



## 37 Days: Countdown to World War One

### 4 August: Britain sends an ultimatum to Germany

David Lloyd-George – Chancellor of the Exchequer:

I do not think that we are prepared for war. The Governor of the Bank of England assures me that we will be very quickly bankrupt as a nation if we take up arms against Germany. And although he exaggerates somewhat he is undoubtedly correct in saying that as a mercantile nation we shall suffer more than most because of the agonies to international trade. I believe also there are some people in this country, possibly even around this table, who will have been delighted by the Kaiser's decision to violate Belgian sovereignty this morning for the simple reason that it coats their own selfish enthusiasm for war with a moral gloss.

However, I differ from my now departed colleagues. I am genuinely frightened by the prospect of a rampant Germany sitting in Brussels and Paris and on the Channel coast. Do I care for Belgium? I fear for her certainly. She is a small nation like my own and she has rights which cannot be eradicated just because the eradicator is strong. Do I care for the principle that international law ought to mean something? Yes I do. There ought to be more of it not less. The German invasion of Belgium has changed everything for me. The only sensible thing now is for this government to send an ultimatum to the aggressors in Berlin.

HH Asquith – Prime Minister:

Is there anyone who disagrees with that last sentence? There will be no opposition from the Conservatives or the er Irish Nationalists. I very much hope there will be no opposition from our own people.

Sir Edward Grey – Foreign Secretary:

Just one thing Prime Minister. Do you not think we ought to consult the Dominion governments before we issue an ultimatum – the Australians and the Canadians will have their own thoughts on this I am quite certain.

Asquith:

There is no constitutional need. They will see it as we see it.

Grey

You did the right thing.

Lloyd-George:

None of us will survive this war – politically I mean.

Narrator (Foreign Office clerk):

Within the hour the British government had drafted its ultimatum to the Kaiser demanding the complete withdrawal of all German troops from Belgium by midnight.