past decade. Throughout the 1880's the Federal Treasury produced a surplus of revenue. This undoubtedly gave extra incentive for legislators to increase governmental expenditures.² It may be hard therefore to understand how the new naval construction was based on a desire for economy. But that was the basis on which the "New Navy" was built. The first ships were made because there was a desire in Congress to economize in the area of repair to old ships. Many

Congressmen, including Eugene Hale, Henry Cabot Lodge, Washington Whitthorne, William McAdoo and Hillary Herbert, who historians have considered ardent navalists were really moderates in the drive to build new ships for the Navy. Through the efforts of such moderates naval bills were kept small enough to receive the necessary amount of support to pass Congress. Clearly congressional moderates steered a middle course between the members who wanted no Navy and those who wanted a "Navy second to none". To do this moderates had to ignore both the demands of officers and the naval affairs committees of both Houses. They also had to lower the yearly estimates given them by the Secretary of the Navy.

The Navy throughout the 1880's both officially and unofficially, pushed for more ships than it could ever hope to get from Congress. In 1881, Secretary of the Navy, William H. Hunt, appointed a "Naval Advisory Board", composed of one rear-admiral, one commodore, one captain, three commanders, three lieutenants, three engineers and three naval constructors. The Board's purpose was to advise the Secretary upon the number of vessels that should be built for the Navy, their class, size and displacement, the materials they should be constructed from, the type and size of guns they should mount, and the type of engine best suited for new ships. There was a wide difference of opinion among most naval officers on these technical questions.

and their difference was reflected in the Board's report. However, all members agreed on the need to build a large number of new ships.³

Secretary Hunt finally decided to use the majority report which recommended the construction of 68 vessels at a total cost of around \$30 million. This report included the construction of eighteen steel unarmored cruisers, twenty wooden unarmored cruisers, five steel rams, five torpedo gunboats and twenty torpedo boats. The Board proposed that the ships should have both full sail power and full steam power and a speed of no more than fifteen but no less than thirteen knots. The minority report proposed that ironclads should be constructed along with the cruisers.⁴

Hunt presented the entire report to Congress in his annual message, stating that he hoped Congress would give it prompt attention because the Navy was on the verge of "dwindling into insignificance." After considering the report the House Committee on Naval Affairs eventually presented a bill to the Congress which called for the construction of fifteen cruisers. At this point the strong advocates of the "New Navy" ran into a stone wall. Benjamin Harris, Chairman of the House Naval Affairs Committee, was unable to get the House to discuss the measure or vote on it. He then tried to attach part of the measure to the annual

appropriations bill. Even this was held up and when the bill finally passed, it called for the construction of only two ships but granted no appropriations. The first attempt by the Navy and the House Naval Affairs Committee to get a large appropriation for naval construction was a dismal failure. It was not the last time that the Congress would ignore an official attempt to build a large number of new ships.⁵

In 1889, Secretary of the Navy, Benjamin Franklin Tracy, appointed a board of six naval officers to look into the Navy's requirements. Tracy's annual report came out at the end of November, before the Board's findings were completed. Tracy asked the Congress for "the immediate creation of two fleets of battleships, of which eight should be assigned to the Pacific and twelve to the Atlantic and Gulf." He then recommended that eight battleships be authorized in the next session of Congress. In addition to the battleships he also stated that the future Navy ought to consist of at least sixty cruisers and twenty coast defense ships.⁶ Such a large recommendation was a serious matter for the Congress to tackle. However, before deliberations began in the House, the Navy Policy Board appointed by Tracy made its report.

The Board recommended thirteen battleships of great endurance, twenty five battleships of limited endurance, seventeen harbor defense ships and rams, sixty eight cruisers of all types and one hundred torpedo boats, a Navy of over two hundred ships.⁷

The Senators and representatives who had been trying to pare down the Secretary's request for eight battleships were quick to disavow this new report. Even Secretary Tracy would have nothing to do with it.⁸ The bill that was finally introduced in the House was considerably smaller than the Secretary's request and certainly much less than what the Navy had hoped for.

Between these two official Navy requests a number of naval officers made their ideas known in the pages of the Proceedings. As early as 1881, Lieutenant E. W. Very was stating a theory that would prove similar to the views of Alfred Thayer Mahan ten years later. In the Prize Essay for 1881, entitled "The Type of (I) Armored Vessel (II) Cruiser Best Suited to the Present Needs of the United States", Very urged the construction of twenty four ironclads to break up or prevent blockades of the United States. While he did not think it wise to send these ships too far out to sea, he believed they should be able to put to sea and fight. He also recommended that sixty unarmored cruisers be built.⁹

In 1885, Ensign I. W. Chambers urged the Congress to build other ships besides cruisers. He thought the Navy should have the same type ships it might be forced to meet in combat. In an article in which he discussed the defense requirements he concluded "that to meet these requirements nothing less than a first-class modern battleship will suffice." Finally, he

presented what he thought "with due economy" represented "the least necessities of the nation." He wanted nine battleships, fifteen coast defense ironclads, twenty torpedo boats, and thirty eight cruisers.¹⁰

In 1886, Rear-Admiral Edward Simpson, President of the Naval Institute issued a call for a large Navy, in his annual address, stating that "the first and most important consideration for the Navy is ships." He went on to urge the country to build battleships as well as cruisers. Finally in 1889, Captain W. T. Sampson urged that armored ships be built large enough to have the advantage over any vessel sent against them. To be effective these ships should be required to have offensive capabilities and in his opinion this excluded the monitor type. In addition to the articles dealing with the need for more ships there were many others arguing the need for better guns, engines, education, and the continuing need for a larger merchant marine.¹¹

In 1889, in an article "Our Future Navy", published in the North American Review, Rear-Admiral Stephen B. Luce, a long time advocate of a large Navy, admonished Congress for not appropriating money for battleships.

In the absence of anything and everything that might resemble a naval policy, we have reversed the usual order of naval development. The battleship being the very foundation of a Navy, and the United States having no battleships, it

is plain in a military sense she has no Navy.

It is not to our interest to have at least one fleet of twelve battleships. That is the question the Executive has been presenting to Congress for the past one hundred years.¹²

Congress was surely more responsive to the Navy's needs than Admiral Luce indicated, but his comment does suggest that Congress, not the Executive or the Navy, was the limiting force on naval appropriations. It would appear that as late as 1890, civilian control over the military was a reality. The Legislature would not be stampeded into expensive programs that it did not think were necessary, in spite of continual urging by Executive and Navy.

Indeed, navalists in Congress and the executive branch of government faced problems in getting their legislative programs past the majority of the members of the House and Senate. It has already been noted that the Secretary of the Navy, William Hunt, and the Chairman of the House Naval Affairs Committee, Benjamin Harris had great difficulty trying to get the Congress to appropriate money for new ships. One of their basic problems lay in the rules of the House of Representatives. By law any new ship construction had to originate with the House Naval Affairs Committee. Because that would cause an increase in the existing naval expenditures, the bill was classified as new legislation and could not be attached to the annual appropriations bill. The second major problem was the fact

that the Secretary of the Navy could not let contracts for new ships without congressional authorization. This meant that the entire ship appropriation had to be passed at one time. The smallest annual appropriation on which the Department of the Navy could operate was fourteen million dollars. To contract with a private firm for the four ships authorized in 1883 would have meant a total appropriation of four and one quarter million dollars in addition to the usual fourteen. The majority of the members in the House were unwilling to increase the naval budget that much in one year, especially when the trend for the last fourteen years, in terms of money, had been downward. There was also a general fear that once the money was appropriated it might be spent on other things and Congress would have to make a deficiency appropriation in order to purchase the ships from the contractors.

To get around this problem Congress decided, evidently influenced by Representative George Robeson who was on both the House Appropriations and Naval Affairs Committee, to make all new contracts a part of the regular appropriations act. The first new ships to be approved were included in the annual Naval Appropriations bill under the subtitle of the Bureau of Construction and Repair. Many objected to this maneuver, but not enough to hold back the bill. The sponsors also tried to keep the intentions of the measure as clear as possible by placing under the Bureau's

title a separate paragraph headed "Increase in the Navy" so that "the members of the House could understand exactly what they were doing." There was no real attempt at deception. It was simply a way in which the Congress could provide for new ships and still maintain year by year control over the money that went to the contractors for building the ships. It also meant that new construction could start without a large increase in the naval budget.¹³

The first appropriation was \$1.3 million, about one fourth of the total cost of the four new ships. Both Democrats and Republicans were in favor of the new legislation and the control it gave Congress over appropriations. Washington Whitthorne thought it was the correct policy and one that provided a very "wholesome check" over the Executive Department with a view to economy.¹⁴

There were two economies in which Whitthorne was specifically interested. One was the thirty percent clause that had been enacted the previous year, and the other was the new steel ships. The thirty percent clause had its origin in Congress rather than the Navy Department and is a good example of how that body was determined to maintain close control over naval appropriations. The act limited the amount of repairs the Navy could expend on wooden ships. No wooden warship was to receive repairs amounting to more than thirty percent of the cost of a

new vessel of the same size and class. In 1883, the act was changed to limit the amount of repairs to twenty percent.¹⁵

A number of pro-navy Congressmen were against the act because it rapidly reduced the size of the Navy without providing enough replacement ships. In 1882, there was no new construction program under way and the immediate effect of the act was to limit the need for officers and men. The whole act was intended to force more economy on the Navy so any new construction that did take place would not create a dramatic upswing in the appropriations. There was a general feeling that too much money had already been spent in trying to keep the old ships in repair when it could have been used on iron or steel ships that did not require as much repair work and were thought to be considerably more effective.¹⁶

The act had considerable bipartisan backing but with the knowledge that ships asked for in 1882 would not be ready before 1885, some members of Congress found it hard to cut down the Navy. Congressman Selwyn Bowman spoke for those who supported the clause but hoped to get Congress to pass a building program.

I do not like to separate from the members of the Committee on Appropriations on the bill. It has been adopted by a large majority of that committee, almost every member in a general way. I do not like many of the ideas which are contained in the bill, and which are entering wedges for the destruction of certain navy-yards and for the reorganizing of the Navy, so as to legislate

in a few years of service, men and ships who have distinguished themselves greatly and who have helped to save us in our day of tribulation.¹⁷

But for those members who had urged economy in connection with the reconstruction program, the bill represented an end to a portion of the annual naval appropriations that had in the opinion of many Congressmen, been going to waste. Washington Whitthorne, a long time advocate of economy, stated that "this amendment, which is in the interest of economy and protects the public interest, is unquestionably in order." Frank Hiscock, another supporter of the bill, visualized the benefits it would bring.

In preparing the bill, we had in view first to strike down the expensive naval organization which exists today, and then to do something to add to the strength of the Navy.

And I say to the committee we were prompted by a desire to cut down appropriations. We do not desire largely to increase them, because we do not think it necessary.¹⁹

Appropriating money for new steel cruisers was also looked upon as an economy move. Representative Benjamin Harris, of Massachusetts thought it would be much wiser to build new vessels rather than "waste money in the repair of old ones."²⁰ Many members were convinced that even though the new ships would be built out of different, more costly material than ships of the past, in the long run they would have better vessels in every respect and the upkeep would be considerably less.²¹

The legislative branch of government made great efforts during the 1880's to keep the naval appropriations at a reasonable level. Congressmen from both ends of the naval spectrum maligned the middle course pursued by the House and Senate. The efforts made throughout the 1880's to push up naval appropriations and build ships were far beyond what most members of Congress could support. Basically this effort to increase spending was promoted by members of the House Naval Affairs Committee. As has been previously stated, in 1882, the House committee hoped to appropriate ten million dollars for new construction and when that effort failed, the committee still hoped to get five million attached to the annual appropriations bill. But this move was prevented by the House Appropriations Committee which took the appropriations for new ships away from the Naval Committee and attached all new ship appropriations to the Annual Naval Appropriations Bill. Representative Joshua Talbott, stated the feelings of the Appropriations Committee.

We have not gone to the full extent of what was recommended unanimously by the Committee on Naval Affairs of this House, including members of that committee from both sides of the House, because we did not care to load down an annual appropriations bill with more money than was necessary.²²

Some members such as James Blount, felt that while the bill seemed like a very economical proposition, "it carries with it the seeds of enormous expenditures, far beyond what now appears."²³ Several members scoffed at his ideas and criticized Blount for

overstating his case. Representative John O'Neill thought that the bill would not lead to extravagance and that the amount of money to be spent was "within a very fine limit."²⁴ Representative Emory Speer stated that he thought American History militated against ever having the large Navy that Blount predicted. But Speer did feel that the bill would produce exactly what the country needed.

We do not need a large Navy. A few ships, swift, efficient, and adequately manned, will be a terror to the great commercial nations of the earth, and in that way we will be able to protect ourselves most adequately from war with them.²⁵

Most members of Congress were glad to be replacing the wooden ships with steel. It seemed clear enough to them that what appeared to be economy in the 1870's had been false economy. Congress felt that in the future the country would have more to show for the money spent on the naval establishment. There are indications that Congressmen liked to consider themselves businessmen acting on sound money principles. As good businessmen many became convinced that the construction of ships that cost less to keep and repair represented a sound business investment. Representative Thomas B. Reed stated clearly how he felt about the construction of new ships.

What we need is not economy as the first thing, but a construction that will be sound and effective. It is not a question of what money we pay so much as a question of what we get for our money.²⁶

In the 47th Congress the majority felt that the construction of

a small number of new steel cruisers covered by a reasonable appropriation and combined with a decrease in the amount of money used to repair old wooden ships was a step in the direction of economy. The essence of the naval appropriation of 1883 was to retain the existing Navy temporarily while reducing as much as possible the burden on the public treasury.²⁷

Resistance to appropriations for large numbers of warships continued throughout the 1880's. Congressman William Calkins introduced the naval appropriation bill in the first session of the 48th Congress by saying he thought Congress would be wise if it followed the recommendations of the Appropriations Committee. He characterized the bill as one of great monetary prudence.

It will be seen by an examination of the bill that there is a large reduction in expenditures over the estimates. I may say further that all reasonable reductions, all measures of economy in the expenditure of public moneys meet with my hearty approval.²⁸

Occasionally, party politics surfaced in the debate but generally both Republicans and Democrats sought the same goal. Both sides claimed to have run the Department of the Navy with greater thrift while providing the country with an adequate Navy. At the same time they castigated each other for not having been diligent enough in keeping track of expenditures and for not having enough to show for the drain on the public treasury. There were continual thundering orations designed to

discredit the party in control of the bill. But when the votes were counted those members of Congress who desired an efficient Navy would steer a reasonable appropriation through the House and Senate.

In 1884, Democrats attempted to keep naval appropriations small by continuing to pay only for the ships authorized in the previous Congress. Democrats stated that they were holding off efforts to build more ships until it could be seen how well the new ones would work in normal operation. Frank Hiscock, one of the moderate supporters of the Navy, stated that the Republicans could keep spending down and build ships at the same time.

We adopted your bills of those Congresses as our guides to the amount which should be expended after you had reduced the naval appropriations to which you dared go. We said we will not exceed your appropriations in the long run will decrease the amount, and yet will give the country a new Navy of first-class ships, and we gave you a policy that I have proved to you will produce results.²⁹

Most Republicans continued to insist that more ships should be built, but at the same time they were quick to point out that although they supported the Navy they did not intend to ask for a large amount of new construction. William Dorsheimer complimented the Democrats for cutting down the number of officers in the upper ranks of the Navy maintaining that it had been a wise economy and had been accomplished without doing injustice to anyone. However, Dorsheimer felt it would also be wise to

continue to build steel ships for the Navy although he was careful to point out that he did not want a large extravagant Navy like those of Europe. As he noted, the Nation's policy had always been maintenance of a small Navy made up of the best quality ships.

Do you gentlemen on the other side propose to follow the example we set for you by building up the Navy by construction of steel cruisers? No. And yet these gentlemen say they are friends of the Navy. Now the true course is to take the middle ground. Give us a small number of the very best ships we can get.³⁰

Between 1885 and 1889, Democrats took up the challenge the Republicans gave them. Enough money was appropriated annually to build new cruisers including three armored cruisers, without annual appropriations being increased significantly until 1888. Amendments were also continually voted down that called for construction of large numbers of cruisers.³¹ William McAdoo in fending off efforts to increase the naval appropriations stated that it was proper in an economical committee not to give the full amount of the estimates, because they were generally in advance of what the public sentiment would approve.³² McAdoo suggested that enough cruisers should be built to replace older ones being decommissioned. Representative Charles Lore reminded his colleague that since the United States had no colonies it had no fear of any foe until the American coast was involved. He urged therefore that any amendment that called

for a large increase in spending be defeated.

The only limitation that occurs to me in building our Navy today depends on the question of wise economy with means and ends in view.³³

It became necessary in 1888 to increase the amount of the annual appropriations from \$16 to \$25 million. A large part of the increase was intended for construction of equipment necessary for making steel gun forgings and armor plate. Until that time the Navy bought its armor and any gun forging larger than one required for a six inch weapon from a European manufacture. Most congressmen felt that if the Country was going to spend money on the Navy it should be spent within the United States. At the same time since a number of cruisers were nearing completion, it was necessary to pay the contractors. Because such an increase in one year proved embarrassing, Democrats proposed a new method of appropriating money for new ships. They hoped to eliminate large increases while reassuring manufacturers that they could invest money in their ship building establishments. Democrats proposed that a certain sum be set aside each year for the construction of ships. They estimated that it took between twelve and fourteen million dollars per year to meet naval expenses. If six million dollars were earmarked each year for new construction, the budget would always be below twenty million dollars. Representative Hillary Herbert proposed the measure but was very careful to explain that it would not result in a

large Navy.

We do not advocate extravagant expenditures on a Navy. It is unnecessary. By the observance of economy in the matter of ordinary expenditures we believe we have reached a point at which appropriations of, say \$20,000,000 per annum will allow us, for some years to come, \$6,000,000 each year toward building our Navy.³⁴

In both 1888 and 1889, there was agitation in the Congress for the construction of large armored battleships. In 1888, the Senate proposed that two ships with a displacement of 15,000 tons each be built. This proposal was turned down by both Republicans and Democrats. There was a general feeling that no one wanted to spend ten million dollars on two ships. In 1889, appropriations for new construction were kept at six million dollars to remain in line with Congress' previous recommendations.³⁵

To be sure the battleship program of 1890 was hardly an economy move. These new armored ships were expensive to build and operate. Nevertheless Congress remained determined to keep naval expenditures down in spite of the demands by the Navy and the administration to build large numbers of battleships. It has already been noted that the Secretary of the Navy asked for eight battleships. The Naval Advisory Board requested an even larger number. When the bill came before Congress, pro-navy Congressmen Eugene Hale, Charles Boutelle, Hillary Herbert and William McAdoo managed to reduce the number of ships from

eight to three. In fact, Herbert preferred to build only two surmizing that the construction of two ships would stay within the six million dollar construction level. In the debates over the battleships these same men spent most of their time discounting the large demands of the Navy, even going so far as to state that these ships were much like the monitors, still popular with many congressmen.³⁶

When Boutelle introduced the appropriations bill he stated that in spite of the increased cost of the new ships, the money spent would be "quite moderate in proportion to the object it attained."³⁷ He said that in both war and peace they would be used to protect the American coast so the ships were to be called "sea-going-coast-line battleships."³⁸ This type of ship would be more economical to build than the larger European type battleships, and would prove far more useful because of their shallow draft.

However, there were objections to the construction of battleships. Representative Samuel Peters of Kansas was upset about the great potential increase in expenditures.

It is too often the desire to start some enterprise at public expense that prompts these patriotic outbursts and prompts these fears that we hear so much about on this floor. We are not in any danger of war. These millions will be lost. It is a useless, wicked expenditure.³⁹

Immediately Jonathan Dolliver from Missouri protested that Peters did not represent all inland congressmen. As a Midwesterner who supported the appropriation he attempted to show that there

were members of Congress from interior states who understood the necessities of a Navy.

We have not undertaken to build for sea-going ships. We have recommended the construction of three war-ships that will be available for coast protection...limited by their coal capacity to the coast of the United States. We have not entered upon a course of naval construction that will make us a great aggressive naval power.⁴⁰

Representative Boutelle, who sponsored the bill in the House continually tried to lead the debate away from the two extremes of no battleships or the demand for eight. He stated that it was not the policy of the Congress to build the great Navy that the policy board had stipulated nor should it support little or no Navy such as the Representative from Indiana, Mr. Holman, had suggested. He quoted Jefferson as his authority as to the type of Navy the United States should have and suggested that he proposed to go no farther than Jefferson's recommendations.⁴¹ William McAdoo also cited Jefferson and stated that "we do not propose, by this or any other bill, to build up a Navy to compete with the navies of European powers." He stated he simply wanted what had been traditional American policy,—"a small but effective fighting Navy of the best types."⁴² Every effort was made both in the House and Senate to assure the members of Congress that there was to be no radical departure from traditional American naval policy nor would the annual appropriations be increased by too large a sum of money.⁴³

The Congress eventually approved money for these battleships.

While gaining these three ships, however, the pro-naval congressmen had held in check the desires of the Department of the Navy to build a larger number of ships. In 1890, in the midst of prosperity, Congress was still acting as a brake on naval appropriations.

CHAPTER II

NOTES

1. Paullin, Paullin's History of Naval Administration, pp. 388-392. Alden, The American Steel Navy, p.13. Herrick, The American Naval Revolution, pp. 25-29. Sprout, The Rise of American Naval Power, pp. 186-189.
2. Herrick, The American Naval Revolution, p. 24.
3. Sprout, The Rise of American Naval Power, p. 186. Herrick, The American Naval Revolution, p. 25. Paullin, Paullin's History of Naval Administration, p. 388.
4. 47th Cong., 1st Sess., House Report No. 653, pp. XXI-XXII, 190-213.
5. U. S. Congressional Record, 47th Cong., 1st Sess., p. 5647. Mr. Harris. "I had prepared three different amendments in the nature of substitutes for the provisions of this bill. One proposed an appropriation of ten million dollars to be spent under the guards and upon the system devised by the Committee on Naval Affairs, set forth in House bill No. 5001 and explained in the accompanying report. I afterward felt that perhaps on an appropriation bill this might be asking too much, and on consulting with the Committee on Appropriations I proposed to offer a substitute appropriation of six ships of war, one ram and several torpedo boats. Upon consultation with a few members of my committee, (for we have not been able to obtain a quorum of late,) and in obedience to the expressed desire of the Committee on Appropriations, I have at last consented to offer no substitute for any portion of this bill, but simply to move to apply to the appropriation of \$1,750,000 the same provision guarding and directing the expenditure which we would have applied to the entire appropriation of \$10,000,000."
6. Navy Department, Annual Report, 1889.
7. "Report of the Policy Board," Proceedings, Vol. XVI (1890), passim.
8. U. S. Congressional Record, 51st Cong., 1st Sess., p. 5281. Mr. Hale. "The bill reported by the Committee on Appropriations is now before the Senate contains

only about one-third of what was recommended by the Naval Committee. Instead of its being the recommendation of the Policy Board, that has been quoted here, or of the Secretary of the Navy, or even of the Committee on Naval Affairs, so conservative is the bill that it covers only about a third of what the Naval Committee reported."

9. Lieutenant E. W. Very, "The Type of (I) Armored Vessel (II) Cruiser Best Suited to the Present Needs of the United States", Proceedings, Vol. VII No. 1 (1881) pp. 54-55, 76-82.
10. Ensign I. W. Chambers, "The Reconstruction and Increase of the Navy", Proceedings, Vol. XI No. 1 (1885).
11. Rear-Admiral Edward Simpson, "The Navy and its Prospects of Rehabilitation", Proceedings Vol. XII No. 36 (1886).
12. The article was also printed in the Naval Institute Proceedings, Rear-Admiral Stephen B. Luce, "Our Future Navy", Vol. XV No. 51 (1889).
13. U.S. Congressional Record 47th Cong., 1st Sess., pp. 5565. Keeping naval appropriations down was the major issue for both Republicans and Democrats. Mr. Hiscock did not think it necessary to increase spending. He simply wanted to spend less on the old wooden ships and more on the construction of new steel cruisers. (p. 5648). Mr. Whitthorne. "The amendment is intended in that way, and as being a safeguard or measure of protection. While I might agree with my friend from Georgia and differ with the Chairman upon the ruling recently had, still, if the text of the bill be in order, necessarily this amendment, which is in the interest of economy and protects the public interest, is unquestionably in order."
14. U.S. Congressional Record 47th Cong., 2nd Sess., p. 1549.
15. Sprout, The Rise of American Naval Power, p. 188.
16. U.S. Congressional Record 47th Cong., 1st Sess., pp. 5527.

16. (Cont.)
5470, 5461. Mr. Blount. "This provision is only a qualification of the other, and the whole provision is a provision which looks to economy and retrenchment in the public service." Mr. Bowman. "Now, in regard to the first point, the abandonment of the policy of repair and the leaving all our present vessels to go to destruction; if I understand the theory of the committee it is that they wish new vessels to be built, but instead of perhaps frightening the country or alarming Congress by bringing in appropriations for the necessary additional amounts, they propose not to raise materially the appropriations, but to leave the navy-yards and the present vessels go to ruin, and to use the money ordinarily necessary for their repair and preservation for the construction of new vessels."
17. Ibid., p. 5470.
18. Ibid., p. 5648.
19. Ibid., p. 5565
20. Ibid., p. 5461.
21. Ibid., p. 5459-5467. Secretary of the Navy, Annual Report, 1882, passim.
22. Ibid., p. 5638.
23. Ibid.
24. Ibid., p. 5647.
25. Ibid., p. 5655.
26. Ibid., p. 5662.
27. Ibid., p. 5527.
28. U. S. Congressional Record, 48th Cong., 1st Sess., p. 1068. Mr. Randall. "I say to-day there is no enemy in sight of this country and I am not willing to give, as I think unnecessarily, if I can help it, to the Navy Department any excessive amounts of money." Mr. Belford was quite unhappy that the Congress would not spend more of the surplus in the treasury on the Navy and blamed it on men usually considered navalists. "Always a surplus,

28. (Cont.)

swelling, rich and blooming, like an English plum-pudding, guarded by the attendant genie of Pennsylvania and New York. The same men who are running this bill on the cheese-paring principle are its guardians, the chairman of the Committee on Appropriations and my friend (Mr. Randall), and the gentlemen to whom he intrusts the bill to manage it and get it through this House, the gentleman from New York (Mr. Hutchins). They have joined their shields together to play before the country the role of dramatic economists."

29. Ibid., p. 1537.

30. U. S. Congressional Record 48th Cong., 2nd Sess., p. 1603. There were other powerful members of the House who went along with Mr. Dorsheimer. Mr. Cannon stated that "The true course is to take the middle ground. "Give us a small number of the very best ships we can get, whether they be steel cruisers or otherwise."

31. J. B. Knight, Navy Yearbook (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1913), p. 779. U. S. Congressional Record 49th Cong., 2nd Sess., p. 2337.

32. U. S. Congressional Record, 49th Cong., 1st Sess., p. 2341. Other members of the House put down the idea that the country had anything to fear from foreign powers. p. 2346. Mr. King. "Mr. Chairman, we are rapidly advancing in new methods of ship building and naval architecture and warfare. We are threatened by foreign foes it is said. Some are undertaking to frighten this committee into extravagant expenditures. Sir, the old ships are going out of fashion; new projectiles are being invented, and new powers of projection are being created. But the appropriation asked for by the gentleman from Texas seems ample for a safe development of a Navy."

33. Ibid., p. 2339.

34. Ibid., p. 5499.

35. Ibid., p. 6727.

36. U. S. Congressional Record, 50th Cong., 1st Sess., p.

36. (Cont.)

3164. Charles Boutelle, one of the most active promoters of the battleships was one of those gentlemen who argued that the ships could be built and the cost could be held down. "I will say, in deference to the views of my friends who have taken special pride in the monitor class of armor-clad vessels that in many of the essential features of the monitor class these vessels preserve the advantage of that type." He went on to say, "their construction will probably occupy from four to five years; so that the appropriations for carrying them forward will be distributed over such a period as to make the annual installments not far from what we have been appropriating hitherto."

37. U.S. Congressional Record, 51st Cong., 1st Sess., p. 3163.

38. Ibid.

39. Ibid., p. 3167.

40. Ibid., p. 3167.

41. Ibid., pp. 3168-3170.

42. Ibid.

53. Ibid., p. 3170. Henry C. Lodge was another member of Congress that supported a moderate Navy. "This bill is merely the continuance of this policy which has stood the test of time and of battle and has never been found at fault. It provides, in a very moderate way, for ships which can fight at sea and which can be concentrated at any point on the coast in defense of the great cities and the great populations of our Atlantic and Pacific seaboard. Your committee has brought in a bill that involves a somewhat larger amount of expenditure in the gross but owing to the longer time of construction only little more in annual outlay, than its predecessors, and which is strictly in the line of policy pursued in the last two Congresses." Mr. Bouetelle made another point during the debate. "This appropriation is a practical business question of insuring our property...Talk about economy, Mr. Chairman! The amount carried in this bill is but a tithe of the premium on insurance upon the defenseless coast of our country today, on thousands of millions of dollars of wealth, to say nothing of the lives." On the Democratic side Mr. Herbert explained his position

43. (Cont.)

"I am not so partial to battle-ships as that I would build any large number of them. In fact should we double the Navy, I should prefer only a few, at most five or six battle-ships, and that we should devote ourselves principally to fast cruisers. I do not advocate an extensive or expensive naval establishment in this country. We have no need to emulate the great naval powers of Europe."

CONCLUSION

This examination of the Congressional response to request for an increased Navy makes clear that Congress continually rejected the proposition that the country needed to develop its Navy along European lines. The Navy had never been large, even in the antebellum days when American merchant ships ranked only second to England in number, so there was no historical precedent for a great Navy. The refusal of Congress, after the Virginus crisis, to increase naval appropriations indicates strongly that Congress believed that the nation was in no immediate danger from foreign aggressors. In short, Congress was never presented with a compelling reason to increase the Navy's size.

Naval historians however have accused Congress and the naval officers of the 1870's of ignoring the needs of the service. At the same time, while they have maintained that the new ships of the 1880's were a step in the right direction, they have still accused Congress of inadequately providing for a Navy. This charge does not consider the realities that the congressmen faced in this period. Moreover there is a tendency on the part of these writers to see the Navy as an end in itself. They are looking back and judging a time in which the American Navy was not equal to European standards as one of drift or indifference. Looking at the problem from purely a military point of view,

they have concluded that the legislators should have been preparing the Navy for the next war. Since they believe that the United States might have become involved in a war with a European power, they make those navies their standard of comparison. It then follows logically that the congressional attitude seems to be indifferent to reality.

However, the reality of the 1870's and 1880's was that the majority of congressmen were not concerned with sea power. This might also be a good indication that their constituents were unlikely to take into account the state of the Navy at election time unless there was some big scandal about the misuse of public funds. Congressmen were more likely to give serious consideration to naval economies and lowering the public burden. Thus when a Republican or a Democrat charged that the Navy needed to be reformed he usually meant that far too much money was being wasted on the Navy. The answer to the problem was more economy. The closer the budget to the daily needs of the Navy, the better its administration would be.

This attitude toward the need for better administration is one that pervaded the 1880's. Naval yards were stripped of excess duties and personnel. The numbers of officers in the service and entering the Naval Academy slowly declined along with the number of enlisted men. Some ranks were dropped from the service while others were thinned out. The new cruisers were built

because there was a genuine expectation that they would be more economical to operate. The size of the Navy generally declined throughout the 1870's and 1880's.

The fact remains that for this twenty year period the Navy held a low position on the national priority list. As far as the size of the Navy was concerned, Congress paid little attention to the suggestions by professional officers, their pro-navy colleagues in Congress, or the Department of the Navy. Congressmen never considered building ships without first being sure the annual appropriation would not be increased excessively. The general legislative trend throughout the period, for both parties, was economy. This was not only in terms of cutting back appropriations but also of holding them down where there was a recommendation to spend more money. Congress displayed a commitment to see that naval expenditures were held down wherever possible.

The argument that Congressional attitude toward the Navy in the 1870's was different from that of the 1880's is not convincing. To be sure there were material changes within the Navy, but to maintain that Congress changed after 1880 is to anticipate the emergence of the large seagoing battle fleets of the early 1900's. The contemporary standard that the majority of the members of Congress used to meet the needs of the Navy was the historical size of the Navy for the previous century. Even

the members who were considered pro-navy continually stated that they did not want to maintain a Navy that would compete in size with European navies. Thus Congress was under only one compulsion and that was to see that the operations of the Navy were carried out as economically as possible.

APPENDIX

ANNUAL NAVAL APPROPRIATIONS

1873.....	\$18,296,733.95
1874.....	\$22,276,257.65
1875.....	\$20,813,946.20
1876.....	\$17,001,006.40
1877.....	\$12,742,155.40
1878.....	\$13,541,024.40
1879.....	\$14,152,603.70
1880.....	\$14,029,986.95
1881.....	\$15,686,671.66
1882.....	\$15,032,046.26
1883.....	\$15,209,100.23
1884.....	\$15,894,434.23
1885.....	\$14,980,472.59
1886.....	\$15,070,837.95
1887.....	\$16,489,907.20
1888.....	\$25,767,348.19
1889.....	\$19,942,835.35
1890.....	\$21,692,510.27

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CAPTAINS AND CONGRESS
A STUDY OF THE ATTITUDES OF
CONGRESS TOWARD ANNUAL NAVAL
APPROPRIATIONS
1870-1890

by

Richard Liles Holzhausen

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AN ABSTRACT OF A MASTER'S THESIS

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requirements for the degree

MASTER OF ARTS

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This study is not an attempt to dispute the fact that the power of the Navy declined between 1865 and 1880. In numbers alone it could not match European Navies. It is the attitude of Congress that this study proposes to look into. Specifically it seeks to answer two questions. Was there a change between the 1870's and the 1880's in Congressional thinking about the Navy as has been suggested? Was congressional policy motivated by the demands of naval officers and the executive branch of government or did it hold to a consistent policy for the twenty year period? It attempts to show that there was a continuing demand for a large Navy by the Department of the Navy and naval officers on one hand while on the other it was opposed by a majority of the members of Congress who were looking for economy in the operation of the Navy which, in the end, was the deciding factor in the determination of naval policy.

The fact remains that for this twenty year period the Navy held a low position on the national priority list. As far as the size of the Navy was concerned, Congress paid little attention to the suggestions by professional officers, their pro-navy colleagues in Congress, or the Department of the Navy. Congressmen never considered building ships without first being sure the annual appropriation would not be increased excessively. The general legislative trend throughout the period, for both parties, was economy. This was not only in terms of cutting back

appropriations but also of holding them down where there was a recommendation to spend more money. Congress displayed a commitment to see that naval expenditures were held down wherever possible.

To be sure there were material changes within the Navy, but to maintain that Congress changed after 1880 is to anticipate the emergence of the large seagoing battle fleets of the early 1900's. The contemporary standard that the majority of the members of Congress used to meet the needs of the Navy was the historical size of the Navy for the previous century. Even the members who were considered pro-navy continually stated that they did not want to maintain a Navy that would compete in size with European Navies. Thus Congress was under only one compulsion and that was to see that the operations of the Navy were carried out as economically as possible.