

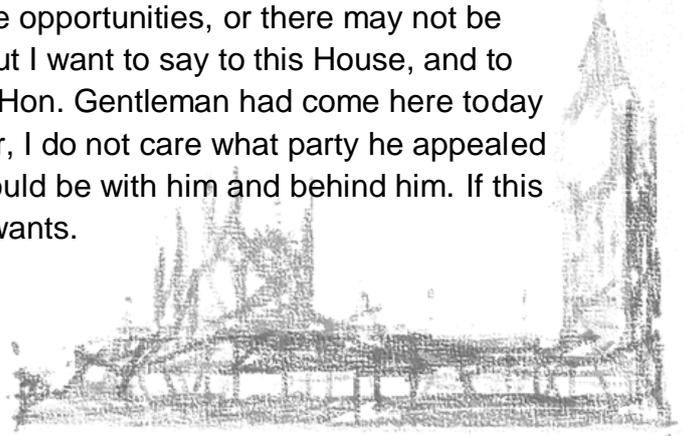
Transcript: Ramsay MacDonald

1. Narrator: The following recording is a re-enactment of a statement made by Ramsay MacDonald on the eve of War, August 3RD 1914. MacDonald, along with Parliament, has just heard an impassioned speech by the Foreign Minister, Sir Edward Grey, advising the House that he believes Britain has no choice but to enter into war.
2. Ramsay MacDonald: I should, had circumstances permitted, have preferred to remain silent this afternoon. But circumstances do not permit of that. I shall model what I have to say on the two speeches we have listened to, and I shall be brief.

The Right Hon. Gentleman, to a House which in a great majority is with him, has delivered a speech the echoes of which will go down in history. The speech has been impressive, but however much we may resist the conclusion to which he has come, we have not been able to resist the moving character of his appeal.

I think he is wrong. I think the Government which he represents and for which he speaks is wrong. I think the verdict of history will be that they are wrong.

We shall see. The effect of the Right Hon. Gentleman's speech in the House is not to be its final effect. There may be opportunities, or there may not be opportunities for us to go into details, but I want to say to this House, and to say it without equivocation, if the Right Hon. Gentleman had come here today and told us that our country is in danger, I do not care what party he appealed to, or to what class he appealed, we would be with him and behind him. If this is so, we will vote him what money he wants.



Yes, and we will go further.

We will offer him ourselves if the country is in danger. But he has not persuaded me that it is. He has not persuaded my hon. friends who cooperate with me that it is, and I am perfectly certain, when his speech gets into cold print tomorrow, he will not persuade a large section of the country.

If the nation's honour were in danger we would be with him. There has been no crime committed by statesmen of this character without those statesmen appealing to their nation's honour.

We fought the Crimean War because of our honour. We rushed to South Africa because of our honour. The Right Hon. Gentleman is appealing to us today because of our honour.

There is a third point. If the Right Hon. Gentleman could come to us and tell us that a small European nationality like Belgium is in danger, and could assure us he is going to confine the conflict to that question, then we would support him.

What is the use of talking about coming to the aid of Belgium, when, as a matter of fact, you are engaging in a whole European War which is not going to leave the map of Europe in the position it is in now.

The Right Hon. Gentleman said nothing about Russia. We want to know about that. We want to try to find out what is going to happen, when it is all over, to the power of Russia in Europe, and we are not going to go blindly into this conflict without having some sort of a rough idea as to what is going to happen.

Finally, so far as France is concerned, we say solemnly and definitely that no such friendship as the Right Hon. Gentleman describes between one nation and another could ever justify one of those nations entering into war on behalf of the other.

If France is really in danger, if, as the result of this, we are going to have the power, civilisation, and genius of France removed from European history, then let him so say. But it is an absolutely impossible conception, which we are talking about to endeavour to justify that which the right hon. Gentleman has foreshadowed.

I not only know but I feel that the feeling of the House is against us. I have been through this before, and 1906 came as part recompense.

It will come again.

We are going to go through it all. We will go through it all.

So far as we are concerned, whatever may happen, whatever may be said about us, whatever attacks may be made upon us, we will take the action that we will take of saying that this country ought to have remained neutral, because in the deepest parts of our hearts we believe that that was right and that that alone was consistent with the honour of the country and the traditions of the party that are now in office.