

Ramsay MacDonald a Very Sick Man – May Be Obligated to Resign Premiership

by Walter G. Fuller, London —(*Special Correspondent of The Eagle*)

London, May 7 — Act II of the great drama — or is it melodrama? — entitled “When Labour Rules,” now playing to a crowded house every night at the Theatre Royal, Westminster, is just beginning. As things are at present, it looks very much as if the lovely heroine, Britannia, is in for a very strenuous and exciting time. When the curtain came down a few days ago at the end of Act I, it seemed very doubtful whether the gallant Scottish knight, Ramsay MacDonald, would be able to rescue the lady from the unhappy situation in which she finds herself. Undoubtedly he means to do his best, but there are difficulties in the way and there are rivals in the field, and if Sir Ramsay doesn’t hurry up and do a great deal better in this second act than he did in the first the audience is likely to get up on its hind legs and bring the play to an end at short notice as far as he is concerned.

Busy Session in Parliament

In other words the parliamentary stage is set for a busy and fateful session, and it is beyond the wit of man to say how it will end and who will be who and what will be what when the House rises in August for the long summer vacation. Till then, day in and day out — except Saturdays and Sundays — those 600-odd honorable gentlemen must sit there and, as the saying goes, “carry on the King’s Government.”

Nobody — least of all Ramsay MacDonald — expects the early breakdown of the present Government. Speaking at a conference of local party leaders in York a few days ago, the Labour premier declared that he saw no reason why Labour should not remain in power for another two or three years. But a day or two later, Lloyd George, addressing his fellow countrymen in Wales, sharply reminded the Premier that, after all, Labour is a minority party in the House and in the nation and that it can remain in office only through the good will of the Liberals.

Lloyd George Defiant

And then the fiery little Welshman added a characteristic gibe. The Labour idea, he said,

seems to be that “we Liberals are going to drag the Labour wagon over the rough roads of parliament for two or three years, goaded along, and at the end of the journey, when there is no further use for us, we are to be slaughtered.”

Such conditions are not good enough, declared Lloyd George: they are not to be endured, and in saying so he knew that he was voicing the sentiments of every member of the Liberty party.

Thus, while Mr Asquith has been resting and recuperating in the south of France, his rival for the Liberal leadership has been making a series of very effective speeches which have greatly heartened the Liberal rank and file and have, incidentally, greatly strengthened the little Welshman’s position as the likeliest candidate for the leadership when Mr Asquith retires.

The question of questions in political circles in England just now is what are to be the relation between the Labour party and the Liberal party in the House and in the country during the coming session. That problem dominates everything else. The Labour Premier said a few days ago that he scorns the idea of a coalition; that any thought of working in alliance with the Liberals was out of the question, and much more to the same effect.

But these lofty sentiments have utterly failed to impress Lloyd George. “No use for coalitions? No patience with alliances?” he exclaims scornfully. “Then will Mr MacDonald tell us what Lords Chelmsford and Lord Parmoor and Lord Haldane are doing in his Cabinet? These gentlemen are not Socialists and Lord Haldane has never ceased to declare himself a Liberal.”

This is a hit — a palpable hit — and one which must have made Mr MacDonald wince. At any rate the canny Scotsman has not said a word in reply to the Welshman so far and my Lords Chelmsford, Parmoor and Haldane are as silent as the grave.

MacDonald Steam Roller in Action

I have been talking this week with a delegate who attended the recent Conference of the

Independent Labour Party at York – an active member of the party who is very much “in the know.” He tells me that there was a small group of delegates, mostly from Scotland and London, which was determined to subject the Labour Premier to a severe heckling at the conclusion of his speech, but by skillful and determined chairmanship and by the bringing into action of a perfectly working steam roller these would-be troublemakers were wiped off the map, and except for one or two interruptions which got very little attention in the press Ramsay MacDonald got away with a speech full of generalities which seems to have pleased nobody.

MacDonald a Very Sick Man

The fact of the matter is MacDonald, despite all reports to the contrary, is a sick man. When Parliament broke up for the Easter holidays ten days ago he was far sicker than is generally known. There were some who were very close to him who began to doubt whether he could hold out for another session and they were considering the advisability of suggesting an early resignation. But it was decided to see what a few days holiday would, so Ramsay MacDonald sent to the King a special appeal, endorsed by his doctors, asking that he might be excused from attending the opening of the Empire Exhibition at Wembley. This release was, of course, granted immediately and as soon as MacDonald was through with his

engagement at York, he hurried off with his eldest daughter for a quiet motoring holiday among the hills and dales of North Wales. Report declares that the rest has done him a lot of good already.

One thing is very certain. The Labour Premier will have to take better care of himself during the coming session if he is to remain as leader of his party during the “two or three years of power” that he believes will be the lot of his government.

All Eyes on Liverpool

And now the news comes that a Conservative MP who managed to beat his Labour opponent at the recent general election by only 139 votes has decided to resign on the grounds of ill health. A bye-election therefore impends which means that the eyes of the country (when they are not following the horse races) will be turned to Liverpool for two or three weeks, and when the election is over and the votes are counted we know what the voters of an important constituency think of the three parties – Tory, Liberal, and Labour – for each is likely to put up a candidate and do its darnedest to get him – or will it be her? – in. So far nobody has been nominated. Names are now being canvassed. Up to the present nobody has said a word about Winston Churchill, but – you never can tell.

17 May 1924