

September 1, 1914

Opinion of the Country.

We have to make up our minds to use the information which we have, and I have made it clear to the House, I trust, that we are prepared to face the situation—(cheers)—and that should it develop, as it seems probable to develop, we will face it. (Renewed cheers.) We have worked for peace up to the last moment and beyond the last moment. How hard, how persistently and how fearlessly we strove for peace the House will see when the papers are before it. That is over so far as the peace of Europe is concerned. We are now face to face with the situation and all the consequences which may have yet to unfold. We believe we shall have the support of the House at large in proceeding to whatever consequences may be forced upon us by the development of facts or actions. (Cheers.) I believe that the country, so quickly is the situation foreseen upon it, has not had time to realize the situation. It is perhaps still thinking of the quarrel between Austria and Servia. The absurdity of the complication of this matter is that Russia and Germany, we know, are at war; we do not know yet officially that Austria, the ally whom Germany is to support, is yet at war with Russia. We know that a great deal is happening on the French frontier; we don't know that the German Ambassador has left Paris. The situation has developed so rapidly that technically as regards the condition of war it is most difficult to describe what it actually is. I wanted to bring out the essential things which affect our own conduct, and to put them clearly before the House of Commons. If we are forced, and rapidly forced, to take our stand upon these issues, I believe when the country realizes what is at stake, what the real issues are, the magnitude of the impending danger in the West of Europe, then I believe we shall be supported throughout not only by the House of Commons, but by the determination, the resolution, the courage and the endurance of the whole country. (Loud and continued cheers.)

Leader of the Opposition.

Mr. Bonar Law, who was received with general cheers, said: The right hon. gentleman has made an appeal for support, and it is necessary that I should say a word or two, but they shall be very few. I wish to say, in the first place, that I do not believe there is a single member in this House who doubts not only that the right hon. gentleman himself and the Government which he represents has done everything in his power up to the last moment to preserve peace. (Cheers.) And I think, nay, I am sure, that if any other course is taken it is because it is forced upon us, and there is absolutely no alternative. One thing further only I should like to say. The right hon. gentleman spoke of the bright spot in the picture which only a day or two ago was a black spot in the political horizon. Everything that he has said I am sure is true; but I should like to say this further, that there is another bright spot; and that is that every one of his Majesty's dominions beyond the seas will be behind us in whatever action it is necessary to take. (Cheers.) And this only will I say. The Government already knows, but I give them now the assurance on behalf of the party of which I am leader in this House that in whatever steps they think it necessary to take for the honor and the security of this country they can rely upon the unhesitating support of the Opposition. (Loud cheers.)

Support From Ireland.

Mr. Redmond (Nat. Waterford): I hope the House will not think me impertinent to intervene in the de-

bate, but I was moved to do so a great deal by that sentence of the Foreign Secretary in which he said the one bright spot in the situation was the changed feeling in Ireland. Sir, in past times when this Empire has been engaged in these terrible enterprises it is true that it would be almost affectation and folly on my part to deny that the sympathy of Nationalist Ireland, for reasons deep down in the centuries of history, have been estranged from this country. But allow me to say that what has occurred in recent years has altered the situation completely. (Cheers.) I must not touch upon any controversial topic, but this I may be allowed to say; that a wider knowledge of the real facts of Irish history has altered the view of the democracy of this country towards the Irish question, and I honestly believe that the democracy of Ireland will turn with the utmost anxiety and sympathy to this country in every trial and danger with which she is faced. (Loud cheers.)

Labor's Criticism.

Mr. Ramsay Macdonald (Lab. Leicester) said: I would have preferred to remain silent this afternoon, but circumstances do not permit of it. I shall model what I have to say upon the two speeches to which we have just listened. We would vote the Foreign Secretary what money he wants and we would go further, for we would offer him ourselves—if the country was in danger. (Cries of "But it is.") He has not persuaded me that it is, and he has not persuaded my hon. friends with me that it is. I am perfectly certain that when the right hon. gentleman's speech gets into cold print to-morrow he will not persuade a large section of the country. If the nation's honor were in danger we would be with him. There has been no crime committed by statesmen of this character without those statesmen appealing to the nation's honor. We went into the Crimean War because of our honor, we rushed into the South African War because of our honor, and the right hon. gentleman is appealing to us to-day because of our honor. (Loud cheers.) If the right hon. gentleman would come to us and say that a small European nationality like Belgium is in danger—(cries of "It is invaded")—and would assure us that he is going to confine the conflict to that question, then we will support him, but what is the use of talking about going to the aid of Belgium when you are really going into a European war which will not leave the map of Europe as it was before?

The Speaker vacated the Chair at 4.35 and the sitting was suspended.

Belgian Neutrality.

Sir Edward Grey, who was received with loud general cheers, said: I only want to give the House some information which was not in my possession when I made my statement this afternoon. This information I have received since the House rose from the Belgian Legation in London: "Germany yesterday evening at seven o'clock presented a Note proposing to Belgium friendly neutrality on Belgian territory and promising the maintenance and independence of the country on the conclusion of peace, threatening in case of refusal to treat Belgium as an enemy. (Cries of 'Oh, Oh!') A time limit of twelve hours was fixed for the reply, and Belgium has answered that an attack on her neutrality would be a flagrant violation of the rights of nations; to accept Germany's proposal would be to sacrifice the honor of the nation. (Cheers.) Belgium is firmly resolved to repel aggression by every possible means." (Cheers.)