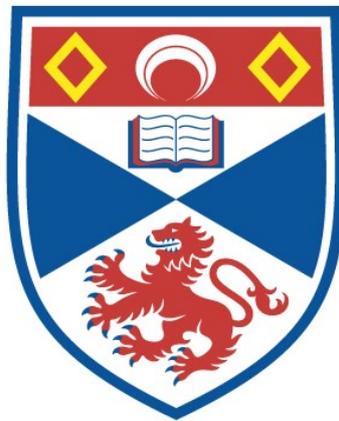


**FLEET STREET'S DILEMMA :  
THE BRITISH PRESS AND THE SOVIET UNION,  
1933-1941**

Steffanie Jennifer Nanson

A Thesis Submitted for the Degree of PhD  
at the  
University of St Andrews



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**Fleet Street's Dilemma:  
The British Press and the Soviet Union,  
1933-1941**

A thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy to  
the University of St. Andrews

by

Steffanie Jennifer Nanson, M.A.

December 1996



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## Abstract

British press opinion concerning the Soviet Union in the 1930s contributes to an understanding of the failed cooperation, prior to 1941, between the British and Soviet Governments.

During the trial of six British engineers in Moscow in 1933, the conservative press jingoistically responded by demanding stringent economic action against the Soviet Union and possibly severing diplomatic cooperation. The liberal and labour press expected relations to improve to prevent similar trials of Britons in the future.

Despite the strain in relations and ideological differences, between 1934 and 1935, Britain and the USSR worked for collective security. The quality conservative press was willing to support a closer relationship, though popular conservative newspapers remained anti-Soviet. The liberal and labour press, though hoping for more, expressed relief that Britain was improving relations with the Soviet Union.

The Spanish Civil War led the conservative press to resume its non-collective beliefs and to become ideologically critical of the Soviet Union. The provincial conservative newspapers were the exceptions. Liberal and labour papers were annoyed with the British refusal to cooperate with the USSR over Spain and became disappointed by the Government's decision to support appeasement rather than collective action.

While the British Government reviewed the benefits of collective security, the Moscow show trials damaged Britain's belief in the stability of the USSR. All papers realised there was something seriously wrong in the Soviet Union. The conservative press advocated avoiding cooperation with a country weakened by purging. The liberal and labour press, though concerned about the image of the USSR, realised that Britain required an East European ally and called for an improvement of existing relations.

In 1939 nearly every newspaper demanded the British Government form an alliance with the USSR against Hitler's aggression and criticised both governments for wasting time. Condemnation of the Soviet Union's signing of the Nazi-Soviet pact and

role in the partition of Poland was relatively limited as hope remained that Britain and the USSR would collaborate to defeat Hitler.

However, the Winter War strained these hopes and led to intense press condemnation of the Soviet attack on Finland. Nevertheless, in July 1940 newspapers became interested in the emerging conflict of interests between Germany and the USSR. Despite criticism of Soviet expansion in Eastern Europe, the press accepted that Britain's security depended on the Soviet Union. All newspapers welcomed the alliance in 1941 and ignored ideological issues.

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I would like to thank all my friends, but mainly Dr. James Bothwell for listening to my thoughts during all those coffee breaks in the Scriptorium.

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## Preface

This thesis investigates British press attitudes towards the fluctuating relationship between Britain and the Soviet Union from 1933 to 1941. Fleet Street's opinions concerning the Soviet Union are important as newspapers were the primary source of information and thus major opinion developers for the British public in the 1930s. The Political and Economic Planning Report on the British Press, conducted in 1938, concluded that often the views adopted by the people reflected the papers which they read. Therefore, the newspapers and journals examined in this work were organised in relation to their political outlook - conservative, liberal, or labour. In the 1930s, the conservative dailies were *The Times*, the *Daily Telegraph*, the *Daily Express*, and the *Daily Mail*. Two conservative provincial dailies, the *Yorkshire Post* and the *Scotsman*, were examined because they had a significant local readership and offered some pronounced views on the Soviet Union. The liberal dailies consulted were the *News Chronicle* and the *Manchester Guardian*, the latter, although provincial, enjoyed an international reputation similar to *The Times*. The *Daily Herald* represented the labour daily press. Of the Sunday newspapers, the *Observer* and the *Sunday Times*, both conservative in political outlook, were consulted. Two evening papers, also conservative, the *Evening Standard* and the *Evening News*, were examined, though often their views reflected the opinions of their respective parent dailies, the *Daily Express* and the *Daily Mail*. Three weekly political journals, the *New Statesman and Nation*, the *Spectator* and the *Economist*, the first labour and the second two liberal in outlook, were examined. Britain's only daily communist newspaper, the *Daily Worker*, was also consulted for its views which were consistently pro-Soviet. Other journals, the *Illustrated London News*, *Contemporary Review*, and *Foreign Affairs*, were also referred to for the very occasional article.

This is not a complete study of newspapers or journals but it is a representative cross section of the British press in the 1930s. Although there appears to be an overwhelming representation of the conservative press, this reflects the then existing

situation as the majority of newspapers published in the 1930s were conservative in outlook. Furthermore, the *Daily Herald* commanded the market for the labour reader. Even though newspapers can be conveniently divided into political outlooks, it did not, however, follow that the opinions of an individual newspaper were consistently conservative, liberal or labour in perspective. Thus the explanation of anomalies in press attitudes features as significantly as does the consistency of a newspaper's views. This is in fact one of the most fascinating issues, that the British press often did not know how to respond to the Soviet Union's people, Government, politics, social and work ethics. Thus Fleet Street's dilemma makes this study fundamental to explaining why there was such delay in the cooperation between Britain and the Soviet Union not only prior to the Second World War, but also in the first two years of the fighting.

The issues affecting British-Soviet relations in the critical years before the Second World War received frequent coverage and debate by the British press. From 1933, the argument as to whether or not the British Government should strive for closer cooperation with the Soviet Union assumed greater attention in the British press. Such discussions had existed prior to 1933, but in that year circumstances heralded a change in the foreign policies of all major European countries, the most significant event being the coming to power of Hitler's National Socialists in Germany. By the time the Germans withdrew from the Disarmament Conference and the League of Nations in October 1933, Europe's statesmen were beginning to respond to Hitler's activity.

The British press only gradually recommended a closer relationship between Britain and the Soviet Union. Conservative newspapers reflected, or at the least concurred in point of view with, the British Government's fear of and hesitancy in seeking a more regular association with the Soviet Union. The liberal and labour press, being less ideologically motivated against the Soviet Union, advocated closer cooperation, initially in the form of economic agreements but as the 1930s progressed, these papers favoured rapid development in political relations.

Discussion by Fleet Street concerning the possibility of improved British-Soviet relations was mixed and inconsistent in the 1930s. Various circumstances provided

strong arguments in the press as to why the Soviet Union was an unsuitable and unnecessary political ally or commercial partner for Britain. One such event was the trial in Moscow of six British engineers of the Metropolitan-Vickers Company in 1933. As a consequence, trade and diplomatic relations between the two countries suffered. Soviet domestic issues also led to the British press questioning the Soviet Government's ability to help Britain against aggression. The most prominent Soviet internal issue for Fleet Street became the purges and show trials held between 1935 and 1938. The trials exhibited an apparent lack of stability as either the Soviet Government was purging innocent people whose views opposed Stalin's or there was a large subversive element threatening to destroy the USSR. Either option led the British press to see the Soviet Union as a potentially weak ally.

Events occurring outside the Soviet Union also contributed to the discussion by British newspapers on the relationship between Britain and the USSR. As Hitler's ambitions became more obvious, Fleet Street increasingly debated the assets and drawbacks of collective security. Though the majority of British newspapers recognised the benefits of collective action, some found it difficult to support British-Soviet cooperation because the Soviet Union was communist and authoritarian. However, some events, such as Eden's visit to Moscow or the Soviet Union becoming a member of the League of Nations, were markedly discussed by the press for their merit in offering peace and trust in Europe and advancing closer, possibly reliable British-Soviet cooperation. Other issues, such as the Spanish Civil War, added to the debate on the potential benefits of collective security against the British Government's growing preference for "appeasement" in resolving Europe's crises. For some conservative politicians and newspapers, appeasement had the added benefit of excluding the Soviet Union from participating on major decisions concerning Europe, such as those made at the Munich Conference.

It was not until the summer of 1939 that the majority of the British press acknowledged that the Soviet Union could help Britain avert a war. Although there were sceptics who continued to suggest the Soviet Union was weak following the vast purging

of its political and military leadership, most newspapers admitted that Britain could not deter Hitler alone, nor could the British fight Germany effectively without Soviet assistance in Eastern Europe. Even when the Soviet Government formed an agreement with Germany in August 1939, Fleet Street did not abandon its hope that some form of cooperation between Britain and the Soviet Union could exist. Nevertheless, the Winter War which began in December, severely strained the possibility of better relations. Between December 1939 and the spring of 1941, the British press was uncertain of the direction in which the Soviet-German partnership was moving. Furthermore, newspapers increasingly wondered if it was possible for Britain to work with the Soviet Union following the latter's expansionist moves in Eastern Europe throughout 1940.

Due to the time and space limitations of a Ph.D. thesis, it was not possible to discuss more than a small selection of events which affected British-Soviet relations in the 1930s and the early years of the Second World War. Thus several items reported by the British press have not been included in great detail. The Five Year Plans, the religious atrocities, the famine, the Stalin Constitution and the Soviet elections of 1937 have only been mentioned in passing. Similarly, British domestic issues, such as the Abdication of Edward VII in December 1936, distracted British press attention from foreign affairs. Other important topics have not been examined, such as the Italian occupation of Abyssinia and the re-militarisation of the Rhineland, simply because the British press made little or no reference to the Soviet Union in connection with these events. Likewise, discussion on the Spanish Civil War does not include the later years of the conflict, firstly, because the war itself faded from international importance in the British press as other events in Europe superseded it and, secondly, because the Soviet Union at the same time reduced its involvement and concern for Spain.

The years between 1933 and 1941 saw a largely varied response in Britain to the Soviet Union. The British Government, the people, and Fleet Street were all attempting to understand a country ideologically very different from their own. The fact that some papers were able to overlook these ideological distinctions and to recognise that the Soviet Government wanted peace as much as Britain meant the Soviet Union received

regular, objective press coverage. However, as a result of the more critical judgement of other newspapers, suspicion of the Soviet Union remained to hinder relations even though both countries desired international stability. In years of calm, improved friendship may not have been so necessary, but in the last five years of peace and the first two years of war, cooperation was vital. Thus the British press, though attempting to inform and direct public opinion concerning international affairs, also reflected the mood of the country and the Government, and provides a new assessment of why Britain and the Soviet Union failed to cooperate before June 1941, even in the face of Nazi aggression.

## Chapter 1

### Introduction

The main source of information on foreign issues in the 1930s was the newspaper, with radio and newsreel only emerging as important methods of communication. Statistics showed that Britain was a nation of newspaper readers - between 1930 and 1936 the estimated average circulation of all daily newspapers rose by around 1.44 million to 9.05<sup>1</sup> and in 1939 it was 10.6 million.<sup>2</sup> "No other people on earth are such avid readers of newspapers as the British".<sup>3</sup> Thus Fleet Street's reaction to the relationship between the Soviet Union and Britain had a direct bearing on the way the public viewed the USSR in such a crucial period. Furthermore, because Ministers were accountable to the public who elected them, the British Government had to heed press opinion as it was the medium which most easily informed and swayed public opinion.

However, at the same time, the British Government developed methods for manipulating the press. The Foreign Office created the News Department which released information to the Diplomatic Correspondents and Downing Street formed a rival Press Office to provide its own version of news for the media. When Chamberlain became Prime Minister in 1937, he exceptionally manipulated the British press into supporting his policies without question.<sup>4</sup> Though the press was virtually subservient to Chamberlain on issues relating to Germany and Italy, its opinion on the Soviet Union was not nearly as regimented by the British Government and newspapers, therefore, had relatively greater freedom in reporting on Soviet matters. There were occasions when the Government attempted to influence news concerning the Soviet Union, most notably during the Metropolitan-Vickers trial in 1933. However, Fleet Street was generally left to

<sup>1</sup> *Political and Economic Planning Report on the British Press*, for 1938, p. 2. The source, presumably in error, gives the figure of 19.05 million.

<sup>2</sup> Curran and Seaton, *Power without Responsibility*, states that between 1920 and 1939, the combined circulation of the national daily rose from 5.4 to 10.6 million. p. 51.

<sup>3</sup> Francis Williams, *Dangerous Estate*, p. 1.

<sup>4</sup> More detail will be given later in this chapter concerning the British Government's efforts to control the British press.

form its own opinions concerning the Soviet Union since British foreign policy was frequently unresponsive towards Moscow. That was especially the situation when Chamberlain became Prime Minister in 1937 as his mistrust of the communists led to an indifferent attitude concerning press criticism or support for the Soviet Government. Thus when compared to Fleet Street's views towards Germany or Italy in the 1930s, British press opinion concerning the Soviet Union showed more variety of expression in the same years.

Communism, especially in the Soviet Union, held a fascination in the British press similar to that felt for Fascist Italy and Nazi Germany. When the Bolsheviks assumed control of Russia in 1917, few in Fleet Street believed Communism could survive. With Lenin's death in 1924, newspapers expressed concern as to who the new leader would be and were generally relieved that Stalin, the proponent of "socialism in one country", had succeeded over the far more revolutionary Trotsky and Zinoviev.<sup>5</sup> While Stalin was cementing his authority in the Soviet Union, Britain's domestic affairs were hit by economic depression due to the Wall Street Crash, leading to rising unemployment and falling standards-of-living. Britain required new outlets for trade and the Soviet Union provided a relatively untapped market in the 1930s. Furthermore, the USSR was enjoying a degree of economic success as a result of the Five Year Plans which had industrialised the country to a significant extent. Thus the British press, increasingly recognising the potential trade opportunities with the Soviet Union, devoted more coverage designed to inform the British public of the internal nature of the USSR. At the same time, Fleet Street recognised that European stability was being affected by the rise of National Socialism in Germany and that the Soviet Union could have a potential impact on Europe's affairs as the antithesis of Nazi Germany.

The "popular" conservative press,<sup>6</sup> consisting of the *Daily Express*, the *Daily Mail*, the *Evening Standard*, and the *Evening News*, generally refused to admit there

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<sup>5</sup> For information concerning members of the Soviet Government, see chapter 5.

<sup>6</sup> The information in this paragraph concerning typology comes primarily from the *Political and Economic Planning Report on the British Press*, for 1938. Also, in this thesis, popular conservative press is used interchangeably with Beaverbrook and Rothermere press, representing the proprietors of the newspapers which are used.

were any benefits for Britain through increased cooperation, economically or diplomatically, with the Soviet Union. Preferring a more insular, Empire approach in trade, these newspapers saw little of advantage in what the Soviet Union offered for not only Britain but also for Europe. The liberal press - comprising the *Manchester Guardian*, the *News Chronicle*, the *Economist*, and the *Spectator* - with the labour press - the *Daily Herald* and the *New Statesman and Nation* - recognised the benefits of cooperation with the Soviet Union and thus supported closer British-Soviet relations. The newspapers, as a group, with the most varied attitudes towards the USSR belonged to the "quality" conservative press, which encompassed *The Times*, the *Daily Telegraph*, the *Sunday Times*, the *Observer*, the *Scotsman*, and the *Yorkshire Post*. Although the London based newspapers retained a suspicion of Soviet intentions, these papers normally gave reasonable consideration to issues concerning the Soviet Union. The provincial quality newspapers regularly presented a more balanced view of the USSR and often argued in favour of closer British-Soviet relations.

Though explained in terms of political outlook, press attitudes towards the USSR were rarely consistently liberal, labour or conservative since the Soviet Union's involvement in Europe was perceived to have varying degrees of significance. It became increasingly rare for Fleet Street to ignore any internal or external affair involving the Soviet Union as the 1930s progressed and the fate of Europe moved rapidly towards war. In this period, the press increasingly debated the value of the Soviet Union as an ally for Britain.

The Soviet Union became a contentious issue between the Left and Right in Britain. The Left, generally represented by the labour and liberal press, welcomed a new state based on an impressive social experiment, though the unpleasant and sinister nature of the techniques used were often criticised by these papers. Although support for the Soviet Union was sometimes reserved, the liberal and labour press often expressed views which were not necessarily of a pro-Soviet outlook but more opposed to the anti-Soviet attitudes of the Right. In contrast, the conservative press criticised the communist social experiment though with varying degrees of dislike and distrust for the Soviet Union. The

*Daily Mail* and the *Observer* were exceedingly anti-Soviet. Rothermere, the proprietor of the *Daily Mail*, was alleged to have been almost unstable on the issue of communism and believed Hitler would save Europe from the threat in the East.<sup>7</sup> The other conservative newspapers took a more objective view, though those newspapers were not apparently open-minded on issues concerning the Soviet Union.

## The British Press<sup>8</sup>

### The Quality Conservative Press

#### *The Times*

*The Times* was one of the oldest British newspapers, founded in 1788. During the 1930s, the chief proprietors were Major the Hon. J. J. Astor, MP and Mr. John Walter. The paper's editor from 1923 to 1941 was Geoffrey Dawson and the assistant editor was Robert Barrington-Ward whose primary interest was in foreign affairs. The political outlook of *The Times* was "independent" Conservative though it usually supported the National Government. In 1930, the paper's circulation was 187,000 and rose to 204,491 in 1939, with a readership almost exclusively belonging to the upper and middle classes as it cost 2d.

Despite its price, heavy layout and limited readership, *The Times* was considered to be the most prestigious British newspaper of the 1930s and had the reputation, both abroad and domestically, for being the mouthpiece of the British Government. This was due to the views of the paper's editor, which were very similar to those of the British Government. Dawson had near total control over the policy of the paper in the 1930s, was an intimate friend of both Halifax and Chamberlain, and was very supportive of the policy of appeasement. This did not mean *The Times* excessively admired Germany,

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<sup>7</sup> F. R. Gannon, *The British Press and Germany*, pp. 24 and 25-26.

<sup>8</sup> This section is heavily dependent on the *Political and Economic Planning Report on the British Press*, for 1938; Lord Camrose, *Newspapers and Their Controllers*; and Gannon, *The British Press and Germany, 1936-1939*. Chapter 2, "The British Press: 1936-1939", pp. 32-88.

though there was a bias in favour of placating Hitler because the paper believed Britain needed to cooperate with the Germans for peace in Europe.

In contrast, the opinions of *The Times* during the 1930s showed no great concern with the Soviet Union. The paper supported Stalin's success as it signalled the end of expansion and an increasing concern with domestic policy.<sup>9</sup> Though allegedly not anti-communist, *The Times* believed agreement with the Soviet Union was impossible for Britain while Comintern activity reportedly continued.<sup>10</sup> This was a main reason why the paper did not advocate or support attempts at greater British-Soviet cooperation. Barrington Ward asked of a friend in February 1938, "Are we to commit ourselves to an ideological campaign in the untrustworthy and compromising company of Stalin?". Thus he suggested that association with the Soviet Union ought to be kept to the minimum amount necessary to restrain German aggression.<sup>11</sup>

In addition, *The Times* was repeatedly criticised for not having a resident correspondent in Moscow. In 1932, A. L. Kennedy, a leader writer and special correspondent from 1911 to 1942 specialising in foreign affairs, explained the paper's position to the Foreign Office - a correspondent would only be sent to Moscow when the journalist was free to report what he liked and in his own style.<sup>12</sup> Thus, in the 1930s, the nearest correspondent for *The Times* was based in Riga, Latvia. However, Robert Urch shrewdly served *The Times* as he read most Soviet newspapers and was, therefore, able to send uncensored information. The left press, especially the *News Chronicle*, the *New Statesman and Nation*, and the *Spectator*, accused Urch of being biased in his dispatches as he sent only what the Soviet press printed. However, contrary to the argument, Urch actually reported official news and could comment freely in any manner he wanted, without fear of censorship or expulsion.<sup>13</sup> Unlike the popular conservative press which also had no resident correspondents in Moscow, Urch's reports were usually not

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<sup>9</sup> Alan Foster, "The Times and Appeasement", p. 444.

<sup>10</sup> *The History of The Times*, Vol. IV, pp. 910-911.

<sup>11</sup> Gannon, p. 27.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid*, p. 23.

<sup>13</sup> *The History of The Times*, Vol IV, pp. 911-912. See the *Spectator*, 13 February 1934. The *New Statesman and Nation*, 11 May 1935.

distorted by an anti-Soviet prejudice. Urch moved from Riga to Warsaw in November 1938 and eventually reported the Winter War from Finland. James Holburn became the first permanent correspondent in Moscow for *The Times* in the summer of 1939. However, from June 1941, the Russian war effort was covered by Ralph Parker who ultimately became very pro-Soviet in his views.<sup>14</sup>

### *Daily Telegraph*

In 1927, the *Daily Telegraph* was purchased by Lords Camrose, Kemsley, and Iiffe from Lord Burnham whose family had founded the paper in 1855. The interests of the three men were split in January 1937; Camrose became the proprietor of the *Daily Telegraph* and bought the *Morning Post* in October 1937. During the 1930s, the *Daily Telegraph* was the largest selling quality daily - in 1930, the paper's circulation was 222,000,<sup>15</sup> and had risen substantially by 1939 to 763,557. One reason for the increased circulation was the cheap price for a quality paper, 1d, which was read predominantly by the upper and middle classes.

Though Camrose acted as editor-in-chief, the *Daily Telegraph's* editor was Arthur E. Watson. Unlike *The Times*, the *Daily Telegraph* had a resident correspondent in Moscow, A. T. Cholerton. Although the political outlook of the *Daily Telegraph* was conservative and fully supported the National Government, the paper had reservations on the policy of appeasement. These, however, were minimally expressed because Camrose felt there was no reasonable alternative to Chamberlain's policies. Though not anti-communist, the paper's editor and proprietor did not expect the British Government to look towards the Soviet Union for an alternative policy. However, in the summer of 1939, the *Daily Telegraph* moved further away from the Government over Germany and Camrose's support for Chamberlain declined while backing for the Soviet Union noticeably improved.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> *The History of The Times*, Vol. V, pp. 84-85.

<sup>15</sup> This figure includes the circulation of the *Morning Post*.

<sup>16</sup> Duff Hart-Davis, *The House the Berry's Built*, pp. 95 and 118.

## The Conservative Provincial Press

### *Yorkshire Post*

There were several important provincial newspapers of which the *Yorkshire Post*, founded in 1754, was the leading conservative daily. In the 1930s, it belonged to the Yorkshire Conservative Newspaper Company with the Hon. Rupert Beckett as Chairman. Arthur Mann was the editor from 1919-1939 and in that time he revised the *Yorkshire Post's* fortunes primarily by keeping the paper and his views independent of the British Government's influence. Though loyal to a conservative philosophy, the editor claimed he was patriotic to his country rather than the Government.<sup>17</sup> Thus Mann strongly opposed appeasement and during the Munich Crisis, the *Yorkshire Post* was the only paper to take a strongly anti-Chamberlain line despite the views of the paper's shareholders. The paper often differed from the rest of the conservative press in advocating greater friendship between Britain and the Soviet Union through collective security and the League of Nations. In November 1939, the *Yorkshire Post* and the *Leeds Mercury* amalgamated in recognition that the London daily press was reaching more people in the North and therefore two dailies printed in Leeds were unprofitable.<sup>18</sup> At the same time, Mann retired as editor and was replaced by William Linton Andrews.

### *Scotsman*

In Scotland, the *Scotsman*, which became a daily in 1855, was considered to be the national newspaper even though the *Glasgow Herald* had a larger circulation.<sup>19</sup> The *Scotsman* was edited and owned by the Findlay and Law families and in the 1930s, the paper's readership numbered 60,000. To provide foreign news coverage, the *Scotsman* often used the same correspondents as the *Morning Post*. Like the *Yorkshire Post*, the Edinburgh based newspaper frequently differed from the London conservative press in its attitudes towards appeasement and the advantages of the Soviet Union's involvement in Europe as a means of securing peace. It appeared that the further a daily was from

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<sup>17</sup> Andrews and Taylor, *Lords and Labourers of the Press*, p. 126.

<sup>18</sup> Gibb and Beckwith, *The Yorkshire Post*, p. 90.

<sup>19</sup> Camrose, p. 137.

London, the less control the British Government could exert on the provincial press despite the conservative outlook of these papers.

### The Conservative Sunday Press

#### *Observer*

The *Observer* was another venerable newspaper, established in 1791. It was bought by Lord Northcliffe in 1905 but sold to Lord Astor in 1911. J. L. Garvin was the editor from 1908 to 1942 and it was he who made the paper famous to the extent that many people equated the *Observer* with Garvin.<sup>20</sup> In the 1930s, Garvin had near total control of the paper and thus editorial policy reflected his own views. To Garvin, nazis and communists were equally hateful and though he believed Hitler would begin a war, he did not trust the Soviet Government enough to treat them as allies.<sup>21</sup> In addition, Garvin did not want another war for Russian or East European interests and thus he supported the policy of appeasement.<sup>22</sup> In 1932, the *Observer's* readership numbered 201,000 and, despite Garvin's influence, the newspaper's circulation had only marginally increased to 214,000 in 1937. This was not enough to win the circulation war with its main quality Sunday competitor, the *Sunday Times*.

#### *Sunday Times*

The *Sunday Times* was founded in 1822 and bought by Lords Camrose, Kemsley, and Iliffe in 1915 when the paper's circulation was only 50,000. Camrose was the editor for twenty-two years but when the partnership split in 1937, Kemsley retained control of the *Sunday Times*. The paper's circulation grew rapidly - in 1932, its readership numbered 187,000 but had risen to 270,000 by 1937, more than sufficient to overtake its rival, the *Observer*. W. W. Hadley became the editor of the *Sunday Times* in 1937, though the major spokesman on foreign affairs, until 1940, was Herbert Sidebotham, also known as "Scrutator".

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid, p. 87.

<sup>21</sup> David Ayerst, *Garvin of the Observer*, p. 263.

<sup>22</sup> Gannon, p. 26.

Lord Kemsley strongly believed in the desirability of a British-German rapprochement and therefore used his newspapers to smooth the path for such an object, though not all his staff was as convinced by the policy of appeasement.<sup>23</sup> Kemsley believed communism was the real enemy and even hoped that Hitler could be encouraged to turn his aggression towards the Soviet Union. Nevertheless, Alexander Werth, who also worked for the *Manchester Guardian* as a correspondent in Europe, was allowed to argue against Kemsley's policy as Werth favoured an alliance with the Soviet Union. Following the German invasion in 1941, Werth was sent to Moscow as correspondent for both the *Sunday Times* and the B.B.C.<sup>24</sup>

### The Popular Conservative Press

#### *Daily Mail* and *Evening News*

The *Daily Mail* was founded in 1896 by Alfred Harmsworth, later Lord Northcliffe. The paper was prosperous from the beginning and became the most profitable paper in Britain<sup>25</sup> as well as being the first British newspaper to reach a million in circulation. On Northcliffe's death in 1922, his brother, Lord Rothermere, assumed control until 1937, at which time his son, the Hon. Esmond Harmsworth, became the proprietor. In 1930, the circulation of the *Daily Mail* was 1,845,000 but had fallen to 1,580,000 in 1937, thus losing the circulation battle with its rivals the *Daily Express* and the *Daily Herald*. The *Daily Mail's* appeal was popular and its political outlook was "independent" right-wing conservative. It was the only popular daily to have a predominantly upper and middle class readership, though the average wage earner also read the paper.

During the 1930s, several editors worked on the *Daily Mail* though Rothermere's views were dominant in editorial policy.<sup>26</sup> The paper frequently carried interviews with continental statesmen, especially the dictators. Thus in the 1930s, the *Daily Mail*

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<sup>23</sup> Hobson, Knightley, and Russell, *The Pearl of Days*, p. 207.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid, pp. 210 and 219.

<sup>25</sup> Camrose, p. 50.

<sup>26</sup> Editors in the 1930s were: W. L. Warden, 1931-1935; A. L. Cranfield, 1936-1938; and R. J. Prew, 1939-1944.

admired Nazi Germany and Fascist Italy's internal accomplishments though the paper expressed disgust with nazi "excesses" and brutality. One of Rothermere's greatest fears was a communist invasion of Britain. Though both Lords Beaverbrook and Rothermere opposed collective security, Beaverbrook did so because he regretted increasing British commitments while Rothermere unreasonably feared proposals introduced by or involving communists.<sup>27</sup>

The *Daily Mail* was associated with the *Evening News* which was established in 1881 and bought in 1894 by Northcliffe. The editor from 1924-1944 was F.L. Fitzhugh. In the 1930s, under Rothermere, the paper had the largest sale of any evening paper in the world which was attributed to the paper's popular following.<sup>28</sup>

#### *Daily Express and Evening Standard*

The *Daily Express* was founded in 1900 by Arthur Pearson as a rival to the *Daily Mail* and was acquired in 1915 by Sir Max Aitken, MP who later became Lord Beaverbrook. By the end of the First World War, Beaverbrook had taken vigorous control of the paper and turned a losing property into a profitable mass circulation paper. The success of the *Daily Express* was due to Beaverbrook's inspiration and drive though Arthur Christiansen was one of the most competent editors of Fleet Street. The paper's appeal was popular and its political outlook was "independent" conservative, opposing collective security and favouring high tariffs. The paper's readership came from all income groups but particularly from the average wage earner. In 1930, the *Daily Express's* circulation was 1,693,000, topped 2,000,000 sales in 1936, and had risen to 2,329,000 by 1937 thus making it the largest circulated newspaper of any daily in Britain. Politically, the *Daily Express* was accused of not measuring up to its huge daily sales but its appeal to the broad public remained a testament to the paper's success.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Alan Foster, "Beaverbrook and Appeasement", p. 16. Stephen Koss, *The Rise and Fall of the Political Press in Britain*, Vol. II, p. 547. Beaverbrook was the proprietor of the Express chain of newspapers.

<sup>28</sup> Camrose, p. 54.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid, pp. 40-41.

Optimism was intentionally a keynote of the *Daily Express*.<sup>30</sup> Due to Beaverbrook's strong belief in isolationism, press coverage of Europe's affairs was kept to a minimum, apart from the Spanish Civil War. Furthermore, Beaverbrook was devoted to the Empire and hoped to increase ties with the United States. Though understanding France's fears of Germany, the proprietor of the *Daily Express* did not want Britain involved in Europe and advocated that Germany be left alone despite the unpleasant aspects of Hitler's regime. Beaverbrook's hatred of the Locarno Treaties and the League of Nations was legendary as they risked dragging Britain into the quarrels of the wider world and increasing British commitments. For example, on 27 October 1934, the headlines of the *Daily Express* read "When Will There Be Another War?" and under it was listed the three things which Beaverbrook believed would cause that war: (1) Balance of Power; (2) Alliances; (3) the League of Nations.<sup>31</sup>

Like many western newspapers, the *Daily Express* welcomed Stalin's triumph in the struggle for power in the Kremlin because the Soviet Union finally appeared to have a leader devoted to domestic needs rather than international revolution.<sup>32</sup> Though opposed to the Soviet Government's plans for Britain in collective security issues, the *Daily Express* was not as hostile towards the Soviet Union as its rival, the *Daily Mail*. Though generally ignoring the Soviet Union, during the show trials and the Spanish Civil War the paper demonstrated a strong anti-Red bias. However, in 1939, Beaverbrook's newspapers led the calls for cooperation between Britain and the Soviet Union. Furthermore, during his visit to Moscow in September 1941 as Minister of Supply, Beaverbrook became so impressed with Stalin that his papers in the 1940s appeased the Soviet Union's aims in Eastern Europe.<sup>33</sup>

Beaverbrook also owned several other papers including the *Evening Standard* which he acquired in 1923. There were several notable editors of the paper in the 1930s: Percy Cudlipp, 1933-1938; R. J. T. Thompson in 1938; and Frank Owen, 1939-1942.

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<sup>30</sup> R. Allen, *The Voice of Britain*, p. 64.

<sup>31</sup> Allen, p. 56 and Foster, "Beaverbrook and Appeasement", p. 9.

<sup>32</sup> Foster, "Beaverbrook and Appeasement", p. 13.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 17-18 and 7.

The newspaper was considered to be more of a quality evening paper than its rival, the *Evening News*. Thus, due to its limited class appeal, the *Evening Standard's* circulation was lower than that of the *Evening News*.<sup>34</sup> However, the paper was noted for its social gossip and the brilliant political cartoons by David Low.

Low was a New Zealander who arrived in Britain in November 1919 and originally worked as the cartoonist for the *Star*, an evening paper belonging to the *Daily News* group. The *Star* was liberal in outlook, but supportive of Labour policies, which was thus similar to the political views of Low.<sup>35</sup> Beaverbrook, recognising Low's talents as a political satirist, after several attempts prevailed on the cartoonist to join the conservative *Evening Standard* in 1927. Low only agreed on the condition that he was given total independence of expression - rarely did Beaverbrook prevent a cartoon from being printed.<sup>36</sup> The cartoons actually caused the paper to be banned in Germany and Italy as they offended both dictators.<sup>37</sup> The British Government, responding to Hitler's complaints, also tried to interfere, though ultimately unsuccessfully, with Low's anti-German cartoons because such satire allegedly jeopardised delicate negotiations and peace.<sup>38</sup> In contrast, Low was sympathetic and supportive of Litvinov's collective security proposals; though he was critical of the repressive actions of the Soviet Government, especially during the show trials.<sup>39</sup> These attitudes did not prevent the cartoonist from becoming good friends with the Soviet Ambassador in London, Ivan Maisky. Low was stridently anti-appeasement and throughout 1938 and 1939, he demanded cooperation between Britain and the Soviet Union.<sup>40</sup>

<sup>34</sup> Camrose, p. 41.

<sup>35</sup> David Low, *Low's Autobiography*, p. 102.

<sup>36</sup> Low, p. 197. Peter Mellini, "Why Didn't They Listen? Political Cartooning and British Foreign Policy, 1933-1940." p. 31. Adrian Smith, "Low and Lord Beaverbrook". p. 11.

<sup>37</sup> Low, pp. 252-254. Mellini, p. 32.

<sup>38</sup> Richard Cockett, *Twilight of Truth*, pp. 43 and 45-46. Mellini, p. 33.

<sup>39</sup> Low, pp. 255 and 317.

<sup>40</sup> All cartoons used in this thesis are printed in Low's *Europe Since Versailles* or his *Europe At War*. Both are compilations by the cartoonist, arranged in January 1940 and February 1941 respectively, and are therefore Low's own choice of some of his most important cartoons. Also, although there were many good cartoonists in the 1930s, only Low is included in this work since he alone had the freedom to express his own controversial opinion. The *Daily Herald's* editors moderated Will Dyson's cartoons and Jimmy Friell, "Gabriel" of the *Daily Worker*, was expected to be radical. Sidney Strube, cartoonist for the *Daily Express* though reaching a far larger audience than Low, "reassured his viewers rather than challenging them" and was considered by the British Government to be an "ambassador for peace". Strube, because of his "glowing confidence" in Britain, was popular with the public, but Low

## The Liberal Press

### *Manchester Guardian*

The *Manchester Guardian* was one of the most famous papers in the world with the widest distribution of any provincial daily.<sup>41</sup> Before the Second World War, the paper's circulation was not above 50,000 though it doubled after 1945. It was founded in 1821 as a weekly, but established a world wide reputation under C. P. Scott, the editor and principal proprietor of the paper from 1872 to 1929. Scott used his contacts with the many British Governments in that period to give the paper its national and international reputation and thus transformed the *Manchester Guardian* from a provincial Lancashire Whig newspaper into a respected liberal paper of news and opinion. In addition, the *Manchester Guardian Weekly* was printed for the United States and there was a German edition until it was suppressed in 1933 by the Nazis. With the decline of the Liberal Party after the First World War, the paper developed increasingly independent views. In the 1930s, the *Manchester Guardian* did not portray Liberal Party policy, as the *News Chronicle* did, though it remained a newspaper with a liberal outlook due to its staff and readers.<sup>42</sup>

Though understanding Hitler's criticism of Versailles, the *Manchester Guardian* detested the racial theory and barbarous practices of National Socialism. The editor from 1933 to 1944, W. P. Crozier, made it the paper's special mission to keep Jewish and Christian persecution and concentration camps in Germany in the public eye.<sup>43</sup> The paper similarly explored the famine in the Soviet Union in the early 1930s and the religious persecution by the Soviet leadership. Of the British press, the *Manchester Guardian* was the firmest advocate of collective security for Europe and therefore clearly supported Litvinov's efforts towards increased cooperation between Britain and the Soviet Union.

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clearly, consistently, and effectually explained the dangers threatening peace in Europe through the medium of cartoon. Mellini, pp. 28-30.

<sup>41</sup> Camrose, p. 116.

<sup>42</sup> Gannon, pp. 74-75.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid, p. 76.

The paper's Moscow Correspondent in the 1930s was Chamberlin, author of *Russia's Iron Age*. However, when Chamberlin was on a six months' leave of absence, he was replaced by Malcolm Muggeridge who went to the Soviet Union as an "idealist, in search of faith" but became rapidly disillusioned by what he saw.<sup>44</sup> It was his reports, smuggled out of the Soviet Union in a diplomatic pouch, which described the famine in the Soviet Union and reported in the paper on 25, 27, and 28 March 1933. However, rather than believing an eye witness account, popular reaction in Britain was abusive and vilified Muggeridge. At the same time, the *Manchester Guardian* refused to print his version of the events concerning the arrest of the British engineers of the Metropolitan-Vickers Company. Therefore, Muggeridge resigned his position, before the trial began, claiming that the British people would not be told the real story in Moscow.<sup>45</sup>

### *News Chronicle*

The *News Chronicle* was created in 1930, by the Cadbury family, as an amalgamation of two liberal newspapers, the *Daily News* and the *Daily Chronicle*. The intended purpose of the *News Chronicle* was to support the liberal cause, and generally the Liberal Party. However, as the party's fortunes declined, so too did the fortunes of those newspapers with a liberal outlook. Thus in 1930, the *News Chronicle's* circulation was 1,400,000 but fell slightly to 1,324,000 in 1937. The popular appeal of the paper meant it was favoured by the average wage earner though other classes read the *News Chronicle* because it took foreign news seriously and presented "well balanced" leading articles.<sup>46</sup>

Sir Walter Layton, a dedicated Liberal,<sup>47</sup> was in control of the *News Chronicle* as chairman, and in effect, the paper's editor-in-chief, though the Cadburys also offered their viewpoints. In 1933, Alymer Vallance came from the *Economist* to become the *News Chronicle's* editor. He was very left wing and sometimes mistaken as a supporter

<sup>44</sup> David Ayerst, *The Guardian: Biography of a Newspaper*, p. 511.

<sup>45</sup> Ian Hunter, *Malcolm Muggeridge: A Life*, pp. 80-85. Ayerst, *The Guardian: Biography of a Newspaper*, p. 512.

<sup>46</sup> David Hubbeck, *No Ordinary Press Baron*, p. 132.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid*, p. 131.

of the Communist Party.<sup>48</sup> There were fears, by the Cadbury's and older liberal staff members, that the paper was becoming socialist, especially since many of the younger journalists were sympathetic to labour plans.<sup>49</sup> In contrast, much of the new staff felt the Cadbury family had become "Tory wolves in Liberal sheep's clothing",<sup>50</sup> thus revealing a disparity between the paper's radical staff and moderate directors. However, Layton made a determined effort to keep the paper independent of either a socialist or conservative outlook. Gerald Barry replaced Vallance as editor in 1936 and one of his most interesting additions to the paper was the publishing of Gallup opinion polls, which began in 1937.

Vernon Bartlett was the *News Chronicle's* Diplomatic Correspondent and the political editor was A. J. Cummings, one of the most "influential, important, and well-informed radical journalists" of the 1930s.<sup>51</sup> He built his reputation around special coverage stories like the Reichstag and the Metropolitan-Vickers trials. Cummings was extremely pro-Soviet which thus influenced the way in which the *News Chronicle* generally reported favourably on issues concerning the Soviet Union. Unless there was a major news event in the Soviet Union, the paper used dispatches by Cholerton, the *Daily Telegraph's* Moscow Correspondent.

## Liberal Journals

### *Economist*

The *Economist* was founded in 1843 as a weekly business journal though it also surveyed international affairs. Sir Walter Layton was editor between 1921 and 1938, though he was also an executive director of the *News Chronicle*. Geoffrey Crowther succeeded Layton as editor in 1938 and inherited a journal which was financially successful and well respected in Europe and America. The journal's circulation doubled from 5,000 in 1922 to 10,000 in 1938, to which Layton partially attributed the economic

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<sup>48</sup> *Ibid*, p. 88.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 135 and 136-137.

<sup>50</sup> Gannon, pp. 38-39.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid*, p. 40.

crisis of the 1930s.<sup>52</sup> Because Layton's political outlook was liberal, the *Economist* had a similar viewpoint, though unlike the *News Chronicle*, the journal did not necessarily support Liberal Party policy.<sup>53</sup> The editorial charter of the *Economist* gave the editor complete power, to the exclusion of the board, and in Layton's words, "It allowed the editor to run the paper as though it belonged to him".<sup>54</sup> He was careful, however, to keep the *Economist* from becoming too left wing and therefore asserted a degree of caution in many leading articles.<sup>55</sup> Layton also wrote special supplements on the economies of individual countries which repeatedly included the Soviet Union.

### *Spectator*

The *Spectator* was founded in 1828 as a weekly journal which reviewed current affairs. Though not exhibiting a strong political outlook, the journal displayed attitudes consistent with the liberal press in the 1930s and appealed to "enlightened" conservatives. This was largely due to the *Spectator's* editor from 1932-1943, Henry Wilson Harris, who strongly favoured the League of Nations and became a "genuinely" Independent MP.<sup>56</sup> In the inter-war years, most weeklies disappeared though the *Spectator's* circulation increased.<sup>57</sup>

## The Labour Press

### *Daily Herald*

The *Daily Herald* was founded in 1912 by several members of the Labour movement, had a precarious existence for many years and, in the early 1920s, was accused of being supported by the Bolsheviks. In 1923, the Labour Party officially assumed control of the paper but with little success. Thus in 1929, J. S. Elias, later Lord

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<sup>52</sup> Hubbeck, p. 88.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid, pp. 86 and 88.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid, p. 87.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid, p. 91.

<sup>56</sup> A. J. P. Taylor, *English History*, p. 388.

<sup>57</sup> Camrose, p. 148. In 1926, the circulation was given as 21,500 (Thomas, Sir William Beach *The Story of the Spectator, 1828-1928*, p. 102) and in 1947 Camrose placed the circulation at nearly 50,000.

Southwood, the head of Odhams Press Ltd, acquired a 51 per cent interest in the *Daily Herald* while the Labour Party retained the other 49 per cent. Odhams assumed full editorial control though the Labour Party expected the paper to continue to support official Labour policy. However, Southwood was a business manager rather than a journalist or a politician and therefore, to attract new readers, he initiated the circulation wars whereby canvassers were sent out with free insurance and gifts. Though proving costly, by 1939 the *Daily Herald* had reached a consistent circulation of over 2 million. Nevertheless, this did not meet with the universal approval of the Labour Party which complained that the paper was too much like other dailies and did not sufficiently back the party. The *Daily Herald's* appeal was popular, and because its official political outlook was labour, nearly 95 per cent of the paper's readership was from the lower middle and working classes.

W. H. Stevenson and Francis Williams, editors from 1931 to 1937 and from 1937 until 1940 respectively, were faced with the conflicting responsibilities of selling a popular newspaper while expressing a supposedly labour viewpoint. This was made even more difficult since the Labour Party was itself divided on issues like the Popular Front, the League of Nations, armaments, pacificism, and a policy towards Germany. As a result of the Soviet Government's domestic activities and those of the Comintern, Williams supported the Labour Party's move to prevent the British Communist Party's affiliation with Labour. This was one reason why the *Daily Herald*, a left-wing paper, was not unduly supportive of an alliance with the Soviet Union prior to 1939. This attitude frequently led the *Daily Worker* to denounce the *Daily Herald* as a traitor to the socialist cause.<sup>58</sup> The paper's Moscow Correspondent was R. T. Miller who was very sympathetic to the Soviet Government, even during the purges.

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<sup>58</sup> For examples of the *Daily Worker's* criticism of the *Daily Herald*, see articles during the period of the great show trials: 25 January 1937, "The 'Herald' Defends Spies and Assassins" by the Political Correspondent.

*New Statesman and Nation*

The *New Statesman and Nation* had the largest circulation of the political weeklies with a readership representing the "intellectual Left". In 1933, the journal sold nearly 14,000 copies a week and by 1936, it had a circulation of 24,000.<sup>59</sup> In the 1930s, the Moscow Correspondent was Louis Fischer and the journal's editor was B. Kingsley Martin, who was an "intellectual socialist of Radical stock".<sup>60</sup> Although the *New Statesman and Nation's* political outlook was distinctly Left, it did not officially support Labour Party policy as criticism was frequent. Although the journal's approach towards the Soviet Union was not always consistent, in general the *New Statesman and Nation* made greater allowances for the Soviet Union<sup>61</sup> than any other British paper except the *Daily Worker*. The "apology for" the Soviet government's actions was particularly strong during the purges. Martin suggested that the shocking behaviour of the Soviet Government might well be nothing but capitalist propaganda and therefore, at no point did the *New Statesman and Nation* accept or reject Stalin's case against the Old Bolsheviks.<sup>62</sup> Martin respected the Soviet Union's attempt to solve unemployment and build its industry, especially when Britain was suffering under the strains of the Great Depression. Though Martin did not justify the excesses of the Soviet Government, he sincerely believed that the failures of the economy and the repression would be eliminated after a short period of strain.<sup>63</sup>

**The Communist Press***Daily Worker*

The *Daily Worker*, the descendant of the *Sunday Worker* founded in 1925, became a daily newspaper in January 1930 as a protest against the "betrayal" of the *Daily Herald* to the capitalist Odhams group. The paper's political outlook was unmistakably

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<sup>59</sup> Edward Hyams, *The New Statesman*, p. 183-184.

<sup>60</sup> Taylor, p. 389.

<sup>61</sup> See for example, comment by Hyams, pp. 130-132 on the fact that Martin allowed the journal to be too committed to the far Left.

<sup>62</sup> Hyams, pp. 146 and 197.

<sup>63</sup> Kingsley Martin, *Editor*, pp. 59 and 62-63.

communist. Though classed as a national daily, it had difficulty maintaining that distinction because, until the advertisers began to see the paper's potential, it usually had to ask for subscriptions from readers to keep it printed. Originally the *Daily Worker* was seen by the British Government as an organ of propaganda for the Communist Party, though the paper increasingly printed more articles of news than rallying cries as the 1930s progressed.<sup>64</sup> Its circulation in 1937 was 150,000 on Saturdays and over 100,000 on other days.

The *Daily Worker's* most prominent editor in the 1930s was William Rust who had been the paper's correspondent in Spain during the Civil War. His reports on that war were allegedly well respected since the paper "persuasively demonstrated" that non-intervention was a sham.<sup>65</sup> The paper's specialist in foreign affairs, Claud Cockburn, who used the pen name Frank Pitcairn, joined the *Daily Worker* from the Washington office of *The Times* in 1935.<sup>66</sup> The Special Correspondent in Moscow was Reg Bishop. The paper's most infamous incident was its closure in January 1941 by the Home Secretary, Herbert Morrison, for not supporting the war effort when the Soviet Union was officially neutral as a result of the Non-Aggression pact with Germany. The paper only reappeared in September 1942, well after Hitler invaded the USSR.

### Radio and Newsreel

The British Broadcasting Company was founded in 1922 as a business enterprise and only in 1927 did it become the British Broadcasting Corporation. In the 1920s, it struggled against the powerful and established interests of the press.<sup>67</sup> However, in the 1930s, the B.B.C. began to demonstrate its popular position as a provider of news and entertainment, and though it was not on a par with the press, it offered a new source for reflection and forming opinions.<sup>68</sup> As with newspapers, the B.B.C. was accused of biased broadcasting. The controllers defended their position by pointing out that right-

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<sup>64</sup> Camrose, p. 76.

<sup>65</sup> William Rust, *The Daily Worker*, pp. 39 and 41.

<sup>66</sup> Rust, pp. 33, 37, and 38.

<sup>67</sup> Asa Briggs, *The Birth of British Broadcasting*, Vol I., pp. 3-4.

<sup>68</sup> P. M. H. Bell, *John Bull and the Bear*, p. 18.

wing opinion claimed the B.B.C. showed a left wing viewpoint while trade unions accused radio broadcasts of having a conservative outlook. Thus the director-general of the B.B.C., Sir John Reith, argued there was a balanced portrayal of events.<sup>69</sup> In further reply to those accusations, Reith alleged the agenda for broadcasting was set for "the national good", though that tended to follow fashion which in the 1930s preferred caution and Conservative Party policies.<sup>70</sup> Nevertheless, the *Daily Mail* and the *Daily Express* fervently campaigned against what they called the "Menace of Red Bias in Radio" which attempted to undermine social order, family life, morals and "national consciousness". For example, during the Spanish Civil War, Catholic Tory MPs supported the *Daily Mail's* assault on the B.B.C.'s supposed "pinkness" in its attitude to the "red murderers" in Spain.<sup>71</sup> Also in the 1930s, the Government, behind the scenes, ensured that its own requirements and views received special attention.<sup>72</sup>

Newsreels were a potentially influential medium for providing news as they had the scope for reaching vast numbers of people. In 1934, there were 4,300 cinemas in Britain which averaged a weekly audience of 18.5 million in paid admissions. In 1940, this attendance reached 21 million with the urban working class was the main patron of the cinema.<sup>73</sup> There were five major newsreel companies - Gaumont, Pathe, Movietone, Paramount, and Universal - which each distributed two newsreels a week.<sup>74</sup> A newsreel was a film which was composed of items of "up-to-the-minute" news or "matters germane thereto". It could also include current events of "such importance" that they warranted a special edition on that particular topic.<sup>75</sup> Newsreels, in their effort to report current affairs before Fleet Street, gave out false information on occasion. Similarly, newsreels sometimes embellished or manipulated their reports.<sup>76</sup> Despite the high attendance at cinemas, in the 1930s newspapers maintained the advantage over newsreels

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<sup>69</sup> Seaton and Pimlott, *The Media and British Politics*, p. 136.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 138 and 140.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 140.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 140.

<sup>73</sup> Aldgate, p. 56.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 23 and x-xi.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 26.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 40 and 43.

as Fleet Street offered more varied and detailed news as well as a diverse range of opinion.<sup>77</sup>

### Style of Reporting

Only the *Daily Worker*, a communist paper with a minimal circulation and restricted influence, opposed the prevailing political culture. It was the only paper to follow strictly its own party, far more than any of the profit-oriented newspapers it denounced.<sup>78</sup> Thus no paper claimed a monopoly on the favours of any party nor could a party impose strict discipline on any newspaper. Even the *Daily Herald* diverged from official Labour policy despite the fact that the Trade Unions owned nearly half of the paper. Similarly, although the *News Chronicle* retained a liberal inclination, it was also a sympathetic source for labour news.<sup>79</sup>

Newspapers did not always reflect the opinions of the people who produced them. For example, the *Daily Herald*, under the editorship of Francis Williams, would have been more critical of Chamberlain if Southwood had not intervened to prevent editorial policy from moving in that direction. The *News Chronicle* was similarly restrained by its cautious proprietor, Layton.<sup>80</sup> However, press barons did not always use their positions to control the policies of their papers. For example, though Beaverbrook was pro-appeasement in the *Daily Express*, in contrast, the *Evening Standard* urged a coalition against fascism.<sup>81</sup> Nevertheless, the proprietors' perceptions of their readers set the tone for their papers. Thus the Beaverbrook press was aimed at "the character and temperament which was bent on moving upwards and outwards". The *Daily Mail* projected a more static, hierarchical system, in keeping with Northcliffe's more traditional style of conservatism and catered for "people who would like to think they earned £1000 a year".<sup>82</sup>

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<sup>77</sup> Bell, p. 18.

<sup>78</sup> Koss, p. 532.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid, pp. 552-553 and 556.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid, pp. 546-547.

<sup>81</sup> Curran and Seaton, *Power without Responsibility*, p. 52.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid, p. 55.

Editors defiantly refused to print everything they knew in the 1930s, not because they were ignorant, but because they misguidedly wished to play down the growing threat of war and the anxiety that Britain would suffer through defeat. In an effort to avoid or hinder the increasing inevitability of war, editors and proprietors took responsibility for calming prevailing fears. Thus they acted to various degrees as appeasers or collaborators to the politicians who practiced appeasement. Fleet Street was frightened of increasing the tension in Europe by making dire predictions which might prove true, especially since the tone of newspapers was believed to have been one factor in inciting the outbreak of war in 1914. Thus the press was "a Frankenstein which cowered before the monster it created". Though the paper's correspondents might object to this overly optimistic view, editors had the last word, especially since many dispatches by foreign journalists were perceived to be gloomy and thus ultimately bad for circulation and advertising.<sup>83</sup>

Stereotypes were frequently found in the foreign affairs coverage of the British press, such as the "neuroticism of the Russian, the phlegm of the British or the instability of the French". Furthermore, foreign nations were often simply portrayed as an ally or enemy of Britain, though a country's position as one or the other often changed from decade to decade and it was relatively easy for the press to change public perceptions when necessary.<sup>84</sup> This was especially true of the Soviet Union. In the First World War, Russia was an ally but with the Bolshevik seizure of power in 1917, the Russians became an ideological enemy which the British public feared and disliked throughout the 1920s. By the beginning of the 1930s, the threat of communist revolution in Europe had declined and the Soviet Union was perceived to be relatively harmless towards Britain. However, the exposure by the *Manchester Guardian* of the religious atrocity campaign, the trial of six British engineers in April 1933, and the great purges from 1936-1938 served to make the British public more suspicious of the Soviet Union. In hindsight,

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<sup>83</sup> Koss, pp. 542-544.

<sup>84</sup> Kingsley Martin, *The Press the Public Wants*, p. 82.

Fleet Street was accused of not treating the Soviet Union as a subject for "serious or objective" reporting.

One compares the readiness with which the press accepted every atrocity story from Russia with the genuine reluctance displayed by almost all the British press to believe or to report the terrible facts about Hitler's concentration camps and anti-Semitic atrocities.

Finally, when Germany invaded the Soviet Union in June 1941, the character of the Soviet Government and its people transformed from "fiends to heroes" of the Allied cause and no praise was too rapturous.<sup>85</sup>

Normally the press at home was urged to uphold "the quarrel" in order to demonstrate to the world and its own public that the Government's cause was just. Thus the role of the press in an international crisis could not be exaggerated.<sup>86</sup> For example, the British press campaign against the Soviet Union during the Metro-Vickers trial saw the reappearance of idiosyncratic phrases and concepts not heard since the First World War.<sup>87</sup> Furthermore, seemingly harmless stories concerning the Soviet Union could assume the most derisive tone. In October 1934, *The Times* cynically described the increasing threat of foreign capitalism in a leading article entitled, "Soviet Shaving". The paper alleged that "razors were blunt" because the "paternal" government was protecting its people from getting capitalism into their pores. Thus the paper sarcastically suggested that the Russian people were not allowed the bourgeois notions of cleanliness and comfort.<sup>88</sup> The *Manchester Guardian* in November 1935 found it amusing that golf was being introduced into the Soviet Union. The paper's correspondent reported that Russians thought it absurd that such a small ball, hit with so much effort, only went a short distance though they were very impressed when an American hit the ball two hundred yards. Thus the *Manchester Guardian* wondered if the Five Year Plan could

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<sup>85</sup> *Ibid*, p. 92.

<sup>86</sup> A. J. Cummings, *The Press*, p. 48.

<sup>87</sup> Martin, *The Educational Role of the Press*, pp. 30-31.

<sup>88</sup> *The Times*, 19 October 1934. Leading article, "Soviet Shaving".

stand up against capitalist America's imports.<sup>89</sup> The British press was also concerned that the Soviet Government's attempts to show Shakespeare's plays with "Soviet realism" distorted them until they were unrecognisable. The *Manchester Guardian* alleged that it made for strange productions when Shakespeare was adapted to Marxist beliefs so that anti-capitalist morals could be extracted.<sup>90</sup>

The press exploited public ignorance and sometimes wilfully failed to provide a partially accurate sketch of international affairs. This could be due to the commercial interests of the paper or because the editor believed the reader did not have the time, education, or inclination to read instructive articles about foreign affairs.<sup>91</sup> For example, Dawson, the editor of *The Times*, believed "the public required soothing" and thus advocated serious and steady reporting.<sup>92</sup> Editors and proprietors wanted to aid recovery following the Great Depression by creating a good "psychological atmosphere" and thus emphasised articles portraying contentment at home and security abroad. *The Times*, often singled out for describing an optimistic picture of the international situation, was in reality no worse than its rivals and more honest and consistent in its approach.<sup>93</sup> However, the assumption that all new ideas inevitably provoked fear was an alarming comment on the mood of the 1930s<sup>94</sup> which A. J. P. Taylor characterized as a "discordant decade".<sup>95</sup>

The method of presenting news was usually based on the two extremes of popular and sober stories. A survey undertaken by Lord Northcliffe in the early 1920s established the "news value" or "reader interest" of the British public. A formula for the selling value of news items was created: the British public liked to read about war, sex, crime, sport, and domestic health and happiness.<sup>96</sup> It was this survey on which most of

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<sup>89</sup> The *Manchester Guardian*, 12 November 1935. Leading article, "Soviet Golf".

<sup>90</sup> The *Manchester Guardian*, 23 November 1935. Leading article, "Shakespeare and the Soviet". The *Scotsman* pointed out that Shakespeare was used to illustrate the wickedness of the bourgeois through the decadence of court life. 3 January 1934, leading article, "Shakespeare and the Bolshevik". See also, the *Spectator*, 10 September 1937. "Soviet Drama" by Basil Wright.

<sup>91</sup> Martin, *The Press the Public Wants*, p. 93.

<sup>92</sup> Gannon, p. 69.

<sup>93</sup> Koss, p. 544.

<sup>94</sup> Asa Briggs, *The Golden Age of Broadcasting*, Vol II, p. 43.

<sup>95</sup> Taylor, *English History*, p. 317.

<sup>96</sup> Martin, *What the Public Wants*, pp. 57-62.

the popular press based their articles, demonstrating that these papers did not believe the education of the reader was of primary importance. Thus when disaster threatened, the public allegedly discovered that none of the things it really needed to know had been explained.<sup>97</sup> Popular news worked on the premise that something was happening somewhere, and whenever possible that information should appear startling or unusual. "Make the news exciting even if it was dull. Make the news palatable by lavish presentations. Make the unreadable readable."<sup>98</sup> However, that did not mean all news in the popular press was unusual or "sensational", but such features were pulled into the forefront of the story and efforts were made to discover such details. Similarly, even important events, if they occurred regularly, had no popular value<sup>99</sup> unless they were given an extra dimension by some startling fact, often of an emotional element.<sup>100</sup> The *Daily Express* had a habit of emphasising that Stalin was seriously ill. For example, in September 1934, the paper's Warsaw Correspondent reported that the Soviet leader required five injections to reduce his blood pressure and thus the Seventeenth Comintern Congress was postponed.<sup>101</sup> Occasionally, the popular press devoted its main news story to international politics. The quality press primarily reported sober news, which was concerned with domestic and international affairs, though some of those newspapers periodically printed whimsical stories on its main news page.<sup>102</sup>

The press was found by the *Political and Economic Planning Report*, carried out in 1938, to be the principle agenda-making body in the everyday conversation of ordinary people concerning public affairs. The press could turn obscure topics into items of great importance through publicity. Because papers could easily whip up popular emotion,

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<sup>97</sup> Martin, *The Educational Role of the Press*, pp. 32-33.

<sup>98</sup> Arthur Christiansen, *Headlines All My Life*, p. 144.

<sup>99</sup> *Economic and Planning Report on the British Press*, for 1938, pp. 95-96.

<sup>100</sup> See for example, the *Daily Express*, 3 and 10 March 1938 and the *Daily Mail*, 3 March 1938 which detailed the sexual theme of the evidence against Bukharin in the third Moscow show trial. Also see, the *Daily Express*, 26 August 1936, which described how Zinoviev wept and fainted before his execution, though the paper's nearest correspondent was in Warsaw.

<sup>101</sup> The *Daily Express*, 27 September 1934. "Stalin's Illness Worse; Doctors in Constant Attendance" by the Special Correspondent in Warsaw. See also, 12 June 1937, "Stalin Goaded by Heart-Attacks" by the Vienna Staff Reporter. Lenin's widow, Krupskaya, also reportedly suffered from heart trouble: 3 September 1936, "Stalin Shoots Lenin's Brother-In-Law" by the Warsaw Correspondent.

<sup>102</sup> *Political and Economic Planning Report on the British Press*, for 1938, p. 96.

public opinion was easily coloured by the manner in which Fleet Street presented news, with an extra degree of danger if the press ignored topics in which it felt the reader was not interested.<sup>103</sup> Thus, due to newspaper coverage, by 1936, the influence of public opinion over foreign affairs had enormously increased. The government recognised that it required popular support behind them to fight wars and even to conduct daily affairs because the press raised expectations of success.<sup>104</sup> For example, Anthony Eden the Foreign Secretary admitted in 1937 that Britain could not fight on behalf of Czechoslovakia or Austria because it went

far beyond where the people of this country were prepared to go. There could be no greater danger than for the Government to declare themselves in favour of a policy which did not command the general support of public opinion at home.<sup>105</sup>

### **Governmental influence on the British press**

The Government exerted an ever larger degree of control over Fleet Street as the 1930s progressed. Initially, the Foreign Office created the News Department, to meet with privileged, and ultimately loyal, journalists, to give them political information. The head of the department between 1935 and 1939, Rex Leeper, made the journalist a "willing extension" of Foreign Office policy by using flattery, openness, and coercion. The view given by the News Department often differed from Downing Street's press office, directed at the time by George Steward who was very loyal to Chamberlain. Thus the British press appeared to be receiving two sides to British policy which correspondents appreciated as it made their reports appear individual and independent of Government policy. However, other correspondents believed information by the News Department and Downing Street encouraged narrow views and turned the newspaper into

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<sup>103</sup> Ibid, pp. 18-19.

<sup>104</sup> *The Listener*, several broadcasts on public opinion and foreign affairs by Lord Elton in June and July 1936.

<sup>105</sup> Bell, p. 5.

the mouthpiece of the Foreign Office or the Prime Minister, thus destroying the independence of the British press.<sup>106</sup>

However, when Leeper became an opponent of appeasement, Chamberlain believed the Foreign Office News Department was his main opponent in Whitehall and therefore took action to silence this opposition.<sup>107</sup> Thus in 1938, the Downing Street press office became, in practical terms, the only source of official information for the British press. Unlike the News Department which made contact with diplomatic journalists, Downing Street preferred to court editors and proprietors to ensure that Fleet Street was sympathetic to Chamberlain and his policies. This approach stifled any independent views by foreign correspondents until March 1939.<sup>108</sup>

Chamberlain's aim was to exploit the press and to defend Government thinking by manipulating Fleet Street into supporting his policy of appeasing the dictators. Any newspaper which did not report favourably of Chamberlain's policies was not privy to the Prime Minister's plans and thus lacked the important news coverage which its rivals printed. Chamberlain, in hindsight, was notorious for exaggerating the truth as he made misleading and inaccurate statements to give the impression that his policies were credible and successful.<sup>109</sup> In addition, Chamberlain used his Cabinet colleague's personal relations with editors and proprietors to influence editorial policy. For example, because Dawson knew all the Prime Ministers of the 1930s and was thus privy to many Cabinet secrets, it was unsurprising that *The Times* was assumed abroad to be the semi-official mouthpiece of the British Government's thinking. Chamberlain was a close friend of Lord Kemsley, owner of the *Sunday Times*, while the Astors, proprietors of the *Observer*, were keen admirers of the Prime Minister's approach to foreign affairs. In contrast, Lord Camrose of the *Daily Telegraph* had little contact with members of the

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<sup>106</sup> Richard Cockett, "The Foreign Office News Department and the Struggle Against Appeasement", pp.74 and 76-77. Robert Dell, the Geneva Correspondent for *Manchester Guardian*, especially objected to the style of the Foreign Office News Department.

<sup>107</sup> Cockett, "The Foreign Office News Department and the Struggle against Appeasement", p.75 and 73.

<sup>108</sup> Cockett, "The Foreign Office News Department and the Struggle against Appeasement", p.84 and James Margach, *The Abuse of Power: The War between Downing Street and the Media from Lloyd George to Callaghan*. p. 53.

<sup>109</sup> Margach, p. 50.

Government and therefore, the paper was less editorially conservative than *The Times*.<sup>110</sup> The *Yorkshire Post* was unique in the late 1930s because it was the only conservative newspaper openly opposed to the policy of appeasement. Mann's ability to write in opposition to the Government's plans was due to his incomparable position amongst editors. He declined all honours and refused to be on very close terms with any politicians in or out of government as both threatened his independent outlook.<sup>111</sup>

Thus by the summer of 1938, the majority of British newspapers were controlled by a small group associated with the Government, who were distancing themselves further from the majority view of their own staff and more importantly from public opinion. Mann's primary complaint, and one which Garvin and Astor, staunch supporters of Chamberlain, increasingly shared, was that the government was forcing the press to write views out of touch with the people of Britain. Garvin wrote in August 1938 that "the daily press no longer gives any true idea of the feeling of this country. There is at last - wide anxiety - a slow, eating anxiety, though silent and feeling helpless." Astor acknowledged in May 1938 that "although the newspapers might have been silenced now... there was widespread uneasiness and this was likely to show itself soon."<sup>112</sup> Vansittart, a former Permanent Under-Secretary between 1931 and 1937, warned in the summer of 1938 that the press was "by its optimism misleading the public. The people would have a rough shock soon."<sup>113</sup>

One such area where the public was not given entirely accurate information concerned the Soviet Union. For example, the press had been willing to ignore the Soviet Union's calls for collective action against Germany in 1938 because the British Government had confidently given the impression that all was under control in Europe and that Germany was only being given what it rightfully deserved. However, as the euphoria of Munich disappeared in the face of further German aggression, Fleet Street increasingly suggested the Soviet Union would have to be approached by the British

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<sup>110</sup> Cockett, *Twilight of Truth*, pp. 12-13 and Margach, p. 53.

<sup>111</sup> Cockett, *Twilight of Truth*, pp. 62-64. Andrews and Taylor, p. 126.

<sup>112</sup> Cockett, *Twilight of Truth*, pp. 64-65 and 83.

<sup>113</sup> Anthony Adamthwaite, "The British Government and the Media", p. 286.

Government, a plan for which Chamberlain remained unenthusiastic. Thus press support for the British-French-Soviet negotiations in 1939 went beyond what the British Government demanded. Even during the negotiations in 1939, Chamberlain still harboured a degree of distrust for the Communists who controlled the Soviet Union. However, instead of reflecting Chamberlain's concerns, the British press criticised his failure to secure an agreement regardless of ideological differences.

With the outbreak of the Second World War, the British Government established the Ministry of Information (MoI) which was meant to provide Fleet Street with information concerning the war. However, the organisation experienced problems in performing this task because Departmental Ministries refused to give the MoI any news. This encouraged the press to by-pass the MoI and to deal directly with ministers and civil servants as before the war. Thus it became the view within the press that "it is hard to discuss seriously something which the world has decided to regard as a rather poor joke".<sup>114</sup> In 1941, the MoI was slow to acknowledge the position of the Soviet Union as Britain's ally despite Churchill's broadcast on 22 June offering immediate and unconditional support for the Soviet Government against Germany. An illustration of the British Government's nervousness of the USSR and Communism was demonstrated in the decision not to allow the B.B.C. to play the "Internationale", the Soviet Union's national anthem.<sup>115</sup> However, the Government and MoI adopted this attitude from fear that Communism would increase in Britain. Thus the MoI's policy was to praise the "Russian" ally with as little reference to Communism as possible, thereby preventing the British Communist Party from gaining any benefits from the Soviet Union's victories.<sup>116</sup> Although the British press recognised that Britain's success against Germany was dependant on the Soviet Union not succumbing to defeat too rapidly, most papers did not want to see communism spread and therefore accepted the cautious approach by the

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<sup>114</sup> W.N. Ewer, "The Ministry of Information", pp. 94-97. Ian McLaine, *The Ministry of Morale*, pp. 24, 28, and 35. See the *News Chronicle*, 3 July 1941. Leading article, "Battle of MoI"; 21 July 1941, leading article, "Too Many Bites".

<sup>115</sup> McLaine, pp. 196-197.

<sup>116</sup> *Ibid*, p. 201.

Government and the MoI. Thus early victories in the Soviet Union were reported in terms of glorious "Russian" heroism.

Prior to the outbreak of the Second World War, the degree to which individual newspapers and journals advocated closer relations varied depending not only on political persuasions, but also on international affairs, the Soviet Union's domestic repression and the foreign objectives of the British Government. The British press responded to these influences and accordingly presented a variety of opinions on the Soviet Union which provided a new dimension as to why Britain and the USSR failed to cooperate closely before June 1941.

## Chapter 2

### **The Metropolitan-Vickers Trial**

On 12 and 13 March 1933, six British engineers employed by Metropolitan-Vickers, a British company with offices in Moscow, were arrested by the OGPU. They, and twenty Russian employees, were charged with economic espionage, bribery, and sabotage. After varying days of interrogation, five of the six British men were released on bail, a privilege never granted to Russian citizens. Despite protest from the British Government, the trial was held between 12 and 19 April. Ultimately, two Britons confessed, W. L. MacDonald, who had not been released on bail, and Leslie Thornton, who, however, withdrew his confession on the first day in court. The trial was held with very little substantial evidence apart from confessions, and those were mainly from Russians. The result was that MacDonald and Thornton were found guilty of organised wrecking, of collecting secret information and of bribery, and as a result of their confessions received two and three years imprisonment respectively. Three other engineers, Allan Monkhouse, Charles de Nordwall, and John Cushny were found guilty on variations of the above charges and received immediate expulsion from the USSR. The sixth defendant, J. D. Gregory, was declared innocent though he too returned to Britain.

The Metro-Vickers trial was not an isolated event straining the diplomatic and economic dealings between Britain and the Soviet Union though it was one of the most serious incidents to affect relations in the interwar period. From the time Britain officially recognised the Soviet Government in 1924, relations had been greatly strained as a result of the Zinoviev letter in October 1924; severed by the Conservative Government following the Arcos Raid in May 1927; and resumed by the Labour Government with a trade agreement in 1930.<sup>1</sup> However, it was allegedly the termination of the 1930

commercial agreement, in October 1932, by the Conservative dominated National Government which increased the tension between Britain and the Soviet Union. The British Charge d'Affairs in Moscow, William Strang, stated that signs of a case being formed against the Metro-Vickers company were evident almost immediately<sup>2</sup> as various Russian employees of the company were arrested and questioned, while Stalin also called for greater vigilance against wrecking inspired by foreigners.<sup>3</sup>

However, the potential implications, which the detaining of British citizens could have, appeared to have been lost on the Soviet Government. There was even some discussion that the Soviet Foreign Commissar, Maxim Litvinov, had not been informed of the arrests until after the event. Thus he and the Soviet Ambassador in London, Ivan Maisky, were unable to explain the nature of the charges or evidence in the days immediately following the arrests.<sup>4</sup> The <sup>detention</sup> ~~detainment~~ and trial of the six British engineers of the Metro-Vickers company had a profound effect on the general impression which Fleet Street presented to the British public about the Soviet Union. Initial British press reaction was unanimous in its expressions of criticism<sup>5</sup> and a great amount of coverage was committed to the representation of the trial which no paper, apart from the *Daily Worker*, suggested was fair. There was, however, far less unanimity amongst the press in its response towards the British Government's conduct in trying to discover the facts of the case and its efforts to free the six British engineers. Furthermore, Fleet Street was

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<sup>2</sup> See Documents on British Foreign Policy, (hereafter D.B.F.P.), Second Series, Vol. VII, no. 253.

<sup>3</sup> William Strang, *Home and Abroad*, pp. 80 and 116-118. See D.B.F.P., Second Series, VII, chapters IV and V. See also Donald N. Lammers, "The Engineers' Trial (Moscow, 1933) and Anglo-Soviet Relations", pp. 258-259 and G. L. Owen, "The Metro-Vickers Crisis: Anglo-Soviet Relations between Trade Agreements, 1932-1934", pp. 97-98. *The Times*, 16 March 1933. Leading article, "Soviet Scapegoats".

<sup>4</sup> See early telegrams in D.B.F.P., Second Series, VII, Chapter IV, such as no. 209; Owen, p.99; Lammers, p. 259.

<sup>5</sup> See all newspapers starting 13 March 1933, with the exception of the *Daily Worker*.

divided in its opinion as to the effects which a retaliatory embargo on Soviet goods would have on the fate of the prisoners, the British economy, and the general relations between the two countries. Conservative newspapers called for a cessation of trade while the liberal and labour press increased demands for stronger economic ties to prevent similar misunderstandings in the future.

### Reaction and retribution

The British Government, immediately deciding that the charges were groundless, assumed a tough attitude and referred to "unfortunate consequences to Anglo-Soviet relations".<sup>6</sup> Though the Cabinet refrained from threatening a diplomatic breach, the British Ambassador in Moscow, Sir Esmond Ovey, repeatedly suggested that strong action by the British Government would secure the release of the British engineers.<sup>7</sup> Thus the British Government suspended existing commercial negotiations which were being conducted to replace the 1930 economic agreement. Furthermore, when it became evident that the trial was going to take place, the British Government introduced a bill which would entail the imposition of an embargo on goods from the Soviet Union pending the outcome of the trial. Litvinov reacted to Ovey's immoderate interviews and subsequent economic threats with surprise and suggested "too much noise" was being made by Britain.<sup>8</sup> The Foreign Commissar was also within his rights when he warned the Ambassador against making threats before the evidence against the accused was heard and criticised British interference in Soviet domestic affairs.<sup>9</sup> Litvinov also refused to listen to Ovey when the former was informed of the bill permitting the embargo.<sup>10</sup> This type of response by the Foreign Commissar led *The Times*, the *Yorkshire Post*, and the

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<sup>6</sup> Curtis Keeble, *Britain and the Soviet Union*, p. 114. The conservative press supported the Government's strong line. See for example, the *Daily Express*, 16 March 1933. "Mr. Baldwin Warns Soviets". The *Evening Standard*, 15 March 1933. "Mr. Baldwin Warns Moscow; 'Grave View of Arrests'; No Justification of Charges".

<sup>7</sup> D.B.F.P., Second Series, Vol. VII, nos. 207, 222, 253. Strang, p.84.

<sup>8</sup> D.B.F.P., Second Series, Vol. VII, no. 239. An American Correspondent, Eugene Lyons, recalled that Ovey "lambasted" Litvinov with the most "undiplomatic vigour" and distasteful "flaming indignation". Lyons, *Assignment in Utopia*, p. 563.

<sup>9</sup> D.B.F.P., Second Series, Vol. VII, no. 243.

<sup>10</sup> D.B.F.P., Second Series, Vol. VII, nos. 297, 298.

*Daily Telegraph* all to suggest it was "incredible" that Litvinov, firstly, called the arrests a "trifling episode" and, secondly, refused to believe the British Government would sever relations following Ogpu activities if the prisoners were not released.<sup>11</sup> Although the *News Chronicle* agreed with the conservative newspapers that the Soviet Government did not understand British concern for the safety of its nationals, the liberal paper warned that such anxiety should not be allowed to impede the understanding between two great states who needed friendship. However, because the *News Chronicle* accepted Litvinov's argument that Britain was "dictating" to the Soviet Government and interfering in Soviet domestic issues, the paper demanded of both countries "cool reasoning" and a degree of mutual understanding.<sup>12</sup>

Early articles in the conservative press were very outspoken in their discussion of the impropriety of arresting British citizens and claimed there was a national feeling of indignation and of anxiety in Britain for the fate of the engineers.<sup>13</sup> The *Daily Express* suggested the arrests were a direct insult to the British nation and declared that

the Russian Government is treating British subjects as no Government before ever dared to... The Russian Government is contemptuous and insolent in disregarding all decencies of international relations. This country expects and demands the [British] Government to make a protest which the Soviet leaders can understand.<sup>14</sup>

In contrast, the labour and liberal press were concerned about the effects of "misplaced Ogpu actions" on the opinion of a Conservative dominated British Government and thus urged that the situation should be cleared up quickly.<sup>15</sup> Though recognising that the British engineers could be guilty, these papers protested no less

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<sup>11</sup> *The Times*, 23 March 1933. Leading article, "A Warning to Russia". *The Yorkshire Post*, 8 April 1933. Leading article, "Soviet Justice". *The Daily Telegraph*, 11 April 1933. Leading article, "The Soviet and Their Prisoners".

<sup>12</sup> *The News Chronicle*, 31 March 1933. Leading article, "Wanted - A Gesture".

<sup>13</sup> *The Daily Telegraph*, 15 March 1933. Leading article, "Moscow's British Prisoners". *The Times*, 16 March 1933. Leading article, "Soviet Scapegoats".

<sup>14</sup> *The Daily Express*, 16 March 1933. Leading article, "Russia's Insults".

<sup>15</sup> *The Daily Herald*, 21 March 1933. Leading article, "Moscow Arrests".

vigorously than the conservative press against OGPU methods and the lack of immediate evidence or an explanation by the Soviet Government. However, the *Manchester Guardian* refused to assume, as the conservative newspapers did, that the Soviet Government was less anxious than Britain's to see justice achieved. Moreover, in the paper's opinion, it was possible and necessary to maintain good relations despite the arrest of British citizens.<sup>16</sup> In noticeable contrast to the above view by the *Daily Express*, the *News Chronicle* sarcastically suggested that if similar charges were made against British citizens in a "more civilised country such as Germany or France", then the Conservative dominated British Government would not protest to such an extent. The paper recognised that there was "inveterate suspicion and hostility" amongst a great section of British opinion towards the "whole Russian experience", and because the Soviet Government maintained an air of secrecy with their proceedings, suspicion increased in Britain. Nevertheless, the *News Chronicle* warned against the British Government hurrying into "extravagant" statements.<sup>17</sup> The *Daily Worker* was likewise highly indignant of the attitude towards the Soviet Government: "We recall that the British Government did not find the arrest of British subjects in other countries of such 'grave concern' as to utter threats against the Government without hearing the evidence for the arrests."<sup>18</sup>

Thus with the exception of the *Daily Worker*,<sup>19</sup> the majority of Fleet Street agreed the cessation of commercial negotiations was necessary until further details of the arrests were available or, in the opinion of the *Sunday Times*, the "Soviets see fit to take a reasonable attitude".<sup>20</sup> However, divisions of opinion amongst the press arose with the British Government's efforts to raise emergency powers which entailed the imposition of an embargo. Conservative newspapers supported these efforts, expecting the Soviet

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<sup>16</sup> The *Manchester Guardian*, 16 March 1933. Leading article, "The Russian Arrests".

<sup>17</sup> The *News Chronicle*, 16 March 1933. Leading article, "Common Sense and Russia". See also, the *New Statesman and Nation*, 25 March 1933.

<sup>18</sup> The *Daily Worker*, 16 March 1933. "Baldwin Threatens Soviet Union" by the Parliamentary Correspondent.

<sup>19</sup> The *Daily Worker*, 20 March 1933. Leading article, "Against the Interventionists".

<sup>20</sup> The *Sunday Times*, 19 March 1933. "Trade Talks with Soviet Suspended". See British newspaper articles from 19-21 March 1933.

Government to capitulate to such an economic threat and to abandon the idea of staging a trial. The labour press, however, found the intended embargo to be as damaging to British industry as it was to Soviet commerce. Furthermore, labour and liberal newspapers and journals rationalised that the Soviet Government had a right, under international law, to try anyone suspected of sabotage or espionage. While the conservative newspapers claimed the embargo would assist in the early release of the British engineers, the labour and liberal press voiced very convincing doubts that an early release would be effected through a ban on Russian goods. Instead, these papers believed the trial merely provided an excuse for "die-hard Tory" opposition to advocate the suspension of further co-operation with the Soviet Union.

*The Times* and the *Daily Telegraph* reported that British public opinion endorsed the suspension of negotiations and that further attempts at talks while Soviet faith was "suspect" would be "a waste of time".<sup>21</sup> The *Daily Telegraph* warned that "those in authority in Russia are well advised to count the cost of trumped-up charges against British subjects".<sup>22</sup> The paper further suggested that if the Soviet Union had common sense, it would not devise problems when the country found British markets and capital so necessary.<sup>23</sup> Thus it appeared to the *Sunday Times* that the Soviet Foreign Office was "burning their bridges".<sup>24</sup>

The *News Chronicle*, like the conservative press, recognised that British public opinion was outraged and reasoned that the Soviet Government had only itself to blame for the uproar in Britain. "If they arrest Britons with strange charges, the British public is bound to leap to conclusions which may not be justified when the acts are known." However, this also proved that the paper differed in opinion from the conservative press

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<sup>21</sup> *The Times*, 23 March 1933. Leading article, "A Warning to Russia". *The Daily Telegraph*, 20 March 1933. Leading article, "The Moscow Prisoners". See also the *Daily Express*, 16 March 1933. "Mr. Baldwin Warns Soviets". *The Evening Standard*, 15 March 1933. "Mr. Baldwin Warns Moscow; 'Grave View of Arrests'; No Justification of Charges".

<sup>22</sup> *The Daily Telegraph*, 16 March 1933. Leading article, "A Reckless Abuse of Power".

<sup>23</sup> *The Daily Telegraph*, 20 March 1933. Leading article, "The Moscow Prisoners". See also *The Times*, 23 March 1933. Leading article, "A Warning to Russia".

<sup>24</sup> *The Sunday Times*, 19 March 1933. "The Soviet's Prisoners" by the Moscow Correspondent.

and warned the British Government against making "similar blunders" before the evidence was seen. The liberal press maintained that the Soviet Government would wish to see a fair trial but the British Government, with its "hectoring" attitude, was placing Moscow in a very difficult position.<sup>25</sup> In addition, the *News Chronicle* saw nothing in the arrests to justify the "hazards" of suspending commercial negotiations which, though harming the Soviet Union a little, would inevitably hurt the British economy in addition to provoking ill-will between the two countries and threatening stability in Europe. "The British Government has a duty to watch the Moscow events. Its duty also is not to be swept by prejudice into hasty action which we may have heavy cause to repent."<sup>26</sup>

The labour press, though holding a similar outlook on the arrests to the liberal press, was more severe in its denunciation of the Conservative leadership and newspapers. In a leading article, the *Daily Herald* warned that the "Tory wild men" shouting for a break in diplomatic relations had not paused to consider the interests of the accused men or the rest of Britain. Instead, the paper alleged that the situation provided "an opportunity to satisfy their own insensate hatreds". The *Daily Herald* agreed with conservative and liberal papers that the British Government had a duty to see that British citizens received a fair trial, but the "mad [economic] measures for which the die-hard press clamours" would not be an advantage for the engineers and would only achieve incalculable damage to British trade and the general cause of peace.<sup>27</sup> Following Ovey's critical representations to Litvinov, the *New Statesman and Nation* accused the British Government of "behaving in a manner it would not think of adopting with another country which had made similar arrests". The journal believed the incident would have "harmlessly blown over", but due to British threats, the tone of official protest, and the abuse in the conservative press over the arrests, the *New Statesman and Nation* felt the

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<sup>25</sup> The *News Chronicle*, 21 March 1933. Leading article, "The Soviets' Prisoners". The *Manchester Guardian*, 18 March 1933. Leading article, "Arrests in Russia".

<sup>26</sup> The *News Chronicle*, 21 March 1933. Leading article, "The Soviets' Prisoners".

<sup>27</sup> The *Daily Herald*, 21 March 1933. Leading article, "Moscow Arrests".

situation had developed into a "serious international imbroglio" since the Soviet Union, like any other country, would not wish to appear to be yielding to intimidation.<sup>28</sup>

Although the *Daily Telegraph* alleged in March that the Cabinet deliberately refrained from acts which would cause a complete rupture with the Soviet Union,<sup>29</sup> in April the British Government adopted an uncompromising economic approach as it became more obvious the Soviet Government would not be coerced from trying the British engineers. The bill permitting an embargo on Soviet trade was thus hurried through parliament on 3 April enabling Britain to prohibit all imports of Russian goods at a week's notice. In the opinion of the *Daily Express*, by applying the "rod of economic sanctions" to the Soviet Union, Britain's leaders were taking "wise, justified, and effective" action in exacting "respect for British nationals from a Government of savages".<sup>30</sup> The *Daily Mail* similarly welcomed the Emergency Bill for an embargo: "the Government - not before it was time - has determined to take vigorous action for the release of the six Britons". The paper believed Britain had shown far too much patience in dealing with the "bad faith and deplorable record" of the Soviet Union.<sup>31</sup>

The British Government declared it was primarily concerned with the fate of the British engineers and was therefore reticent about other motives for the embargo.<sup>32</sup> However, the conservative press openly alleged that the Embargo Bill also provided the opportunity for redressing the one-sidedness of the 1930 trade agreement with the Soviet Union which was accused of exporting far more than it imported. Conservative newspapers supported the speech to the House of Commons by Sir John Simon, the Foreign Minister, which called for the control of Russian imports since, in the opinion of these newspapers, it appeared to be the only method of proving to the Soviet Government

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<sup>28</sup> *The New Statesman and Nation*, 25 March 1933. "Comments". See also, the *News Chronicle*, 21 March 1933. Leading article, "The Soviets' Prisoners".

<sup>29</sup> *The Daily Telegraph*, 24 March 1933. "No Prohibition of Imports" by the Political Correspondent.

<sup>30</sup> *The Daily Express*, 4 April 1933. Leading article, "Well Done, the Government".

<sup>31</sup> *The Daily Mail*, 4 April 1933. Leading article, "Vigorous Action".

<sup>32</sup> D.B.F.P., Second Series, Vol. VII, no. 311.

that Britain meant business in rectifying commercial issues.<sup>33</sup> A new agreement was required to regulate Russian imports and until such a settlement was reached, *The Times* assumed the uncompromising view that there was little reason to conduct trade with the Soviet Union.<sup>34</sup> Thus the embargo, as explained and rationalised by the Conservative press, was not intended purely as a means of securing the release of the British engineers. Strang, in contrast, stated that his, and the Foreign Office's, only concern at the time was the release of the six British men. He pointed out that the immediate cessation of the embargo upon the release, in July, of the two imprisoned Britons proved that it was intended for no other purpose than to help the detained men.<sup>35</sup>

However, the labour and liberal press were correct to ask if the purpose of the bill would help the British engineers awaiting trial. *The Daily Herald* argued that "economic sabre-rattling" was "very dangerous folly" as it had no means of helping the prisoners and merely ensured that greater evils would follow.<sup>36</sup> *The New Statesman and Nation* claimed that the debate on the embargo showed the House of Commons at its worst, where an "orgy of prejudice and passion" had been released. The journal claimed the British Government "has behaved with an insolence towards the Russians which it would not dare to do to other nations". *The New Statesman and Nation* did not accept the Foreign Secretary's statement that the bill was intended only to help the prisoners and not proposed to cause a breach with the Soviet Union. In the journal's opinion, there were too many "infatuated anti-Bolsheviks" venting their spite without regard to lost trade or the safety of the engineers. The journal thus found it ironic that there was a suggestion that "Russians suffer <sup>from</sup> ~~form~~ morbid hysteria... when any visitor to the House of Commons might have made the same complaint of Britain". Therefore, the *New*

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<sup>33</sup> *The Times*, 6 April 1933. Leading article, "The Moscow Prisoners". See also, the *Daily Telegraph*, 6 April 1933; *The Yorkshire Post*, 4 April 1933; *The Daily Mail*, 4 April 1933.

<sup>34</sup> *The Times*, 4 April 1933. Leading article, "Trade with Russia".

<sup>35</sup> Strang, p. 113.

<sup>36</sup> *The Daily Herald*, 4 April 1933. Leading article, "Bad to Worse"; 5 April 1933, leading article, "Towards Paralysis".

*Statesman and Nation* pleaded for the "mischief" to be stopped before it was too late.<sup>37</sup> The *Daily Herald* described events as a "tragedy of folly and clumsy diplomacy" by both Moscow and London. The paper conceded that the way in which the Soviet Government had handled the affair was only calculated to arouse suspicion and resentment in Britain, though the British Government was achieving similar damage with its public warnings of "unfortunate consequences". The *Daily Herald* alleged that "prestige" had unfortunately been called into effect so that the threat of an embargo only made it more difficult for Moscow to be "reasonable or conciliatory".<sup>38</sup>

The *Manchester Guardian* similarly indicated that the British Government was mistaken if it thought its "bullying" action would prevent the trial. The paper argued that the Government could insist on the rights of the engineers but believed fewer threats would be more helpful since the fate of the Britons could be jeopardised by such efforts of coercion.<sup>39</sup> The *Manchester Guardian* accused the British Government of pretending to act nobly, when in reality it appeared to have abandoned the interests of those facing trial. The embargo would not help the British men because the Soviet Government perceived it to be an attempt at intimidation which only increased Soviet suspicion of capitalist diplomacy. In the paper's view, the purpose of the trial had become political with the British Government's attempt to redress trade differences through economic warfare rather than negotiation.<sup>40</sup> Thus the *Manchester Guardian* implied that Simon was speaking hypocritically when he claimed he wished for trade between Britain and the Soviet Union to continue.<sup>41</sup> The *News Chronicle* accepted that the British Government was being pressed by public opinion<sup>42</sup> but the paper accused the Foreign Office of taking actions designed to ensure the Soviet Government refused to change the Ogpu's blunder

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<sup>37</sup> *The New Statesman and Nation*, 8 April 1933. Leading article, "The Russian Embargo". The *Manchester Guardian* also called for an end to the hysteria in Britain: 3 April 1933, leading article, "Bad Advice".

<sup>38</sup> *The Daily Herald*, 4 April 1933. Leading article, "Bad to Worse".

<sup>39</sup> *The Manchester Guardian*, 3 April 1933. Leading article, "Bad Advice".

<sup>40</sup> *The Manchester Guardian*, 4 April 1933. Leading article, "Diplomacy by Threats".

<sup>41</sup> *The Manchester Guardian*, 6 April 1933. Leading article, "The Russian Debate".

<sup>42</sup> *The News Chronicle*, 4 April 1933. Leading article, "The Government and the Soviets".

since Britain's demands were such that no government could yield.<sup>43</sup> The *Economist* suggested the British Government should use tact when dealing with Moscow but feared that "inflammatory nationalist feeling" was ready to explode. The journal believed the Cabinet went far to rival the original lack of wisdom by the Soviet authorities and that the bill was thus a further "unfortunate step".<sup>44</sup> The *Spectator* warned that the British Government could not afford to alienate the Soviet Union as it was "too large and influential" in the Far East and Europe. As the journal pointed out, nothing could be easier than to break-off relations, though that was a "short-sighted and irresponsible" move by statesmen who hailed this as an opportunity for a break similar to the Arcos incident. The *Spectator* reasoned that the Soviet Union must realise that the trial antagonised Britain and therefore would only hold it if there was sufficient evidence.<sup>45</sup>

### The trial

Discussion concerning the type of trial and the possibility of justice being issued occupied a considerable amount of news coverage by Fleet Street in April 1933. Though the liberal and quality conservative press admitted that the Soviet Union had the right to investigate and punish British citizens if they so deserved, these papers argued that the British Government would need to be satisfied that justice along British standards was being upheld.<sup>46</sup> The popular conservative press, however, was not so accommodating. The *Daily Mail* argued that because Soviet courts were "tribunals for working deliberate wrongs and for providing the Soviets with victims and scapegoats", the safety of the British men rested on pressure by their own government.<sup>47</sup>

The methods employed by the OGPU were frequently discussed by Fleet Street. The *Daily Telegraph* alleged that it was with "typical Soviet cruelty" that MacDonald's

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<sup>43</sup> The *News Chronicle*, 6 April 1933. Leading article, "A Desperate Remedy". The *Spectator*, 7 April 1933. News of the Week.

<sup>44</sup> The *Economist*, 8 April 1933. Leading article, "Britain and Russia".

<sup>45</sup> The *Spectator*, 7 April 1933. Leading article, "The Trial at Moscow".

<sup>46</sup> The *Sunday Times*, 2 April 1933. "Russian Law that Is Not Justice; Courts Subservient to Policy; Part of Machine of Government; Can Englishmen Get Fair Trial?" by a Russian Legal Expert. Also, the *Manchester Guardian*, 4 April 1933 and the *News Chronicle*, 4 April 1933.

<sup>47</sup> The *Daily Mail*, 4 April 1933. Leading article, "Vigorous Action".

confession was used by the OGPU in an attempt to implicate and obtain confessions from the other British men.<sup>48</sup> The *Evening News* alleged that to the Russian mind, an admission of guilt wrung from the prisoner by torture was as valuable as any other, a tactic not used by Britain since the sixteenth century. In the view of the paper,

it is idle to pretend that the civilised West has anything in common with the Russian outlook... A person is either a humbug or a fool to pretend to understand or to sympathise with Soviet methods or the Soviet mind.<sup>49</sup>

MacDonald's withdrawal of his plea of guilty in the first court session and subsequent reaffirmation of guilt following a short recess, appeared to confirm the allegations by the British press that cruelty was in use. Thus the *Daily Telegraph* called MacDonald's testimony "heartbreaking and revolting" in a trial which was an "insane parody of judicial process".<sup>50</sup> The *Scotsman* suggested he confessed out of fear since

fear is the most potent emotion in Russia... The Soviet Union is in the grip of terror such as never known before, to the extent that even innocent men are cowed by it and incapable of asserting their manhood... It shows much for British phlegm and endurance that five of the six pleaded 'not guilty'.<sup>51</sup>

Nevertheless, the conservative press expressed satisfaction that there were "certain truths and unplanned deviations" in the trial since five of the British engineers refused to plead guilty and Monkhouse even declared in court that the charges were trumped up.<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> The *Daily Telegraph*, 11 April 1933. Leading article, "The Soviet and Their Prisoners". See also the *Daily Express*, 11 and 12 April 1933. The *Daily Telegraph*, 12 April 1933. "Why Mr. MacDonald Is Isolated; Prosecution's Tactics" by the Diplomatic Correspondent. The *Scotsman*, 11 April 1933. Leading article, "The Russian Trial".

<sup>49</sup> The *Evening News*, 18 April 1933. Leading article, "Bench and Barbarism". The *Daily Mail*, 13 April 1933. Leading article, "A Travesty of Justice"; 18 April 1933, leading article, "The Sinister Frame-Up". The *Daily Telegraph*, 18 April 1933. Leading article, "Moscow's British Admirers".

<sup>50</sup> The *Daily Telegraph*, 15 April 1933. Leading article, "A Ghastly Travesty of Justice". For other similar views, see the *News Chronicle*, 18 April 1933. Leading article, "An Outrage". The *Daily Mail*, 17 April 1933. Leading article, "Tragic Interlude". The *Evening Standard*, 17 April 1933. Leading article, "Moscow's Purpose".

<sup>51</sup> The *Scotsman*, 13 April 1933. Leading article, "The Russian Trial".

<sup>52</sup> The *Yorkshire Post*, 18 April 1933. Leading article, "Moscow Truths and Fictions". See also, *The Times*, 15 April 1933. "The Moscow Trial"; 'A Frame Up'; Mr. Monkhouse's Declaration". The *Evening News* 13 and 15 April.

The *Manchester Guardian* agreed with the conservative press in its assessment of the trial as "make-believe, alien to Britain, and without evidence or real charges", though the paper was less prejudiced in thinking that the Moscow court tried to be conciliatory during the case. Though acknowledging that the trial was "farcical", the *Manchester Guardian* continued to recognise that there was a political side to it, in which passions in both Britain and the Soviet Union had become inflamed.<sup>53</sup> Although the paper claimed it was preposterous for British citizens to be made into "political catspaws of the state", the *Manchester Guardian* nevertheless pointed out that anyone who worked in the Soviet Union understood the risks involved. With this in mind, the paper expected the British Government to maintain relations, contrary to conservative press opinion, to protect other Britons who worked in the Soviet Union.<sup>54</sup> Although the *News Chronicle* conceded the trial was an attempt by Moscow to convince the world that Soviet criminal law was not a travesty of justice, the paper, nevertheless, sarcastically suggested that the Soviet Government should have "gagged" Vyshinsky before his "brutal assault" against the defendants.<sup>55</sup>

When the verdict was announced, the quality conservative press was surprised, though relieved, and therefore less condemnatory in its opinion of the Soviet Union than in earlier articles. *The Times* was convinced the "mild" sentences were most likely due to the British Government's swift pressure<sup>56</sup> and the *Scotsman* suggested that the judgement was a half hearted attempt by the Soviet court to avert British anger.<sup>57</sup> The *Daily Telegraph* also conceded that the verdict fell short of the paper's worst fears though it expected the British Government to secure the release of the two remaining engineers by taking any necessary measures.<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> *The Manchester Guardian*, 19 April 1933. Leading article, "The Moscow Verdict".

<sup>54</sup> *The Manchester Guardian*, 20 April 1933. Leading article, "Verdict and Embargo". *The Spectator*, 21 April 1933. Leading article, "The Moscow Verdict".

<sup>55</sup> *The News Chronicle*, 18 April 1933. Leading article, "An Outrage". Vyshinsky was the Soviet prosecutor.

<sup>56</sup> *The Times*, 20 April 1933. Leading article, "The Moscow Prisoners".

<sup>57</sup> *The Scotsman*, 19 April 1933. Leading article, "The Russian Trial".

<sup>58</sup> *The Daily Telegraph*, 19 April 1933. Leading article, "Moscow Delivers Sentence".

The popular Conservative press, despite the relatively lenient sentences, continued its criticism of the Soviet Union. The *Daily Mail* and the *Daily Express* claimed that the trial had ended as "shamefully" as expected. Both papers stressed that the British public would never tolerate the imprisonment of the two men, on such "flimsy" evidence, in the "ghastly cells of the Lubyanka" and therefore expected swift retribution by the British Government.<sup>59</sup>

The liberal press, like the quality conservative newspapers, was relieved with the verdict. However, rather than expressing indignation over the imprisonment of two Britons or calling for further punitive measures, the liberal papers warned against excessive British actions. The *News Chronicle* believed the relatively mild sentences suggested that the Soviet Government could be approached since the verdict demonstrated that the Kremlin was clearly not looking for trouble. Therefore, the paper argued that Britain should refrain from further threats and work calmly for a solution.<sup>60</sup> The *Economist* found the punishment unpredictably mild, considering the results of previous trials of foreigners when "sensational" sentences were passed.<sup>61</sup> Though finding the verdict unexpectedly light, the *Spectator* alleged the trial of the British engineers was as fair as anyone in the Soviet Union could receive. Foreigners living in the USSR knew it was very easy to break the law through innocent actions and therefore generally exercised caution in relations and transactions with Russians.<sup>62</sup>

The *Daily Worker* was the only British paper to say the prosecution established guilt, thus demonstrating the vigilance of the Soviet Government in "protecting the rights and property of the workers". The paper also suggested that it was not surprising the British Government had feared the trial after the revelations in the espionage case.<sup>63</sup> The *Daily Worker* was convinced the investigation and the sentences were more fair than

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<sup>59</sup> The *Daily Mail*, 19 April 1933. Leading article, "Mockery of Justice". The *Daily Express*, 19 April 1933. Leading article, "Guilty".

<sup>60</sup> The *News Chronicle*, 19 April 1933. Leading article, "The Moscow Sentences". The *Economist*, 22 April 1933. Leading article, "Moscow and After". The *Spectator*, 21 April 1933. Leading article, "The Moscow Verdict".

<sup>61</sup> The *Economist*, 22 April 1933. Leading article, "Moscow and After".

<sup>62</sup> The *Spectator*, 21 April 1933. Leading article, "The Moscow Verdict".

<sup>63</sup> The *Daily Worker*, 19 April 1933. Leading article, "Soviet Justice and Its Enemies".

those in a capitalist state. Furthermore, the paper believed that the men deserved no leniency and therefore, the act of clemency by the Soviet Government showed mercy.<sup>64</sup>

Although the British Government denied there was any substance to the charges of espionage<sup>65</sup>, Strang, in charge of the Embassy when Ovey returned to Britain at the end of March, was aware that several foreign correspondents in Moscow considered there to be some truth in the OGPU's case.<sup>66</sup> Many resident journalists believed the British engineers confessed to the lesser crimes of wrecking to conceal the larger ones of espionage, though the reporters admitted that the confessions may have been made with no greater intention than to protect loved ones. Although several correspondents acknowledged that no case was made and no evidence provided, many firmly believed that the real story was never made public, even with the return of the men to Britain.<sup>67</sup> However, the newspapers and political journals in Britain, despite any misgivings by their correspondents in Moscow, loyally reported that the British engineers were in no way guilty of any of the accusations. It was simple, and potentially the truth, for the press to explain that charges of bribery were merely gifts or loans to less fortunate Russian colleagues. Fleet Street was also able to state that responsible engineers of any nationality would not sabotage their own work. As to the accusations of espionage, editors and journalists had no means of verifying the charges apart from statements by the British Government. Conservative newspapers flatly denied the possibility of espionage while the liberal and labour press thought it unlikely. The fact that two of the British men had confessed and that one had pleaded guilty in no way forced the British press to accept the charges. Instead, Fleet Street suggested the engineers were saving Russian colleagues

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<sup>64</sup> The *Daily Worker*, 20 April 1933. Leading article, "Answer the British Diehards".

<sup>65</sup> Keeble, p. 115.

<sup>66</sup> D.B.F.P., Second Series, Vol. VII, nos. 330, 404, 411, 451.

<sup>67</sup> Lyons, pp. 565-568. Jonathan Haslam (*The Soviet Union and the Struggle for Collective Security in Europe, 1933-1939*, pp. 17-18) and Owen (p. 100) suggest that Thornton's inability to make a clear denial against the evidence was especially confusing for foreign correspondents and diplomats in Moscow. Furthermore, the British Government relied on the type of economic information which a company like the Metro-Vickers could provide to fill in gaps on conditions in the Soviet Union. Thus, though not technically members of the Intelligence Service, the company did assist that department yet the Foreign Office could have remained ignorant of the role played by certain members of the Metro-Vickers company. See also Lammers, pp. 264-265.

or that third degree methods had been used, such as sleep deprivation.<sup>68</sup> In the end, newspapers and journals of all political persuasions could state that the improbable charges were unproved by the Soviet court.

The British Government, recognising the patriotic feelings of the British press, used it to incite public opinion in support of the accused and against the Soviet Union.<sup>69</sup> Furthermore, on 11 April, Strang recommended to Simon that an "intentional leakage" be made to the London Press to soften the impact of MacDonald's "bombshell" confessions.<sup>70</sup> Collier, in the Foreign Office, replied to Strang on 12 April that the newspapers were already suggesting MacDonald's testimony meant he was "throwing himself on the mercy of the Court", though "barbarous methods" of extracting confessions were also being reported. Nevertheless, Collier stated that further hints had been given to the national press.<sup>71</sup> Thus, there was evidence that the British Government was subtly attempting to manipulate the press into supporting His Majesty's Government's response to the arrests and of encouraging negative opinions towards the Soviet Union.

Strang also complained to Simon that A. J. Cummings, the political correspondent and special representative for the *News Chronicle* sent to Moscow to cover the trial, reported favourably towards the Soviet judicial system. Strang feared this would give a false impression to the British public of actual events in Moscow.<sup>72</sup> In contrast, the *New Statesman and Nation* was concerned that the British public was not being given a balanced view of the Moscow trial since the "anti-Bolshevik" press in Britain printed "all sorts of nonsense" which led the public to believe "Soviet Russia was

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<sup>68</sup> *The Times*, 20 April 1933. Leading article, "The Moscow Prisoners".

<sup>69</sup> D.B.F.P., Second Series, Vol. VII, nos. 211, 222 and 239. Haslam, p. 18. Lyons noted that "the arrests caused a storm of patriotic anger in Britain". p. 563.

<sup>70</sup> D.B.F.P., Second Series, Vol. VII, no. 381.

<sup>71</sup> D.B.F.P., Second Series, Vol. VII, no. 381, fn 2. See for example, the *Scotsman*, 11 April 1933. Leading article, "The Russian Trial". The *Daily Telegraph*, 14 April 1933. Leading article, "The Moscow Trial Opens".

<sup>72</sup> D.B.F.P., Second Series, Vol. VII, no. 388, fn 2. Strang did not really need to worry since the majority of British newspapers, including the *News Chronicle*, were firmly sceptical of the merits of the trial.

particularly awful".<sup>73</sup> A further demonstration of the Government's subtle, though admittedly unnecessary, manipulation of the British press was indicated with Simon's suggestion that Strang ask Cholerton, the Moscow Correspondent for the *Daily Telegraph*, to appeal to the Soviet Government for the expulsion of the six engineers in place of a trial. Simon explained that Cholerton's idea should appear to be "independent" of the Foreign Office because if Litvinov discovered it was a proposal by the British Government, the plan would be ignored.<sup>74</sup> Strang replied favourably to the suggestion since Cholerton was a "man of intelligence and discretion". The correspondent willingly accepted the task on behalf of the British Government even though he did not expect success because the Soviet Government was determined to carry out the trial.<sup>75</sup> Thus it was evident that some journalists voluntarily and naturally acted in accord with the British Government's wishes.

### The embargo

The quality conservative press generally wrote very similar articles supporting Britain's rapid reaction to the verdict - "not a day or an hour was lost by the Government".<sup>76</sup> These papers expected the embargo to have a "sobering" effect on the Soviet Union since it hit the "soft spot of Russian needs" and could allegedly ruin the Soviet economy. Furthermore, the quality conservative press believed that such prompt action demonstrated the British Government's determination to assist in the release of Thornton and MacDonald, especially since Britain also required foreign trade.<sup>77</sup> The *Scotsman* hoped the Soviet Government had "gratified its vanity" by condemning the accused, but argued that it should show its "magnanimity" by releasing the two

<sup>73</sup> *The New Statesman and Nation*, 22 April 1933. Leading article, "Moscow and the Big Stick".

<sup>74</sup> D.B.F.P., Second Series, Vol. VII, no. 341.

<sup>75</sup> D.B.F.P., Second Series, Vol. VII, nos. 348 and 368.

<sup>76</sup> *The Daily Telegraph*, 20 April 1933. Leading article, "A Prompt Answer to Moscow".

<sup>77</sup> *The Times*, 21 April 1933. "The Moscow Charges" by the Riga Correspondent. *The Daily Telegraph*, 20 April 1933. Leading article, "A Prompt Answer to Moscow". *The Scotsman*, 20 April 1933. Leading article, "The Russian Embargo". *The Sunday Times*, 23 April 1933. Leading article, "Justice for Trade".

engineers.<sup>78</sup> In addition, the quality conservative press recognised that the embargo could help clear up international trade relations, not only by protecting the rights of foreigners in the Soviet Union, but by settling the imbalance in British-Soviet trade.<sup>79</sup> Although these newspapers allegedly desired a return to some form of commercial relations with the Soviet Union,<sup>80</sup> they admitted there were problems. For example, the *Observer* accused the Soviet Government of a "morbid suspicion and susceptibility" which made trade difficult,<sup>81</sup> though the paper conveniently forgot similar suspicions and prejudices by several members of the British Government. The *Scotsman* likewise noted the difficulty in conducting business with a country which maintained a "poor moral code" and therefore, although the Metropolitan-Vickers incident was technically concluded, the paper claimed it would not be forgotten.<sup>82</sup>

The *Yorkshire Post* took a view surprisingly similar to the popular conservative press in suggesting even stronger measures than an embargo which the British population would allegedly support. The paper implied that since trade relations had been halted, perhaps the British Embassy in Moscow was no longer viable.<sup>83</sup> The Beaverbrook and Rothermere press also called for a complete severing of relations. The *Evening Standard* and the *Evening News*, though commending the Government's promptitude in passing the embargo, hoped Britain would have nothing more to do with such a country. Furthermore, these papers argued Britain would not suffer by the embargo since the balance of trade with the Soviet Union had for so long been unfavourable to Britain.<sup>84</sup>

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<sup>78</sup> The *Scotsman*, 20 April 1933. Leading article, "The Russian Embargo".

<sup>79</sup> Ibid. The *Sunday Times*, 23 April 1933. Leading article, "Justice for Trade".

<sup>80</sup> See for example, The *Observer*, 23 April 1933. Leading article, "Moscow and Common Sense". The paper reported that Thornton and MacDonald would be released within a week thus preventing a trade war which no one wanted. The *Daily Express* also reported that the two imprisoned men were going to be released within a week; 22 April 1933.

<sup>81</sup> The *Observer*, 23 April 1933. Leading article, "Moscow and Common Sense".

<sup>82</sup> The *Scotsman*, 20 April 1933. Leading article, "The Russian Embargo". The *Daily Telegraph*, 19 April 1933. Leading article, "Moscow Delivers Sentence".

<sup>83</sup> The *Yorkshire Post*, 20 April 1933. Leading article, "After the Moscow Trial".

<sup>84</sup> The *Evening Standard*, 19 April 1933. Leading article, "No Truck with Russia". The *Evening News*, 19 April 1933. Leading article, "The Moscow Mummery". The *Daily Mail*, 13 April 1933. Leading article, "A Travesty of Justice".

The liberal and labour press, however, were opposed to the "precipitate" use of the embargo.<sup>85</sup> In the opinion of the *Manchester Guardian*, its enforcement raised doubts as to whether or not the British Government was acting on behalf of the two prisoners or for its own political purposes.<sup>86</sup> In contrast to conservative newspapers, none of the liberal and labour press believed the sentences of imprisonment would be commuted because of the embargo<sup>87</sup> though the *Manchester Guardian* thought it would be a "wise and prompt act by the Soviet Government to cut the ground from under the feet of the [Tory] die-hards".<sup>88</sup> The *Spectator* argued that without the threat of a ban on Russian goods, the sentences might have been even lighter<sup>89</sup> but, in the view of the *New Statesman and Nation*, Soviet prestige had been forced to contend with British arrogance.<sup>90</sup> The *News Chronicle* regretted the "habitual use of trade for political reprisals" because it was "too expensive"<sup>91</sup> especially since the Soviet Government enforced its own embargo of British goods.<sup>92</sup> Furthermore, despite assurances by the Foreign Minister, the *Economist* was concerned there was no guarantee that once the two British engineers were released, the British Government would agree to end the embargo.<sup>93</sup>

### Explanation for the trial

Why did the Soviet Government arrest six British citizens who worked for a responsible engineering company, especially at a time when the Soviet Union required

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<sup>85</sup> See for example, *The Manchester Guardian*, 20 April 1933. Leading article, "Verdict and Embargo". *The News Chronicle*, 20 April 1933. Leading article, "A Dangerous Weapon". *The Economist*, 22 April 1933. Leading article, "Moscow and After".

<sup>86</sup> *The Manchester Guardian*, 20 April 1933. Leading article, "Verdict and Embargo".

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.* *The Spectator*, 21 April 1933. Leading article, "The Moscow Verdict". *The Daily Herald*, 21 April 1933. "Moscow Appeal for Exile of Sentenced Britons". *The New Statesman and Nation*, 22 April 1933. Leading article, "Moscow and the Big Stick". *The News Chronicle*, 20 April 1933. Leading article, "A Dangerous Weapon". *The Economist*, 22 April 1933. Leading article, "Moscow and After".

<sup>88</sup> *The Manchester Guardian*, 21 April 1933. Leading article, "Hope and Peace".

<sup>89</sup> *The Spectator*, 21 April 1933. Leading article, "The Moscow Verdict".

<sup>90</sup> *The New Statesman and Nation*, 22 April 1933. Leading article, "Moscow and the Big Stick".

<sup>91</sup> *The News Chronicle*, 24 April 1933. Leading article, "The Return from Moscow".

<sup>92</sup> *The Manchester Guardian*, 24 April 1933. Leading article, "The Russian Trade War".

<sup>93</sup> *The Economist*, 22 April 1933. Leading article, "Moscow and After".

trade and allies? The USSR needed foreign capital to increase its industrial capacity and furthermore, the Great Depression was a problem facing all of Europe in 1933, so no country would have taken actions which threatened trade relations. A common explanation in most of the British press for the arrest of the British engineers was the alleged failure of the Five Year Plan. For example, the *Daily Express* feared that the search for foreign scapegoats had led to "the vile charges trumped up against them by a bankrupt Bolshevik Government" for the failures of "Soviet schemes of socialism".<sup>94</sup> The *Daily Telegraph*, with less ideologically motivated references, suggested that the staging of sensational treason trials was a "time-honoured resource" of the Soviet Government when failures and breakdowns had to be concealed.<sup>95</sup> Though the *Manchester Guardian* warned the British Government to look further than its own prejudices, the paper also suggested that the Soviet Government was trying to divert attention in the USSR from economic problems.<sup>96</sup> Since the *Economist* found it difficult to imagine that a company which had worked in the Soviet Union for ten years would sabotage its own work, the journal suggested the arrests were more likely to be used as a screen for official Soviet incompetence.<sup>97</sup>

However, Fleet Street offered other explanations, such as the *Sunday Times's* suspicion that the Metropolitan-Vickers trial was held so the Soviet Government could default on its payments to Britain. The only evidence for this explanation, in the opinion of the paper, was that the Soviet Union was never a power which could be trusted. Its "code of honour" was not like other civilised nations because it had no "moral scruples".<sup>98</sup> The *Observer* referred to the Soviet Government as a "tyranny as merciless and capricious as Ivan the Terrible" since there were no guarantees of liberty or life. "Where there is no humour, people perish."<sup>99</sup> As the *Scotsman* argued, in order to understand the Soviet Union, the British public had to remember that the psychology of

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<sup>94</sup> The *Daily Express*, 17 March 1933. Leading article, "Send Us a Man!".

<sup>95</sup> The *Daily Telegraph*, 15 March 1933. Leading article, "Moscow's British Prisoners".

<sup>96</sup> The *Manchester Guardian*, 18 March 1933. Leading article, "Arrests in Russia".

<sup>97</sup> The *Economist*, 18 March 1933. "The Arrests in Russia".

<sup>98</sup> The *Sunday Times*, 23 April 1933. Leading article, "Justice for Trade".

<sup>99</sup> The *Observer*, 23 April 1933. Leading article, "Moscow and Common Sense".

the Russian was "eastern" and therefore allowances had to be made.<sup>100</sup> Most ironically, it was the *News Chronicle* and the *Manchester Guardian* who, despite their liberal pedigrees, displayed attitudes which sounded very similar to conservative attitudes. These papers, for example, accused the Soviet Union of being less civilised than Britain. "We are dealing with a 'fanatical' people and circumspection as well as firmness is needed in our action."<sup>101</sup> In the opinion of the *Manchester Guardian*, the Embargo Bill, which ignored Russia's sovereign rights, proved that Britain did not understand that the Soviet Union "lived in a world outside 'ordinary' considerations".<sup>102</sup>

Eugene Lyons, an American correspondent in Moscow for the United Press, admitted that he and other journalists failed to understand why the trial was staged since it merely emphasised to the Soviet population and the world at large that Russian industry remained ineffective and living conditions continued to be poor despite the first Five Year Plan.<sup>103</sup> However, Lyons acknowledged that the trial succeeded to a limited extent in diverting attention abroad and at home from the growing catastrophe in the countryside. Lyons admitted that press correspondents in Moscow "made a deal" with the Soviet censor - news of the famine in the countryside would not be covered in exchange for relatively free expression on the Metropolitan-Vickers trial.<sup>104</sup>

Strang suggested that not only was it possible that the trial was held to hide internal problems, but potentially of more importance, a statement was being made concerning Soviet foreign relations. Strang believed the Soviet Government selected the British engineers in an effort to teach the British Government that it could not pursue anti-Soviet activities with impunity, whether economic or diplomatic in nature. By 1933,

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<sup>100</sup> The *Scotsman*, 19 April 1933. Leading article, "The Russian Trial".

<sup>101</sup> The *News Chronicle*, 4 April 1933. Leading article, "The Government and the Soviets".

<sup>102</sup> The *Manchester Guardian*, 5 April 1933. Leading article, "The White Paper".

<sup>103</sup> Lyons, p. 568.

<sup>104</sup> *Ibid*, p. 564. Several papers, nevertheless, maintained that their correspondents were finding it difficult to send detailed and correct reports: see for example, the *Manchester Guardian*, 16 March 1933. Furthermore, some correspondents were initially refused visas into the Soviet Union to witness the trial: see for example, the *Daily Express*, 12 April 1933 and *Daily Mail*, 7 April 1933. D.B.F.P., Second Series, Vol. VII, no. 232 describes the troubles the foreign correspondents, specifically mentioning Lyons, had in sending information home and that to avoid the censor, they were phoning their reports to London.

British policy in Europe had appeared to the Soviet Government to have assumed a "definite anti-Soviet bent", especially with the Ottawa Agreement of August 1932.<sup>105</sup> Moscow viewed these changes with suspicion and began an anti-British campaign in the Soviet press at the end of 1932. Furthermore, Strang suspected that the stage was being set for greater action against Britain, and the Metro-Vickers organisation proved an easy target. The company had been in the Soviet Union for several years, had engineers in important areas of industry, and men who had potential access to machines for wrecking and saw information for economic espionage. Thus Strang argued the Metro-Vickers employees were convenient scapegoats in the Soviet Government's attempt to show the British that the Soviet Union was a country which deserved respect.<sup>106</sup>

Several papers admitted to being confused as to whether or not the Soviet Government had achieved anything beneficial by holding the trial. The *Daily Express* and the *Daily Mail* alleged that the Soviet rulers desperately staged the trial because the Five Year Plan had failed, though only "the starving peasants who received a blood sacrifice instead of the bread they are crying for" were deceived.<sup>107</sup> The *Economist* wondered why the Soviet authorities should have risked and even incurred a political breach with Britain at a time when the Soviet Union was pursuing a conciliatory foreign policy and feared attack by Japan in the Far East.<sup>108</sup> The *Daily Telegraph*, the *Spectator*, and the *Sunday Times* admitted, following the conclusion of the trial, that they remained baffled as to its clear purpose. The papers recognised that there were political motives and the necessity of covering up domestic problems but this did not explain why British engineers were accused. These papers felt that until this trial, the Soviet Government's policy had been to improve its position and favour with Britain. However, with no

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<sup>105</sup> This commercial agreement gave the Dominions most favoured nation status which conflicted with the 1930 trade agreement between Britain and the Soviet Union.

<sup>106</sup> Strang, pp. 80 and 116-118. See D.B.F.P., Second Series, Vol. VII, chapters IV and V. See also Lammers, pp. 258-259 and Owen, pp. 97-98. *The Times*, 16 March 1933. Leading article, "Soviet Scapegoats".

<sup>107</sup> *The Daily Express*, 17 April 1933. Leading article, "The Terror Tribunal". *The Daily Mail*, 20 April 1933. Leading article, "Welcome Action".

<sup>108</sup> *The Economist*, 22 April 1933. Leading article, "Moscow and After".

warning or purpose, the "most detested aspect of the Soviet Union" was displayed in a way in which each paper alleged shocked and outraged British public opinion.<sup>109</sup>

The impression that the Soviet Government was forced to carry on and to repair an error made by the Ogpu without the loss of prestige was held by several papers, journals and the British Embassy in Moscow. The *Daily Telegraph* and the *Economist* thought that someone in the Ogpu had probably "blundered"<sup>110</sup> and the *New Statesman and Nation* hoped that an "honest mistake" was made by the secret police without the Soviet Government's knowledge.<sup>111</sup> The *Yorkshire Post* wondered if the entire Soviet Government was as "obtuse" as the Ogpu since the Kremlin seemed intent on ignoring the effect of the trial on British public opinion.<sup>112</sup> Strang believed the relatively early release of the two British men in June was an effort by the Soviet Government to restore favourable, calm, and stable relations following the questionable action by the secret police.<sup>113</sup> However, Western observers in Moscow in April 1933 attributed the arrests to Stalin's orders,<sup>114</sup> though the British press made no significant comment to this effect. This may have been because of the censor or because a rumour was circulated by the Soviet Government that the Ogpu had acted on its own initiative. Stalin, in May 1933, used this as an excuse to purge the secret police of its more dangerous members - dangerous because they were a threat to Stalin's dictatorship.<sup>115</sup>

### Resumption of trade

In June 1933, when there were rumours of a trade rapprochement and the release of the two British engineers, Fleet Street was nearly unanimous in its support for an end

<sup>109</sup> The *Daily Telegraph*, 19 April 1933. Leading article, "Moscow Delivers Sentence". The *Spectator*, 21 April 1933. Leading article, "The Moscow Verdict". The *Sunday Times*, 16 April 1933. Leading article, "Black Work at Moscow".

<sup>110</sup> The *Economist*, 18 March 1933. "The Arrests in Russia". The *Daily Telegraph*, 15 March 1933. Leading article, "Moscow's British Prisoners". See also, *The Times*, 16 March 1933. Leading article, "Soviet Scapegoats". The *Daily Express*, 16 March 1933. "Sentence without Trial?" by the Diplomatic Correspondent. Strang, pp. 80 and 116-118. See D.B.F.P., Second Series, Vol. VII, chapters IV, V, and VI. See no. 484 dated 8 May 1933.

<sup>111</sup> The *New Statesman and Nation*, 18 March 1933. "Comments".

<sup>112</sup> The *Yorkshire Post*, 6 April 1933. Leading article, "The Russian Dispatches".

<sup>113</sup> Strang, p. 120.

<sup>114</sup> Owen, p. 97 and D.B.F.P., Second Series, Vol. VII, no. 219.

<sup>115</sup> Owen, pp. 97 and 103. D.B.F.P., Second Series, Vol. VII, no. 484.

to the commercial war. Ultimately the hostility caused by the Metro-Vickers affair declined as the need for stable commercial relations increased, and curiously, the atmosphere improved as a result of the trial. When the Soviet Government released MacDonald and Thornton on 2 July, the conservative press felt the British Government's embargo policy had been vindicated. The *Daily Telegraph's* leading article on 3 July was entitled "The Embargo Effects Its Purpose", a view supported by other conservative newspapers.<sup>116</sup> In the opinion of the *Daily Telegraph*, the affair had provided a useful lesson - an embargo was a good weapon in securing the release of a country's nationals. Furthermore, the Soviet Government's reprisals were in comparison allegedly impotent.<sup>117</sup> Nevertheless, although the *Sunday Times* reported that the British Government felt vindicated in its embargo policy, the paper admitted that the outcome had as much to do with "Russian" common sense and commercial values which had triumphed over political dogma.<sup>118</sup>

The liberal and labour press, in contrast, argued that the two Britons would in all likelihood have been released sooner had the British Government not disregarded the Soviet Union's honour. Furthermore, the *Manchester Guardian*, the *News Chronicle*, and the *New Statesman and Nation* were concerned that the British Government had undervalued trade with the Soviet Union at a time when British unemployment was high.<sup>119</sup> Thus the *Daily Herald* was generous in its praise of Simon and Litvinov for achieving a "victory for common sense".<sup>120</sup> The *Economist* pointed out that "prestige is very largely a matter of time" and that after two months of the embargo, tempers had

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<sup>116</sup> See for example, the *Scotsman*, 1 July 1933. Leading article, "The Russian Embargo"; 3 July 1933, leading article, "British Prisoners Released".

<sup>117</sup> The *Daily Telegraph*, 3 July 1933. Leading article, "The Embargo Effects Its Purpose". The *Times*, 3 July 1933. Leading article, "Trade with Russia".

<sup>118</sup> The *Sunday Times*, 2 July 1933. Leading article, "The Russian Statement".

<sup>119</sup> The *Manchester Guardian*, 26 June 1933. Leading article, "Mr. Baldwin and Russia". The *News Chronicle*, 30 June 1933. Leading article, "Who Is Holding It Up?". The *New Statesman and Nation*, 1 July 1933. Leading article, "Russian Pride and British Prejudice".

<sup>120</sup> The *Daily Herald*, 3 July 1933. "Moscow Prisoners Exile; Trade and Jail Shackles Smashed; Englishmen Home Again this Week" by the Diplomatic Correspondent. See also 26 June 1933, leading article, "Sabotage".

cooled, common sense had re-emerged, and honour had been satisfied unfortunately by sacrificing trade.<sup>121</sup>

In contrast, the *Daily Worker* claimed that protest against the embargo by the British population meant that the Tory diehards had finally been forced to give in.<sup>122</sup> In addition, the paper alleged the release of the "two worthless individuals" was not even a "face-saver" for the British Government. Though the embargo was lifted, the *Daily Worker* reported that the Britain's workers would carry on the fight against the anti-Soviet policy of British imperialism.<sup>123</sup>

The release of the British engineers and the end of the embargo meant that commercial negotiations, which had been suspended in March, were resumed in July. None of the British press expected the talks for a new trade agreement to take long<sup>124</sup> though the *New Statesman and Nation* warned against the "characteristic pettiness of die-hard Tories".<sup>125</sup> The conservative press primarily wanted a commercial contract which was less one-sided, though an agreement was required quickly so the British economy could benefit.<sup>126</sup> The *Economist* also hoped that the future trade accord would not allow loopholes for further discrimination or embargos.<sup>127</sup>

However, the expected and much sought after commercial agreement did not materialise until 17 February 1934 and was greeted with varying degrees of enthusiasm by Fleet Street. During the months of negotiation, the liberal and labour press noted that despite the folly of the embargo, talks for a new settlement "drift slowly". The *Daily Herald* alleged that this was due to those who

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<sup>121</sup> The *Economist*, 1 July 1933. "Sir J. Simon and M. Litvinov".

<sup>122</sup> The *Daily Worker*, 27 June 1933. Leading article, "Anti-Soviet Embargo Must Go".

<sup>123</sup> The *Daily Worker*, 3 July 1933. Leading article, "The Embargo Goes".

<sup>124</sup> See for example, *The Times*, 26 June 1933. Leading article, "Anglo-Russian Trade"; 8 July 1933, "Trade with Russia; Talks to be Resumed on Monday" by the Parliamentary Correspondent. The *Scotsman*, 3 July 1933. Leading article, "British Prisoners Released".

<sup>125</sup> The *New Statesman and Nation*, 8 July 1933. "Comments - Mr. Litvinov's Successful Visit".

<sup>126</sup> *The Times*, 3 July 1933. Leading article, "Trade with Russia". The *Scotsman*, 3 July 1933. Leading article, "British Prisoners Released". See also, the *Manchester Guardian*, 4 July 1933. "Russia Buying from US" by the NY Correspondent.

<sup>127</sup> The *Economist*, 8 July 1933. "Soviet Diplomacy".

were so influenced by a blind hatred of Soviet Russia that they wish for no trade agreement, no trade, and no relations with Moscow... Yet these stupid ones, adding a class-hatred of the Soviet system to an inherited Disraeli-cum-Victorian hatred of Russia, would bedevil and break both economic and political relations.<sup>128</sup>

The paper further accused the National Government of having a

genius for creating deadlocks... Its conferences march from breakdown to breakdown... Its ineptitude is masterly... The British people are tired both of mischief and of silliness in their rulers.<sup>129</sup>

When the agreement was finally concluded, there was scepticism in the British press that the British Government had achieved the best result possible. For example, *The Times* wrote a short, dry leading article which stated that "it is satisfactory that an agreement has at length been concluded putting the trade between Great Britain and Russia on a regular footing". The paper welcomed any understanding which smoothed the path of mutual trade but only as long as Britain was assured of an expansion in commerce with the Soviet Union.<sup>130</sup> *The Daily Telegraph* similarly accepted that there was no reason why deep-seated dislike of each other's economic and political systems had to interfere with free commerce, especially since Britain required foreign trade.<sup>131</sup>

Labour and liberal newspapers, though relieved an agreement was reached, were critical of the British Government's efforts at negotiation. *The Daily Herald's* leading article concerning the trade settlement was sarcastically entitled, "Signed at Last". The paper alleged that the delay was characteristic of the British Government, though "when there was mischief to be done", such as the enforcing of an embargo, it acted quickly. However, the Conservatives "dawdled and dithered" if something "useful" had to be

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<sup>128</sup> *The Daily Herald*, 6 September 1933. Editorial, "Stupidity and the Soviets". Further article on 18 September. See also, the *Manchester Guardian*, 5 January 1934. Leading article, "The Russian Negotiations". *The News Chronicle*, 9 January 1934. "Still Splitting Straws".

<sup>129</sup> *The Daily Herald*, 27 October 1933. Leading article, "Folly or Worse".

<sup>130</sup> *The Times*, 17 February 1933. Leading article, "The Russian Trade Agreement".

<sup>131</sup> *The Daily Telegraph*, 20 February 1934. Leading article, "Two-Way Trade with Russia".

achieved.<sup>132</sup> The *New Statesman and Nation* called it a "happy ending to an unnecessarily long and foolish chapter" and hoped that no further "political antics" would disturb commercial relations.<sup>133</sup>

However, two British newspapers clearly opposed the new temporary commercial agreement, one a popular conservative newspaper and the other a quality paper. The *Daily Express* was not impressed with the terms of the pact which "visibly benefits the Russians" and left several British industries "at the mercy" of a Soviet promise to correct the balance of trade.<sup>134</sup> In a leading article, the *Daily Express* asserted, somewhat irrelevantly, that "the work, health and happiness of the British people are not likely to increase by reason of the new Russian Trade Agreement" which made an attempt to strike a "fake" balance in the trade between the two countries. The *Daily Express* suggested that Britain would find greater advantage if it placed its money in trade within the Empire and forgot about endowing the "slave population of Russia".<sup>135</sup> The *Scotsman* was also not "aroused to enthusiasm" over the new agreement because the paper felt Scottish industry, and especially the herring fisheries, had again been ignored and left to the whims of the Soviet Government.<sup>136</sup>

## Conclusion

When taken in context with the rest of Europe's major events, the Metropolitan-Vickers trial appeared to have less significance. However, domestically it was immensely important for the British population as a result of intense British press coverage. Furthermore, the British Left was convinced of continuing anti-Bolshevism in the Conservative Party while the Right reaffirmed its opinion that the Soviet Government

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<sup>132</sup> The *Daily Herald*, 17 February 1934. Leading article, "Signed at Last".

<sup>133</sup> The *New Statesman and Nation*, 17 February 1934. "Comments - The Russian Trade Agreement". The *Manchester Guardian*, 20 February 1934, Leading article, "A Fresh Start". The *News Chronicle*, 20 February 1934. Leading article, "At Last".

<sup>134</sup> The *Daily Express*, 20 February 1934. "Russia Promises to Buy More".

<sup>135</sup> The *Daily Express*, 20 February 1934. Leading article, "Opinion".

<sup>136</sup> The *Scotsman*, 20 February 1934. Leading article, "Trade with Russia". The agreement did benefit the Soviet Union in that several important issues and clauses were ignored by the Soviet Government and thus the balance of trade was ultimately not rectified. Owen, pp. 105-107.

could never be trusted.<sup>137</sup> Internationally the Metro-Vickers trial displayed the kind of tensions which existed between the West and the Soviet Union and demonstrated how a seemingly minor incident could easily assume serious consequences. However, these issues became less significant as a result of Hitler becoming Chancellor of Germany since foreign relations moved into the early stages of revolving around German policies. In addition, Britain's major allies, France and the United States, though anxious for the safety of French and American citizens in the USSR, were relatively uninterested and generally unsupportive of Britain's severing of trade with the Soviet Union. The United States actually capitalised on the incident by expanding trade with the Soviet Union, and France did not hesitate to continue negotiations with the Soviet Government for a co-operative alliance.<sup>138</sup>

In addition to the election of the Nazi party in Germany, Japan, which had invaded Manchuria in 1931, by 1933 appeared to be growing stronger, and was thus perceived by the Soviet Government to be a significant threat. Therefore, Soviet foreign policy was in the very early stages of a transformation, moving towards collective security. Though the trial of six British citizens first provoked Britain into taking strong action and secondly, proved <sup>unbeneficial</sup> ~~unbeneficial~~ to British-Soviet relations, the Metro-Vickers affair did no lasting damage since commercial relations were restored, albeit ten months later. The *Economist* was pleased to report that the embargo dispute due to the Metro-Vickers trial had been solved in a "manner acceptable to both [countries]", in a way in which the "patriotic press" of both sides was able to say the other had backed down. It was with relief that the journal stated that British and Soviet diplomacy was conducted impeccably in the last act of the dispute, thus making up for some of the blunders of the earlier proceedings.<sup>139</sup> In August 1933, once the situation had become calmer, the

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<sup>137</sup> Lammers, pp. 266-267.

<sup>138</sup> The *Manchester Guardian*, 20 November 1933. Leading article, "Britain Lags Behind". The *News Chronicle*, 23 November 1933. Leading article, "Mr. Bennett on Britain". The *New Statesman and Nation*, 25 November 1933. "Comments - Russian and the USA". See also earlier warnings by the *Manchester Guardian*, 4 July 1933. "Russia Buying from US" by the NY Correspondent. The *Scotsman*, 3 July 1933. Leading article, "British Prisoners Released".

<sup>139</sup> The *Economist*, 8 July 1933. "Soviet Diplomacy".

*Contemporary Review* stated that the Metro-Vickers case was merely another in a long series of "absurd incidents" produced by the "incompatible temperament" of the Russian and British people.<sup>140</sup>

The Metropolitan-Vickers trial proved how a relatively small event could damage relations between Britain and the Soviet Union and how these relations could take months to repair. The incident also highlighted the large role which the British press achieved in portraying events and in encouraging or dismissing calls for a resumption in economic relations. The press to an extent was harnessed to the British Government's cause though in general newspapers and journals, whether conservative, liberal, or labour, were inflamed sufficiently of their own accord to condemn the Soviet Union. Regardless of political outlook, most of Fleet Street expressed, at some point, abusive language towards the Soviet Union, unjustified especially when the guilt of the accused was neither proved nor disproved. The political journalist for the *News Chronicle*, A. J. Cummings, in 1936 wrote of the incident,

The reporting of the trial in the British press was in my judgement one of the most disreputable episodes in the history of British newspapers. Nearly every newspaper in the land ran amok that astonishing week.<sup>141</sup>

The British press, whether it was right to do so or not, took a determined strong, patriotic view of the trial. To the best of its ability, Fleet Street believed it was informing the British public of events in Moscow despite expressing a significant degree of ill-will towards the Soviet Union. The Metropolitan-Vickers trial and the ensuing trade negotiations showed that in quality and popular conservative newspapers, the attitude of mistrust remained prevalent. Furthermore, the mistrust expressed by the conservative press reflected the emotions and beliefs felt by many conservative politicians and civil servants. The exchanges between the British Embassy in Moscow and the Foreign

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<sup>140</sup> The *Contemporary Review*, August 1933. "The Anglo-Russian Comedy".

<sup>141</sup> A. J. Cummings, *The Press*, p. 52.

Office in London, as well as the Foreign Secretary's speeches in the House of Commons, give evidence of mistrust and a desire for strong action. Thus the conservative press conformed to Government policy. There were signs that the Government was making discreet moves to keep the conservative press patriotic, though even the Foreign Office recognised that this was unnecessary due to the nature of the trial.<sup>142</sup>

In contrast, the labour press primarily expressed disappointment over Soviet action in holding the trial since it encouraged mistrust of the Soviet Government in conservative opinion. The labour press was also disappointed, though not surprised, that the British Government had not conducted itself more professionally during the trial and especially in the ensuing commercial negotiations. Liberal newspapers and journals accepted the reservations felt in the British Government and by the British public, largely encouraged by Fleet Street itself, but the liberal press was disappointed with the British Government's reaction to the events. Equally as distressing for these papers was the fact that the Soviet Union was not evolving as rapidly as hoped towards greater freedom and economic stability. The labour and liberal press never forgot the plight of the six British engineers and campaigned vigorously for a fair trial and the release of these men. There were initial signs that the *Manchester Guardian* was swayed by governmental influence and therefore ignored the initial reports on the arrest of the six Britons by its Moscow Correspondent, Malcolm Muggeridge.<sup>143</sup> However, the paper rapidly became disillusioned by the British Government's decision to use the embargo to secure the release of the British engineers. The labour and liberal press opposed the British Government's attitude towards Moscow and trade issues and thus tended to support calls by Labour and Liberal politicians who warned against hasty, and therefore potentially damaging, action.<sup>144</sup> Thus the labour and liberal press did not respond as totally as the

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<sup>142</sup> D.B.F.P., Second Series, Vol. VII, nos. 211, 222, 239, 381, 341.

<sup>143</sup> Ian Hunter, *Malcolm Muggeridge: A Life*, p. 85.

<sup>144</sup> *The Daily Herald*, 6 April 1933. "Excited MPs in Anti-Russian Debate", by the Parliamentary Correspondent. *The New Statesman and Nation*, 8 April 1933. "Comments - The Russian Embargo". *The News Chronicle*, 6 April 1933. "Moscow Drama in the Commons", by

conservative newspapers to the government's wishes for support which caused some concern in the Embassy and the Foreign Office.<sup>145</sup> Nevertheless, no British newspaper or journal, apart from the *Daily Worker*, accepted or questioned the possibility that the British engineers were guilty. Thus Fleet Street concurred with the Foreign Secretary's speech to the House of Commons on 5 April which declared the Metro-Vickers engineers were not members of the Intelligence Services. This fact alone demonstrated the influence which the British Government held over the British press.

Trade and political co-operation could only proceed slowly following the large scale setback caused by the Metro-Vickers trial. The conservative press accepted the Temporary Trade Agreement in 1934 with some satisfaction while the liberal and labour press desired further cooperation to prevent other misunderstandings from hindering future relations. Nevertheless, the Metro-Vickers incident was the last unfavourable encounter between Britain and the Soviet Union between the two world wars. Furthermore, the Temporary Trade Agreement of 1934 remained the official economic regulator for the two countries for over forty years.<sup>146</sup> Also, 1934 marked the year in which the Soviet Union seriously began to support the policy of collective security and expected to work with Britain and France against the threatened aggression of Nazi Germany.

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Parliamentary Correspondent, E. Clephan Palmer. *The Manchester Guardian*, 6 April 1933. Leading article, "The Russian Debate".

<sup>145</sup> D.B.F.P., Second Series, Vol. VII, no. 388

<sup>146</sup> Keeble, p.123.

## Chapter 3

### The Indivisibility of Peace

In 1933, the Soviet Government recognised the implications of Hitler's coming to power in Germany since one of the avowed aims of the Nazi leader was the intention of increasing the living space, *lebensraum*, of the Third Reich with territory from the Soviet Union. In response, the Soviet Government's foreign policy became less isolationist and increasingly supportive of the principles of collective security.<sup>1</sup> While the Soviet Union recognised the need to become more involved in European affairs, primarily due to Germany, the rest of Europe was likewise forced to question and to react to the direction of German foreign policy. David Low's cartoon on 12 October 1933 depicted Hitler as an "Unintentional Cupid" who was bringing the formerly isolated states of Europe together.<sup>2</sup> The West increasingly assessed the possibilities of cooperation with Moscow as Soviet foreign policy actively promoted the "indivisibility of peace". The idea of collective security became popular in the 1930s as a means of preventing a second major war since it was based on the premise that if all states acted together, collectively, then conflict of interest could be minimised. European countries hoped that through a collective system, disarmament would be achieved and the need for bi-lateral pacts would be replaced by multilateral cooperation. The main problem with collective security was that it relied on states submitting their sovereignty to the group's interests, as was epitomised by the League of Nations where individual goals were allegedly yielded to the grand alliance. The British Government initially supported collective principles, as long as Britain's commitments abroad did not increase, but gradually adopted a policy of appeasement in an effort to avoid antagonising Hitler who refused to participate in

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<sup>1</sup> The Soviet Union, prior to 1933, already enjoyed better relations with many Western States though primarily with a focus on commercial interests. This had been necessary for the fulfilment of the Five Year Plans which required foreign capital.

<sup>2</sup> See Figure 3.1. The *Evening Standard*, 12 October 1933, "Unintentional Cupid".

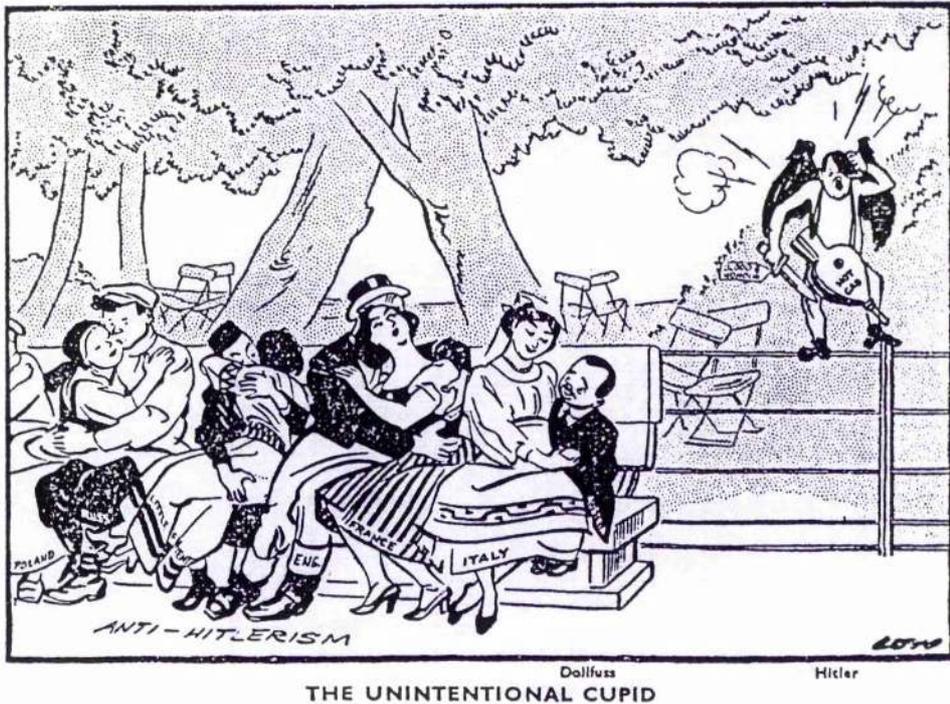


Fig. 3.1

collective agreements, especially those offered by the Soviet Government. As appeasement increasingly dominated British foreign policy, it naturally conflicted with the Soviet Union's plans for collective security. Thus, although Litvinov and Stalin strongly preferred a collective system, at no point did the Soviet Government ignore the possibilities of forming stronger partnerships with individual nations if events called for that course of action. Hence when collective agreements appeared to be unsuccessful, the Soviet Union formed alliances with France and Czechoslovakia but also kept its options open towards Germany.

Fleet Street devoted significant coverage to European affairs and events which concerned the Soviet Union as the Kremlin's activity increasingly influenced Britain's course in Europe. Newspapers and journals regularly debated on whether or not Britain could ignore the Soviet Government's calls for collective security and if any measures suggested from Moscow were of benefit to Europe or would merely lead Britain closer to war. The popular conservative press considered any suggestions from the Soviet Union to be mischievous and clearly intended to draw Britain into war against Japan and

Germany, with the secret aim of advancing communism and destroying Western democracy. In slight contrast, the quality conservative press cautiously welcomed the direction in which the Soviet Union's foreign policy was moving since it suggested less desire by the communists to incite unrest. Some of these newspapers urged the British Government to work more closely with Moscow. Other quality conservative papers retained the traditional wariness of communism and thus rarely offered more than moral support to the Soviet Government's proposals since they enlarged Britain's role in Europe and, after 1935, increasingly conflicted with German aims. Sometimes, individual quality conservative newspapers offered a mixed opinion depending on the circumstances at the time. The *Daily Telegraph*, for example, was often inconsistent with its views of the Soviet Union's collective security proposals. However, the liberal and labour press, on the whole, welcomed the Soviet Government's attempts at creating a collective system as these papers believed it was the best means of preventing war. This section of the press most clearly recognised the unreasonableness of Hitler's attitude towards communism and therefore criticised the British Government for its hesitancy in cooperating with the Soviet Union.

### The League of Nations

Until 1933, the Soviet Union's foreign policy was primarily based on economic and political cooperation with Weimar Germany.<sup>3</sup> Although Hitler reversed the Weimar Government's relationship with Moscow, in the early months of Nazi power, both Germany and the Soviet Union pretended there would be no change in policy towards each other.<sup>4</sup> The British Embassy in Moscow was unable to confirm if Germany and the Soviet Union were truly cooperating, though Strang suggested in August 1933 that the Soviet Union would prefer to have a stronger relationship with France.<sup>5</sup> *The Times* noted that early speeches and interviews by Hitler suggested there was cooperation and in

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<sup>3</sup> Weimar Germany and the Soviet Union had originally come together in the 1920s as a result of neither being invited to Versailles or into the League of Nations, and because both required trade.

<sup>4</sup> E.H. Carr, *German-Soviet Relations*, p. 109. Jonathan Haslam, *The Struggle for Collective Security, 1933-1939*, p. 23. Robert Tucker, "The Emergence of Stalin's Foreign Policy", pp. 580, 585.

<sup>5</sup> D.B.F.P., Second Series, Vol. VII, no. 532.

May 1933 the Nazi Government even re-ratified the 1926 German-Soviet Treaty of Friendship and its protocol.<sup>6</sup> In the Soviet Union, *Izvestia* confirmed the friendship while the Soviet Government retained a cautious policy towards Germany and spoke of good relations.<sup>7</sup> However, the first signs of disagreement were evident in Litvinov's speech in December 1933, in which the *Manchester Guardian* noted the Soviet Government was "dissatisfied" with the course of German-Soviet relations.<sup>8</sup> Papers as politically diverse as the *News Chronicle*, the *Daily Telegraph* and the *New Statesman and Nation* believed Litvinov was warning the Nazi Government that Moscow recognised Germany's aggressive intentions and thus formerly good relations were about to change significantly. Furthermore, in the same speech, these papers noted the Foreign Commissar's positive but cautious overtures to the West.<sup>9</sup>

The British press of all political outlooks acknowledged that Litvinov was a respectable statesman despite his firm adherence to communism. The *New Statesman and Nation* suggested that there were few in the Soviet Union or abroad who failed to recognise Litvinov's "wisdom, knowledge of international affairs, and ability as a negotiator". Journalists in Geneva and Moscow thought highly of him but were often frustrated by his desire for secrecy.<sup>10</sup> Even the *Daily Express*, generally cynical towards the Soviet Union, recognised "Litvinov's diplomatic coup" following the formal recognition by the United States of the Soviet Union in November 1933.<sup>11</sup> The *News Chronicle* reported that the Foreign Commissar had been very active in 1933 and thus deserved congratulations on being able to add an agreement with the United States to his

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<sup>6</sup> See for example, *The Times*, 6 May 1933. "Soviet-German Relations" by the Riga Correspondent.

<sup>7</sup> *The Observer*, 19 March 1933. "Soviet Russia and Germany; Friendly Relations to Continue" by the Moscow Correspondent.

<sup>8</sup> *The Manchester Guardian*, 30 December 1933. "War Menace in Far East; Plain Speaking by Litvinov" by the Moscow Correspondent.

<sup>9</sup> *The News Chronicle*, 30 December 1933. "Litvinov's Grave Charges: He Accused Both Japan and Germany". *The Daily Telegraph*, 30 December 1933. "Soviet Warning to Japan; Blunt Words Also to Germany" by the Moscow Correspondent. *The New Statesman and Nation*, 6 January 1934. "Comments - Warnings from Moscow".

<sup>10</sup> *The New Statesman and Nation*, 23 November 1935. "Miscellany - Maxim Maximovitch Litvinov".

<sup>11</sup> *The Daily Express*, 18 November 1933. "US Restores Diplomatic Rights to Russia" by the New York Correspondent.

other diplomatic achievements of the year.<sup>12</sup> Litvinov was the acknowledged architect of the Soviet drive for collective security and his first major activity in that field was the Soviet Union's participation in the unsuccessful Disarmament Conference which convened in February 1932 and quietly dissolved in June 1934.<sup>13</sup> However, a significant consequence of the conference was the proposal by the Soviet and French Governments for an Eastern Locarno Pact contingent on the Soviet Union's entry into the League of Nations.

Germany's withdrawal from the League of Nations in October 1933 and increasingly aggressive tone was an aspect which the British press alleged helped to remove the Soviet Union's traditional attitude of hostility towards that organisation.<sup>14</sup> Speeches against the League of Nations had decreased in 1933,<sup>15</sup> much to the approval of France who was growing more concerned by the advent of National Socialism in Germany.<sup>16</sup> The British press cautiously approved of Litvinov's speech in December 1933, which was the first by a Soviet statesman to express the "beneficial influence" of the League of Nations, thus heralding a change in attitude not only to that organisation but to the rest of Europe.<sup>17</sup> Thus newspapers and journals, from conservative to labour, supported Litvinov's hopes for improved relations with the rest of Europe.<sup>18</sup> The new British Ambassador in Moscow, Lord Chilston, also cautiously recommended that the British Government attempt to strengthen connections with the Soviet Union.<sup>19</sup> In May

<sup>12</sup> *The News Chronicle*, 18 November 1933. Leading article, "Mr. Roosevelt and the Soviets".

<sup>13</sup> Haigh, Morris, and Peters, *Soviet Foreign Policy, the League of Nations, and Europe, 1917-1939*, p. 15.

<sup>14</sup> See for example, *The Times*, 17 October 1933. "Moscow Critical of Germany" by the Riga Correspondent.

<sup>15</sup> Though comments against the League of Nations had decreased, the Soviet Government's attitude was not entirely clear. See for example, *The Times*, 8 March 1933 for an article by Reuter which pointed out that the Soviet Union remained unwilling to join an advisory committee of the League to arbitrate their disagreement with Japan.

<sup>16</sup> David Dunn, "Maksim Litvinov: Commissar of Contradiction", p. 225.

<sup>17</sup> *The Manchester Guardian*, 30 December 1933. "War Menace in Far East; Japan 'Provocative'; Plain Speaking by Litvinov; Anglo-Russian Trade" by the Moscow Correspondent. *The Times*, 30 December 1933 by the Riga Correspondent. *The Economist*, 6 January 1934. Stalin had also given a private interview to the *New York Times*, reported by the British press on 29 December 1933, in which he too hinted that the Soviet Union might join the League of Nations.

<sup>18</sup> *The Daily Telegraph*, 30 December 1933. "Soviet Warning to Japan; Blunt Words Also to Germany" by the Moscow Correspondent. *The Times*, 1 January 1934, by the Riga Correspondent. *The New Statesman and Nation*, 6 January 1934. "Comments- Warnings from Moscow".

<sup>19</sup> D.B.F.P., Second Series, Vol. VII, nos. 548, 549, and 550.

1934, Fleet Street reported what it considered to be an amazing development in European affairs. The Soviet Union, with the support of the French Government, was seriously considering making an application to join the League of Nations at the September meeting of the Assembly, a plan which was received with varying degrees of enthusiasm by the British press.

Initial reports by the quality conservative press revealed scepticism. Though *The Times* recognised the importance and the benefits of Soviet membership into the League and hoped the USSR was changing for the better, the paper short-sightedly suggested in May 1934 that the British Government should not bargain for the Soviet Union's entry since Britain itself would gain nothing.<sup>20</sup> *The Daily Telegraph* took a more cynical interest in "Soviet Russia's disposition to join the League of Nations" and was concerned because Moscow "deemed it <sup>expedient</sup> ~~expedient~~ to change its tone". Nevertheless, the paper believed the British Government should support the Soviet Union's application since "Moscow's contemptible and abusive language" towards the League had ceased.<sup>21</sup> In contrast, the popular conservative press expressed suspicion of Litvinov's plans for the Soviet Union's future in Europe. *The Daily Express*, for example, clearly hoped the British Government would avoid becoming involved in Moscow's plans even if the Soviet Union joined the League of Nations.<sup>22</sup>

Contrary to conservative press opinion, the majority of the liberal and labour press expressed unreserved approval and found hope for Europe in the Soviet Government's proposal to join the League. *The Economist* and the *New Statesman and Nation* argued that the British Government should take an active role in securing the Soviet Union's entry into the League of Nations because there were some obstacles which Britain's status as a world leader could overcome. For example, these journals wanted the British Government to ensure that the USSR was given a permanent seat on the Council.<sup>23</sup> *The News Chronicle* not only welcomed the Soviet Union's application

<sup>20</sup> *The Times*, 23 May 1934. Leading article, "Russia and the League".

<sup>21</sup> *The Daily Telegraph*, 24 May 1934. Leading article, "Russia's Terms for League".

<sup>22</sup> *The Daily Express*, 23 May 1934. Leading article, "In Europe".

<sup>23</sup> *The Economist*, 26 May 1934. Leading article, "Russia Takes a Hand". *The New Statesman and Nation*, 26 May 1934. "Comment - Russia and the League".

to join the League of Nations, but also pointed out that it meant the League still had something to offer, despite its increasing number of critics, since "great nations do not voluntarily associate with <sup>impotent</sup> important talking shops". The *News Chronicle* did not believe that the Soviet Union was joining "for the cynical reason that she has nothing to gain and much to risk in war", as was often suggested by the conservative press. The paper, instead, reported that the Soviet Government simply wished to join in a genuine desire to promote peace.<sup>24</sup>

Surprisingly, the *Daily Herald's* Geneva Correspondent appeared to have misinterpreted the international situation in May and therefore, the paper did not respond as favourably as expected. Though the majority of Fleet Street was stating exactly the opposite,<sup>25</sup> the *Daily Herald's* correspondent reported that "Litvinov had poured cold water on the idea of Russia joining the League of Nations".<sup>26</sup> By July, however, the *Daily Herald* held the same opinion as the rest of the British press in recognising the Soviet Union seriously intended to enter the League. Though the paper was pleased that the British Government was finally supportive of the Soviet Government's efforts to gain entry into the League of Nations, the paper could not refrain from censuring the Conservatives for their allegedly biased policy against the Soviet Union.

For the past few years, the Labour Party, in the face of abuse and misrepresentation, urged in the name of sanity and common sense, that the Soviet Union be recognised formally and also welcomed as a great power in the comity of nations. Gradually common sense has prevailed over prejudice.<sup>27</sup>

In September 1934, it was generally agreed by Fleet Street that the Soviet Union would be accepted into the League of Nations although there remained an unwillingness by the popular conservative press to see the "wolf" welcomed into the fold. However,

<sup>24</sup> The *News Chronicle*, 23 May 1934. Leading article, "Re-enter Russia?" The paper's attitude contrasted to that of *The Times*, 23 May 1934. Leading article, "Russia and the League"; and the *Daily Telegraph*, 24 May 1934. Leading article, "Russia's Terms for League".

<sup>25</sup> See for example *The Times*, 29 May 1934. *The Manchester Guardian*, 28 May 1934. *The Sunday Times*, 27 May 1934. *The Scotsman*, 26 May 1934.

<sup>26</sup> *The Daily Herald*, 30 May 1934, article by the Geneva Correspondent.

<sup>27</sup> *The Daily Herald*, 14 July 1934. Leading article, "Pact and League".

the majority of newspapers and political journals were rational in their assessment of the value of the Soviet Union's membership - most noted obvious benefits and pointed out that at the very least, it was easier to watch the wolf from inside.<sup>28</sup>

Although the quality conservative press welcomed the Soviet Union's membership into the League of Nations, favourable comment was tempered with cautious appraisals of what Britain could expect from such an event. For example, the *Yorkshire Post* warned against raising hopes to unrealistic expectations since the USSR alone could not turn the League into a powerful organisation.<sup>29</sup> Although the *Sunday Times* suggested that it was not "virtue, but necessity" which forced the Soviet Government to "tee <sup>tee</sup> tow the line" towards the League, the paper was not expressing opposition since it saw the merits of the USSR's membership. "Whatever we think of Stalinist Russia, it is better to have her inside the League than out." Furthermore, the paper alleged that the French, as their friendship with the Soviet Government improved, were taking the correct approach by insisting the Soviet Union entered the League, thus "regularising" the association.<sup>30</sup> In a similar attitude, the *Scotsman* admitted that even though the Soviet Union was not the most desirable candidate for the League of Nations after years of subversive activity, the paper recognised that it was very important to involve the Soviet Government in international affairs or else the League might collapse. The paper conceded that despite economic and political differences, the Soviet Union could no longer be ignored and it was better to secure Soviet cooperation rather than to leave such a large country isolated in Europe and Asia. However, equally as important to the *Scotsman* was the possibility that Germany would be unable to remain outside the League as to do so would demonstrate an increasing desire to alienate the world.<sup>31</sup>

In contrast to the evolution in opinion of the quality conservative newspapers, the popular conservative press remained unreservedly opposed to the Soviet Union joining

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<sup>28</sup> The idea of "the wolf" came from the *Daily Mail*, 6 September 1934. Leading article, "Wolf in the Fold" and the *Manchester Guardian*, 12 September 1934. Leading article, "The League and Russia".

<sup>29</sup> The *Yorkshire Post*, 11 September 1934. Leading article, "The League, Russia, and Germany".

<sup>30</sup> The *Sunday Times*, 9 September 1934. Leading article, "Moves of the Powers".

<sup>31</sup> The *Scotsman*, 11 September 1934. Leading article, "The League of Nations".

the League of Nations and devoted an unusually large amount of press coverage to the issue. The Beaverbrook and Rothermere papers were especially critical of the way in which the Soviet Union had joined and therefore, international affairs and the Soviet Union received detailed, and generally irrational, reporting. The *Daily Express* and the *Daily Mail* described with dismay how Britain had joined France in supporting the Soviet entry to the extent that "good nations", such as Switzerland, were "snubbed" by the West for showing hostility towards the Soviet Union. The *Daily Express* accused the French of pursuing an anti-German policy and cheered the Swiss for their opposition.<sup>32</sup> The *Daily Mail* also encouraged the Swiss Government to do more since "no good will come to the League or its members if the USSR is admitted".<sup>33</sup> The *Evening News* condemned the behind the scenes efforts at Geneva where the "Big Stick" was being wielded to hush opposition. The paper alleged that "Poor Switzerland has such an honest and well-founded aversion to Russia and its methods. It feels like asking the League to move so its air is not fouled by the Bolsheviks." In addition, the *Evening News* suggested that since the League "has decided to sup with the Devil, it will need a very long spoon for the broth."<sup>34</sup>

The *Daily Express*, in a leading article, accused "some unthinking people", which could refer to other newspapers, of being gravely wrong when they said that the Soviet Union's entry was not a danger to Britain. In the opinion of the *Daily Express*, it was incorrect to assume the Soviet Union wanted to join the League for peace because "Russia is filled with the desire for war".<sup>35</sup> In the *Daily Mail's* view,

The latest Muscovite manoeuvre is so obvious that it is incredible that Moscow's hypocritical professions of good faith could be accepted at face value... For years the Soviets refused to join the "coalition of brigands" at Geneva and tried to break

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<sup>32</sup> The *Daily Express*, 11 September 1934. "Soviet Russia Invited to Join League" by the Geneva Correspondent; 18 September 1934, "Russia Lashed in League Battle" by D. Sefton Delmer, the Special Correspondent at Geneva.

<sup>33</sup> The *Daily Mail*, 6 September 1934. Leading article, "Wolf into the Fold".

<sup>34</sup> The *Evening News*, 12 September 1934. Leading article, "Mudlarking at Geneva".

<sup>35</sup> The *Daily Express*, 13 September 1934. Leading article, "Russia in the League".

it up... but the wolf has ceased to snarl out of the fold and wears sheepskin to hold council with the lambs inside.<sup>36</sup>

Both the *Daily Mail* and the *Evening News* alleged that "Russia's presence can only bring further discredit to the League" since the Soviet creed remained one of "sedition and revolution" and therefore, the USSR sought admission simply to make mischief.<sup>37</sup>

In addition to disparaging the Soviet Union, the Beaverbrook and Rothermere press condemned the behaviour of the British Government in permitting the Soviet Union to join the League of Nations, giving the impression that these papers believed the organisation to be sacred. This was ironic since the popular conservative press rarely supported the League's work, nor did these papers wish to see British participation in the League as more than minimal since it was deemed to be beyond Britain's sphere of interest.<sup>38</sup> Nevertheless, the popular conservative press exaggerated the theme of the British Government's "humiliating" abandonment of Christian faith in allowing the "Red gangsters of Moscow" to join the League of Nations.<sup>39</sup>

What mockery when Christian powers rush out to bring Russia in and Russia dithers on the doorstep... Russia's entry brings an element of atheism and anti-Christianity which is contrary to the whole spirit of the League or whatever spirit may be left. All Christian members should defend the faith and resign forthwith.<sup>40</sup>

The *Evening News* pointed out that the leaders of the Soviet Union were the "sworn foes" of Christianity and "arch-conspirators" against all that was "stable and decent" in Western life. The paper alleged that "decent people" would be disgusted by the "inconceivable folly" at Geneva and concluded that "no good can come of it, and Britain, because a part of it, has lost the opportunity of striking a blow for international honour

<sup>36</sup> The *Daily Mail*, 6 September 1934. Leading article, "Wolf into the Fold".

<sup>37</sup> Ibid. The *Evening News*, 12 September 1934. Leading article, "Mudlarking at Geneva".

<sup>38</sup> The *Evening Standard*, 13 September 1934. Leading article, "Geneva". The *Daily Mail*, 12 September 1934. Leading article, "War-Mongers of Geneva".

<sup>39</sup> The *Daily Mail*, 12 September 1934. Leading article, "War-Mongers of Geneva".

<sup>40</sup> The *Daily Express*, 15 September 1934. Leading article, "Russia or the Faith?".

and decency".<sup>41</sup> The *Evening Standard* bluntly stated that "a farce was being played out in Geneva" since the paper had been led to understand that the League was based on Christian principles. However,

Now British statesmen give all their effort to a nation whose policy is conducted in a most thorough and ruthless campaign against Christianity... In its short history, the Soviet Union has violated, through secret and subversive acts, the fundamental principles the League professed to stand for.

The evening paper saw no reason to believe the Soviet Government would change and therefore found it "extraordinary" that Britain was so eager to oblige the Soviet Union.<sup>42</sup> Thus, although the popular conservative press supported the British Government's foreign policy, in this event, these newspapers were not afraid to oppose His Majesty's Government's support for the Soviet entry into the League of Nations.

Low's cartoon on 14 September 1934, "New Member", depicted pretentious anti-Communist club members criticising France and Britain for allowing Litvinov, with his "vulgar disarmament ideas", into a "gentlemen's" league. Thus Low was critical of the paper which printed his cartoons, the *Evening Standard*, expressed his dissatisfaction with the lack of action by those with authority, and welcomed Litvinov's new collective security ideas.<sup>43</sup>

The liberal and labour press devoted its coverage to the recognition of the positive role which the Soviet Union intended to play in Europe. The *Manchester Guardian* was relieved that so many member states accepted the need to include the Soviet Union in international affairs. Likewise, the paper was satisfied that the Soviet Government appreciated the importance of the League of Nations, though the paper warned it was a "small organisation steadily losing credit". However, the *Manchester Guardian* conceded there must be "something of value" in it if the Soviet Government wished to join. Furthermore, the paper disagreed with the *Daily Mail's* suggestion that the Soviet

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<sup>41</sup> The *Evening News*, 12 September 1934. Leading article, "Mudlarking at Geneva".

<sup>42</sup> The *Evening Standard*, 13 September 1934. Leading article, "Geneva".

<sup>43</sup> See Figure 3.2. The *Evening Standard*, 14 September 1934, "New Member".

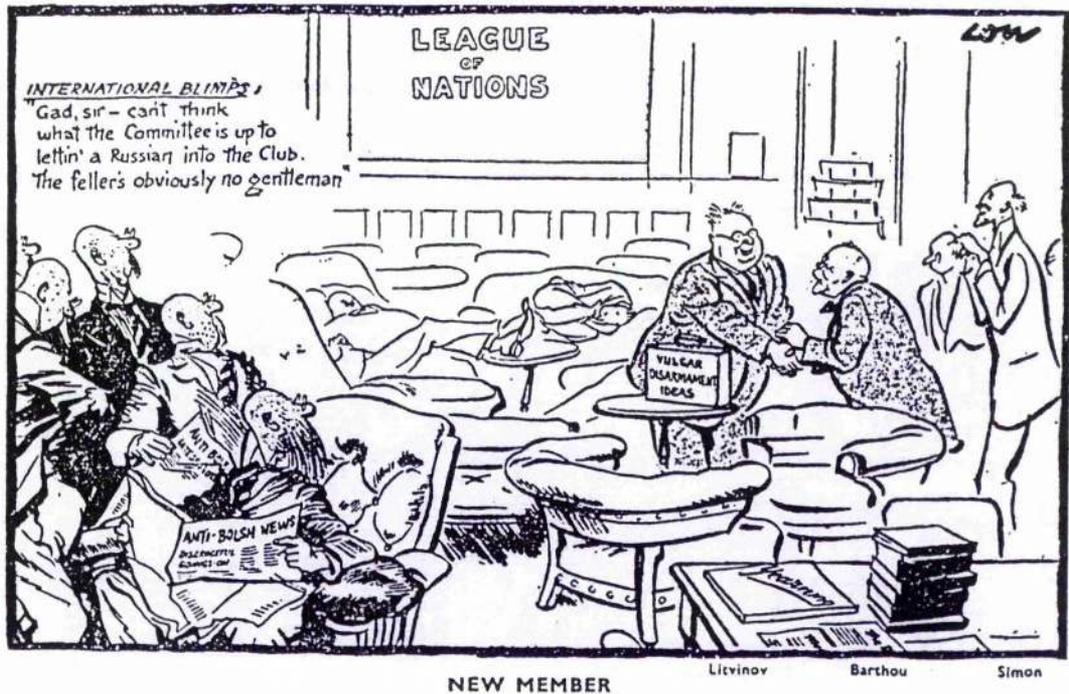


Fig. 3.2

Union was a lone wolf disguised as a sheep. In the liberal paper's view, there were "already others in the League wearing sheep's clothing".<sup>44</sup> The *News Chronicle* and the *Daily Herald* similarly believed the Soviet Union's entry into the League was opportune because the organisation needed an act of faith and goodwill to restore its declining authority.<sup>45</sup> Although the Soviet Union was a communist state, the *Spectator* argued that "in the main Russia is for peace" and therefore, Europe would benefit.<sup>46</sup>

The *Daily Worker* called the invitation issued by the West a victory for the USSR, a "great champion for the cause of world peace". The paper alleged that the capitalist states were compelled to recognise the outstanding and powerful role the Soviet Union occupied in the world, a role which could no longer be ignored. The *Daily Worker* suggested that the invitation was a "bitter pill for the rabid imperialist warmongers and intriguers", such as the *Daily Mail* and to a lesser extent *The Times*.

<sup>44</sup> The *Manchester Guardian*, 12 September 1934. Leading article, "The League and Russia".

<sup>45</sup> The *News Chronicle*, 11 September 1934. Leading article, "A Bright Spot at Geneva". The *Daily Herald*, 17 September 1934. "Soviet Entry to League Is Now Settled" by the Special Correspondent to Geneva, W. N. Ewer; 17 September 1934, leading article, "A Word to the League".

<sup>46</sup> The *Spectator*, 7 September 1934. Leading article, "The Real Issue at Geneva".

However, the communist paper conceded that the British Government, despite a lingering "hatred", had at least recognised that the situation in Europe had changed and that the Soviet Union represented peace.<sup>47</sup>

Nevertheless, despite the general welcome in the majority of the British press for the Soviet Union's membership into the League, a degree of apprehension over the changes for Europe remained. The quality conservative press was naturally uneasy since it retained an attitude which was sceptical of Communism. Primarily, *The Times* remained anxious that the Soviet Union had only joined for security reasons which would unfortunately involve the rest of Europe, possibly in war. Secondly, *The Times* felt that the end of subversive activities should have been made a condition of Soviet entry and feared that those schemes would continue despite the apparent goodwill expressed by Litvinov.<sup>48</sup> The *Yorkshire Post* expressed similar concerns and stated that it was only a "change of face, not a change of heart" since the Soviet Government continued to follow the Marxist dogma. Though it appeared that Soviet propaganda against capitalism had declined, the *Yorkshire Post* alleged that world revolutionary doctrines were only "shelved" until more applicable. Thus the paper, irrationally, proposed that if Stalin and Litvinov were truly sincere to the League, they would have "thrown over" the teachings of Marx and Lenin.<sup>49</sup>

However, not only did the Conservative press admit to some reservation, but the labour and liberal press likewise did. Regardless of the paper's positive support for the Soviet entry, the *Daily Herald* surprisingly voiced its concern over the future of the League following the Soviet Union's membership. Although the paper hoped that Moscow's efforts at collective security would decisively influence the organisation and offset the loss of Germany, the paper was concerned that the League was becoming a place where states came to prepare for war, not to prevent it.<sup>50</sup> The *Manchester Guardian*

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<sup>47</sup> *The Daily Worker*, 13 September 1934. Leading article, "Soviet Union and the League". See also 17 September 1934, leading article, "Why Soviet Union Enters the League".

<sup>48</sup> *The Times*, 20 September 1934. Leading article, "Russia at the Council". See also 10 September 1934.

<sup>49</sup> *The Yorkshire Post*, 19 September 1934. Leading article, "Russia at Geneva".

<sup>50</sup> *The Daily Herald*, 19 September 1934. Leading article, "Geneva's Future".

also admitted to having fears that the Soviet Government was acting purely for its own benefit.<sup>51</sup> The *Spectator* expressed "satisfaction rather than enthusiasm", which it alleged was the general feeling in Britain, towards the Soviet Union's entry into the League. The journal pointed out that the USSR, despite joining, continued to be an autocratic police state where murder was semi-legalised, famine abounded, and religion was persecuted. Although the *Spectator* condemned the Soviet Government for these aspects, the journal pointed out that the same conditions had existed under the Tsars and therefore, the British Government could provide no significant reason to hinder Soviet membership.<sup>52</sup>

It was the *Daily Telegraph*, not noted in 1934 for its accommodating attitudes towards the Soviet Union,<sup>53</sup> which devoted a large amount of press coverage concerning the advantages which Europe could expect from cooperation with the Soviet Government. "The impossible six months ago is now an actuality of the present... It was a pariah of its own choosing until now but it is not right to keep her so," especially since the "logic of the situation" meant it was better for the Soviet Union to join to promote peace. The *Daily Telegraph* believed in the Soviet Government's promise to be loyal, and though that did not necessarily mean a "change of heart, it is a change of attitude" which had to be grasped by the West since "Russia needs the League and the League needs Russia."<sup>54</sup>

### The Eastern Locarno Plan

The general support by the British press for the Soviet Union's membership into the League of Nations occurred during the height of a thaw in British-Soviet relations which lasted from the spring of 1934 to the end of 1935.<sup>55</sup> It was during that period that

<sup>51</sup> The *Manchester Guardian*, 20 September 1934. Leading article, "Russia into the League".

<sup>52</sup> The *Spectator*, 21 September 1934. Leading article, "Russia at Geneva".

<sup>53</sup> See for example, the *Daily Telegraph*, 24 May 1934. Leading article, "Russia's Terms for League".

<sup>54</sup> The *Daily Telegraph*, 18 September 1934. Leading article, "Russia at Geneva". There remained hints of sarcasm towards the Soviet Union in the paper. For example, the headline for 19 September read "Russia Joins the League; Litvinov Arrives Too Soon".

<sup>55</sup> Curtis Keeble, *Britain and the Soviet Union, 1917-1989*, pp. 122-129.

the British Government was adapting its foreign policy to meet the changes caused by Nazi Germany and thus collective activity appeared to be the correct policy to adopt. Because Germany had withdrawn from the League, the Soviet Union was accepted as a suitable replacement to strengthen the organisation and with the further hope that the Germans would be encouraged to return. Furthermore, by being admitted into the League, the Soviet Government's plans for Europe were allegedly given the proper international recognition and mark of respectability.<sup>56</sup> One plan had already been suggested by the French and Soviet Governments in May 1934, the idea of an Eastern Locarno pact which was intended to guarantee, against aggression, the existence of Eastern Europe's frontiers by the major European powers. [The French Government intended to reinforce its alliance with the Little Entente thereby improving France's position in Eastern Europe. Germany, who had alleged aggressive designs on the small countries to its east, was also invited to join as a key member. Most states in Europe would not consider the plan while the USSR remained outside the League, which was one reason why France was intent on securing the Soviet Union's membership into the organisation. The British Government, though eventually supporting the idea of Germany, France, and the Soviet Union acting as guarantors to Eastern Europe, refused to be actively involved in such a commitment. More serious, however, was the lack of support from the rest of Europe. Germany and Poland refused outright to join and the smaller East European states, such as those in the Baltic region, were suspicious of Soviet intentions and unwilling to support a project which might antagonise Hitler.<sup>57</sup>

Fleet Street reacted with varying degrees of enthusiasm to the idea of an East European security system, thus reflecting the degree to which each newspaper or political journal wished Britain to be committed in Europe. The Eastern Locarno plan returned the issue of pre-war alliances, which had been in the form of bi-lateral pacts as opposed to collective agreements, to the main news pages. The majority of the British press

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<sup>56</sup> Haigh, p. 27.

<sup>57</sup> For British press sympathy towards Baltic and Little Entente fears see for example, *The Times*, 15 June 1934. "Eastern Locarno' Plan; Attitude of Baltic States" by the Riga Correspondent; 12 April 1935, "New Soviet Pact Proposals" by the Riga Correspondent. *The Manchester Guardian*, 7 May 1935. Leading article, "The Baltic States".

recognised that bi-lateral alliances had contributed to the outbreak of the First World War and therefore had to be avoided.<sup>58</sup> There was, however, a difference of opinion amongst newspapers as to the extent to which Britain should be committed to collective agreements. The liberal and labour press wished to see the country involved in a large collective coalition while conservative papers, with the exception of the *Scotsman* and the *Yorkshire Post*, thought Britain ought to remain outside alliances, even if collective, so as to avoid the conditions of 1914.

The Eastern Locarno plan was met with cautious support by the British press when it was first proposed by Litvinov in the spring of 1934 at the Disarmament Conference. Although the *New Statesman and Nation* welcomed the "simple and promising" plan for Eastern Europe, the journal pointed out that first reactions were not favourable. Germany was suspicious of French and Soviet intentions, while conservative opinion in Britain was "shy" of anything offered from Moscow and moreover preferred to keep out of European troubles, like America. Despite these problems, the *New Statesman and Nation*, though awaiting further details, felt the project offered renewed efforts for peace on potentially realistic lines.<sup>59</sup> The *Economist* was relieved to see the Soviet Union active in the security of Europe and welcomed the Franco-Soviet plan for an Eastern pact which invited Germany to join thus preventing a return to pre-war alliances. However, the journal was less supportive of Britain's participation in the plan. The *Economist* called for the British Government to wait for further details before it accepted a role in Eastern Europe.<sup>60</sup> In addition, the press argued that Britain could not become involved in a security plan offered by the Soviet Union

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<sup>58</sup> See for example, the reaction of the British press to the signing of the Franco-Soviet Treaty of Mutual Friendship and Non-Aggression in 1935. Most papers expressed concern that another bi-lateral pact was contributing further misunderstanding in Europe. See later in this chapter. See also other random articles: *The Daily Herald*, 22 February 1935. Leading article, "Visit to Moscow". *The New Statesman and Nation*, 23 February 1935. "Comments". *The Manchester Guardian*, 22 February 1935. Leading article, "London and Moscow". *The News Chronicle*, 28 March 1935. Leading article, "The Berlin Talks".

<sup>59</sup> *The New Statesman and Nation*, 2 June 1934. Leading article, "The Russian Plan".

<sup>60</sup> *The Economist*, 26 May 1934. Leading article, "Russian Takes a Hand".

until that country became a member of the League of Nations thus regularising its relations with the West.<sup>61</sup>

In July 1934, Fleet Street was, on the whole, more optimistic and supportive of an Eastern Locarno plan. Although the Foreign Secretary, Sir John Simon, gave Britain's "support" to the "Franco-Soviet" idea for an Eastern Locarno Pact, the liberal press could not understand his objections to allowing Britain to join and therefore accused the Government of preferring the old system of selective alliances to collective action. Thus the *Manchester Guardian* and the *News Chronicle* criticised the British Government for refusing to act independently of Germany, whose protestations were condemned by both papers as unreasonable since the new pact implied German participation on equal terms.<sup>62</sup>

Of the quality conservative press, the *Scotsman*, without allowing its "imagination to run riot", most clearly believed in July that the Eastern Locarno plan was beneficial to not only Europe but also Britain. The paper disagreed with those "Britons who see the scheme as a means of embroiling Britain abroad in an all European Locarno". In the opinion of the *Scotsman*, the British Government needed to join a plan for the protection of Europe and thus a collective security system, which included Nazi Germany, was far better than bi-lateral pacts. However, the *Scotsman* recognised that it was Germany's attitude which was crucial to the scheme because without German participation, the plan would at best be a defensive alliance and at the worst an encirclement of Germany by suspicious and unfriendly neighbours. Nevertheless, the paper suggested the proposal would provide the "acid test" of Hitler's desire for peace since a refusal to join could only be taken in the worst possible meaning.<sup>63</sup> Therefore, unlike the rest of the conservative press, the *Scotsman* laid responsibility for the success of the plan on Germany. Low also held Germany accountable for the tension in Europe.

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<sup>61</sup> The *Manchester Guardian*, 28 May 1934. Leading article, "The Conference". The *Daily Telegraph*, 24 May 1934. Leading article, "Russia's Terms for League". The *New Statesman and Nation*, 2 June 1934. Leading article, "The Russian Plan". The *Times*, 23 May 1934. Leading article, "Russia and the League". The *Economist*, 26 May 1934. Leading article, "Russian Takes a Hand".

<sup>62</sup> The *Manchester Guardian*, 14 July 1934. Leading article, "A European Pact?". The *News Chronicle*, 14 July 1934. Leading article, "The New Pact".

<sup>63</sup> The *Scotsman*, 14 July 1934. Leading article, "An Eastern Locarno".



assumed "Russia will join". Thus the *Daily Telegraph* strangely appeared to have ignored the fact that the Soviet Union was one of the proposers of the original idea for an Eastern Locarno plan. In addition, as with the rest of the quality conservative press, the *Daily Telegraph* was relieved that Britain was taking a "purely benevolent" attitude and not increasing its obligations.<sup>66</sup> Thus Low's cartoon, "Playtime in the European Nursery", critically noted Simon's lack of participation with the other European leaders in building a stable Europe.<sup>67</sup>

The popular conservative press condemned the Eastern Locarno plan outright. In May 1934, the *Daily Express* criticised the idea of an Eastern security pact as a move by France, with the aid of the Soviet Union, to encircle Germany. However, the paper stated with confidence that Britain would never consent to joining because "the people" would reject such a proposal.<sup>68</sup> In July, even though the *Daily Express* was forced to acknowledge that the British Government approved of the plan, the paper reported that the "biggest cheer of the day" in the House of Commons came when the Foreign Minister announced Britain would not sign the pact nor commit the country to any new undertakings.<sup>69</sup> As the rest of Europe "feverishly" rearmed and threatened to isolate Germany, the *Daily Express* alleged that the situation was more menacing for Britain in 1934 than in 1914 because British commitments had multiplied. Thus the paper pessimistically, and irrationally, reported that "death is hurrying this way. Raise your voice before it is too late! Protest against war pacts! Agitate! No more war for us!"<sup>70</sup>

At the same time that the Soviet Union was admitted into the League of Nations, thus allegedly providing the Soviet Union with respectability, Germany and Poland issued a joint declaration on their peace methods. Both states believed in the benefit of bi-lateral pacts as the "best safeguard for peace in Eastern Europe", thus sending a severe blow against the Eastern Locarno plan.<sup>71</sup> The *Daily Telegraph* reported without

<sup>66</sup> The *Daily Telegraph*, 14 July 1934. Leading article, "Hope of an Eastern Locarno".

<sup>67</sup> See Figure 3.3. The *Evening Standard*, 20 July 1934, "Playtime in the European Nursery".

<sup>68</sup> The *Daily Express*, 23 May 1934. Leading article, "In Europe".

<sup>69</sup> The *Daily Express*, 14 July 1934. Leading article, "This Peace Pact".

<sup>70</sup> The *Daily Express*, 16 July 1934. Leading article, "Lest We Forget".

<sup>71</sup> The *News Chronicle*, 19 September 1934. "Blow to Eastern Locarno", B.U.P. in Geneva.

disappointment, in a leading article ironically entitled "Germany's Peaceful Protestations", that the "Franco-Russian project for an Eastern European Pact on the Locarno principles is dead".<sup>72</sup> The *Daily Mail* also did not regret the "untimely demise" of the East European plan and even felt that it would be "a good thing if Western Locarno follows it... Germany's rejection of Eastern Locarno means another still-born pact flung on the diplomatic dustheaps".<sup>73</sup>

Except for the *Daily Telegraph*, the quality conservative and liberal newspapers regretted the failure of the Eastern Locarno proposals though the *Yorkshire Post* was not surprised by Germany's refusal to join.<sup>74</sup> The *Scotsman* reported that after two months of deliberation, the Germans had finally rejected the plans for Eastern Europe out of suspicion of a "catch" by the French and Soviet Governments. The paper could not give credit to Hitler's fears of encirclement since the agreement offered reciprocity for all involved. Furthermore, the paper suggested that the German preference for bi-lateral agreements could potentially rebound on Germany. With the apparent failure of the East European plan, the *Scotsman* felt that in all likelihood it would be replaced by a Franco-Soviet bi-lateral alliance which the paper argued should cause the German Government more concern.<sup>75</sup>

### Eden's visit to Moscow

The British Government, hypocritically, did not criticise Hitler's preference for bi-lateral pacts. The Soviet press thus found much to condemn in German and British attitudes and questioned the British Government's ambivalence towards Germany,

<sup>72</sup> The *Daily Telegraph*, 13 September 1934. Leading article, "Germany's Peaceful Protestations".

<sup>73</sup> The *Daily Mail*, 13 September 1934. Leading article, "Britain's Best Course". See also, the *Daily Express*, 14 July 1934. "Germany Upsets Eastern Locarno" by the Foreign Editor. This article also criticises British participation in Western Locarno.

<sup>74</sup> The *Yorkshire Post*, 12 September 1934. Leading article, "Germany as Ishmel".

<sup>75</sup> The *Scotsman*, 12 September 1934. Leading article, "An Eastern Locarno". Liberal press reports were very similar: the *Manchester Guardian*, 12 September 1934. Leading article, "The League and Russia". The *News Chronicle*, 11 September 1934. "Germany's No" by B.U.P.; 14 September 1934, "Poles Tear Up a League Pact" by Vernon Bartlett.

declaring that Britain wanted to compromise on the Eastern Security plan.<sup>76</sup> In an attempt to rectify this misunderstanding of Britain's support for the Eastern Locarno proposals and to prove its commitment to collective security, the British Government announced its decision to send a Minister to Moscow to exchange views with Litvinov on the European situation.

In February 1935, it was decided that Simon would meet with Hitler for economic talks and to discuss the Eastern Locarno plan. Following the Berlin meetings, a group of Foreign Office representatives, though no specific reference was made of the Foreign Secretary, would continue to Moscow, Warsaw and Prague for similar discussions. The labour press immediately and enthusiastically expressed satisfaction in the proposed talks since the visit of a Cabinet Minister would do much to dispel Soviet mistrust. The *Daily Herald* and the *New Statesman and Nation*, relieved that Britain was finally paying a "courtesy" visit, welcomed the positive step towards improving British-Soviet relations since the situation in Europe in 1935 made such a trip essential for the promotion of a collective arrangement.

Peace cannot be secured by Eastern or Western pacts alone, by encirclement or isolation, by alliances or ententes. It requires an all-inclusive system embracing regional pacts and also the framework of the League, with the spirit of the League.<sup>77</sup>

However, the liberal and quality conservative press responded with more reserve to the proposal. The *Manchester Guardian*, though warmly welcoming the first official state visit, cautiously pointed out that it would be impossible for Britain to accept any commitments of a direct nature in Eastern Europe beyond the Covenant of the League's commitments. Nevertheless, the paper agreed with Litvinov that "peace is indivisible" and thus hoped the trip would enable a mutual understanding between East and West, a

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<sup>76</sup> D.B.F.P., Second Series, Vol. XII, nos. 464 and 474. See also, *The Times*, 27 February 1935. "Moscow and the Pact; Critical of British Policy" by the Riga Correspondent. *The News Chronicle*, 18 February 1935. Leading article, "Is It Peace?".

<sup>77</sup> *The Daily Herald*, 22 February 1935. Leading article, "Visit to Moscow". See also, the *New Statesman and Nation*, 23 February 1935. "Comments".

necessity for European peace.<sup>78</sup> The *News Chronicle* was even more circumspect than the *Manchester Guardian* in its praise for the visit. The paper thought the idea of sending Simon to the Soviet Union was very good "should circumstances make it possible" - the Foreign Minister's trip could only take place if he was able to remove the misunderstanding between Germany and the USSR.<sup>79</sup> Continuing with its supportive attitude towards the Soviet Union, established when that country entered the League of Nations, the *Daily Telegraph* believed a senior British Minister had a duty to visit Berlin and Moscow. He would thus be able to convince Hitler that the Soviet Government wanted peace and to discuss with the Soviet leadership the best method of moving the Soviet Union into a leading role in Europe.<sup>80</sup>

Again, the popular conservative press most intensely opposed the proposed visit by Simon to Berlin and Moscow. The *Daily Express* alleged that Britain only met with "disastrous" results when its Ministers went abroad for discussions. In addition, the paper objected to the intended visits because

It is 550 miles to Berlin; 290 more to Warsaw; then 720 to Moscow. It is further than that from Britain's true interests. What purpose do the ministers hope to achieve by a policy of wilful, wicked interference in the affairs of Europe.

The paper did not wish to see British commitments increase and did not believe that peace existed in "Berlin, Vienna, Paris, and Moscow where the war-spider spins its web". On the contrary, the *Daily Express* argued that "Peace lies in the strength and security of the Empire".<sup>81</sup>

As rumours circulated at the beginning of March that Simon did not intend to visit Moscow, A. J. Cummings, the political correspondent of the *News Chronicle*, believed the British Government "lacked courage". In the correspondent's opinion, sending

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<sup>78</sup> The *Manchester Guardian*, 22 February 1935. Leading article, "London and Moscow".

<sup>79</sup> The *News Chronicle*, 22 February 1934. Leading article, "Wanted, an Honest Broker".

<sup>80</sup> The *Daily Telegraph*, 21 February 1935. Leading article, "Soviet Support for Regional Pacts". Also, 23 February 1935, article by the Diplomatic Correspondent.

<sup>81</sup> The *Daily Express*, 26 February 1935. Leading article, "Bad for Britain". See also the *Daily Mail*, end February 1935.

another member of the Government, such as Anthony Eden, the Lord Privy Seal, to "explore the situation" would mean delay which

is altogether bad as it would only exasperate the Russians, take all the bigness and spontaneity out of a major mission, and probably doom to failure the main purpose of building a bridge of goodwill, to be translated into treaty terms, between Moscow and Berlin.

Cummings hoped a full diplomatic mission would be sent to the Soviet Union and thought the British Government would actually be surprised and delighted with the British public's response to such an event.<sup>82</sup>

However, the British Government announced that Eden would head the delegation to Moscow. The labour and liberal press immediately questioned the British Government's decision:

The choice is a concession to the prejudices and ill-manners of the Diehards in the Cabinet. They were compelled to recognise the necessity of a Ministerial visit to Moscow, but were unwilling to pay the Russians the compliment of sending the Secretary of State... They have grudgingly agreed to a junior minister, but with no Cabinet rank. The discourtesy is lamentable and will be duly noted in Moscow, though they will not protest.<sup>83</sup>

It was not that the *Daily Herald* disliked Eden; the paper believed him to be "personally more than acceptable". The issue was that he had no authority and would therefore need to consult the Cabinet before agreeing to anything. The *Manchester Guardian* also wished Simon was visiting Moscow after his discussions in Berlin simply because "if a member of the Cabinet goes to Germany, then he should also go to Russia". As with the *Daily Herald*, the liberal paper did not doubt Eden's competency to negotiate since he was a "very able" person. However, the *Manchester Guardian* did not dwell on the

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<sup>82</sup> *The News Chronicle*, 4 March 1935. "Simon Must Go to Moscow", special article by A. J. Cummings.

<sup>83</sup> *The Daily Herald*, 8 March 1935. Leading article, "Slight on Soviet".

"slight", but suggested that "everywhere should welcome the news of the visit - all do except Germany." It was difficult for the paper to comprehend why the German Government objected to the trip to Moscow since it was not directed against Nazi Germany.<sup>84</sup>

Simon and Eden's visit to Berlin produced no advantages for the Eastern Locarno plan, and the majority of the British press was disheartened by Hitler's unreasonable desire to prevent the pact. Apart from the *Daily Worker*, the *New Statesman and Nation* was the most condemning of the press towards Hitler's response to Simon's efforts. The journal wondered if Hitler was "blinded by his hatred of Communism" or if it was a desire to be free of commitments so he could attack the Soviet Union which led him to refuse to join a collective security system. The Nazi leader's claim that he would join any pact which excluded Moscow was useless, in the opinion of the *New Statesman and Nation*, since the Soviet Union was vital to the maintenance of European peace. Thus the journal suggested that Hitler's frank talks with Simon would probably contribute more towards a Franco-Soviet understanding and a pact than anything else.<sup>85</sup>

The liberal press and some quality conservative newspapers were ~~was~~ likewise disappointed with Hitler's uncompromising attitude towards an association with the Soviet Union. The *News Chronicle* accused the Nazi leader of "planning ruin" in Europe if he refused to cooperate with Moscow.<sup>86</sup> Both the *Scotsman* and the *Sunday Times* were dissatisfied with Hitler's excuses and alleged fears since most of them could be removed if Germany acted with the Soviet Union.<sup>87</sup> In contrast, the *Daily Telegraph* adopted a discouraging outlook, comparable to the popular conservative press, and suggested that due to the lack of success in Berlin, Eden's hopes of being able to accomplish anything in Moscow were ruined.<sup>88</sup> There was, however, no complaint by the paper concerning Hitler's unyielding opposition to the Soviet Union and the *Daily*

<sup>84</sup> The *Manchester Guardian*, 8 March 1935. Leading article, "Mr. Eden's Visit".

<sup>85</sup> The *New Statesman and Nation*, 30 March 1935. "Comments - Hitler and Russia". See also the *Daily Worker*, 26 and 27 March 1935.

<sup>86</sup> The *News Chronicle*, 28 March 1935. Leading article, "The Berlin Talks".

<sup>87</sup> The *Scotsman*, 27 March 1935. "Berlin Conversations Concluded" by the Berlin Correspondent. The *Sunday Times*, 24 March 1935. Leading article, "The Visit to Berlin".

<sup>88</sup> The *Daily Telegraph*, 27 March 1935. Leading article, "The Door Is Shut on Eastern Pact".

*Telegraph* appeared to have accepted that the Eastern Locarno plan was not going to succeed.

The popular conservative press was once again relieved by the "fruitlessness" of the visit. The *Daily Express* wanted the British Government to follow Hitler's suggestion that Britain should refrain from becoming entangled in Eastern Europe. Involvement there, in the paper's opinion, could lead to a quarrel with Germany and therefore, Britain ought to concentrate on the Empire, its true sphere of interest.<sup>89</sup> The *Daily Mail* found it incredible that a British Government would consider entering into any sort of pact with Moscow, especially one which increasingly resembled a plan to encircle Germany.<sup>90</sup> Following the outcome of the Berlin talks and despite the *Daily Mail's* appreciation of Eden's "admirable work for peace through tact and judgement", the paper felt compelled to ask if the visit to Moscow would serve a practical purpose. Though admitting that Eden was an "expert diplomatist", the *Daily Mail* suggested that he would have to deal with very "artful and dangerous people, who will put forth blandishments to entangle Britain in commitments of a most mischievous kind". The paper further stated that the present European situation was a matter for only Britain, France, Germany, and Italy to solve because the Soviet Union had no place in Europe since it was an Asiatic state.<sup>91</sup>

Despite these negative attitudes towards the Soviet Union and collective security, Eden's visit took place and was given prominent coverage in the British press especially since he was favourably received in Moscow and had talks with Litvinov and Stalin.<sup>92</sup> The *Daily Herald* suggested that because Stalin, who rarely spoke to foreign statesmen, met with Eden for discussions on Europe, trade and Asia, the Soviet Government believed the situation in Europe was very serious.<sup>93</sup> The *Daily Herald* felt it "desirable to emphasise how deeply important for peace is the maintenance of good and friendly

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<sup>89</sup> The *Daily Express*, 20 and 27 March 1935. Leading article and report by Berlin Correspondent respectively.

<sup>90</sup> The *Daily Mail*, 26 March 1935. Leading article, "An Historic Parallel".

<sup>91</sup> The *Daily Mail*, 23 March 1935. Leading article, "The Visit to Moscow".

<sup>92</sup> See British newspapers, 28 March to 1 April 1935.

<sup>93</sup> The *Daily Herald*, 30 March 1935. "Eden's Frank Talk with Stalin" by an Exchange Correspondent.

relations between Moscow and Britain" since both countries were influential states belonging to the League and linked by the desire for peace. The paper alleged that the slogan "peace is indivisible" had to be the standard of Europe since regional pacts were acceptable only if they were within the framework of the League of Nations. Furthermore, cooperation between the British and Soviet Governments was essential in aiding Europe's quest for peace and thus Eden's visit assumed vital importance.<sup>94</sup>

Even the *Daily Express*, which disapproved of the British visit to Moscow, recognised that the Soviet Government had greeted Eden with special treatment.<sup>95</sup> Nevertheless, the paper cynically alleged it was done to draw the British in: "Stalin is ready to offer Britain a military pact to march the Red Guards by the side of the Grenadier Guards for the defence of Britain if Hitler dares to attack us." The *Daily Express*, however, did not expect a German attack and argued that the British would thus be obliged to assist the Soviet Union in the far more likely prospect of a Soviet-Japanese war. Therefore, the *Daily Express* suggested that the less Britain had to do with Stalin, the "more occasion we shall have to 'Cheer up, smile, and be gay'".<sup>96</sup>

Though the results of Eden's talks in Moscow were not spectacular, they were far more positive than the outcome of Simon's discussions in Berlin. Eden himself noted the contrast and hoped that Hitler would take sufficient notice of the improved relations between Moscow and London.<sup>97</sup> The British-Soviet communique stressed that the "friendly cooperation of the two countries in the general work for the collective organisation of peace and security is of primary importance for the furtherance of international efforts to this end".<sup>98</sup> Although Eden was sincere in his preference for Britain to promote collective security, he recognised that despite Hitler's intransigent

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<sup>94</sup> The *Daily Herald*, 28 March 1935. Leading article, "Talks in Moscow".

<sup>95</sup> The *Daily Express*, 28 March 1935. "Russia Greet Mr. Eden with 'Blue Danube'" by the Warsaw Correspondent; 29 March 1935, "Litvinov Toasts the King; Moscow Fetes Mr. Eden".

<sup>96</sup> The *Daily Express*, 29 March 1935. Leading article, "Cheer Up, Smile, and Be Gay".

<sup>97</sup> Anthony Eden, *Facing the Dictators*. p. 165. The British Ambassador in Berlin reported that Hitler was "perturbed" by the Moscow communique and the warmth of the Soviet reception for Eden. D.B.F.P., Second Series, Vol. XII, no. 690.

<sup>98</sup> Eden, p. 161.

attitude, many in the Cabinet would remain unenthusiastic, primarily from a distrust of communism.<sup>99</sup>

The liberal and labour press accepted the simple results of the talks and especially welcomed the improved nature of British-Soviet relations. The *News Chronicle* called the mission an "unqualified" success and pointed out that the greatest result of the talks was a promise of "cordial cooperation in the future for the maintenance of peace".<sup>100</sup> The *Manchester Guardian* reported that there was complete accord between Britain and the Soviet Union, a benefit for Europe since both countries believed in "collective security" though the paper acknowledged this might leave little harmony between Germany and Britain.<sup>101</sup> The *Spectator* pointed out that there were people in Britain who feared cooperation with the Soviet Union because of its "barbaric" background. However, the journal, in a view identical to Eden's, suggested that the only way to deal with Germany, who was appearing more aggressive, was to work with the Soviet Government since it held the same attitude towards peace and security as the British Government. Thus Britain had to take advantage of the support which the Soviet Union could give and furthermore, the *Spectator* thought that the British Government should remember that Eastern Europe was the region in which the Great War had begun.<sup>102</sup> Both the *Daily Herald* and the *News Chronicle* argued that as two important European and Asiatic powers, Britain and the Soviet Union had to cooperate. Though the papers hoped Germany would join the Eastern Locarno plan, both conceded that the British and Soviet Governments would work without the Germans if necessary.<sup>103</sup>

The quality conservative press accepted the results of the Moscow visit with relief. The *Daily Telegraph*, despite its negative attitude following Simon's efforts in Berlin, believed that Stalin's admiration of Britain would help to smooth the relations between London and Moscow and that regardless of economic and political differences,

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<sup>99</sup> Ibid, pp. 162 and 143.

<sup>100</sup> The *News Chronicle*, 1 April 1935. "Russia for Collective Pacts" by A. J. Cummings in Moscow; 1 April 1935, leading article, "The Eastern Pact".

<sup>101</sup> The *Manchester Guardian*, 2 April 1935. Leading article, "From Moscow to Warsaw".

<sup>102</sup> The *Spectator*, 5 April 1935. Leading article, "1914 and 1935". See Eden, p. 143.

<sup>103</sup> The *Daily Herald*, 1 April 1935. Leading article, "Peace and the Soviet". The *News Chronicle*, 1 April 1935. Leading article, "The Eastern Pact".

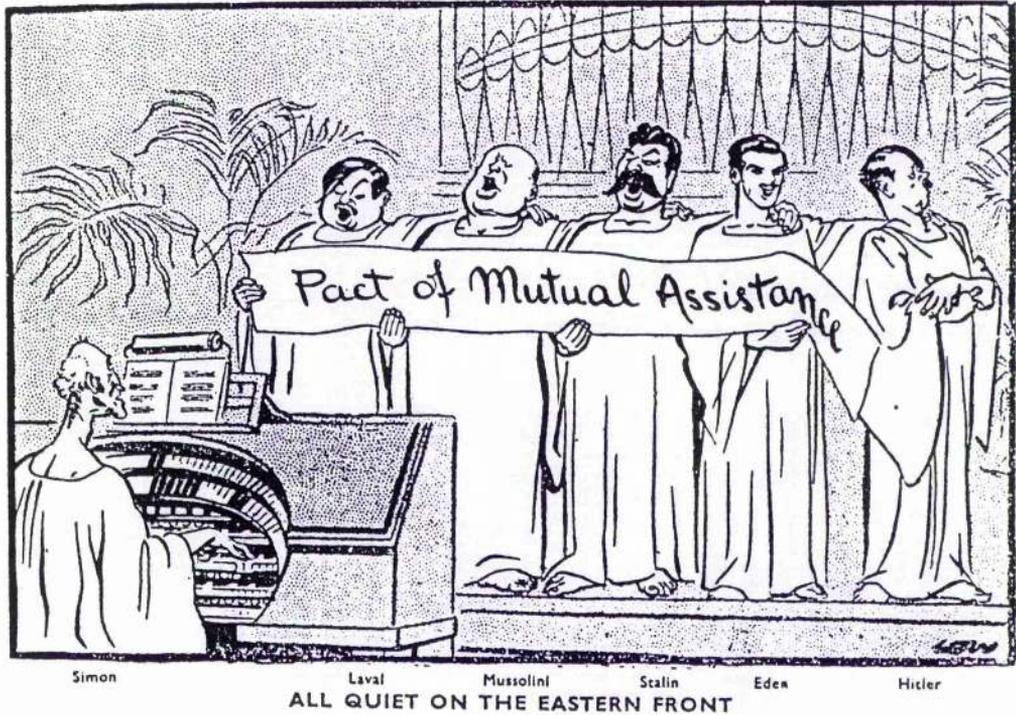


Fig. 3.4

the two countries could hold "further fruitful workings".<sup>104</sup> The *Sunday Times* and the *Scotsman* were pleased that the visit appeared to have been "most harmonious" and that relations were "distinctly improved" as a result of Eden's ability to impress on Stalin that Britain was not opposed to the idea of an Eastern Locarno plan.<sup>105</sup> However, in contrast to the *Daily Herald's* and the *News Chronicle's* argument that Britain and the Soviet Union could work without Germany if necessary, the *Scotsman* warned that such a move would convert Europe into two armed camps. If collective security failed, then Britain's foreign policy could potentially move into an alliance system "reminiscent of the old days" which would encircle Germany. The *Scotsman*, nevertheless, continued to place clear responsibility for the success of collective security on Germany even though the Berlin discussions did not offer much hope of German collaboration.<sup>106</sup> Low's cartoon, "All Quiet on the Eastern Front", on 5 April 1935 showed that Hitler, despite

<sup>104</sup> The *Daily Telegraph*, 2 April 1935. Leading article, "Mr. Eden's Fruitful Visit".

<sup>105</sup> The *Sunday Times*, 31 March 1935. Various articles. The *Scotsman*, 1 April 1935. Leading article, "Moscow Conversations".

<sup>106</sup> The *Scotsman*, 1 April 1935. Leading article, "Moscow Conversations".

Eden's efforts to bring Moscow and Berlin together, refused to join a pact of mutual assistance if the Soviet Union was a member.<sup>107</sup>

The coverage of Eden's journey around Eastern Europe in *The Times* focused on Germany's reactions, which were critical especially of the talks in Moscow.<sup>108</sup> However, *The Times* printed an important leading article on 4 April, entitled "The British Role", which argued that Germany had been unfairly and irrationally criticised for refusing to join the proposed East European pact. Furthermore, the paper wanted Britain's position to be restricted to a "mediating and educative" role.<sup>109</sup> While the article rarely mentioned Eden's efforts in Moscow, it had far reaching consequences on Soviet opinion. Eden had noted that wherever he visited, there was suspicion of Britain's foreign policy, which had been worst in Moscow where the Soviet Government was concerned that the British would concede too much to Germany.<sup>110</sup> Eden assigned to *The Times* a large degree of responsibility for encouraging these doubts since Europe widely regarded the paper as an organ of the British Government. His annoyance with the attitude of the paper was expressed in a memorandum on 7 April which specifically berated the "defeatist" leading article for agreeing too openly with German opinions. Eden demanded that the British Government make it clear that *The Times* did not represent Foreign Office opinion as otherwise the paper would "destroy effective foreign policy in Europe". More important was his suggestion that Britain adopt a "firm" policy of collective peace and stand strong against Germany's growing demands. Eden alleged that to appear "weak and vacillating", along the lines of *The Times's* suggestions, would encourage German demands and depreciate Britain's value in the opinion its friends and enemies.<sup>111</sup>

<sup>107</sup> See Figure 3.4. The *Evening Standard*, 5 April 1935, "All Quiet on the Eastern Front".

<sup>108</sup> *The Times*, 21 March and 28 March 1935. "Moscow and British Note" by the Riga Correspondent, and "British Visit to Moscow" by a special correspondent at Negoreloe, on the border of Poland and the Soviet Union. *The Times*, 1 April 1935. "Germany Critical of Moscow Talks" by the Berlin Correspondent.

<sup>109</sup> *The Times*, 4 April 1935. Leading article, "British Role".

<sup>110</sup> Eden, p. 176.

<sup>111</sup> D.B.F.P., Second Series, Vol. XII, no. 701.

It was possible that the relative success of the Moscow talks prevented the popular conservative press from expressing its usual opposition to the Soviet Union. The *Daily Mail* made little comment on the British visit and when the paper did, its articles usually reported on the dress sense of the Soviet leadership, of what the entertainment consisted, and what the representatives ate at banquets.<sup>112</sup> The *Daily Express* also made very few observations during the visit.<sup>113</sup> However, once Eden had returned to London, the paper claimed that although Litvinov was the "hero of the British press", he was not so in the *Daily Express* since the paper was not impressed with his methods of trying to force Britain into fighting with suggestions that "peace is indivisible".<sup>114</sup>

#### Decline of collective security

As a result of the failure to secure German and Polish acceptance of an Eastern Locarno plan, the British Government's fears of bi-lateral pacts were gradually realised as the French and Soviet Governments moved closer together. In 1932, a Franco-Soviet Pact of mutual friendship and non-aggression was formed though the final signatures and ratification were delayed, until May 1935 and February 1936 respectively, while the plans for Eastern Europe and the Soviet entry into the League of Nations were given priority. Though the reaction of the British press was generally <sup>of relief</sup> that the treaty was not aggressive, there remained some reservations about a new bi-lateral pact, especially by those newspapers and journals of the liberal and labour press which hoped to see Britain more closely involved with the Soviet Union.

Laval, who replaced the pro-Soviet Barthou as Foreign Minister after his assassination in October 1934, visited Moscow in May 1935 to sign a pact which was the culmination of a four year Franco-Soviet rapprochement. The labour and liberal press expressed concern with the growing number of bi-lateral agreements even though the

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<sup>112</sup> The *Daily Mail*, 29 and 30 March 1935. Articles by the Special Correspondent in Moscow, F.W. Memory.

<sup>113</sup> See for example, the *Daily Express*, 1 and 2 April 1935.

<sup>114</sup> The *Daily Express*, 11 April 1935. Leading article, "The Indivisible Pact".

*New Statesman and Nation* suggested that Europe could benefit from the pact since it was within the framework of the League Covenant. Furthermore, collective security remained a possibility despite the new bi-lateral alliance.<sup>115</sup> However, the *Daily Herald* and the *News Chronicle* demanded that Britain contribute more to the collective security system to prevent further bi-lateral agreements which isolated too many countries and made them vulnerable to aggressive designs.<sup>116</sup>

The quality conservative press, ignoring the possible set-backs for collective security as a result of the Franco-Soviet pact, believed the Soviet Union <sup>profited</sup> ~~profited~~ more than France by the agreement. Though it was claimed by the Soviet and French press to be a pale substitute to an Eastern Locarno Pact, the Riga Correspondent for *The Times* suggested that the agreement was more than useful for the Soviet Union since France would be a strong ally.<sup>117</sup> The *Observer*, however, recognised that "modern industrialist Russia" was a far better partner for the French than Tsarist Russia had been.<sup>118</sup> The *Daily Telegraph* believed that the British Government's only concern with regards to the pact should be to confirm that it was a defensive alliance within the League.<sup>119</sup>

As expected, the popular conservative press was cynical of the pact between the French and Soviet Governments. Furthermore, the majority of coverage in these papers was not devoted to the significance of the alliance. Instead, the *Daily Express* reported on irrelevant, though highly entertaining, details such as Laval's visit to Lenin's tomb and the way in which Moscow's inhabitants "danced with joy" in the streets when the pact was signed.<sup>120</sup> Two months before the signatures, the *Daily Express* suggested that France was making a senseless choice in allying with the Soviet Union because the

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<sup>115</sup> *The New Statesman and Nation*, "Comments - The Franco-Russian Entente".

<sup>116</sup> *The Daily Herald*, 6 May 1935. Leading article, "A Peace Pact". *The News Chronicle*, 11 April 1935. Leading article, "Better than Pacts".

<sup>117</sup> *The Times*, 14 May 1935. "Soviet Comment" by the Riga Correspondent.

<sup>118</sup> *The Observer*, 12 May 1935. "M. Laval's Visit to Moscow: Modern Russia as an Ally" by the Moscow Correspondent. See also, 5 May 1935, "World: Week by Week - The Franco-Russian Pact".

<sup>119</sup> *The Daily Telegraph*, 15 May 1935. Leading article, "Organising a System of Security".

<sup>120</sup> *The Daily Express*, 14 May 1935. "M. Laval Sees Lenin's Tomb" by the Moscow Correspondent; 3 May 1935, "Moscow Dances with Joy", by Reuter in Moscow.

Red Army was not "in the habit of winning" due to its lack of organisation. In contrast, the paper argued that Germany had selected a better ally in Japan.<sup>121</sup> However, in June 1936 the *Daily Express*, though remaining unsupportive of the Franco-Soviet alliance, suggested that the Soviet Union was possibly the stronger member of the partnership because France was suffering from various domestic crises, especially strikes. The paper found it ironic that "whereas once they would have stoked up the troubles", the Soviet Government was allegedly lending support to subdue the disorder to prevent Germany ~~from~~ <sup>from</sup> taking advantage of France's weakened position.<sup>122</sup>

The pact remained unratified until February 1936 at which time the majority of British press opinion echoed the views of the previous May.<sup>123</sup> However, *The Times* was further concerned because French ratification was denounced by Germany as "encirclement", though the paper believed the agreement was a peaceful settlement aimed against no one and formed as a protective measure to thwart aggression.<sup>124</sup> The liberal and labour press was similarly anxious but gave cautious approval to the pact since Germany was invited to join at any time. The *Manchester Guardian* feared that Europe was becoming increasingly unstable. "As the diplomatic cauldron boils ever more threateningly, there is an unprecedented hurrying to and fro of the great ones... Those fearing Germany draw closer together."<sup>125</sup>

The real concern for Europe in 1936 was caused by the Nazi re-militarisation of the Rhineland in March which was alleged by the German Government to be a necessary consequence of the Franco-Soviet Pact. All British newspapers, whether conservative, liberal or labour in outlook, did not wish to see the Rhineland episode evolve into a war and therefore most did not support Litvinov's calls for strong action against Germany's

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<sup>121</sup> *The Daily Express*, 19 March 1935. Leading article, "Partners in War".

<sup>122</sup> *The Daily Express*, 13 June 1936. Leading article, "Stalin Has a 'Deal' Too".

<sup>123</sup> See for example, *The Times*, 11 February 1936. Leading article, "The Franco-Soviet Treaty".

<sup>124</sup> *The Times*, 29 February 1936. Various article by Correspondents in Berlin, Warsaw, and Riga. *The Daily Herald*, 12 February 1936 by Paris Correspondent.

<sup>125</sup> *The Manchester Guardian*, 12 February 1936. Leading article, "The Franco-Soviet Treaty". *The New Statesman and Nation*, 15 February 1936. "Comments".

aggression.<sup>126</sup> Even the *Manchester Guardian*, though displeased with Hitler and usually very supportive of collective action, concurred with the rest of the British press and refused to support Litvinov's appeals.<sup>127</sup>

Other non-collective alliances did not lead to an improvement in relations between Britain and the Soviet Union. For example, when Italy joined the Anti-Comintern Pact in November 1937, which Germany and Japan had signed the previous November,<sup>128</sup> the British Government became more concerned with cooperating with the Italian and German Governments who refused to negotiate or work with the Soviet Union. Thus, another means of encouraging Britain to work collectively with Moscow was wilfully overlooked, the importance of which was not lost on the Soviet Government. Although the British press of all political persuasions disliked the Anti-Comintern Pact, suggestions that Britain and the Soviet Union cooperate against German and Italian designs were limited. The popular conservative press perceived few dangers for anyone since the pact was "for show" and meant simply to "keep the brew boiling".<sup>129</sup> Thus there was no need for Britain or the Soviet Union to respond individually or together. The quality conservative press also found the pact "unnecessary and regrettable", and though directed against the Soviet Union and possibly the British Empire, these papers did not believe the agreement was aggressive in terms.<sup>130</sup> Therefore, suggestions that Britain and the Soviet Union should act collectively were not made since such action was considered needless. Even the liberal and labour press, which devoted the most interest to the pact, believed the agreement "signified next to nothing" and therefore did not require a collective response to it.<sup>131</sup> Only the *Observer* expressed sympathy, and thus a degree of support,

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<sup>126</sup> See for example, *The Times*, 10 and 11 March 1936. *The Daily Herald*, 13, 14, and 17 March 1936, leading articles.

<sup>127</sup> *The Manchester Guardian*, 13 and 16 March 1936. Various articles.

<sup>128</sup> The Anti-Comintern Pact was allegedly designed to prevent the spread of communism in Germany, Japan, and Italy but in reality the plan, inspired by Hitler, was a lightly veiled threat against the Soviet Union.

<sup>129</sup> *The Daily Express*, 9 November 1937. Leading articles, "Where Is Prague?" and "The Anti-Red Axis".

<sup>130</sup> *The Sunday Times*, 7 November 1937. Leading article, "The Shifting Scene". *The Daily Telegraph*, 30 November 1936. Leading article, "Soviet Sabre-Rattling"; 26 November 1936, leading article, "The Anti-Bolshevist Pact".

<sup>131</sup> *The Spectator*, 12 November 1937. "From Axis to Triangle". *The News Chronicle*, 8 November 1937. Leading article, "Triple Alliance". *The Daily Herald*, 5 November 1937. Leading

with Hitler's diplomacy in forming the Anti-Comintern Pact. "What else could we expect?" when the Soviet Union formed pacts with France and Czechoslovakia and meddled in Spain.<sup>132</sup>

At the same time that Hitler was making aggressive moves in Europe and offering a concerted front against communism, Litvinov, despite his calls for unified action, did not wish to see Europe erupt into war as that was contrary to the Soviet Government's aims.<sup>133</sup> However, Britain's failure to respond firmly to Hitler's aggression led the Soviet Government to reconsider its objectives in 1936, especially since the British Government was increasingly cool towards the Soviet Union and more conciliatory towards Germany. By September 1936, hopes of new Locarno plans for the West or the East were declining due to German obstruction. Litvinov, though still supported by the labour and liberal press in Britain,<sup>134</sup> recognised the failure of the Eastern Locarno plan and the ineffectiveness of the League of Nations to the extent that his speeches increasingly reflected the failure of collective security.<sup>135</sup> Furthermore, the Soviet Government, despite its efforts to convince Europe of the "indivisibility of peace" and its criticism of the German refusal to participate in an Eastern Locarno plan, recognised the need to cooperate with Germany. Thus trade negotiations continued despite the remilitarization of the Rhineland, the Spanish Civil War, and the propaganda directed against each other.<sup>136</sup> The British press regretted that political relations between Germany and the USSR were so bad that there would be no chance of an European

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article, "Who Keeps the Law". *The Manchester Guardian*, 8 November 1937. "Aims of Enlarged Anti-Comintern Pact" by the Diplomatic Correspondent in London. See also Alain Fleury, "Le Pacte 'anti-Komintern' (25 novembre 1936), vu par la press française", p. 413.

<sup>132</sup> *The Observer*, 29 November 1936. "Drift; The New Alliances and Their Meaning" by J. L. Garvin.

<sup>133</sup> Haigh, p. 57.

<sup>134</sup> *The Daily Herald*, 29 September 1936. "Litvinov Shatters Hopes of New Locarno" by W. N. Ewer, the Diplomatic Correspondent in Geneva. Also, the *News Chronicle*, 3 August 1936. Leading article, "As Russia Sees It".

<sup>135</sup> Haslam, p. 93 and 95. Carr, *German-Soviet Relations*, pp. 124-125. Litvinov's recognition that the League of Nations was ineffective was apparent in September and October 1935 with the Italian invasion of Abyssinia and the failure to impose strong sanctions.

<sup>136</sup> Dunn, pp. 238-239. Robert Manne, "The Foreign Office and the Failure of Anglo-Soviet Rapprochement", p. 746. Though the Foreign Office may have had some fears that a German-Soviet rapprochement could be achieved through economic negotiations, the fear was not realised or expressed by the British press.

settlement. The *Daily Herald*, with startling foresight, had an "uncomfortable feeling" that the fate of Europe depended on Soviet-German relations.<sup>137</sup>

### Conclusion

Although Fleet Street recognised and supported, to varying degrees, the Soviet Union's efforts to promote collective security, when it came to important events, such as the crises over the Rhineland, Abyssinia and the Anschluss, the British press did not wish to see these issues develop into a European war. Fleet Street believed Britain had to act collectively with Germany, not against it, and therefore these papers refused to accept the Soviet Union's call for firm action because such a move could increase the possibility of war.<sup>138</sup>

The popular conservative press had never supported collective security proposals as these papers perceived no value in the concept. The desire for Britain to remain isolated from Europe, Empire bound, and non-antagonistic to Germany outweighed all considerations for a collective system. Furthermore, many plans for collective action were offered by the communists whom the Beaverbrook and Rothermere press distrusted. In June 1934, the soviet Government believed that the Rothermere and Beaverbrook press, "though not officially inspired, nevertheless must represent the views of large numbers of British Government supporters".<sup>139</sup> Vansittart, the Permanent Under-Secretary, denied that the British Government provided an official policy line to these newspapers, and even asked Chilston to point out to Litvinov that His Majesty's Government was "often bitterly attacked by [the Rothermere and Beaverbrook

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<sup>137</sup> The *Daily Herald*, 30 September 1936. Leading article, "Germany Against Russia". See also the *Manchester Guardian*, 14-16 September 1936. The *Sunday Times*, 13 September 1936. The *New Statesman and Nation*, 19 September 1936.

<sup>138</sup> The *Manchester Guardian*, 18 March 1938. Leading article, "The Russian Proposal". The *News Chronicle*, 18 March 1938. Leading article, "The Only Basis". The *Daily Herald*, 18 March 1938. "Powers v. Hitler: Litvinov's Move" by Reuter. The conservative press held a similar opinion though it was the traditional attitude that Germany should not be antagonised. See for example, *The Times*, 18 March 1938. "Measures to Resist Aggression" by the Moscow Correspondent. The *Daily Telegraph*, 18 March 1938. "Soviet Offers to Join in Collective Action" by the Moscow Correspondent. The *Daily Express*, 18 March 1938. "Why All the Gloom? Lord Beaverbrook Predicts Years of Peace for Us".

<sup>139</sup> D.B.F.P., Second Series, Vol. VII, nos. 606.

press]".<sup>140</sup> The popular conservative press often found itself opposing the movements of the British Government during the thaw in relations between 1934 and 1935. Criticism of the Government was often as detailed as that directed against the Soviet Union, especially concerning the British support for the Soviet entry into the League of Nations. However, because the British Government made no significant move towards cementing cooperation between the two countries following Eden's visit to Moscow, the attitude of the popular conservative press eventually resumed a reflection on the ideas of the British Government whose mistrust of the Soviet Government prevented a closer relationship.

The quality conservative press, though suspicious of Soviet intentions, nevertheless cautiously supported the advantages which collective security, even if offered by the Soviet Government, could provide for Europe. However, as appeasement gained the support of quality conservative newspapers, the temporary favourable efforts by the Soviet Union in 1934 and 1935 lost value. The *Daily Telegraph* presented the most variable coverage. Its attitude occasionally resembled the opinions of the popular conservative press which disliked the Soviet Union's increased involvement in Europe. At other times, the *Daily Telegraph's* articles reflected attitudes which displayed an ambivalence towards the Soviet Union's ideas, though without finding it necessary to attack with hostility the Soviet Union's efforts towards collective security. In contrast, the *Scotsman*, and to a degree the *Sunday Times* and the *Yorkshire Post*, urged the British Government to work more closely with the Soviet Government. Furthermore, unlike the rest of the conservative press, these three papers criticised Hitler for frustrating constructive policies aimed at securing European peace. The *Scotsman* and the *Yorkshire Post* succeeded in offering different opinions from the British Government because they were provincial newspapers whose editors were determined to remain independent of Government influence. In contrast, the conservative London dailies, whose editors were often intimate friends of politicians and civil servants, reflected much more closely Government beliefs. For example, when Simon finally offered British

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<sup>140</sup> D.B.F.P., Second Series, Vol. VII, nos. 608 and 611.

support for an Eastern Locarno Plan, the quality conservative newspapers in London also made favourable references to the Soviet Union's ideas on the security of Eastern Europe.<sup>141</sup> Thus Eden, though critical of *The Times* in April 1935 for its pro-German attitude which opposed the Eastern Locarno Plan, recognised that the newspaper was "unofficially" reflecting the British Government's views on the situation.<sup>142</sup>

The liberal and labour press believed it was in Britain's best interest to bring the Soviet Union and Germany together as only thus would Europe be saved from war. Although these papers did not hesitate to blame Germany for the failure of collective security, they also regretted that the British Government failed to take advantage of the benefits secured as a consequence of Eden's positive journey to Moscow. As British foreign policy increasingly appeased Germany and ignored the valuable ideas offered by the Soviet Government, the liberal and labour press deplored the demise of collective activity by the major states of Europe. Despite the British Government's positive efforts towards collective security in 1934 and early 1935, criticism by the liberal and labour press occurred though it was often offered in a manner which was meant to encourage His Majesty's Government to do more to secure British-Soviet cooperation. However, when the test came over the re-militarisation of the Rhineland, these papers abandoned the principles of collective security in the face of German aggression.

Nevertheless,, collective security was given a further opportunity to achieve its purpose, before the Second World War, when the Spanish Civil War broke out in July 1936. Though none of the British press wished to see Britain heavily involved in Spain, the issue for Fleet Street became clouded by political bias and the fear of doing too much or too little to help the Republican effort. The conservative press wished to avoid antagonising Germany and Italy while the liberal and labour press preferred decisive action similar to that which the Soviet Union proposed for a concerted effort against the rebels and fascists. .

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<sup>141</sup> See articles in July 1934. Also, D.B.F.P., Second Series, Vol. VII, no. 608.

<sup>142</sup> Eden, p. 176 and D.B.F.P., Second Series, Vol. XII, no. 701.

## Chapter 4

### "The Spanish Shambles"<sup>1</sup>

Despite the Soviet Union's apparent change in foreign policy to promoting collective security, many British politicians and civil servants remained sceptical of the Soviet Government's new aims in Europe. Old fears prevailed that the long term goals of the Soviet Union continued to be the destruction of capitalism and democracy. In 1935 for example, Viscount Chilston, Britain's Ambassador to Moscow, rejected the new policy by the Soviet Government as "not a change of heart... but a change of tactics" and emphasised that "world revolution remains as ever the ultimate end of Comintern policy." Chilston warned that the Soviet leadership's reversal of policy was merely "a change-over to a far cleverer line of attack, and one which is eventually more likely to bear fruit in democratic countries than the former line of preaching open revolution".<sup>2</sup> These fears increased when France and Spain both elected Popular Front Governments in May and February 1936 respectively. Furthermore, neither government seemed to provide stability as domestic crises rapidly developed. The Spanish Popular Front Government appeared especially vulnerable which caused concern in Britain where it was understood that the Soviet Union was offering support to reinforce the government in Madrid. The British Government was worried that if Spain's Popular Front could not survive independently of Moscow, then the Soviet Government would gain a base in South-Western Europe from which communism could spread. It was assumed that France, in its vulnerable condition, would very likely fall to such a threat. Thus, when Spanish garrisons in Morocco were seized on 17 July 1936 by General Franco's right-wing military officers and fighting spread throughout Spain, the British Government secretly welcomed the potential overthrow of the Popular Front as a means of preventing the

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<sup>1</sup> Title of leading article in the *Spectator*, 21 August 1936.

<sup>2</sup> Douglas Little, "Red Scare, 1936: Anti-Bolshevism and the Origins of British Non-Intervention in the Spanish Civil War", p. 293.

spread of communism.<sup>3</sup> Consequently, collective action in Spain was destined to fail as a result of the Conservative Government's traditional distrust of the Soviet Union's foreign policy.

With the outbreak of the Spanish Civil War, the Soviet Government recognised that an opportunity had arisen in Europe for the spread of communism. However, because the country was preoccupied with domestic issues, such as the second Five Year Plan and preparations for the first Moscow show trial, Stalin preferred to let the Republican Government fight with very limited Soviet resources. For example, the Soviet Government initially gave indirect assistance by forcing the Russian workers to make contributions to support the republican war effort. Nevertheless, as German and Italian aid to Franco's Nationalists increased, the Soviet leadership recognised it would have to take some action, not necessarily to help the spread of communism, but to hinder the success of fascism in Spain. Yet intervention was costly, especially if undertaken without France and Britain who appeared resolved to avoid involvement, and therefore, the Soviet Union sought to promote collective action with the West through non-intervention.<sup>4</sup>

In the first weeks of the Spanish Civil War, the British press displayed a surprising lack of interest in events, though coverage rapidly increased in August. Fleet Street was primarily concerned with seeing Britain remain uninvolved in a civil war which had the potential to entangle all of Europe in a larger conflict. Thus newspapers and political journals focused attention on the successes and failures of the non-intervention plan and the Nyon Conference as they represented the best means of keeping the Spanish war localised. The role of the Soviet Union in promoting or hindering non-intervention was carefully scrutinised by Fleet Street since all newspapers and journals knew the Soviet Government was assisting the Republicans, though the degree of help was open to debate. The popular conservative press was, on the whole, irrational in its

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<sup>3</sup> Little, p. 297 and 299. Cattell, *Soviet Diplomacy and the Spanish Civil War*, p. 11. For examples of Foreign Office fears that Soviet intervention in Spain was intended to spread communism, see D.B.F.P., Second Series, Vol. XVII, no. 78 and Vol. XVIII, no. 34.

<sup>4</sup> Thomas, *The Spanish Civil War*. p. 215-216. Carr, *The Comintern and the Spanish Civil War*, p. 15.

assessment of the Soviet Union's position in Spain. These papers actually attributed the outbreak of the war to Moscow and continually stated that were it not for communist intervention, Germany and Italy would not have been "obliged" to help Franco. In addition, the Rothermere and Beaverbrook press argued that the Soviet Union had no reason to be involved in the civil war since Spain was geographically far from Moscow's interests. Thus these papers argued the Soviet Government had ulterior motives for Europe.

Though the quality conservative press, with the exception of the *Scotsman* and the *Sunday Times*, was similarly opposed to Soviet involvement in Spain, these papers recognised that all major European states had to work collectively to prevent the war from spreading. Nevertheless, at times these newspapers accused the Soviet Government of inflaming the situation and of pushing Europe closer to war for its own purposes. For example, the attitude of the *Observer* was intolerant of the Soviet Union, thus prejudging the situation in Spain. Like the popular conservative press, the paper's editor, Garvin, stated that "Moscow's stimulus and aid long before Franco invaded is the cause of Spain's war lasting so long and so cruelly."<sup>5</sup> However, the majority of the conservative press consistently argued that non-intervention was the only policy to follow, as it kept British men from fighting in Spain and prevented the war from spreading throughout Europe, an attitude which reflected and found encouragement from the British Government.

In contrast, the liberal and labour press, with the *Scotsman* and the *Sunday Times*, were sympathetic and supportive of the Soviet Union's calls for collective action against Germany and Italy. These papers realised that the Soviet Union was assisting the Republican Government, but argued that Moscow was merely responding to German and Italian aid and attempting to prevent the demise of a democratically elected government. The liberal and labour press achieved a balance in their reporting by recognising that the republican and the nationalist armies were equally accountable for the atrocities in Spain

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<sup>5</sup> The *Observer*, 29 November 1936. "Drift; The New Alliances and Their Meaning" by J. L. Garvin. See also, 7 November 1937, "The Truth About Intervention; How Russia Feeds the War; Back to Fair Play" by J. L. Garvin.

and that the Soviet Union was not the only country undertaking foreign intervention. Furthermore, these newspapers and journals, though very supportive of non-intervention, were critical of the British Government for not enforcing the plan more vigorously. Thus the liberal and labour press gave the appearance of opposing His Majesty's Government though these papers had no more desire to send British troops to Spain than politicians or conservative newspapers.

### Reds and Blacks

The *Illustrated London News* printed an astute article by Arthur Bryant, the editor of the journal, in August 1936 which acknowledged and explained the early lack of interest displayed by the British press in the Spanish Civil War. Bryant pointed out that while "neighbouring countries" thought of revolutions or civil wars,

British minds think of the annual holiday... We may scan the papers anxiously and shake our heads over the doings of the bloodthirsty Fascists or the wicked Reds (depending on our political convictions) but we really do care very little what their doings are so long as they do not interfere with ours. Our friends are sometimes shocked by this absorption of ourselves in trifles. They accuse us of lacking romanticism and lacking in political imagination... and call us a nation of shopkeepers.

Bryant, however, believed it was not necessarily bad that "England never stirs for anything but her own material interest" since ideals, in practice, frequently assumed a different shape from that which was intended.<sup>6</sup>

Regardless of this detached attitude, the *Illustrated London News* was critical of prejudiced press coverage by papers which reported that Spanish priests were being murdered by "progressively-minded" young communists while other newspapers wrote that the same communists were being "bundled against walls" by the army and summarily

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<sup>6</sup> The *Illustrated London News*, 8 August 1936. "Our Notebook" by Arthur Bryant. Arthur Bryant, also the biographer and confidant of Stanley Baldwin, had visited Spain in the Spring of 1936 and recognised that revolution was imminent. See Little, p. 296.

shot.<sup>7</sup> The popular conservative press was especially guilty of unbalanced reporting against communist involvement in Spain and rarely printed an article which did not condemn the evil practices of the "Reds" while praising the honourable work of the nationalists to save Spain. The *Daily Express's* correspondents in Spain - D. Sefton Delmer (who became the paper's Moscow Correspondent in 1939), Selkirk Panton, and O. D. Gallacher - regularly used "Reds" interchangeably with "Republicans". Sefton Delmer, for example, reported from the Northern Rebel Headquarters at Burgos as a witness to the nationalist fight for the "Red Army" village of Guadarrama, where he claimed to have spent four hours being bombed by "Red" planes.<sup>8</sup> Gallacher reported in a similar style and alleged Largo Caballero, the Prime Minister of the Republican Government from February 1936 to May 1937, was Spain's "Red" boss.<sup>9</sup> The *Daily Mail* printed equally sensationalist headlines which alleged the "Rout of the Spanish Red Army" while "Red Women Butcher Spanish Priests".<sup>10</sup>

Thus the popular conservative press was in no doubt who was to blame for the increased threat of a European war and wrote leading articles which were no more objective towards the Soviet Union than reports by their correspondents. For example, the *Evening News* alleged that the "supposedly moderate Left-Wing Government" of Spain was powerless to control "these murderous gangs [of Reds]" who were supported by Moscow. As the "tide of Red murder" increased, the "anti-Reds" had been forced to respond to "save Spain".<sup>11</sup> The *Daily Mail* reported that communist troops and arms had been flooding into Spain on the orders of the Soviet Government to throw the country into a "reign of murder and rapine". The paper condemned the Spanish Government for betraying the country and for arming the "dregs of society", while a communist victory, in the opinion of the *Daily Mail*, would be a "terrible blow to civilisation".<sup>12</sup> The

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<sup>7</sup> The *Illustrated London News*, 8 August 1936. "Our Notebook" by Arthur Bryant.

<sup>8</sup> The *Daily Express*, 6 August 1936. "Daily Express Bombed By Red Airmen" by D. Sefton Delmer, Staff Reporter.

<sup>9</sup> The *Daily Express*, 5 September 1936. "Reds Fight to End" by O. D. Gallacher, Staff Reporter.

<sup>10</sup> See articles throughout August 1936 for examples.

<sup>11</sup> The *Evening News*, 3 August 1936. Leading article, "Red Spain".

<sup>12</sup> The *Daily Mail*, 4 August 1936. Leading article, "M. Blum's Choice". The "dregs of society" referred to Spanish Communists.

*Evening News* even stated that British interests would not be served if the Communists won. It was thus with relief that the paper reported, "well-informed witnesses assure us the Spanish Reds are certain to lose and the Spanish Patriots are certain to win".<sup>13</sup>

A leading article in the *Daily Mail* alleged British newspapers which attempted to present events of the civil war in an impartial manner were "Britain's home-made Reds and friends of the Bolsheviks... who continue to pervert the facts of the Spanish War".<sup>14</sup> In reality, the majority of British newspapers, though concerned by the possibility of communism spreading in Spain,<sup>15</sup> refused to believe the civil war was caused solely by the Soviet Government. For example, the *Daily Telegraph*, though generally unsupportive of the Soviet Union's involvement in Spain, cautioned that the Spanish crisis could not simply be seen as an affair between "Blacks and Reds".<sup>16</sup> Only the *Observer* was noticeably "anti-Red" and irrationally critical of the Soviet Union's position in Spain.<sup>17</sup> At no point did the liberal and labour press advocate Britain joining the war though they did demand collective action, preferably at the negotiating table, amongst Britain, France, the Soviet Union and Germany if Hitler would participate. Liberal and labour papers demanded that the British Government recognise that the Soviet Union was not to blame for the new crisis in Europe but that through cooperation, the Soviet Government could help Britain prevent the spread of war into the rest of Europe.<sup>18</sup> Furthermore, the liberal and labour press censured the Rothermere and Beaverbrook newspapers for their partial journalism.

<sup>13</sup> *The Evening News*, 10 August 1936. Leading article, "Keeping the Bull in the Ring".

<sup>14</sup> *The Daily Mail*, 22 August 1936. Leading article, "The Truth Once Again"; 4 August 1936, leading article, "M. Blum's Choice".

<sup>15</sup> See for example, the *Daily Telegraph*, 3 August 1936. Leading article, "Spain's Peril from Communism". *The Times*, 5 August 1936.

<sup>16</sup> *The Daily Telegraph*, 5 August 1936. Leading article, "Europe's Clear Duty in Spain". *The Sunday Times* on 11 October 1936 changed its mind and suggested that the fighting was between two masses of "Blacks and Reds" rather than two rival parties. Leading article, "Keep Clear!".

<sup>17</sup> See for example, the *Observer*, 29 November 1936. "Drift; The New Alliances and Their Meaning" by J. L. Garvin; 7 November 1937, "The Truth About Intervention; How Russia Feeds the War; Back to Fair Play" by J. L. Garvin. *The Times* was also critical of communism in Spain, but to a comparatively lesser degree. *The History of The Times* suggests that the paper's editor, Geoffrey Dawson, was uninterested in the Spanish Civil War, though he had correspondents send daily reports, and therefore *The Times's* opinions on Spain were not always clearly expressed: p. 906, fn. 2 and Appendix II, p. 1142.

<sup>18</sup> See for example, the *Manchester Guardian*, 6 and 12 August 1936; the *News Chronicle*, 3 August 1936; the *New Statesman and Nation*, 1 August 1936.

For example, the *Spectator* criticised in detail the reporting by the *Daily Mail*.

There are certain canons of journalistic honesty to which even the *Daily Mail* might be expected to pay some kind of reluctant tribute. After reading its account of the fall of Badajoz that illusion is dispelled once for all. The *Mail*, unique among English papers, had a special correspondent in Badajoz. He entered it with the victorious insurgent forces. And to judge from his report as printed he is unique among special correspondents in his capacity for failing to see what stared him in the face. There is a colour blindness which leaves atrocities invisible except when Reds commit them which is either a misfortune or a malignity, according to whether it is involuntary or deliberate.<sup>19</sup>

The *News Chronicle* was similarly critical of the style of reporting used by the *Daily Express* to cover the events of the Spanish Civil War and denounced the Rothermere press for representing the republican struggle in Spain as a "Moscow inspired campaign of extermination against Christianity". The paper found it ironic that "the orgy of hate and distortion of facts" which flowed from Rothermere's newspapers claimed Spain could only be saved with a fascist victory. Thus the *News Chronicle* questioned the soundness of this hypothesis as it made fascism synonymous with Christianity and anti-Bolshevism.<sup>20</sup> The *New Statesman and Nation* condemned the "sinister, daily magnification of atrocities by the Rothermere press" though the journal hoped that "thoughtful people" would not believe the tales of horror. The journal was relieved to see that the attitude of the "reputable conservative press" had been modified into recognising the war was started by an army revolt of "anti-Government forces". Suggestions by *The Times* and the Rothermere newspapers that Soviet agents fomented the trouble and planned a state of chaos in Spain led the *New Statesman and Nation* to ask sarcastically "Are we to infer that the Bolsheviks deliberately engineered Franco's 'war of liberation from Marxism'?"<sup>21</sup> The *Daily Worker* was naturally critical of the popular conservative press for allegedly sending correspondents to report, from fascist bases, on atrocities

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<sup>19</sup> The *Spectator*, 21 August 1936. "A Spectator's Notebook".

<sup>20</sup> The *News Chronicle*, 4 August 1936. Leading article, "Now We Know".

<sup>21</sup> The *New Statesman and Nation*, 1 August 1936. "Comments - Spain and the Tory Press".

against the Republic and communists.<sup>22</sup> However, the paper was as unobjective, though against the "Fascists", as the Rothermere and Beaverbrook newspapers.<sup>23</sup>

### The non-intervention plan

During the first month of fighting, accusations and counter-accusations of intervention were made by the Soviet Union, Germany and Italy.<sup>24</sup> Hitler and Mussolini initially denied sending aid to Spain, but realising that their assistance could not be hidden indefinitely, the German leader explained that it was necessary to prevent the spread of communism in Europe.<sup>25</sup> The *Daily Telegraph* acknowledged that evidence of Italy's intervention made the Soviet Government more anxious to help the Republicans though the paper warned that such action would not help Spain.<sup>26</sup> The *Observer* suggested the Spanish Civil War had broken the last vestiges of reserve between the German and the Soviet Governments and created a challenge which increased the bitterness between the two countries.<sup>27</sup> Furthermore, as Germany and the Soviet Union responded to each other's involvement in Spain, the fear of a large scale war increasingly became a reality as Europe appeared to be dividing into two camps.

To avoid a European conflict, in August the French Government proposed a non-intervention plan supported by the British Government. Despite Blum's initial sympathy towards the Spanish Republic, since both countries had Popular Front Governments, he felt that a solution to France's serious domestic problems had to be his first priority or he could lose his position as Prime Minister. Also to send assistance to Spain might lead to an arms race and develop into a war with Germany for which France was unprepared.

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<sup>22</sup> The *Daily Worker*, 24 July 1936. "More Victories for Republic".

<sup>23</sup> See for example, the *Daily Worker*, 24 July 1936. "More Victories for Republic; Fascist Face Failure".

<sup>24</sup> The *Times*, 5 August 1936. "German Charges against USSR" by the Berlin Correspondent; 8 August 1936, "Money for Madrid" by the Riga Correspondent. The *Manchester Guardian*, 12 August 1936. "German Press Comments on Spain" by the Berlin Correspondent.

<sup>25</sup> Cattell, *Soviet Diplomacy*, p. 4.

<sup>26</sup> The *Daily Telegraph*, 3 August 1936. Leading article, "Spain's Peril from Communism". See also, 4 and 5 August 1936. In July, a plane carrying Italian troops to the Nationalist forces crashed in Northern Africa providing evidence that Italy was aiding Franco.

<sup>27</sup> The *Observer*, 30 August 1936. Leading article, "Berlin and Moscow". The British Government also feared that German and Soviet bitterness could lead to European war: D.B.F.P., Second Series, Vol. XVII, no. 84.

Furthermore, the French, despite the Franco-Soviet Pact and the association with the Little Entente, remained dependent on the British Government's attitude which was suspicious of the Soviet Union's motives and goals in Spain and hence Europe.<sup>28</sup> Likewise, since the cornerstone of Soviet foreign policy lay in the Franco-Soviet Pact, the Soviet Government had to follow France's lead so as not to alienate British and French opinion at a time when collective security remained a key feature of Soviet foreign policy. Moreover, the Soviet Union could not afford to send aid to Spain on the same scale as Germany and Italy. Therefore, the Soviet Government accepted the non-intervention agreement on the condition that Germany and Italy agreed to abide by it entirely.<sup>29</sup>

A main focus of interest in the British press concerning the Spanish Civil War and the Soviet Union's role in it became the issue of non-intervention and the committee established by Britain and France to provide it. The quality conservative press approved of the non-intervention plan for the simple reason that it would prevent communist aid to the Republic and keep Britain out of a conflict which could potentially lead to European complications.<sup>30</sup> However, the *Observer* understood that the success of the plan inevitably depended on the willingness of the German and the Soviet Governments to negotiate at the same table.<sup>31</sup> Thus quality conservative newspapers were critical of the Soviet Government's "reluctant" acceptance of the non-intervention plan. For example, *The Times* and the *Daily Telegraph* reported that Moscow had attached special conditions before accepting the agreement. *The Times* further claimed that the Soviet Government's suggestion that Germany and Italy would refuse to abide by the plan, showed that German involvement in Spain and Hitler's attitude to non-intervention were "widely misrepresented".<sup>32</sup> The *Daily Telegraph*, seeing nothing wrong in the German

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<sup>28</sup> Thomas, pp. 215-216. Cattell, *Soviet Diplomacy*, pp. 6 and 14.

<sup>29</sup> Cattell, *Soviet Diplomacy*, pp. 16, 18, 20. Thomas, pp. 257, 261. Carr, *The Comintern and the Spanish Civil War*, p. 17.

<sup>30</sup> See for example, the *Sunday Times*, 2 August 1936. "France Asks Powers to Ban Arms for Spain". *The Observer*, 2 August 1936. *The Daily Telegraph*, 3 August 1936. *The Times*, 10 August 1936.

<sup>31</sup> *The Observer*, 30 August 1936. Leading article, "Berlin and Moscow".

<sup>32</sup> *The Times*, 10 August 1936. Leading article, "Collective Neutrality". *The Daily Telegraph*, 6 August 1936. "Soviet Reply to France; Two Provisos" by the Moscow Correspondent.

attitude, suggested Hitler merely required time, which was ironically not acceptable for the Soviet Government to have, before he could accept the agreement since aid was already en route to Spain.<sup>33</sup> These attitudes of the quality Conservative press were a reflection of the British Government's opinions.<sup>34</sup>

Though the liberal and labour press welcomed the non-intervention plan for the same reason as the quality conservative press, the avoidance of a European war, the former papers observed the Soviet Government's compliance in a different light. The *Manchester Guardian* reported that the acceptance of the non-intervention agreement was "without reservation" since the plan appeared to promote collective security against fascism.<sup>35</sup> The *New Statesman and Nation* and the *News Chronicle* rationally pointed out that not only the Soviet Union, but also Germany and Italy, had delayed before accepting the suggestion of a simple neutrality agreement towards Spain.<sup>36</sup> The *Spectator* felt that the agreement, though beneficial, was belatedly reached by all involved and therefore, the nationalists had <sup>profited</sup> ~~profited~~ far more by early intervention than the republicans. Nevertheless, the journal felt non-intervention was the best option to provide collective activity in Europe.

Disastrous and deplorable as the fate of the unhappy country is, the fate of Europe would be tenfold more deplorable if the attempt to isolate the Spanish war failed... The Spanish war, lamentable as it is, is a civil war, and it must be kept a civil war.<sup>37</sup>

However, it was almost immediately apparent that Germany and Italy, though professing to support non-intervention, were not abiding by the agreement, thus provoking the Soviet press into condemning the "lying nature of the Nazis".<sup>38</sup> The *Daily*

<sup>33</sup> The *Daily Telegraph*, 7 August 1936. Leading article, "The Vital Concerns of Europe".

<sup>34</sup> D.B.F.P., Second Series, Vol. XVIII, nos. 34, 78, and 84.

<sup>35</sup> The *Manchester Guardian*, 12 August 1936. "Non-Intervention" by the Diplomatic Correspondent.

<sup>36</sup> The *New Statesman and Nation*, 8 August 1936. "Comments". The *News Chronicle*, 14 August 1936. Leading article, "How Much Longer?".

<sup>37</sup> The *Spectator*, 28 August 1936. "The Defence of Democracy".

<sup>38</sup> The *Times*, 29 August 1936. "Soviet Attack on Nazi Press; 'A Lying Campaign'" by the Riga Correspondent.

*Worker* accused Mussolini of wanting to turn the Mediterranean into an "Italian lake" and suggested that Hitler was using every pretext to start a European war.<sup>39</sup> Due to the British Government's reluctance to take action against German and Italian intervention, for fear of antagonising Hitler, the non-intervention committee became concerned with "the murky tide of procedure". What should have been a notable success for collective security became the most frustrating aspect of the Spanish Civil War for the Soviet Union as procedure prevented any action from being carried out. For the German and Italian Governments the non-intervention committee provided the best means of delaying efforts against their illegal intervention.<sup>40</sup> Thus the liberal press, and unsurprisingly the *Daily Worker*, expressed anger with the British Government for betraying the Spanish Republic to the "Fascists" by not enforcing and assisting the implementation of the increasingly "farfical" non-intervention plan.<sup>41</sup> Furthermore, the *Manchester Guardian* warned that unless the British Government responded to the deliberate contravention of the agreement, Moscow would rapidly come to the conclusion that the republicans would need to be supported to prevent the triumph of fascism.<sup>42</sup>

In October 1936, the warnings of the liberal press became a reality when a note by the Soviet Government questioned the committee's ability to ensure that countries pledged to non-intervention abided by the terms of the agreement. The Soviet Union announced its intention of withdrawing from the committee if the situation did not change, thus forcing the organisation's first crisis. Moscow felt compelled to issue its "ultimatum" to force Britain and France to take a stand against German and Italian assistance. If that failed, the Soviet Government wanted to be free of commitments to the non-intervention agreement to enable them to send assistance to the republicans who, at the time, were near to surrendering Madrid.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> The *Daily Worker*, 8 August 1936. Leading article, "At the Cross Roads".

<sup>40</sup> Thomas, p. 277. Carr, *The Comintern and Spain*, p. 23.

<sup>41</sup> See for example, the *News Chronicle*, 2 September 1936. Leading article, "Still Cheating". The *Daily Worker*, 8 August 1936. Leading article, "At the Cross Roads".

<sup>42</sup> The *Manchester Guardian*, 15 September 1936. "Russian Policy on Spain; A Change Possible?" by the Moscow Correspondent.

<sup>43</sup> Cattell, *Soviet Diplomacy*, p.44.

The British press reacted with opposing opinions as to who was responsible for the crisis, with conservative newspapers, despite some exceptions, blaming the Soviet Union. In contrast, the liberal and labour press, with the *Scotsman* and the *Sunday Times*, criticised not only Germany and Italy but also the British Government for the failure of non-intervention. Though British newspapers of all political persuasions feared the sudden increased threat of Europe wide war, the liberal and labour press argued that the easiest means of avoiding such an event was by cooperating with the Soviet Government and acting on its complaints. The conservative press also regarded non-intervention as the best method of keeping Britain out of an European war, but argued that the committee had to be maintained even without the Soviet Union if its representatives chose to carry out their threat to withdraw.

The quality conservative press received the Soviet Government's announcement with attitudes varying from condemnation to understanding. The *Daily Telegraph* and the *Observer* expressed the most critical opinions towards the declaration, seeing the Soviet Union as a potential trouble maker and not as a valuable ally for Britain in the maintenance of European peace. Because the *Daily Telegraph* accepted German and Italian denials against the charges of continued intervention, the paper suggested that the Soviet Government was "trifling with Europe".<sup>44</sup> The *Observer* blamed Moscow entirely for ruining the non-intervention pact<sup>45</sup> and Garvin, the editor of the Sunday newspaper, criticised the Soviet Union's "mischief making" tactics. Garvin, without noting the irony of his argument, condemned the proposed threat of intervention since it would require the German Government to increase its involvement. Thus, the *Observer's* editor called for Moscow "to cease for once and for all to meddle with the lives of other nations" and warned that British policy had to break free of Soviet entanglements.<sup>46</sup> Although the *Daily Telegraph* suggested that the non-intervention

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<sup>44</sup> The *Daily Telegraph*, 15 October 1936. Leading article, "Spain's Fate on the Eve of Decision".

<sup>45</sup> The *Observer*, 11 October 1936. "Moscow Dooms Neutrality" by the Diplomatic Correspondent.

<sup>46</sup> The *Observer*, 25 October 1936. "Which Flag?" by J. L. Garvin. The *Daily Express* was similarly indifferent to the Soviet Government's threat to leave the committee: 10 October 1936, "Powers Squabble on Spain: Italy Threatens Russia" by the Political Correspondent, Guy Eden.

committee would have to continue without the Soviet Union to prevent Europe from dividing into two camps,<sup>47</sup> the paper, also ignoring the irony of its suggestion, hoped Moscow's threat to intervene was merely "theatrical" since Germany and Italy would be forced to respond to increased communist assistance.<sup>48</sup>

However, two quality conservative newspapers expressed a more understanding opinion of the Soviet Union's announcement which demonstrated a balanced interpretation of the situation in Spain. The *Sunday Times*, though critical of Moscow's note, appreciated the counter-charges between the "two masses of Blacks and Reds" and therefore refused to condemn the Soviet Government for attempting to force the non-intervention committee to take constructive action. However, the paper was concerned that the situation in Spain could deteriorate without the non-intervention agreement, even despite its problems, and therefore argued for the continuation of the plan hopefully with the Soviet Union as a member.<sup>49</sup> The *Scotsman* also respected the Soviet Government's argument and pointed out that the note was permissible by the rules of the non-intervention committee. Moreover, the paper feared that the "slow trickle of military aid" in the first months of fighting would turn into a "rapid flood" to both sides in Spain if the Soviet Union withdrew. This led the *Scotsman* to express further concern that the Soviet Government would be unable to send as much aid as Germany and Italy.<sup>50</sup> Both papers considered the Soviet Union to be an important member of the non-intervention committee because of its belief in collective security and thus hoped Moscow would recognise its responsibility to Europe and remain in the organisation. Though not clearly laying the blame for the failures of the non-intervention committee on Britain, as the liberal and labour press did, the *Sunday Times* and the *Scotsman* were concerned that the British Government was not adequately responding to the Soviet Government's

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<sup>47</sup> The *Daily Telegraph*, 26 October 1936. Leading article, "Russia's Ambiguous Attitude".

<sup>48</sup> The *Daily Telegraph*, 9 October 1936. Leading article, "Russia's Charges of Intervention"; 24 October 1936, leading article, "Russia's Ambiguous Attitude".

<sup>49</sup> The *Sunday Times*, 11 October 1936. Leading article, "Keep Clear!; No Intervention in Spain"; 25 October 1936, leading article, "The Powers and Spain".

<sup>50</sup> The *Scotsman*, 9 October 1936. Leading article, "Russia's Move".

complaints to prevent the non-intervention plan from becoming an "empty, torn, scrap of paper".<sup>51</sup>

The labour and liberal press were supportive of the Soviet Union's grievances and denounced Britain's hypocritical indifference towards German and Italian intervention. These papers also expressed annoyance with the British Government for failing to recognise the importance of the Soviet Union not only in the non-intervention committee, but also for the peace of Europe.<sup>52</sup> The *Daily Herald* and the *New Statesman and Nation* demanded that the British Government heed Moscow's grievances and warned that delays in the non-intervention committee by Britain merely encouraged the Soviet Union to withdraw from an "unholy alliance" which "achieved nothing".<sup>53</sup> The *Manchester Guardian* sympathised with the Soviet leadership's frustration and recognised that the violations by Germany and Italy left the Soviet Government no choice but to be equally free of such an agreement.<sup>54</sup> Although the *News Chronicle* held the "fascists", and not the communists, in "undoubtable" responsibility, the paper recognised that the British Government had played a significant part in the current crisis and despite "non-intervention not meaning much from the beginning", the paper alleged it was suddenly proved "to mean nothing".<sup>55</sup>

By November, the Soviet Government had received no satisfactory reply from the non-intervention committee to its criticisms against German and Italian assistance, and although its representatives did not withdraw, the Soviet Union quietly increased its supplies to Republican Spain. Italy and Germany subsequently extended their amount of troops and aid. This additional involvement in Spain led to the cynical opinion by the

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<sup>51</sup> The *Scotsman*, 24 October 1936. Leading article, "Russia and Spain". See also, the *Sunday Times*, 25 October 1936. Leading article, "The Powers and Spain".

<sup>52</sup> The *Daily Herald*, 21 October 1936. "Soviet May Decide to Supply Arms" by the Diplomatic Correspondent. The *Manchester Guardian*, 24 October 1936. "Russia's New Stand on Arms for Spain".

<sup>53</sup> The *Daily Herald*, 21 October 1936. "Soviet May Decide to Send Arms" by the Diplomatic Correspondent. The *New Statesman and Nation*, 10 October 1936. "Comments - Russia Calls the Bluff". See also, the *Daily Herald*, 9 October 1936. "Soviet Demand for Speedy Action"; 22 October 1936, "Hitler Denies Arms Aid to Russia". Both articles by the Diplomatic Correspondent.

<sup>54</sup> The *Manchester Guardian*, 24 October 1936. Leading article, "Russia and Non-Intervention".

<sup>55</sup> The *News Chronicle*, 8 October 1936. Leading article, "Russia Intervenes". See also, 15 October 1936, "Russia Demands Control of Ports of Portugal" and 19 October 1936, "Soviet Withdraw a Matter of Days" by the Moscow Correspondent.

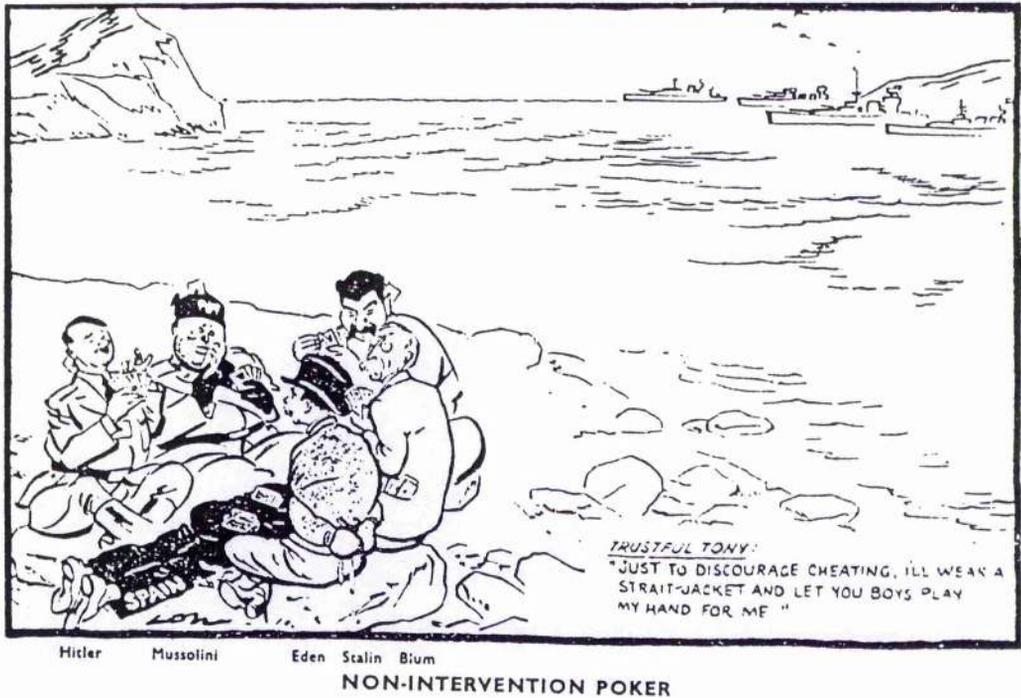


Fig. 4.1

*Contemporary Review* that it was due to the "typical diplomatic muddle" of the non-intervention committee that "five of the six great powers" found it necessary to intervene. A small scale civil war had escalated to such an extent, in the view of the journal, that "even the Germans accuse the Spaniards of not doing enough in their own war".<sup>56</sup> Low's cartoon on 13 January 1937, "Non-Intervention Poker", portrayed Eden, the Foreign Secretary, trusting his opponents in the game to play his hand for him though he could easily see they all had cards hidden up their sleeves. Thus Low was critical of Britain's notions of honour when dealing with the leaders of Germany, Italy, the Soviet Union and also France.<sup>57</sup>

### The Nyon Conference

By the summer of 1937, the Soviet Union realised that the British and French Governments would not confront Germany and Italy about intervention. The Soviet

<sup>56</sup> *The Contemporary Review*, February 1937. "Foreign Affairs - The Comedy of 'Non-Intervention'".

<sup>57</sup> See Figure 4.1. *The Evening Standard*, 13 January 1937, "Non-Intervention Poker".

Government recognised that Britain and France only continued with the non-intervention committee to stop the civil war from becoming a European war and to prevent Spain, when Franco won, from becoming a German or Italian military base.<sup>58</sup> Collective action between the Soviet Union and Britain in Spain finally appeared inoperative especially since the Soviet Union's major European ally, France, had lost the initiative in European politics. However, the Nyon Conference in September 1937 offered the Soviet Government, and the liberal and labour press, renewed hope that collective security was not a lost cause.

The Nyon Conference was suggested as a result of the increasing number of merchant ships being sunk in the Mediterranean, predominantly by Italy. Only the Soviet Government directly and officially accused the Italians, a charge the British Government would rather have overlooked due to its efforts at rapprochement with Italy.<sup>59</sup> However, the British Government could not ignore the number of British ships being sunk, the demands by ship owners for protection, and the insistence by the press, of all political persuasions, for the Government to take firm action against such aggression.<sup>60</sup> Britain and France, therefore, resolved to hold a conference to establish joint action against piracy, to be conducted outside the League of Nations since Italy and Germany were not members. Nyon's location was also suggested because the non-intervention committee, based in London, had become a symbol of procrastination and if the talks were kept separate, it was hoped technical issues would be settled in a practical manner without recriminations of the past.

The majority of the British press, with the exception of the Beaverbrook and Rothermere newspapers, welcomed the Nyon Conference but remained realistic as to the possibility of positive results. The *Daily Express*, though demanding an end to piracy, objected to "yet another conference" which would probably expand Britain's already

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<sup>58</sup> Cattell, *Soviet Diplomacy*, p. 88. It was also increasingly obvious that the British Government favoured a Nationalist victory over a Communist supported Republican victory.

<sup>59</sup> D.B.F.P., Second Series, Vol. XIX, Chapter II.

<sup>60</sup> The *News Chronicle*, 3 September 1937. "More British Warships For Mediterranean" by Phillip Jordan. The *Daily Express*, 6 September 1937. "Blum Attacks Italy as Conference Is Called" by the Political Correspondent. The *Daily Telegraph*, 6 September 1937. "Twelve-Power Conference on Piracy" by the Diplomatic Correspondent.

extremely large role abroad.<sup>61</sup> The quality conservative press was again divided in its opinion on the benefits of the conference. The *Scotsman*, continuing to recognise Italian and German responsibility for Europe's problems, pointed out that success at Nyon would largely depend on Italy's willingness to cooperate.<sup>62</sup> In contrast, although the *Observer* similarly recognised that Italian participation was essential to the conference's success, the paper remained unsupportive of the Soviet Government's involvement since its interest in the Mediterranean seemed irrelevant.<sup>63</sup> The liberal press favoured the Nyon Conference, not only because it would solve the issue of piracy in the Mediterranean, but more importantly it marked a step towards increased cooperation between the Soviet Union and the West. These papers were, therefore, pleased that Britain proposed to take the lead in the discussions.<sup>64</sup>

Although the Soviet leadership saw the Nyon Conference as an opportunity to improve collective action and to prevent their country from becoming more isolated in Europe, Moscow recognised Britain's preference for compromise towards the German and Italian Governments. Thus the Soviet Government set the stage for the talks by sending a strongly worded note accusing Italy of sinking two Russian ships, demanding compensation and punishment for the offenders. The main aim of the allegation was to wound Italy's pride, thereby keeping its representatives away from the conference, while at the same time, the Soviet delegation would demonstrate its willingness to cooperate with the British and French Governments.<sup>65</sup> The note, reported in every British newspaper, received mixed opinions and made the conference more important than it was originally acknowledged to be by Fleet Street.<sup>66</sup>

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<sup>61</sup> The *Daily Express*, 6 September 1937. Leading article, "Indivisible Bunk".

<sup>62</sup> The *Scotsman*, 6 September 1937. Leading article, "Safety of Shipping".

<sup>63</sup> The *Observer*, 5 September 1937. "Yesterday's Consultations" by the Diplomatic Correspondent.

<sup>64</sup> See for example, the *News Chronicle*, 8 September 1937. Leading article, "Courage Will Pay".

<sup>65</sup> Cattell, *Soviet Diplomacy*, p. 93. See D.B.F.P., Second Series, Vol. XIX, no. 139 in which it is reported that the French Government did not see the notes as politically motivated.

<sup>66</sup> The *Manchester Guardian*, 7 September 1937. "Russia Demands Reparation from Italy". Also the *News Chronicle*, the *Daily Express*, and the *Daily Telegraph* for their articles on 7 September 1937.

The popular conservative press was extremely negative and critical of the Soviet Government's activity. The *Daily Express* sarcastically claimed that the proposed Mediterranean Conference on Piracy was going to be a "nice party"<sup>67</sup> while the *Daily Mail* believed the note was a "well-calculated move" by the Soviet Government<sup>68</sup> which intended to "smash the conference" and keep the discussions ineffective by forcing Italy to be absent. The paper even speculated that the Soviet Union was responsible for the sinking of a torpedoed British destroyer. However, the *Daily Mail* was relieved that "Russia has blundered at last by showing its hand too clearly" and hoped that Moscow's "impudent attempt to blow up the conference" would provide proof of the "Red's treacherous and perilous influence" on international affairs. The paper recommended that the Italian Government recognise the "malign purposes" of the note, curb indignation and attend the conference in spite of "Russian" insults.<sup>69</sup>

The attitude of the quality conservative press was again not unanimous towards the Soviet Government's actions. *The Times* merely characterised the note as "stupid" since it hindered a beneficial conference which was meant to deal with the degeneration of security in the Mediterranean.<sup>70</sup> The *Daily Telegraph* was also critical of the Soviet Union, but willing to ignore the note for the sake of peace in Europe. The paper concluded that Soviet diplomacy "must take the heaviest share of blame" for creating an "unfortunate atmosphere" because the accusations could only be regarded as "uncalculating clumsiness or a deliberate attempt to wreck any joint action". The *Daily Telegraph* suggested that Italy and Germany would show great wisdom in taking their places at the meeting, though if they refused to attend, the paper expected the conference to proceed as it was an important means of making the Mediterranean safe for neutral shipping. In the paper's opinion, the heated accusations served as a useful reminder of the "unnecessarily explosive" atmosphere in Europe and therefore, the conference had to

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<sup>67</sup> *The Daily Express*, 7 September 1937. Leading article, "Russia Is Angry".

<sup>68</sup> *The Daily Mail*, 7 September 1937. "Italy's Curt Note to Soviet" by the Rome Correspondent.

<sup>69</sup> *The Daily Mail*, 8 September 1937. Leading article, "Moscow At It Again".

<sup>70</sup> *The Times*, 8 September 1937. "The Meeting at Nyon" by the Rome Correspondent. See also a leading article on 6 September.

meet as it provided a great opportunity for collaboration.<sup>71</sup> The *Scotsman* was again less discriminatory in its attitude towards the note from the Soviet Government and apportioned blame on all involved - on the "Fascist" powers for refusing to cooperate for law and order in Europe; on the Soviet Union, despite the possible substance of the charges, because the note was inopportune; and on Britain and France who were held responsible for delaying decisions on piracy and intervention. Even if the Italians and Germans declined to join the conference, the *Scotsman*, regardless, expected to see Britain and France take definite action in the protection of shipping.<sup>72</sup>

The liberal and labour press expressed the most surprise over the Soviet Government's note and, to a limited extent, was critical of Moscow's efforts as they appeared to be hindering collective security. The *News Chronicle* indicated confusion over "Russia's inexplicable move in crashing in with her note to Rome on the eve of the conference".<sup>73</sup> German, Italian, and Soviet arguments implied to the paper that each country was to blame for the crisis since all three wished to drag "technical" discussions back to the "political wrangle".<sup>74</sup> The *Daily Herald*, though without condemning the Soviet Government's tactics, was concerned that the conference would be prevented from reaching a settlement since both Italy and Germany refused to join if the Soviet Union was present.<sup>75</sup> The *Spectator*, normally sympathetic to complaints or suggestions by the Soviet Government, blamed Moscow for threatening the Nyon talks with disaster and wondered if Stalin was deliberately angling for war by taking such a strong line.<sup>76</sup> In contrast, the *Daily Worker* argued that the Soviet note, which was backed by "abundant" evidence, "struck a severe blow against Fascist war plans" and piracy. The paper could not understand why the British Government attempted to "hide the identity of the pirates" and criticised the note, which was allegedly within the "ordinary diplomatic rights" of the

<sup>71</sup> The *Daily Telegraph*, 9 September 1937. Leading article, "To End the Piracy Menace".

<sup>72</sup> The *Scotsman*, 9 September 1937. Leading article, "The Nyon Conference".

<sup>73</sup> The *News Chronicle*, 8 September 1937. Leading article, "Courage Will Pay". See also the *Scotsman*, 8 September 1937.

<sup>74</sup> The *News Chronicle*, 9 September 1937. Leading article, "Piracy Must Be Stopped".

<sup>75</sup> The *Daily Herald*, September 1937. Several articles expressed concern that Soviet action might hinder the conference although the paper does not denounce the Soviet note. The *Daily Worker*, on 10 September 1937, condemns the *Daily Herald's* attitude for not supporting the Soviet Union.

<sup>76</sup> The *Spectator*, 10 September 1937. "The Turmoil in Europe".

Soviet Government. The *Daily Worker* suggested that instead of censuring the Soviet Union, Britain and France should support Moscow's lead against piracy and the "Fascists".<sup>77</sup>

The majority of the British press expressed acute disappointment when the German and Italian Governments refused to join the Nyon Conference. Even those papers of the quality conservative press which blamed Soviet diplomacy, such as the *Daily Telegraph* and *The Times*, recognised that the quarrel was largely irrelevant to the purpose of the negotiations and that Germany and Italy should have overlooked their pride and joined the talks. Contrary to its usual appeasement of Hitler, *The Times* demanded that British policy would not become "deflected from its course" by German and Italian indignation.<sup>78</sup> In an attitude slightly more tolerant towards the Soviet Union and more critical of Germany and Italy, the *Daily Telegraph*, hoping for security from the Nyon Conference, found it regrettable that the Germans and Italians were unable to separate the issue of piracy from politics, especially when it largely concerned themselves.<sup>79</sup> This attitude was similar to the *Scotsman* which found it difficult to understand the logic behind the Italian and German refusals to participate. Even more curious for both the *Scotsman* and the *Daily Telegraph* was the demand by Germany and Italy that the piracy issue be presented to the non-intervention committee. These newspapers found the proposal "illogical" since the Soviet Union would simply be able to present its case more clearly in London. However, the *Scotsman* thought that perhaps the demand was made because Germany and Italy knew decisions were often postponed by the committee. In the opinion of the paper, this demonstrated an unwillingness by the German and Italian Governments to cooperate with the Soviet Union.<sup>80</sup>

In contrast, the popular conservative press continued to criticise the Soviet Union for hindering the conference. The *Daily Mail* called for the British Government to persist

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<sup>77</sup> The *Daily Worker*, 8 September 1937. Leading article, "Strait from the Shoulder".

<sup>78</sup> *The Times*, 9 September 1936. Leading article, "The Nyon Conference".

<sup>79</sup> The *Daily Telegraph*, 10 September 1937. Leading article, "An Illogical Refusal".

<sup>80</sup> The *Scotsman*, 10 September 1937. Leading article, "Mediterranean Problem". The *Daily Telegraph*, 10 September 1937. Leading article, "An Illogical Refusal".

in attaining peace, even in the face of the "malignant plotting" of the "Moscow Reds".<sup>81</sup> However, there was also a sense of relief in the Rothermere and Beaverbrook newspapers that the Nyon Conference would be unsuccessful. Because Germany and Italy refused to join the piracy talks, the *Daily Express* urged that the meeting be held in Geneva to minimise British commitments and prematurely called it the "new Geneva Conference".<sup>82</sup> Although the paper alleged the discussions would have come to nothing even if Germany or Italy were present, the *Daily Express* persisted in condemning Soviet diplomacy towards the Italians. The paper, showing a curious but constant lack of understanding towards Germany's goals in Europe, declared that

the Russians would not have attended the conference if Italy had been present and therefore the Russians intended to use the conference to do the Italians no good, as they have done with the League of Nations to do the Germans no good.<sup>83</sup>

The British Government, anxious to settle the crisis in the Mediterranean, resolved to meet at Nyon without the Germans or the Italians, a decision which was welcomed by the British press of all political persuasions with the exception of the popular conservative press. The *Daily Express* lamented the "fuss caused between Mussolini and Stalin" which had frightened the British Government into holding the conference at Nyon.<sup>84</sup> The liberal and quality conservative papers were, however, relieved that Britain was finally taking action and "meant business". For example, the *Sunday Times*, the *Scotsman*, and the *News Chronicle* found the "promptitude" shown in convening the Nyon Conference refreshing when contrasted to the "delay and procrastination" of events in recent years. Though the German and Italian absence was

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<sup>81</sup> The *Daily Mail*, 9 September 1937. Leading article, "Work for Peace".

<sup>82</sup> The *Daily Express*, 9 September 1937. Leading article, "Next". The *Scotsman* also suggested the conference be moved to Geneva for ease of access and to emphasise the lack of cooperation by the two powers who had withdrawn from the League of Nations. See 9 and 10 September 1937.

<sup>83</sup> The *Daily Express*, 9 September 1937. Leading article, "Next".

<sup>84</sup> The *Daily Express*, 11 September 1937. Leading article, "Uproar- So What?".

regretted, these newspapers believed that the "likeliest procrastinators" were removed and expected positive results <sup>from</sup> ~~from~~ Britain, France, and the Soviet Union.<sup>85</sup>

Within days of meeting, an agreement was signed by the eight members in which Britain and France were apportioned zones in the Mediterranean for policing against further piracy. The objections of the popular conservative press were immediately asserted - the *Daily Express* deplored a move which, yet again, increased Britain's responsibilities,<sup>86</sup> while the *Daily Mail* found little satisfaction in the plan since Italy was not a member and the Soviet Union was.<sup>87</sup>

However, it was the quality conservative press which expressed the most satisfaction with the agreement, an attitude that admitted, to an extent, the beneficial value of the Soviet Union in Europe. The *Daily Telegraph*, dropping its usual critical attitude towards the Soviet Government, was pleased to report, that despite difficult conditions, those states which met in Nyon had cooperated to reach a "swift but practical" agreement to control piracy in the Mediterranean. The paper also hoped there would be further advances in collective security after the achievements at Nyon.<sup>88</sup> Even the *Observer* admitted that success had been due to the German and Italian absence and the fact that the Soviet note, to which the paper remained critical, had been ignored while discussions proceeded.<sup>89</sup> For the *Scotsman*, the "remarkable celerity" of reaching an agreement showed that it was a "very childish procedure to humour the dictators".<sup>90</sup> *The Times*, however, was satisfied that Britain and France were chiefly responsible for the plan while the Soviet Union was not directly involved in the patrol of the Mediterranean. Therefore, although recognising that the Soviet Government had contributed to the proposals at the

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<sup>85</sup> *The Sunday Times*, 12 September 1937. Leading article, "A Good Start at Nyon". *The Scotsman*, 11 September 1937. Leading article, "Mediterranean Policy". *The News Chronicle*, 11 September 1937. Leading article, "The Anti-Piracy Plan". *The Daily Worker* also welcomed the talks but feared that Britain wanted to form a "backstairs deal" with Germany and Italy: 11 September 1937, leading article, "Hiding the Guilty".

<sup>86</sup> *The Daily Express*, 13 September 1937. Leading article, "Royal (Universal) Navy".

<sup>87</sup> *The Daily Mail*, various articles from 10 - 15 September 1937.

<sup>88</sup> *The Daily Telegraph*, 13 September 1937. Leading article, "A Practical Anti-Piracy Plan".

<sup>89</sup> *The Observer*, 12 September 1937. "Mediterranean Pact Last Night" by the Special Correspondent at Nyon.

<sup>90</sup> *The Scotsman*, 13 September 1937. Leading article, "Policing the Seas".

conference, the paper was relieved to see that the Soviet Union's role in Europe had not increased.<sup>91</sup>

The liberal press was also impressed with the results of the Conference and the British Government's apparent awareness of the Soviet Union's value in Europe. The *News Chronicle* called the Nyon Plan a "neat diplomatic job" and expressed pleasure that the British Government had not excluded the Soviet Union from the conference as that would have conceded the "Italian-German thesis that Russia was a pariah among nations".<sup>92</sup> The *Spectator* accepted the Soviet Government's contributions towards the "brief, harmonious, and effective" decision reached at Nyon. In addition, the journal accused Germany and Italy, and not the Soviet Union which was a change of attitude from 10 September, of trying to thwart the success of the conference by staying away.<sup>93</sup> The *New Statesman and Nation* thought that perhaps the days of international "dilly-dally and humbug" were finished. The journal, and the *News Chronicle*, believed Britain, by working closely with France and the Soviet Union at Nyon, finally recognised the value of collective security and its success against dictators.<sup>94</sup>

However, regardless of the positive results at Nyon where Britain and the Soviet Union had cooperated to reach a practical agreement and despite the British press's satisfaction in reporting this increased cooperation, the event did not promote a better understanding between the two countries or provide a new move towards collective security plans. If anything, the British Government took fright at the success of a conference without Germany and Italy which might encourage the two countries to avoid future group negotiations. It was thought that further cooperation between Britain and the Soviet Union could lead to Hitler and Mussolini working together and ignoring British proposals. Thus there was an immediate retreat by Britain, from the strong stance against aggression, with an invitation to Italy to join the terms of the Nyon Agreement,

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<sup>91</sup> *The Times*, 13 September 1936. Leading article, "Success at Nyon".

<sup>92</sup> *The News Chronicle*, 13 September 1937. Leading article, "The Plan Accepted".

<sup>93</sup> *The Spectator*, 17 September 1937. "Nyon and Geneva".

<sup>94</sup> *The New Statesman and Nation*, 18 September 1937. Leading article, "Is It the End of Piracy?". *The News Chronicle*, 16 September 1937. Leading article, "The Duce Declines". See also the *Daily Worker* for a similar article, though the paper warned that the British Government would have to do more against Fascism in Spain: 16 September 1937, leading article, "New Menace".

though the Italians rejected the offer.<sup>95</sup> As a result, the *News Chronicle* admitted that Italy's refusal to cooperate was "regrettable but hardly surprising" and therefore, the paper conceded it was difficult not to agree with Litvinov's point that cooperation had to be confined only to members of the "Peace Front".<sup>96</sup> Although Italy's "childishness" was not extraordinary, the *New Statesman and Nation* hoped the "new-found firmness" of Britain, France, and the Soviet Union would encourage Mussolini to eventually accepting the plan.<sup>97</sup> Even the popular conservative press expressed annoyance with the Italian Government,<sup>98</sup> which marked a notable addition to the regular criticism directed towards the Soviet Union. However, when Mussolini, alarmed by the Conference's success, altered his decision in November 1937, the British Government eagerly accepted Italy into the Mediterranean's control scheme, thus confirming Moscow's fear that collective security against aggression was not the first priority of the British Government.<sup>99</sup>

### Conclusion

The Spanish Civil War received prominent press coverage in Britain because it was the first major military conflict in Europe since 1918 and also because there was concern that those countries involved in the fighting in Spain would cause the war to spread into the rest of Europe. Initially, Fleet Street supported the non-intervention plan because it appeared to be the best means of localising the civil war and of preventing both fascism and communism from finding a base in South-Western Europe. However, it was only a month after the plan was announced that the British press, of all political persuasions, knew that Germany, Italy and the Soviet Union were sending aid to Spain and intended to continue with their assistance thus rendering the non-intervention plan useless. Even the popular conservative press, after the first year of fighting, did not

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<sup>95</sup> Cattell, *Soviet Diplomacy*, p. 96.

<sup>96</sup> *The News Chronicle*, 16 September 1937. Leading article, "The Duce Declines".

<sup>97</sup> *The New Statesman and Nation*, 18 September 1937. Leading article, "Is It the End of Piracy?".

<sup>98</sup> *The Daily Express*, 15 September 1937. Leading article, "Italy Says No!".

<sup>99</sup> Cattell, *Soviet Diplomacy*, pp. 95-96.

blame the Soviet Government alone, though there was little condemnation of Germany's role. "Between the Italians and the Russians, they have blown the smoke screen away from the non-intervention committee".<sup>100</sup> However, there was a difference of opinion in the British press as to the Soviet Union's overall aims in Spain.

The conservative press, and especially the popular newspapers, was consistently hostile to the Soviet Union's efforts concerning Spain. These papers, with the exception of the *Scotsman* and the *Sunday Times*, criticised Soviet intervention, which was used by this section of the press as an excuse for accepting the need for German and Italian assistance to the nationalists. The Beaverbrook and Rothermere newspapers, in particular, wanted to see the "Red" influence in Spain reduced to keep the threat of communism in Europe at a minimum. Thus the majority of the conservative press supported the British Government's lack of cooperation with the Soviet Union, especially when the latter called for firm action against Germany and Italy. These papers believed Germany was the key to peace or war in Europe and therefore, the supposedly sensible foreign policy was for Britain to appease Hitler and to ignore the Soviet Union. Thus collective action between Britain and the Soviet Union over Spain received very limited support by the quality conservative newspapers and outright condemnation by the Beaverbrook and Rothermere press. Once again, the majority of the conservative press reflected the attitudes of the British Government which feared cooperation with communists and preferred to avoid confrontation with Germany and Italy. As the British Government increasingly let it be known that it preferred a nationalist victory, the conservative press acted accordingly and its opinions were formed by statements and hints from His Majesty's Government.<sup>101</sup>

In contrast, the liberal and labour press warned against trying to "squeeze out"<sup>102</sup> the Soviet Union from future talks on Spain and Europe as exclusion of that nature would increase Moscow's suspicions of British intentions in Europe and encourage a return to

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<sup>100</sup> The *Daily Express*, 20 October 1937. Leading article, "Spain: Talk Is Over".

<sup>101</sup> D.B.F.P., Second Series, Vol. XVII, nos. 34, 78, and Chapter II. See also, Cattell, *Soviet Diplomacy*, p. 88.

<sup>102</sup> The *News Chronicle*, 26 October 1937. "Critical Talks on Spain; Move to Oust Russia from Committee" by Vernon Bartlett.

an isolationist foreign policy by the Soviet Government.<sup>103</sup> Though fearful that the events in Spain could lead to a European war, the liberal and labour press, with the *Scotsman* and the *Sunday Times*, argued that Britain needed to show a strong front with the Soviet Government against German and Italian aggression rather than humouring Hitler. Especially following the success at Nyon, these papers accused the British Government of allowing collective action to fail, thus causing serious implications for Europe's future since the Soviet Union would not accept continued indifferent treatment. The liberal and labour press, though recognising that the British Government's desire to avoid entangling Britain in Spain's affairs was the correct attitude to have, criticised His Majesty's Government's official policy which did nothing to prevent the increasing intervention by Germany, Italy and the Soviet Union. Therefore, efforts by the British Government to secure Fleet Street's unconditional support against involvement over Spain failed with the liberal and labour press which was certain that there were too many Conservative politicians who feared communism thus preventing a rational policy concerning the conflict which saw so many different European countries involved.

Yet another opportunity for collective security failed as Britain ignored the Soviet Government's diplomatic efforts during the Spanish Civil War. As the war dragged on until 1939, it received less prominent coverage in the British press since the fighting was contained in Spain and especially because other European issues, such as the German occupation of Austria in March 1938, began to eclipse it in importance. Furthermore, the role of the Soviet Union in Spain became less of an issue for the British press because Soviet intervention did not match that of Germany and Italy and thus the threat of communism in Europe appeared to recede. Also, Fleet Street's interest in the Soviet Union increasingly focused on internal issues, such as the three Moscow show trials which provided far more interesting news and also caused some concern as to the Soviet Union's stability. As Soviet political and military personnel were purged, the visible benefits of cooperation between the Soviet Union and Britain decreased and additionally contributed to the failure of collective security.

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<sup>103</sup> The *News Chronicle*, 30 October 1937. "Complete Deadlock on Spain; Worse Muddle; More Delay" by Vernon Bartlett.

## Chapter 5

### "Stalin's Necktie"<sup>1</sup>

The relentlessness of the purges and show trials held in the Soviet Union in the 1930s received detailed and prominent coverage in the British press, thus contributing to British opinion that the Soviet regime was an unstable and unsuitable ally for the West. Correspondents had noted throughout the 1920s that arrests and trials of "class enemies" in the cities and the countryside were part of the Soviet Government's method of providing socialism, centralisation and discipline.<sup>2</sup> However, it was in the 1930s that newspapers and political journals explained that the trials were not intended to provide justice, but to demonstrate to the world and the Soviet people that communism was a success.<sup>3</sup> Increasingly, it appeared to Fleet Street that all problems within the Soviet Union would be solved by purges.

It was the political show trials, held between 1935 and 1938, which received the most prominent press coverage in Britain. Although the early years of Stalin's leadership saw many senior Communists expelled from the party, by 1933 the majority had recanted and declared their willingness to follow Stalin's policies. Thus in the first half of the 1930s, it appeared to the British press that Stalin was creating a strong government and establishing stability in the Soviet Union. In addition, the period between July 1935 and July 1936 gave the impression of being an "idyllic interlude"<sup>4</sup> as the harvest was good, the Five Year Plans seemed to be succeeding, and Stalin announced a revised constitution. A new era was heralded by the British press for the USSR, especially since a year after the Soviet entry into the League of Nations, the West accepted, though with a degree of reservation, the prospect of cooperation with the Soviet Government since it

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<sup>1</sup> Title of leading article in *The Times*, 26 January 1937.

<sup>2</sup> See for example, *The Times*, 13 January 1928. Leading article, "Bolsheviks in Exile"; 15 November 1929, "New 'Purge' of Soviet Officials" by the Riga Correspondent; 14 January 1929, "Class War in Soviet Villages" by the Riga Correspondent. *The Scotsman*, 12 January 1928. Leading article, "Bolshevist Exiles"; 6 June 1929, "Soviet Terrorism" by the Correspondent in Berlin.

<sup>3</sup> Max Radin, "The Moscow Trials: A Legal View", *Foreign Affairs*, October 1937, p. 66.

<sup>4</sup> Robert Conquest, *The Great Terror*, p. 78.

supported peace through collective security. Although *The Times* did not believe all was perfect in the Soviet Union, the paper argued that purges and trials were "becoming more judicial" despite the fact that executions continued.<sup>5</sup> Bernard Pares, an expert on Russia, in April 1936 wrote for the *Spectator* suggesting wreckers' trials were no longer necessary since the need for scapegoats was declining with the increasing success of Soviet economic plans.<sup>6</sup>

However, in reality December 1934 had indicated a new phase in the Soviet Union, one of terror, repression, fear and death. Furthermore, the "idyllic interlude" did not lead to the Soviet Government adopting a more humane, "Western" styled approach to governing the Soviet Union. Those twelve months were used by Stalin and the NKVD to organise the "evidence", on the basis of which most of the original Bolshevik leadership, and many ordinary party members and citizens, were purged between 1936 and 1938. Only in hindsight did the British press recognise that the assassination in December 1934 of Sergei Kirov, the Leningrad Party leader, signalled a renewed era of terror. Prominent members of the Communist Party, including Zinoviev and Kamenev,<sup>7</sup> were alleged to be responsible for the opposition group which organised Kirov's death. Though Fleet Street was generally surprised that such famous men were tried and sent to exile for five to ten years, the British press believed that the political trial in January 1935 was unique.

Thus Fleet Street was unprepared for the first great Moscow show trial in which Zinoviev and Kamenev allegedly organised terrorist activities with Leon Trotsky.<sup>8</sup> The

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<sup>5</sup> *The Times*, 10 August 1935. "Political Crimes' in Russia; Six Persons Executed for Murder" by the Riga Correspondent.

<sup>6</sup> *The Spectator*, 24 April 1936. "Moscow After 20 Years: V. Desiderata" by Sir Bernard Pares.

<sup>7</sup> Gregory Zinoviev was one of Lenin's closest associates. Until January 1926, he was the chairman of the Leningrad Soviet but was dismissed from the Communist party in December 1927 for opposing Stalin's policies. He recanted and was readmitted to the party in 1928 but was again expelled in 1932 and exiled, only to recant in 1933. Lev Kamenev, after Lenin's death, originally supported Stalin against Trotsky but moved to the Left Opposition and was thus expelled in December 1927 from the party. He recanted in 1928 and assumed various senior positions. However, he was expelled from the party in 1932 but was readmitted in 1933.

<sup>8</sup> Following Lenin's death in 1924, Trotsky, though at one time a possible candidate for leadership, increasingly found himself opposed to Stalin's policies. Trotsky joined Zinoviev and Kamenev in the United Opposition but all three were expelled in 1927 and because Trotsky refused to recant, he was exiled first within the Soviet Union but was deported in 1928. He lived in Turkey, Norway, and finally Mexico where he was assassinated in August 1940. In the 1930s, he wrote volumes

press recognised belatedly that Zinoviev and Kamenev had been spared in January 1935, only to be executed in August 1936 with fourteen others, accused of attempting to assassinate Stalin and to overthrow the communist state with foreign assistance. Though acknowledging the rumours and reports of further arrests at the time of the trial, British newspapers hoped that it would be an isolated event. Nevertheless, the *Observer* astutely recognised that the clearest result of the trial was that

Vigilance and more vigilance will be the order of the day. Trials and executions and more trials are certain to follow. The mood in the country is to exterminate once and for all the entire opposition and use the evidence to discredit Trotsky and his followers.<sup>9</sup>

Within three months of the first show trial, the Soviet authorities staged another political trial, though this time of industrial personnel from Novosibirsk in Siberia. The Five Year Plans had provided for the large scale development of heavy industry though the emphasis had been on speed not safety. Since much of the new factory work force had very little knowledge of how to operate industrial machinery, accidents were extremely common. The Novosibirsk trial was important as it marked a new type of show trial which provided excuses for the failures of the Five Year Plans and thus allegedly offered diversions and scapegoats for economic problems.<sup>10</sup> Furthermore, as a result of the evidence by the accused, a number of leading economic commissars were arrested and subsequently became the defendants at the second Moscow show trial in January 1937.<sup>11</sup> Thus the British press was not surprised when eighteen "Trotskyists" were accused of "terrorism, wrecking, espionage and conspiring to overthrow the Soviet

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explaining the dangers of Stalinism and organised international meetings of communists opposed to Stalin. Thus, those who supported him became known as Trotskyists.

<sup>9</sup> The *Observer*, 23 August 1936. "Closing Scene in Moscow Trial" by the Moscow Correspondent. See also, the *Daily Telegraph*, 24 August 1936. Leading article, "The Treason Trial in Moscow". The *Scotsman*, 27 August 1936. "Soviet 'Clean-Up'" by the Press Association in Moscow. The *Yorkshire Post*, 24 August 1936. Leading article, "Moscow Treason Trial".

<sup>10</sup> J. Arch Getty, *The Origins of the Great Purges*, p. 128. Conquest, pp. 149-150.

<sup>11</sup> Getty, p. 126, 132. Conquest, p. 142. The *Daily Telegraph*, 21 November 1936. "Poison Gas in Soviet Mine" by the Moscow Correspondent. See also, the *Scotsman*, 21 November 1936. "Soviet Trial; Allegation of Poison Gas in Mines" by Reuter in Novosibirsk. The *Daily Express*, 13 November 1936. "Moscow Brits Arrested As Great Spy Trial Pends" by the Warsaw Correspondent.

Government to ensure a return to capitalism and the re-establishment of a bourgeois regime."<sup>12</sup> The only unexpected aspect of the second Moscow show trial, which led to a degree of surprise in the British press, was due to the fact that four of the accused, including Radek and Sokolnikov,<sup>13</sup> received more lenient sentences of ten years penal servitude while the other fourteen were executed.

Thus, although Fleet Street realised in 1937 that purges and show trials were a fact of life in the Soviet Union, the secret trial and execution in June of the Red Army's eight top commanders, including Marshall Tukhachevsky, came as a considerable surprise to foreign correspondents in Moscow. In reality, it was not a sudden attack on the army<sup>14</sup> since the first and second Moscow show trials had implicated high ranking army leaders. However, the British press, despite noting rumours, had failed to recognise that a military purge might follow, though after the trial the *Daily Mail* suggested that "never was the situation in Moscow so tense nor so dramatic".<sup>15</sup>

The third Moscow show trial in February and March 1938 was perhaps the most expected, though at the same time the most anti-climatic, of all the trials held in the Soviet Union. Fleet Street had long expected Bukharin and Rykov<sup>16</sup> to be tried, yet by this trial, the British press knew what to expect in the way of accusations and evidence. Genrikh Yagoda, the former head of the NKVD, was also a defendant thus raising questions on

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<sup>12</sup> *The Times*, 20 January 1937. "New Soviet Mass Trial; Leninists in Dock; 'Terrorism, Wrecking, and Spying'" by the Riga Correspondent.

<sup>13</sup> Karl Radek was a party publicist in the inter-war period. He was forced to give up his positions on the party Central Committee and the Comintern executive committee and was expelled from the Communist party in 1927. He recanted in 1929. In 1936, although he demanded the death penalty for Zinoviev and Kamenev, Radek was arrested in the same year. Grigory Sokolnikov was a financial administrator in the 1920s. Although he held differing views from Stalin, Sokolnikov associated himself with the majority position and in 1929 became Soviet ambassador to Britain and Deputy Commissar for Foreign Affairs until 1934. He was arrested in 1936.

<sup>14</sup> Conquest, p. 188.

<sup>15</sup> *The Daily Mail*, 12 June 1937. "Eight Soviet Army Chiefs to be Shot; Midnight Sentence: Girl Betrays Marshal; Wives Repudiate Prisoners; Stalin Fears for His Life" by the Warsaw Correspondent.

<sup>16</sup> Nikolay Bukharin was a leading Bolshevik politician, associate of Lenin, and, in 1924, a Politburo member. Bukharin disagreed with Stalin over agricultural policies and lost his seat in the Politburo in 1929. Though privately admitting his mistake in supporting Stalin, he publicly offered loyalty to Stalin and thus in 1934 was elected to the Central Committee by the Seventeenth Party Congress and became editor of *Izvestia*. He also contributed to the Stalin Constitution. He was arrested in 1937. Aleksey Rykov was Lenin's successor as Soviet premier, the Chairman of the Council of People's Commissars. He was associated with the Right Opposition and was thus forced to relinquish all posts in 1930 though he served as Commissar for Transport until 1937 when he was arrested.

the validity of the previous cases. The only deviation came in the first day of the trial when Krestinsky<sup>17</sup> pleaded "not guilty" to the charges, thus making him the exception to the usual pathetic acquiescence of the accused. Nevertheless, he too pleaded guilty on the second day of the proceedings. Furthermore, British press coverage of the third show trial did not receive such prominent placement in newspapers as it was concluded at the same time as Hitler's occupation of Austria. Although not all newspapers found the editorial space to comment on the verdict, nevertheless those which contained leaders did not fail to suggest and hope, though cynically since no further significant opposition members survived, that the show trials had reached an end.

From the first signs of terror, the conservative press adopted a negative attitude towards the internal turmoil caused by the purges and became increasingly sceptical of the Soviet Union's ability to fulfil its duties in Europe when faced with such internal political chaos. Few papers of the quality conservative press attempted to justify Stalin's and the NKVD's actions against political opposition. These papers, though expressing a sense of outrage, to an extent accepted the trials as the typical result of a Communist regime, impressions which were similarly echoed by the popular conservative press. However, the Beaverbrook and Rothermere newspapers were far more condemnatory than the quality press towards the judicial and domestic system of the Soviet Union and suggested that Britain should have no association with such "barbarism". In contrast, the liberal and labour press usually argued the purges were an internal issue and thus should not affect the Soviet Union's political standing in Europe. Nevertheless, these papers acknowledged the damage caused by the trials to the international standing of the Soviet Union. Furthermore, because the liberal and labour press, to an extent, sympathised and supported the Soviet Government's less repressive socialist policies, these papers were particularly disturbed by the trials and questioned why the Soviet leadership pursued such an illogical course. While the conservative press found it a natural phenomenon of communism, the liberal and labour press offered a variety of explanations and thus sometimes contradicted their own views. Thus to all appearances, the liberal and labour

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<sup>17</sup> Nikolay Krestinsky was associated with several trade missions in the 1920s.

press appeared to express less consistent attitudes, though in reality conservative newspapers were equally confused by the purges and as interested in the trials. This confusion was also being experienced by members of the British Government and civil service, causing some disappointment but primarily disgust and a desire to avoid significant contact with the Soviet Union until greater stability returned.<sup>18</sup>

However, the purges were at no point represented by Fleet Street as events which merely provided interesting reading for the British public. The show trials were correctly identified as having greater significance for European affairs, which was especially evident as war became increasingly likely in the late 1930s. The effects of the purges, especially those affecting the Red Army, were noted by the British press and contributed to the impression in 1938 that the Soviet Union was a weak and, therefore, non-essential member of the European community.

### The terror

In general, the British press, regardless of political outlook, expressed nearly identical and consistent horror against the intensity of the repression between 1934 and 1938. Following Kirov's assassination, the *Sunday Times* found it "gruesome" that conspiracies against Stalin were "avenged with a ferocity and contempt for human life unsurpassed in the worst days of Tsarist oppression".<sup>19</sup> *The Times*, however, recognised that the terror and repression which the Bolsheviks had inherited was adapted to suit their own needs.<sup>20</sup> Though not condoning the use of terror, an article in the *Daily Herald* sympathised with British protesters of Soviet terrorism but suggested Britain did not understand that the Russian people were accustomed to the methods of despotism.<sup>21</sup> Nevertheless, the *Daily Herald* argued that the Soviet regime in 1934 could not justify the

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<sup>18</sup> D.B.F.P., Second Series, Vol. XVII, no. 130.

<sup>19</sup> *The Sunday Times*, 20 January 1935. Leading article, "Soviet Justice". See also *The Times*, 4 December 1934 and the *Daily Telegraph*, 4 and 5 December 1934.

<sup>20</sup> *The Times*, 12 December 1934. Leading article, "A Russian Terrorism"; 8 December 1934, "Soviet Revival of Red Terror; A Political Instrument" by the Riga Correspondent.

<sup>21</sup> *The Daily Herald*, 3 January 1935. Special article by Hamilton Fyfe, "Why There Is Terror in Russia".

renewed use of terror since "the Russian executions are barbarous and unworthy of a regime which professes to be the most advanced in the world".<sup>22</sup>

The British press clearly believed the use of terror represented a new heresy or witch hunt in which "the Revolution, like Cronos, is a monster which devours its own children".<sup>23</sup> The *Scotsman* pointed out that prior to the Revolution, the "agitator" was a hero and an underground society was a "glorious organisation".<sup>24</sup> However, the paper suggested in August 1936 that Zinoviev and Kamenev discovered that a "revolution is a terrible boomerang that often destroys those who engineer it".<sup>25</sup> The *Daily Herald* condemned the Soviet system,

because it is a dictatorship and because the Moscow Trials are essential to dictatorship. Had Russia been a democracy, Stalin's opponents would have formed a peaceful opposition working for their conception of socialism... rather than being devoured.<sup>26</sup>

Parallels were drawn by much of the British press between the terror of the French Revolution and the terror caused by Stalin's purges in the Soviet Union. The *Daily Mail* suggested in January 1935 that Zinoviev was "Russia's Danton" and would therefore be guillotined by his colleagues.<sup>27</sup> In a similar opinion in 1937, the *News Chronicle* cited Danton on his way to the guillotine in 1792: "When Revolutions have consumed all their enemies, they consume themselves." In both France and the Soviet

<sup>22</sup> The *Daily Herald*, 20 December 1934. Leading article, "Terror in Russia".

<sup>23</sup> The *Economist*, 19 January 1935. "The Trial of Zinoviev and Kamenev". See also, *The Times*, 18 January 1935. "Leningrad Trial Sentences; New Heresy Hunt" by the Riga Correspondent. *The Manchester Guardian*, 20 August 1936. Leading article, "The Russian Trial"; 24 January 1935, "Moscow Trials Continue; 12 Persons Sentenced" by the Moscow Correspondent; 24 December 1934, "Heresy Hunt in Full Swing" by the Press Association Foreign Specialist in Moscow. *The Daily Telegraph*, 19 January 1935. Leading article, "Soviet Terror and Mercy"; 20 August 1936, leading article, "The Moscow Trial". The *Economist*, 22 August 1936. "Trial By and For the People". Chilton, the British Ambassador in Moscow, made nearly the same statement in a telegram to Eden: D.B.F.P., Second Series, Vol. XVII, no. 130.

<sup>24</sup> The *Scotsman*, 19 June 1935. Leading article, "Soviet Justice".

<sup>25</sup> The *Scotsman*, 25 August 1936. Leading article, "Moscow's Verdict".

<sup>26</sup> The *Daily Herald*, 30 January 1937. Leading article, as quoted in Deli, "The Image of the Russian Purges in the *Daily Herald* and the *New Statesman*", p. 265.

<sup>27</sup> The *Daily Mail*, 17 January 1935. "Zinoviev Confesses; Will It Doom Stalin?; Red Plots May End Soon; Trial Reveals Leaders' Betrayal; Country Split" by the Riga Correspondent; 30 January 1937, leading article, "The Moscow Sentences".

Union, regardless of whether the accused were guilty or innocent, the revolution which the revolutionaries themselves had striven to create had brought about their own destruction.<sup>28</sup>

Fleet Street believed that as a result of the continued use of terror, the Soviet Union which Lenin had intended was very different from that which had actually evolved under Stalin in the 1930s. In the opinion of the *News Chronicle* and the *New Statesman and Nation*, the executions following the first Moscow show trial severed the last connection of Soviet Russia to the October Revolution since only Stalin was left and Bolshevism as a revolutionary force was dead.<sup>29</sup> Though this view was essentially true, it was partially inaccurate since the remaining old Bolsheviks were purged in two further show trials. The number of people affected by Kirov's assassination in December 1934 led the *Daily Express* to claim that all dictators, whether fascist or communist, were forced to lean on their armies because there was eternal conflict below the thin crust of "solidarity".<sup>30</sup> Thus the *Daily Mail* suggested the Russian Revolution was possibly reaching its natural conclusion.<sup>31</sup> If terror and repression were so necessary after twenty years of communism, then the *Daily Herald*, in June 1937, did not believe socialism provided emancipation and happiness.<sup>32</sup>

The popular conservative press was the most critical of the Fleet Street newspapers towards the terror and printed in great detail the number of people suffering from the renewed use of repression.<sup>33</sup> The Beaverbrook and Rothermere press became more sarcastic towards the oppressive nature of the terror as these papers often printed

<sup>28</sup> The *News Chronicle*, 30 January 1937. Leading article, "Devouring Its Children". In a special article by Malcolm Muggeridge in the *Daily Telegraph* - 9 March 1938, "Significance of Soviet Trials; Terrorist Regime Must Continue to Create an Excuse for Terror" - he argued that similarities between Danton and Stalin's victims could not always be made as Soviet Russia was far different from France in the 1790s.

<sup>29</sup> The *News Chronicle*, 27 August 1936. Leading article, "Exit Bolshevism". The *New Statesman and Nation*, 29 August 1936. "Comments - The Soviet Purge".

<sup>30</sup> The *Daily Express*, 7 December 1934. Leading article, "Revolt".

<sup>31</sup> The *Daily Mail*, 17 January 1935. "Zinoviev Confesses; Will It Doom Stalin?; Red Plots May End Soon; Trial Reveals Leaders' Betrayal; Country Split" by the Riga Correspondent.

<sup>32</sup> The *Daily Herald*, 10 June 1937. Leading article, "Crisis in Russia".

<sup>33</sup> The *Daily Express*, 7 December 1934. "Stalin's Purge: First Full Story; Many OGPU Chiefs Face the Firing Squad; Shot within Five Minutes of Being Tried; Women and Children Among the Victims; 'All Enemies Shall Be Buried Before 1935'" by the Warsaw Special Correspondent; 3 December 1934, "OGPU Vengeance on Plotters; 10 Officers Executed; Assassin's 8 Shots in Palace; Dying Man Fires at Murderer; Conspiracy to Kill Stalin" by the Warsaw Correspondent.

curious stories. For example, the *Daily Express* ironically reported that the OGPU executioner had to take a rest after the executions for Kirov's death.<sup>34</sup> The paper's correspondent in Warsaw cynically described in November 1936 how five Russian railwaymen had been arrested, tried, and shot within 19 hours.<sup>35</sup> The *Evening News* declared after the second Moscow show trial that the "wheel has indeed swung full circle when such a man [Beloborodov, who allegedly ~~murdered~~<sup>murdered</sup> the Tsar] is found to be an enemy of the state." The paper had expected that the "hand which had bloodily dispatched the last Romanovs" would have enjoyed "sacrosanctity scarcely less formidable than that of Lenin himself."<sup>36</sup> Following the "grim news from Moscow" of the Red Army purge, the *Daily Express* believed that even twenty years after the Revolution, the Soviet Union "presents a dark picture of human hate and fear".<sup>37</sup>

### Guilt and Confessions

Though the British press was prepared to believe there was treachery in the Soviet Union against Stalin, especially since dictators were usually faced with opposition, the implausibility of the accusations made it difficult for Fleet Street to accept the truth behind all of the charges. The majority of Western observers rejected the nature of the plots which were out of character with most of the accused, especially those condemned as enemy agents. Other witnesses found it difficult to accept that the Old Guard would try to destroy the country which they had created. Furthermore, the trials occasionally produced allegations of meetings, held abroad, between communist leaders and Trotskyists. Often those accusations could be verified and were frequently found to be fabrications.<sup>38</sup>

<sup>34</sup> The *Daily Express*, 7 January 1935. "OGPU Executioner Takes a Rest-Cure; Killer's Nerve Shaken by 100 Deaths; Stalin Forced to Share Power with Red Army Chiefs" by the Warsaw Correspondent.

<sup>35</sup> The *Daily Express*, 20 November 1936. "In 19 Hours; Russians Arrested, Tried, Shot" by the Warsaw Correspondent.

<sup>36</sup> The *Evening News*, 27 January 1937. Leading article, "Another Viper?"

<sup>37</sup> The *Daily Express*, 11 June 1937. Leading article, "Russia Trembles". The *Daily Mail*, 14 June 1937. "Russia: Executions, Strikes, Terror; Army Unrest; Plot to Cede Ukraine; Every Man a Spy" by the Special Correspondent in Riga.

<sup>38</sup> Conquest, pp. 464-465. See also, Max Radin, *Foreign Affairs*, October 1937, p. 69.

In general Fleet Street struggled to believe that so many people could be guilty and therefore, it was sometimes easier to assume repression had become a permanent feature in the Soviet Union. For example, after Kirov's assassination, the quality conservative press refused to accept that everyone who was executed, over a hundred people, actually belonged to Zinoviev's opposition group.<sup>39</sup> Thus, in the opinion of the *Manchester Guardian*, the trials in the Soviet Union rarely produced justice, though they provided "diversionary state holidays" for the workers.<sup>40</sup> Inevitably, the Soviet Government punished more innocent people than it did guilty, a fact which the *Sunday Times* found difficult to accept. The paper described the essence of the Soviet justice system in one critical question: "Is it right that 99 per cent of innocent people should suffer in the Soviet system so that it never allows one guilty person to go free?"<sup>41</sup>

With the first Moscow show trial, the quality conservative press was sceptical of the confessions, especially those which admitted to assisting foreign intervention. For example, *The Times* struggled to understand why the Soviet Government found it necessary to introduce a foreign "<sup>diabolus</sup>diabolus ex machina" inspired by Trotsky as such allegations did not lend credibility to the trial.<sup>42</sup> The *Scotsman* was concerned that the "story of conspiracy so far given is strangely unconvincing. And the probable verdict will not be endorsed by fair-minded observers since the whole story bristles with improbabilities". Therefore, the confessions "are either made to order or the Soviet Government has a fertile imagination".<sup>43</sup> Thus the *Sunday Times* clearly alleged that the trial was staged.<sup>44</sup>

When the same type of confessions were made at the second Moscow show trial, the quality conservative press felt its opinions were confirmed - the confessions of the

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<sup>39</sup> *The Times*, 18 December 1934. "Kirov Murder; New Expulsion by Soviet; 'Enemies within Party'" by the Riga Correspondent. *The Daily Telegraph*, 19 January 1935. Leading article, "Soviet Terror and Mercy". *The Sunday Times*, 20 January 1935. Leading article, "Soviet Justice"

<sup>40</sup> *The Manchester Guardian*, 20 August 1936. Leading article, "The Russian Trial".

<sup>41</sup> *The Sunday Times*, 31 January 1937. Special article by 'Scrutator', "The Russian Trials; A Grim Psychological Study".

<sup>42</sup> *The Times*, 20 August 1936. Leading article, "Zinoviev Again". *The Scotsman*, 21 August 1936. Leading article, "Soviet Justice".

<sup>43</sup> *The Scotsman*, 21 August 1936. Leading article, "Soviet Justice".

<sup>44</sup> *The Sunday Times*, 23 August 1936. Leading article, "The Moscow Trial".

accused did not signify their guilt. The *Yorkshire Post* alleged "the Slav loves intrigue for ~~their~~<sup>his</sup> own sake" thus making the disclosures almost "commonplace". In the opinion of the paper, if the indictments were true, then the "Russian paradise" of the Bolsheviks had been erected not by "social enthusiasm", but by a "most horrible gang of depraved maniacs". However, if the confessions were extorted and part of a series of fantastic inventions, then Stalin was trying to ensure his power through the ruthless elimination of potentially influential people.<sup>45</sup> The quality conservative press argued that the disclosures at the second Moscow show trial were even more ludicrous than those of the first trial. For example, Beloborodov, the man alleged to have killed the Tsar and his family, was on trial for conspiring with Stalin's chauffeur to drive the communist leader over a precipice.<sup>46</sup> Yet despite the ridiculous nature of the confessions, these papers recognised there would never be a way of proving the accuracy of the trials.<sup>47</sup> Both the *Daily Telegraph* and the *Sunday Times* declared that "the imagination boggles" at trying to translate the show trial held in January 1937. The *Daily Telegraph* admitted to being astonished that the "Lieutenants of Lenin" conspired to parcel out areas of the Soviet Union to Germany and Japan, planned the wholesale murders of the present leaders of the USSR, and organised the wrecking of industrial plants without regard to life.<sup>48</sup> The *Sunday Times* attempted to explain some of the charges in an "English Translation" whereby "Lloyd George promises to give Yorkshire to Italy". The paper wondered how much of this "wickedness" Britain was genuinely supposed to believe. The *Sunday Times* suggested the British Government had come to believe both Trotsky and the Germans, who called the trial a "frame-up", because "it was easier to damn a system than formerly credible men".<sup>49</sup>

<sup>45</sup> The *Yorkshire Post*, 27 January 1937. Leading article, "The Terror in Russia". See also, the *Scotsman*, 26 January 1937. Leading article, "The Russian Trial".

<sup>46</sup> The *Daily Telegraph*, 27 January 1937. "Arrest of Man Who Executed the Tsar; Alleged Plot to Kill Stalin; Chauffeur 'Urged to Fake Smash'; 'To Drive Premier Over Precipice'" by the Moscow Correspondent.

<sup>47</sup> See for example, *The Times*, 26 January 1937. Leading article, "Stalin's Necktie". The *Sunday Times*, 24 January 1937. "Alleged Plot for War with USSR; Amazing Confession Charges" by the Moscow Correspondent.

<sup>48</sup> The *Daily Telegraph*, 30 January 1937. Leading article, "A Farcical Trial".

<sup>49</sup> The *Sunday Times*, 31 January 1937. Special article by 'Scrutator', "The Russian Trials; A Grim Psychological Study". See also, the *Daily Telegraph*, 28 January 1937. Special article by A. T.

At the third Moscow show trial, the *Daily Telegraph* stated it was absurd to think that Lenin's friends and former leaders, the "fine-flower of the Bolshevik movement", were the paid servants of foreign governments. Furthermore, the charges of attempted assassination were especially farcical when it was remembered that only one political murder, that of Kirov, had been accomplished by such terrible criminals.<sup>50</sup> Thus by the third Moscow show trial, the quality conservative press expected the same rituals to be performed,<sup>51</sup> a "victory parade" where every type of opposition, terror, sabotage, treachery, and espionage was publicly merged into a single great conspiracy.<sup>52</sup> The *Scotsman* found it ironic that "with each trial, the ingenuity of the prosecutors is evinced anew in the elaboration of implausible charges".<sup>53</sup> It seemed curious to the *Yorkshire Post* and the *Scotsman* that the "dubious and fantastic" evidence, which had only become available after twenty years of plotting, actually made Bukharin and Rykov "very subtle or innocuous conspirators. Or Lenin and Stalin were unusually trusting."<sup>54</sup>

There was only one, curious exception amongst the quality conservative press, following the first Moscow show trial, when the *Observer's* Moscow Correspondent suggested it was "futile to think the trial was staged and the charges trumped up. The Government's case against the defendants was genuine."<sup>55</sup> Though the paper's attitude changed after the second Moscow show trial,<sup>56</sup> this was one of several examples of non-

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Cholerton, the Moscow Correspondent, "Behind the Moscow Trial 'Confessions'; How Prosecution's Case Has Developed". *The Times*, 1 February 1937. Leading article, "Moscow and the 'Trotskyists'". D.B.F.P., Second Series, Vol. XVII, no. 129.

<sup>50</sup> *The Daily Telegraph*, 9 March 1938. Special article by Malcolm Muggeridge, "Significance of Soviet Trials; Terrorist Regime Must Continue to Create an Excuse for Terror"; 14 March 1938, leading article, "Moscow's Grim Assize". *The Times*, 14 March 1938. Leading article, "The Moscow Trial". John Erickson, *The Soviet High Command*, p. 464.

<sup>51</sup> *The Times*, 2 March 1938. Leading article, "The Russian Trial". *The Daily Telegraph*, 9 March 1938. Special article by Malcolm Muggeridge, "Significance of Soviet Trials; Terrorist Regime Must Continue to Create an Excuse for Terror".

<sup>52</sup> Conquest, pp. 341-343.

<sup>53</sup> *The Scotsman*, 2 March 1938. Leading article, "Soviet Treason Trial"

<sup>54</sup> *The Yorkshire Post*, 7 March 1938. Leading article, "Moscow Mysteries". *The Scotsman*, 2 March 1938. Leading article, "Soviet Treason Trial".

<sup>55</sup> *The Observer*, 23 August 1936. "Closing Scene in Moscow Trial; Death Penalty Demanded; 'Mad Dogs Must Be Shot'; Prisoners in Tears" by the Moscow Correspondent.

<sup>56</sup> *The Observer*, 31 January 1937. "Moscow and the Verdict"; 13 March 1938, "World: Week by Week - The Moscow Drama".

socialist foreigners who were present at the trials and who were deluded by the proceedings.<sup>57</sup>

The popular conservative press found the accusations, confessions, and evidence unsatisfactory and unjustifiable. These papers first suggested that the personalities of the "conspirators" were not conducive to criminal behaviour. For example, after Kirov's assassination, the *Daily Express* could not accept that Zinoviev and Kamenev had anything to do with the murder since the former was "an untrustworthy agitator" and the latter was "an inveterate wobbler".<sup>58</sup> However during the first show trial, the personalities of the accused became unimportant when compared to the amount of evidence which these papers found simply unbelievable. The *Daily Express* questioned the "facts" which led Stalin to put former Bolshevik leaders on trial for their lives for allegedly conspiring with Germany. The paper thought it was unlikely the Germans would want to replace Stalin with Trotsky, and thus the *Daily Express* declared the trial to be the "biggest frame-up".<sup>59</sup>

During the second Moscow show trial, the popular conservative press, like the rest of Fleet Street, found the evidence even more ludicrous and thus "easily" doubted the validity of the confessions.<sup>60</sup> The *Evening Standard* classed the confessions as those of "mental home patients"<sup>61</sup> when, for example, some defendants admitted spreading a bacterial infection amongst their fellow countrymen, conducting widespread sabotage and organising train wrecking on a massive scale.<sup>62</sup> During the third Moscow show trial, the

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<sup>57</sup> See for example, Joseph Davies, *Mission to Moscow*. Davies was the United States Ambassador to Moscow in the 1930s and firmly believed in the validity of the purges and show trials. The *Daily Herald's* Moscow Correspondent, R. T. Miller, believed in the accuracy of the second show trial and therefore wrote a preface to the book providing the verbatim report of the 1937 Moscow Trial, *The Moscow Trial (January 1937) and Two Speeches by Stalin*. See also Conquest, pp. 464-472, for his criticism of the way in which many Westerners were deceived by the Soviet Government into believing the trials were at least partially true.

<sup>58</sup> *The Daily Express*, 21 December 1934. Leading article, "Russian Clean-Up".

<sup>59</sup> *The Daily Express*, 22 August 1936. Leading article, "Arabian Nights".

<sup>60</sup> *The Evening News*, 26 January 1937. Leading article, "A Choice of Evils". See also, the *Daily Express*, 27 January 1937. "Czar Murderer Taken by OGPU" by the Warsaw Staff Reporter.

<sup>61</sup> *The Evening Standard*, 30 January 1937. Leading article, "Moscow Mystery".

<sup>62</sup> *The Evening News*, 26 January 1937. Leading article, "A Choice of Evils" *The Evening Standard*, 27 January 1937. "Moscow Fury at Wrecking" by a Special Correspondent; 27 January 1937, "Organised 3,500 Train Crashes in Two Years; Confession at Moscow Trial by Ex-Railway Chief" by the Exchange Telegraph in Moscow. See also, the *Evening News* which carried as its main headline for 27 January 1937 "I Organised 3,500 Railway Accidents" by Central News and Reuter.

*Daily Express* complained that no one in Britain was capable of understanding charges which were "so preposterous, they outstrip the imagination". The paper hoped that one day the world would be told why death sentences could "so light-heartedly" be imposed and ruthlessly carried out but until then, Stalin's empire "is shrouded".<sup>63</sup>

The liberal press condemned the repetitiveness and lack of originality in all the Moscow show trials. The *Spectator* and the *Economist* believed the first trial was rendered "farcical" by the "abounding evidence and abject confessions" to every "imaginable and unimaginable" crime by "completely broken men".<sup>64</sup> Cynicism was even more evident following the second show trial, when the liberal press reported the amazing stories of large scale train wrecks and mining disasters.<sup>65</sup> Like the conservative press, the *News Chronicle* believed the second Moscow trial was a "frame-up" because Radek, a "courageous man", confessed to crimes and plans which his character could never commit.<sup>66</sup> Though liberal newspapers found it difficult to accept the evidence as anything other than fabrications, since many disasters were too amazing to be true,<sup>67</sup> the *Manchester Guardian* could not entirely discount the fact that amongst all the "evidence" there could possibly be "some sketch of truth". However, if there was no factual basis for the charges, then Stalin tried innocent people because he "has an insane jealousy and ambition".<sup>68</sup> The *News Chronicle* argued that if after twenty years of communism, "there is such disloyalty, inefficiency, corruption, and sedition as the Soviet Government declares, what a condemnation of Soviet rule this is!" If, however, the charges were unfounded, then the paper believed it was a "revolting exhibition of tyranny".<sup>69</sup> The *Contemporary Review* bluntly stated that "in Russia, they have reached the stage where

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<sup>63</sup> The *Daily Express*, 12 March 1938. Leading article, "Stalin's Purge".

<sup>64</sup> The *Spectator*, 28 August 1936. Leading article, "Twilight of the Bolsheviks". The *Economist*, 29 August 1936. "Stalin Wins".

<sup>65</sup> See for example, the *Manchester Guardian*, 28 January 1937. "Russian Railway Disasters; Moscow Prisoner Claims that He Ordered Large Numbers". The *News Chronicle*, 28 January 1937. "Tension as Moscow Trial Ends: Diplomat 'Mr. X' Named" by the Moscow Correspondent.

<sup>66</sup> The *News Chronicle*, 1 February 1937. Special article by Cummings, "What the Russian Trial Means". See also, 22 January 1937, leading article, "Out-Radeked".

<sup>67</sup> The *News Chronicle*, 25 January 1937. "Radek Talks of Nazi War Plot; Ex-London Envoy Confesses At Moscow Trial" by the Moscow Correspondent.

<sup>68</sup> The *Manchester Guardian*, 1 February 1937. Leading article, "The Moscow Trial".

<sup>69</sup> The *News Chronicle*, 11 June 1937. Leading article, "Moscow Enigma".

politicians simply shoot each other"<sup>70</sup> and the *Manchester Guardian* sarcastically admitted that "the work of saving Russia from 'Trotskyism' was carried out with great vigour by Stalin's administration".<sup>71</sup>

The liberal press found the third Moscow show trial a repetition of the previous ones, and although perhaps more spectacular,<sup>72</sup> the *Manchester Guardian* claimed the only difference between the trials of 1936 and 1938 were the names of the prisoners.<sup>73</sup> Nevertheless, the liberal press found the evidence in the third trial as "bewildering" as that previously used. Although the *Manchester Guardian* was again prepared to concede there could be a "substratum of truth",<sup>74</sup> the *News Chronicle* claimed that even more than before, the present trial "piques the curiosity" of the outside world which tried to find a semblance of truth or logic.<sup>75</sup>

Within Fleet Street, the labour press was the most unsettled by the possibility that Stalin and the NKVD, which appeared to be so strong, found it necessary to fabricate evidence. The *New Statesman and Nation* maintained that the first Moscow show trial was wholly unconvincing because an opposition group organised around Trotsky, and with the aid of the Nazis, was impossible in 1936. Thus the worst possible interpretation of the trial, in the journal's opinion, was that the secret police had invented the whole conspiracy to perpetuate its power on the eve of the adoption of the "quasi-democratic" constitution. Though the *New Statesman and Nation* accepted there may have been a plot against Stalin, the unconvincing confessions gave the trial a "dubious" value.<sup>76</sup> The *Daily Herald* was similarly concerned <sup>with</sup> by the accuracy of the evidence.

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<sup>70</sup> The *Contemporary Review*, September 1937. "Foreign Affairs - Human Problems: I. Russia".

<sup>71</sup> The *Manchester Guardian*, 23 January 1937. Leading article, "The Russian Trial".

<sup>72</sup> The *News Chronicle*, 1 March 1938. "Soviet Treason Surprises" by the Moscow Correspondent.

<sup>73</sup> The *Manchester Guardian*, 3 March 1938. Leading article, "The Trial".

<sup>74</sup> The *Manchester Guardian*, 14 March 1938. Leading article, "The Moscow Trial". See also the *Daily Express*, 12 March 1938, which surprisingly offered the same opinion.

<sup>75</sup> The *News Chronicle*, 15 March 1938. Special article by Cummings, "Arabian Nights in Moscow".

<sup>76</sup> The *New Statesman and Nation*, 29 August 1936. "Comments- The Soviet Purge".

If the charges and the evidence are faked and the confessions extorted, then the Soviet Government has committed an act of terrorism worthy of ranking with the supreme achievement of fascism. But, if the evidence is genuine, then all who once held high hopes of the Russian Revolution will be not less sick at heart.<sup>77</sup>

Therefore, during the second Moscow show trial, the labour press expected more plausible allegations and confessions.<sup>78</sup> Thus the ridiculous nature of the charges, such as one man being responsible for 3,500 railway accidents between 1934 and 1935, convinced the *Daily Herald* that the trial was staged.<sup>79</sup> The *New Statesman and Nation* also believed the evidence made for a "curious story" and demanded that Stalin explain his actions so foreigners could understand the trials.

To doubt the truth of the confessions is to accuse the Soviet Government of a disregard for the most elementary principles of justice. But to accept them as they stand is to draw a picture of a regime divided against itself, a regime in which the leaders are at a deadly feud with each other, a regime in which the only way to express discontent is in conspiracy and the only way to suppress conspiracy, mass executions. If there is an escape from this dilemma Stalin should tell us what it is.<sup>80</sup>

Following the third Moscow show trial, the labour press remained confused since it could not account for Stalin's creation of such absurd charges and disclosures by the accused.

Like its predecessors this latest of Soviet treason trials defies explanation. Belief in the charges, the evidence, the confessions is impossible to the sane mind. Yet blind disbelief provides no reasonable interpretation either.<sup>81</sup>

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<sup>77</sup> The *Daily Herald*, 24 August 1936. Leading article, "Soviet Trial".

<sup>78</sup> The *Daily Herald*, 23 January 1937. Leading article, "Moscow's New Trial".

<sup>79</sup> The *Daily Herald*, 28 January 1937. "Confessed He Arranged 3,500 Rail Crashes; Amazing Evidence at Soviet Trial" by the Exchange.

<sup>80</sup> The *New Statesman and Nation*, 30 January 1937. Leading article, "Will Stalin Explain?".

<sup>81</sup> The *Daily Herald*, 14 March 1938. Leading article, also quoted in Deli, p. 267.

It was Yagoda's presence at the third show trial which most baffled the *New Statesman and Nation*.

If logic and justice count for anything, some of these "traitors" for whose death Yagoda was responsible, will be posthumously reinstated as martyrs struck down by the machinations of the GPU. They cannot have it both ways. If Yagoda is as bad as [we are] told, we cannot believe the evidence in the trials he organised.<sup>82</sup>

When discussing why the accused made such unnatural and farcical confessions, Fleet Street referred to the psychology of the people of the Soviet Union. The *Daily Telegraph* ironically suggested that it was the "Russian way to confess and abase themselves: they did not lack courage".<sup>83</sup> The *Yorkshire Post* likewise believed it was more exceptional for a Russian not to divulge what he knew.<sup>84</sup> One of the defendants, Boguslavsky, reasoned in his evidence at the second Moscow show trial that it was his duty to confess "thus providing the best means of destroying Trotskyism".<sup>85</sup> The *Evening News* found it curious that the allegedly guilty men "eagerly" and "cheerfully" revealed their intention to lead crimes "ten times more ruthless and horrible than any in the annals of <sup>gangsterism</sup>gansterism".<sup>86</sup>

The British press admitted that perhaps the accused asserted their guilt because they were promised a light sentence<sup>87</sup> or that by confessing, they hoped to save the lives of family and friends who were being held "hostage".<sup>88</sup> However, the *Evening Standard*

<sup>82</sup> The *New Statesman and Nation*, 12 March 1938. "Comments - The Soviet Trial". Also quoted by Deli, p. 278.

<sup>83</sup> The *Daily Telegraph*, 24 August 1936. Leading article, "The Treason Trial in Moscow". The *News Chronicle*, 15 March 1938. Special article by Cummings, "Arabian Nights in Moscow".

<sup>84</sup> The *Yorkshire Post*, 24 August 1936. Leading article, "Moscow Treason Trial".

<sup>85</sup> The *Daily Telegraph*, 26 January 1937. "Why Prisoner Confessed; Unhappy Over Trotsky" by the Moscow Correspondent. The *Manchester Guardian*, 26 January 1937. "More Evidence at Moscow Trial; Prisoner Explains His Confession". The *Daily Herald*, 26 January 1937. "Soviet Accused Explains Confession". The *New Statesman and Nation*, 30 January 1937. Leading article, "Will Stalin Explain?". Teddy Uldricks, "The Impact of the Great Purges on the People's Commissariat of Foreign Affairs", p. 189.

<sup>86</sup> The *Evening News*, 26 January 1937. Leading article, "A Choice of Evils".

<sup>87</sup> The *Scotsman*, 26 January 1937. Leading article, "The Russian Trial".

<sup>88</sup> Conquest, p. 75. Issac Deutscher, *Stalin: A Political Biography*, p. 374. The *Manchester Guardian*, 2 February 1937. Letter by A. J. P. Taylor. See also on 2 February 1937, the letter by Dr. J. N. Steinberg, formerly People's Commissar of Justice in the first Soviet Government.

acknowledged that rarely were defendants let off as a result of revealing their crimes.<sup>89</sup> In August 1936, the *Daily Express* thought Zinoviev and Kamenev had finally "bowed to Stalin" to save their lives, though in vain.<sup>90</sup> Nevertheless, following the verdict of the second Moscow show trial, Radek and three others allegedly received preferential treatment when they were sentenced to five or ten years of penal servitude.<sup>91</sup> The majority of Fleet Street expressed amazement that Radek escaped the death penalty and questioned the consistency of the Soviet judicial system.<sup>92</sup> Ironically, the *Daily Express* reasoned, with a degree of logic, that the thirteen executed men were probably the lucky ones since there was undoubtedly something wrong in the Soviet Union.<sup>93</sup>

The British press also seriously suggested drugs and torture were used by the NKVD to extract confessions. For example, the *Scotsman* believed it was more plausible that the admissions were given under duress, through torture or drugs, rather than because of "a change of heart".<sup>94</sup> The uniformity of the disclosures suggested to the *News Chronicle* that the accused suffered "third degree" torture despite denials by the Soviet Government and the defendants.<sup>95</sup> The *Daily Mail* unrestrainedly maintained that the accused "are plied night and day by inquisitors until they give way because they are deprived of sleep".<sup>96</sup> The paper's Warsaw Correspondent also suggested the allegedly guilty men were hypnotised daily and thus made their admissions while in a trance.<sup>97</sup> The *Daily Express* stated that some "observers" attributed the "confessions" to a hypnotic drug which "petrified the victim's will". Though the paper admitted it sounded fantastic, the *Daily Express* alleged the idea of such drugs was no more eccentric than the

<sup>89</sup> The *Evening Standard*, 30 January 1937. Leading article, "Moscow Mystery".

<sup>90</sup> The *Daily Express*, 28 August 1936. Leading article, "The Police Called".

<sup>91</sup> Max Radin, *Foreign Affairs*, October 1937, p. 77.

<sup>92</sup> See for example articles in newspapers on 30 January and 1 February 1937. The *New Statesman and Nation*, "Will Stalin Explain?", The *Daily Telegraph*, "A Farcical Trial". The *Daily Mail*, "The Moscow Sentences". The *Yorkshire Post*, "Radek and Sokolnikov Escape Death".

<sup>93</sup> The *Daily Express*, 1 February 1937. Leading article, "Firing Squad".

<sup>94</sup> The *Scotsman*, 26 January 1937. Leading article, "The Russian Trial". The *Contemporary Review*, March 1937. Leading article, "Foreign Affairs - Mr. Stalin at Bay".

<sup>95</sup> The *News Chronicle*, 1 February 1937. Special article by Cummings, "What the Russian Trial Means". The *New Statesman and Nation*, 30 January 1937. Leading article, "Will Stalin Explain?".

<sup>96</sup> The *Daily Mail*, 30 January 1937. Leading article, "The Moscow Sentences".

<sup>97</sup> The *Daily Mail*, 26 January 1937. "Moscow Prisoners in a Trance; Hypnotised Daily" by the Warsaw Special Correspondent.

disclosures made by formerly strong men who were suddenly abasing themselves.<sup>98</sup> In Conquest's opinion, it appeared that foreigners could not accurately imagine the means by which the NKVD extracted confessions. Although many of the defendants acknowledged that they were wrong and thus simply accepted blame out of loyalty to the Soviet Party, torture was more frequently used. A system, known as the "conveyor", was employed in which the accused were interrogated in poor conditions, for long periods, with very little sleep and food. If a victim managed to withstand these pressures, as many did such as Bukharin, then their families were taken as hostages or promises of light sentences were offered to make the arrested person confess. Thus all methods brought abject self-abasement or else execution without trial.<sup>99</sup>

Nevertheless, the *Yorkshire Post* and the *Daily Telegraph* admitted that although torture and drugs were a possibility, not all defendants appeared to suffer physically.<sup>100</sup> The *New Statesman and Nation* was also confused when Radek joked of his coming execution as that did not sound like a man who had been tortured.<sup>101</sup> The *Daily Worker* firmly stated that the accused confessed because there was so much evidence gathered against them and therefore, drugs and torture were unnecessary.<sup>102</sup> In the paper's opinion, there was no doubt that the men were caught "red-handed" and thus the confessions confirmed their guilt.<sup>103</sup> Whatever the reason for the confessions, the British press could only speculate as there was no means of discovering the whole truth.

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<sup>98</sup> The *Daily Express*, 25 January 1937. Leading article, "Are They Drugged?"; 25 January 1937, leading article, "State Trial".

<sup>99</sup> Conquest, pp. 110 and 121-130. See also Roy Medvedev, *Let History Judge*, pp. 381-383, who accepts that depressants could account for the "inert and sluggish" tones used by the accused during their trials. Also, Deutscher, p. 374.

<sup>100</sup> The *Yorkshire Post*, 7 March 1938. Leading article, "Moscow Mysteries". The *Daily Telegraph*, 9 March 1938. Special article by Malcolm Muggeridge, "Significance of Soviet Trials; Terrorist Regime Must Continue to Create an Excuse for Terror".

<sup>101</sup> The *New Statesman and Nation*, 30 January 1937. Leading article, "Will Stalin Explain?". See Conquest p. 146 for a different view on the health of the accused. Piatakov especially is described as being "so weak, he looked like a skeleton".

<sup>102</sup> The *Daily Worker*, 27 January 1937, "Why Plotters Confessed" by R. P. Arnot, the Moscow Correspondent.

<sup>103</sup> The *Daily Worker*, 25 August 1936. Leading article, "Guilty"; 1 February 1937, leading article, "After the Trial".

### Stalin's responsibility

Prior to the Moscow show trials, Fleet Street held the Ogpu accountable for making arrests and organising the evidence for trials, and thus some papers suggested the secret police had a large degree of authority in the Soviet Union.<sup>104</sup> However, in April 1934, Stalin declared there was no longer a need for the Ogpu due to its own success at eliminating the enemies of the Revolution. Officially the work of the secret police was taken over by the Commissariat for Internal Affairs (NKVD) which reportedly substituted a system of administration for the former organisation of espionage and terrorism. Thus the labour press viewed the changes as a sign that stability had returned to the Soviet Union and suggested the end of the Ogpu's supremacy.<sup>105</sup> In contrast, the conservative and liberal press, though hoping for less repression, expected the NKVD to continue its previous activities under the new commissar, Yagoda, since nothing truly appeared to have changed.<sup>106</sup> Indeed, Yagoda organised the first Moscow show trial. Chilston, the British Ambassador in Moscow, recognised after the first Moscow show trial that Stalin was gaining more thorough control by eliminating those who criticised him and by replacing them with "his own men". Furthermore, Chilston was concerned that Stalin was "falling entirely into the hands" of the NKVD who did wish to see increased freedom as allegedly promised in the new constitution.<sup>107</sup>

However, with the "sensational" dismissal of Yagoda as head of the NKVD in October 1936, Fleet Street increasingly recognised it was Stalin who unquestionably organised the repression and trials. The fact that the head of the NKVD could be removed so easily indicated to *The Times* that Stalin had become very strong as a result of the

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<sup>104</sup> *The Manchester Guardian*, 17 March 1933. Leading article, "O.G.P.U.". *The Times*, 25 May 1933. "More Arrests by Ogpu" by the Riga Correspondent.

<sup>105</sup> *The Daily Herald*, 17 April 1934. "Soviet to End G.P.U. and Secret Trials; Stalin Bringing Law into Line with West; Emergency Days Are Ended; Prisoners Being Released" by the Diplomatic Correspondent. On 13 August 1935, the *Daily Herald* welcomed an amnesty releasing prisoners, though the paper cynically recognised that they were replaced by those who had originally arrested the victims.

<sup>106</sup> *The Daily Telegraph*, 27 February 1934. "A New Development in Soviet Policy". *The News Chronicle*, 27 February 1934. "Teeth of Russia's Dreaded Secret Police Drawn; Duties to Be Taken Over; 16 Years' Terror Ended" by Reuter in Moscow. *The Times*, 15 January 1934. "Communist Purge in Russia; 270,000 Members Expelled" by the Riga Correspondent. *The Daily Express*, 11 May 1934. "Russia's Most Dreaded Man Dead; Ogpu Chief Who Despised Mercy" by Reuter.

<sup>107</sup> D.B.F.P., Second Series, Vol. XVII, no. 130.

purges.<sup>108</sup> His telegram of 25 September to Politburo members demonstrated this strength.

We consider it absolutely necessary and urgent that Comrade Yezhov be appointed to head the People's Commissariat of Internal Affairs [NKVD]. Yagoda has obviously proved unequal to the task of exposing the Trotskyite-Zinovievite bloc. *The OGPU was four years late in this matter.* All party officials and most of the NKVD agents in the oblasti are talking about this.<sup>109</sup>

A large proportion of the British press, speculating on the probable results of Nikolay Yezhov's appointment, feared an increased number of trials against wreckers and opposition groups.<sup>110</sup> Thus in 1937, the world witnessed "terror and repression... on the party and all citizens of the Soviet Union on a scale previously unheard of."<sup>111</sup>

In January 1937, *The Times* was under no illusions as to Stalin's leading role in the purges. The paper compared Stalin to Stolypin, who as Prime Minister from 1906-1911 under Tsar Nicholas II, was responsible for a number of modernising reforms. However, his period of office was marked by harsh treatment of rioters in the countryside and by a revival of Jewish persecution. As a consequence, this reactionary period was referred to as the age of "Stolypin's Necktie". Thus *The Times* claimed that despite a new constitution, "Stalin's necktie" was similarly tight around Lenin's comrades.<sup>112</sup> As the *Daily Express* explained, Lenin's colleagues were quite simply eliminated so that "the Revolution, even after twenty years, is a castaway crew on a raft."<sup>113</sup> Thus in December 1937, the *Daily Express* was not surprised when it cynically reported that Trotsky was "still working hard... Eight more went for the bullet, all high in the hierarchy of the 'most

<sup>108</sup> *The Times*, 3 October 1936. Leading article, "The Strong Hand in Moscow".

<sup>109</sup> Medvedev, p. 358. The telegram was quoted in Khrushchev's secret speech to the Twentieth Congress.

<sup>110</sup> See for example, the *Daily Herald*, the *Daily Express*, the *Scotsman*, all 9 October 1936; *The Times*, 12 November 1936; the *Manchester Guardian*, 25 November 1936.

<sup>111</sup> Medvedev, p. 361.

<sup>112</sup> *The Times*, 26 January 1937. Leading article, "Stalin's Necktie".

<sup>113</sup> *The Daily Express*, 23 January 1937. Leading article, "Survivors - For How Long".

free and democratic country in the world". The paper alleged that soon the country would be united though not until "Stalin is the solitary keeper of the cemetery".<sup>114</sup>

With the third Moscow show trial, the *Daily Telegraph* responded by condemning the actions of the "witch-hunting dictator".

The world now knows Bolshevism is rotten to the core. Either the most notable men are base and treacherous beyond belief, or the man in Moscow who now wields despotic power is a homicidal maniac. In either case, though there is nothing much to fear, there is nothing more to hope for.<sup>115</sup>

The *Daily Express* suggested that when Stalin claimed there was a plot against the Soviet State, he actually meant the plot was against himself, since "L'État, c'est moi".<sup>116</sup> Another leading article in the paper, entitled "I Had a Comrade", sarcastically claimed Stalin had executed, jailed, or exiled all communist revolutionary leaders except Lenin, who "had managed to die in time". The paper wondered if there was any leader left in the Soviet Union, apart from Stalin,

who will not have 'confessed' to being a traitor, a Trotskyist, a spy, or a saboteur within twelve months. Picking 'one' such winner will be harder than picking twelve in the football pools here.<sup>117</sup>

As with conservative newspapers, the liberal and labour press also increasingly recognised Stalin's role in the purges following Yagoda's dismissal as head of the NKVD in September 1936.<sup>118</sup> Not only did "Russia again become a gigantic question mark,"<sup>119</sup> but the *Daily Herald* pointed out that the trial provided a warning to all in the Soviet

<sup>114</sup> The *Daily Express*, 21 December 1937. Leading article, "Trotsky, Naturally".

<sup>115</sup> The *Daily Telegraph*, 14 March 1938. Leading article, "Moscow's Grim Assize".

<sup>116</sup> The *Daily Express*, 10 March 1938. Leading article, "I Am the State".

<sup>117</sup> The *Daily Express*, 7 March 1938. Leading article, "I Had a Comrade".

<sup>118</sup> See for example, the *Daily Herald*, 28 September 1936. "Rykov Released" from Soviet Post" by Reuter and Exchange". The *Manchester Guardian*, 25 November 1936. "New Heresy Hunt in Moscow". See also, the *Manchester Guardian*, 6 April 1937. Leading article, "Darkest Russia". The *News Chronicle*, 7 April 1937. Leading article, "Russia's 'Purge'". Yagoda was officially arrested in April 1937.

<sup>119</sup> The *Daily Herald*, 31 August 1936. Leading article, "Stalin's Terror". The *Economist*, 29 August 1936. "Stalin Wins".

Union that Stalin was the master and to oppose him was one of the worst crimes. The ruthlessness and the extent of the purge made it clear to the paper that the Soviet Union was not moving from dictatorship to democracy, but from one kind of dictatorship into another. "And this dictatorship is not 'of the proletariat' nor is it communist".<sup>120</sup> Though people like Rust, the editor of the *Daily Worker*, argued Stalin was selectively purging the most dangerous old Bolsheviks,<sup>121</sup> the *News Chronicle* recognised that few of Lenin's comrades remained in January 1937 to defend the Revolution.<sup>122</sup>

Stalin appeared to Fleet Street to be assuming the mantle worn by most dictators. Until Zinoviev and Kamenev were arrested for Kirov's assassination, the *Daily Express* stated that Stalin had treated the Old Guard with more respect than Hitler had treated his old friends.<sup>123</sup> The *Yorkshire Post* pointed out that until August 1936, the principle that "dog does not eat dog" held true and though "[Soviet] hands might drip with bourgeois blood, unlike the Nazis they did not kill each other".<sup>124</sup> Low's cartoon on 28 August 1936, "It's Queer How You Remind Me of Someone, Josef...", showed how much the cartoonist believed Stalin had noted and imitated Hitler's successful purge of the opposition. In the Soviet Union, the number of executions far exceeded the degree of constitutional change.<sup>125</sup>

Nevertheless, Stalin was genuinely popular amongst the masses, much as the Tsars had been perceived as father figures to the peasants. Both Stalin and the Romanovs based their popularity on appearance, on assuming credit for great achievements and by assigning scapegoats for any problems.<sup>126</sup> However, in August 1937, the *Manchester Guardian's* Moscow Correspondent noted that Stalin had attempted to improve his popularity in the Soviet Union by making full use of popular dislike for the NKVD to

<sup>120</sup> The *Daily Herald*, 2 September 1936. Leading article, "Russia".

<sup>121</sup> The *Manchester Guardian*, 12 September 1936. Letter by William Rust, "The Significance of the Russian Trial; A Defence of Stalin's Policy". See also, the *Daily Worker*, 26 August 1936.

<sup>122</sup> The *News Chronicle*, 30 January 1937. Leading article, "Devouring Its Children".

<sup>123</sup> The *Daily Express*, 21 December 1934. Leading article, "Russian Clean-Up". The paper was referring to the Rohm purge in the summer of 1934.

<sup>124</sup> The *Yorkshire Post*, 24 August 1936. Leading article, "Moscow Treason Trial".

<sup>125</sup> See Figure 5.1. The *Evening Standard*, 28 August 1936, "It's Queer How You Remind Me of Someone, Josef...". See also, the *News Chronicle*, 11 June 1937. Leading article, "Moscow Enigma".

<sup>126</sup> Dmitri Volkogonov, *Stalin: Triumph and Tragedy*, p. 263. Medvedev, p. 356.



Stalin  
"IT'S QUEER HOW YOU REMIND ME OF SOMEONE, JOSEF . . ."

Fig. 5.1

depose Yagoda.<sup>127</sup> Furthermore, a decree was issued in 1938 by Stalin, calling for the halt of mass expulsions and informing against the party. Nevertheless, the *Manchester Guardian* suggested the ordinary person and party member would continue to be "frightened out of his life" as Stalin's decree was recognised by the paper to be simply a means of increasing his popularity. The paper did not believe purging would cease since in reality "Stalin, the huntsman, was urging on the hounds".<sup>128</sup>

### Seeking understanding

In an attempt to understand Stalin's motives for holding the trials, the British press suggested a variety of explanations such as economic failures, fear of foreign invasion and Stalin's personal anxieties. There was strong support within Fleet Street for the theory that the trials were necessary to provide scapegoats and diversions from the internal problems of the Soviet Union. Following Kirov's murder, *The Times* and the

<sup>127</sup> *The Manchester Guardian*, 18 August 1937. Turnover article by the former Moscow Correspondent, "Russia Under Stalin: I. Dictatorship; The Struggle for Power; A Fanatical Policeman".

<sup>128</sup> *The Manchester Guardian*, 21 January 1938. Leading article, "About Turn in Russia". *The Times*, 4 October 1937. "Executions in Russia; A Relaxation in Severity" by the Riga Correspondent.

*Scotsman* thought it reasonable to suggest that perhaps the Soviet Government was using the assassination and the consequent resumption of terror as a means of diverting attention from economic and social problems.<sup>129</sup> This theory became especially favoured after the Novosibirsk and the second Moscow show trial since the accused were predominantly economic leaders. Thus it appeared to the quality conservative press that those defendants were "sacrificed" to save the economy.<sup>130</sup> However, the *Yorkshire Post* questioned the sense of such a policy since workers and managers who feared for their own lives if mistakes were punished with death would not give their "best or most loyal" service.<sup>131</sup>

The liberal press also recognised that the trials were possibly held for economic reasons. The *Economist* argued that the Soviet economy was not nearly as "rosy" as the Soviet authorities wished the West to believe since production was not keeping up with expectation. The journal, therefore, suspected that the first Moscow show trial was intended to provide a "boost" in domestic affairs.<sup>132</sup> The *Manchester Guardian*, in contrast after the second Moscow show trial, believed the Soviet Union was advancing economically though the paper admitted that the purge of industrial personnel was potentially very damaging to further economic development.<sup>133</sup>

Another possible reason for the show trials, offered by the British press, was the recognition that the Soviet leadership was afraid of foreign invasion especially from Japan in the Far East and Germany in Europe. The conservative press admitted that this anxiety had increased by the first Moscow show trial in August 1936,<sup>134</sup> though these papers believed such fear had escalated out of proportion by the third show trial. Furthermore, the threat of foreign intervention had appeared to much of the quality conservative press

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<sup>129</sup> *The Times*, 24 December 1934. "The Terror in Russia" by the Riga Correspondent. *The Scotsman*, 26 December 1934. Leading article, "The Russian Purge".

<sup>130</sup> *The Daily Telegraph*, 30 January 1937. Leading article, "A Farcical Trial".

<sup>131</sup> *The Yorkshire Post*, 24 August 1936. Leading article, "Moscow Treason Trial". *Conquest*, p. 149.

<sup>132</sup> *The Economist*, 22 August 1936. "Trial By and For the People".

<sup>133</sup> *The Manchester Guardian*, 1 February 1937. Leading article, "The Moscow Trial".

<sup>134</sup> *The Yorkshire Post*, 24 August 1936. Leading article, "Moscow Treason Trial". *The Daily Express*, 24 August 1936. Leading article, "The Priests of Baal"; 26 August 1936, leading article, "Mad Dog Days".

to recede as the Red Army had improved, though this view disappeared with the execution of its most capable leaders.<sup>135</sup>

The liberal and labour press primarily believed foreign intervention was one of many convenient excuses for removing "impotent" political opposition.<sup>136</sup> The *Spectator* alleged that "spies, Trotskyists, wreckers, and foreign powers are only metaphors for political opponents whom a dictator must necessarily consider as traitors."<sup>137</sup> After Kirov's assassination, the *Daily Herald* did not believe the threat of foreign interference justified a "civilised government in the shooting out of hand of dozens of people, who may or may not be guilty".<sup>138</sup> Nor did the *New Statesman and Nation* believe the threat of invasion justified the anxieties which led to the executions after the first Moscow show trial. "Much that is disappointing in Russia today is due to fear of invasion and the vast military preparations which follow from such fear."<sup>139</sup>

In general, the British press attributed the trials to Stalin's "nervous reaction", fears, ambitions, and paranoias. In the opinion of the quality conservative press, fear of Trotsky, despite his exile and "apparent impotence", meant he was still perceived by the Soviet Government to be the greatest criminal and the most significant threat to the Soviet state.<sup>140</sup> Thus the accused in the first Moscow show trial were alleged to be "Trotskyists" and all domestic and foreign problems were linked to those conspirators. Nevertheless, the *Scotsman* suggested that it was unlikely that all "dangerous conspirators" were organised by Trotsky. Instead, the paper suggested Stalin had discovered a suitable excuse for carrying out a purge of all his critics by labelling them Trotskyists even if they were not.<sup>141</sup> The *Observer*, though critical of Stalin's methods,

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<sup>135</sup> The *Scotsman*, 10 March 1938. Leading article, "Britain and the Soviet". The *Observer*, 23 August 1936. "Closing Scene in Moscow Trial" by the Moscow Correspondent.

<sup>136</sup> The *Economist*, 29 December 1934. "Conspiracy in Russia". The *Manchester Guardian*, 7 January 1935. "Kirov Murder; Soviet Press Innuendos against Germany" by Reuter; 17 January 1935, leading article, "Moral Lessons".

<sup>137</sup> The *Spectator*, 18 June 1937, Leading article, "The Russian Mystery".

<sup>138</sup> The *Daily Herald*, 20 December 1934. Leading article, "Terror in Russia".

<sup>139</sup> The *New Statesman and Nation*, 5 September 1936. Also quoted in Deli, p. 270.

<sup>140</sup> The *Daily Telegraph*, 24 August 1936. Leading article, "The Treason Trial in Moscow". The *Times*, 25 August 1936. Leading article, "M. Stalin's Purge"; 20 August 1936, leading article, "Zinoviev Again"; 28 December 1934, leading article, "The New Russian Terror".

<sup>141</sup> The *Scotsman*, 25 August 1936. Leading article, "Moscow's Verdict".

nevertheless believed in 1936 that it was wrong to conclude the Soviet state was internally shaken or that Stalin's power was declining as a result of fear. Instead, the paper thought he had become the acknowledged leader, with unconquerable prestige, of a unified party.<sup>142</sup> *The Times* also cynically suggested that the Soviet Government had become more powerful as a result of the purge of oppositionists, thus making Stalinist policy truly "supreme".<sup>143</sup>

By the second Moscow show trial, the quality conservative press acknowledged that Stalin had definitely consolidated his position as he was able to eliminate, on any pretext, all colleagues who allegedly opposed him.<sup>144</sup> Following the third Moscow show trial, the *Yorkshire Post* reported that Stalin was a "terrified dictator", engaged in an "utterly ruthless campaign" to exterminate every conceivable challenge to his own autocratic power. Therefore, the paper believed the outlook was "grim" for the people of the Soviet Union<sup>145</sup> and the *Daily Telegraph* suggested that "a government ruling through fear necessitated that everyone be afraid all the time, thus tending the growth of morbid hysteria".<sup>146</sup>

The popular conservative press argued that Trotsky was the key to understanding the trials and Stalin's fears. A *Daily Express* correspondent, Frank Owen, wrote that the first show trial was "a big fight, staged today in Moscow... perhaps it would be the very last in the vicious struggle between the two men for power". Furthermore, assuming Stalin won, Owen pointed out that anyone who continued to support Trotsky would face execution.<sup>147</sup> The *Daily Express* found Trotsky's influence in the Soviet Union ironic. "He must be the most remarkable phenomenon in the world since Mahomet" if he could

<sup>142</sup> *The Observer*, 23 August 1936. "Closing Scene in Moscow Trial" by the Moscow Correspondent.

<sup>143</sup> *The Times*, 3 October 1936. Leading article, "The Strong Hand in Moscow". See also the *Daily Worker*, 1 February 1937. Leading article, "After the Trial", which inevitably stated the Soviet Union was stronger as a result of removing the traitors.

<sup>144</sup> *The Times*, 29 September 1937. Leading article, "Malaise in Moscow".

<sup>145</sup> *The Yorkshire Post*, 7 March 1938. Leading article, "Moscow Mysteries".

<sup>146</sup> *The Daily Telegraph*, 9 March 1938. Special article by Malcolm Muggeridge, "Significance of Soviet Trials; Terrorist Regime Must Continue to Create an Excuse for Terror".

<sup>147</sup> *The Daily Express*, 19 August 1936. Special article by Frank Owen, "Stalin vs. Trotsky; The Thirteenth Round". Frank Owen was an author, journalist, and broadcaster. He was the Liberal MP for Hereford in 1929-1931 but joined the *Daily Express* from 1931-1937 as a correspondent. He became the Editor of the *Evening Standard* in 1938 until 1941. In 1938, he co-wrote *Guilty Men* with Michael Foot and Peter Howard, and in 1940 Owen wrote *The Three Dictators*.

organise, from exile, such large scale opposition against Stalin.<sup>148</sup> At the second show trial, the *Daily Express* again thought it astonishing that Trotsky commanded the assistance of scores of the "most talented and trusted Red leaders". In the opinion of the paper, this made him the "most marvellous Soviet leader ever".<sup>149</sup> However, the popular conservative press also believed that Stalin and his comrades not only feared Trotsky, but everyone and "especially one another". Thus the *Evening Standard* suggested that socialism was not desirable if it could only be achieved through Stalin's method of terror, trials, and executions since "those who live by the sword must perish by the sword and those governed by fear inevitably succumb to fear."<sup>150</sup>

The liberal and labour press also became convinced that Stalin conducted the trials out of anxiety for his personal safety. The *Spectator* recognised that when Stalin won the contest for succession to Lenin's position of authority, Trotsky became "enemy number one of the Socialist State".<sup>151</sup> In June 1937, the *News Chronicle* pointed out that "hardly a day passes now without some 'revelation' from Moscow of further widespread and dangerous plots against the safety of the Soviet regime".<sup>152</sup> The *Daily Herald* suggested that with the growth of power came an increase in fear.

There comes a time - it seems that it has arrived in Russia - where only in the cutting-off of many heads is there appeasement of anxiety. And that appeasement is only temporary. That is the lesson of these latest executions.<sup>153</sup>

In 1938, the *Manchester Guardian* explained that the purges were necessary for the consolidation of Stalin's dictatorship as they were the only means of "removing all the tallest poppies in the field".<sup>154</sup> In the paper's view, the show trials proved that any opponent to the Government in power was "a traitor, a scoundrel, and a murderer... it

<sup>148</sup> The *Daily Express*, 31 August 1936. Leading article, "Wandering Jew".

<sup>149</sup> The *Daily Express*, 1 February 1937. Leading article, "Firing Squad".

<sup>150</sup> The *Evening Standard*, 30 January 1937. Leading article, "Moscow Mystery".

<sup>151</sup> The *Spectator*, 28 August 1936. Leading article, "Twilight of the Bolsheviks".

<sup>152</sup> The *News Chronicle*, 11 June 1937. Leading article, "Moscow Enigma". The *Manchester Guardian*, 20 August 1936. Leading article, "The Russian Trial".

<sup>153</sup> The *Daily Herald*, 10 June 1937. Leading article, "Crisis in Russia" also quoted in Deli, p. 266.

<sup>154</sup> The *Manchester Guardian*, 21 January 1938. Leading article, "About Turn in Russia".

was dangerous to oppose Stalin, to have independent views, to have travelled abroad, and to have known foreigners."<sup>155</sup>

In contrast to the majority of the British press, the *Daily Worker* reported the Moscow show trials with complete sincerity and entirely believed in the validity of the Soviet justice system and thus the guilt of the accused. The paper did not seek excuses for Stalin's actions since the Soviet court established that the defendants were traitors who "openly" confessed to plotting Stalin's assassination and the destruction of the the Soviet Union. Thus the *Daily Worker* was critical of those papers, especially the *Daily Herald*, which failed to understand Stalin's simple reason for holding the trials, which was to protect himself and thus his country from traitors.<sup>156</sup>

Another explanation as to why Stalin held the trials was offered by the popular conservative press, though it was virtually unrealistic, even absurd, and not supported by the majority of Fleet Street. The Vienna Staff Reporter for the *Daily Express* alleged that Stalin's continual ill-health was "seen in Vienna as partly responsible for his violent political attacks". Thus, because Stalin suffered from heart disease, he lived in "perpetual fear of extremely painful attacks".<sup>157</sup> Medvedev argued that Stalin's health did not provide such an easy, or rational, explanation for the purges. Though Stalin displayed signs of paranoia, he was mentally competent and acted with self-control and order. That was why he allowed some of Lenin's close associates, such as Litvinov, to remain in the government.<sup>158</sup> The *New Statesman and Nation* suggested Stalin's psychological reasoning was an inexcusable explanation for the trials though "many British newspapers suggest that Stalin has a tyrant's diseased mind, like Tacitus and Emperor Tiberius".<sup>159</sup> *Foreign Affairs* in October 1937 similarly dismissed the rumour that Stalin was insane because

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<sup>155</sup> The *Manchester Guardian*, 14 March 1938. Leading article, "The Moscow Trial"; 31 January 1938, turnover article by a correspondent, "The Russian Purge; Stalin's Policy".

<sup>156</sup> The *Daily Worker*, 25 August 1936. Leading article, "Guilty"; 2 March 1938, leading article, "Commonsense about the Trial".

<sup>157</sup> The *Daily Express*, 12 June 1937. "Stalin Goaded by Heart Attacks" by the Vienna Staff Reporter.

<sup>158</sup> Medvedev, p. 543, 545-546.

<sup>159</sup> The *New Statesman and Nation*, 19 June 1937. Leading article, "The European Nightmare".

Insanity is too simple and neat a way of explaining the acts of a man who controls the life of an immense realm containing a population of 170 millions. History does not allow absolute rulers - whether sovereigns, dictators, or "leaders" - to do anything so banal as to lose their reason. This privilege is reserved for private citizens.<sup>160</sup>

The labour and liberal press never denied there could be a conspiracy against Stalin since intrigue was considered normal in dictatorships.<sup>161</sup> The *News Chronicle* and the *Manchester Guardian* recognised the potential existence of underground conspiracy groups since disagreement was prevented from being expressed freely and thus plotting murder was the only way to remove a dictator.<sup>162</sup> The *Daily Telegraph* and the *Yorkshire Post* likewise accepted that it was possible Zinoviev and Kamenev were potentially dangerous rivals to Stalin's leadership and therefore had to be removed despite their "traditional sanctity" as Lenin's friends.<sup>163</sup> However, the *New Statesman and Nation* did not believe all who were accused were culpable, which thus meant many innocent people were tried and executed for being guilty of nothing worse than a critical attitude.<sup>164</sup>

### British admirers of the Soviet Union

In general, the quality conservative and liberal press argued that the trials were embarrassing for those people in Britain who admired the Soviet Union.<sup>165</sup> Chilton made the same comment because he had thought there were encouraging signs that the

<sup>160</sup> Max Radin, *Foreign Affairs*, Oct. 1937. p. 44.

<sup>161</sup> The *Daily Herald*, 2 September 1936. Leading article, "Russia"; 24 August 1936, leading article, "Soviet Trial". The *New Statesman and Nation*, 5 September 1936. Leading article, "The Moscow Purge".

<sup>162</sup> The *Manchester Guardian*, 1 February 1937. Leading article, "The Moscow Trial". The *News Chronicle*, 25 August 1936. Special article by Cummings, "The Moscow Trial". The *Spectator*, 28 August 1936. Leading article, "Twilight of the Bolsheviks".

<sup>163</sup> The *Daily Telegraph*, 19 January 1935. Leading article, "Soviet Terror and Mercy". The *Yorkshire Post*, 24 August 1936. Leading article, "Moscow Treason Trial".

<sup>164</sup> The *New Statesman and Nation*, 19 June 1937. Leading article, "The European Nightmare".

<sup>165</sup> See for example, the *Daily Telegraph*, 24 December 1934. Leading article, "Stalin's Iron Hand". The *Scotsman*, 21 August 1936. Leading article, "Soviet Justice". The *Times*, 26 January 1937. Letter by F. H. Hamilton, "The Moscow State Trial; Bolshevik Methods; A Dilemma for the Friends of Russia".

USSR was in the process of settling down to the life of a "normal and orderly state".<sup>166</sup> The *Scotsman* thought it was paradoxical that people with extreme communist views had a better chance of expressing them "with impunity" in conservative Britain than in communist Russia.<sup>167</sup> In the opinion of the *Manchester Guardian* in January 1935, "these trials may satisfy the high morality of the Russian Communist Party", yet to the outside world, the purges were "pathetic and repulsive".<sup>168</sup> Following the first Moscow show trial, the *Spectator* alleged

The liberal friends of the Soviet Union, who took at face value the new 'democratic' constitution announced for adoption by the All-Union Congress of Soviets next November, and persuaded themselves that the Soviet regime was really moving at last in the direction of liberty and toleration, cannot conceal their bewilderment. Even the more sceptical have been horrified at this public reversion to terrorist methods.<sup>169</sup>

The *Manchester Guardian* thus believed that few but the "faithfully blind" would accept the charges at face value and see the confessions as genuine.<sup>170</sup>

In comparison, the popular conservative press revelled in the alleged discomfort of the British admirers, caused by the trials. In the opinion of the *Daily Mail*, articles in *Pravda*, which for example declared "The Vipers have been crushed", could only embarrass Britain's "credulous dupes of Soviet propaganda". Furthermore, these people were "dupes" because they had treated the executed "traitors", especially Zinoviev, as "high priests of the Bolshevik cult".<sup>171</sup> The *Daily Mail* viewed the second Moscow show trial of the "very cream of communism" as a

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<sup>166</sup> D.B.F.P., Second Series, Vol. XVII, no. 130.

<sup>167</sup> The *Scotsman*, 19 January 1935. Leading article, "Soviet Justice".

<sup>168</sup> The *Manchester Guardian*, 17 January 1935. Leading article, "Moral Lessons".

<sup>169</sup> The *Spectator*, 28 August 1936. Leading article, "Twilight of the Bolsheviks".

<sup>170</sup> The *Manchester Guardian*, 20 August 1936. Leading article, "The Russian Trial".

<sup>171</sup> The *Daily Mail*, 26 August 1936. Leading article, "The Moscow Savages". The *Evening Standard* also quoted *Pravda* on 25 August 1936. See also, the *Daily Express*, 12 October 1936. Leading article, "The Shadow of Radek"; 2 September 1936, leading article, "Mister Pollitt"; 2 September 1936, "British Reds Are Split by Stalin's Purge" by a Staff Reporter.

foul exhibition, miscalled a trial, which exhibits the whole Soviet regime in the most revolting light. It should open the eyes of Britain's pitiful Pinks to the character of the murderous demagogues whom they profess to admire and trust.<sup>172</sup>

The *Evening News* also stated that

Either Britain's pro-Reds are dupes and disciples of a system whose apostles are super-gangsters ready for treason, arson, and murder to fantastic lengths. Or they are friends and admirers of a Government which 'frames-up' its enemies with a cold criminality of mind as merciless and brutal as the crimes which its victims are somehow prevailed on to confess.<sup>173</sup>

The *Daily Herald's* main concern after the first Moscow show trial was that the British Communist Party should never <sup>be</sup> ~~by~~ permitted to affiliate with the Labour Party. The paper argued that the savagery of the show trial offended the majority of democratic Labour Party members who were thus determined to prevent the communists from joining their party.<sup>174</sup> The paper denounced the British Communists for obeying the lead of Moscow, who demanded that its followers abroad "scream for blood" in order to please Stalin. The *Daily Herald* claimed that "under orders they posed as democrats, and under orders they suddenly drop this mask to cheer for the secret police."<sup>175</sup> Thus it was with relief that the paper reported in October 1936 that the British Communist Party's attempts to affiliate with the Labour Party had "fizzled out" in a majority vote against the communists.<sup>176</sup>

After supporting, for twenty years, the efforts of the Soviet Government "to build a new socialist order on the ruins of tsarism", the *Daily Herald* was dismayed with the way in which the Soviet Union was conducting its domestic affairs. The paper finally accepted that despite a new constitution, Stalin's dictatorship was as bad as that of Hitler

<sup>172</sup> *The Daily Mail*, 30 January 1937. Leading article, "The Moscow Sentences".

<sup>173</sup> *The Evening News*, 26 January 1937. Leading article, "A Choice of Evils".

<sup>174</sup> *The Daily Herald*, 24 August 1936. Leading article, "Soviet Trial".

<sup>175</sup> *The Daily Herald*, 25 August 1936. Leading article, "Blood Lust".

<sup>176</sup> *The Daily Herald*, 8 October 1936. Leading article, "Communist Fizzle".

or Mussolini, especially since there was still a secret police employing ruthless methods. The changes in the Soviet Union led the *Daily Herald* to state:

It is profoundly disappointing, a profoundly disappointing change: most disappointing and most disturbing to the warmest sympathisers and warmest defenders of the Soviet regime. For it is their hopes which are being destroyed.<sup>177</sup>

As a result of this attitude and because the *Daily Herald* did not accept the trials at face value, the paper was repeatedly criticised by the *Daily Worker* for being a traitor to its political background. For example, the communist paper called it sheer "brazenness" for the "socialist" *Daily Herald* to "viciously attack" the Soviet Government's stern measures against a group of deadly workers' enemies.<sup>178</sup>

Although the British press expected most admirers of the Soviet Union to abandon their support for the Soviet Government, many expressed their continued backing for the USSR and thus believed the trials were accurate. For example, D. N. Pritt, a lawyer and the Socialist M.P. for North Hammersmith, repudiated those people who wrote to the *Manchester Guardian* stating that the accused were neither properly defended nor proven guilty.<sup>179</sup> Moreover, these admirers stated that the Soviet Union was merely becoming stronger and thus more beneficial for Europe's security.<sup>180</sup>

### The Soviet Union's international standing

The resurgence in the use of terror in December 1934 surprised most British newspapers because the Soviet state had appeared to be showing signs of economic growth and political stability. Moreover, its pacific foreign policy, which included entry into the League of Nations, had meant foreign sympathy and a new willingness by the

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<sup>177</sup> The *Daily Herald*, 2 September 1936. Leading article, "Russia".

<sup>178</sup> The *Daily Worker*, 21 December 1934. "The Soviet Union and Its Enemies". See also 26 August 1936, 25 January 1937, 1 February 1937, and 15 March 1938.

<sup>179</sup> See for example, the *Manchester Guardian*, 22 September 1936, letter by Pritt.

<sup>180</sup> See for example, the *Daily Worker*, 1 February 1937. Leading article, "After the Trial". The *Manchester Guardian*, 12 September 1936, letter by William Rust.

West to cooperate with the Soviet Government, especially as Germany became increasingly belligerent. However, the *Manchester Guardian* was one of the first newspapers to suggest that the return to large scale terror was endangering this favourable Western opinion.<sup>181</sup> For example, the renewed use of repression caused infinite problems for Litvinov at Geneva<sup>182</sup> as world opinion, in the view of the *Daily Express*, became "affronted by Stalin's new terror".<sup>183</sup> Furthermore, it was not only the repression which dismayed the West, but also the allegations that many of the accused were the paid spies of various European Governments.

The quality conservative press continually reported that the purges created a bad impression in the West especially at a time when Europe's peace and stability was threatened by increased rearmament, the Spanish Civil War, and anxiety over German and Italian aggression. With the first Moscow show trial, the *Scotsman* alleged that "such charges and elaborate confessions" excited no surprise abroad, but merely renewed the bad impression caused by previous cases. In the paper's opinion, the greatest surprise was that the Soviet Government chose "this juncture to indulge in an exhibition of judicial persecution".<sup>184</sup> The Novosibirsk trial included a German engineer as one of the defendants, thus causing outrage in Germany and causing other European states to look warily at the Soviet Government's intentions.<sup>185</sup> Furthermore, accusations of espionage against Germany in the second Moscow show trial encouraged the *Yorkshire Post* to acknowledge that "the admitted facts leave it open to Russia's neighbours to urge that communism is an infection rather than a creed."<sup>186</sup>

Though the accused in the show trials frequently confessed to being spies for the West, charges of espionage peaked in the third trial and Rakovsky, a former charge

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<sup>181</sup> The *Manchester Guardian*, 7 December 1934. Leading article, "The Terror in Russia". See also, the *Scotsman*, 26 December 1934. Leading article, "The Russian Purge".

<sup>182</sup> *The Times*, 12 December 1934. Leading article, "A Russian Terrorism".

<sup>183</sup> *The Daily Express*, 24 December 1934. Leading article, "Red Christmas".

<sup>184</sup> *The Scotsman*, 21 August 1936. Leading article, "Soviet Justice". Many newspapers compared the trials between 1936 and 1938 to earlier trials and occasionally made references to the Metropolitan-Vickers Trial in April 1933. See for example, the *Daily Telegraph*, 22 January 1937; *The Sunday Times*, 24 January 1937; *The Manchester Guardian*, 24 July 1937; *The Daily Mail*, 2 March 1938.

<sup>185</sup> See various articles by the British press between 11 and 27 November 1936.

<sup>186</sup> *The Yorkshire Post*, 27 January 1937. Leading article, "The Terror in Russia".

d'affairs in London, admitted he had been a British spy since 1924.<sup>187</sup> The farcical nature of the accusations against Britain merely confirmed the quality conservative press's view in 1938 that the Soviet Union was unnecessary and undesirable for British security.<sup>188</sup> The *Scotsman* claimed the charges were so absurd that a formal denial by the British Prime Minister was hardly necessary since such allegations would not be credited outside the USSR. Moreover, such charges did not improve the Soviet Union's reputation and prejudiced its relations with the West. Though the *Scotsman* believed the Soviet Government for a time had "posed as good Europeans", willing to share a role in international affairs and anxious to promote peace, the paper believed the Soviet leadership had adopted an isolationist attitude and had become careless of its standing in the eyes of the world.<sup>189</sup> The *Daily Telegraph* warned that as a great power, the Soviet Union had become emasculated at a time when those who trusted it were counting most on Soviet support.<sup>190</sup> France allegedly lost enthusiasm for an ally which had given ammunition to every enemy of the Franco-Soviet Pact.<sup>191</sup>

From the first Moscow show trial, the liberal press argued that the "Red" terror "bewildered" the West and thus "Russia's good name" as an ally of the forces of peace and social justice was wilfully being sacrificed.<sup>192</sup> In the opinions of the *News Chronicle* and the *Manchester Guardian*, the trial advertised to the world the Soviet Government's "persecution mania" and its "terroristic system" which was thus bound to have a "bad effect on international opinion".<sup>193</sup> In the view of the liberal press, most damaging was the probability that the Soviet Union's advocacy of collective security

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<sup>187</sup> The *Daily Telegraph*, 3 March 1938. "Moscow Trial Prisoner's Challenge; Trotsky Said to Be British Spy" by the Moscow Correspondent; 4 March 1938, "Lone Resister in Moscow Trial Surrenders; I Plead Guilty to Everything"; Lord Chilston in Court; Hears Allegations against Britain" by the Moscow Correspondent. The *Sunday Times*, 6 March 1938. Two articles by the Moscow Correspondent.

<sup>188</sup> The *Times*, 2 March 1938. Leading article, "The Russian Trial".

<sup>189</sup> The *Scotsman*, 10 March 1938. Leading article, "Britain and the Soviet".

<sup>190</sup> The *Daily Telegraph*, 14 March 1938. Leading article, "Moscow's Grim Assize".

<sup>191</sup> The *Observer*, 13 March 1938. "World: Week by Week - The Moscow Drama". The *Daily Telegraph*, 9 March 1938. Special article by Malcolm Muggeridge, "Significance of Soviet Trials; Terrorist Regime Must Continue to Create an Excuse for Terror". The *Times*, 29 September 1937. Leading article, "Malaise in Moscow".

<sup>192</sup> The *Manchester Guardian*, 20 August 1936. Leading article, "The Russian Trial".

<sup>193</sup> The *News Chronicle*, 21 August 1936. Leading article, "The Zinoviev Trial". The *Manchester Guardian*, 20 August 1936. Leading article, "The Russian Trial".

would suffer a setback. Foreigners immediately reacted with dismay to the evident panic and hysteria of the Soviet Government and to the increasingly inhumane conditions of the USSR's internal policy.<sup>194</sup> The *News Chronicle* alleged the spectacular staging of the trial merely "excites cynical comment in capitalist countries" at a critical moment in international affairs.<sup>195</sup> The paper suggested that "Stalin is strong enough to show mercy... Yesterday's shots have helped the Nazis".<sup>196</sup> Thus the *Manchester Guardian* acknowledged that if arrests and death sentences were required to keep order within the Soviet Union, then its value as an ally declined appreciably.<sup>197</sup>

From the time of Kirov's murder and the repression which followed, the labour press found it difficult to believe that the Soviet Government was unaware of the damage being caused to its international standing. This suggested to the *Daily Herald* that the Soviet regime was neither as strong nor as stable as the West had thought,<sup>198</sup> since the use of terror in the Soviet Union provided an asset to the enemies of the Soviet state.<sup>199</sup> Following the first Moscow show trial, the *Daily Herald* again alleged "the reputation of the Soviet Government and communism did not improve as a result of the great state trial".<sup>200</sup> For the *New Statesman and Nation*, the real puzzle was not who would be affected by the trial but why the NKVD, which had long prepared the case, was permitted to hold it in August 1936.<sup>201</sup> However, though regretting the trial, the labour press stressed that justice was an internal affair of the Soviet Union and should not affect its position in Europe, especially since the Soviet Government did not seek external gain through violence.<sup>202</sup> Nevertheless, after the second Moscow show trial, the *New Statesman and Nation* found it curious that Stalin continued to ignore the damaging effect

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<sup>194</sup> The *Manchester Guardian*, 25 August 1936. Leading article, "The Russian Sentences".

<sup>195</sup> The *News Chronicle*, 25 August 1936. Special article by A. J. Cummings, "The Moscow Trial".

<sup>196</sup> The *News Chronicle*, 26 August 1936. Leading article, "Executions in Moscow".

<sup>197</sup> The *Manchester Guardian*, 25 August 1936. Leading article, "The Russian Sentences".

<sup>198</sup> The *Daily Herald*, 29 December 1934. Leading article, "Darkest Russia".

<sup>199</sup> The *Daily Herald*, 20 December 1934. Leading article, "Terror in Russia".

<sup>200</sup> The *Daily Herald*, 24 August 1936. Leading article, "Soviet Trial".

<sup>201</sup> The *New Statesman and Nation*, 22 August 1936. "Comments - The Moscow Trial". See also the same impressions in the liberal press, the *News Chronicle*, 21 August 1936. The *Manchester Guardian*, 29 August 1936.

<sup>202</sup> The *Daily Herald*, 25 November 1936. Leading article, "Praise".

on Western opinion of his spectacular method of removing his opponents from positions of influence.<sup>203</sup>

The secret execution of the Soviet Union's military experts made the greatest impact on the British press as it was the most damaging purge in terms of the country's international strength and prestige. The *Observer* suggested in 1936 that as long as the Soviet Union had a strong Red Army, the country would have stature and help the West.<sup>204</sup> Thus Fleet Street reacted negatively to the news of the secret trial of Marshal Tukhachevsky and his officers. *The Times* believed that the eight executed commanders had been the "cream of the Red Army". Furthermore, the paper was concerned that their replacements were not selected for their military and theoretical abilities but because they were "virtual non-entities", chosen for their staunch loyalty to Stalin and the party.<sup>205</sup> The quality conservative press believed that internationally, a strong Soviet Union was required as a principle guarantor of peace against aggressive states. However, the *Sunday Times* wondered if those countries would feel restrained following the execution of the Red Army leadership.<sup>206</sup> Although the Soviet press maintained the purge actually harmed the Germans as it deprived them of their spies, thus ensuring the safety of the Soviet Union, *The Times* was sceptical that the USSR was really stronger. The paper's correspondent in Riga alleged that

In a few weeks Stalin's purges have done more wrecking in the Army than the enemies of Soviet Russia could ever hope to do... The removal of the eight great generals has deprived the Army of its brains.<sup>207</sup>

The cynical impression which the *Daily Express* gained from the purge of the Red Army was that "Hitler is a great guy if Stalin's story is true because he [Hitler] gets

<sup>203</sup> *The New Statesman and Nation*, 30 January 1937. Leading article, "Will Stalin Explain?".

<sup>204</sup> *The Observer*, 23 August 1936. "Closing Scene in Moscow Trial" by the Moscow Correspondent. See also, *The Times*, 3 October 1936. Leading article, "The Strong Hand in Moscow".

<sup>205</sup> *The Times*, 11 June 1937. "The Red Army Purge; Loyalty Before Generalship; Vanished Leaders" by the Riga Correspondent.

<sup>206</sup> *The Sunday Times*, 13 June 1937. Leading article, "More Russian Executions; Terror in the Army".

<sup>207</sup> *The Times*, 15 June 1937. "Changes in the Red Army; Stalin's Friends Promoted; Bewildered Troops" by the Riga Correspondent.

so many to betray Russia to Germany."<sup>208</sup> Once the "smoke had lifted" following the execution, the *Daily Express* saw a "Russia very weakened in the eyes of the rest of the world", especially France which could not hide its fears that the military pact with the Soviet Union would fail.<sup>209</sup> The *Daily Mail* claimed that "nothing in history parallels the shambles made by the demented and grisly regime in Moscow". The paper, noting the secrecy of the trial and executions, reported that the inhuman controllers of "Red Russia" kept "the ruthless dealings of the Soviet Union in darkness. The grim, familiar sound of shooting, once more affronts the outside world".<sup>210</sup>

The liberal press was surprised the Soviet Government chose to destroy not only its prestige, but its strength by executing the Red Army experts. Despite the statements by the Soviet Government that the country was stronger as a result of the purge, the liberal press believed the opposite because the executions had a detrimental effect on the Soviet Union's allies. The *Spectator* alleged no one maintained confidence in a state which loudly proclaimed its most gifted soldiers betrayed secrets to a potential enemy. Thus the journal believed the purge was a gift from heaven for the enemies of the Franco-Soviet pact, though the *Spectator* acknowledged that if the generals had dissented from the party, there would have been no choice but to remove them, thus in theory, making the Soviet Union stronger.<sup>211</sup>

The *New Statesman and Nation* called the execution of the Red Army's leadership "The European Nightmare".

The latest batch of executions in Russia is likely to have far more serious international repercussions than any that have preceded them. Those who look to

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<sup>208</sup> The *Daily Express*, 14 June 1937. Leading article, "If Stalin Is Right".

<sup>209</sup> The *Daily Express*, 15 June 1937. Leading article, "Clean-Up".

<sup>210</sup> The *Daily Mail*, 14 June 1937. Leading article, "Moscow Shambles" It is curious that the *Daily Mail* could specify the exact time of the execution, midnight on 12 June, when other papers such as the *Observer* claimed there was no information to be found, especially since all details were kept secret. In addition, the *Daily Mail's* closest correspondent to Moscow was in Warsaw or Riga while the *Observer* used a correspondent in Moscow. (See the *Daily Mail*, 12 June 1937 for the article by the Warsaw Correspondent which gives details of the execution.)

<sup>211</sup> The *Spectator*, 18 June 1937, Leading article, "The Russian Mystery". See also, the *Manchester Guardian*, 14 June 1937. "Execution of Soviet Generals; Red Army and Public Stunned" by the Moscow Correspondent. The *News Chronicle*, 14 June 1937. "Moscow Executions Mystify Europe; Fascist Powers See Blow to Soviet Prestige", by the Moscow Correspondent.

the USSR for military assistance are not much perturbed when old revolutionaries are put out of the way, and may shrug their shoulders at the execution of officials and industrialists. But when eight of the foremost military experts in the USSR are put to death at one stroke, serious misgivings inevitably arise about the stability of the regime and the reliability of the war machine.<sup>212</sup>

Within a few months, the "solid work of years" was undone and because Soviet military might had declined, so had the effect of the Franco-Soviet pact against the Nazis. With the execution of the Soviet generals, the *New Statesman and Nation* thought the purge would inevitably strengthen the position of all in Britain who wished to isolate the Soviet Union and who wished to become friends with Nazi Germany.<sup>213</sup> The *Daily Herald* similarly declared that "in one sweep the Soviet is rid of its most reliable and brilliant leaders of the great Red Army".<sup>214</sup> In 1938, the *New Statesman and Nation* continued to find it incredible that the Soviet Government remained indifferent to the devastating effect of the trials abroad, especially in France where the Franco-Soviet Pact was undermined more thoroughly by the purges than any of Hitler's propaganda.<sup>215</sup>

The effect of the army purge was felt acutely by the British press in 1938. In June, *The Times* became aware of the fact that the Red Army was short of officers due to the purges which deprived the army of between a third and a half of its officers above the rank of lieutenant.<sup>216</sup> It appeared that the Soviet leadership ignored the fact that the army was seriously weak because in October, despite the crisis over Czechoslovakia, a new round of purges removed many of the new officers of the Red Army.<sup>217</sup>

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<sup>212</sup> *The New Statesman and Nation*, 19 June 1937. Leading article, "The European Nightmare". Also quoted in Deli, p. 275.

<sup>213</sup> *The New Statesman and Nation*, 19 June 1937. Leading article, "The European Nightmare".

<sup>214</sup> *The Daily Herald*, 14 June 1937. Leading article, "Terror in the USSR".

<sup>215</sup> *The New Statesman and Nation*, 12 March 1938. "Comments - The Soviet Trial".

<sup>216</sup> *The Times*, 13 June 1938. "Red Army Short of Officers; Effect of Purge; Half-Trained Cadets Enroled" by the Riga Correspondent.

<sup>217</sup> *The Times*, 24 October 1938. "Another Red Army 'Purge'; Arrest of Officers" by the Riga Correspondent. *The Manchester Guardian*, 2 March 1938. "Russia' Military Efficiency Impaired by 'Purge'; Execution of Many Officers" by the Diplomatic Correspondent.

## Conclusion

In August 1937, the *Spectator* suggested that the majority of people in Britain would find it difficult to understand not only the Soviet Government's attitude, but also that of the ordinary Soviet citizen.

There is too much Eastern blood in Soviet veins for us in England to understand the Soviet people in their present stage of development. Their capacity for frenzied hatred, unscrupulous cunning in their relations with internal and external enemies, combined with boundless enthusiasm and spontaneous generosity, shows friends cannot be measured with an ordinary European yardstick. Add to this the fact that the vast majority of Soviet citizens are peasants, still smarting under former injustices, and you may begin to realise the power of the emotional urge behind these public outbursts.<sup>218</sup>

Thus it was clear that the majority of the British press failed to understand not only why the Soviet Government held such trials, but also why the Russian people accepted the purges.<sup>219</sup> Furthermore, by September 1937, the horrible routine of the trials and the execution of "enemies" had become so normal a feature of daily life in the Soviet Union that *The Times* admitted "it is easy to forget or overlook" the purges.<sup>220</sup>

British newspapers and journals of all political persuasions devoted detailed press coverage to the show trials of the Soviet Union. Though recognising that the purges were a domestic affair of the USSR, the British press increasingly became concerned that the death of so many political and military personnel would become detrimental to the security of Europe. It was only two years before the first Moscow show trial that the West had finally accepted the Soviet Union as a member of the League of Nations and an active participant in the search for peace through collective security. The purges and show trials increasingly negated these benefits for Europe.

<sup>218</sup> *The Spectator*, 20 August 1937. "Crime and Punishment in Russia" by H. S. Marchant.

<sup>219</sup> See for example, the *Evening Standard*, 30 January 1937. Leading article, "Moscow Mystery". *The News Chronicle*, 1 February 1937. Special article by Cummings, "What the Russian Trial Means". *The New Statesman and Nation*, 6 February 1937. "Comments - The Moscow Trial". *The Manchester Guardian*, 6 April 1937. Leading article, "Darkest Russia". "The Russian Mystery" by Balticus, *Foreign Affairs*, October 1937.

<sup>220</sup> *The Times*, 29 September 1937. Leading article, "Malaise in Moscow".

The scale of the purging substantially influenced the opinion of the conservative press - the Soviet Union remained a "dark" country and therefore ought not to be heavily relied upon as an ally of Great Britain. Such demonstrations of internal instability which the show trials provided were viewed as evidence that the Soviet leadership lacked control, though it was cynically noted that Stalin was ruthlessly acquiring that control. However, in the view of the conservative newspapers, until the Soviet Government became stable, the Soviet Union in its weakened position ought to be ignored when dealing with Europe's crises as only strong states could provide European security. The quality conservative newspapers recognised that the USSR would one day be important to Europe, though not while the effects of the show trials could be felt. In contrast, the popular conservative press's mistrust for the Soviet Government intensified during the purges and significantly influenced their desire to avoid contact with Moscow. Furthermore, these papers found it difficult to believe the Soviet Government would ever resolve its internal chaos thus allowing the Soviet Union to become an important member of Europe.

The liberal press was considerably perplexed by the purges and trials. These papers supported stronger relations between the British and Soviet Governments as well as a larger role for the Soviet Union in Europe's security. However, the liberal press was forced to admit that a country which displayed such internal instability could not possibly devote the necessary time, effort, and resources to Europe. These papers and journals, in the early stages of the purges, hoped that it was a case of eliminating trouble-makers thus ensuring firmer control for the Soviet leadership. However, as the purges increased in intensity, the liberal press accepted that the Soviet Union's position in Europe was not as beneficial as hoped since the Government was forced to contend with domestic issues. This concerned the liberal press more than conservative newspapers since the former recognised that Britain's strength in Europe was reduced by the lack of a strong ally in Eastern Europe.

The labour press was remarkably disappointed by the trials. Its political leanings had led these newspapers and journals to have greater expectations for the social changes

in the Soviet Union. Thus these papers urged a closer relationship between the British and Soviet Governments. Furthermore, the labour press was convinced the Soviet Union had a significant and vital role to fulfil in Europe. However, the purges and show trials reduced the confidence of labour newspapers towards the Soviet Union as such instability could not be ignored by even the most ardent press supporters. The labour press could not even believe the show trials were minor blemishes on the record of the Soviet Union since the evidence suggested that the Revolution had been corrupt and wrongly pursued. Otherwise, these papers were forced to accept that the regime of the 1930s was itself corrupt and was thus destroying the Revolution. Either option discouraged the labour press from calling for Britain to rely too heavily on the Soviet Union until the crisis was complete or until Germany made an East European ally absolutely necessary.

There was no real need for the British Government to have put forward an official or unofficial line concerning Britain's reaction to the purges. Dismay, disappointment and confusion were common reactions of both the Government and the press. The British Government did not know why Stalin chose to eliminate so many of Lenin's comrades, prominent people and ordinary citizens. Thus the Government admitted that it was speculating.<sup>221</sup> Fleet Street was, therefore, portraying a line of thought very similar to that of His Majesty's Government, though without requiring direction or subtle influence.

At the Eighteenth Party Congress held in March 1939, it was announced that the purge had officially ended.<sup>222</sup> In his speech, Stalin denied that the purges had weakened the Soviet system and claimed they had provided a stronger government and prevented surrounding hostile powers from gaining supporters within the Soviet Union.<sup>223</sup> However, the *News Chronicle* argued that Stalin had been forced to abandon the purges because the Soviet people were utterly demoralised.<sup>224</sup> In addition, although the external

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<sup>221</sup> D.B.F.P., Second Series, Vol. XVII, nos. 129 and 130.

<sup>222</sup> *The Times*, 23 March 1939. "Party Reforms in Russia; End of Purge" by the Warsaw Correspondent.

<sup>223</sup> *The Sunday Times*, 12 March 1939. "Stalin Defends Purges; Soviet Stronger as Result; Secret Service To Be Expanded" by B.U.P. in Moscow.

<sup>224</sup> *The News Chronicle*, 14 March 1939. "Spotlight on Politics" by Cummings.

threat to the Soviet Union appeared to have become more serious, there were, in reality, very few of Lenin's colleagues left to be eliminated.<sup>225</sup> Thus some of Fleet Street hoped a milder era had arrived in the Soviet Union.<sup>226</sup> However, despite the removal of Yezhov and his replacement by Lavrentiy Beria in 1939, doubt remained in the British press as to whether or not the purges would decline in frequency. For example, the *Manchester Guardian* called Beria the "little Stalin of the Caucasus", thus suggesting that the paper was not deceived by the rumours circulating in Moscow that a more liberal and rational policy was to follow the change in leadership of the Soviet secret police.<sup>227</sup>

In reality, the purges did not end abruptly nor was Beria a "milder" head of the NKVD than Yezhov. The purges continued after they were officially concluded in March 1939, though by this time the British press was devoting the majority of its coverage towards Germany's intentions and Britain's efforts to secure allies and prevent a war. As negotiations amongst Britain, France and the Soviet Union proceeded in the spring and summer of 1939, the press obviously focused coverage on these talks and the hopeful outcome of an alliance. In many ways, it would have been inexcusable for the British press to try to find evidence of purges even if the papers had the time, resources, and interest. However, with the signing of the Nazi-Soviet Pact in August 1939, the British press resumed some criticism of the Soviet Union and evidence of purging became news again, though attracting far less attention than previously.<sup>228</sup>

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<sup>225</sup> *The Times*, 5 April 1938. "Red Justice 'Polluted'; Denunciation of Krylenko" by the Riga Correspondent.

<sup>226</sup> *The Times*, 8 March 1939. "GPU Purge in Russia" by the Warsaw Correspondent.

<sup>227</sup> *The Manchester Guardian*, 24 January 1939. "'Purge' in Soviet Secret Police; New Chief Gets to Work" by the Moscow Correspondent.

<sup>228</sup> For example, *The Times*, 14 October 1939. "Bolshevism in Ukraine; Persecution of Clergy and Nationalists" by the Bucharest Correspondent.

## Chapter 6

### "Chestnuts in the Fire"

In 1938 the Soviet Union was forced to change its approach to relations with Europe following the failure of collective security. Spain, the German re-militarisation of the Rhineland, and the Italian invasion of Abyssinia all pointed to the difficulties of pursuing a policy of collective security, but the event which heralded the demise of that plan was the German occupation of Austria, the Anschluss, in March 1938. Again the Soviet Government's calls for collective action were ignored by the British Government, with which the majority of the British press concurred, including liberal newspapers.<sup>1</sup> By the time the Munich Conference was convened in September 1938, the Soviet Government, which was not invited, was resigned to the failure of collective security and elected to play a waiting game.<sup>2</sup> While Britain and France hoped their efforts at Munich were successful in avoiding war with Germany, the Kremlin quietly re-evaluated its foreign policy. Thus the Soviet Union's response to Hitler's occupation of Prague in March 1939 reflected caution rather than the vigorous protest and calls for great power conferences which followed the Anschluss. The Soviet Government began to question whether an alliance with Britain and France was actually better than a partnership with Germany. Hence Stalin's speech to the Eighteenth Party Congress in March, with its ambiguous hints, left the door open to both sides in Europe with a reminder that the Soviet Union would not be used by either in war. However, to say Stalin's speech was directed towards Germany or foreshadowed an improvement in Soviet-German relations

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<sup>1</sup> See for example, the *Manchester Guardian*, 18 March 1938. Leading article, "The Russian Proposal".

<sup>2</sup> Chilston, the British Ambassador in Moscow, suggested to Halifax in October 1938 that the Soviet Government showed no indication of changing its foreign policy or of removing Litvinov as Commissar of Foreign Affairs despite the apparent failure of collective security in 1938. However, Chilston warned that the Soviet Government would be anxious to avoid future exclusion from European counsels and would watch for further developments before choosing a new foreign policy: D.B.F.P., Third series, Vol. III, no. 217.

ignored the fact that most diplomats in Moscow, whether German or British, missed the message which was delivered at a low point in relations between Germany and the Soviet Union.<sup>3</sup> It was in this light that the Soviet Government conducted negotiations with Britain and France while secretly keeping channels open with Germany. It was ultimately the failure of the British and French Governments to recognise the significance and truth behind Stalin's speech in March, combined with the Conservative Government's traditional distrust of communism, which led to the failure of the tripartite negotiations. In August 1939, Hitler seized the opportunity and presented the Soviet Union with temporary security in a form which the British Government had refused.

The general lack of support from the conservative press towards the Soviet Union's key role in Europe at the end of 1938 radically altered in the spring of 1939. Although there remained an element of suspicion towards Moscow's ultimate aims in Europe, the conservative press recognised that the prevention of a European war or even success in fighting against Nazi Germany was dependant on Britain and the Soviet Union becoming allies in the near future. However, it was the popular conservative press which altered the most radically in its perception of the Soviet Union with Beaverbrook's newspapers assuming a leading position in the advocacy of a Tripartite Agreement. In contrast, throughout the negotiations, *The Times* was only half-hearted in its hopes of success<sup>4</sup> and was even to a degree pro-German. Nevertheless, during the summer but especially in August, the paper was over-confident that a British-French-Soviet pact was imminent.<sup>5</sup>

Disappointed by the Soviet exclusion at the Munich Conference, the labour and liberal newspapers presented a more determined view when advocating an alliance between Britain and the Soviet Union in 1939. The labour press was particularly condemnatory of Chamberlain's apparent lack of interest in the discussions and the

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<sup>3</sup> Geoffrey Roberts, "The Soviet Decision for a Pact with Nazi Germany", p. 59. D.C. Watt, "The Initiation of the Negotiations Leading to the Nazi-Soviet Pact: A Historical Problem" in *Essays In Honour of E. H. Carr*, eds., Abramsky and Williams. pp. 156, 158-159.

<sup>4</sup> Richard Cockett, *Twilight of Truth*, p. 116. Iverach McDonald, *The History of The Times: Struggles in War and Peace, 1939-1966*, p. 24.

<sup>5</sup> F. R. Gannon, *The British Press and Germany, 1936-1939*, p. 27.

consequent delays. The liberal press showed slightly more restraint in its criticism of the British Government, which was balanced by disapproval of what these papers perceived to be an equally poor effort at negotiation by the Soviet Government.

In March 1939, 84 per cent of people questioned in a British Institute of Public Opinion (B.I.P.O.) survey wanted to see Britain and the Soviet Union more friendly to each other.<sup>6</sup> However, this clear feeling was not echoed by the British Government as in April, the Foreign Office was more divided than the country in supporting an alliance with the Soviet Union.<sup>7</sup> Parliamentary pressure by Opposition and Tory rebels led Sir Alexander Cadogan, the Permanent Secretary, to write that the British Government "had to move towards Soviet Russia 'in order to placate our left-wing in England, rather than to obtain any solid military advantage'".<sup>8</sup> Nevertheless, in May more members of the Cabinet recognised the need for an alliance with the Soviet Union though there remained a degree of hesitation<sup>9</sup> which was not reflected throughout Fleet Street. Although there was speculation in the British press at the time of Litvinov's retirement in May, the majority of newspapers argued that Soviet foreign policy had not abandoned the wish to cooperate with Britain.

However, as delays mounted, Fleet Street and the population became more anxious. In June, 84 per cent of people questioned by B.I.P.O. continued to favour a military alliance between Britain, France and the Soviet Union.<sup>10</sup> As the summer passed, warnings became increasingly shrill, especially from the conservative press, and though continually <sup>predicting</sup> ~~prophesizing~~ success, the slowness and fear of failure led to a growing barrage of negative opinion by these papers towards the British Government and far less condemnation and a greater understanding of the Soviet Union. The British press of all political persuasions strongly urged the British Government to form an alliance with the

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<sup>6</sup> British Institute of Public Opinion (B.I.P.O.), Gallup Poll, March 1939. Only 7 per cent replied "no" and 9 per cent were "undecided".

<sup>7</sup> Michael Carley, "End of the 'Low, Dishonest Decade': Failure of the Anglo-Franco-Soviet Alliance in 1939", pp. 318-319.

<sup>8</sup> Robert Manne, "The British Decision for Alliance with Russia, May 1939", pp 17-18.

<sup>9</sup> Manne, "The British Decision for Alliance with Russia, May 1939", p. 3 and A.J.P. Taylor, *English History*, pp 545-546.

<sup>10</sup> B.I.P.O., Gallup Poll, June 1939. Only 7 per cent said "no" and 9 per cent were "undecided".

Soviet Union not only to protect Poland, but primarily to issue a strong deterrent to Hitler. The news of military talks in August 1939 did not alleviate the anxiety felt by the liberal and labour press which noted the "slow steamer" carrying the military mission to Moscow. The conservative press, however, grasped at military talks as a positive and conclusive step towards immediate success. Nevertheless in August, only 50 per cent of the British public believed the British Government was doing its best to secure a pact with the Soviet Union, while 20 per cent believed the opposite.<sup>11</sup>

### Ignored at Munich

In September 1938, Chamberlain made three trips to Germany in an effort to prevent Europe from going to war over Hitler's designs on Czechoslovakia. The final visit was to Munich, on 29-30 September, where a Four Power Conference was convened consisting of Germany, Italy, Britain and France. Most significantly, Hitler and Mussolini declared their unwillingness to attend any conference which included the Czechoslovak and Soviet Governments.<sup>12</sup> Though most British newspapers noted the omission, few cared that such an important country was excluded and also doubted the Soviet Government's sincerity in offering to help Czechoslovakia as stated in the Franco-Soviet-Czechoslovak pact of mutual assistance. Furthermore, once the Munich Agreement<sup>13</sup> was made public, there was too much immediate relief that war had been averted to care what the Soviet Government might have done or intended to do. Though some newspapers asked if the price was too high, the majority of Fleet Street failed to realise that British-Soviet cooperation in September 1938 would have been a safer option than British and French appeasement of Hitler.

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<sup>11</sup> B.I.P.O., Gallup Poll, August 1939.

<sup>12</sup> Halifax explained to Maisky, the Soviet Ambassador in London, that the British Government only agreed to Hitler's condition in an effort to ensure that negotiations at such a critical time would be held. Halifax assured Maisky that Britain would continue to inform Moscow of the issues at Munich and that the British Government wished to improve existing relations with the Soviet Government. D.B.F.P., Third Series, Vol. II, no. 221.

<sup>13</sup> The Munich Agreement stated that the Western territory of Czechoslovakia, the Sudetenland, which was inhabited primarily by Germans, was to be ceded to Germany over ten days in October 1938. The area was strategically vital to Czechoslovakia, as well as being rich in natural resources.

Most articles in the popular conservative press mentioned the Soviet Union only briefly at the time of the Munich Conference and the tone was generally cynical towards the Soviet Government's offers of assistance to the Czechs against German aims. For example, the *Daily Express* pointed out that the Soviet Union's frontier was over a hundred miles from Czechoslovakia and the neutral states in between refused to allow passage for the Red Army and Airforce.<sup>14</sup> Furthermore, there was no suggestion that the popular conservative press wanted to see increased cooperation between Britain and the Soviet Union.

The quality conservative press, though noting the Soviet Union's annoyance and frustration at not being invited to any discussions on Czechoslovakia, argued that the exclusion of the Soviet Union was necessary to ensure that Hitler attended such vital negotiations.<sup>15</sup> Most papers remarked that the Soviet Government offered to honour its pledge to Czechoslovakia, though only if France acted first.<sup>16</sup> However, *The Times* pointed out that the Red Army was reorganising, "yet again", following the "slack" caused by the purges and therefore, Moscow would be unable to help the Czechs effectively.<sup>17</sup> Furthermore, the paper reported that the Soviet Government disclaimed any responsibility for the "fatal and inexorable consequences" caused by the talks in Germany.<sup>18</sup> Although the Soviet Union was basically ignored by the quality conservative press during the Munich Conference, when Chamberlain returned to London, those newspapers finally consider the Soviet Government's reaction to events. The Riga Correspondent for *The Times* alleged that "Soviet Russia is perhaps the only country in the world not rejoicing in the success of the Munich Conference in averting war".<sup>19</sup> Despite accepting the British Government's decision to ignore the Soviet Union,

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<sup>14</sup> *The Daily Express*, 20 September 1938. Leading article, "Good News".

<sup>15</sup> See for example, the *Daily Telegraph*, 4 October 1938. "Why Russia Was Omitted" by the Special Representative at Westminster.

<sup>16</sup> *The Daily Telegraph*, 21 and 24 September 1938. "Soviet Pledge to Czechs" and "Russia's Promise", both by the Geneva Correspondent. *The Times*, 19 September 1938. "Russia's Uncertain Part" by the Riga Correspondent.

<sup>17</sup> *The Times*, 19 September 1938. "Russia's Uncertain Part" by the Riga Correspondent.

<sup>18</sup> *The Times*, 22 September 1938. "No Retreat by Russia" by the Geneva Correspondent.

<sup>19</sup> *The Times*, 1 October 1938. "Russia Ignores the Conference" by the Riga Correspondent.

the *Daily Telegraph* believed that Britain still wished to work with the Soviet Government.<sup>20</sup>

As expected, the liberal and labour press were critical of the Soviet Union's exclusion from Munich, yet they too displayed relief that war had been avoided. Although the *News Chronicle* recognised that the Munich Conference was not an international meeting since the Soviet Union and Czechoslovakia were not invited, the paper "heaved a sigh of relief" with the rest of the world when war was averted.<sup>21</sup> The *New Statesman and Nation* surprisingly made very little comment directly about the Soviet Union, though its coverage, to a large extent, disapproved of the British Government for refusing to cooperate with Moscow.<sup>22</sup>

It was the *Manchester Guardian* and the *Daily Herald* which were the most outspoken over the exclusion of the Soviet Union from the Munich Conference. The *Manchester Guardian* was not surprised that the Soviet Government's response to Chamberlain's efforts was cynical and isolationist since the British leadership appeared to be doing its best to ignore Moscow. Although accepting that the Soviet Union was an "enigma", the paper believed the Soviet Government might have helped Czechoslovakia if given some encouragement by Britain.<sup>23</sup> The *Daily Herald* made similar observations but also stated that a peaceful settlement could never be effective without Moscow. However, the paper cynically recognised that Chamberlain had never before tried to cooperate with the Soviet Government, so therefore, why should he have made an attempt at Munich.<sup>24</sup> The *Daily Worker* argued that Chamberlain was actually in the service of the "war dictators" and thus pretending to the British people that he was a saint

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<sup>20</sup> The *Daily Telegraph*, 4 October 1938. "Why Russia Was Omitted" by the Special Correspondent at Westminster. See also, the *Observer*, 2 October 1938. "What It Means" by Garvin.

<sup>21</sup> The *News Chronicle*, 29 September 1938. Leading article, "Force of Opinion"; 30 September 1938, leading article, "The Decision".

<sup>22</sup> The *New Statesman and Nation*, 24 September 1938. Leading article, "The Surrender to Hitler".

<sup>23</sup> The *Manchester Guardian*, 22 September 1938. Leading article, "Seven Days" and "Foreign Opinion on Czech Crisis" by the Moscow Correspondent.

<sup>24</sup> The *Daily Herald*, 22 September 1938. Leading article, "Shall the Sword Win"; 27 September 1938, leading article, "One Way To Peace"; 29 September 1938, leading article, "Four-Power Conference".

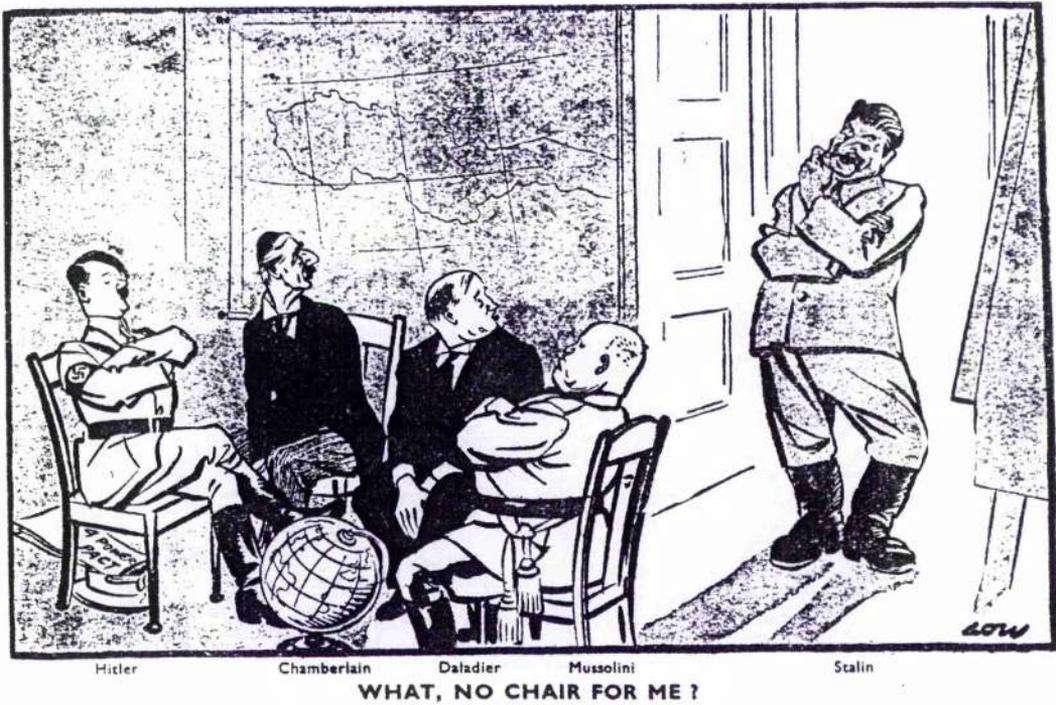


Fig. 6.1

when really he was the devil.<sup>25</sup> Low's cartoon on 30 September 1938 depicted Stalin arriving at the Munich Conference, asking the four assembled leaders, "What, No Chair For Me?". Thus Low astutely recorded that the Soviet Union had been snubbed at Munich by the West and that Stalin had taken note.<sup>26</sup>

As a result of Munich, the *Manchester Guardian* called for the British leadership to decide if it intended to work with the Soviet Government or wished to alienate Moscow completely. The paper stated that if there was a war, Britain would need the Soviet Union as an ally.<sup>27</sup> The *Daily Herald* similarly warned that by driving the USSR into isolation, Britain was "enormously" reducing the forces of collective security against aggression in Europe.<sup>28</sup> The *Daily Worker* predicted that the Munich Agreement did not provide peace and therefore would ultimately bring about war.<sup>29</sup>

<sup>25</sup> The *Daily Worker*, 26 September 1938. Leading article, "Seems a Saint but Plays the Devil".

<sup>26</sup> Figure 6.1. The *Evening Standard* 30 September 1938. "What, No Chair For Me?".

<sup>27</sup> The *Manchester Guardian*, 12 October 1938. Leading article, "Russia and the Crisis".

<sup>28</sup> The *Daily Herald*, 3 October 1938. Leading article, "The Next Step"; 5 October 1938, leading article, "Which Policy?".

<sup>29</sup> The *Daily Worker*, 1 October 1938. Leading article, "Surrender to Blackmail Does Not Save Peace"; 4 October 1938, leading article, "Munich Terms Mean War Not Peace".

Thus Czechoslovakia was sacrificed to Germany and the majority of the British press rejoiced in the fact that war had been averted. However, it was not long before Hitler showed he could not be trusted and that Britain required a stronger relationship with the Soviet Union. Although the majority of Fleet Street ignored the Soviet Union during the Munich Conference, within months, most newspapers and journals were considering the implications of such short-sighted action and hoped it was not too late to secure the Soviet Government in an alliance against Hitler.

### Litvinov and British delays

Attempts at an alliance began inauspiciously as the majority of the British press failed to recognise the significance of Stalin's speech to the Eighteenth Party Congress on 10 March 1939. The greater proportion of Fleet Street referred to the foreign implications of the presentation sporadically in May and June, though usually as an after thought to Molotov's speech on foreign policy at the end of May. Only the *News Chronicle*, the *New Statesman and Nation*, the *Spectator* and the *Daily Worker* mentioned specifically Stalin's references to Soviet foreign affairs. A. J. Cummings, the Political Correspondent for the *News Chronicle*, accused Britain's daily press of ignoring Stalin's "remarkable" speech which did not specifically call for diplomatic overtures to the West but neither did it reject them as a possibility. Most importantly, Cummings pointed to Stalin's warning that the Soviet Union would not pull the chestnuts out of the fire for Britain and France.<sup>30</sup> The *Spectator* also noted Stalin's warning that if the Western powers failed to work with the Soviet Union, that country had the strength to remain isolated.<sup>31</sup> The *New Statesman and Nation* criticised the British daily press and the B.B.C. for ignoring the Soviet leader's speech or dismissing it in a few lines. The journal suggested that because Stalin made so few public presentations, it was a very important statement which expressed the determination of the Soviet Union to "behave as a good neighbour to any who similarly showed a desire for good neighbourliness".<sup>32</sup> As

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<sup>30</sup> The *News Chronicle*, 14 March 1939. "Spotlight on Politics" by A. J. Cummings.

<sup>31</sup> The *Spectator*, 17 March 1939. "News of the Week - Stalin on Soviet Policy"

<sup>32</sup> The *New Statesman and Nation*, 18 March 1939. "Comments - Stalin Speaks".

expected, the *Daily Worker* was the most critical about Fleet Street's near suppression of the "most important speech by anyone anywhere during this period". The failure to acknowledge Stalin's statements was especially noticeable when the *Daily Worker* compared it to the prominence accorded to presentations by "spokesmen of aggressor states".<sup>33</sup>

The lack of coverage by the British press of such a significant speech by Stalin was a reflection of the British Government's failure to notice the true implications of a presentation by a leader who rarely made public appearances and statements. Chamberlain declined to refer to the speech in the House of Commons. Despite debate by Members of Parliament on the necessity of joining forces with the Soviet Union following the occupation of Prague on 15 March, Chamberlain refused to be drawn into firmly supporting improved British-Soviet relations.<sup>34</sup> In addition, there was virtually no Foreign Office response to the telegram by Seeds, the British Ambassador in Moscow, detailing Stalin's speech. This was especially curious since Seeds clearly warned that Britain could not expect the Soviet Government naturally to wish to join the West in an alliance.<sup>35</sup>

However, the attitude of the British press was about to change radically towards the Soviet Union. When Germany occupied Prague, the entire British press demanded, though with varying degrees of enthusiasm, that the British Government join the USSR in a collective security pact to protect Europe from future aggression. The Soviet Government suggested an immediate meeting of Britain, France, the Soviet Union, Poland, Rumania and Turkey to form a peace front, but the British Government preferred to issue its own guarantee to Poland. Such a bi-lateral treaty increased the Soviet Government's options and bargaining power<sup>36</sup> and demonstrated a lack of foresight by the British leadership which was depicted in a David Low cartoon showing the struggle

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<sup>33</sup> The *Daily Worker*, 13 March 1939. "Vital Speech Suppressed in British Press"; 14 March 1939, leading Article, "Dangerous News".

<sup>34</sup> House of Commons Debates, Fifth Series, Vol. 345.

<sup>35</sup> D.B.F.P., Third Series, Vol. IV, no. 452.

<sup>36</sup> Manne, "The British Decision for Alliance with Russia, May 1939", pp. 16-17.



Fig. 6.2

Litvinov faced to secure collective action.<sup>37</sup> Litvinov, however, made a further proposal on 17 April 1939 for a tripartite British-French-Soviet agreement for a period of five to ten years which would provide for mutual assistance, including military aid between the parties involved and also the East European states bordering the Soviet Union.<sup>38</sup> The British Government hesitated to commit to an increased association with the Soviet Union and took nearly three weeks to respond to the proposal.

The quality conservative press began slowly in representing the case for a tripartite agreement and it was not until Litvinov's resignation that these papers became firm advocates of an alliance. Prior to 3 May, the quality conservative press focused attention on Poland and Rumania<sup>39</sup> because an agreement with the Soviet Union was expected, but only on the best terms, and therefore, time was allegedly not a factor. For example, although *The Times* in April called for a defensive bloc based on the principles

<sup>37</sup> Figure 6.2. The *Evening Standard*, 5 April 1939, "A Piece Missing, Tovarish".

<sup>38</sup> D.B.F.P., Third Series, Vol. V, no. 201.

<sup>39</sup> The British press primarily focused its coverage towards Poland, Rumania, and Turkey because that was the direction in which the British Government was conducting its efforts. The majority of telegrams in D.B.F.P., Third Series, Vol. V, between 1 April and 7 May 1939, were exchanged with the embassies in Warsaw and Ankara.

of collective security, the paper suggested Litvinov would need to alter some of his demands before Britain could work with Moscow as not all states in Europe wished to be ~~guaranteed~~<sup>guaranteed</sup> by the Soviet Government.<sup>40</sup> Other quality conservative newspapers, however, appeared to take a more determined approach to an alliance with the Soviet Union following the occupation of Prague. The Diplomatic Correspondent for the *Observer* argued the British Government ought to have reached an understanding with the Soviet Union prior to the pledge to the Poles as only then would collective security in Eastern Europe be successful. Though the journalist thus felt the British guarantee to Poland was a "reckless gamble", he assumed that "it is taken for granted that Russia will play an important part in the scheme". Furthermore, the correspondent did not urge hastiness or panicking into an unsatisfactory agreement since he believed that "at the present stage there is held to be no urgent need for a pronouncement on Russia's part."<sup>41</sup> Unlike *The Times*, the *Daily Telegraph* and the *Sunday Times* admitted that a political and military alliance with the Soviet Union was crucial. Although these papers recognised that Moscow was wary in the face of Polish and Rumanian distrust for a guarantee by the USSR, the *Daily Telegraph* and the *Sunday Times* optimistically believed in April that an agreement would rapidly be reached since talks "progressed favourably".<sup>42</sup>

The popular conservative press showed a more immediate and vigorous interest in a proposed alliance between Britain and the Soviet Union. As proof of their sincerity towards cooperation with the Soviet Government, the Rothermere and Beaverbrook press refrained from making their usual disparaging ideological remarks against the USSR. For example, contrary to its normally unfavourable opinion, the *Daily Mail* stated that the Soviet Union was one of the "seven mightiest powers" in the world and with its

<sup>40</sup> *The Times*, 11 and 25 April 1939. Articles by the Warsaw Correspondent.

<sup>41</sup> *The Observer*, 2 April 1939. Article by the Diplomatic Correspondent. Also quoted by Alan Foster, "An Unequivocal Guarantee? Fleet Street and the British Guarantee to Poland, 31 March 1939", p. 37.

<sup>42</sup> *The Daily Telegraph*, 15 and 17 April 1939. Articles by Moscow and Diplomatic Correspondents. See other articles in April. *The Sunday Times*, 23 and 30 April 1939. Articles by the Diplomatic Correspondent.

inexhaustible reserves of people, the USSR was a suitably strong ally for Britain.<sup>43</sup> As soon as the British Government offered a guarantee to Warsaw, the popular conservative press pointed out the necessity of making the Soviet Union a partner due to its proximity with Poland. However, the *Evening Standard* feared "Russia is unlikely to join in the Guarantee" because of opposition from the Poles<sup>44</sup> and the *Daily Express* warned that Britain would find it difficult to fulfil its obligations without the Soviet Government who was in a far better position to give Poland effective assistance.<sup>45</sup> Thus the Beaverbrook and Rothermere press welcomed the start of negotiations between Britain and the Soviet Union in April and acknowledged the benefits of Litvinov's collective security plans.<sup>46</sup> Nevertheless, a degree of suspicion remained in the popular conservative press as to what the Soviet Union's true intentions were and those papers, therefore, advocated a degree of caution. Though the *Daily Express* recognised that "Russia has come down to the big table, where the big game is on" and knew what "number the Russians will play", the paper was unsure what the stake would be.<sup>47</sup> The *Daily Mail* was concerned that the Soviet Union wanted too much in the way of a military alliance, which would force Britain to enter into commitments with unknown consequences. More importantly however, the paper, against its traditional attitude, demanded that ideologies should not become involved in the discussions as that would prevent a security pact.<sup>48</sup>

Though the liberal press began by criticising the British Government's efforts at achieving an alliance with the Soviet Union,<sup>49</sup> towards the end of April, these papers and journals were generally more optimistic. Though congratulating Britain's leaders for

<sup>43</sup> The *Daily Mail*, 21 March 1939. Leading article, "What of Russia?".

<sup>44</sup> The *Evening Standard*, 31 March 1939. Also quoted in Foster, p. 34.

<sup>45</sup> The *Daily Express*, 4 April 1939. Leading article, "A Peaceful Settlement".

<sup>46</sup> The *Daily Express*, 15 April 1939. Articles by the Political Correspondent, Guy Eden, and the Moscow Correspondent, Sefton Delmer. The *Daily Mail*, 15 and 17 April 1939. Articles by the Diplomatic Correspondent, Wilson Broadbent. The *Evening Standard*, 31 March 1939. Also quoted in Foster, p. 34.

<sup>47</sup> The *Daily Express*, 1 May 1939. Leading article, "Russia Watches".

<sup>48</sup> The *Daily Mail*, 1 May 1939. Leading article, "Russia's Plan".

<sup>49</sup> See for example, The *News Chronicle*, 20 March 1939. Leading article, "Peace Front"; 21 March 1939 leading article, "Waste No Time". The *Spectator*, 14 April 1939. "News of the Week - Moscow and the Crisis"; Also an article by Walter Durranty, "Russia's Suspicions". The *Manchester Guardian*, 11 April 1939. Leading article, "The Government and Parliament"; See also 14 April 1939.

taking their first steps,<sup>50</sup> the *News Chronicle* argued that the British Government could not expect a military alliance to "fall into its lap" and therefore had to do more to secure the Soviet Union in a collective security plan.<sup>51</sup> The *Manchester Guardian* was satisfied with the progress of the talks, yet the paper recognised that negotiations were "dragging a little" as a result of differences of opinion. Although the British wished for a limited pact while the Soviet Government proposed a more comprehensive and theoretical agreement, the *Manchester Guardian* believed a compromise could be found since Litvinov's proposal had value. However, the paper warned that Moscow could afford to take its time whereas Britain could not following its hasty guarantee to Poland.<sup>52</sup>

The labour press was regularly critical of the progress of negotiations since these papers had called for an alliance between Britain and the Soviet Union to be formed immediately after the occupation of Prague on 15 March. The *Daily Herald* demanded that the British Government recognise its failure to establish friendship with Germany and redirect its policy in the only channel possible - "immediate collaboration, and if possible, a military alliance" with France and the Soviet Union.<sup>53</sup> In view of the fact that the USSR was the "greatest power in Eastern Europe", the *Daily Herald* and the *New Statesman and Nation* stated that British public opinion demanded a collective security agreement to provide a strong front against aggression.<sup>54</sup> The *Daily Herald* believed British foreign policy was "criminal and foolish" for isolating the Soviet Union. The failure even to consult the Soviet Government over the guarantee to Poland led the *Daily Herald* to question the real intentions of the British Government towards the Soviet Union. In the paper's opinion, the only way for Britain to prove it seriously intended to cooperate with Moscow was for the Foreign Ministers to meet, "unless Chamberlain wanted to see Stalin in a real effort at peace",<sup>55</sup> which was a severe reproof against the

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<sup>50</sup> The *News Chronicle*, 14 April 1939. Leading article, "What of Russia?".

<sup>51</sup> The *News Chronicle*, 15 April 1939. Leading article, "What's the Obstacle?".

<sup>52</sup> The *Manchester Guardian*, 22 April 1939. "Interval for Talks" by the Diplomatic Correspondent. The *News Chronicle*, 1 May 1939. Leading article, "Press Ahead".

<sup>53</sup> The *Daily Herald*, 20 March 1939. Leading article, "What Is Needed"; 21 March 1939, leading article, "Joint Action".

<sup>54</sup> The *Daily Herald*, 3 April 1939. Leading article, "The Next Step". The *New Statesman and Nation*, 8 April 1939. "The New Policy"; 15 April 1939, "Mr. Chamberlain and the USSR".

<sup>55</sup> The *Daily Herald*, 5 April 1939. Leading article, "Russia's Part".

futility of Chamberlain's visits to Hitler in September 1938. The *Daily Herald* warned that Stalin was serious when he threatened to remain independent of Europe because the Soviet Union "would not be used as a smoke-screen for the dubious designs of other governments or to pull the chestnuts out of the fire for their benefit".<sup>56</sup> Although the *New Statesman and Nation* admitted that Moscow was taking a tough line in the negotiations, the journal pointed out that the Soviet Union was the one in a strong situation while Britain, through its "presumptuous" guarantees, was in a weak position.<sup>57</sup>

The British Government ignored the possibility that the Soviet Union might remain neutral or even become allied to Germany in the war, thus demonstrating a blindness in British thinking. As a consequence, the quality conservative press failed to see anything wrong in the way negotiations were proceeding in April and May. There was also limited discussion in these papers over the proposals made by Litvinov in April and why the British Government delayed its reply. Therefore, when Litvinov "suddenly resigned" on 3 May 1939, the quality conservative press expressed surprise not that Litvinov was gone but that he should leave in the midst of important negotiations. *The Times*, the *Daily Telegraph* and the *Scotsman* reported that rumours had been circulating for some months that Litvinov was to be dismissed, yet these newspapers admitted that the timing of his resignation "aroused curiosity" in Europe since Litvinov was a "key" and "capable figure".<sup>58</sup> There was, however, no suggestion by quality conservative newspapers, unlike the liberal and labour press, that Litvinov's retirement was in any way due to Britain's delay in negotiating an agreement. Nevertheless, the Warsaw Correspondent for *The Times* reported the rumour that Litvinov had resigned because his peace policy was out of favour with his colleagues.<sup>59</sup> The *Scotsman*,

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<sup>56</sup> *The Daily Herald*, 13 April 1939. "Soviet Doubtful of Britain" by the Diplomatic Correspondent.

<sup>57</sup> *The New Statesman and Nation*, 22 April 1939. "The New Phase in Europe".

<sup>58</sup> *The Daily Telegraph*, 4 May 1939. "Resignation of Litvinov; Surprise Announcement in Moscow Last Night" by the Moscow Correspondent. *The Scotsman*, 4 May 1939. "Europe Sensation" by the Moscow Correspondent. *The Times*, 5 May 1939. Leading article, "M. Litvinoff Withdraws".

<sup>59</sup> *The Times*, 4 May 1939. "Resignation of M. Litvinov" by the Warsaw Correspondent; 5 May 1939, leading article, "M. Litvinoff Withdraws".

showing an unsubstantiated degree of optimism, found it surprising that Litvinov would "throw up his task voluntarily just at the moment when what he strove for was in his grasp".<sup>60</sup> The *Yorkshire Post*, however, admitted to feeling anxious as to the outcome of the negotiations and recognised in hindsight that Litvinov's warnings about Hitler's intentions over the previous twelve months were justified. Therefore, the paper "truly regretted" the Foreign Commissar's disappearance from the diplomatic stage.<sup>61</sup>

To a large extent, the quality conservative press was primarily surprised by Litvinov's replacement, Molotov, since he had very limited experience in foreign affairs and had repeatedly boasted of the Soviet Union's strength and independence. However, correspondents for *The Times* and the *Daily Telegraph* pointed out that it was still too early to suggest a change in Soviet foreign policy and therefore believed Moscow intended to cooperate with Britain and France.<sup>62</sup> *The Times* stated that it was not "prudent to assume that the removal of the Foreign Commissar necessarily heralded a change in policy. M. Litvinov's position was that of a trusted agent rather than a responsible creator of policy."<sup>63</sup> Although Britain's delay in negotiating and Litvinov's retirement encouraged rumours suggesting Stalin intended to alter Soviet foreign policy, the *Scotsman* did not believe them to be true. The paper warned that until Stalin's plans were better known, the resignation did not "portend a radical departure" in foreign policy as the Soviet Union remained opposed to aggression.<sup>64</sup>

The *Daily Telegraph* suggested that Litvinov would more likely be missed by foreigners rather than by his own people, especially since the paper alleged that Stalin had never liked the Foreign Commissar but had been forced to retain Litvinov due to his great knowledge, skill, and international respect.<sup>65</sup> Fleet Street devoted far more coverage of

<sup>60</sup> *The Scotsman*, 5 May 1939. Leading article, "The Russian Surprise".

<sup>61</sup> *The Yorkshire Post*, 5 May 1939. Leading article, "The Negotiations with Russia".

<sup>62</sup> *The Times*, 4 May 1939. Article by the Diplomatic Correspondent. *The Daily Telegraph*, 6 May 1939. "Soviet Premier to Make a Statement on Policy; No Crisis Over the Fall of Litvinov" by the Moscow Correspondent.

<sup>63</sup> *The Times*, 5 May 1939. Leading article, "M. Litvinoff Withdraws". See also, the *Observer*, 7 May 1939. "World: Week by Week - Mr. Litvinov Resigns".

<sup>64</sup> *The Scotsman*, 5 May 1939. Leading article, "The Russian Surprise".

<sup>65</sup> *The Daily Telegraph*, 6 May 1939. "Soviet Premier to Make a Statement on Policy; No Crisis Over the Fall of Litvinov" by the Moscow Correspondent.

the Foreign Commissar's resignation than the Soviet press which merely printed an "inconspicuous four-line notice on the back pages".<sup>66</sup> Litvinov had been genuinely admired in the West and by the British press and thus the style of reporting his resignation ironically sometimes resembled that of an obituary.<sup>67</sup> Sir William Seeds, the British Ambassador in Moscow, communicated his early apprehensions to the Foreign Office that he would find it increasingly difficult to communicate with the new Commissar of Foreign Affairs because Molotov's methods of negotiating were far different from Litvinov's.<sup>68</sup> The latter was well respected abroad and understood Western customs and ways of negotiating. Sir William Strang, the Head of the Foreign Office Central Department at the time, suggested that subtlety could be used when talking to Litvinov and many successful plans were achieved without wasted effort, whereas any proposal made to Molotov had to be unambiguous and purposeful.<sup>69</sup> Thus Seeds expected more protracted negotiations following Molotov's appointment.

There was genuine regret in the popular conservative press that Litvinov was "removed" as he was "one of the most famous statesmen in the world".<sup>70</sup> However, these papers were primarily apprehensive that Molotov's appointment heralded a change in Soviet foreign policy. The *Daily Express* was concerned with the effects of Molotov becoming Foreign Commissar since he was reputed to favour bi-lateral pacts over Litvinov's "dream" of collective security.<sup>71</sup> The paper gloomily argued that if the new Foreign Commissar chose to become more isolationist, the Soviet Union would survive but Britain would suffer.<sup>72</sup> Curiously, both the *Daily Express* and the *Evening Standard*

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<sup>66</sup> D.B.F.P., Third Series, Vol. V, no. 353.

<sup>67</sup> See for example, the *News Chronicle*, 4 May 1939. Special article by A. J. Cummings, "Litvinov, The Man As I New Him". For articles by the British press admiring Litvinov's abilities and personality, see chapter 3.

<sup>68</sup> D.B.F.P., Third Series, Vol. V, nos. 359, 509, 533.

<sup>69</sup> William Strang, *Home and Abroad*, p. 165.

<sup>70</sup> The *Daily Mail*, 4 May 1939. "Litvinov Hands Stalin His Resignation" by B.U.P. and A.P. in Moscow.

<sup>71</sup> The *Daily Express*, 4 May 1939. "Litvinov Sacked by the Red Army" by the Moscow Correspondent.

<sup>72</sup> The *Daily Express*, 5 May 1939. Leading article, "Take Your Choice".

reported that Litvinov had been "sacked" by Stalin on the advice of the Red Army.<sup>73</sup> Thus the *Evening Standard* believed Germany welcomed Litvinov's "fall" as a signal for a change in Soviet foreign policy and most significantly, the channels of communication were reportedly reopened between Berlin and Moscow thus threatening a British-Soviet agreement.<sup>74</sup>

Unlike the conservative press, immediate speculation in the *Manchester Guardian* suggested that Litvinov's resignation heralded a change in Soviet foreign policy<sup>75</sup> due to the unjustifiably slow progress of the talks, especially since Moscow continued to await a reply from the British Government on the Soviet proposal of 17 April.<sup>76</sup> The *Manchester Guardian* condemned the British for being complacent, for failing to appreciate the Soviet Government's point of view, and for inadequately proving its commitment and sincerity in the negotiations.<sup>77</sup> The *Spectator* was "far from reassured" by Litvinov's resignation since the journal believed that if the "chief negotiator" was replaced, a change of policy normally followed. However, the journal pointed out that in the case of the Soviet Union, that might not happen.<sup>78</sup> Nevertheless, the *Manchester Guardian* sincerely believed that had the British Government been "whole-hearted" in the negotiations, Litvinov would have remained the Foreign Commissar.<sup>79</sup> The *News Chronicle*, however, preferred to believe there would be no change in foreign policy<sup>80</sup> since it was "inconceivable that the Russian people" would accept an alliance with Germany.<sup>81</sup> Nevertheless, like the *Manchester Guardian*, the *News Chronicle* believed

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<sup>73</sup> The *Daily Express*, 4 May 1939. "Litvinov Sacked by the Red Army" by the Moscow Correspondent. The *Evening Standard*, 4 May 1939. "Litvinov Fall after Protests by Army" by the Diplomatic Correspondent.

<sup>74</sup> The *Evening Standard*, 4 May 1939. Leading article, "Litvinov"; 5 May 1939, leading article, "Russia".

<sup>75</sup> The *Manchester Guardian*, 4 May 1939. "Litvinov Resigns" by the Moscow Correspondent.

<sup>76</sup> The *Manchester Guardian*, 2 May 1939. "Negotiations with Russia" by the Diplomatic Correspondent.

<sup>77</sup> The *Manchester Guardian*, 3 May 1939. Leading article, "How Long?".

<sup>78</sup> The *Spectator*, 5 May 1939. "News of the Week".

<sup>79</sup> The *Manchester Guardian*, 5 May 1939. "Moscow Full of Rumours" by the Moscow Correspondent and leading article, "Mr. Litvinov".

<sup>80</sup> The *News Chronicle*, 4 May 1939. "Litvinov Resigns: Molotov Is Soviet Foreign Minister".

<sup>81</sup> The *News Chronicle*, 5 May 1939. "Stalin's Line of Action" by the Moscow Correspondent.

it was possible that Stalin blamed Litvinov for allowing the British Government to procrastinate and therefore, Stalin placed ultimate blame for the failure of collective security on Britain. Therefore, in the paper's opinion, the resignation appeared to be a warning to the British leadership that the Soviet Government would not wait indefinitely for an agreement.<sup>82</sup>

The *Daily Herald* also noted that the "snail's pace" of the negotiations caused "disquiet and impatience in those who attach high importance to the enlistment of Russian power in Europe".<sup>83</sup> Thus Litvinov's resignation appeared to support the labour press's condemnation of the British Government for moving slowly. Although the *Daily Herald* admitted that it did not know if Soviet foreign policy would change,<sup>84</sup> the *New Statesman and Nation* warned that Moscow's "edges were sharpened" and therefore, the British Government ought to take note.<sup>85</sup>

The *Daily Worker* was highly entertained by the "frenzied" speculation of the "capitalist press" which created "castles in the air" concerning Litvinov's resignation. The paper suggested that the "jitterbugs" did not need to search for excuses concerning Litvinov's retirement but should look no further than to the fact that the British Government had delayed its answer to the Soviet proposal. In the paper's opinion, Molotov became Foreign Commissar, not to alter Soviet foreign policy, but to give it clearer direction and firmness.<sup>86</sup>

### Molotov takes over

Though the Foreign Office recognised several reasons for Litvinov's resignation, it preferred to believe there was no change in policy by the Soviet Government and therefore, Litvinov was merely removed as a result of internal issues, possibly in a new, though limited, purge so Stalin could consolidate his authority.<sup>87</sup> Because the British

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<sup>82</sup> *The News Chronicle*, 5 May 1939. Leading article, "Litvinov".

<sup>83</sup> *The Daily Herald*, 3 May 1939. Leading article, "Britain and the USSR".

<sup>84</sup> *The Daily Herald*, 5 May 1939. "Litvinov: Still a Mystery"; leading article, "Litvinov".

<sup>85</sup> *The New Statesman and Nation*, 13 May 1939. "Comments".

<sup>86</sup> *The Daily Worker*, 5 May 1939. Leading article, "Litvinov".

<sup>87</sup> D.B.F.P., Third Series, Vol. V, nos. 398 and 509. Roberts, *Soviet Decision for Pact with Germany*, pp. 60-61; *Fall of Litvinov*, p. 643.

Government retained confidence in the success of the tripartite negotiations, regardless of Litvinov's departure, the quality conservative press also initially maintained an optimistic attitude. For example, in a leading article, *The Times* reported that the Prime Minister was confident talks with Moscow remained friendly as there was a common desire to act against aggression in a reciprocal manner.<sup>88</sup> Without much evidence, the *Daily Telegraph* adamantly believed Molotov was more anxious than Litvinov for a collective agreement against aggression.<sup>89</sup> Although the quality conservative press reflected the British Government's expectations of the negotiations, this was not due to substantial manipulation by the Downing Street press office. These papers were genuinely optimistic and assumed both the British and Soviet Governments were making the best efforts to secure an alliance against aggression.

In May as a result of back-bench pressure, more members of the British Cabinet appreciated the need for an alliance with the Soviet Union.<sup>90</sup> Anthony Eden, for example, wrote to the *Sunday Times* that he understood the British people wanted an alliance with all countries desiring peace. Thus he sought to assure the population that delays with the Soviet Union were not due to ideological issues.<sup>91</sup> However, there remained some in the Cabinet, such as Lord Halifax, the Foreign Secretary, who continued to be hopelessly uninformed of public opinion. For example, he told the French Government that "half the British population" held the Soviet Union responsible as much as the Nazis for "all the troubles of the last ten years".<sup>92</sup>

*The Times* was similarly out of touch with the British public, though in accord with Chamberlain and Halifax. Despite supporting the negotiations out of a sense of duty towards the British Government and writing leading articles expressing a desire for an

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<sup>88</sup> *The Times*, 4 May 1939. Leading article, "Poland and Russia". See also the *Scotsman*, 6 May 1939. Leading article, "The Russian Negotiations".

<sup>89</sup> *The Daily Telegraph*, 11 May 1939. Leading article, "Russia and the Peace Pact". Roberts argues that Litvinov had become so disillusioned with collective security that by April 1939 he had dropped the policy and that it was Molotov and Stalin who were the leading advocates of the tripartite negotiations. See *Fall of Litvinov*, pp. 646-647 and 651-653.

<sup>90</sup> Manne, "The British Decision for Alliance with Russia, May 1939", p. 3.

<sup>91</sup> *The Sunday Times*, 14 May 1939. "Russian and the Organisation of Peace" by the Rt Hon. Anthony Eden.

<sup>92</sup> Carley, p. 321.

agreement, *The Times* nevertheless remained cautious in supporting the Soviet Union.<sup>93</sup> Though not substantiated by B.I.P.O. polls,<sup>94</sup> several articles in *The Times* in May warned that a large proportion of the British population wished for Britain to avoid becoming aligned in an ideological front as that could divide Europe into rivalries. Thus a "hard and fast" alliance with the Soviet Government would hamper negotiations with other countries who opposed communism.<sup>95</sup> *The Times* argued that negotiations with Moscow were neither simple nor purely bilateral as the protection of many states was involved. In addition, the paper pointed out that the Soviet Government had recently made a significant change in its foreign office so delays were inevitable.<sup>96</sup> Thus *The Times* justified the Prime Minister's cautious approach and ignored British responsibility for the delays in reaching an agreement. Furthermore, the paper suggested suspicion and misunderstanding had hindered the early stage of negotiations, due firstly to Moscow's self-imposed isolation and secondly, to the difference in temperament between the Soviet Union and Britain. *The Times* was, therefore, the only paper to suggest that the ideological outlook of the Soviet Government required the British negotiators to act slowly and cautiously because there was no foundation of trust.<sup>97</sup>

In strong contrast to *The Times*, the *Yorkshire Post* reported the British public was "mystified" by the increasing number of statements by the Prime Minister which announced the rise of what the paper alleged to be "incomprehensible" differences.<sup>98</sup> Although the *Daily Telegraph* continued to give the British Government its traditional support, the paper expressed a degree of "misgiving" in the delay with the Soviet Union. Therefore, the *Daily Telegraph* called for the British leadership to "reiterate its strong desire for an agreement" and to deny that its hesitations were a result of ideological differences. Although the paper conceded that it was "better to go slowly than to form a

<sup>93</sup> McDonald, *The History of The Times: Struggles in War and Peace, 1939-1966*. p. 24.

<sup>94</sup> See for example, B.I.P.O., Gallup Survey, for March and June 1939. In June, one question asked "Which is the country you like least?", 54 per cent disliked Germany while only 5 per cent disliked Russia.

<sup>95</sup> *The Times*, 4 May 1939. Leading article, "Poland and Russia"; 11 May 1939, leading article, "Britain and Russia"; 9 May 1939, leading article, "Russia and the Balkans".

<sup>96</sup> *The Times*, 9 May 1939. Leading article, "Russia and the Balkans".

<sup>97</sup> *The Times*, 25 May 1939. Leading article, "Progress with Russia".

<sup>98</sup> *The Yorkshire Post*, 5 May 1939. Leading article, "The Negotiations with Russia".

hasty agreement which caused problems in the future", it failed to understand why there were problems when France and the Soviet Union were allies, France and Britain were partners, and therefore, Britain and the USSR were indirectly allies.<sup>99</sup> Although the *Daily Telegraph* recognised the Soviet Government wanted a "more rigid and comprehensive" scheme, the paper thought the Soviet proposals would benefit Britain even if a full military alliance was required.<sup>100</sup>

In contrast to the paper's traditional hostility to Moscow, the *Observer* in May became a strong advocate of an alliance with the Soviet Union. The Sunday paper believed it was critical that an agreement be reached without further deadlock. "Either Britain and France continue on their chosen path or they tumble the elaborate Peace bloc." The paper was critical of the British Government's "fear of overdoing it... by driving Germany into a corner 'whence blindly she might plunge the world into war'". The *Observer* stated this ought to be the British Government's policy since Germany needed to be encircled and contained "like a house on fire". Thus the *Observer*, in contrast to its views in previous years and to *The Times*, believed that only a full military alliance could convince Germany that British guarantees to Eastern Europe would be honoured.<sup>101</sup>

The popular conservative press was relieved to see talks continuing after Litvinov's resignation, though the *Daily Mail*, like *The Times*, was satisfied with the British Government's reluctance to form a "hard and fast triple alliance" as that could involve Britain in areas far beyond Europe.<sup>102</sup> In contrast, the *Daily Express* suggested that "the sooner there was an alliance, the sooner the British Government would be in step with the British public".<sup>103</sup> For ~~the~~ Beaverbrook newspaper, as an advocate of isolationism, it was admittedly a difficult line to promote. However, the paper accepted that the British population wanted an alliance and therefore, if there had to be

<sup>99</sup> *The Daily Telegraph*, 20 May 1939. Leading article, "Peace through Strength".

<sup>100</sup> *The Daily Telegraph*, 11 May 1939. Leading article, "Russia and the Peace Pact".

<sup>101</sup> *The Observer*, 21 May 1939. Leading article, "Russia as the Key; A Critical Week".

<sup>102</sup> *The Daily Mail*, 11 May 1939. Leading article, "A Word to Russia".

<sup>103</sup> *The Daily Express*, 19 May 1939. Leading article, "They Talk of Russia".

cooperation, the *Daily Express* preferred to have the best agreement, as soon as possible.<sup>104</sup>

Although the *Daily Mail* genuinely wanted a pact and therefore regretted delays, the paper, unlike the Beaverbrook press, alleged that the Soviet Union was more to blame than the British Government for the set-backs. For example, a meeting in Geneva between Halifax and Potemkin, the Assistant Commissar of Foreign Affairs, had failed to take place in May. As a result, the *Daily Mail* alleged, hypocritically, that it would be "unfortunate if an agreement were again delayed through the absence of a delegate charged with full diplomatic powers" as it would be a waste of Halifax's time.<sup>105</sup> Though this was undoubtedly true at the time and a fair accusation against the Soviet Government, the *Daily Mail* would conveniently forget that neither Strang nor the British military mission in August had full diplomatic powers. In contrast, the *Daily Express* critically stated that the "arrangements for a marriage between Chamberlain and Stalin are moving forward in a mysterious way. So far there is nothing wonderful about the performance." However, the paper suggested that the "light is slowly breaking on a bewildering series" of proposals and counter-proposals with Chamberlain as the "timid suitor who prefers to propose in the dark".<sup>106</sup> The paper optimistically believed that "barring an entirely unexpected accident", a full military alliance amongst the three states would be concluded "shortly".<sup>107</sup>

Throughout May, the liberal press expressed annoyance that an agreement with the Soviet Union had not been concluded and thus repeatedly criticised Chamberlain and the Foreign Office. The *News Chronicle* was dismayed that the British Government exhibited "no enthusiasm for Russian support" though the British people "unanimously" called for it.<sup>108</sup> The paper described Britain's efforts in the negotiations as a "frightening delay in the reinforcement of collective security"<sup>109</sup> and condemned British diplomacy for

<sup>104</sup> The *Daily Express*, 11 May 1939. Leading article, "Two Messages"; 19 May 1939, leading article, "They Talk of Russia"; 20 May 1939, leading article, "Hesitation".

<sup>105</sup> The *Daily Mail*, 17 May 1939. Leading article, "Why Geneva?".

<sup>106</sup> The *Daily Express*, 22 May 1939. Leading article, "In the Dark".

<sup>107</sup> The *Daily Express*, 22 May 1939. "Halifax Acts".

<sup>108</sup> The *News Chronicle*, 8 May 1939. Leading article, "We Want Russia".

<sup>109</sup> The *News Chronicle*, 8 May 1939. "Russia: Biggest Factor for Peace" by Vernon Bartlett.

moving haltingly, increasing fears that the talks might end in deadlock.<sup>110</sup> In the opinion of the *Manchester Guardian*, the British Government's reticence explained Moscow's suspicion that Britain and France were not to be trusted and were secretly encouraging Hitler to attack the Ukraine.<sup>111</sup> The *News Chronicle* could not understand why the British Government was "shy" of a "full-blooded" military alliance with the Soviet Union and thus accused a "large section of the Tory party" of retaining anti-Soviet prejudices even though the Prime Minister denied it. The paper was, however, relieved that Eden, Churchill and the *Observer*, the "organ of the Clivenden Set" and a notoriously anti-Soviet newspaper, favoured an alliance with the Soviet Union.<sup>112</sup> The *Manchester Guardian* was also unconvinced by the Prime Minister's statement that he was not influenced by "ideological" causes and that he did not "despise" the value of "Russian" assistance. The paper further accused the British Government of "risking the loss of the great advantage of Russia's help to avert war or help us win it". Though Chamberlain claimed to be speaking for the people, the *Manchester Guardian* denied that the Prime Minister understood the population and suggested the country realised it stood a better chance of peace if the Soviet Union was involved.<sup>113</sup>

In an outspoken article, the *Spectator* demanded that the "arguing" end so a clear agreement could be reached as the situation in Europe was "far too critical for finessing".<sup>114</sup> Though the *Manchester Guardian* recognised that a major problem was due to the Soviet desire to increase the scope of the negotiations while Britain wished to limit them, the paper pointed out that regardless, the discussions could not be allowed to fail and any form of agreement had to be secured to deter Hitler. The paper alleged that the British guarantees to Poland and Rumania were useless without the Soviet Union and

<sup>110</sup> The *News Chronicle*, 8 May 1939. Leading article, "We Want Russia".

<sup>111</sup> The *Manchester Guardian*, 11 May 1939. Leading article, "London-Moscow". See also, the *News Chronicle*, 11 May 1939. Leading article, "Clearing the Air".

<sup>112</sup> The *News Chronicle*, 8 May 1939. Leading article, "We Want Russia". The idea for the "Clivenden Set" was created by Claud Cockburn in his weekly newsletter, *The Week*, to describe a fictitious group of plutocrats who collaborated with Hitler to encourage him to move freely in Eastern Europe thus saving the West from his aggression. (Gannon, p. 24) The people allegedly belonging to the Clivenden Set were Geoffrey Dawson, the Astors, Sir Neville Henderson, J. L. Garvin, and Lord Lothian.

<sup>113</sup> The *Manchester Guardian*, 20 May 1939. Leading article, "A Poor Case".

<sup>114</sup> The *Spectator*, 19 May 1939. "Russia and Peace".

this alone should have increased the British Government's resolve to conclude an alliance with Moscow.<sup>115</sup> The *News Chronicle* also reported that it was "not so good that the most important country, Russia," remained outside the system of guarantees for Eastern Europe. Furthermore, in the *News Chronicle's* opinion, the excuse offered by the British Government, that an agreement with the Soviet Union would encircle Germany, was poor since the Germans needed to be surrounded.<sup>116</sup> The paper was also "far from reassured" by Chamberlain since "vital weeks are slipping by" without an agreement.<sup>117</sup>

Though occasionally Moscow received some mild criticism by the labour press, in general, the British Government was allocated most of the blame for failing to secure a pact. The *Daily Herald* expressed annoyance that two months after the occupation of Prague, misunderstanding and suspicion remained to hinder the negotiations. Although the *Daily Herald* believed the British Government's attitude had change significantly, the paper alleged that Soviet suspicions were justifiable as a result of Chamberlain's determination, since 1937, to keep Britain out of a full alliance with Moscow. Therefore, the newspaper pointed out that the only way to remove Soviet anxiety was to form the alliance which the Soviet Government demanded.<sup>118</sup> The *Daily Herald* believed that the Soviet Union's "good faith" was established beyond a doubt,<sup>119</sup> and therefore, the paper called for Britain and the USSR to "hurry up and agree"<sup>120</sup> and criticised both countries for wasting opportunities.<sup>121</sup> Nevertheless, the *Daily Herald* reported it could not understand the British Government's attitude in rejecting Litvinov's April terms since his plan was far more advantageous to Britain than the British Government's own proposals<sup>122</sup> which were based on the participants providing unilateral, rather than collective, assistance.

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<sup>115</sup> The *Manchester Guardian*, 16 May 1939. Leading article, "Time and Russia".

<sup>116</sup> The *News Chronicle*, 15 May 1939. Leading article, "We Still Want Russia". See a comparable article by the *Observer* on 21 May 1939, thus demonstrating how similar the attitudes of the quality conservative and the liberal press had become towards the Soviet Union.

<sup>117</sup> The *News Chronicle*, 20 May 1939. Leading article, "Still Fencing".

<sup>118</sup> The *Daily Herald*, 11 May 1939. Leading article, "The Peace Front".

<sup>119</sup> The *Daily Herald*, 11 May 1939. Leading article, "The Peace Front".

<sup>120</sup> The *Daily Herald*, 16 May 1939. Leading article, "Hurry Up and Agree".

<sup>121</sup> The *Daily Herald*, 17 May 1939. See also, the *New Statesman and Nation*, 20 May 1939.

<sup>122</sup> The *Daily Herald*, 19 May 1939. "Russia Insists on Triple Pact" by the Diplomatic Correspondent, Ewer.

Optimism in the British press assumed new expectations in late May with the anticipation of an agreement<sup>123</sup> since the British Government had finally offered its own proposal for a triple alliance linked to the principles of the League of Nations. However, the confidence felt by Fleet Street was diminished by Molotov's speech to the Soviet Parliament on 30 May. *The Times* pointed out, with a slight degree of relief, that the speech was neither a full acceptance nor a flat refusal of Britain's proposals. Thus the paper was confident, reflecting the assurance of the British Government,<sup>124</sup> that continued negotiations would remove further misgivings and reservations.<sup>125</sup> *The Daily Telegraph's* more realistic interpretation of Molotov's statement acknowledged that the Soviet Government believed there was a considerable gap before a pact would be finalised despite agreement in principle. *The Daily Telegraph* admitted that although the differences were serious, they "ought not to be insurmountable" as Molotov's speech gave the impression of a genuine desire for a joint anti-aggression front. Moreover, the *Daily Telegraph* thought it would be unfortunate to jeopardise the negotiations through a lack of mutual confidence or through a failure to understand each other's intentions.<sup>126</sup> Garvin, in the *Observer*, continuing with a positive attitude towards the Soviet Union, admitted that the "hitch with Russia is unpleasant and not without danger" though he stressed there was no reason to hold a "dismal" view. Because there was "four-fifth's agreement already", Garvin believed peace would eventually be secured. As for Molotov's speech, the editor of the *Observer* thought it displayed "candour" similar to that used by the Western democracies.<sup>127</sup>

The *Scotsman* was very disappointed that an agreement was not reached and contrary to its usual understanding and friendliness, expressed more dissatisfaction with the Soviet Union than the rest of the quality conservative press, and criticism became

<sup>123</sup> See for example, *The Times*, 29 May 1939. "Anglo-French Plan" by the Moscow Correspondent; 25 May 1939, leading article, "Progress with Russia". *The Daily Telegraph*, 29 May 1939. Leading article, "The Encirclement Myth". *The Observer*, 28 May 1939. Leading article, "The Covenant". *The Daily Mail*, 25 May 1939. Leading article, "Russia Day by Day". *The Manchester Guardian*, 27 May 1939. "Quick Moves in Russian Negotiations".

<sup>124</sup> See for example, D.B.F.P., Third Series, Vol. V, nos. 689, 707.

<sup>125</sup> *The Times*, 1 June 1939. Leading article, "M. Molotov's Speech".

<sup>126</sup> *The Daily Telegraph*, 1 June 1939. Leading article, "Moscow and the Peace Front".

<sup>127</sup> *The Observer*, 4 June 1939. Special article by Garvin, "Russia's Choice".

more noticeable as the summer advanced. The *Scotsman* suggested that an agreement was not as near to completion as believed in Britain, though not the fault of the British Government, because "once again Russia has left Europe guessing". Therefore, the paper agreed with "those who turn Stalin's words and say it is Britain and France who are pulling the chestnuts out of the fire for Russia" and questioned the Soviet Union's desire to help others. Despite its negative attitude, the paper, bolstered by the British Government's confidence, continued to believe an agreement would be concluded if Moscow received careful handling and was "made to feel she's leading against aggression with Britain and France following".<sup>128</sup> However, this suggestion was unrealistic since the British Government would never consider such an idea. Chamberlain particularly believed he was in control of Europe and refused to concede to pressure, whether it was from nazis or communists.

Hope was restored to the quality conservative press in June when the British Government sent Strang to Moscow as a special envoy to speed up the negotiations. The *Daily Telegraph* believed the civil servant's presence was a convincing effort by the British Government to allay Soviet anxieties that Britain was not serious in its efforts to achieve an alliance.<sup>129</sup> The *Sunday Times* even suggested that once confidence returned to the negotiations, a Cabinet Minister might go to Moscow to follow up Strang's achievements.<sup>130</sup> Thus the quality conservative press expected the "dragging out of negotiations" to cease.<sup>131</sup> The *Observer* was critical of all delay, by any of the negotiators, but especially accused Britain and France of refusing to consider rationally the Soviet proposal. However, the paper reported that they would soon have to listen to Moscow in order to secure peace.<sup>132</sup> Even *The Times* was concerned that negotiations "go very slowly forward and then stop", though the paper was comforted in the fact that

<sup>128</sup> The *Scotsman*, 1 June 1939. Leading article, "The Russian Negotiations".

<sup>129</sup> The *Daily Telegraph*, 8 June 1939. Leading article, "The Premier, Russia, and Spain". See also, the *Observer*, 11 June 1939.

<sup>130</sup> The *Sunday Times*, 11 June 1939. "Minister May Go to Moscow" by a Diplomatic Correspondent.

<sup>131</sup> The *Daily Telegraph*, 19 July 1939. "Cabinet Talks on Soviet Pact" by the Diplomatic Correspondent. The *Sunday Times*, 2 and 9 July 1939. Articles by a Diplomatic Correspondent. The *Yorkshire Post*, 27 July 1939. "Early Moves in Moscow".

<sup>132</sup> The *Observer*, 25 June 1939. "World - Talks in Moscow".

talks at least did not go backwards. However, *The Times* believed the position of the negotiations "is unhappy" because the atmosphere in Moscow "is not favourable for frank discussions" due to the "remoteness of the Kremlin".<sup>133</sup> Furthermore, the paper was critical of the British Government for giving in too often to the Soviet Government on vital points. For example, *The Times* believed that if the Baltic states refused to be ~~guaranteed~~ <sup>guaranteed</sup> by the Soviet Union, then Britain could not force them to act against their will.<sup>134</sup> This was a very remarkable and inexcusable change in attitude when compared to the infamous leader of 7 September 1938 which stressed that Czechoslovakia had no choice but to accept German demands.<sup>135</sup>

Due to their expectations for an agreement, the popular conservative press was disappointed that Molotov's speech in May did not accept the plan as presumed.<sup>136</sup> The *Daily Express* was concerned that the scope of Britain's activities in Europe was expanding, for example to include guarantees to the Baltic states,<sup>137</sup> and that led to renewed suspicion against Soviet aims by the Beaverbrook and Rothermere press. The *Daily Mail* cynically admitted that success remained doubtful because the Soviet Union would only agree to its own terms. The paper expressed disappointment because it genuinely believed that apart from a few minor points, a pact was attainable.<sup>138</sup> However, only a week later, the *Daily Mail* appeared to have lost patience with both sides in the negotiations since Potemkin had not gone to Geneva in May and Halifax was not going to Moscow in June. "Neither Mohamet nor the mountain seem disposed to move in the business of Anglo-Soviet negotiations." Nevertheless, the paper ironically continued to praise Chamberlain's "patience and tenacity for succeeding thus far". The decision to send a civil servant, Strang, to help the ambassador was considered by the *Daily Mail* to be a "wise" idea, though the paper sarcastically recognised that "to have sent a bigger man would no doubt satisfy the dramatic instincts of the Russians".

<sup>133</sup> *The Times*, 5 July 1939. Leading article, "The Talks with Russia".

<sup>134</sup> *The Times*, 5 July 1939. Leading article, "The Talks with Russia".

<sup>135</sup> See the leading article in *The Times*, 7 September 1938.

<sup>136</sup> *The Daily Express*, 1 June 1939. "Molotov Asks for More".

<sup>137</sup> *The Daily Express*, 2 June 1939. Leading article, "Liabilities".

<sup>138</sup> *The Daily Mail*, 1 June 1939. Leading article, "Moscow Is Critical". See also the *Daily Express*, 3 June 1939. Leading article, "Russia Still Hedging".

However, the paper did not rule out that it might be a good idea to send a Cabinet Minister once the ground had been thoroughly explored by Strang.<sup>139</sup> This attitude was extremely different from that of March 1935 when the *Daily Mail* had strongly opposed Eden's visit to Moscow thus proving the seriousness of the situation.<sup>140</sup>

Despite rumours in July that Halifax might expedite the negotiations by visiting Moscow,<sup>141</sup> the *Daily Express* presented a more pessimistic attitude towards a pact and criticised all participants in the discussions. The paper alleged that neither the Kremlin nor the British were anxious or eager for an agreement which had become a "bad egg because it was addled and stale" after months of negotiating.<sup>142</sup> Despite years of deriding Litvinov's slogan, "the indivisibility of peace",<sup>143</sup> the *Daily Express* concluded that the former Commissar of Foreign Affairs had been correct because "peace is indivisible".<sup>144</sup>

There was less consistency in the opinions displayed by the liberal press as to when an agreement would be reached and who was more responsible for the failure to secure an alliance. The *Manchester Guardian*, in an article more critical towards the Soviet Union than usual, found Molotov's attitude "on the whole disappointing" as the British Government had gone a long way to meeting Moscow's demands in Eastern Europe.<sup>145</sup> Furthermore, the *Manchester Guardian* claimed Chamberlain was justified in suggesting that a "wall or veil" continued to exist between the Soviet Union and Britain. However, the paper accepted that the British "unsurprisingly" continued to pay the price of excluding the Soviet Government from Munich. Therefore, before the British Government conceded too much, the *Manchester Guardian* advised Chamberlain "to act fast" to clear up existing misunderstandings.<sup>146</sup>

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<sup>139</sup> The *Daily Mail*, 8 June 1939. Leading article, "Courier to Russia".

<sup>140</sup> For example, see the leading article in the *Daily Mail*, 23 March 1935. Also, see chapter 3.

<sup>141</sup> The *Daily Express*, 6 July 1939. "Halifax May Go to Moscow" by the Political Correspondent, Guy Eden.

<sup>142</sup> The *Daily Express*, 10 July 1939. Leading article, "A Bad Egg".

<sup>143</sup> See chapter 3.

<sup>144</sup> The *Daily Express*, 11 July 1939. Leading article, "A Phrase Comes True".

<sup>145</sup> The *Manchester Guardian*, 1 June 1939. "Refusal by Russia" by the Diplomatic Correspondent.

<sup>146</sup> The *Manchester Guardian*, 2 June 1939. Leading article, "A Sort of Veil".

In contrast, the *News Chronicle* and the *Economist* saw only positive prospects in Molotov's speech which "reveals progress towards an agreement", though both noted the talks remained "painfully slow" and beset with complications as a result of suspicion based on British and French diplomacy since 1937. The *News Chronicle* suggested that the best means of removing these anxieties was to send Halifax to Moscow.<sup>147</sup> The *News Chronicle* and the *Economist* both found it a "pity" that the Foreign Secretary was not travelling to the Soviet Union since "a civil servant instead of a high political figure will confirm Russia's suspicion that it will not be treated on equal terms with Britain and France".<sup>148</sup> The *News Chronicle* reported rumours which suggested that Britain's real intention in sending Strang was to keep Moscow talking while the British leadership made a deal with the aggressors.<sup>149</sup> However, the paper stated that although there was no reason to believe the suggestions, there would be less occasion to listen to them if Halifax went to Moscow.<sup>150</sup> Furthermore, as Low pointed out in his cartoon on 9 June, "All You Have To Do Is Sit Down", the British formula did not take into account the changed atmosphere in the Soviet Union following Molotov's appointment as Foreign Commissar. A minor British official could not do Halifax's job and therefore, the Soviet Government would be more difficult to please.<sup>151</sup>

As with conservative newspapers, in June the liberal press became more anxious over the delays. Though the *Manchester Guardian* found the "interminable delay in the Russian negotiations frankly deplorable", the paper was unsure who was to blame as both sides displayed a "flaccid attitude".<sup>152</sup> The paper reported that the British Government "offers more and more" while the "Russians less and less" which made

<sup>147</sup> The *News Chronicle*, 1 June 1939. Leading article, "Russia's Answer". The *Economist*, 3 June 1939. "Britain and Russia". The *News Chronicle*, 5 June 1939. Leading article, "Bridge the Gulf".

<sup>148</sup> The *News Chronicle*, 8 June 1939. Leading article, "Send Lord Halifax". The *Economist*, 10 June 1939. "Finding a Formula".

<sup>149</sup> Halifax telegraphed Seeds that he believed Strang would accelerate the negotiations: D.B.F.P., Third Series, Vol. V, no. 735. There was no communication made to Seeds that Strang's responsibilities including stalling the talks.

<sup>150</sup> The *News Chronicle*, 13 June 1939. Leading article, "Off to Moscow". See also, the *Manchester Guardian*, 8 June 1939. Leading article, "To Moscow". Halifax had explained to Maisky on 8 June that it was "really impossible [for him] to get away" and that furthermore, "this kind of business was better handled by Ambassadors": D.B.F.P., Third Series, Vol. VI, no. 5.

<sup>151</sup> Figure 6.3. The *Evening Standard*, 9 June 1939, "All You Have To Do Is Sit Down".

<sup>152</sup> The *Manchester Guardian*, 24 June 1939. Leading article, "Europe Waits".

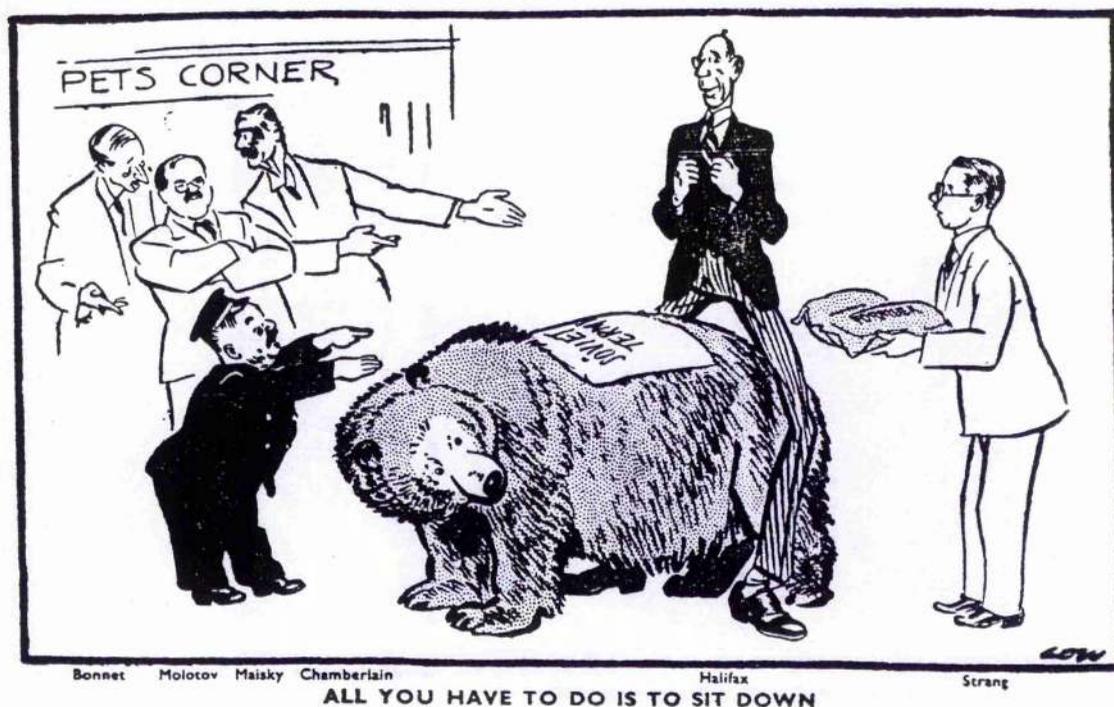


Fig.6.3

Britain look impotent from Hitler's viewpoint.<sup>153</sup> The *Economist* accused the Soviet Government of "remaining inscrutably, disappointingly, the same".<sup>154</sup> The journal also regretted that Britain had in the past left the Soviet Union out of important conferences, such as Munich, since the British Government was, in the end, forced to conclude terms which primarily served Soviet interests. Nevertheless, the *Economist* pointed out that Britain required an agreement, even on "unpalatable" Soviet terms, since the alternative, the USSR remaining neutral or joining the enemy, would prove more costly.<sup>155</sup> Although the *News Chronicle* was not as severe against the Soviet Union, the paper did find the growing list of states to be <sup>guaranteed</sup> ~~guaranteed~~ "to meet Russian demands... superfluous and an unnecessary complication".<sup>156</sup>

<sup>153</sup> The *Manchester Guardian*, 5 July 1939. "Moscow Talks Again Going Badly" by the Diplomatic Correspondent; 24 June 1939, leading article, "Europe Waits"; 6 July 1939, leading article, "The Russian Pact".

<sup>154</sup> The *Economist*, 24 June 1939. "Moscow Manana".

<sup>155</sup> The *Economist*, 8 July 1939. Leading article, "England and Eastern Europe".

<sup>156</sup> The *News Chronicle*, 23 June 1939. Leading article, "The Russian Talks"; 5 July 1939, leading article, "Vital Needs".

The labour press, though critical of delays, found greater fault with the British Government's conduct in the negotiations. In June, the *New Statesman and Nation* and the *Daily Herald* accepted the Soviet Government's need for more time before it accepted or rejected Britain's proposal. The former journal warned that if the British Government did not prove its sincerity, the Soviet Union would turn to Germany "to avoid pulling other people's chestnuts out of the fire".<sup>157</sup> Although the *Daily Herald* recognised that "big business deals take time and care... therefore, this too must take time", the paper warned that unnecessary delay was dangerous.<sup>158</sup> The paper sarcastically reported that Chamberlain had finally realised that an envoy was necessary in Moscow to help discussions since "long-range exchanges" had proven unsatisfactory. Though the *Daily Herald* suggested it was "better late than never" that Strang was sent to Moscow,<sup>159</sup> the *New Statesman and Nation* assumed a very negative attitude towards the mission as "it raises immediate suspicion of delay since obviously one of the principle Cabinet Ministers should go".<sup>160</sup>

### Confidence in the military mission

In August, Britain and France sent a military mission to Moscow since the negotiators believed that the basic points of a political agreement had nearly been resolved. The entire conservative press was extremely confident of a positive result. *The Times* stated that Britain and France "promptly" agreed to the Soviet suggestion of military talks,<sup>161</sup> though the paper failed to note the irony of sending the mission by steamer. The paper also hoped that Strang would be able to return home, again ignoring the irony when pointing out that he was required in London after a two month absence, though he had not secured a signed agreement. Once more the paradox was lost on *The Times* which reported on 14 August, two weeks after the initial suggestion for military

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<sup>157</sup> *The New Statesman and Nation*, 3 June 1939. "Comments". See also, the *Daily Herald*, 1 June 1939. "Britain's Plan Fails to Satisfy Soviet" by the Diplomatic Correspondent.

<sup>158</sup> *The Daily Herald*, 7 June 1939. Leading article, "Impatience".

<sup>159</sup> *The Daily Herald*, 8 June 1939. Leading article, "To Moscow".

<sup>160</sup> *The New Statesman and Nation*, 10 June 1939. "Comments".

<sup>161</sup> *The Times*, 5 August 1939. "Missions Sail for Russia" by the Diplomatic Correspondent.

talks, that the British-French military mission "very promptly" got to work with the Soviet delegation.<sup>162</sup> The *Sunday Times* and the *Observer*, as a result of their unsubstantiated optimism, similarly saw nothing ironic in their reports that a "specially chartered steamer" was to take the British and French representatives to the Soviet Union while Strang was to return to London by plane.<sup>163</sup> Both papers believed that the good reception and the "immediate" settling to work augered well for future success and that tripartite cooperation was a step closer. Furthermore, the papers hoped for rapid success since "Russia's strength will undeniably increase Britain's security".<sup>164</sup> There was no reference to Britain's strength in helping the Soviet Union's security.

The *Daily Express* was very optimistic and because of the announcement of a military mission, the paper assured its readers that a full agreement was virtually certain.<sup>165</sup> However, despite the inclination for an alliance, the *Daily Express* urged that the British negotiators not give in too much to the Soviet Government or it would be the Kremlin deciding when Britain should fight.<sup>166</sup> The *Daily Mail* and the *Evening Standard*, though hoping for a pact, primarily welcomed the fact that the military mission allowed Strang to fly to London where he was needed.<sup>167</sup> As with the quality conservative newspapers, the irony of the situation was not observed.

Following the announcement that a military mission was going to Moscow, the liberal press failed to express the same degree of confidence as the conservative newspapers. The *News Chronicle* cynically noted that "at present we are getting a big dose of optimism" after another "long period of depression". The paper found it unfortunate that there were "no cheery echoes in Moscow" and therefore, the *News*

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<sup>162</sup> *The Times*, 14 August 1939. "Two Days' Work in Moscow" by the Moscow Correspondent. See also, the *Daily Telegraph*, 1 August 1939. Leading article, "Britain's Work for the Peace Front"; 11 and 12 August 1939, articles by the Leningrad and Moscow Correspondent.

<sup>163</sup> *The Sunday Times*, 6 August 1939. "Military Missions Leave for Moscow". The *Observer*, 6 August 1939. "Missions Leave for Russia" by the Diplomatic Correspondent.

<sup>164</sup> *The Sunday Times*, 13 August 1939. Leading article, "Moscow Staff Talks". The *Observer*, 13 August 1939. "World - The Staff Talks Begin"; 20 August 1939, "World - Progress in Moscow".

<sup>165</sup> *The Daily Express*, 26 July 1939. "Britain and Russia Reach Agreement" by Guy Eden.

<sup>166</sup> *The Daily Express*, 31 July 1939. Leading article, "Downing Street, Moscow".

<sup>167</sup> *The Daily Mail*, 7 August 1939. "Strang Back in London This Week" by W. Broadbent. *The Evening Standard*, 5 August 1939.

*Chronicle* wondered if British political circles were affecting optimism for domestic political needs.<sup>168</sup> The *Economist* was equally sceptical that a pact was nearing completion - "It is with a jaundiced eye that the rumours of an impending agreement in Moscow are read nowadays."<sup>169</sup> Although the *Manchester Guardian* supported the delegation, the paper welcomed Eden's call for "someone important" to visit Moscow.<sup>170</sup> In contrast, the *News Chronicle* believed that dictators were always impressed by deeds not words, so the dispatch of British and French military representatives would help to prove to the Soviet Government that Britain meant business.<sup>171</sup>

Although the *Daily Herald* believed that sending a military mission to Moscow demonstrated that the British Government was attempting to make up lost ground by putting "teeth in the political talks",<sup>172</sup> in reality the opposite occurred. The *Daily Worker* correctly stated that because the delegation had no authority to make decisions, the British Government was continuing to delay and therefore did not seriously intend to finalise an agreement.<sup>173</sup> Britain had pursued an alliance without enthusiasm throughout the summer. Thus the military mission was a continuation of British policy since the Western representatives were given very restricted instructions which the Soviet leadership immediately perceived.<sup>174</sup> As a consequence, the Soviet Government turned to Germany for its security and obtained a pact which the British Government had refused to believe was a possibility.

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<sup>168</sup> The *News Chronicle*, 29 July 1939. Leading article, "What About That Pact?"

<sup>169</sup> The *Economist*, 29 July 1939. "Near a Pact?"

<sup>170</sup> The *Manchester Guardian*, 1 August 1939. Articles by the Parliamentary Correspondent.

<sup>171</sup> The *News Chronicle*, 1 August 1939. Leading article, "Mission to Russia".

<sup>172</sup> The *Daily Herald*, 1 August 1939. Leading article, "Teeth in It".

<sup>173</sup> The *Daily Worker*, 16 August 1939. "Mission Says It Has No Power" by the Diplomatic Correspondent.

<sup>174</sup> See D.B.F.P., Series III, Vol.VI, chapters VII and IX; Vol. VII, no. 34. The Soviet Government recognised that the British representatives had no authority and admitted that it had been one inducement in the Soviet decision to reach an agreement with Germany: Documents on Soviet Foreign Policy, Vol. III, 27 August 1939, Press interview by Voroshilov; and 31 August 1939, Speech by Molotov to the Fourth (Special) Session of the Supreme Soviet.



Funk Ribbentrop Gobbels  
 "IF THE BRITISH DON'T, MAYBE WE WILL"

Fig. 6.4

### The Nazi-Soviet deal

Though the majority of the British press had noted Soviet-German economic talks in July<sup>175</sup> and though some papers, especially the *News Chronicle*, suggested these negotiations could evolve into political discussions,<sup>176</sup> none of the British press genuinely thought the Nazi-Soviet pact was such a strong possibility. Low's cartoon on 29 July, "If the British Don't, Maybe We Will", showed the Germans anxiously waiting outside Molotov's office, hoping the British would fail to please the Soviet Government, thus hinting at what few newspapers dared to say - that political discussions were being held simultaneously.<sup>177</sup> Believing the military mission was proceeding successfully, Fleet Street was confident an alliance would be reached in merely a matter of time. Thus the size of the headlines in the British press on 23 August betrayed the anxiety which these newspapers felt with the momentous news of the Nazi-Soviet Non-Aggression

<sup>175</sup> See for example, the *News Chronicle*, 24 July 1939; *Daily Herald*, 22 July 1939; *The Times*, 22 July 1939.

<sup>176</sup> The *News Chronicle*, 24 July 1939. "75 Minute Talk at Moscow" by the Moscow Correspondent.

<sup>177</sup> Figure 6.4. The *Evening Standard*, 29 July 1939. "If The British Don't, Maybe We Will".

Pact. For example, the headlines in *The Times* covered two columns which stated "The World Astonished at Nazi-Soviet Pact".

*The Times* admitted that the British press and Government had never taken seriously the hints by the Soviet Government that it would turn to Germany if necessary.<sup>178</sup> *The Daily Telegraph* reported that the world was "startled" by the pact as it was a "flat contradiction against the nature of things" since in recent years, Germany and the Soviet Union had conducted a tirade against each other.<sup>179</sup> Although Moscow declared there was no inconsistency since peace had always been its desired goal, *The Times*, however, observed that "many people believe Russia has torn off the mask".<sup>180</sup> *The Sunday Times* explained that the shock experienced by the "whole world" was a result of the "cynicism of two dictators without masks and against their ideologies". Though the paper considered Stalin to be slightly better than Hitler, the *Sunday Times* acknowledged that the pact "strips both of pretences and lip-service" and showed them merely to be ruthless politicians.<sup>181</sup>

The *Yorkshire Post* belligerently stated that a Nazi-Soviet agreement would make no difference to British guarantees in Eastern Europe,<sup>182</sup> though *The Times* admitted the pact undoubtedly created greater danger for Poland and the West since the threat of two fronts was gone.<sup>183</sup> *The Times* acknowledged, without irony, that Germany's success in obtaining a pact, when Britain could not, was "possibly" due to Ribbentrop's large staff which accompanied him to Moscow as compared to "the modest, if highly efficient, members of the Foreign Office who went out to assist the Ambassador to <sup>the United Kingdom</sup> Great Britain". Thus *The Times* suggested that it "must be gratifying to Stalin to have the author of the Anti-Comintern pact sitting on his doorstep".<sup>184</sup> Still displaying a latent admiration for Germany, the newspaper was contemptuous of Hitler for choosing to work with "people ideologically opposed to National Socialism". However, the Soviet Union received its

<sup>178</sup> *The Times*, 23 August 1939. Article by the Diplomatic Correspondent.

<sup>179</sup> *The Daily Telegraph*, 23 August 1939. Leading article, "In the Hour of Crisis".

<sup>180</sup> *The Times*, 23 August 1939. "The Russian View" by the Moscow Correspondent.

<sup>181</sup> *The Sunday Times*, 27 August 1939. "Double-Dealing in Excelsis" by J. A. Spender.

<sup>182</sup> *The Yorkshire Post*, 23 August 1939. Leading article, "Nothing Is Changed".

<sup>183</sup> *The Times*, 23 August 1939. Leading article, "The Russo-German Deal".

<sup>184</sup> *The Times*, 24 August 1939. Leading article, "Moscow and Berlin".

share of criticism in *The Times* which was not surprised that Britain's efforts at negotiation had progressed slowly since Soviet-German discussions were conducted simultaneously. Thus the paper placed the blame for the failure of the tripartite talks on the Soviet Government,<sup>185</sup> since Stalin was in "no hurry to fight aggression".<sup>186</sup>

In contrast, the *Yorkshire Post* did not criticise the Soviet Union but instead accused British statesmen of once again "showing a woeful lack of imagination" for another lost opportunity.<sup>187</sup> Nevertheless, the paper admitted that "Russia forfeits its good name for genuinely pacifist interests".<sup>188</sup> Garvin's article in the *Observer* concerning the pact was surprisingly restrained towards the Soviet Union. Though the paper accused the Soviet Government of signing Poland's death warrant, the *Observer* primarily devoted its coverage to Germany's "possible" attack on Poland.<sup>189</sup>

The *Scotsman* was the most critical of the quality conservative press towards the Soviet Government for deciding to "run with the hare and hunt with the hounds".<sup>190</sup> The *Scotsman* possibly felt the most betrayed as a result of the pact because the paper had supported Moscow's calls for collective security throughout the 1930s and therefore had been the strongest advocate amongst the quality conservative press for an alliance with the Soviet Union. The *Scotsman* alleged that the "tortuous and protracted nature of the negotiations" with Britain and France was apparently merely time-wasting until Moscow reached a decision as to the safest and most advantageous policy. The paper disapprovingly suggested that the Soviet Government had found it "good to pose for a time as a champion of democracy and the defender of oppressed nationalities".<sup>191</sup> Though the *Scotsman* admitted that the Soviet Union's cynical actions would surprise some, the paper believed that many would see it as consistent with the character of its internal policy and general attitude towards other nations.<sup>192</sup>

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<sup>185</sup> *The Times*, 23 August 1939. Leading article, "The Russo-German Deal".

<sup>186</sup> *The Times*, 24 August 1939. Leading article, "Moscow and Berlin".

<sup>187</sup> *The Yorkshire Post*, 23 August 1939. Leading article, "Nothing Is Changed".

<sup>188</sup> *The Yorkshire Post*, 25 August 1939. Leading article, "What the Pact Means".

<sup>189</sup> *The Observer*, 27 August 1939. Leading article by Garvin, "Climax".

<sup>190</sup> *The Scotsman*, 23 August 1939. Leading article, "The European Situation".

<sup>191</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>192</sup> *The Scotsman*, 25 August 1939. Leading article, "Russia's Treachery".

Although the *Daily Express* and the *Daily Mail* found the Nazi-Soviet pact "sensational" and accepted that the tripartite negotiations in Moscow had to be cancelled, the Beaverbrook and Rothermere press refused to believe the situation was critical since Britain's guarantee to Poland remained.<sup>193</sup> The *Evening Standard* was unconcerned by the agreement since the paper alleged it had always stated that once Litvinov was removed in May, the Soviet Union wished to be isolated. Rather than seeing the pact as a crisis, the *Evening Standard* believed that Britain could benefit from it by concentrating its military efforts with France and the United States.<sup>194</sup> However, the *Evening News* called the agreement a "bombshell from Russia" and believed the worst, even expecting Germany to invade Poland the next day.<sup>195</sup> On the 23 August, the *Daily Express's* comment was reserved, probably out of disgust, to noting that the "world moves faster"<sup>196</sup> and the *Daily Mail* suggested sarcastically that there was a "certain grim humour" in the Soviet Union and Germany becoming allies.<sup>197</sup>

The liberal press was as surprised as conservative newspapers by the "sudden" news that a trade agreement had developed into a political pact between Germany and the Soviet Union.<sup>198</sup> The *Manchester Guardian* pointed out that a Nazi-Soviet pact undeniably made the international situation more critical than before and that the "precarious balance between war and peace" would be affected by Stalin's decision. Though the *Manchester Guardian* acknowledged that the Soviet Government had mistrusted British and French intentions, especially after Munich, and that Britain's handling of the discussions over four months was "not adroit", the paper found it difficult to accept that unresolved issues lead the Soviet Government to abandon its beliefs.<sup>199</sup> Thus the paper concluded that Soviet policy "is not as high-principled or

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<sup>193</sup> The *Daily Express*, 22 August 1939. Leading article, "Midnight News". The *Daily Mail*, 22 August 1939. Leading article, "Russia and Germany".

<sup>194</sup> The *Evening Standard*, 22 August 1939. Leading article, "Russia"; 23 August 1939, leading article, "Not Yet".

<sup>195</sup> The *Evening News*, 22 August 1939. Leading article, "Bombshell from Russia".

<sup>196</sup> The *Daily Express*, 23 August 1939. Leading article, "March of Events".

<sup>197</sup> The *Daily Mail*, 23 August 1939. Leading article, "Russia's Talks".

<sup>198</sup> See for example, the *Manchester Guardian*, 22 August 1939.

<sup>199</sup> The *Manchester Guardian*, 23 August 1939. Leading article, "The Russo-German Pact".

hard-headed as thought".<sup>200</sup> Despite attaching some blame to the British Government, the *Economist* likewise primarily focused its criticism on the Soviet Union's role in the pact. The journal reported that the "Bolshevik bomb has a shattering effect... and is the biggest single piece of perfidy in history". The journal accused Moscow of betraying all its principles, encouraging the aggressors, and of double-crossing those who tried to befriend the Soviet Union.<sup>201</sup> "No words are too severe for the duplicity of allowing the negotiations with Britain and France to advance to the threshold of success while Russia was secretly grasping the hand of the aggressor".<sup>202</sup>

In contrast to the outspoken criticism against the Soviet Government of the *Manchester Guardian* and the *Economist*, Vernon Bartlett, the Diplomatic Correspondent of the *News Chronicle*, expressed understanding towards the Soviet Union and believed the pact was a result of Stalin's disappointment in the military talks with Britain. The British Government had ignored Soviet plans and allegedly offered more attention to Hitler and thus Bartlett was not surprised the Soviet Government also considered Germany's offer for a pact to keep the Soviet Union out of war.<sup>203</sup> The Diplomatic Correspondent argued that Britain had been rash to offer guarantees in Eastern Europe without Moscow and therefore, no one had a right to be surprised by the turn of events. Bartlett sarcastically asked how much Britain would have to pay in "blood, money, or humiliation" for the "anti-Soviet prejudices of the British Government and its over-loyal supporters".<sup>204</sup> The *News Chronicle* also believed that

the fate of Europe is no longer settled in Westminster but in Moscow. The initiative of the diplomatic world has passed to Russia for the moment... For good or evil Russia has placed herself in a position of great diplomatic strength... Russia's national interests are unchanged... and her chief interest is to be left alone in peace to work on the socialist experiment.<sup>205</sup>

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<sup>200</sup> The *Manchester Guardian*, 24 August 1939. Leading article, "What Kind of Pact?".

<sup>201</sup> The *Economist*, 26 August 1939. Leading article, "Double Cross Roads".

<sup>202</sup> The *Economist*, 2 September 1939. Leading article, "Twilight Hours".

<sup>203</sup> The *News Chronicle*, 22 August 1939. "Non-Aggression Pact to be Concluded" by V. Bartlett.

<sup>204</sup> The *News Chronicle*, 23 August 1939. "Moscow-Berlin Axis?" by V. Bartlett.

<sup>205</sup> The *News Chronicle*, 24 August 1939. Leading article, "Russia to Play".

Though hoping the Soviet Union would not help Germany as much as Hitler expected,<sup>206</sup> the *Manchester Guardian* and the *Spectator* admitted that the terms of the pact left "no room for optimism" as they were worse than expected. There was no escape clause allowing the Soviet Union to help an attacked country thus making it easy for Germany to invade Poland.<sup>207</sup> Nevertheless, repentance and accusations against past conduct by the British Government were alleged, by the *Spectator*, to be unimportant as long as Britain and France stood by Poland.<sup>208</sup> The *News Chronicle* argued it was in the Soviet Union's interest not to see Poland disappear and therefore, the paper naively hoped the Soviet Government might try to save that country.<sup>209</sup>

The *Daily Herald* blamed Germany, Britain, and the Soviet Union for the Nazi-Soviet pact. Firstly, the paper alleged it was a shocking reversal of German policy.<sup>210</sup> Secondly, although acknowledging that "Russia's sudden and cynical pact with Germany has no effect on Britain", the *Daily Herald* pointed out that the British Government had to take its share of the blame for allowing the negotiations with the Soviet Union to be so protracted. However, despite Britain "being wrong on occasions, that does not justify Russia's betrayal of her principles".<sup>211</sup> The *New Statesman and Nation* was more convinced of Britain's responsibility for the conclusion of the pact. The "folly" of providing a guarantee for Poland without the Soviet Union and the consequent reluctance to conclude a settlement meant Britain "stood alone".<sup>212</sup>

Unsurprisingly, though hypocritically, Britain's leading communist paper saw nothing questionable concerning Moscow's agreement with Germany. The *Daily Worker* stated that the Soviet-German pact was simply a "dramatic peace move to halt

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<sup>206</sup> The *Manchester Guardian*, 23 and 25 August 1939. Leading articles, "The Russo-German Pact" and "The Issue".

<sup>207</sup> The *Manchester Guardian*, 25 August 1939. Leading article, "Terms Revealed". The *Spectator*, 25 August 1939. "On the Verge" and "Britain's Part". For details of the Nazi-Soviet pact, see D.G.F.P., Series D, Vol. VII, no. 228. For British reaction to the agreement, see D.B.F.P., Third Series, Vol. VII, Chapters III and IV.

<sup>208</sup> The *Spectator*, 25 August 1939. "On the Verge" and "Britain's Part".

<sup>209</sup> The *News Chronicle*, 25 August 1939. Leading article, "In the Balance"; 5 September 1939, "Moscow's Policy of Neutrality" by the Moscow Correspondent.

<sup>210</sup> The *Daily Herald*, 23 August 1939. Leading article, "We Stand Firm".

<sup>211</sup> The *Daily Herald*, 28 August 1939. Leading article, "We Wait Unshaken".

<sup>212</sup> The *New Statesman and Nation*, 26 August 1939. Leading article, "Ribbentrop at the Kremlin".

aggression".<sup>213</sup> The paper claimed that Hitler valued the Soviet Union's military strength, whereas Britain did not, and thus Germany realised the Anti-Comintern pact was useless. The *Daily Worker* argued that a British-Soviet pact remained possible but only if Chamberlain or Halifax "went by plane" to Moscow. Furthermore, the paper alleged the Soviet-German pact was the "logical" outcome of Stalin's speech in March and thus it was left to the British to make the next move.<sup>214</sup> Of note was the fact that the *Daily Worker* printed its leader on the 25 August with phrases very similar to that of *Pravda* and *Izvestia*, the daily newspapers of the Soviet Union that portrayed official Communist Party policy, which declared the pact accorded with the principles of the Soviet Government's peace policy.<sup>215</sup> Thus it was obvious the *Daily Worker* took its lead from the official Soviet line and during the fighting, would not support the British war effort.

### The partition of Poland

Germany's invasion of Poland on 1 September was followed by the British and French declarations of war on 3 September and the Soviet declaration of neutrality. In the first week, the Soviet Union maintained good relations with Warsaw but on 11 September, Fleet Street reported "ominous" Soviet press criticism of Poland and the partial mobilisation of the Red Army to the Polish frontier, an alleged consequence of the rapid advance of the German army.<sup>216</sup> The *Scotsman* believed mobilisation by the "Russian vulture" was not good news and suggested the Soviet Union intended to stab Poland in the back, though the paper cynically conceded that Stalin might wait for Germany to do all the killing.<sup>217</sup>

On 17 September, the Red Army invaded Eastern Poland allegedly to protect the oppressed Ukrainian and Belorussian minorities. The *Scotsman*, however, called it a

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<sup>213</sup> The *Daily Worker*, 23 August 1939. "Soviet's Dramatic Peace Move to Halt Aggressors".

<sup>214</sup> The *Daily Worker*, 25 August 1939. Leading article, "Soviets' Move for General Peace".

<sup>215</sup> D.B.F.P., Third Series, Vol. VII, no. 240.

<sup>216</sup> The *Observer*, 17 September 1939. "The War" by Garvin. *The Times*, 15 September 1939. "Russian Criticism of Poland" by the Helsinki Correspondent.

<sup>217</sup> The *Scotsman*, 16 September 1939. Leading article, "Russia and Poland".

"wanton act of aggression in keeping with the methods of the Soviet's new ally" and accused Molotov of creating "absurd pretexts for concealing the rapacity of Russian policy". The paper alleged that under the circumstances, the Soviet aggression was "more dastardly" than that committed by the Germans because Poland was already fighting for survival. Thus, in the *Scotsman's* opinion, the Soviet Union was revealed in its true colours rather than as the "peace-loving, enlightened country" it pretended to be.<sup>218</sup> *The Times* expressed similar horror that the Poles had to fight a new aggressor, labelling the Soviet attack a "flagrant act of aggression" and a "stab in the back".<sup>219</sup> In view of the fact that the quality conservative press alleged the partition of Poland had been prearranged in a secret clause of the Nazi-Soviet pact,<sup>220</sup> *The Times* claimed the issue had never been "would" Stalin invade, but "when". Thus the only surprise for the paper was the speed with which the Red Army had attacked, which suggested that Britain's peace front was "pallid and uninviting" in comparison to what Germany offered: "Germany was to do the murder and Russia was to share the estate."<sup>221</sup>

Apart from the seven articles in the non-aggression agreement, which basically prevented the two countries from attacking each other and kept each neutral in the event of war, there was a "Secret Additional Protocol". It divided Eastern Europe into spheres of influence, in which paragraph two allocated areas east of the rivers Narev, Vistula, and San to the Soviet Union.<sup>222</sup> Although Fleet Street had no confirmation of the arrangement, Low's cartoon on 2 October, "How Much Can You Give Us On This?", was very close to the truth. Not only did Stalin make significant gains in Poland, but the Nazis were willing to give him freedom of movement in Eastern Europe in exchange for Soviet neutrality during the German war against the West.<sup>223</sup>

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<sup>218</sup> *The Scotsman*, 18 September 1939. Leading article, "Russia's Aggression".

<sup>219</sup> *The Times*, 18 September 1939. "Red Army in Polish Territory" by the Helsinki Correspondent.

<sup>220</sup> See for example, the *Scotsman*, 16 September 1939. Leading article, "Russia and Poland".

<sup>221</sup> *The Times*, 18 September 1939. Leading article, "Stalin Shows His Hand".

<sup>222</sup> D.G.F.P., Series D, Vol VII, nos. 228 and 229. See nos. 284 and 353 for amendments to the Secret Protocol.

<sup>223</sup> Figure 6.5. *The Evening Standard*, 2 October 1939. "How Much Can You Give Us On This?".



Fig. 6.5

The *Daily Telegraph* expressed a more accommodating attitude towards the Soviet Union's invasion of Poland as it saw positive alternatives to the gloom and indignant outrage of *The Times* and the *Scotsman*. The *Daily Telegraph* suggested Stalin was willing to clash with his new friend for the sake of Soviet interests and possibly to prevent Hitler from acquiring all of Poland. Though the *Daily Telegraph* admitted it could be a planned partition of Poland, the paper believed there was also a distinct possibility that the Soviet Government decided to act before Germany advanced too near to the Soviet Union.<sup>224</sup> Following the division of Poland, Garvin, in the *Observer*, expressed a degree of admiration for the way in which the Soviet Government had forced Germany "to yield every inch of the coveted corner".<sup>225</sup> However, following the demise of a buffer state, *The Times* logically wondered if the two countries could continue to work together.<sup>226</sup> Low's cartoon of 20 September 1939 depicted the "Rendezvous" of the two dictators, who though acting courteously to each other,

<sup>224</sup> *The Daily Telegraph*, 18 September 1939. Leading article, "Russia's Rubicon".

<sup>225</sup> *The Observer*, 24 September 1939. "The War" by Garvin.

<sup>226</sup> *The Times*, 18 September 1939. Leading article, "Stalin Shows His Hand".





Fig. 6.7

suggested the Soviet Union was helping itself and not Britain or Germany,<sup>230</sup> the paper altered its opinion and alleged that the Red Army's invasion had come as a surprise to Hitler and would, therefore, keep the Germans occupied to Britain's benefit.<sup>231</sup> Even though the *Daily Mail* accused the Soviet Union of betraying the Poles by "stabbing them in the back" and called the invasion an "act of treachery" using Nazi techniques,<sup>232</sup> the paper suggested Stalin held the diplomatic initiative over Hitler since the Soviet Union's Polish acquisition contained oil-fields.<sup>233</sup>

Although the *Manchester Guardian* and the *News Chronicle* reported that the partition of Poland had been prearranged,<sup>234</sup> the latter maintained that the Soviet Union had been forced to invade as a result of the rapid advance of German troops. However,

<sup>230</sup> The *Daily Express*, 18 September 1939. Leading article, "Two Questions".

<sup>231</sup> The *Daily Express*, 21 September 1939. "Russia's Drive Will Keep Big Nazi Army Busy in Poland" by G. Eden.

<sup>232</sup> The *Daily Mail*, 18 September 1939. Leading article, "Betrayal".

<sup>233</sup> The *Daily Mail*, 27 September 1939. "Ribbentrop Flying to Moscow Today". The *Daily Express*, 23 September 1939. Leading article, "Uneasy Conquest".

<sup>234</sup> The *Manchester Guardian*, 19 September 1939. "The Consequences of Russia's Aggression" by the Diplomatic Correspondent. The *News Chronicle*, 15 September 1939. "Berlin Expects Soviet to Join in Partition" by the Special Correspondent in Copenhagen; 18 September 1939, leading article, "Russia Marches In".

the *News Chronicle* condemned the Soviet Government's "flagrant act of aggression" and called Molotov's pretext, the protection of the Belorussian and Ukrainian minorities, "cynical".<sup>235</sup> The *Spectator* likewise condemned the Soviet Union's invasion as a

treacherous and cynical attack, heralded by the contemptible and threadbare pretence, invoked with sickening monotony by the Nazis in like conditions rather than for an oppressed minority, which occasioned generally as much surprise as it did anger and disgust... Stalin's crime is only a few shades less black than Hitler's.<sup>236</sup>

In the view of the *Economist*, the "morality of the Russian act is inexplicable". The journal believed there had to be a lack of mutual trust between the "Nazi lion and the Bolshevik jackal" if the Soviet Government, as it alleged, was forced to act to prevent Germany from using the minorities in Poland as a springboard for an invasion into the Ukraine.<sup>237</sup>

A difference of opinion arose amongst the liberal press's estimation of British responsibility for the invasion of Poland. In the opinion of the *News Chronicle*, the "real tragedy" was Britain's mistreatment and scorn of the Soviet Government's proposals which encouraged Moscow to look elsewhere.<sup>238</sup> The *Spectator*, however, refused to blame the British negotiators and Government because "Germany and Russia lack British morals".<sup>239</sup>

The labour press was similarly divided amongst itself concerning the Soviet Union's role in the defeat of the Poles. With the Red Army invasion of Poland, the *Daily Herald* denounced the Soviet Government for embarking on war for territorial gain, which demonstrated how far Stalin's Russia had deviated from Lenin's. The paper noted the cynicism of the Soviet Government's decision "clothed in phrases struck directly

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<sup>235</sup> The *News Chronicle*, 18 September 1939. Leading article, "Russia Marches In".

<sup>236</sup> The *Spectator*, 22 September 1939. "The Unholy Alliance".

<sup>237</sup> The *Economist*, 23 September 1939. Leading article, "Red Nazis".

<sup>238</sup> The *News Chronicle*, 19 September 1939. Leading article, "The Russian Enigma".

<sup>239</sup> The *Spectator*, 22 September 1939. "The Unholy Alliance". See Also, the *Manchester Guardian*, 18 September 1939. Leading article, "A New Partition".



Fig.6.8

from the Nazi mint". Most significantly, the *Daily Herald* admitted that it would no longer be deluded by the belief that the Soviet Union "set examples to the world in social justice and international fair dealing".<sup>240</sup> W. N. Ewer, the Diplomatic Correspondent for the paper, suggested Stalin was an imperialist who did not place the welfare of his people first and therefore, his "hero is now Peter the Great rather than Lenin."<sup>241</sup>

In a contrasting attitude, the *New Statesman and Nation*, though displeased by the Nazi-Soviet pact, did not feel the Red Army's occupation of Poland was necessarily a bad circumstance for Britain and the Allies. As a result of the Soviet Union preventing Hitler from acquiring important resources and the Baltic states, the journal continued to believe Moscow was essentially helping Britain.<sup>242</sup> This point of view was very similar to the *Daily Worker* which stressed that the Soviet Government was forced to act quickly

<sup>240</sup> The *Daily Herald*, 18 September 1939. Leading article, "We Shall Not Fail".

<sup>241</sup> The *Daily Herald*, 21 September 1939. "Russian Riddle Solved" by Ewer. Also see the cartoon by Low, Figure 6.8. The *Evening Standard*, 26 October 1939, "Russian Lake".

<sup>242</sup> The *New Statesman and Nation*, 23 September 1939. Leading article, "Brest-Litovsk Revenged".

as the Nazis "rapidly swept" through Poland to the border of the Ukraine and Belorussia.<sup>243</sup>

### Conclusion

The tripartite negotiations represented the first event which had positively united the British press towards the Soviet Union. All newspapers and journals demanded an agreement between Britain and the Soviet Union. Even though *The Times* was unenthusiastic, the rest of the quality conservative press urged the British Government to display more interest in an alliance with the Soviet Union by increasing the pace of the negotiations. Criticism of the Soviet Union occurred regularly, though it was balanced by disapproval with the British Government's failure to make significant attempts to secure an agreement. Only the *Scotsman* repeatedly and blatantly criticised the Soviet Union for demanding too much.

The popular conservative press recognised that an isolationist policy was useless in the crisis facing Europe in 1939 and accepted that the British people wanted an alliance with the Soviet Union. Thus the Rothermere and Beaverbrook newspapers called for the British Government to reach an honourable alliance quickly and not necessarily all on Soviet terms. Most unusual for the popular conservative press was their restraint from bitter criticism towards the Soviet Union as these papers recognised that Britain needed Soviet assistance regardless of differences in ideology.

Initially, the liberal press focused its criticism on the British Government for failing to advance the negotiations. However, as delays continued in the summer, disapproval of Soviet efforts became as frequent as criticism directed at Britain's endeavours. Thus the liberal press disappointingly suggested that neither wanted an alliance even though both would benefit immensely by the reciprocal demands.

In general, the labour press believed the Soviet Union was sincerely trying to secure an alliance, while the British Government, with its traditional Tory prejudices,

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<sup>243</sup> *The Daily Worker*, 18 September 1939. "Soviet Counter-Blow Vs Nazis" and leading article, "Counter-Blow Vs. Nazis". See also, various articles on 19, 20, and 22 September 1939.

refused to reach an alliance. Thus the overwhelming majority of labour press criticism was focused against the British leadership, though on occasions, these papers were disappointed that the Soviet Government demanded so much.

It appeared that the British leadership was unconcerned with Fleet Street's demands for an alliance and the consequent criticism in newspapers of the Government's failure to negotiate with Moscow. When the Prime Minister pursued crucial talks with Hitler in September 1938, Chamberlain met with journalists to explain his moves and his expectations for success.<sup>244</sup> However, there were no similar meetings between the Prime Minister and journalists during the long months of important negotiations between Britain and the Soviet Union. Furthermore, Seeds did not complain that the British press was ruining the discussions in Moscow, also a marked contrast from Sir Neville Henderson, the British Ambassador in Berlin, who repeatedly passed on the Nazi Government's criticism that British newspapers made the international situation worse in 1938.<sup>245</sup> Thus in 1938, the British Government exerted more influence over Fleet Street, whereas in 1939, the British press asserted its independence though not sufficiently to convince the British leadership to reach an agreement with the Soviet Government.

With the signing of the Nazi-Soviet pact, Fleet Street became perplexed rather than hostile towards the Soviet Union. Only the *Scotsman* was extremely critical of the Soviet Government while the rest of the British press retained a degree of optimism. The conservative newspapers, though in general concluding that it might be better for Britain to fight without the services of the unreliable Soviet Union, recognised that the British Government was responsible to an extent for Moscow choosing to side with Nazi Germany. There was as much condemnation directed at Hitler for allying with the communists as there was directed against Stalin for betraying the principles of collective security against aggression. Although none of the quality conservative press believed the Soviet Union had signed a pact with Germany primarily to hurt Britain, some of these

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<sup>244</sup> D.B.F.P., Third Series, Vol. II, Appendix III.

<sup>245</sup> See for example, D.B.F.P., Third Series, Vol. I, nos. 252 and 269.

papers suggested the British would do as well without the Soviet Union's strength against Germany in Eastern Europe.

There was little disapproval in the popular conservative press of Britain's failure to reach an agreement since it was assumed the Soviet Government was simply untrustworthy. However, these newspapers continued to refrain from severe criticism of the Soviet Union, though there was disappointment, as these papers recognised that Britain and the USSR could eventually become allies since Hitler's aim ultimately remained the occupation of the Ukraine.

The liberal and labour press, however, were primarily disappointed with the British Government for failing to recognise that a Nazi-Soviet pact was a legitimate possibility. Though the Soviet Union was criticised for traitorously turning to Germany, the liberal and labour press admitted that the British Government had driven them to it. These papers, like the conservative press, retained the hope that the Soviet Union would not do anything which would cause the defeat of Britain in the war against Germany. Nevertheless, the *Daily Herald* found less to trust in the Soviet Union and became more sceptical of Moscow's aims. However, the most important circumstance for Fleet Street was not that the Soviet Union had defected to the enemy, but the fact that the Nazi-Soviet pact did not alter Britain's commitment to Poland.

Though British public opinion was dissatisfied by the Nazi-Soviet pact and the Red Army occupation of Poland, a large majority continued to hope for close, friendly relations between Britain and the Soviet Union. The public, though admitting "Russia was a dark horse", believed ultimately "Russia will come in on our side" to defeat Nazi Germany.<sup>246</sup> The *Daily Herald* noted that although the British people were "hot with indignation" towards the Soviet Union, they were also bewildered by "peaceful Russia making war".<sup>247</sup> In September, a B.I.P.O. survey showed that the British population was confused by the effects of the Nazi-Soviet pact. When considering if the agreement helped or hindered Germany's efforts to make war against Britain, 30 per cent answered

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<sup>246</sup> Tom Harrisson, "Public Opinion about Russia", pp. 356-357.

<sup>247</sup> The *Daily Herald*, 21 September 1939. "Russian Riddle Solved" by Ewer.

"both" while 18 per cent suggested "neither". Only 32 per cent clearly believed the Soviet Government significantly helped Germany.<sup>248</sup> In November, a B.I.P.O. poll revealed that 68 per cent of people surveyed did not expect the Soviet Union to give sufficient support to Germany to cause a British defeat.<sup>249</sup> Thus *The Times* was not entirely correct in September when it alleged that "British public opinion is revolted, though not in the least dismayed, by these cynical exercises in the lower diplomacy".<sup>250</sup> Furthermore, in October, 47 per cent of those questioned wanted a British Minister to go to Moscow to discuss future relations with the Soviet Government.<sup>251</sup>

The Soviet Union actively changed its foreign policy, not with the signing of the Nazi-Soviet pact, but with the invasion of Poland. The plan became one of security through strategic-political expansion through a series of *ad hoc* responses and reactions to events rather than planning. Poland was the first of many hesitant steps, in which the Baltic states, Finland and Rumania would follow.<sup>252</sup> Though the British press noted the change from collective security to offensive action with the invasion of Poland, Fleet Street continued to hope the Soviet Government would not become an aggressor along the lines of Hitler. Therefore, the British press maintained a cautious, though friendly, attitude towards the Soviet Union until these newspapers and journals were given a stronger reason than Poland to alter their opinions. Such an event, the Winter War, which began on 30 November 1939, forced Fleet Street to form a more critical attitude towards the Soviet Union.

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<sup>248</sup> B.I.P.O., Gallup Poll, September 1939: "Do you think Russia's recent actions have helped or have hindered Germany in making war against us?" 32 per cent replied "helped"; 8 per cent replied "hindered"; 30 per cent replied "both"; 18 per cent replied "neither"; 12 per cent replied "don't know".

<sup>249</sup> B.I.P.O., Gallup Poll, November 1939. 14 per cent believed Russian help would assist in a German victory over Britain while 18 per cent remained undecided.

<sup>250</sup> *The Times*, 18 September 1939. Leading article, "Stalin Shows His Hand".

<sup>251</sup> B.I.P.O., Gallup Poll, October 1939. 34 per cent were opposed to a Ministerial visit and 19 per cent were undecided.

<sup>252</sup> Roberts, *Soviet Decision*, pp. 69 and 74.

## Chapter 7

### **British-Soviet cooperation?**

On 3 September 1939, Britain declared war on Germany without the assistance of the Soviet Union. The British were unable to offer effective help to the Polish people who were defeated within a fortnight. The Soviet Union shared in the spoils and throughout the autumn there were signs that Moscow intended to seize further territory in Eastern Europe. When the Baltic States were forced to make military concessions in October to the Soviet Union, the British Government practically ignored their plight. However, when the Soviet Government accused the Finns of aggressive intentions and responded by attacking Finland, the British leadership was forced to react to such blatant aggrandisement, especially since the amount of protest by the British public and the press against the Soviet Union and sympathy for Finland was phenomenal. Although the British Government, already at war with Germany, sensibly refrained from taking military action against the Soviet Union, relations between the two countries grew even more strained since it was an action of significance as serious and threatening as the Nazi-Soviet pact. For example, the British Ambassador, Sir William Seeds, left Moscow at the end of 1939 and was not replaced until June 1940 by Sir Stafford Cripps. Britain remained unresponsive in the summer of 1940 when the Baltic states were integrated into the Soviet Union and Bessarabia was annexed from Rumania. By this time, France had fallen and Britain was preparing for a German invasion. Of further importance were the repeated rumours in late 1940 that Germany and the Soviet Union regularly disagreed over interests in the Balkans. It was at this point that the British Government began to make careful diplomatic overtures to Moscow in preparation for cooperation should Germany attack the Soviet Union as appeared increasingly likely in the spring of 1941. However, Britain was forced to wait as the Soviet Government preferred to accommodate the Germans to avoid military conflict. It was not until Germany invaded the Soviet

Union, Operation Barbarossa, that the British and Soviet Governments became allies, thus removing the dislike of the previous eighteen months.

Although Fleet Street expressed concern for the Soviet Government's method of dealing with the Baltic states in the autumn of 1939, it appeared that these countries, despite coercion and intimidation, were able to retain their sovereignty by making concessions.<sup>1</sup> However, it was the Soviet Government's attempts to coerce Finland into conceding territory and islands for military bases which caused the British press to focus intensely on the tactics of the Soviet Union. The attack on the "poor but brave and heroic Finns"<sup>2</sup> led to a large degree of antipathy in British press coverage of the Soviet Union at the time. The only exceptions were the *Daily Worker* and, most surprisingly, the *New Statesman and Nation* which accepted the invasion for the reasons given by Molotov. It was remarkable that one incident could occupy so much coverage in the British press, especially when newspapers were greatly reduced in size with the start of the war to ration paper and newsprint.

Furthermore, the Winter War was not officially the British Government's concern since Britain was at war only with Germany. However, the conflict in Finland occurred during the Phoney War so the British press had the time to report events in Scandinavia. Nevertheless, it was the intensity of the daily condemnation for the Soviet Union by Fleet Street which made the war in Finland so important to British people. The press also decided that the true circumstances of the Nazi-Soviet pact were again being demonstrated. British press and public opinion concerning the Soviet Union reached an unprecedented low in the winter of 1939 and 1940 which took a long time to mend. In a B.I.P.O. poll conducted in November 1939, 42 per cent of people questioned wanted

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<sup>1</sup> See for example, *The Times*, 7 October 1939. "Russia's Grip on Baltic" by the Moscow Correspondent. *The Daily Express*, 27, 29 and 30 September 1939. *The Daily Mail*, 10 October 1939. Leading article, "Red Baltic".

<sup>2</sup> Nearly the entire British press used this phrase or variations of it between December 1939 and March 1940.

British military assistance sent to Scandinavia if the area became involved in war with the Soviet Union.<sup>3</sup>

Such bitter condemnation of the Soviet Union was the reverse of the previous nine months and was especially notable when compared to the lack of criticism and even interest in the Soviet Union's expansionist aims against the Baltic states and Rumania in the summer of 1940. By this time, the British press, first, was far more interested in events in Western Europe - the Low Countries and France were defeated in May and June and thus Fleet Street was naturally more concerned about the impending German attack on Britain. Secondly, as Soviet interests turned towards the Balkans, it became obvious to the British press that Germany and the Soviet Union would have to settle a conflict of interest as both countries coveted South-Eastern Europe. The awareness by Fleet Street of the potential clash and crisis in cooperation led British newspapers to report with caution and a degree of hope on the issues affecting Germany and the Soviet Union. Though most papers were unable to forget the attack on Finland, Fleet Street was sufficiently realistic to recognise that Britain's survival depended on the German and Soviet Governments seriously <sup>disagreeing</sup> ~~disagreeing~~ so that Moscow would become the ally of Britain. Thus press coverage concerning the Soviet Union in the second half of 1940 and the first half of 1941 was devoted to explaining the increased conflict between Germany and the Soviet Union and expressing the hope that Britain and Moscow would work together.

Nevertheless, the British press was forced to exhibit patience as the Soviet Union constantly stated relations between Moscow and Berlin were very amicable. Thus, at times, Fleet Street was justifiably critical of the Soviet Government. However, at no point in 1940 or 1941 did any newspaper or journal lose sight of the fact that Germany was the enemy and therefore, if an alliance with the Soviet Union, despite its dubious history of relations with Britain in the 1930s, was necessary to defeat Hitler, then the British press was determined to support the Government's efforts to secure such an ally.

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<sup>3</sup> British Institute of Public Opinion (B.I.P.O.), Gallup Poll, November 1939. 42 per cent replied "yes"; 38 per cent replied "no"; and 20 per cent replied "no opinion". This poll shows that a significant number of people were willing to believe the Soviet Union was also an enemy of Britain.

### "The Crime against Finland"<sup>4</sup>

In October, the quality conservative press reported indifferently on Finland's discussions with the Soviet Union while the liberal and labour press displayed more concern. The quality conservative press was merely reflecting the British Government's lack of interest in an area which appeared to have little effect on the war against Germany. Furthermore, to avoid another area of conflict, the British Government encouraged the Finns to accept the Soviet terms as they were not entirely unreasonable.<sup>5</sup> Thus *The Times* assumed Finland would peacefully hand over the territory which the Soviet Government demanded as there was "no justification in Finland holding these islands if it threatens peace". The paper further conceded that the Finnish frontier was close to Leningrad and perhaps ought to be revised.<sup>6</sup> The *Observer* stated there would be no war over Finland because "Soviet policy is too astute to incur the world's ill-will", thus demonstrating how little Garvin understood the Soviet Union. The paper indifferently reported that the Baltic states were again "Russian provinces with local governments" but acknowledged that Finland was different because it was "the Switzerland of the North". Therefore, in Garvin's view, even though the Finns would have to make some concessions to Soviet naval interests in the Gulf, Finland would remain "strong and free".<sup>7</sup> In contrast, the liberal and labour press recognised the signs of an aggressor, whose "ominous" threats to Finland sounded "Germanic".<sup>8</sup> The *Manchester Guardian* and the *News Chronicle* warned that the Finns remained isolated against "Russian imperialism" since the Baltic states only retained nominal independence after making concessions to Soviet demands.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>4</sup> Title of a leading article in the *Sunday Times*, 3 December 1939.

<sup>5</sup> Anthony Upton, *Finland, 1939-40*, pp. 27 and 39. Gabriel Gorodetsky, *The Impact of the Ribbentrop-Molotov Pact on the Course of Soviet Foreign Policy*, p. 29. Sir Llewellyn Woodward, *British Foreign Policy in the Second World War*, p. 38. Bayer offers an opposing view: some in the British Government encouraged Finland to resist though the Foreign Office saw the Finnish position as one of "sheer folly". It was suggested that Finnish resistance might help Allied interests against Germany as a war involving the Soviet Union would prevent Russian supplies from reaching Germany, hinder Swedish trade with Germany, and could ultimately lead to war between Germany and the Soviet Union. See J. A. Bayer, *British Policy Towards the Russo-Finnish War, 1939-1940*. pp. 28-33.

<sup>6</sup> *The Times*, 21 October 1939. "The Finnish Problem".

<sup>7</sup> *The Observer*, 15 October 1939. "War and Policy - Finland Stands Fast" by J. L. Garvin.

<sup>8</sup> *The Daily Herald*, 4 November 1939. Leading article, "Threat to Finland".



Thus *The Times* and the *Scotsman* sarcastically pointed out that the "world" was "ludicrously" asked to believe the Finns shot at themselves.<sup>12</sup> In the opinion of the *Sunday Times*, "even against the sombre background of recent history, Russia's crime against Finland stands out with peculiar blackness". The paper accused the Soviet Union of cruelty more "odious because of its hypocrisy" for past pretences of peace and for being the alleged friend of "small nations".<sup>13</sup> The *Scotsman* claimed there was universal condemnation by the civilised world for the "contemptuous" attack and accused the Soviet Government of "nauseous hypocrisy" after years of protesting against aggression.<sup>14</sup>

The *Daily Telegraph* admitted that it had thought the Soviet Union exemplified peace and believed in self-determination of states until it "swallowed" half of Poland, the Baltic states and "arrogantly and deliberately" picked a quarrel with Finland. Thus the paper recognised Moscow's "sheer passion for aggrandisement" and sarcastically pointed out that the Soviet Government had borrowed from Berlin the "whole brutal and unconscionable" technique of aggression.<sup>15</sup> The *Observer* alleged "Adolf Molotov"<sup>16</sup> had "demonstrated further gratuitous illustrations of what to expect from a reign of brute force".<sup>17</sup> Like Hitler blaming the Poles, Stalin accused the Finns of being the aggressors, though *The Times* believed "this trick is so stale, we wonder why any war-monger still troubles to employ it."<sup>18</sup> Even though the paper was not surprised by the Soviet Union's decision to invade Finland, *The Times* admitted to "being amazed by Stalin's slavish fidelity in following Hitler's technique".<sup>19</sup>

Unlike the rest of the British press, the popular conservative newspapers reported that Finland surrendered without fighting, basing its news on the fact that the Finnish

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<sup>12</sup> *The Times*, 30 November 1939. Leading article, "Finland and the Soviet"; 1 December 1939, article by the Moscow Correspondent. The *Scotsman*, 30 November 1939. Leading article, "Finland's Peril".

<sup>13</sup> *The Sunday Times*, 3 December 1939. Leading article, "The Crime Against Finland".

<sup>14</sup> *The Scotsman*, 2 December 1939. Leading article, "Finland's Ordeal".

<sup>15</sup> *The Daily Telegraph*, 30 November 1939. Leading article, "Menaced Finland".

<sup>16</sup> *The Observer*, 3 December 1939. Leading article, "Adolf Molotov".

<sup>17</sup> *The Observer*, 10 December 1939. Leading article, "What We Fight For".

<sup>18</sup> *The Times*, 1 December 1939. Leading article, "The Invasion of Finland".

<sup>19</sup> *The Times*, 4 December 1939. Leading article, "Kommissar into Gauleiter".

Government resigned on 1 December.<sup>20</sup> These papers could be excused for reporting inaccurately since the Foreign Office also believed the resignation of the Finnish Government heralded Finland's capitulation.<sup>21</sup> For example, the *Evening Standard* justifiably wrote that because there were so many victims, Finland had no choice but to sue for peace since becoming a vassal to the Soviet Union was better than being a corpse.<sup>22</sup> However, once the popular conservative press realised the Finns intended to resist, these papers regularly described the "heroic" and determined effort by Finland.

As with the quality conservative press, the Beaverbrook and Rothermere newspapers made parallels between German and Soviet styles of aggression. The *Evening Standard* suggested the Soviet Union would suffer a blackened record from its adventure because after twenty years of boasting it opposed "imperialist cravings", it adopted, "sickeningly and servilely", Hitler's technique.<sup>23</sup> The *Evening News* reported that the free nations of the world watched "with nausea the tragedy of Poland enacted again". Owing to the fact that Finland had not agreed "instantly and abjectly like serfs" to the brutal demands of the Kremlin, the paper alleged that Molotov wanted to "teach these instigators of war a lesson".<sup>24</sup> The *Daily Mail* pointed out that Stalin was adding to his criminal record by "murderously assaulting" a victim whose only offence, in the paper's view, was to be the weak neighbour of a predatory power. Thus Stalin had proved to be the "assiduous pupil" of the Nazi leader, though the paper accused Stalin of being "less adroit" because his "trumped-up" excuses were "even flimsier" than Hitler's.<sup>25</sup> In the opinion of the *Daily Express*, it was unreasonable to suggest that a country whose population was only four million, the size of the Soviet Union's peace time army, would start a war.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> See for example, the *Daily Mail*, 1 December 1939. Leading article, "Murder of Finland". The *Daily Express*, 1 December 1939. Leading article, "Murdered".

<sup>21</sup> Bayer, p. 34.

<sup>22</sup> The *Evening Standard*, 1 December 1939. Leading article, "One Day".

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> The *Evening News*, 30 November 1939. Leading article, "The Finnish Tragedy".

<sup>25</sup> The *Daily Mail*, 1 December 1939. Leading article, "Murder of Finland". See also, the *Daily Express*, 1 December 1939.

<sup>26</sup> The *Daily Express*, 30 November 1939. Leading article, "The Lamb is Accused".

The liberal and labour press believed Soviet foreign policy had reached the end of an epoch by "wantonly, inexcusably, openly and unashamedly" invading Finland, thus demonstrating that the Soviet Union valued collective security less than its private ambitions. These papers watched the Soviet Union cynically forfeit the respect of the world thereby undoing all its "splendid years of work".<sup>27</sup> The *Daily Herald* accused the Soviet Union of copying "absolutely" the tactics of Hitlerism thereby turning the "laws of civilisation into jungle law".<sup>28</sup> The *News Chronicle* suggested the Soviet Government lacked a case against Finland since it was "nonsense and fantasy" to allege that the Finns posed a threat to the Soviet Union's security.<sup>29</sup> The *Manchester Guardian* similarly stated that the Soviet Government's reasons for invading Finland were as "flimsy" as Germany's with Poland since it was inconceivable that a country of four million, "an aggressive pigmy", wished to attack Leningrad.<sup>30</sup> Although the *Economist* suggested that "not even the Nazis were so flagrant" in the quarrels they deliberately picked, the journal, nevertheless, retained a greater "hatred" of the Nazis.<sup>31</sup>

The *New Statesman and Nation* curiously expressed an opinion opposite to the rest of the British press, an opinion which was surprisingly similar to that of the *Daily Worker*. The *New Statesman and Nation* did not condemn the Soviet Union's attack on Finland but actually stated that Stalin had no choice but to assume that the Finnish refusal to reach an agreement showed the Finns had aggressive intentions. The journal suggested that Stalin could reasonably expect Germany to use Finland as a springboard for an invasion.<sup>32</sup> More habitual was the *Daily Worker's* condemnation of "those people" who believed the Soviet Union "threatened poor little Finland" because the paper stated that in reality, Finland had been on a "war footing for months". Thus the paper

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<sup>27</sup> The *Manchester Guardian*, 1 December 1939. Leading article, "The War on Finland". The *News Chronicle*, 30 November 1939. Leading article, "Finland's Crisis"; 1 December 1939, leading article, "The Invasion of Finland". The *Daily Herald*, 1 December 1939. Leading article, "Wanton Attack".

<sup>28</sup> The *Daily Herald*, 2 December 1939. Leading article, "Ruthless War"; 28 November 1939, leading article, "More Provocation"; 30 November 1939, leading article, "Imperial Threats".

<sup>29</sup> The *News Chronicle*, 28 November 1939. Leading article, "Russia and Finland".

<sup>30</sup> The *Manchester Guardian*, 29 November 1939. Leading article, "Threats to Finland".

<sup>31</sup> The *Economist*, 9 December 1939. Leading article, "Stalin's Aggression".

<sup>32</sup> The *New Statesman and Nation*, 2 December 1939. "Comments - Russia's Patience".

was not entirely surprised that the Finns had refused to reach an "honourable" agreement like the Baltic states. The communist paper, therefore, argued that the Soviet Government was simply looking to protect itself since Finland was a convenient "jumping-off" point for the West against the Soviet Union.<sup>33</sup> In another leading article, the *Daily Worker* claimed "Chamberlain engineered the war in Northern Europe through a Finnish puppet government". Thus the fight in Finland was not a conflict between a "wolf and a lamb", but between the Western imperialist powers using Finland as their outpost against the socialist state which "defends the interests of the world's workers".<sup>34</sup>

### Germany's influence

Not only did the British press discuss how similar Stalin's methods were to Hitler's, but Fleet Street also addressed the issue of whether or not Germany and the Soviet Union were in agreement over the attack on Finland. Initial reports by the conservative press suggested Hitler did not support the Soviet Union's invasion of Finland. *The Times* and the *Daily Express* alleged that one reason for the attack on the Finns was that Stalin feared a German invasion through Finland.<sup>35</sup> Thus the *Observer* believed Germany's prestige was weakened by the Soviet invasion<sup>36</sup> and in the opinion of the *Yorkshire Post*, the attack could not be agreeable to Germany regardless of what Berlin said.<sup>37</sup> The *Daily Mail* disclosed that the German radio reported Finnish victories to the extent that "one might think Germany did not want Russia to win".<sup>38</sup>

At the beginning of December, the liberal and labour press similarly suggested a conflict of interest between Germany and the Soviet Union. The *News Chronicle* suggested that the Germans "did not favour" the Soviet Union's attack,<sup>39</sup> while the *Daily*

<sup>33</sup> *The Daily Worker*, 30 November 1939. Leading article, "Finland".

<sup>34</sup> *The Daily Worker*, 1 December 1939. Leading article, "Finland - The Facts".

<sup>35</sup> *The Times*, 1 December 1939. Leading article, "The Invasion of Finland". The *Daily Express*, 1 December 1939. Leading article, "Murdered". In this belief, the conservative press was similar to the *New Statesman and Nation*, 2 December 1939. "Comments - Russia's Patience."

<sup>36</sup> *The Observer*, 3 December 1939. "Soviet Act a Blow to Berlin" by the Diplomatic Correspondent.

<sup>37</sup> *The Yorkshire Post*, 1 December 1939. Leading article, "Brutal Russia".

<sup>38</sup> *The Daily Mail*, 9 December 1939. Leading article, "Germany and Finland".

<sup>39</sup> *The News Chronicle*, 4 December 1939. Leading article, "Finland Fights On".

*Herald* alleged Stalin had ignored the Nazi Government's warnings against an invasion.<sup>40</sup> Although the *Spectator* acknowledged it was possible Germany and the Soviet Union were cooperating to conquer all of Scandinavia,<sup>41</sup> the journal argued German prestige suffered by Stalin's move.<sup>42</sup> The *Economist* also believed the Soviet Union's attack strained the new relationship first, because the Nazi Government supported Finland and secondly, the Red Army's probable success in Finland presented a threat to Germany's access to Swedish ore.<sup>43</sup>

However, the British press soon suggested the opposite as newspapers alleged the occupation of Finland was a condition of the Nazi-Soviet pact. Fleet Street was correct since in the first paragraph of the Secret Additional Protocol of the Non-Aggression Treaty, the Soviet Government was given as its sphere of interest "the territories belonging to the Baltic States (Finland, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania)".<sup>44</sup> *The Times* and the *Sunday Times* reported that "recent events" showed Germany, "which lacks scruples over the independence of nations", was responsible for the Soviet Union's invasion of Finland.<sup>45</sup> Yet *The Times* claimed that this support for the Soviet Union was hypocritical since in 1938 the German Government had boasted of its role in liberating Finland from communist rule in 1918.<sup>46</sup> Furthermore, *The Times* and the *Manchester Guardian* alleged Germany was "embarrassed" by the Soviet Union's war of expansion especially since it caused problems between Hitler and Mussolini as the latter wished to offer assistance to the Finns. In addition, the Soviet Union's blockade of Finland prevented Scandinavian supplies from reaching Germany while the Soviet war effort required the use all resources, even those promised to Germany.<sup>47</sup> However,

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<sup>40</sup> *The Daily Herald*, 4 December 1939. "Stalin's Blow to Hitler Shocks Nazi Chiefs".

<sup>41</sup> *The Spectator*, 8 December 1939. "Where Will Russia Stop?"

<sup>42</sup> *The Spectator*, 8 December 1939. "The War Surveyed: Finland and Beyond" by Strategicus.

<sup>43</sup> *The Economist*, 9 December 1939. Leading article, "Stalin's Aggression". See also, the *Evening Standard*, 1 December 1939. Leading article, "One Day".

<sup>44</sup> D.G.F.P., Series D, Vol. VII, no. 229, "Secret Additional Protocol".

<sup>45</sup> *The Times*, 4 December 1939. "Moscow Bargain with Berlin" by the Diplomatic Correspondent. *The Sunday Times*, 3 December 1939. Leading article, "The Crime Against Finland".

<sup>46</sup> *The Times*, 14 December 1939. Leading article, "Germany's Lebensraum".

<sup>47</sup> *The Times*, 20 December 1939. "Nazi Concerns at Soviet War" by the Brussels Correspondent. See also, 10 January 1940. *The Manchester Guardian*, 15 December 1939. Leading article, "Germany and Russia". See also, the *Sunday Times*, 3 December 1939.

because of the Nazi-Soviet pact, regardless of the economic implications, and despite popular opinion in Germany, Hitler refused to order the Soviet Government to stop the invasion and maintained a neutrality which unsurprisingly favoured the USSR. Nevertheless, in later stages of the war when the Allies threatened to intervene, Germany encouraged Moscow and the Finns to end the conflict.<sup>48</sup>

### Britain's response

The criticism in the conservative press for the Soviet Government was interspersed with pity for the soldiers of the Red Army who were allegedly forced to fight by the communist dictatorship. The *Sunday Times's* Special Correspondent for the Finnish War, Virginia Cowles, reported that captured Russian troops had been told by their leaders that the Finns would welcome them as liberators.<sup>49</sup> The Stockholm Correspondent for *The Times* called the Red Army "clumsy"<sup>50</sup> as a result of poor equipment and especially because the leadership was deceived into believing the invincibility of their army regardless of the heavy purges in the military which not only decreased the number of competent leaders, but also ruined morale.<sup>51</sup> The *Daily Express* admitted that although the "Russians were notoriously brave", they were not fighting with modern tactics and were "badly-led, ill-clad, and supplied with poor quality arms".<sup>52</sup> The *Evening News* sarcastically suggested that the efficiency of Stalin's forces had not been improved by the systematic shooting of all his good generals.<sup>53</sup> At the end of December, the paper accused Stalin of carrying through the theory of dictatorship to its "logical and cold-blooded conclusion" as Russian bodies were found without identification badges thus signifying that they were merely the "unknown slaves of the

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<sup>48</sup> Upton, pp. 78-79.

<sup>49</sup> The *Sunday Times*, 18 February 1940. "Red Army's Race Against Time" by Virginia Cowles. *The Times*, 4 January 1940. Leading article, "The Fighting Finns".

<sup>50</sup> *The Times*, 12 December 1939. "Finns Recapture a Town" by the Stockholm Correspondent. See also, 4 January 1940.

<sup>51</sup> *The Times*, 21 December 1939. Leading article, "Finland's Heroic Stand".

<sup>52</sup> The *Daily Express*, 4 December 1939. "Russians Using Out of Date Tactics" by the Military Correspondent; 9 December 1939. Leading article, "Courage of Despair".

<sup>53</sup> The *Evening News*, 7 December 1939. Leading article, "David and Goliath".

Kremlin".<sup>54</sup> Three weeks into the fighting, the quality conservative press reported the Red Army was retreating everywhere and that the soldiers of the Red Army were losing confidence.<sup>55</sup>

*The Times's* denunciations of the Soviet Union intensified daily while its admiration of Finland correspondingly increased. *The Times* supported "gallant" Finland's decision to fight for its "life and liberty" rather than the servitude which the "self-seeking Soviets" wished to impose.<sup>56</sup> *The Daily Telegraph* and the *Scotsman* expressed great satisfaction that, contrary to the belief of many western military experts, "heroic" Finland survived three weeks of fighting, fought "magnificently", and thus "drew the admiration of the world". However, the *Scotsman* was worried that such success could not hold out indefinitely even though the Red Army was in retreat, suffered great losses and abandoned equipment.<sup>57</sup> This encouraged debate in the British press over the possibility of British aid to Finland and the threat of Britain becoming involved in a war against the Soviet Union.

Although the *Sunday Times* recognised that the world, apart from Germany and the Soviet Union, sympathised with Finland, the paper wondered how far that would transform into action.<sup>58</sup> In the first days of fighting, *The Times* pointed out that although Finland's friends were "outraged" by the use of force against the "small nation", the Finns were "not in a position to be helped" as Germany and the Soviet Union were the closest countries to Scandinavia. Chamberlain's expressions of sympathy and condemnation of the attack were thus sufficient for *The Times*.<sup>59</sup> *The Daily Telegraph* likewise offered its sympathy with that of the "rest of the world" but made no suggestion

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<sup>54</sup> *The Evening News*, 28 December 1939. Leading article, "The Rights of Man".

<sup>55</sup> *The Times*, 28 December 1939. Leading article, "A Valiant Defiance"; 30 December 1939, "Doubts among Russians" by the Stockholm Correspondent. *The Daily Telegraph*, 23 December 1939. Leading article, "Finland Fighting Back". *The Scotsman*, 23 December 1939. Leading article, "Finnish Resistance".

<sup>56</sup> *The Times*, 2 December 1939. Leading article, "Moscow without the Mask"; 4 December 1939, leading article, "Kommissar into Gauleiter"; 8 December 1939, leading article, "A Gallant Defense".

<sup>57</sup> *The Daily Telegraph*, 22 December 1939. Leading article, "Finland's Heroic Struggle". *The Scotsman*, 23 December 1939. Leading article, "Finnish Resistance".

<sup>58</sup> *The Sunday Times*, 24 December 1939. Leading article, "Aid for the Finns".

<sup>59</sup> *The Times*, 1 December 1939. Leading article, "The Invasion of Finland".

of sending assistance.<sup>60</sup> The *Yorkshire Post* regretted that the Soviet Union would probably succeed all too quickly since the Scandinavian countries were virtually powerless, and despite sympathy in the United States, the Americans stressed their neutrality. Similarly, though the British felt great compassion, they were already occupied against Germany and the *Yorkshire Post* specifically claimed Britain was not responsible for Finland.<sup>61</sup>

However, in mid-December, the *Yorkshire Post* accepted that Britain would send some aid but warned that the Germans remained Britain's chief enemy.<sup>62</sup> *The Times* also gradually changed its attitude towards assistance when it reported that because Britain "so admired" the Finns, the British wanted to help.<sup>63</sup> Thus at the end of December, *The Times* and the *Daily Telegraph* were urging that greater assistance be given to support the "outpost of democracy withstanding the menace of barbarism" because Finland's cause "is the cause of the whole civilised world". Therefore, these papers supported the release of munitions by the British and French Governments despite the need for weapons against Germany.<sup>64</sup> The *Daily Telegraph* pointed out that diplomatic support alone was not enough to sustain miracles and Finnish heroism deserved help. The paper argued that the West could not afford to allow Finland to fall to a tyrant's ambitions and therefore, more was needed than a few thousand Swedish volunteers.<sup>65</sup> Furthermore, Germany was reportedly attempting to help its partner by warning the neutral states of Scandinavia not to assist Finland.<sup>66</sup> As the Soviet Union's success increased against the Finns in February, *The Times* and the *Daily Telegraph*

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<sup>60</sup> The *Daily Telegraph*, 1 December 1939. Leading article, "Freedom's Last Martyr"; 2 December 1939, leading article, "World Conscience Shocked".

<sup>61</sup> The *Yorkshire Post*, 1 December 1939. Leading article, "Brutal Russia".

<sup>62</sup> The *Yorkshire Post*, 15 December 1939. "British Supplies for Finland".

<sup>63</sup> *The Times*, 21 December 1939. Leading article, "Finland's Heroic Stand".

<sup>64</sup> *The Times*, 28 December 1939. Leading article, "A Valiant Defiance". The *Daily Telegraph*, 28 December 1939. Leading article, "Finland Continues Her Struggle".

<sup>65</sup> The *Daily Telegraph*, 23 December 1939. Leading article, "Finland Fighting Back"; 22 December 1939, leading article, "Finland's Heroic Struggle"; 28 December 1939, leading article, "Finland Continues Her Struggle"; 20 January 1940, leading article, "World Sympathy for Finland"; 27 January 1940, leading article, "Finland's Fight". *The Times*, 18 January 1940. Leading article, "Finland's Cause".

<sup>66</sup> The *Daily Telegraph*, 9 January 1940. Leading article, "Neutrals Stand Firm".

extended their calls for assistance to reverse the trends.<sup>67</sup> The *Daily Telegraph* urged the "friends of freedom" to help as there should be no "delay in payment" since every nation was in Finland's debt.<sup>68</sup>

However, the popular conservative press was convinced that although the Finns fought bravely and deserved help against the Soviet Union, it was inappropriate for Britain to send aid. Thus the Beaverbrook and Rothermere newspapers most closely reflected the attitude of the British Government which believed that because the Winter War was not a threat to the Allies, Britain should not enter the conflict unless the Soviet Union threatened Sweden and Norway.<sup>69</sup> The *Evening News* called Finland's fight "gallant", similar to "David fighting Goliath", because the "3,670,000 free people of Finland are fighting 180 million slaves of Russia".<sup>70</sup> Nevertheless, the *Daily Express* believed the outlook was "black" as there was "only one end".<sup>71</sup> The paper acknowledged that there were people in Britain and abroad, specifically mentioning Italy, who asked why the British did not declare war on the Soviet Union, to which the *Daily Express* replied "One [war] is enough". The Beaverbrook paper did not want Britain to become "side-tracked" or to spread itself too thinly as the focus of conflict had to remain against Hitler.<sup>72</sup> The *Evening Standard* recognised that the war in Finland was overshadowing the hostilities in the West, with the result that British people were allegedly asking if Britain was fighting the correct enemy. Though the paper felt the Soviet Union's "wanton and brutal assault" was worse than Germany's, the *Evening Standard*, however, warned that it was Hitler's "dearest wish" for the British to fight the Soviet Union thereby relieving the Germans of the pressure of having to attack Britain.

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<sup>67</sup> *The Times*, 15 February 1940. Leading article, "Volunteers for Finland". The *Daily Telegraph*, 15 February 1940. Leading article, "Finland's Urgent Need".

<sup>68</sup> The *Daily Telegraph*, 29 February 1940. Leading article, "Finland Fights On". See also, *The Times*, 26 February 1940. Leading article, "The Cause of Finland".

<sup>69</sup> Upton, p 79.

<sup>70</sup> The *Evening News*, 30 November 1939. Leading article, "The Finnish Tragedy"; 7 December 1939, leading article, "David and Goliath".

<sup>71</sup> The *Daily Express*, 2 December 1939. Leading article, "Treachery"; 9 December 1939, leading article, "Courage of Despair".

<sup>72</sup> The *Daily Express*, 1 December 1939. Leading article, "Murdered".

Therefore, in the paper's view, it was essential that the British population remember who the enemy was.<sup>73</sup>

Although the *Daily Mail* offered its "profound sympathy" for the Finnish people, the paper believed nothing could be done by Britain to lessen Finland's plight.<sup>74</sup> Thus the *Evening Standard* suggested Finland look to the United States, who was not involved in the war against Germany.<sup>75</sup> The *Daily Express* additionally argued that Sweden and Norway had a duty to enter the war with Finland<sup>76</sup> and therefore, in January, could not understand why the Swedish Government had not "rallied" to the Finns as the Swedish population demanded.<sup>77</sup> Massive air raids on Finland at the end of January led the *Daily Express* to state that Finland's plea for help "must surely be heard", but "across the Atlantic".<sup>78</sup> The paper even disagreed with the Archbishop of Canterbury, who called for British help, and argued that Britain required every gun and plane at home, even though the paper acknowledged that the majority of British people agreed with the Archbishop and not the *Daily Express*.<sup>79</sup>

In February, the *Daily Express* reported that as a result of the Soviet Union's success, the British Government was disturbed and thus the paper's attitude altered enough to suggest Britain should make a limited contribution to Finland in materials and volunteers.<sup>80</sup> Though not expressing enthusiasm, the Beaverbrook newspaper did not object to British volunteers enlisting to fight in Finland, but British troops were required first against Hitler.<sup>81</sup> However, in March, the *Daily Express* reported that the agitation for Britain to help the Finns continued though the paper believed there was no justification for it. The newspaper pointed out that Britain already had enough to do, "it

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<sup>73</sup> The *Evening Standard*, 6 December 1939. Leading article, "Which Enemy?"; 2 December 1939, leading article, "Heroes of England".

<sup>74</sup> The *Daily Mail*, 1 December 1939. Leading article, "Murder of Finland"; 2 December 1939, leading article, "US and Finland"; 27 December 1939, leading article, "The Finns Fight On".

<sup>75</sup> The *Evening Standard*, 27 December 1939. Leading article, "Finland".

<sup>76</sup> The *Daily Express*, 27 December 1939. Leading article, "Bombs for Christmas".

<sup>77</sup> The *Daily Express*, 19 January 1940. "Rally to Finns' Is Battle Cry" by the Stockholm Correspondent.

<sup>78</sup> The *Daily Express*, 30 January 1940. Leading article, "Murder Marches On".

<sup>79</sup> The *Daily Express*, 2 February 1940. Leading article, "Help for Finland".

<sup>80</sup> The *Daily Express*, 19 February 1940. Leading article, "Troops for Finland".

<sup>81</sup> The *Daily Express*, 7 February 1940. By a Staff Reporter.

can't police the world", and that those who urged war on the Soviet Union were "unsound advisers".<sup>82</sup>

As with conservative newspapers, the liberal and labour press reported with surprise the failure of the Red Army to defeat Finland quickly. The *Spectator* wrote that the small Finnish army was "taking apart the large Russian army" because of the weakening effect of the purges.<sup>83</sup> The *Daily Herald* believed that Stalin had lost the legend of the Red Army's invincibility as it was forced to retreat repeatedly and thus the paper suggested that even if the USSR won, its enemies would not fear the Soviet Union as they had prior to December 1939.<sup>84</sup> The *News Chronicle*, though acknowledging Finland's heroic resistance, admitted that the world's sympathy should not lead to expectations that Finnish success would be more than temporary for the simple reason that Finland was too small.<sup>85</sup> The *Spectator* also pointed out that the Soviet Union was able to replace its troops with fresh men even though they were like "sheep driven to the slaughter".<sup>86</sup>

In contrast to the rest of the British press, the *New Statesman and Nation* provided excuses for the Soviet Union when the Red Army did not succeed as quickly as expected. For example, the journal suggested that unfavourable weather could account for the Red Army's slow progress.<sup>87</sup> In December, the journal pointed out that the Soviet Union was adapting its tactics for a larger offensive<sup>88</sup> and believed Moscow had merely underestimated its adversary in the beginning. Though failing to note the irony,

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<sup>82</sup> The *Daily Express*, 5 March 1940. Leading article, "War for Finland?". However, papers like the *News Chronicle* refuted the *Daily Express's* claims that the *News Chronicle* "supports a move to send this country into war against Russia on behalf of Finland": 6 January 1940, leading article, "Finland".

<sup>83</sup> The *Spectator*, 8 December 1939. "The War Surveyed: Finland and Beyond" by Strategicus; 15 December 1939, "The War Surveyed: The Finnish Campaign" by Strategicus.

<sup>84</sup> The *Daily Herald*, 28 December 1939. Leading article, "Growing Dim". The *Manchester Guardian*, 29 December 1939. Leading article, "Finland's War".

<sup>85</sup> The *News Chronicle*, 4 December 1939. Leading article, "Finland Fights On".

<sup>86</sup> The *Spectator*, 26 January 1940. "The War Surveyed: Finland and Morale" by Strategicus.

<sup>87</sup> The *New Statesman and Nation*, 9 December 1939. "Comments - The Attack on Finland".

<sup>88</sup> The *New Statesman and Nation*, 16 December 1939. "Comments - The Finnish Campaign".

the *New Statesman and Nation* indicated that the Soviet Union was finally paying the Finns the "compliment" of using better troops.<sup>89</sup>

Though recognising that a significant proportion of the British population wished to send aid, the liberal press pointed out that British help would naturally be limited by geography and the fact that Britain was at war with Germany. Therefore, the *News Chronicle* believed it would be of no service to Finland to raise false hopes of assistance<sup>90</sup> and the *Economist* condescendingly stated Britain could only promise the Finns that they "would not be forgotten".<sup>91</sup> Despite the courage and skill employed by the Finnish troops, the *Spectator* and the *Manchester Guardian* recognised that unless outside help arrived, there was only one outcome in Finland.<sup>92</sup> Therefore, Sweden and Norway were encouraged by the liberal press to send help especially since Finland's success ensured the safety of Scandinavia.<sup>93</sup> However, the *Manchester Guardian* recognised that Germany's attitude was critical of any aid for Finland, especially if from Sweden.<sup>94</sup>

Towards the end of December and early January, some of the liberal press changed its attitude concerning British aid to Finland. The *News Chronicle* and the *Manchester Guardian* recognised that Finland's heroism could not last for ever. Although "Russia had never been famous for its military brilliance", there was a "doggedness" in its troops in the opinion of the *Manchester Guardian*. Therefore, Finland required immediate aid from the West, at least as a gesture of humanity.<sup>95</sup> The *News Chronicle* did not believe that sending arms to Finland required a British

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<sup>89</sup> The *New Statesman and Nation*, 23 December 1939. "Comments - The Finnish War".

<sup>90</sup> The *News Chronicle*, 30 November 1939. Leading article, "Finland's Crisis".

<sup>91</sup> The *Economist*, 9 December 1939. Leading article, "Stalin's Aggression".

<sup>92</sup> The *Spectator*, 8 December 1939. "Where Will Russia Stop?". The *Manchester Guardian*, 2 December 1939. Leading article, "The Fate of Finland"; 22 December 1939, leading article, "Finland and Beyond"; 11 December 1939, leading article, "Finland's Fight". See also, the *News Chronicle*, 23 December 1939. Leading article, "Finland Holds On".

<sup>93</sup> The *News Chronicle*, 11 December 1939. Leading article, "Safety in Numbers". The *Manchester Guardian*, 29 November 1939. Leading article, "Threats to Finland".

<sup>94</sup> The *Manchester Guardian*, 5 December 1939. Leading article, "The War on Finland".

<sup>95</sup> The *News Chronicle*, 20 December 1939. Leading article, "Now or Never"; 11 January 1940, leading article, "Now Is the Time"; 22 January 1940, leading article, "Finland's Need". The *Manchester Guardian*, 29 December 1939. Leading article, "Finland's War"; 2 January 1940, leading article, "Ways to Finland".

declaration of war on the Soviet Union.<sup>96</sup> In contrast, the *Spectator* and the *Daily Herald*, though acknowledging "Europe's lasting debt to the Finns", believed that troops could not be sent to Finland as that would mean going to war against the Soviet Union while Britain was already struggling against a "more formidable aggressor".<sup>97</sup> However, in January, the *Spectator* suggested that "brilliant as Finland's victories are, it would be a delusion to suppose a nation of four million could stand indefinitely against 180 million unless powerful help is sent to them."<sup>98</sup> Therefore, the journal altered its attitude and wanted the Allies to do all they could for "heroic" Finland's "glowing passion for freedom".<sup>99</sup>

At the end of January, the *Manchester Guardian* believed the British and French Governments had much to fear if Finland was defeated and therefore, the paper suggested there should be less talk of Finland's heroic resistance, "since history would safely deal with that", and more thought on how to help the Finns.<sup>100</sup> Thus the calls for aid to be sent to Finland increased in urgency in February as the liberal press, and finally the *Daily Herald*, clearly understood the Soviet Union would win if Britain and France continued to ignore the situation. The *News Chronicle* demanded that Finland not become another Poland or Czechoslovakia and urged the Allies to enter the conflict in Finland, regardless of cost, thereby making it the turning point in Europe's war.<sup>101</sup> The *Manchester Guardian* wanted volunteers sent to relieve the small Finnish forces, arguing that Britain and France would suffer if Finland fell.<sup>102</sup> The *Spectator* demanded that every necessary effort be made without delay since "honour and interest alike" dictated that British support ought only to be limited by its capacity. The journal believed there was a terrible danger that "we should send too little or too late... And thus add to

<sup>96</sup> The *News Chronicle*, 6 January 1940. Leading article, "Finland".

<sup>97</sup> The *Spectator*, 22 December 1939. "News of the Week - Finland's Struggle"; 29 December 1939, "News of the Week - What Help for Finland?". The *Daily Herald*, 28 December 1939. Leading article, "Growing Dim"

<sup>98</sup> The *Spectator*, 12 January 1940. "News of the Week - Finland's Need of Help".

<sup>99</sup> The *Spectator*, 26 January 1940. "The War Surveyed: Finland and Morale" by Strategicus.

<sup>100</sup> The *Manchester Guardian*, 23 January 1940. Leading article, "Raiders over Finland"; 31 January 1939, leading article, "North of Lake Ladoga".

<sup>101</sup> The *News Chronicle*, 3 February 1940. Leading article, "Finland Must Not Lose"; 14 February 1940, leading article, "Help for Finland".

<sup>102</sup> The *Manchester Guardian*, 10 February 1940. Leading article, "Aid for Finland".

Finland's suffering."<sup>103</sup> *The Daily Herald* urged the British population to help since the Finns "hold the frontier of European democracy" and that despite the stresses of the British war effort, Britain could afford to make a "tangible token of sympathy".<sup>104</sup> When the British Government permitted volunteers to register in February to fight in Finland, the *New Statesman and Nation* remembered with bitterness a totally different attitude by the Government towards Spain.<sup>105</sup> *The Daily Worker* reported with similar criticism of foreign aid to Finland, though the paper stated that it was all in vain as the Red Army was successfully advancing.<sup>106</sup>

### The Soviet Union's victory?

In March, the tide of success turned decisively towards the Soviet Union so that *The Times* stated time was running out, not only for Finland, but for Northern Europe.<sup>107</sup> The British press simultaneously reported that the Finnish Government was considering peace terms from Moscow, thus creating a "state of collective insanity" among the Allies.<sup>108</sup> Without consulting Britain, the French unrealistically offered to send men and supplies, with no means of providing them, and thus the British Government recognised that France was attempting to lay the blame for Finland's defeat on Britain. Though the British Government eventually made similar frantic offers, to convince the people at home and abroad that the Allies wanted to help Finland, they were delayed long enough to convince the Finnish Government that it would be better to end the war.<sup>109</sup>

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<sup>103</sup> *The Spectator*, 9 February 1940. "News of the Week - Help Finland Now" and "The War Surveyed: Finland's Hour of Need" by Strategicus. See also, the *Manchester Guardian*, 17 February 1940. Leading article, "Finland's Crisis"; 23 February 1940, leading article, "Finland and Beyond". *The News Chronicle*, 17 February 1940. Leading article, "Neutrals and Aggression".

<sup>104</sup> *The Daily Herald*, 15 February 1940. Leading article, "Help the Finns".

<sup>105</sup> *The New Statesman and Nation*, 17 February 1940. "Comments - Two Kinds of Volunteers". The International Brigades, who fought in the Spanish Civil War, had been formed by volunteers who did not have the official sanction of the British Government.

<sup>106</sup> *The Daily Worker*, 8 December 1939. "New Finnish Government Faced with British Armed Intervention; Planes To 'Fight Hitler' Diverted To Fight Red Army"; 5 January 1940, "Wall Street's £25,000 To Aid Mannerheim". See also, 16 and 17 February 1940.

<sup>107</sup> *The Times*, 5 March 1940. Leading article, "The Fate of Viipuri". *The Manchester Guardian*, 4 March 1940. Leading article, "At Viipuri".

<sup>108</sup> Upton, p. 130.

<sup>109</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 131-133. Bayer, pp. 54-57.

Contrary to the British Government's expectations, there was no significant public protest<sup>110</sup> since Fleet Street primarily suggested Sweden and Norway were responsible for Finland's defeat<sup>111</sup> and thus Allied prestige survived. In March 1940, with the war in Finland resolved, the British population remained uncertain and generally hostile towards the Soviet Union. Although 41 per cent of those questioned in a B.I.P.O. poll wanted the British Government to try to establish friendly relations with Russia, 47 per cent did not. Even more indicative of the British mood was that 41 per cent of those questioned believed that one day Britain would have to fight Russia though 29 per cent remained "undecided".<sup>112</sup>

Surprisingly, only *The Times* harshly criticised the lack of assistance by the Allies. Although the paper had argued against British aid at the outset of the conflict, *The Times* alleged Britain and France could have acted more positively had they so wished, especially in the first weeks of fighting. Therefore, the paper warned that Britain could not afford to make the same mistake against aggression in the future if other neutrals were to survive.<sup>113</sup> Thus *The Times* appeared to believe Britain had a duty to protect Europe, a remarkable change in attitude from September 1938.<sup>114</sup> Though other newspapers recognised Britain's failure to help Finland, most accepted that the British Government had not acted dishonourably.<sup>115</sup> The *Sunday Times's* main criticism was centred on Chamberlain's failure to form an alliance with the Soviet Union in August 1939 which

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<sup>110</sup> Bayer, pp. 63-64.

<sup>111</sup> *The Scotsman*, 9 March 1940. Leading article, "Finnish Problem"; 12 March 1940, leading article, "Finland's Choice". *The Daily Telegraph*, 11 March 1940. Leading article, "The Two Wars". *The Times*, 11 March 1940. Leading article, "Finland and Europe". *The Sunday Times*, 10 March 1940. Leading article, "Sweden and the Fight to Save Finland". *The Daily Express*, 11 March 1940. Leading article, "Diplomats in a Hurry". *The Daily Mail*, 8 March 1940. Leading article, "Peace in the North?"; 11 March 1940, leading article, "Finnish Peace Moves"; 12 March 1940, leading article, "Sweden's Folly". *The Spectator*, 1 March 1940. "News of the Week - Sweden's Choice"; 15 March 1940, "Finland and the Great War". *The Manchester Guardian*, 11 March 1940. Leading article, "Finland"; 14 March 1940, leading article, "The Moscow Peace". *The News Chronicle*, 9 March 1940. Leading article, "Critical Days"; 11 March 1940, leading article, "Russia Must Give Proof"; 13 March 1940, leading article, "One War Ended". *The New Statesman and Nation*, 16 March 1940. "The Moral of Finland".

<sup>112</sup> B.I.P.O., Gallup Poll, March 1940.

<sup>113</sup> *The Times*, 14 March 1940. Leading article, "Finland".

<sup>114</sup> See the leading article in *The Times*, 7 September 1938.

<sup>115</sup> See for example, the *Sunday Times*, 17 March 1940. "Finland and After Hitler's Game" by Scrutator. *The Daily Telegraph*, 14 March 1940. Leading article, "Finland's Cruel Fate".



Fig. 7.2

would thus have prevented any such diplomatic defeat for Britain.<sup>116</sup> The popular conservative press believed the British Government had a duty to its country first and therefore was in no way to blame for Finland's collapse.<sup>117</sup> Nevertheless, the *Daily Express* suggested Britain could learn a lesson from the Winter War: "defeat is bitter and the victor's terms are humiliating".<sup>118</sup>

The Soviet Government was heavily criticised for attacking Finland and the harsh terms which were imposed on the Finns. Low suggested on 27 February that the "First Casualty" of the European war was "idealism" as the Soviet Union defeated democratic Finland, thereby proving it had significant aggressive intentions.<sup>119</sup> The *Sunday Times* was critical of the "Asiatic despot"<sup>120</sup> and *The Times* alleged only Stalin could be

<sup>116</sup> The *Sunday Times*, 17 March 1940. "Finland and After Hitler's Game" by Scrutator. See also, the *Daily Telegraph*, 14 March 1940. Leading article, "Finland's Cruel Fate"; 19 March 1940, leading article, "The Allies and Finland".

<sup>117</sup> The *Daily Mail*, 8 March 1940. Leading article, "Peace in the North?"; 11 March 1940, leading article, "Finnish Peace Moves"; 14 March 1940, leading article, "Finland - and After".

<sup>118</sup> The *Daily Express*, 13 March 1940. Leading article, "Russia Gets Her Way".

<sup>119</sup> Figure 7.2. The *Evening Standard*, 27 February 1940. "First Casualty".

<sup>120</sup> The *Sunday Times*, 10 March 1940. Leading article, "Sweden and the Fight to Save Finland".

satisfied with the terms of peace even though it had not been the quick war he had envisaged.<sup>121</sup> Thus the *Scotsman* and *The Times* argued there was no military glory for the Soviet Union after the "reckless sacrifice of lives", miscalculation and mismanagement. These papers suggested that the harsh and oppressive terms of peace were Stalin's revenge for the Red Army's humiliating defeats.<sup>122</sup> Nevertheless, the *Manchester Guardian* believed Moscow had been taught a lesson<sup>123</sup> and the *News Chronicle* wondered how long it would take for the Soviet Union to replace its lost resources.<sup>124</sup> The *Daily Telegraph* believed the chaotic blunders of the Red Army would become more exposed and that the Soviet Government could not expect further success in expansion since Finland was only a very small, isolated victim.<sup>125</sup>

The *Daily Express* was the only paper to suggest that the Soviet Union had received all its demands.<sup>126</sup> However, though accepting that Moscow secured its immediate aims, the *Daily Herald* believed that the Soviet Union had not obtained every goal it wanted and the paper was, therefore, concerned that the Soviet Government would attack Finland again, much as Germany had occupied Prague despite the Munich settlement.<sup>127</sup> The *News Chronicle* likewise wondered if the Soviet Union was really ready to abandon force.<sup>128</sup> The *Daily Mail* was even more astute when it questioned if "Russia's appetite is sated by the meal of Finnish territory" or if Stalin would demand Bessarabia from Rumania.<sup>129</sup> The *New Statesman and Nation*, though failing to condemn the Soviet Union's attack on Finland, finally recognised that the Soviet Union's motives were questionable and therefore stated that the peace terms were "far reaching

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<sup>121</sup> *The Times*, 14 March 1940. Leading article, "Finland". See also, the *Daily Telegraph*, 15 March 1940. Leading article, "The Crack in Joy-Bells".

<sup>122</sup> *The Scotsman*, 14 March 1940. Leading article, "A Russian Peace". See Upton, pp. 94-95 for a similar suggestion.

<sup>123</sup> *The Manchester Guardian*, 13 March 1940. Leading article, "Finland's Position".

<sup>124</sup> *The News Chronicle*, 14 March 1940. Leading article, "Finland's Great Example".

<sup>125</sup> *The Daily Telegraph*, 14 March 1940. Leading article, "Finland's Cruel Fate".

<sup>126</sup> *The Daily Express*, 13 March 1940. Leading article, "Russia Gets Her Way".

<sup>127</sup> *The Daily Herald*, 14 March 1940. Leading article, "Peace". See also, the *Manchester Guardian*, 11 March 1940. Leading article, "Finland". *The News Chronicle*, 9 March 1940. Leading article, "Critical Days".

<sup>128</sup> *The News Chronicle*, 11 March 1940. Leading article, "Russia Must Give Proof".

<sup>129</sup> *The Daily Mail*, 15 March 1940. Leading article, "Stalin's Programme". See a similar suggestion in *Daily Express*, 16 March 1940. "Hitler Fears Stalin Attack in Balkans" by S. Panton.

and exceedingly unpleasant".<sup>130</sup> Thus only the *Daily Worker* supported the Soviet Government's success in securing peace terms suitable to Stalin.<sup>131</sup>

In reality, the result of the Winter War was that although the Soviet Union dictated the terms of the peace, it was not a total victory over Finland. The Red Army's weaknesses were exposed and the new territory did little to help Leningrad in the war against Germany.<sup>132</sup> The invasion of Finland marked a further change in Soviet policy as it publicly abandoned the image which it had created in the 1930s, of a commitment to collective security and non-aggression, since neither could protect Soviet interests.<sup>133</sup> The Soviet Government instigated the Winter War not because the Finns were insufficiently conciliatory, but because the Soviet leadership felt it was in a position to pursue its diplomatic demands successfully with force. Furthermore, in view of the fact that Moscow wished to avoid appearing subservient to Germany, the Soviet leadership found it necessary to impose its will on smaller states thus leading to the attack on Finland.<sup>134</sup> New demands were presented to Finland in June 1940 when the Baltic states were annexed, increasing Finnish suspicions of the Soviet Union's aims and as a result, Finland accepted a role in Germany's attack on the Soviet Union in June 1941.<sup>135</sup>

Britain recognised that the only reason the Soviet Government was able to impose such harsh terms on Finland was because no foreign aid had been sent to assist the Finns. This caused some concern in the British Government, which expected Germany to attack eventually the Soviet Union, because it was unlikely that the Red Army would be capable of surviving against the impressive German military might. Nevertheless, the British Government declined to antagonise the Soviet Government in 1940, even despite further expansion by Stalin, in recognition that London and Moscow might become allies against Germany.

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<sup>130</sup> *The New Statesman and Nation*, 16 March 1940. "The Moral of Finland".

<sup>131</sup> *The Daily Worker*, 12 March 1940. Leading article, "Finland and Peace"; 14 March 1940, "Soviets Defeat Cabinet's War Plans in North".

<sup>132</sup> Upton, pp. 149-153.

<sup>133</sup> Spring, p. 207.

<sup>134</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 220, 221-222. Upton, pp. 94-95.

<sup>135</sup> Upton, pp. 153-157.

### Further Soviet expansion

Virtually the entire British press accepted without objection the Soviet Government's annexation of Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania in June 1940. Though most newspapers and journals expressed concern for the loss of independence of the three Baltic states, criticism of the Soviet Union was limited because the British Government was occupied in conflict elsewhere and unable to make an effective protest.<sup>136</sup> Fleet Street generally expressed the same attitude towards the Balkan region and though there was slightly more criticism for the Soviet Union's aggressive ambitions, the majority of the British press did not express concern for Rumania or Bessarabia. Furthermore, newspaper coverage of the Balkans increasingly focused on whether or not the Soviet Union and Germany would clash over <sup>rival</sup> personal interests in South-Eastern Europe. Unlike the emotion caused by the Red Army's attack on Finland, public opinion in Britain was not angered by the Soviet Government's annexations in Eastern Europe and remained hopeful that a Soviet-German conflict would erupt, though confidence in Moscow's intentions varied between June 1940 and June 1941.<sup>137</sup> From September to December 1940, signs of strain between Berlin and Moscow increased but were never sufficiently critical to cause a definitive rupture in relations.

When, in June 1940, the Soviet Union occupied the Baltic states and incorporated them into the Soviet Union, *The Times* speculated that the lack of German protest probably meant the annexation was a stipulation of the Nazi-Soviet pact. However, the paper thought Stalin's efforts "to regain the territory of Tsarist Russia" might be contrary to Hitler's wishes.<sup>138</sup> The *Daily Telegraph* and the *Observer* suggested that the incorporation of the three states was a defensive move by the Soviet Government against Germany whose rapid success in the West forced the Soviet Union to move in Eastern Europe.<sup>139</sup> For a paper which had never trusted the Soviet Union and communism, *The*

<sup>136</sup> Woodward, *British Foreign Policy in the Second World War*, p. 475. The British Government refused officially to recognise the Soviet Union's acquisition, but that was as far as Britain responded.

<sup>137</sup> Tom Harrison, "Public Opinion About Russia", p. 360.

<sup>138</sup> *The Times*, 3 July 1940. Leading article, "The Balkan Cauldron".

<sup>139</sup> *The Daily Telegraph*, 17 and 18 June 1940. Articles by the Stockholm Correspondent. *The Observer*, 23 June 1940. "Russia's Plan in Eastern Europe" by the Diplomatic Correspondent.

*Times* curiously conceded it was better for the Baltic states to lose their independence to the Soviet Union rather than Germany, the "arch enemy". The paper also pointed out that since Britain and France could do nothing, the Baltic states were left with no choice but to accept Moscow's pressure.<sup>140</sup> This demonstrated a most remarkable change in attitude from the previous year when *The Times* stated that Britain had no right to force the Baltic states to accept a guarantee by the Soviet Government, thus contributing to Moscow's decision to sign the Nazi-Soviet pact.<sup>141</sup> However, the *Scotsman* was far more contemptuous of the Soviet Union and claimed Moscow could only act with German approval since the Red Army was too weak and could not afford a war against Germany.<sup>142</sup>

Neither the Beaverbrook nor the Rothermere press expressed surprise, "after all other events in Europe were considered", that the Baltic states came under the protection of and lost their independence to the Soviet Union in June 1940.<sup>143</sup> Furthermore, in view of the fact that there were other issues of greater importance, such as the war in France, none of these papers protested as they would certainly have done in the previous year. Also, the *Daily Express* suggested that Britain and the Soviet Union would eventually become allies since Hitler's focus of conquest would move to Eastern Europe.<sup>144</sup>

Even the liberal press was only marginally concerned for the fate of the Baltic region. There was a degree of sarcasm in the reporting of the *Manchester Guardian* in July when the paper acknowledged the Baltic states had become not only republics of the Soviet Union, but also the outer layer of a "fortress" in the country's defence.<sup>145</sup> However, the paper did not protest the lost independence of the three states. The *News Chronicle* and the *Economist* similarly accepted without objection the change in status of

<sup>140</sup> *The Times*, 25 July 1940. Leading article, "Russia on the Baltic".

<sup>141</sup> See for example, *The Times*, 5 July 1939. Leading article, "The Talks with Russia".

<sup>142</sup> *The Scotsman*, 28 June 1940. Leading article, "Russian Moves".

<sup>143</sup> *The Daily Mail*, 20 June 1940. "Soviet Leaders in Estonia"; 15 July 1940, "Three States Vote Communist".

<sup>144</sup> *The Daily Express*, 18 June 1940. Leading article, "Russia in Danger".

<sup>145</sup> *The Manchester Guardian*, 2 and 22 July 1940. Leading article, "Russia's Gains" and an article by Reuters.

Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania and suggested the Soviet Government's decision was due to the rapidity of Germany's victory over France.<sup>146</sup> In the autumn of 1939, the *Spectator* had suggested that the Baltic states were "easy victims" to the "German type bloodless victory" and therefore, these states would only retain their independence as long as the Soviet Union tolerated it.<sup>147</sup> Thus the journal, from an early date, noted Moscow intended to incorporate the Baltic countries into the Soviet Union and was therefore not surprised when it happened.<sup>148</sup>

Though the *Daily Herald* made no protest against the Soviet Union's occupation of the Baltic region, the paper suggested the Soviet Government had the support of Germany in redrawing the map of Eastern Europe.<sup>149</sup> In contrast, the *New Statesman and Nation* believed the Soviet Union was looking to its own security when it annexed the Baltic states since the Nazi-Soviet pact would not continue when Germany decided to occupy Eastern Europe. Furthermore, the journal expressed satisfaction that there was no bloodshed in the Soviet Government's annexation primarily because the *New Statesman and Nation* naively accepted that the Baltic states had "asked to join" the Soviet Union.<sup>150</sup> Thus the journal, ignoring the implications of lost sovereignty and continuing to support the Soviet Union unlike any other member of the British press, except the *Daily Worker*,<sup>151</sup> welcomed the Soviet Government's actions towards the Baltic states because the *New Statesman and Nation* believed it provided them with protection from Germany.<sup>152</sup>

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<sup>146</sup> The *News Chronicle*, 18 June 1940. "2,000 Soviet Tanks Are Massed on Germany's Doorstep". The *Economist*, 22 June 1940. "Russia's Baltic Policy" by a Correspondent. The *Spectator*, 21 and 28 June 1940. "News of the Week".

<sup>147</sup> The *Spectator*, 13 October 1939. "News of the Week - Russia and the Baltic". For similar warnings see also, the *News Chronicle*, 18 September 1939. Leading article, "Russia Marches In". The *Economist*, 23 September 1939. "The Fourth Partition". The *Daily Herald*, 30 September 1939. Leading article, "What the Pact Means".

<sup>148</sup> The *Spectator*, 21 June 1940. "News of the Week - Russia Shares the Spoils?"; 28 June 1940, "News of the Week - Russia in the Background".

<sup>149</sup> The *Daily Herald*, 19 June 1940. "Redrawing Europe: Stalin's Aims" by W.N.E.

<sup>150</sup> The *New Statesman and Nation*, 22 June 1940. "Comments - Stalin Takes Precautions"; 27 July 1940, "Comments - Stalin Alone".

<sup>151</sup> The *Daily Worker*, 23 July 1940. "Three States Ask To Join USSR" by the Moscow Correspondent.

<sup>152</sup> The *New Statesman and Nation*, 22 June 1940. "Comments - Stalin Takes Precautions".

The attitude of the British press towards the Soviet Union's demands on the Balkan region, and especially Rumania, was nearly identical to its attitude towards the fate of the Baltic states. The majority of British newspapers were uninterested in the fate of Bessarabia and Northern Bukovina. Instead, Fleet Street devoted its coverage of the Balkans to the far more crucial factor in Britain's war effort - would German and Soviet interests in South-Eastern Europe reach such a high degree of tension as to incite war between the two countries? It was assumed by the British press that Rumania's concessions to the Soviet Union would be the last time Germany accepted Stalin's expansion in the Balkans.

The *Daily Telegraph* attached great importance to the Soviet Union's acquisition of Bessarabia and Northern Bukovina as it showed the Soviet Government's revived interest and influence in Balkan affairs.<sup>153</sup> As with the Baltic states, *The Times* accepted the <sup>surrender</sup> cessation of Bessarabia to the Soviet Union since Rumania was too weak to fight the Red Army and especially since "negotiation is out of fashion on the continent".<sup>154</sup> Of the quality conservative press, only the *Scotsman* expressed significant contempt for Soviet demands on Rumania and wondered if Germany supported Moscow's activity in the Balkans. The paper expected the Soviet Government, since its "appetite was whetted", to "try for a great amount" in South-Eastern Europe,<sup>155</sup> though the *Sunday Times* suggested that the Soviet Union was in reality too afraid of Germany to seize all it wanted.<sup>156</sup>

However, further comment by the quality conservative press was reserved to the aspects of the Balkans which suggested a conflict of interest between Germany and the Soviet Union. *The Times* entitled one of its leading articles "The Balkan Cauldron" which aptly described the tense situation in South-Eastern Europe. The paper believed that Hitler had intended to immobilise the Soviet Union with the Nazi-Soviet pact while Germany defeated Western Europe. This, however, did not comply with Stalin's

<sup>153</sup> *The Daily Telegraph*, 29 June 1940. Leading article, "Russia's Latest Stroke".

<sup>154</sup> *The Times*, 29 June 1940. Leading article, "Rumania Cedes Bessarabia".

<sup>155</sup> *The Scotsman*, 28 June 1940. Leading article, "Russia Moves"; 29 June 1940, leading article, "Russia Marches In".

<sup>156</sup> *The Sunday Times*, 4 August 1940. "Molotov's Aims" by the Diplomatic Correspondent.

intentions which were to strengthen his country's western defences while Germany was occupied elsewhere. In the opinion of *The Times*, although Hitler ignored the Soviet Union's invasion of Finland, the paper alleged that Berlin could not afford to ignore Stalin's ambitions in the Balkans as the Soviet Union could materially affect Hitler's dreams of "Hungarian wheat, Yugoslav minerals, and Rumanian oil". Therefore, the paper argued that the annexation of the Baltic states and parts of Rumania were not really to restore the old Russian Empire, but to keep Germany a safe distance from the Soviet Union.<sup>157</sup> *The Daily Telegraph* and the *Sunday Times* similarly suggested that although Germany accepted the Soviet Government's aims in Rumania, these papers believed Hitler would neither welcome a rival in the "Danube region" nor the effective barrier against Germany in the East which Stalin was building.<sup>158</sup>

Although the *Observer* expected a "flare-up" in the Balkans as a result of the Red Army's advances in Rumania,<sup>159</sup> the majority of the quality conservative press reported that Germany and the Soviet Union were attempting to play down the strains in their relationship despite the increased tension.<sup>160</sup> *The Times* especially felt the Soviet Government was attempting to maintain good relations with Germany until the outcome of the German attack on Britain was more clear.<sup>161</sup> Thus the "marriage of convenience" continued<sup>162</sup> and the *Daily Telegraph* believed the chance of a British-Soviet alliance in the summer of 1940 was minimal especially when the paper also considered Britain's past hostility towards Moscow.<sup>163</sup>

The popular conservative press took a more disapproving interest in "Russia's grab" of Bessarabia, "the richest land on earth".<sup>164</sup> However, though critical of the

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<sup>157</sup> *The Times*, 3 July 1940. Leading article, "The Balkan Cauldron".

<sup>158</sup> *The Daily Telegraph*, 29 June 1940. Leading article, "Russia's Latest Stroke". *The Sunday Times*, 30 June 1940. Leading article, "Russia's Move".

<sup>159</sup> *The Observer*, 23 and 30 June 1941, by the Diplomatic Correspondent.

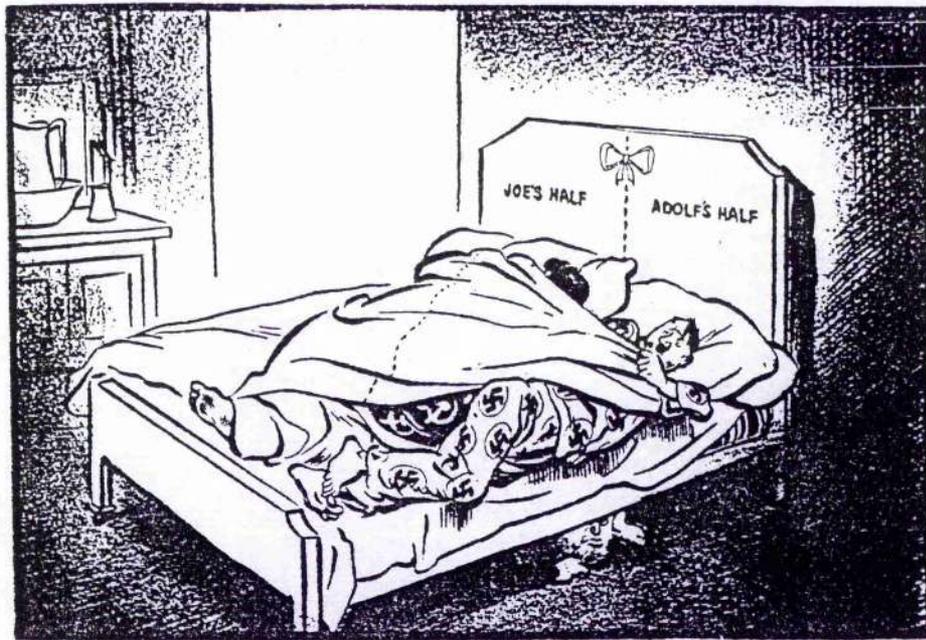
<sup>160</sup> See for example, *The Times*, 5 July and 3 August 1940.

<sup>161</sup> *The Times*, 13 August 1940. "Russia Watches and Waits" by the Special Correspondent in Sofia.

<sup>162</sup> *The Daily Telegraph*, 29 June 1940. Leading article, "Russia's Latest Stroke". *The Sunday Times*, 30 June 1940. Leading article, "Russia's Move".

<sup>163</sup> *The Daily Telegraph*, 2 August 1940. "Russia Reaffirms Her Neutrality" by the Moscow Correspondent.

<sup>164</sup> *The Daily Express*, 29 July 1940. "Carol: Stop the Grabs" from a Belgrade dispatch. *The Daily Mail*, 28 June 1940. "King Carol Asks for Talks".



UNEASY NIGHTS IN THE BALKANS

Fig. 7.3

Soviet Union's methods, these papers did not care about the fate of Bessarabia or Northern Bukovina. Like the quality conservative press, the *Daily Express* was far more interested in the emerging conflict between Germany and the Soviet Union over the "grabbing" of territory in the Balkans.<sup>165</sup> Low's cartoon in the *Evening Standard* on 23 July 1940, "Uneasy Nights in the Balkans", showed Stalin encroaching on Hitler's half of a bed thus demonstrating the strained partnership in South-Eastern Europe.<sup>166</sup>

The liberal press expressed no surprise over the Soviet Union's ultimatum to Rumania and the subsequent occupation of Bessarabia and Northern Bukovina. Thus there was no protest as to the fate of these regions by these papers which, like the conservative press, focused on the emerging crisis between Germany and the Soviet Union. The *Manchester Guardian* and the *News Chronicle* believed Moscow had acted following France's rapid collapse to Germany. Both papers thus acknowledged that it was clear the Soviet Government was determined to do all it could for its own protection

<sup>165</sup> The *Daily Express*, 11 July 1940. "Hitler Tries to Halt Balkan Grabbing Game" by Sefton Delmer; 27 July 1940, "Stalin Surprises Hitler" by a Special Correspondent; 14 September 1940, "Moscow Warns Nazis" by A. P.; 16 October 1940, "Moscow Not Told".

<sup>166</sup> Figure 7.3. The *Evening Standard*, 23 July 1940. "Uneasy Nights in the Balkans".

and therefore, the occupation of territory in Rumania was part of a plan to strengthen the Soviet Union against the West.<sup>167</sup> The *Manchester Guardian* suggested that Moscow felt the situation in Europe had changed because the ultimatum to Rumania by the Soviet Government was "very brusque" and the occupation "vigorous". Thus the paper believed there was an urgency which had been absent in the demands to the Baltic states and the leisurely approach against Finland. In addition, the *Manchester Guardian* argued that the Soviet Union's entry into the Balkans was in opposition to German expectations for economic gains in that area.<sup>168</sup> However, though noting the mutual distrust between Germany and the Soviet Union concerning ambitions in the Balkans, the liberal press recognised that neither country was prepared for war against the other.<sup>169</sup>

The *Daily Herald* was also neither surprised by the Soviet Union's occupation of Bessarabia nor concerned with the fate of Rumania or other countries in the Balkans.<sup>170</sup> The paper, however, alleged that Hitler was forced to accept Stalin's "redrawn map of Eastern Europe" as an accomplished fact.<sup>171</sup> As with comment on the annexation of the Baltic states, the *New Statesman and Nation* believed the Soviet Union's pressure on Rumania was simply a precaution to protect the USSR against the increasing power of the Axis. Thus the journal argued that Stalin, though hoping for the best from the Nazi-Soviet pact, was preparing for the worst.<sup>172</sup> The *Daily Worker* also maintained that the Soviet Government was forced to prepare for war against the "imperialist-capitalists" by occupying Bessarabia, though the paper was unique in stating that the people of northern Rumania welcomed their incorporation into the Soviet Union and felt liberated.<sup>173</sup>

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<sup>167</sup> The *Manchester Guardian*, 28 June 1940. Leading article, "Russia Moves Again"; 2 July 1940, leading article, "Russia's Gains". The *News Chronicle*, 28 June 1940. Leading article, "Realistic".

<sup>168</sup> The *Manchester Guardian*, 2 July 1940. Leading article, "Russia's Gains"; 23 July 1940, leading article, "Russia Moves Again".

<sup>169</sup> The *News Chronicle*, 11 July 1940. "Moscow Suspects German Ambitions" by the Diplomatic Correspondent; 30 July 1940, leading article, "Future of Balkans". The *Economist*, 6 July 1940. "Russia Takes Another Outpost".

<sup>170</sup> The *Daily Herald*, 28 June 1940. "Rumania Accepts Soviet Ultimatum on Bessarabia" by W.N.E.

<sup>171</sup> The *Daily Herald*, 19 June 1940. "Redrawing Europe: Stalin's Aims" by W.N.E.

<sup>172</sup> The *New Statesman and Nation*, 22 June 1940. "Comments - Stalin Takes Precautions".

<sup>173</sup> The *Daily Worker*, 29 June 1940. Leading article, "Rumania".

"Russia must toe the line"<sup>174</sup>

Despite Molotov's speech to the Soviet <sup>government</sup> Parliament on 1 August 1940 which firmly stated Soviet-German relations were very good,<sup>175</sup> within two months, the British press devoted significant coverage to Moscow's irritation with Berlin for not being invited to the Danubian Conference hosted by Germany in September 1940.<sup>176</sup> The *Scotsman* speculated that the Soviet Union's exclusion from the Danubian Conference and subsequent protest to Berlin was the first open sign of a rift between Germany and the Soviet Union. However, the paper recognised that the conflict of interest between the two dictators was unlikely to result in a war which neither wanted at the time.<sup>177</sup> The *Times* and the *Observer* similarly maintained that neither country was prepared to fight the other and therefore, the Soviet Government's note was merely intended as a reminder to Germany not to ignore Moscow in the future.<sup>178</sup>

The *Manchester Guardian* found the Soviet Union's exclusion from the Danubian Conference a "strange interpretation of the pledge of a year ago" which insisted on consultation on all common interests. The paper wondered if the omission was intentional, thus suggesting that the Soviet Government had a right to be wary of its ally.<sup>179</sup> The *News Chronicle* pointed out that it was the first time since the signing of the Nazi-Soviet pact that the Soviet leadership had sent a "frigid" note to its partner and therefore, the paper wondered if Germany could placate the Soviet Union.<sup>180</sup> Even the *Daily Worker's* leading article on the Soviet note to Germany, though scorning the hopes of the capitalist press of a failing relationship, sounded a warning to the German

<sup>174</sup> Title of an article in the *Daily Herald*, 2 October 1940.

<sup>175</sup> The *Manchester Guardian*, 3 August 1940. Leading article, "Molotov's Speech". The *News Chronicle*, 2 and 3 August 1940, by Vernon Bartlett. The *Economist*, 10 August 1940. "Molotov's Speech". The *Daily Herald*, 2 August 1940. "Molotov Predicts A World War".

<sup>176</sup> See for example, the *Daily Telegraph*, 14 September 1940. "Soviet Calm in Danube" by the Diplomatic Correspondent. The *Daily Herald*, 18 September 1940. "Germany Tells Russia 'Hands Off Balkans'" by W.N.E. Germany held the Danubian Conference in order to explain to the states along that river what Berlin expected of them economically and politically and what these Balkan countries could look for in return.

<sup>177</sup> The *Scotsman*, 17 September 1940. Leading article, "Danubian Rivalry".

<sup>178</sup> The *Times*, 14, 16, 17 September 1940. Leading article on 16 September, "The Lower Danube". The *Observer*, 15 September 1940. "The World's Week - The Russian Sphinx".

<sup>179</sup> The *Manchester Guardian*, 16 September 1940. Leading article, "Russia Protests".

<sup>180</sup> The *News Chronicle*, 14 September 1940. Leading article, "Annoyed".

Government that the Soviet Union could not be ignored in an area which it considered it had a vital interest.<sup>181</sup>

Further protest by the Soviet Government in October of German high-handedness in Rumania was another signal to the British press of differences between the two countries.<sup>182</sup> The *Economist* suggested that the tension over Rumania was such that a breach between Moscow and Berlin might be unavoidable though the journal continued to believe the Soviet and German Governments wished to avoid war.<sup>183</sup> Nevertheless, the *Daily Herald* and the *Economist* surmised that "Germany was turning the diplomatic screws" on the Soviet Government. Both papers suggested that Hitler was no longer afraid of the Soviet Union, that "Russia will be squeezed hard", and "will have to toe the line" especially in the Balkans, since the Red Army was too weak to fight Germany.<sup>184</sup>

With the announcement of Molotov's visit to Berlin in mid-November 1940, the British press believed Germany and the Soviet Union were attempting to repair their differences. Nevertheless, *The Times* sarcastically noted that Molotov's first visit since the signing of the Nazi-Soviet pact was "unrushed" - the Soviet statesman took the train to Berlin whereas Ribbentrop always flew to Moscow. The paper was, however, more concerned about the possible inducements Germany was going to offer to Molotov and what the Soviet Union was expected to give in return.<sup>185</sup> Though a "spectacular" agreement was expected,<sup>186</sup> with the conclusion of the talks, the British press expressed surprise that nothing of great advantage to either state had allegedly been reached. Nevertheless, *The Times* and the *Scotsman* suggested the Soviet Government was

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<sup>181</sup> The *Daily Worker*, 16 September 1940. Leading article, "On the Danube".

<sup>182</sup> The *Manchester Guardian*, 16 October 1940. "Nazi Moves in Rumania"; 17 October 1940, leading article, "Germany in the East". *The Times*, 1 and 25 October 1940. The *Daily Telegraph*, 15-17 October 1940.

<sup>183</sup> The *Economist*, 19 October 1940. "Russia's Dilemma".

<sup>184</sup> The *Daily Herald*, 2 October 1940. "Russia Must Toe the Line, Say Nazis" by W.N.E. The *Economist*, 19 October 1940. "Russia's Dilemma".

<sup>185</sup> *The Times*, 12 November 1940. Leading article, "Active Diplomacy". For example, the British press and Government speculated that Germany would offer the Soviet Government a "New World Order" in which the Soviet Union would be given control of the Bosphorus Straits and the Near East in exchange for a German sphere of influence in South-Eastern Europe and increased economic aid from the Soviet Union.

<sup>186</sup> The *Daily Express*, 13 November 1940. Various articles. The *Daily Mail*, 13-15 November 1940. Various articles.

playing for time despite heavy German pressure.<sup>187</sup> In addition, the *Daily Telegraph* suggested that regardless of the apparent lack of a result, mutual concessions would continue since neither country was ready for war.<sup>188</sup>

The *Spectator* was more interested in what the invitation denoted and suggested the military and diplomatic situation was not satisfactory to Berlin because when "things go well, Hitler has no use for Russia". Thus the journal believed the Soviet Union would be forced to end its role as the traditional protector of the Slavs.<sup>189</sup> The *Manchester Guardian* similarly questioned why the Soviet Government, in visiting Berlin, allowed the Germans such a diplomatic success and demonstrated Stalin's acceptance of the Soviet Union's weaknesses.<sup>190</sup> The *Economist* sarcastically wrote that if the situation in Europe was not so important, there would be something "comic" about Molotov's visit to Berlin since it was his first trip abroad. Furthermore, despite the Soviet Government's statements of "complete unity", the journal believed that the visit demonstrated Germany was stronger and allowed Hitler to protest against the Soviet Union's encroachment on his new world order.<sup>191</sup> Low's cartoon on 4 October, "Orders and Decorations", showed that Hitler no longer cared for Stalin's friendship since his new world order was sufficiently strong without the Soviet dictator. However, Low sardonically hinted of the impending Nazi invasion of the USSR by portraying Ribbentrop promising Stalin that Hitler would soon give his attention to the Soviet Union.<sup>192</sup>

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<sup>187</sup> *The Times*, 13 November 1940. Various articles by the Diplomatic Correspondent. The *Scotsman*, 15 November 1940. Leading article, "Molotov's Visit".

<sup>188</sup> *The Daily Telegraph*, 15 November 1940. Leading article, "Wooing Moscow".

<sup>189</sup> *The Spectator*, 15 November 1940. "News of the Week - Berlin and Moscow".

<sup>190</sup> *The Manchester Guardian*, 15 November 1940. Leading article, "Home to Moscow". The *News Chronicle*, 12 November 1940. Leading article, "Molotov's Visit"; 15 November 1940, "Nazis Warn Turkey After Molotov Goes Home".

<sup>191</sup> *The Economist*, 16 November 1940. Leading article, "Molotov in Berlin".

<sup>192</sup> Figure 7.4: *The Evening Standard*, 4 October 1940. "Orders and Decorations".

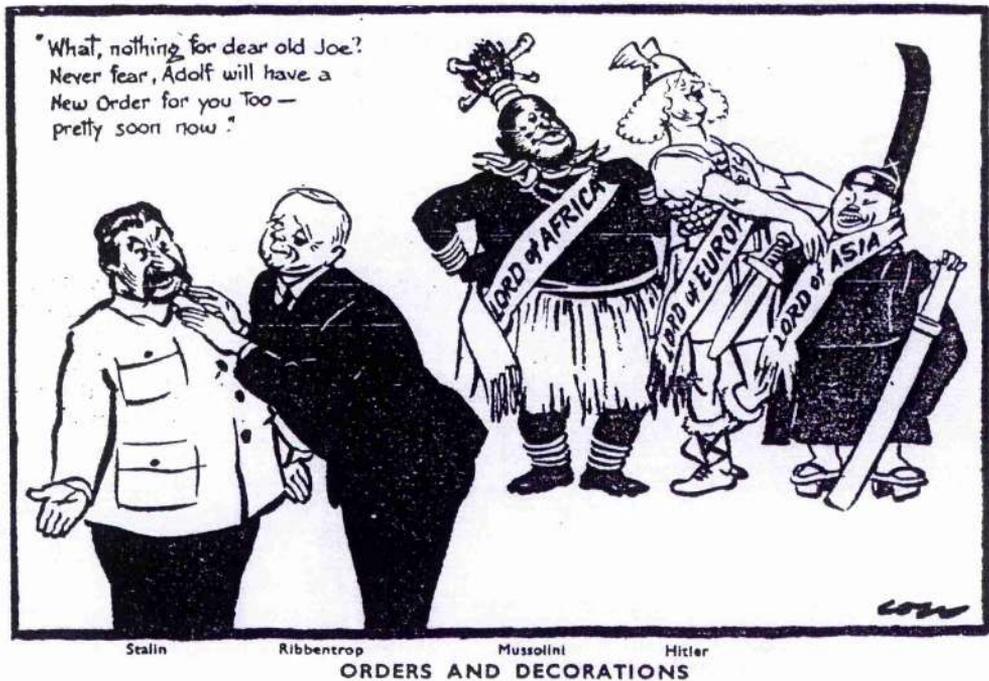


Fig. 7.4

### Conclusion

The invasion of Finland by the Soviet Union ruined any possibility of an immediate improvement in British-Soviet relations. The British Government would have preferred to ignore as far as possible the Winter War, but public opinion and Fleet Street were irrepressibly hostile towards the Soviet Union. In addition, Finland appealed to the League of Nations to denounce and take action against the Soviet Government. Thus it was impossible for Britain to refrain from issuing formal condemnation of the Soviet attack.<sup>193</sup> This was an instance of the British press encouraging the Government to react and yet the reaction was ultimately insufficient in the opinion of the majority of Fleet Street. As a consequence, press coverage of the Winter War frequently diverged from the official policy of the British Government. His Majesty's Government realise that Moscow was intent on avoiding action which might help Germany or Britain and thereby hasten the victory of either side. Therefore, the British leadership refused to jeopardise

<sup>193</sup> Woodward, *British Foreign Policy in Second World War*. Vol. I, p. 40.

the precarious position which Moscow had assumed by declaring war on the Soviet Union over Finnish interests.<sup>194</sup>

Due to the same motives, the British Government similarly responded to the annexation of the Baltic states. Halifax neither refused to acknowledge the Soviet Union's acquisition nor offered hope to the three states that Britain would assist them in regaining their independence. Already at this time, the British Government strongly believed Hitler was contemplating his invasion of the Soviet Union.<sup>195</sup> The failure of the British press to react to the annexations of the Baltic states thus reflected the attitude of the British Government and indicated that by the summer of 1940, Fleet Street was significantly influenced by Government policy.

Though the British press expressed a degree of criticism of the Soviet Union's aggression in Eastern Europe during 1940, in 1941 the past was not allowed to hinder the necessity of Britain and the USSR becoming allies. Fleet Street noted that the Soviet Government admitted admiration for Britain's resistance of Germany's attack in the air and of British efforts in the Mediterranean. Thus *The Times* suggested the Soviet Government's statements of friendship with Germany "rang hollow".<sup>196</sup> The British press in 1941 also recognised that Germany had resumed a hostile attitude towards the Soviet Union since Stalin was either unable or unwilling to make further concessions to Hitler.<sup>197</sup> Thus it became obvious to the West that the Soviet Union would be attacked by Germany<sup>198</sup> and the *Daily Herald* unnecessarily suggested that the "German-Russian situation is beginning to figure quite importantly in the general picture of war".<sup>199</sup> In a

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<sup>194</sup> Ibid, p. 108.

<sup>195</sup> Ibid, p. 475.

<sup>196</sup> *The Times*, 14 January 1941. Leading article, "Russia and Germany". There were also reports of praise in October 1940. See for example, the *News Chronicle*, 18 October 1940. "Red Army Praises Our Planes" by the Moscow Correspondent.

<sup>197</sup> *The Times*, 1 May 1941. "May Day at the Kremlin" by the Diplomatic Correspondent. *The Sunday Times*, 11 May 1941. "Nazi War of Nerves on Russia". *The Daily Express*, 5 March 1941. Leading article; "Lovers' Tiff". *The Daily Telegraph*, 5 March 1941. Leading article, "The Russian Oracle". *The Manchester Guardian*, 4 and 5 March 1941. "Russian Disapproval of Nazi Move" and leading article, "Russia and Bulgaria". *The Scotsman*, 14 April 1941. Leading article, "Russia's Fears".

<sup>198</sup> Woodward, p. 598.

<sup>199</sup> *The Daily Herald*, 8 May 1941. "Nazis Don't Trust Stalin" by W.N.E.

B.I.P.O. poll in April 1941, 70 per cent of those questioned wanted to see Great Britain and the Soviet Union become friendlier towards each other.<sup>200</sup>

The truth was that German-Soviet friction throughout 1940 had meant that Britain and the Soviet Union would become allies. Therefore, despite Fleet Street's overwhelming hostility towards the Soviet Union's invasion of Finland, which occupied a staggering amount of press coverage, within months, British newspapers realised their country's survival depended on the opening of a second front in Europe. If the invasion of Finland had occurred when Britain was not fighting Germany in the Second World War, it would have been unlikely that the British press would have ignored so rapidly such aggression. Neither would Britain's newspapers have offered to support an alliance with an aggressor. Despite the critical attitude which Fleet Street developed for the Soviet Union as a result of the Winter War, the British press noted, with varying degrees of hope and confidence, that Hitler was displeased with Stalin's moves in the Balkans. Thus the newspapers carefully watched for signs that the Soviet Government accepted Britain as its partner against Germany. This, however, did not happen, despite the British Government's efforts, until Germany invaded the Soviet Union in June 1941.

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<sup>200</sup> B.I.P.O., Gallup Poll, April 1941. 13 per cent replied "no"; 17 per cent replied "no opinion".

## Chapter 8

### Epilogue: "War Today Is Indivisible"<sup>1</sup>

When the attack on the USSR came in June 1941, the Soviet Union proved that although it had not completed the efforts to rebuild its military power and economy, the Red Army and industry were mobilised sufficiently to prevent Germany from securing the quick victory which Hitler sought. Most importantly, the German attack opened a second European front, one which the British Government was keen to retain. Therefore, in spite of previous hostilities and differences in ideology, Winston Churchill immediately offered the Soviet Government British arms, planes, and manpower. Fleet Street was nearly unanimous in giving its support to the British Government's policy of assistance to the Soviet Union, though there was the occasional murmur of concern that Britain had to retain enough for its own war effort. This was predominantly the case in the first weeks of the conflict when some papers, primarily the *Scotsman* and the *Daily Mail*, wondered how long it would be until the Soviet Union, due to its weak army, was forced to surrender. Therefore, in the view of these papers, it would be foolish to send supplies which Britain would require against a Germany materially stronger from the conquest of Russian agricultural, industrial, and natural resources. However, once the Red Army appeared to show signs of withstanding the onslaught, those papers expressing uncertainty conceded that some aid ought to be sent. In general, however, the British press of all political persuasions accepted that the Soviet Union was fighting not only for itself but also for Britain. Thus Fleet Street welcomed the British-Soviet Mutual Aid Agreement of 12 July 1941. In the autumn, the British press demanded supplies be sent more rapidly to the Soviet Union and there was overwhelming relief in the success of the Beaverbrook-Harriman mission which <sup>guaranteed</sup> ~~guaranteed~~ British and American war supplies to the USSR.

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<sup>1</sup> Comment in a leading article of the *Daily Herald*, 28 August 1941, "Do It Now!".

The invasion of the Soviet Union was the event which united the British press, the population, and the Government in support for the USSR. As *The Times* pointed out, the attack on the USSR even rallied the "tiny minority of [British] Communist dissidents" to the national cause.<sup>2</sup> However, this unity did not persuade the British Government to drop the ban on the *Daily Worker* which had been enforced since the 21 January 1941. In addition, though the *Daily Worker* was supported by other members of the British press, especially the *News Chronicle*,<sup>3</sup> in its campaign to resume printing once Britain and the Soviet Union were allies, the ban was not officially lifted until September 1942.

In contrast to the years before the war when some editors refused to send correspondents to Moscow because of censorship, with the invasion in June 1941 all newspapers were represented by a resident correspondent since the British public wanted detailed knowledge of the conflict in the USSR.<sup>4</sup> However, Sir Stafford Cripps, the British Ambassador in Moscow, did not believe that the Soviet Government would be more forthcoming in supplying news. Cripps was correct since during the war only the Soviet Government's view of events was allowed to be reported in the West while a correspondent's independent judgement was forbidden by the censor.<sup>5</sup> *The Times* called for the Soviet Government to open up to the press, first so that news beyond official announcements was communicated and secondly, to satisfy the British people who were "intensely interested" in the Soviet Union's struggle and "wished the Red Army well".<sup>6</sup> However, no matter how sympathetic a correspondent might be to the Soviet Union or communism, including the *Daily Worker*, he or she was not accorded special treatment.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> *The Times*, 14 July 1941. Leading article, "Britain and Russia".

<sup>3</sup> William Rust, *The Story of the Daily Worker*, p. 86. *The News Chronicle*, 22 January 1941. Leading article, "End of the Rope".

<sup>4</sup> The number of Western correspondents had increased in May 1939 as a result of one of the first acts by the new Foreign Commissar, Molotov, who ended censorship. However, he restored censorship in 1940.

<sup>5</sup> Richard Cockett, "In Wartime Every Objective Reporter Should Be Shot", pp. 517-520.

<sup>6</sup> *The Times*, 26 June 1941. "Work of the Red Army; Need More News" by the Moscow Correspondent.

<sup>7</sup> Cockett, "In Wartime Every Objective Reporter Should Be Shot", p. 526.

Thus daily coverage in the British press concerning the war in the USSR was often repetitive and newspapers usually printed very similar reports.

### Barbarossa

Prior to the invasion, Fleet Street pointed out that Stalin, "in typical fashion", was unwilling to believe that Germany would invade the Soviet Union. For example, the *News Chronicle* reported that Stalin went to the theatre to prove he was not concerned with the movement of German troops into Eastern Europe.<sup>8</sup> The press admitted that Stalin might choose to "appease" Hitler with offers of oil though it seemed doubtful that the Soviet leader would be able to provide enough to satisfy German needs.<sup>9</sup> The *Yorkshire Post* pointed out that appeasement was a poor option, as the British had discovered, since Stalin would have to fight Hitler and therefore, the paper suggested "sooner was better than later".<sup>10</sup> The *Scotsman* betrayed a lingering bitterness towards the Soviet Government, which the rest of the quality conservative press did not express, when the paper suggested Stalin was "outpowered and outwitted" and would have to yield to Germany to save his "ramshackle" regime.<sup>11</sup> The popular conservative press similarly feared that the Soviet Union was not sufficiently strong to fight the Germans and that Stalin would thus prefer to make concessions to Berlin even if it weakened the Soviet Union.<sup>12</sup> Furthermore, although the *Evening Standard* believed that British and Soviet interests were interlocked, the paper was not sure the Soviet Union realised that.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> The *News Chronicle*, 20 June 1941. "Russians Silent as Tension Grows" by the Diplomatic Correspondent.

<sup>9</sup> *The Times*, 16 and 18 June 1941. Various articles. *The Daily Telegraph*, 14 June 1941. *The Sunday Times*, 15 June 1941. *The Manchester Guardian*, 12, 14, 18 June 1941. Various articles. *The News Chronicle*, 17 June 1941. Leading article, "Stalin's Dilemma". *The Daily Herald*, June 1941. Various articles.

<sup>10</sup> *The Yorkshire Post*, 16 June 1941. Leading article, "Hitler's Needs from Russia". See also, 20 June 1941. Leading article, "The Russian Enigma".

<sup>11</sup> *The Scotsman*, 14 June 1941. Leading article, "Germany's Plans".

<sup>12</sup> *The Daily Express*, 13 June 1941. Leading article, "Russia in Chains"; 18 June 1941, leading article, "Eighty Days". *The Daily Mail*, 13 June 1941. Leading article, "Stalin v. Hitler"; 18 June 1941, leading article, "Russia on the Verge".

<sup>13</sup> *The Evening Standard*, 20 June 1941. Leading article, "Rumours and Facts".

Though Fleet Street expected the invasion, the *Yorkshire Post* admitted it was surprised by the suddenness of the attack.<sup>14</sup> The majority of the quality conservative press supported Churchill's offer of aid to the Soviet Union based on "mutual and reciprocal" cooperation.<sup>15</sup> However, the *Scotsman* only grudgingly accepted sending assistance to the Soviet Union as there was "no other course possible" and because both Britain and the USSR faced a common enemy whose destruction "is the overriding consideration, transcending all ideological arguments". Unlike other quality conservative papers, the *Scotsman* emphasised that "Russia was not a saint in knightly armour" as it was responsible for the "blood of Finland and the Baltics". However, by supporting the Soviet Union, Britain could "hasten the downfall of the Nazi regime... We would be fools to let any scruple stand in the way". Even though the *Scotsman* acknowledged that the Soviet Union could give Britain a respite from fighting to rebuild and become stronger, in view of the fact that the paper distrusted Stalin, it wanted British aid to rest chiefly in bombing the enemy in the West.<sup>16</sup> This attitude by the *Scotsman*, a formerly trusting and supportive newspaper, was surprisingly harsh towards the Soviet Union at a time when formerly indifferent newspapers, such as *The Times*, or especially hostile papers, like the popular conservative press, ignored past difficulties.

The *Daily Express* and the *Evening News* were very quick to support Churchill's call for aid to the Soviet Union since "every Russian shot and bomb helps Britain". The deeper Hitler advanced into the USSR, the more time Britain had to recover and thus the Beaverbrook newspapers believed that Britain and the Soviet Union were "pulling each other's chestnuts out of the fire".<sup>17</sup> In contrast to the *Daily Express's* almost unconditional support, the *Daily Mail* reflected on Stalin's changes in policy during the previous years and called for Britain to remain "cool and objective". Stalin was finally "paying the price for a policy of brutal cynicism and a series of shattering

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<sup>14</sup> *The Yorkshire Post*, 23 June 1941. Leading article, "The Enemy of Mankind".

<sup>15</sup> *The Times*, 25 June 1941. Leading article, "Aid to Russia". *The Daily Telegraph*, 23 - 25 June 1941.

<sup>16</sup> *The Scotsman*, 23 June 1941. Second leading article, "British Aid to Russia".

<sup>17</sup> *The Daily Express*, 23 June 1941. Leading article, "Our Pledge"; 24 June 1941, leading article, "Ain't Life Grand!". *The Evening News*, 23 June 1941. Leading article, "The Russian March".

political blunders" of which the Nazi-Soviet pact had especially "alienated the whole democratic world in one stroke".<sup>18</sup> Though the *Daily Mail* admitted that the "courage of the Russian soldier is proverbial", the paper believed it would take more than courage to defeat Germany and based on the Soviet Union's record, the paper was not sure the Red Army could win or even survive until the winter.<sup>19</sup> Thus, in an attitude similar to the *Scotsman*, the *Daily Mail* wanted Britain to be responsible for the war in the West, leaving the Soviet Union responsible for fighting in the East. British help should, therefore, be restricted to bombing Germany from the West and offering the Soviet government "valuable" advice.<sup>20</sup>

The liberal and labour press ironically stressed that Britain's chances of success had significantly increased with the attack on the Soviet Union and thus expected "great things" from Churchill's offer of assistance.<sup>21</sup> In addition, the liberal press was almost enthusiastic in its expressions of relief that Hitler had returned to his original principles against "Bolshevism". For example, the *News Chronicle* suggested it was "great news" that Hitler had "taken the plunge" by invading the USSR. Furthermore, the paper supported British aid to the Soviet Union and stated that Stalin did not have to worry that British resolve would decline "because Hitler spits his venom at the East". The *News Chronicle* recognised that although "Stalin actually fed the mad dog, it has bitten him just the same". Thus the paper alleged that the Soviet leader, like others before him, was deceived and betrayed by Hitler.<sup>22</sup> Such a statement showed the large degree of support which the *News Chronicle* believed was owed by Britain to the Soviet Union despite the fact that Stalin had chosen Germany as his first ally in the war. In contrast, the *Manchester Guardian* stated that British-Soviet cooperation, vital though it was, could never change Britain's feelings on the Soviet Government's role in the Winter War. The

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<sup>18</sup> The *Daily Mail*, 23 June 1941. Leading article, "Russia".

<sup>19</sup> The *Daily Mail*, 28 June 1941. Leading article, "Russia's Hard Fight".

<sup>20</sup> The *Daily Mail*, 24 June 1941. Leading article, "Stalin's Reply".

<sup>21</sup> The *News Chronicle*, 24 June 1941. Leading article, "Britain's Chance". The *Manchester Guardian*, 23 June 1941. Leading article, "Hitler and Russia" The *New Statesman and Nation*, 28 June 1941. "Comments - Our Great Opportunity".

<sup>22</sup> The *News Chronicle*, 23 June 1941. Leading article, "The Greatest Clash". The *Manchester Guardian*, 23 June 1941. Leading article, "Hitler and Russia".

paper even felt some sympathy for the Finns caught between the traditional enemy of the Soviet Union and Germany which used Finland as a springboard against the USSR in June 1941.<sup>23</sup>

By July, the general approach of the British press was to describe the "Russian" war effort in positive and heroic terms. *The Times* admired Stalin's appeal to his people to fight for the freedom of their country, an appeal which did not disguise the seriousness of the situation as the Soviet leader admitted that Germany had made substantial gains in Lithuania and the Ukraine. In the opinion of *The Times*, Stalin's speech reflected the spirit of determination which deserved the moral and physical encouragement of Britain and the United States.<sup>24</sup> *The Daily Telegraph* and the *Observer* were similarly amazed and gratified by the resistance of the Russian people to the German invasion, supported Stalin's efforts to unite his people and encouraged the British population to respond to "Russian" needs.<sup>25</sup> *The Manchester Guardian* also admired the Soviet leader's truthful appeal to his people which admitted there had been German success but expected "Russian" victory through self-sacrifice, while the *Economist* appreciated the way the Soviet Government adapted the economy to war needs.<sup>26</sup>

The *Daily Herald's* approach to reporting the war in the East was slightly different to that of the rest of the British press, as it primarily focused on Britain's failure to help the Soviet Union in its hour of need. *The Daily Herald* acknowledged that the Red Army was a questionable factor after its unimpressive fight against Finland and therefore, Britain had to help before the army was defeated. In view of the fact that the USSR's resistance helped Britain, rather than peace being indivisible, the paper suggested that "war is indivisible". Furthermore, the people of the Soviet Union were

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<sup>23</sup> *The Manchester Guardian*, 25 June 1941. Leading article, "Britain and Russia"; 27 June 1941, leading article, "Sweden and Finland". *The News Chronicle*, 28 June 1941. Leading article, "No Neutrality".

<sup>24</sup> *The Times*, 4 July 1941. Leading article, "Stalin's Appeal".

<sup>25</sup> *The Daily Telegraph*, 4 July 1941. Leading article, "Russia's Firm Resolve". *The Observer*, 6 July 1941. "The Battle of Russia" by J.L. Garvin.

<sup>26</sup> *The Manchester Guardian*, 4 July 1941. Leading article, "Stalin's Speech". *The Economist*, 26 July 1941. "The Russian Home Front" by a correspondent. *The News Chronicle*, 8 July 1941. Leading article, "Thanks to Russia".

not fighting for ideological reasons but for the survival of the Fatherland.<sup>27</sup> The *Daily Herald* applauded the spirit of the British people in their desire to help the Soviet Union but warned that the British Government did not appear to realise speed was necessary. Therefore, the paper felt responsible for making the British leadership understand that the population demanded rapid and large scale aid to the Soviet Union.<sup>28</sup> Throughout July, the *Daily Herald* stated that the British Government had become complacent and was not doing enough for the Soviet Union.<sup>29</sup>

Thus the entire British press welcomed the announcement of the British-Soviet Mutual Aid Agreement on 12 July 1941 in which both governments promised to "render each other assistance and support of all kinds" and to refrain from negotiating or concluding a separate peace.<sup>30</sup> *The Times* alleged the pact would be "rightly and unanimously welcomed by responsible opinion in Britain"<sup>31</sup> while the *Daily Telegraph* stressed that it had only taken three weeks for Churchill's declaration of assistance to be officially turned into an agreement.<sup>32</sup> *The News Chronicle* expressed relief that the pact, which "many hoped for two years ago", was signed, though the paper recognised that ironically it had only been made possible by Hitler.<sup>33</sup> The *Daily Herald* welcomed the fact that ideological differences were sensibly forgotten by both sides in the effort to defeat Nazi Germany.<sup>34</sup>

However, the British press, despite its praise for the Soviet war effort, did not ignore the fact that the Red Army was retreating and that Leningrad was in serious danger of falling to the Germans but at the same time, Fleet Street pointed out that Germany was

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<sup>27</sup> The *Daily Herald*, 30 June 1941. Leading article, "Russia"; 23 June 1941, leading article, "Full Speed Ahead"; 24 June 1941, leading article, "To the Government". See also, the *Manchester Guardian*, 4 July 1941.

<sup>28</sup> The *Daily Herald*, 7 July 1941. Leading article, "Co-operation"; 8 July 1941, leading article, "Work and See".

<sup>29</sup> The *Daily Herald*, 9 July 1941. Leading article, "The Supreme Problem"; 18 September 1941, leading article, "Are We doing Enough?".

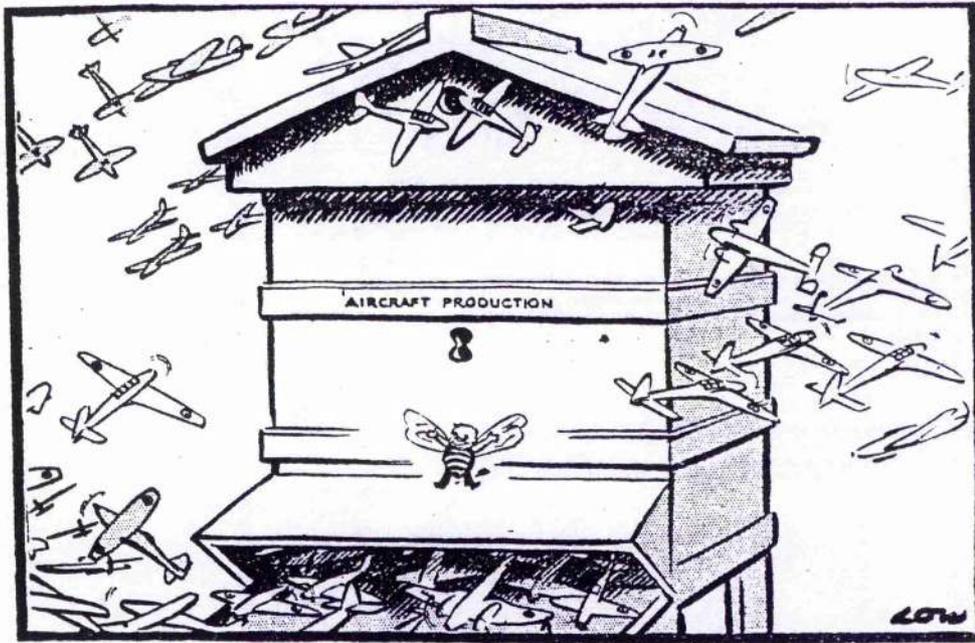
<sup>30</sup> Curtis Keeble, *Britain and the Soviet Union, 1917-1989*, p. 169.

<sup>31</sup> *The Times*, 14 July 1941. Leading article, "Britain and Russia".

<sup>32</sup> The *Daily Telegraph*, 14 July 1941. Leading article, "Our Joint Action with Russia". See also, the *Daily Express*, 14 July 1941. Leading article, "Fruits of Conquest".

<sup>33</sup> *The News Chronicle*, 14 July 1941. Leading article, "Pray Silence". See also, the *Spectator*, 18 July 1941. Leading article, "London, Moscow, Paris". The *Manchester Guardian*, 14 July 1941. Leading article, "The Agreement with Russia".

<sup>34</sup> The *Daily Herald*, 14 July 1941. Leading article, "The Treaty".



Beaverbrook  
HOW DOTH THE BUSY LITTLE B

Fig. 8.1

being made to fight long and hard.<sup>35</sup> In September, the *Sunday Times* warned against British complacency and the tendency to forget there was great sacrifice of Russian lives for Britain as well as the Soviet Union.<sup>36</sup> The *Scotsman* became less critical and increasingly impressed with the self-sacrifice of the Russian people and the Soviet Government, especially when the Dneiper Dam, the USSR's "engineering masterpiece", was blown up.<sup>37</sup> Articles in the *Daily Express* stated only admiration for "great Russian feats and cunning" against Germany.<sup>38</sup> In view of the fact that the paper's proprietor, Beaverbrook, became the Minister of Supply, the *Daily Express* was extremely supportive of aid for the USSR.<sup>39</sup> The *Daily Mail* also dropped its remaining criticism of the Soviet Union by September in response to the Red Army's efforts and endorsed whatever assistance the British Government chose to send to the USSR.<sup>40</sup>

<sup>35</sup> See leading articles in *The Times*, 19, 24, and 29 July, 12 and 22 August 1941.

<sup>36</sup> The *Sunday Times*, 21 September 1941. Leading article, "Positive Policy". See also the *Manchester Guardian*, 29 August 1941. "Dneiper Dam Blown Up by Russians".

<sup>37</sup> The *Scotsman*, 30 August 1941. Leading article, "The Russian Front".

<sup>38</sup> See for example articles in July and September 1941.

<sup>39</sup> The *Daily Express*, 22 September 1941. Leading article, "Tank Week". See Low's cartoon, Figure 8.1. The *Evening Standard*, 9 July 1940, "How Doth the Busy Little B".

<sup>40</sup> See for example, the *Daily Mail*, 4 and 14 September and 2 October 1941.

Fleet Street welcomed the announcement of the Beaverbrook-Harriman mission to Moscow to organise the amount of supplies necessary for the Soviet Union and the method of sending them. However, the majority of the British press was disappointed with the amount of time it took the mission actually to reach Moscow. Only the *Spectator* believed that the delays prior to holding the meetings were necessary and had met with "unreasonable" criticism since the advanced preparation had ensured a rapid and successful conference.<sup>41</sup> In contrast, the *Scotsman* believed there was "excusable criticism" for the delay in starting the discussions though the paper admitted that the time had been used to ensure the conference moved swiftly when it convened.<sup>42</sup> The *Daily Herald* was bluntly critical of the British Government for ignoring the demands of the British people and the press and in the failure to react sufficiently fast to help the Soviet Union.<sup>43</sup>

Despite the delays, the quality conservative press offered congratulations for the way in which the mission got to work and provided supplies for the Soviet Union.<sup>44</sup> The *Observer* appreciatively noted that banquets had been "cut in favour of efficiency" so that work was completed in half the time expected.<sup>45</sup> However, the liberal and labour press, though relieved by the rapidity of the Moscow Conference, expected British Ministers to match their words with deeds and wanted to see stronger British-Soviet cooperation.<sup>46</sup> Thus, despite progress the *News Chronicle* accepted the British population's "mood of anger" towards the British Government for not helping the Soviet Union more in the first three months of fighting<sup>47</sup> and the *Daily Herald* refused to be entirely satisfied until aid actually reached the Soviet Union.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> The *Spectator*, 3 October 1941. "News of the Week - Allied Conference in Moscow". The *Manchester Guardian*, 3 October 1941. Leading article, "The Alliance".

<sup>42</sup> The *Scotsman*, 30 September 1941. Leading article, "Moscow Conference".

<sup>43</sup> The *Daily Herald*, 19 September 1941. Leading article, "Our Ally".

<sup>44</sup> The *Times*, 6 September 1941. Leading article, "Help for Russia"; 24 September 1941, leading article, "A Call for Aid"; 3 October 1941, leading article, "The Moscow Meeting". See also the *Daily Telegraph*, 3 October 1941.

<sup>45</sup> The *Observer*, 5 October 1941. "The Moscow Pact" by Garvin. The *Scotsman*, 3 October 1941. Leading article, "Aid for Russia". See also, the *Daily Express*, 1 - 3 October 1941.

<sup>46</sup> The *News Chronicle*, 24 September 1941. Leading article, "Maisky Speaks".

<sup>47</sup> The *News Chronicle*, 2 October 1941. Leading article, "Hustle in Moscow"; 11 October 1941, leading article, "Britain's Disquiet".

<sup>48</sup> The *Daily Herald*, 4 October 1941. Leading article, "Winter Help".

## Conclusion

Thus the British press accepted that Britain and the Soviet Union were allies. One of the most noticeable changes by Fleet Street was the dropping of "Soviet Russia" for the less accurate but also less ideologically motivated term "Russia". There were occasional exceptions, such as the *Daily Express*, which continued to report in terms of "Reds" and "Soviets" though with far less frequency.<sup>49</sup> Quality conservative and liberal newspapers immediately accepted that past differences and ideologies had to be forgotten in an effort to defeat Hitler and that issues other than the most effective means of overwhelming Germany ought to be ignored until later. The only significant exception to this attitude was the *Scotsman* which encouraged its readers to remember that the Soviet Union had abandoned Britain in 1939 and chosen to ally with Hitler, and therefore deserved to struggle to a degree. The paper also believed that Britain, regardless of an alliance with the Soviet Union, had to consider the fate of Eastern Europe where the Soviet Union had ignored the sovereign rights of Finland, the Baltic states, and Rumania.<sup>50</sup> However, the *Scotsman's* attitude changed in the late summer of 1941 when it appeared the Soviet Union was resisting the German advance and when it emerged that the British and Soviet Governments were committed to working together.<sup>51</sup>

The popular conservative press also readily approved the British-Soviet alliance against Germany. The *Daily Express* was especially supportive of British aid to the Soviet Union since that would help Britain's efforts in the long term against Germany. The *Daily Mail*, however, was more circumspect towards British aid to the Soviet Union. The paper recognised that although it was a good thing for the British and Soviet Governments to cooperate, it was unfortunate that Stalin had avoided such an alliance for so long. Thus the *Daily Mail* remained slightly critical and suspicious of the Soviet

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<sup>49</sup> See for example, the *Daily Express*, 23 June 1941. "Red Cities Blitzed" and "All Aid for Soviets".

<sup>50</sup> The *Scotsman*, 23 1941. Leading articles, "Road to Moscow" and "British Aid to Russia"; 25 June 1941, leading article, "Aid for Russia".

<sup>51</sup> The *Scotsman*, 30 September 1941. Leading article, "Moscow Conference".

Union though gradually the paper came to support the "truly courageous" effort of the "Russians" and advocated large scale British supplies for the USSR.<sup>52</sup>

The labour press warmly welcomed the fact that Britain and the Soviet Union had become allies. Although recognising that it was Stalin who had avoided Britain in the first two years of the war, the *Daily Herald* constantly urged the British Government to provide better and faster help for the Soviet Union and recommended less complacency by Britain. The paper rarely relaxed its reproaches which was in noticeable contrast to the near constant positive comment by the conservative and liberal press after 21 June 1941. The *Daily Herald* felt justified in its criticism because it was supported by the British public which did not believe their Government was acting sufficiently to help directly the Soviet Union or indirectly Britain. In August, a B.I.P.O. poll reported that 30 percent of those questioned did not believe the British Government was providing enough military help for the Russians.<sup>53</sup> Despite the British-Soviet Mutual Aid Agreement in July 1941 and the Beaverbrook-Harriman Mission in September, a B.I.P.O. poll conducted in October stated that 49 per cent of those surveyed thought the British Government had not taken full advantage of the opportunities offered by the German attack on Russia.<sup>54</sup> Furthermore, a year later in September 1942, the British public still believed that Britain could have taken more advantage of the German attack on Russia.<sup>55</sup>

Though there was a small degree of smugness in the British press in June 1941 because the newspapers and the Government had warned of the coming invasion of the Soviet Union, which Stalin had ignored, this almost immediately disappeared as the crisis recalled Fleet Street to its purpose of promoting the war against Germany. Hostility, indifference and ideology were ignored in the struggle against a common enemy and not until the end of the war were any of those three issues allowed to resurface as a hindrance

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<sup>52</sup> The *Daily Mail*, 4 September 1941. Leading article, "Battle of Leningrad".

<sup>53</sup> B.I.P.O., Gallup Poll, August 1941. Only 37 per cent believed Britain was doing enough while 33 per cent expressed "no opinion".

<sup>54</sup> B.I.P.O., Gallup Poll, October 1941. Only 29 per cent believed Britain had taken advantage of the German attack while 22 per cent offered "no opinion".

<sup>55</sup> B.I.P.O., Gallup Poll, September 1942. Of those questioned, 44 per cent believed Britain had not done enough as a result of Germany's attack on Russia, 28 per cent thought Britain had done enough, while 28 per cent had "no opinion".

to cooperation between Britain and the Soviet Union. This style of collaboration was inevitably going to encourage the problems that occurred in the post-war conferences which were meant to resolve the problems of Europe but which led to the end of cooperation and the beginnings of the Cold War. However, before those problems occurred, "Uncle Joe's" reputation was created and subsequently supported by the British press.<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> In 1941, the majority of press coverage concerning the Soviet Union was devoted to the conflict on the Eastern Front. However, there was some evidence that the conservative press was eager to promote the good reputation of Stalin even before he "officially" became known as "Uncle Joe". See for example, the *Daily Mail*, 24 June and 2 October 1941; the *Daily Express*, 23 June, 14 July, 2 October 1941; *The Times*, 4 and 14 July, 7 November 1941.

## Chapter 9

### Conclusion<sup>1</sup>

An examination of British press attitudes in the 1930s concerning the Soviet Union provides insight into two main issues. First, Fleet Street allowed people to discover what the Soviet Union, an alien and far away country, was like. Very few people in the 1930s could afford the journey and therefore, few had first hand knowledge of such a vast and potentially important country. Thus the press was in a position to inform the British public about subjects of which the people knew little, though often the newspapers themselves chose not to provide entirely accurate information.<sup>2</sup> The Soviet Union was one such topic which was often misrepresented, either through ignorance or deliberate distortion of facts, by the majority of the British press in the 1930s. However, the reason for examining newspaper coverage of the Soviet Union in the 1930s, as compared to articles of other little known countries and peoples, was because the USSR had a significant degree of influence on British foreign affairs, whether or not the British Government wished to acknowledge that was the case. Thus an examination of British press attitudes towards the Soviet Union secondly provides insight into British views towards the Soviet Union and reveals why the British and the Soviet Governments did not establish a better relationship before 1941.

The failure to work together was all the more surprising when the main aim of the two countries in the 1930s was considered. Both countries were determined to maintain peace in Europe. It was, therefore, disappointing that such an important goal could not be achieved by two very influential states, a point which liberal and labour newspapers

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<sup>1</sup> The majority of articles sighted in the conclusion have already been used in previous chapters. Furthermore, they are a limited selection representing a far greater number of articles.

<sup>2</sup> Kingsley Martin, *The Press the Public Wants*, p.93. Martin argued that it was against the commercial interests of the proprietor to print too much information of a potentially negative aspect. A.J. Cummings, *The Press and a Changing Civilisation*, pp. 2-3. Cummings believed that the people were "greedy" for news and learned much from newspapers, though he admitted that some articles could be falsified and thus misleading.

noted, though few conservative papers conceded.<sup>3</sup> For a period between 1934 and 1935, and again in 1939, it appeared that Britain and the Soviet Union were collaborating and yet ultimately, the two governments moved with different methods in the pursuit of peace. The press of the 1930s provided a good indication of why and how cooperation failed because newspapers reflected the attitudes of the British Government, whether or not the press intended to do so. This included those liberal, labour, and some quality conservative newspapers which frequently reported favourably on the Soviet Union.

An examination of Fleet Street attitudes concerning the Soviet Union in the 1930s establishes three predominant and interlocking reasons for the failure to improve British-Soviet relations before 1941. First, the British press acknowledged that the Soviet Union in the 1930s was internally changing very rapidly. Despite recognition of economic advances under the Five Year Plans, there were far more articles concerned with the failures of harvests and the suffering of the people.<sup>4</sup> There was also as much disillusionment and criticism directed at the Soviet Government because the Soviet population lived under an inhumane and barbaric regime. These views hindered further confidence in the Soviet Union since any benefits which the press reported were inevitably negated by the far greater coverage of the cruel and repressive nature of Soviet justice which came under intense scrutiny in the 1930s. For example, the liberal press had welcomed the growth of the economy but these papers believed the show trials caused fear amongst the Russian people and therefore hindered social and economic growth.<sup>5</sup> The labour press, the firmest supporter of the "socialist experiment", was disappointed that large scale repression was deemed necessary by the Soviet Government when domestically the country appeared to be advancing favourably.<sup>6</sup> The conservative

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<sup>3</sup> See for example, the *Manchester Guardian*, 2 April 1935; 10 February and 18 July 1936. The *News Chronicle*, 28 January 1939. The *Daily Herald*, 28 March, 1 April, and 9 December 1935; 21 January 1939. The *Scotsman*, 1 April 1935. The *Daily Telegraph*, 2 April 1935.

<sup>4</sup> See for example, *The Times*, 29 May 1934; 18 February 1935. The *Daily Telegraph*, 4 September 1936. The *Daily Express*, April 1933; 29 December 1934. The *News Chronicle*, 17 May and 19 June 1933. The *Manchester Guardian*, 9 September 1935; 20 February 1936. The *New Statesman and Nation*, 20 July 1935.

<sup>5</sup> The *Economist*, 22 August 1936. The *Manchester Guardian*, 6 March 1935; 1 February 1937. See also, the *Yorkshire Post*, 24 August 1936.

<sup>6</sup> The *Daily Herald*, 1 April 1935; 2 September 1936; 10 June 1937. The *New Statesman and Nation*, 30 January 1937.

press, regardless of any economic advances, believed the purges were a clear sign that internally the Soviet Union was "barbaric" and therefore, the country was not as socially advanced as the West or worthy of improved relations with Britain.<sup>7</sup>

Thus all newspapers and journals contained suspicion, scepticism or disappointment with the Soviet Union's internal developments. Such feelings were conveyed to the British public causing uncertainty in the beliefs of many people that Britain and the Soviet Union should cooperate. Furthermore, although the press was technically independent of the British Government, newspapers always noted and often reflected the feelings of the Government which was itself suspicious and sceptical of the domestic affairs of the Soviet Union. Thus the Government preferred to watch the USSR's internal developments to see if the Soviet Government was sufficiently stable and strong to provide the foreign assistance it offered. While it was possible that traitors were at large in Moscow or that the Soviet Government was corrupt, the British Government cautiously chose to wait for a time when the Soviet Union would become constant and reliable. The conservative press willingly accepted that policy and discussed in detail the negative aspects of the show trials.<sup>8</sup> The liberal and labour press, though accepting the logic of such a policy, nevertheless felt that foreign circumstances were not conducive to such waiting and argued that the Soviet Union's internal policy, deplorable though it was, should not interfere with the Soviet Government's peaceful foreign policy. Nevertheless, such concessions to the alleged disgracefulness of Soviet judgement allowed a degree of suspicion which reduced the emphasis of the liberal and labour press's full encouragement of improved British-Soviet relations.<sup>9</sup>

As the domestic affairs of the Soviet Union were rapidly evolving, so too was the Government's foreign policy which ironically contributed to the second failure to improve British-Soviet relations. The Soviet Government in the 1930s abandoned its policy of remaining isolated from foreign affairs, to taking an active position in promoting

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<sup>7</sup> *The Scotsman*, 10 March 1938. *The Daily Express*, 24 December 1934. *The Sunday Times*, 31 January 1937. *The Times*, 1 February 1937. *The Daily Telegraph*, 28 January 1937.

<sup>8</sup> See especially discussion in June 1937 of the Red Army purge. Also, *The Times*, 13 June and 24 October 1938.

<sup>9</sup> Again see particularly June 1937 for discontent with the Red Army purge.

collective security in Europe, or what Litvinov called "the indivisibility of peace". The Soviet Union was responding to the changing situation in Europe as a result of Hitler's rise to power in Germany in 1933. In the first years of Hitler's rule, Britain was similarly concerned by Hitler's expansionist aims and thus accepted the apparently peaceful intentions of the Soviet Union. The British Government, therefore, approved Litvinov's collective security plans and supported the Soviet entry into the League of Nations in September 1934. In addition, the British Government endorsed an Eastern Locarno plan, though with no desire to join it, to guarantee the sovereignty of Eastern Europe. To show commitment to the plan, Eden was sent to Moscow in March 1935, and yet at this point, the signs were evident that Britain was more anxious to cooperate with Germany. Eden was merely a minor member of the Government, with no real authority, and as Hitler refused to join the Eastern Locarno plan, British enthusiasm towards working with the Soviet Union declined.

In these issues, the British press again reflected the British Government. It is notable that the quality conservative press between, 1934 and 1935, was at its most complimentary towards the Soviet Union. These were the years in which the British Government was clearly weighing up the advantages of better relations with the Soviet Union against the rising influence and strength of Germany. Thus, following the British Government's lead, these papers supported the Soviet entry into the League, the plan for an Eastern Locarno, and Eden's visit to Moscow. Nevertheless, there remained a significant degree of suspicion.<sup>10</sup> For example, some papers only supported Soviet entry into the League because it might encourage Germany to re-enter as continued voluntary isolation from that organisation showed an intransigent attitude by Hitler towards cooperation.<sup>11</sup> Quality conservative press support for an Eastern Locarno plan was only conditional on German support, and in addition, the *Observer* and the *Daily Telegraph* failed to recognise that the project originated with Litvinov as much as with the French

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<sup>10</sup> See quality conservative newspapers in September 1934 which, though welcoming Soviet membership into the League of Nations, retained suspicion of Soviet motives.

<sup>11</sup> The *Scotsman*, 11 September 1934.

Government.<sup>12</sup> Finally, support for Eden's visit to Moscow was given primarily because it was not the Foreign Secretary, Simon, making the journey,<sup>13</sup> and *The Times* especially reduced the importance of the event by disguising the significance of Eden's meetings behind a great deal more coverage devoted to Simon's visit to Berlin a few days before.<sup>14</sup>

As it became more evident that Germany refused to join any plan conceived by the Soviet Government, the quality conservative press lost interest in such projects. Increasingly, these newspapers saw Soviet plans as intending to encircle Germany or unwarranted "meddling" in Europe, and therefore were very dangerous proposals for Britain to consider. Thus there was a suspicion that the Soviet Union's foreign policy was intended only for the Soviet Union's benefit rather than Europe's or Britain's.<sup>15</sup> This was ironic since Britain's reason for adopting the policy of appeasement was for British security, though Eastern Europe was sacrificed to Germany. As the British Government preferred appeasement of Germany, so too did the quality conservative press and thus coverage of the Soviet Union's role in Europe decreased in importance though not necessarily frequency. What became apparent was that Germany was more often in the headlines or leading articles of the quality conservative press than the Soviet Union, unless there was a show trial.

The popular conservative press was even less receptive to the Soviet Union's efforts to become involved in Europe's affairs. Those papers believed the Soviet Government intended to weaken Europe by causing conflict between Britain and Germany so the Soviet Union would be the leading force in Europe. Therefore, the Beaverbrook and Rothermere newspapers wanted the British Government to avoid any efforts by Moscow to entangle Britain in a disagreement with Germany.<sup>16</sup> Thus these

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<sup>12</sup> *The Observer*, 15 July 1934. *The Daily Telegraph*, 14 July 1934.

<sup>13</sup> See articles in March 1935.

<sup>14</sup> *The Times*, 4 April 1935.

<sup>15</sup> For example, the *Daily Telegraph*, 15 May 1935; 24 October and 30 November 1936. *The Observer*, 25 October and 29 November 1936; 7 November 1937. *The Times*, 9 July 1936.

<sup>16</sup> See for example, the *Daily Express*, 23 May, 14 and 17 July, and 13 September 1934; 20 March and 11 April 1935; articles on Spanish Civil War. *The Daily Mail*, 6 and 12 September 1934; 23 and 26 March 1935; articles on Spanish Civil War.

papers criticised the British Government for supporting both the Soviet entry into the League and the Eastern Locarno plan, and also believed Eden had no business in Moscow. However, in contrast to the quality conservative press, the popular conservative newspapers also had no desire for Britain to become more involved with Germany. These papers preferred that the British Government remain uncommitted to Europe's affairs.<sup>17</sup> Though the majority of articles in the popular conservative press were concerned with Britain's domestic issues,<sup>18</sup> Germany received a significant degree of coverage. The only issues concerning the Soviet Union which received detailed attention, and all of it negative, were the show trials and communist involvement in Spain.

As Hitler's expansionist aims became more apparent, the liberal and labour press believed that Europe had to work together to maintain peace and these papers, therefore, welcomed the Soviet Union's efforts towards collective security. Thus the Soviet Union's entry into the League was heralded as a step in that direction and Litvinov's Eastern Locarno plan was also seen as an opportunity for Europe to collaborate against aggression. When Hitler refused to join a security scheme for Eastern Europe, the liberal and labour press pointed to his "obvious" desire to divide Europe. These papers called for the British Government to admit that the Soviet Union's method of securing peace was more beneficial because membership was open to all whereas Germany's plans wanted to exclude the Soviet Union.<sup>19</sup> Thus when Eden was sent to Moscow rather than Simon, there was dissatisfaction that the Foreign Secretary had not gone, though there was also a hope that at least efforts were being made towards improving British-Soviet understanding for Europe's benefit. Criticism for the failure to secure a better relationship primarily focused on the British Government, though the liberal and labour

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<sup>17</sup> R. Allen, *Voice of Britain*, p. 56. See for example, popular conservative press articles in September 1934, and March and April 1935.

<sup>18</sup> Martin, *The Press the Public Wants*, pp. 58-61. Allen, p. 64.

<sup>19</sup> *The Manchester Guardian*, 11 September 1934; 2 April 1935; 10 February, 18 July and 26 August 1936. *The News Chronicle*, 28 March 1935. *The Daily Herald*, 24 November 1934; 1 April 1935. *The New Statesman and Nation*, 30 March 1935.

press also acknowledged that the Soviet Union was partly to blame.<sup>20</sup> However, during the Spanish Civil War, these papers expressed dissatisfaction with the British Government for avoiding cooperation with the Soviet Union over non-intervention plans.

The liberal and labour press disliked appeasement and yet there was a degree of acceptance as long as peace was secured. Although these papers criticised the British Government's appeasement of Germany, at the same time, these papers welcomed the British leadership's initiative and hoped for "peace in our time". This was especially true when Europe came under the slightest threat of war. The liberal and labour press failed to support Litvinov's calls for collective action against aggression, claiming that the British people did not wish to fight for the Rhineland, Austria, or Czechoslovakia.<sup>21</sup> Despite protest at the exclusion of the Soviet Union from the Munich Conference, it was relatively feeble when compared to the support which these papers accorded to the Soviet Union's complaints against the failure of non-intervention in the Spanish Civil War. Thus even the liberal and labour press, despite their belief in collective security, listened to what the British Government suggested concerning Europe's safety and occasionally agreed to ignore suggestions for peace by the Soviet Union.

Finally, press coverage of the Soviet Union's internal and external developments was affected first by the suspicion and prejudice expressed against communism by the conservative press, and sometimes liberal papers, and secondly by the disappointment voiced by the liberal and labour press because the communist leadership had failed in the socialist experiment. These expressions of suspicion, prejudice, and disappointment led to a lack of trust between the two countries and thus contributed to the failure by the British and the Soviet Governments to improve relations prior to 1941. The suspicions and prejudices displayed by the conservative press were again a reflection of the British Government, as there were many conservative party members who could not hide their dislike and distrust of communism. Chamberlain particularly had a deep aversion to it

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<sup>20</sup> See for example, press coverage of the Soviet note to Italy prior to the Nyon Conference: the *Manchester Guardian*, 7 September 1937. The *News Chronicle*, 8 September 1937.

<sup>21</sup> The *Daily Herald*, 13 and 14 March 1936. The *Manchester Guardian*, 18 March 1938. The *News Chronicle*, 30 September 1938.

and for that reason would not accept the Soviet Government as a partner against aggression. Churchill also suspected communist intentions, though he was able to see beyond his dislike to recognise that Britain needed the Soviet Union's strength against Germany to survive.<sup>22</sup> Communism allegedly threatened what most people in Britain wanted, peace, and there was a fear that communism would spread into Britain. Therefore, one reason why the British Government wanted General Franco to succeed in Spain was to prevent a Soviet base from developing in south-west Europe from which communism would spread to the rest of the continent.<sup>23</sup>

Thus there was little support by the conservative press for the Republicans in Spain, even though they had been democratically elected, because they were supported by communists throughout Europe. The popular conservative press was especially critical of the "Red" threat to Spain, criticism which was unjustified since these papers failed to take the same negative attitude towards fascism in Spain. Thus ideological differences prevented British-Soviet cooperation in Spain.<sup>24</sup> However, even more important to Britain, because it was closer to matters at home, was the trial of six British engineers in 1933 in Moscow which led to frenzied hatred and prejudice against communism and the Soviet Union in the conservative press, which alleged both were totally rotten if British citizens could be tried.<sup>25</sup> The prejudice led the conservative press to demand the most damaging and useless reprisals, from economic embargos to the severing of diplomatic relations.<sup>26</sup> Again the conservative press reflected the questionable and hysterical activity of the British Government, though the newspapers were actually less reserved than the Government. Such ideological hatred could have caused greater damage, though common

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<sup>22</sup> Michael J. Carley, "A Fearful Concatenation of Circumstances': the Anglo-Soviet Rapprochement, 1934-1936", p. 30. Richard Cockett, *Twilight of Truth*, p. 115.

<sup>23</sup> Douglas Little, "Red Scare, 1936: Anti-Bolshevism and the Origins of British Non-Intervention in the Spanish Civil War", p. 297 and 299. Cattell, *Soviet Diplomacy and the Spanish Civil War*, p. 11. D.B.F.P., Second Series, Vol. XVII, no. 78 and Vol. XVIII, no. 34. Carley, "A Fearful Concatenation of Circumstances", p. 50.

<sup>24</sup> See for example, a large amount of ideologically motivated reporting in the popular conservative press in August 1936. Less obvious, but nevertheless negative, was the quality conservative press criticism of communism compared to the failure to criticise nationalist help. *The Sunday Times*, 11 October 1936. *The Observer*, 30 August and 25 November 1936. *The Times*, 8 October 1936.

<sup>25</sup> *The Daily Express*, 16 and 17 March 1933. *The Daily Mail*, 4 April 1933. *The Times*, 16 March 1933. *The Yorkshire Post*, 4 April 1933.

<sup>26</sup> *The Yorkshire Post*, 20 April 1933. *The Daily Mail*, 13 and 19 April 1933.

sense by both governments, and especially by Litvinov, prevented severe damage to relations.

The liberal and labour press, though anxious about communism, were able to accept the Soviet Union's difference in ideological views because Britain and the Soviet Union both desired peace. However, the liberal press occasionally made ideological or racial references to the Soviet Union similar to those of the quality conservative newspapers. For example, the liberal press found that the "Eastern" or "Oriental" blood of the Soviet people provided a convenient excuse for some of the ills in the Soviet Union, such as show trials.<sup>27</sup> These papers also regretted that communism hindered a more western approach to governing the Soviet Union.<sup>28</sup>

However, these references did not prevent the liberal press from rationally judging the Soviet Union's peaceful foreign policy. Thus the difference between conservative and liberal or labour press attitudes was that the former expressed prejudice towards communism and therefore found it difficult to advocate British cooperation with such a state. The latter newspapers expressed disappointment with what communism achieved or how communist leadership excesses prevented the Soviet Union from making true socialist gains. During the Metropolitan-Vickers trial, the liberal and labour press failed to comprehend why the Soviet Government threatened British-Soviet relations by trying British citizens on flimsy evidence.<sup>29</sup> Likewise, during the Moscow show trials, these papers questioned why the Soviet leadership held trials, again with poor evidence, at a time when Britain and the Soviet Union needed to show unity of purpose against aggression. These papers regretted that the Soviet Government thus gave the British leadership an excuse for avoiding closer contact with Moscow. There was profound disappointment that socialism was not strong, had proved so unstable, and that the

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<sup>27</sup> *The Spectator*, 20 August 1937. *The News Chronicle*, 4 April 1933. *The Manchester Guardian*, 5 April 1933.

<sup>28</sup> *The Manchester Guardian*, 6 March 1935; 16 June 1936; 18 December 1937. *The Daily Herald*, 6 and 13 June 1936; 10 June and December 1937. See also the *Yorkshire Post*, 19 September 1934.

<sup>29</sup> See liberal and labour papers, March and April 1933. The quality conservative press also questioned the timing of the trial.

communists failed to see the damage the purges caused to their prestige.<sup>30</sup> The show trials contributed to a firm suspicion in all the British press that communism was wrecking the Soviet Union<sup>31</sup> not only because there were apparently so many traitors, but because it seemed as likely that there was significant corruption in the Soviet leadership.<sup>32</sup>

As Europe moved closer to war, ideology continued to encourage suspicion or disappointment, especially at the Munich Conference when the Soviet Union was ignored. The lack of trust between the British and Soviet Governments, aggravated in the 1930s, came to a crisis in 1939 when the two countries, with France, tried to reach an agreement on how to protect Europe from German aggression. Ideological differences were finally ignored by the majority of the press<sup>33</sup> in 1939 in an effort to assist the British Government in securing an alliance with the Soviet Union against Germany. It was the first time the British press had been so positively united towards the Soviet Union though these attitudes were not rewarded by the British or Soviet Governments, much to the dismay of many newspapers.<sup>34</sup> British efforts at appeasement brought only war while the Soviet Union, looking for the best option as was Britain, found Germany a willing partner and thus avoided war.

Prejudice and suspicion contributed to the British-Soviet failure to cooperate between 1933 and 1939. From 1939 to 1941, the legacy of distrust between the two countries, as demonstrated by the British press, could not be overcome until Germany invaded the Soviet Union. Fleet Street recognised that the British Government had missed an opportunity for advancing British-Soviet relations and possibly deterring Hitler from war. Thus despite the Winter War, when British newspapers resumed criticism of

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<sup>30</sup> For example, the *Manchester Guardian*, 17 January 1935. The *Spectator*, 28 August 1936. The *Daily Herald*, 2 September 1936.

<sup>31</sup> See articles in June 1937 following the Red Army purge.

<sup>32</sup> The *Sunday Times*, 31 January 1937. The *Daily Telegraph*, 28 January 1937. The *Times*, 1 February 1937. The *Daily Express*, 22 August 1936. The *News Chronicle*, 11 June 1937. The *Spectator*, 28 August 1936. The *Economist*, 29 August 1936.

<sup>33</sup> The *Times* was the exception.

<sup>34</sup> The *Scotsman*, the *Daily Mail* and *The Times* were the most critical of the Nazi-Soviet pact though other newspapers expressed disappointment with the Soviet and British Governments.

the Soviet Union on a grand scale, some of which was ideologically motivated,<sup>35</sup> the British press soon recognised that Britain's survival required a second front in Europe and thus the Soviet Union as an ally. It was notable that the press's desire to assist Finland against the Red Army was not matched by the British Government and thus press opinion towards the Soviet Union was not necessarily reflecting the aims of the War Cabinet. However, criticism by the British leadership and press of the Soviet Union's expansionist goals in Eastern Europe was reserved, compared to condemnation during the Winter War, as both newspapers and the Government focused on the rising conflict of interest between Berlin and Moscow. Thus hope that Britain and the Soviet Union would become allies grew, but press expectations were not realised until June 1941.

British-Soviet cooperation did not fail as a result of favourable or unfavourable comment concerning the Soviet Union by the British press. Newspapers did not have that type of influence, regardless of British or Soviet Government complaints that the press damaged relations.<sup>36</sup> Fleet Street's ability in the 1930s was in reflecting Government opinion to help lead public opinion, though the press also reflected public opinion to ensure that the Government was acting in the public's interest. Thus the amount of coverage devoted to the Soviet Union in the 1930s demonstrated that Britain was aware of the growing significance in Europe of that country. While the liberal and labour press, occasionally supported by some of the quality conservative newspapers,<sup>37</sup> believed the British should work with Moscow for Britain's benefit, the conservative press was more sceptical and chose what it considered to be a more sensible, though cautious, route to peace. The press was a valuable means of showing the divisions which existed in Britain amongst those who preferred to see the advancement of British-Soviet relations and those who opposed such beneficial relations. The prejudice, suspicion, and disappointment expressed by Fleet Street help to explain why Britain and the Soviet Union failed to cooperate against aggression before 1941.

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<sup>35</sup> See for example, the *Sunday Times*, 18 February 1940. *The Times*, 4 January 1940. *The Evening News*, 28 December 1939.

<sup>36</sup> Carley, "A Fearful Concatenation of Circumstances", pp. 37 and 39. D.B.F.P., Second Series, Vol. VII, nos. 597, 602, 606, 608, and 611.

<sup>37</sup> Usually it was the *Scotsman*, the *Yorkshire Post*, and occasionally the *Sunday Times*.

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