

Britain's Labour Premier, Foe of Secret Diplomacy, Does a Quick 'Bout Face

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

London, June 28 — Ichabod, thy glory hath departed. What are we to say of Ramsay MacDonald now? Here is a man who has been denouncing the evils of "secret diplomacy" up hill and down dale for the past 20 years, and who has made himself an authority on the subject of secret treaties. With a few friends he organized, shortly after the outbreak of the war, an active little group of radicals who called themselves "The Union for Democratic Control." The prime object of this organization was to overthrow secret diplomacy. The chief plank in its program was that all negotiations between governments should be carried on in the broad light of day.

The war, declared Ramsay MacDonald and his friends, had come about largely through the statesmen and diplomats who had plotted and planned the secret treaties behind closed doors. When Labour ruled, said the Union for Democratic Control, such things should not be.

Labour Is In Power

Well, labour is now ruling, and the former leader of the fight against secret diplomacy is now Prime Minister of Britain and Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs. with, presumably, a great deal of power in his hands. Surely never before had a man a better chance to put some of his principles into practice, to say nothing of keeping his promises.

What happens? From the very first, after coming into power, it has been observed that Ramsay MacDonald's replies to his questioners in the House of Commons when foreign affairs are being dealt with are as guarded and cautious as they can well be and tell as little as possible of what is going forward. The Labour Premier's passion for democracy and for "open covenants openly arrived at" seems somehow to have vanished into thin air, and in its place appears a degree of caution and reserve worthy of the crustiest Tory diplomat of the old school.

There has, of course, been much underground criticism of this disparity between the Premier's former ideals and present practices,

but this week the criticism has been expressing itself pretty vigorously in the press and in public meetings.

The reason for this is that with the coming to England of the new French Premier, Herriot, public attention was all keyed up for an object lesson in Labour's new style diplomacy.

Especially hopeful were supporters of the Labour Party. "Now we will show you how these things ought to be done," they said. "No more hole-and-corner meetings and back-stairs stuff. Henceforth with us everything shall be open and above board."

Lid Quickly Closed

But Ramsay MacDonald said otherwise. On the day M. Herriot landed on these shores the British Foreign Office — in other words Ramsay MacDonald — issued a statement declaring that no information whatever would be given to the press or public concerning the conversations between the two Premiers.

The genial Frenchman himself, on landing in England, told the assembled British journalists that Mr MacDonald had insisted on the confidential and personal character of the conversations and that therefore he could tell them nothing.

And so M. Herriot was whisked off to the secluded country house where British Premiers spend their weekends, and beyond a colourless official bulletin to the effect that a pleasant time was being had by all, the British public knows nothing of what has been going at what may well be an epoch-making conference.

This policy of secrecy will lose the Labour Premier some worthwhile friends, and will still further weaken the hold of the Labour Government upon the affections and imagination of the British people, who in the main are genuinely sick of the old school diplomat and all his mystery and mummery, red tape and gold lace.

6 July 1924