RUSSIA AND THE BRITISH PRESS

1938 - 1940

by

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A thesis submitted to the Graduate Faculty of Arts and Science of McGill University in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in History.

August 1965.

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NOTE:

i) Expressions such as "the press", "thought", "noticed", "felt" and the like have been used. Such phrasing may not stand up to exact analysis, but has the benefit of descriptiveness and the sanction of usage.

ii) Due to the nature of this study, ibidem (ibid.) has been used to refer to the prior newspaper and date when alone. When followed by a different date ibid. will refer only to the previously cited newspaper. In the case of books usual convention has been followed.

PART ONE

MUNICH

CHAPTER ONE

1. INTRODUCTION

The Czechoslovakian crisis in the Spring and Summer of 1938 had deeply divided the British press. By September 1938 there were discernible clear lines of difference both on the policy Britain was urged to pursue in Central Europe and on the role - or lack of role - envisaged for the U.S.S.R. The Soviet connection to events stemmed from the Czech-Soviet Mutual Assistance Pact of May 1935, contingent for its operation in the case of aggression on the active intervention of France.

The Times, forcefully and without reservation, supported the Chamberlain Government's foreign policy of appeasement. The necessity to conduct international relations upon the principle of the peaceful adjustment of disputes via the techniques of diplomatic negotiation and conciliation was fervently advocated. The prime objective centred on the pacification of Germany: the satisfaction of legitimate German grievances resulting from the need for revision of the Versailles Treaty. Most potentially disruptive in the view of the Times was German fear of encirclement. Hence, it was implied that Czechoslovakia must relinquish her French and Russian treaties - "that system of insecurity organised with the object of encircling Germany...."[1] The Times took a generally optimistic view of the possibility of appeasing Germany and was convinced of her desire for the peaceful settlement of disputes as opposed to a resort to force. Finally, the disturbances in Central Europe were pictured as essentially a minority dispute illustrating the clear necessity for Sudeten self-determination. Above all, the emphasis

1. Times, 21 September 1938.

of the Times was to localise the dispute as not of sufficient gravity to involve the powers of Europe in conflict. Hence, its famous suggestion on 7 September 1938, "of making Czechoslovakia a more homogeneous State by the secession of that fringe of alien populations who are contiguous to the nations with which they are united by race." With the Times emphasizing conciliation rather than resistance, a role for the U.S.S.R. was obviously never seriously considered.[1] And in this the Times was consistent. Actual news coverage as dispatched from the Riga correspondent (the Times was without a Moscow correspondent from September 1917 until May 1939) consisted largely of reports on agricultural or industrial failures, purges and census figures. Soviet diplomatic moves and the utterances of its politicians were ignored or under-emphasized. Soviet intentions throughout September 1938, were in the Times, continually termed "uncertain".

The other Conservative press organ selected for analysis, the Daily Telegraph, maintained an independent attitude of critical approval towards Chamberlain's foreign policy. It asserted that legitimate Sudeten claims should be supported although resisted at the point which compromised Czech national sovereignty. It shared, but not unequivocably, the Times' hopes for a policy of appeasement. Late in September 1938, editorial opinion grew more cynical of Hitler's intentions and emphasized the need for firmness and for Britain to make her position clear to Germany. The policy of the Telegraph towards the U.S.S.R. was similar to the Times. It was content to observe for most of September that the Soviets were "mute" as to their intentions. Its foreign press excerpts seldom included Russia, nor were reports on Soviet diplomacy at all frequent. In fairness, it must be noted

1. The History of the Times, Vol. IV (London, 1952), pp. 911-912; John Evelyn Wrench, Geoffrey Dawson and Our Times (London, 1955), pp. 371-374.

that the Telegraph's editorial policy was in a state of flux during the crisis. When the attitude of the press stiffened in late September, the Telegraph equally endorsed a firm stand by Britain, France, and Russia in line with the Tory militants.

In its editorial and special articles the Daily Express promulgated a policy of extreme appeasement considerably more severe than that implemented by Chamberlain. This policy the Express exalted as "isolation"; a view designed to urge Britain to turn her back on the quarrels of Europe and concentrate on domestic affairs and the development and defence of the British Empire. It campaigned for most of September 1938, with a "No War" policy. The Express was convinced of Hitler's desire for a peaceful settlement, supported Sudeten self-determination, urged concessions from the Czech Government, especially the abandonment of the Franco-Czech and Russo-Czech agreements, and eschewed any notion of collective security. It was convinced that the Soviets, whom they largely refused to report on, would not act in support of Czechoslovakia. Moreover, because of the Russo-Czech Pact, the Soviets were pictured as a hindrance to extracting concessions from President Beneš. In special articles, the Express condoned German expansion eastward at Soviet expense.[1]

As the daily newspaper representing the main Opposition party in Parliament, the mass circulation Daily Herald presents a total contrast to any of the above views. This official Labour organ remained fiercely critical of Chamberlain's policy, frankly pro-Czech and anti-German. The Daily Herald regarded international relations as in a period of anarchy due to the breaking up of the League of Nations, the failure effectively to apply sanctions and the League provisions for collective security, and a deterioration in

1. See, for example, Daily Express, 22 September 1938.

international morality. Consequently, what was demanded of the democracies (amongst whom the Herald included the Soviet Union) was the restoration of the authority of international law, and a firm stand in the face of totalitarian aggression. By the latter provision, the Herald implied the pursuit of a collective security policy which in view of the ineffectiveness of the League meant in effect an Anglo-France-Soviet alliance.

The inclusion of Russia in the Herald's policy was based firstly, on its ideological sympathy for the "Socialist experiment" in the Soviet Union. Secondly, the latter's foreign policy, as embodied mainly in the public utterances of M. Litvinov, Commissar for Foreign Affairs, was admired as a model of support for the League of Nations and collective security. The Soviets were pictured as the only great power not intent on aggressive expansionism; a model of principled morality in international affairs.

In regard to the September 1938 crisis, the Daily Herald incessantly demanded that Britain declare firmly her intention to defend Czechoslovakia against aggression. Furthermore, that the Government must recognise Hitler's responsibility as the master-mind for the Central European crisis. "The crisis of the summer of 1938," argued the Herald, "has not been a Czech crisis, or a Sudeten crisis. It has been a Hitler crisis."[1] The principle issue involved was here seen as not necessarily a specific grievance to be remedied, or the application of the principle of self-determination which the Herald supported, but rather Hitler's use of the minority question to pursue his ambitions for conquest and continental domination. This Labour organ feared that such ambitions would be satisfied ultimately at the expense of the U.S.S.R. The policy utterances of the Soviet Union were featured prominently, supported, and fully believed.

1. Daily Herald, 5 September 1939.

The Liberal Manchester Guardian shared with the Daily Herald most of the above attitudes. It was a keen critic of the policy of appeasement, advocated closer collaboration with the Soviet Union, and likewise declared that Britain, France, and the Soviets must be firm in dealing with Germany. The Guardian also argued eloquently against the dangers inherent in abandoning Czechoslovakia and the French system of alliances to a German move eastwards. Their greatest fear was expressed in their continued warnings to the Government not to "cold-shoulder" the U.S.S.R. Convinced admirers of Socialist Russia, but repelled by Stalin's use of terror, the Guardian gave Soviet foreign and domestic events maximum coverage.

A further selection from the weekly press offers a body of Independent views. The New Statesman, the Spectator, and the Economist, during the September crisis, shared many of the attitudes characteristic of the Liberal Guardian and Labour Herald: criticism of the price being paid for German appeasement, pessimism as to Hitler's ultimate intentions, and emphasis on German responsibility for the crisis. Similarly with regard to the U.S.S.R., they too displayed the belief in the non-aggressive nature of Soviet foreign policy and accepted her declared intention to fulfil all treaty obligations. Finally, they too were convinced that only the spectre of a united Anglo-French-Soviet defence front was capable of the firmness to manage Hitler and preserve Czech integrity. In comparing this body of opinion with the Conservative press it is noticeable that a desire for more active collaboration between Britain and Russia varied with editorial determination to resist or appease Germany.

2. RUSSIA AND THE CRISIS OF SEPTEMBER 1938

On 6 September 1938 the Daily Herald reported that two days earlier,[1] M. Litvinov had assured the French Chargé d'Affaires in Moscow, that Russia would fulfil her treaty obligations to the full provided the French did likewise. The report appeared in no other newspaper. The Herald further claimed that M. Alexandrovsky, Soviet Minister in Czechoslovakia, acting on instructions from Moscow advised the Czech Government to make no more concessions, and gave assurances of Russian support in the event of war. The New Statesman, in a leading article termed Russia's attitude: "the one clear factor in the situation."[2] The diplomatic correspondent of the Manchester Guardian stated on 10 September 1939 that the Soviets were carrying out military preparations on the western frontier under General Bluecher. The article concluded: "It is believed both here (i.e., London) and in Paris that Russia would go to war almost automatically as soon as Czecho-Slovakia was attacked."

The Economist and the Spectator were similarly definitive in stating their views as to Soviet intentions. The latter journal commented on a worsening of the crisis, after the disturbances at Mährisch-Ostrau on 7 September, that the Germans were stopping one step short of unilateral action simply "by the spectacle of superior force, of Britain and France, Russia and Czechoslovakia, on guard against her."[3] The Economist declared that as to Soviet intentions "there has never been any confession of uncertainty...."

1. The Herald was mistaken on its dates. The interview took place on 2 September 1938. For a fuller discussion, see Winston Churchill, The Second World War, Vol. 1. The Gathering Storm (London, 1948), pp. 229-232, 239. Ivan Maisky, Who Helped Hitler? (London,1964), p.78.
2. New Statesman and Nation (hereafter referred to as New Statesman) 3 September 1938.
3. Spectator, 9 September 1938.

and reported on assurances given by Litvinov to the German Ambassador that Russia would fulfil to the letter her treaty with Czechoslovakia.[1] The New Statesman on 3 September also carried this latter report, and predicted that the aid would be in the form of troops and aeroplanes.

While editorially the Daily Telegraph urged a compromise solution to the Czech crisis, by granting the Sudetens the limit of autonomy consonant with the maintenance of Czech territorial sovereignty, its Moscow correspondent reported Litvinov's assurances to the German Ambassador. He emphasized, however, that Soviet obligations to Czechoslovakia depended on a prior French initiative.[2] The Times Riga correspondent did not report any of the above information. Rather, he observed that "No responsible official in Moscow has made any public statement recently bearing on the Sudeten German crisis." He did admit that the Soviet press, while avoiding "specific promises," had assured Czechoslovakia of Russia's support. His dispatch further informed the reader that Britain was caricatured in the Soviet press as "Germany's fond dupe."[3] In a rare editorial reference on 8 September, the Times sceptically commented that Russia "may or may not honour" her treaty obligations to Czechoslovakia. Finally, the Daily Express impressed its readers with the importance of getting the Czechs "to accept the necessary sacrifices....", the prime one being the shedding of her French and Russian alliances.[4]

Nor were those newspapers who counted on the U.S.S.R. coming to Czechoslovakia's aid unaware of the practical problems involved. As Russia had no common frontier with Germany or Czechoslovakia any support would have to

1. Economist, 10 September 1938.
2. Daily Telegraph, 6 September 1938.
3. Times, 7 September 1938.
4. Daily Express, 3 September 1938.

be sent via Poland or Rumania. The co-operation of the Poles, was not even mentioned, the press no doubt assuming it to be an impossibility. As for the Rumanian route, the Economist, the New Statesman, the Daily Herald, and surprisingly, the Daily Express published news items that Rumania would permit the passage of Soviet material support.[1] The source of these reports were discussions being held in Geneva between Russian, French and Rumanian plenipotentiaries.

In contrast to the certitude with which a section of the British press viewed Soviet intentions the Times and Daily Telegraph largely ignored comment on this aspect. However, both did see fit to devote entire leaders on 6 September 1938 to a speech delivered by Mr. Elvin, as President of the Trades Union Congress. Therein Elvin had asked: "Why had not Great Britain, France, and the Soviet Republic plainly told Germany that she must 'keep off the grass?'"[2] In a rather tart reply the Times challenged Elvin's classification of Russia as one of the democracies. Instead, the leader described the Soviet Union as "the most totalitarian of all the dictatorships" and referred at length to the purges, the O.G.P.U., censorship, agitations of the Comintern, and Soviet intervention in Spain. The Daily Telegraph likewise objected to Elvin's inclusion of the Soviet Union among the democracies. The leading article described his remarks as a "torrent of contradictory philosophy" and termed regrettable Elvin's "Wild talk of foreign affairs and praise of communism...."[3] Clearly, then, sceptical or indifferent to Soviet treaty commitments, the Conservative press was equally disposed to leave the Soviets out of the European crisis. The Daily Herald supported by the

1. Economist, 10 September 1938; New Statesman, 17 September 1938; Daily Herald, 12 September 1938; Daily Express, 13 September 1938.
2. Quoted, Times, 6 September 1938.
3. Daily Telegraph, 6 September 1938.

Manchester Guardian totally endorsed the T.U.C. call for "collective defence against aggression" and exhortation to leave "no doubt in the mind of the German Government that Britain will unite with the French and Soviet Governments to resist any attack upon Czechoslovakia."[1]

Hitler's speech to the Nuremberg Rally on the night of 12 September 1938, for which the press had worked themselves up to fever pitch, provided neither a respite nor a worsening of the crisis. The Opposition and Independent press exhorted the Government to proclaim its intentions clearly, and above all warn that the use of force by Hitler would be similarly met. Moreover, this section of opinion was convinced that any aggressive act by Hitler "would bring Britain, France and Russia into the field against him."[2]

The Times and Daily Express ruled out a solution by force and urged a peaceful adjustment of differences with mutual concession from Sudetens and Czechs. Conciliation and autonomy to the point compatible with Czech national sovereignty was the editorial view of the Daily Telegraph. Paradoxically, the 15 September issue carried an article by Winston Churchill who said that a joint or simultaneous note by Great Britain, France and Russia, pledging common action in case of aggression, would most probably ward off the catastrophe. On 14 September, the Sudeten German Party broke off negotiations. They claimed autonomy would no longer suffice and demanded instead self-determination; in effect, a return to the Reich. The press was universally apprehensive and hourly fearful of a unilateral move by Germany. The unprecedented decision of the British Prime Minister to consult personally with Herr Hitler lent to events a different complexion.

The British press on 15 September unanimously endorsed the initiative,

1. Daily Herald, 8 and 9 September 1938; Manchester Guardian, 9 September 1938.
2. Spectator, 16 September 1939.

over-whelmed by this most unexpected development. However, in the period from the Berchtesgaden to the Godesberg visits, the press continued to speculate and debate on the main issues of British policy and the Soviet Union's role - actual and potential. The Liberal and Labour press, and Independent weeklies, when the novelty of Chamberlain's flight wore off, continued their expression of apprehension, virtually undermining their original approval. As early as 15 September, indeed, in the same leader applauding Chamberlain's flight, the Daily Herald suggested that Britain and France keep the U.S.S.R. "fully informed" as to developments. The Spectator, likewise, reviewing events, urged Lord Halifax to journey to Geneva and begin "immediate consultations with the representatives of the four States so vitally concerned in the maintenance of the peace of Europe."[1] Whilst opposing the Berchtesgaden visit the Economist warned against "an ignominious surrender" to the threat of force.[2]

The Manchester Guardian was most active and adamant in tempering its approval with warnings of apprehension and focusing on the implications of Chamberlain's unprecedented moves. It argued that the independence of Czechoslovakia depended on the continued possession of its defensive mountain belt lying within the Sudeten German districts. The loss of this strategic frontier, the Guardian continued, would put Czechoslovakia at the mercy of Germany and leave the way open for the German Drang nach Osten. Therefore, British support of a secessionist solution would imply tacit approval of Germany satisfying her ambitions in the east - ultimately at Soviet expense.[3] The Guardian quoted liberally from Soviet press sources accusing Britain of just such aims. A further development troubling the Guardian

1. Spectator, 16 September 1938.
2. Economist, 17 September 1938.
3. Manchester Guardian, 15, 16 and 19 September 1938.

were reported suggestions for a four-power pact. It was pointed out that any such move would be interpreted by Hitler as "the equivalent of a guarantee by the Western Powers that they should not interfere in Eastern and South-eastern European affairs."[1] The Paris correspondent, commenting on such a possibility, noted that a four-power pact "would be principally directed against Russia so as to divert Germany's energies from the west - at least for a time."[2] The concern of the Soviet Union at this prospect was fully reported in a selection of Moscow news reports. The New Statesman, as well, voiced its concern with the prospects of this diplomatic development which it termed "dear to Mr. Chamberlain's heart."[3] And finally, returning to the Economist on 24 September, its Paris correspondent distinguished in Germany's offensive two motives: the liberation of the Sudetens on the "popular pretext" and more crucial intention of disrupting the French post-war system of alliance. The Liberal, Labour and Independent press, while not unapproving of the former motive, feared the latter as the primary aim.

In contrast, the Conservative and Isolationist press were equally adamant as to the issues. The Daily Express warmly approved Sudeten self-determination, admonished Benes for his "foreign alliances," and supported a four-power pact "in which Britain, France, Germany and Italy will agree to be friends and work together."[4] The Times and Daily Telegraph were in general agreement. The relation of the Soviets to the crisis, so much a concern to other sections of the press, was hardly discussed. In a rare reference, the Times Riga correspondent noted that Mr. Chamberlain's visit

1. Manchester Guardian, 17 September 1938.
2. Ibid, 21 September 1938.
3. New Statesman, 17 September 1938.
4. Daily Express, 17 and 19 September 1938.

to Germany was disapproved in Moscow. He claimed Soviet press reports gave a "warped reflection" of the attitude to the visit in European capitals. The current Soviet press interpretation claimed Chamberlain's visit had avoided an "Imperialist war" - an event, the correspondent implied, the Soviets had anticipated with satisfaction.[1]

Whichever view was espoused by the press as to the new turn of events resulting from Chamberlain's Berchtesgaden flight, some of the practical aspects of the Soviet role continued to be noticed, but contradictory reports circulated. The Daily Herald backed its total faith in the Soviets fulfilling their obligations with items on Soviet military precautions and preparations to aid Czechoslovakia: troops and munitions were reported waiting in the Ukraine, and Rumania was reported willing to permit the passage of supplies by air.[2] The Statesman, too, reported the latter possibility.[3] The Guardian faithfully adhered to its view that the Soviets would fulfil her obligations provided the French did likewise. However, it published a puzzled report that there were no external signs of military preparation in Moscow.[4] The Conservative and Isolationist press continued clearly doubtful as to Soviet intentions or the practical feasibility of her aid. The Daily Express was convinced that if the Czechs refused conciliation they should be at war "without Russia."[5] The Daily Telegraph emphasized that Soviet official circles had remained "mute" throughout the crisis and were continuing "silent" on their "practical attitude."[6] The Times stressed Russia's

1. Times, 16 September 1938.
2. Daily Herald, 16, 17 and 20 September 1938.
3. New Statesman, 17 September 1938.
4. Manchester Guardian, 21 September 1938.
5. Daily Express, 20 September 1938.
6. Daily Telegraph, 16 and 21 September 1938.

"uncertain part" and the lack of indications as to her intentions.[1]

As a result of the Anglo-French talks in London, 18 September 1938, the crisis took a direction towards greater conciliation, with a solution of secession clearly in the offing. Reports of these talks leaked out to the press and there was evident wavering as the Czech acceptance was awaited. Some papers commented on rumours of a projected guarantee to Czechoslovakia to replace the French and Soviet treaties. The Liberal, Labour, and Independent press, while not unanimous in condemning a guarantee, criticised one aspect of such a policy. The "essential point," as the Economist pointed out, and most of this section of opinion would have agreed, was

> ... whether or not Russia is to be in the picture. If Russia joins France and Britain in the guarantee, then the new Czechoslovakia ... will still have some of the attributes of sovereignty. If Russia is excluded, then Britain and France will, in effect, have abandoned Central Europe to Germany. For Russia is the only Power whose geographical position enables her to offer immediate aid; and if the Czechoslovakian State is left with no real independence, the road to the South East is opened wide.[2]

The implication of not including Russia in Western diplomatic relations, concluded the Economist, would mean driving Russia into isolation. Both the New Statesman and Spectator warned of precisely the same dangers and more. The latter journal criticised the guarantee as a weak attempt to

1. Times, 19 September 1938.
2. Economist, 24 September 1938.

prevent what Hitler would take as synonymous with Sudeten accession to the Reich; namely, an open door to South-Eastern Europe.[1] The Daily Telegraph and the Times approved of the guarantee as a measure to end sabre-rattling diplomacy. However, on strict isolationist grounds, the Express violently opposed any such British project. Finally, the Manchester Guardian on 22 September claimed that "so long as Mr. Chamberlain indulges his prejudices ... Russia's reaction ... will be cynical and possibly isolationist,..." as for all intents and purposes, she was effectively excluded from a resolution of the crisis. And indeed so it seemed if one must explain the relative lack of publicity accorded to Litvinov's pronouncements at the League of Nations.

On 21 September two contradictory reports reached the pages of the British press. The Times asserted without comment that the Soviets had assured Czechoslovakia of their support as per their pact. The Daily Herald reported similarly, but added that the Soviets had promised "unofficial" unilateral aid if the Czechs were to resist and France failed to act. Although it was admitted such assistance "would not be sufficient to induce Czechoslovakia to envisage a war with Germany." Thirdly, the Daily Express, in view of similar reports, concluded that it would be "unlikely" that the U.S.S.R. would unilaterally aid Czechoslovakia. On 21 September Litvinov addressed the League Assembly, revealing the content of the Payart interview on 2 September and reviewing the extent of Soviet-Czech contacts, the precise nature of Soviet obligations, and her willingness to offer Czechoslovakia immediate aid if France should first render similar assistance.[2] Litvinov's remarks were barely reported in the press, and even less commented

1. Spectator, 23 September 1938.
2. For text of speech see Jane Degras, ed., Soviet Documents on Foreign Policy, Vol. III, 1933-1941 (London, 1953), pp. 299-304.

upon by Conservative organs. The Telegraph merely noted that this was the first public pronouncement on Moscow's attitude to the crisis and emphasized that Soviet obligations were conditional on France initiating measures.[1] Any further speculation by the press along these lines, was clearly headed for a cul-de-sac. On the same day as Litvinov's speech to the Assembly, President Beneš had accepted the Anglo-French proposals. The British Prime Minister thereupon met Hitler at Godesberg to arrange the transfer of the Sudeten fringes of Czechoslovakia to the Reich.

The news of their stormy Godesberg meeting and reports of increased German demands slowly filtered through to the press between 23 and 27 September. With it there developed a notable stiffening of attitude and more critical view of the suggested settlement. This turn of events was remarkably reflected in the nation as a whole.[2] The crisis was moving towards resistance. Eden, in a widely reported speech, argued that a policy of appeasement was a valuable tool of international diplomacy. But that policy "'must not be at the expense either of our vital interest, or of our national reputation, or of our sense of fair dealing.... There must always be a point at which we as a nation, must make a stand....'"[3] The British press as a mirror of that opinion, reflected this new turn in the European crisis. No longer was press discussion and attention the Sudeten question. Rather, the issue in foreign politics became that of negotiation as against aggression, peaceful cession under agreed conditions versus force. The press had accepted the Anglo-French plan of 18 September as a basis of negotiation to resolve the crisis. The results of the Godesberg meeting

1. Daily Telegraph, 22 September 1938.
2. Charles Madge and Tom Harrison, Britain by Mass-Observation, (London, 1939), pp.78-96.
3. Quoted, Times, 22 September 1938.

showed Hitler no longer satisfied, revealed threats, warnings of violence, and a virtual ultimatum. On this point, not of aim or principle, but method and procedure, the crisis deepened as resistance stiffened in an atmosphere of war preparation. Significantly, especially in the case of the Conservative and Isolationist press, more attention than usual was focused upon the activities of the Soviet Union.

On 24 September the press prominently reported that during a discussion the previous day in the Sixth (Political) Committee of the League Assembly, Litvinov reiterated the Soviet assurance that Russia would come to the aid of Czechoslovakia if France did so as well. While the Times left the report at this point, without further comment, the Daily Herald, Daily Express, and Daily Telegraph reported that the Czechs were also assured of the possibility of Soviet unilateral aid if France remained indifferent. Furthermore, the Daily Express and Daily Telegraph prominently reported that Earl de la Warr, the Lord Privy Seal, and Mr. R. A. Butler, seeking "a further explanation of the Soviet position...." had afterwards seen M. Litvinov. The Express, too, in its report on Czech mobilization, claimed that "the order was given at the suggestion of Britain, France and Russia."[1] Finally, and still on 24 September the press reported that the Soviets had warned Poland that should Polish troops, concentrated on the Czech border seize Teschen, the Soviets would be forced to denounce their 1932 Pact of Non-Aggression. The Times was not at all sure how to interpret this move. Its Riga correspondent on 26 September claimed the Russians were trying to create their own Sudeten problem, in view of the large Ukrainian and White Russian minorities in Poland. He suspected the intention was to gain "a cheap Red military

1. Daily Express, 24 September 1938.

success" in this "attractive enterprise."[1] In striking contrast, Liberal and Labour journals interpreted the move as part of the general stiffening of the democracies' attitude towards aggression. The New Statesman claimed it "cleared the decks for action...."[2] Russia's "'preventive' diplomatic action," opined the Guardian, proved she was keeping her hands free to assist Czechoslovakia. The rest of this Guardian leader praised past Soviet activity in criticising aggression and claimed the "misfortune" of British policy was the habit of "cold-shouldering Russia."[3]

The retort to the Guardian and much similar opinion seemed to come on 27 September 1938. On that day feature coverage was given to the following press communiqué issued by the Foreign Office the previous evening:

> ... if in spite of all efforts made by the British Prime Minister, a German attack is made upon Czechoslovakia, the immediate result must be that France will be bound to come to her assistance, and Great Britain and Russia will certainly stand by France.[4]

Surrounding this statement there has been extensive controversy.[5] But

1. Times, 26 September 1938.
2. New Statesman, 1 October 1938.
3. Manchester Guardian, 24 September 1938.
4. Documents on British Foreign Policy 1919-1939, Third Series, Vol.II (London, 1949), p.550.
5. The British Documents, ibid., state Halifax authorised the issue of this communiqué. The Earl of Birkenhead, Halifax (London, 1965), pp. 402-403, attributes the communiqué to Halifax but submits no new information. Winston Churchill, op. cit., p.242, describes his role in conjunction with Halifax and Mr. R. Leeper in its formulation. Churchill believed the Prime Minister "was in full accord". Lord Templewood, Nine Troubled Years (London, 1954), p.318, claims that

whatever opinion has subsequently been taken, it is imperative to note in this context that the press accepted the Soviet inclusion without question as a sign of Britain's determination to resist unilateral German action. The Spectator later described the "relief" it brought to many.[1] The Telegraph and Express inter alia headlined the notice and the Telegraph leader emphasized the unity of a Franco-British-Soviet front. Only the Times gave it a short three paragraph mention at the bottom of a page. The Foreign Office communiqué assumed paramount importance in the post-Munich press debate. It was used as a basis of argument by a wide section of press opinion asserting that the Government's subsequent activities were a repudiation of this firm stand invoking Soviet support.[2]

because Britain had no authority to speak for Russia "we immediately issued a repudiation of this statement." Lord Strang, Home and Abroad (London, 1956), p. 149, opines that while "perhaps rather too sweeping" the statement merely repeated what the Soviets had been saying. Andrew Rothstein, The Munich Conspiracy (London, 1958), p. 103, says Litvinov told him personally "without hesitation" that the statement was issued without the knowledge of, or consultation with, the Soviet Government. Ivan Maisky, op. cit., ignores the communiqué entirely.

1. Spectator, 30 September 1939.
2. See below, pp. 24-27, 54.

CHAPTER TWO

1. THE MUNICH CONFERENCE: SOVIET EXCLUSION

The British press on Wednesday, 28 September, presented a united front, its mood one of resolute defiance and determination, but also one of universal gloom. Britain stood at the threshold of war. Germany's 2 p.m. threat to mobilize was hours away from fulfilment. While Wednesday's press still headlined news of the mobilisation of the British fleet, A.R.P. activity in London, and protestations echoing Chamberlain's previous night's broadcast that the use of force would be resisted, the House of Commons witnessed a memorable event. For sheer drama the scene the afternoon of 28 September was perfect. The Prime Minister, speaking to a morose House, reviewed at great length the course of Anglo-German diplomacy and the Czechoslovakian crisis. He omitted any reference to the Soviet Union - the brunt of his review illustrating the efforts he had made to solve the crisis by diplomatic negotiation. Nearing the end of his speech, he was handed a note to the effect that Hitler had agreed to a third meeting at Munich. The news brought the members of the House - save a few - to their feet in cheers. The Parliamentary correspondents of the British press dashed back to their typewriters with a story that is a journalist's delight.

The principal effect, as it reached the daily press' front pages on Thursday, 29 September, was one of relief that the threat of war had been averted by a last minute concession from Hitler. This was the initial[1] reaction of all press opinion. So overwhelming was the event

1. Emphasis mine.

that the news columns contained relatively little analysis. The anti-Chamberlain press later reverted to their bitter criticism of the Government as the Munich debate progressed, but this initial relief at being released from the impending threat of war was their first spontaneous reaction. It could obviously not have been otherwise. In so far as Chamberlain argued: "Armed conflict between nations is a nightmare...."[1] all sections of the British press agreed. It was accordingly grateful to him for having secured Britain's release from this nightmare. However, the subsequent point must be stressed. Gratitude to the Prime Minister from the British press for having averted war does not and cannot be equated with concurrence in his conduct of Britain's foreign relations. This was later charged by the Conservative press in its criticism of anti-Chamberlain journals. Least of all, can it be said, that the Liberal, Labour, and Independent press' initial gratitude to Chamberlain and good wishes as he flew a third time to Hitler implied approval of his policy as it related to the Soviet Union. Indeed, one of the most violent criticisms was directed at Chamberlain's handling of Anglo-Russian relations.

Relief and gratitude, therefore, were mixed with and gave way (in the anti-Chamberlain press) to feelings of apprehension, pessimism, fear, and criticism. But the immediate relief on 29 September was widespread. The Isolationist and Conservative press were obviously jubilant. The Daily Express having confidently predicted all September that there was to be "no war this year or next year" headlined: "'IT'S ALL RIGHT'" and on the next day again in large bold letters "PEACE". Its leader

1. Neville Chamberlain, In Search of Peace (London, 1939), p. 276.

after expressing hopes for a "wider reconciliation" between Britain and Germany continued:

> Two weeks ago he (i.e. Chamberlain) was being urged to send an ultimatum to the German Government - a joint note by Britain, France and Russia. He would not take that course.
>
> And now it is plain that if he had taken that bad advice, this situation could never have been achieved.[1]

The Times' leader extolled the Prime Minister in Royal Obituary style. With similar excitement the Daily Telegraph, which had throughout maintained an attitude of critical approval of Chamberlain's policy, credited the Prime Minister with a "personal triumph". But, characteristically, sounded an early warning: "... the present respite must be hailed with a certain reserve...." It continued: "This nation cannot prudently afford to purchase present ease at the expense of future trouble." All concessions have come from the Czech side it noted. Therefore, the Telegraph warned that Czechoslovakia must "be left as a viable entity" in order to avoid in future "... a revival of all the present troubles." The Manchester Guardian and the Daily Herald announced with relief: "There is to be no war,..."[2], thankful for the respite Hitler had consented to - or, that Chamberlain had achieved.

The crisis broke too late in the week for the periodicals to present any elaborate analysis. Their immediate reaction, likewise, was relief with the respite that had been gained. The Economist on 1 October went little beyond expressing its congratulations to the Prime Minister. Even the New Statesman, hysterical in its denunciations of Chamberlain's

1. Daily Express, 29 September 1938.
2. Daily Herald, 30 September 1938.

foreign policy, especially Anglo-Russian relations, commented: "Everyone must share in a feeling of immense relief that war ... has been at least postponed and very possibly averted." Finally, the Spectator, in a leader on 30 September, found itself impressed by Chamberlain's "almost superhuman efforts to save the world from a tragedy without parallel."

Again and again there is apparent in the first instance[1] that universal note of almost pathetic obeisance offered by the press. After the first flush of relief passed, however, and the war clouds dispersed, and after the Munich Agreement had been presented to public view the British press returned to its pre-Munich stances. The Labour, Liberal, and Independent press, guilty in a moment of understandable weakness, resumed their prior critical posture. The Isolationist and Conservative press hailed the Agreement as the positive affirmation of the far-sightedness of Chamberlain's foreign policy.

Thursday, 29 September 1938, the British press, when covering Chamberlain's announcement in the House of Commons that Hitler had agreed to meet him at Munich in the company of Daladier and Musselini, prominently featured this calling of a four-power conference. Indeed, the Daily Telegraph of the 29th, headlined: "FOUR POWER CONFERENCE" - with tacit and obvious approval. For here was the essence of Chamberlain's vision of European diplomacy - a personal confrontation between the major powers, Russia obviously excluded, for the negotiated settlement of disputes. But a four-power conference did not escape the criticism and concern of a certain section of the press. It is noteworthy - and

1. Emphasis mine.

perhaps obvious - that the section of the press which had kept the Soviets before the eyes of the public throughout the crisis, applauded the 26 September press communiqué, and warned the Government for weeks of the need to obtain Russian admission to the negotiations, now voiced its grave concern at the recall of the four-power conference with the implied threat at the isolation of Russia from the concert of European nations and diplomacy.

The exclusion of the U.S.S.R. greatly distressed the Daily Herald. As early as 29 September a long leader, after reviewing the course of recent events and claiming that Chamberlain had suggested to Hitler the calling of a British-Italian-French-German conference to continue negotiations on the transfer of Czech territory, asserted that "the question must therefore be asked. Why did the British Government not mention Russia, as a proper party to the Conference, since her interest is equal to that of any?" (The Herald, too, expressed regret at the exclusion of Czechoslovakia.) Furthermore, the Herald, which had all through September urged a united front of powers - Britain, France, and Russia - had seen its efforts finally crystallized in the 26 September press communiqué. This communiqué, continued the same leader, had "brought into being the close co-operation of Britain, France and Russia in defence of the principles of negotiations, which alone can be the basis of just international dealing...." Therefore, concluded the Daily Herald: "The close co-operation which now exists between Britain, France and Russia must continue." The Guardian as well criticised the conference in a very similar manner. After expressing its approval of the respite that had been afforded, the leading article of September 29, with Litvinov's famous slogan in mind, declared: "Peace is still indivisible"

and Britain must strive for "something wider than a four-power conference". Then it too made the same point as the Herald: "... if Russia's assistance to the democracies was assured (and warmly welcomed by the people of this country) in the case of conflict, for how long or on what grounds could she be excluded form the saner task of conference?" Finally, even though the Telegraph's leader on 29 September made no mention of the U.S.S.R. the Paris correspondent reported in a sombre mood that in some quarters the conference was being regarded "with great reserve". He noted that French pro-Nazis rejoiced at this successful move by German diplomacy - always aimed at driving "a wedge between France and Soviet Russia and the Powers of the Little Entente...." And he added: "In Russian circles, on the other hand, dismay is expressed that the Soviet Government should have been left out."[1]

The weeklies, too, noted the exclusion of Russia from the Munich Conference with great anxiety. As opposed to great power politics, the New Statesman had continuously urged collective defence - an "all-in method of security" - and therefore was suspicious of "the Four Power conference (which ought to have been a Six or at least a Five Power conference) at Munich...."[2] In the same leader, it referred to the 26 September press communiqué, wherein "... Britain formally stated her intention of fighting side by side with France and Russia in the event of an attack on Czechoslovakia...." After inferring that this did much to bring Hitler to his senses the Statesman continued: "We should be happier about the Four-Power meeting at Munich if Czechoslovakia ... were represented ... and if Russia, who is as concerned about Czecho-

1. Daily Telegraph, 29 September 1938.
2. New Statesman, 1 October 1938.

slovakia as France, were not so ostentatiously excluded." This leader concluded with an analysis of Chamberlain's foreign policy as attempting to turn German eastwards against Bolshevism, and consequently the Statesman could not but disapprove "the destruction ... of Czechoslovakia ... and the consequent drive to the East." Finally, the Spectator voiced its distress that Russia and Czechoslovakia were "conspicuous absentees" from the Munich Conference. The leader launched into a scathing criticism relating to the exclusion of these two powers. "A Four-Power conference," it argued,

> is not in itself a departure to be greatly welcomed, for a ... regard for the interests of the absent is not always conspicuous in such cases. Three Great Powers were mentioned in the British Official communiqué on Tuesday as pledged to ... the support of Czechoslovakia, and only two of them were invited to Munich on Thursday.[1]

In effect, these papers were asserting that in a moment of crisis the British Government saw fit to publish a statement in line with their own views and whose net result would have been a revival of collective security: a de facto triple alliance. Few used this actual term. And yet, the Isolationist Daily Express perhaps in its simplicity saw this, and, while obviously opposed, declared that the Munich Conference "offers us great hopes" for it "destroys the ghost of collective security... still troubling our peace of mind."[2] But it is precisely that hint of collective defence, so clearly at their grasp, that some newspapers saw discarded at the Munich Conference because of the ex-

1. Spectator, 30 September 1938.
2. Daily Express, 1 October 1938.

clusion of the Soviet Union.

Nonetheless, as an important footnote, it was recognized that perhaps Britain did not have a choice; that the choice was Hitler's; and that being the case "it was no doubt a choice between a Four-Power conference and no conference, and since a Four-Power conference was calculated to postpone war, and might avert it altogether, there could be no hesitation. But let it not be forgotten," this Spectator leading article warned, "that Russia's help may still be needed; it is a good deal to hope for if she is excluded from discussion and only called in to fight."[1] Even the Daily Herald had to admit: "It is possible that insistence upon Russian and Czech participation in the talks at this moment would, in fact, have meant that there were no talks."[2] And finally, the Daily Telegraph's Moscow correspondent, going even further in his analysis of the role of the Soviets throughout the crisis, said: "... any active intervention by Russia in Governmental discussions during the last few weeks would only have served to infuriate Hitler with his anti-Bolshevik complex and so render a peaceful settlement more difficult."[3]

2. PRESS DEBATES ON THE IMPLICATIONS FOR RUSSIA

The meeting at Munich constituted a highly complex historical event that has enabled all shades of opinion to arrive at very different con-

1. Daily Express, 1 October 1938.
2. Daily Herald, 29 September 1938.
3. Daily Telegraph, 29 September 1938.

clusions. Self-justification, criticism, and self-satisfaction have all found grounds for confirmation. In a similar manner, the various organs of the British press were able to manipulate the Munich Agreement. The Isolationist Daily Express displayed its glee with a simple headline on 30 September: "PEACE". The Telegraph and the Times likewise: "Peace, even at a price, is a blessing."[1] While the Jeremiahs of the British press - the Guardian, Herald and the weeklies - asked in horror: what price, peace? And in asking what was the price Britain and France had paid the press embarked on a vigorous, acrimonious and lengthy debate on the Munich Agreement: its merits and demerits, gains and losses. The focus throughout must be largely the Soviet Union. It is not the clauses of the Agreement but what the British press had to say about the past, present, and future role of the U.S.S.R. in European diplomacy related to and stemming from its conclusion that is relevant here.

The projected four-power agreement to guarantee Czechoslovakia was based on a draft presented to the conference by Mussolini. It provided for the evacuation and occupation of the Sudeten areas to proceed by successive defined stages between 1 and 10 October. The 'Annex to the Agreement Between Germany, the United Kingdom, France and Italy', concluded in Munich on 29 September 1938, stated:

> His Majesty's Government in the United Kingdom and the French Government have entered into the above agreement on the basis that they stand by the offer contained in Paragraph 6 of the Anglo-French proposals of September 19 in relation to an international guarantee of the new boundaries of the Czechoslovak State against unprovoked aggression.[2]

1. Daily Telegraph, 1 October 1938.
2. Documents on British Foreign Policy 1919-1939, Third Series, op.cit., pp. 628-629.

It was understood that Germany and Italy would offer their guarantee when the question of the Polish and Hungarian minorities had been settled. If not accomplished in three months another four-power conference would be held to deal with it.

This question of a guarantee to Czechoslovakia cannot be said to have aroused very great enthusiasm in the British press. The reasons for this varied a good deal with the particular editorial opinion pursued. For some a guarantee was contrary to traditional British policy in Central Europe. For others, acceptance was rationalized on the grounds of compensation - something had to be done for the poor Czechs. While for the third group of newspapers the guarantee was bad politics and bad logistics. It perpetrated the exclusion of the U.S.S.R. from European diplomacy; and Britain and France could not possibly aid a land-locked Central European power without the co-operation of the Soviet Union.

In the first instance, the Daily Express was passionately opposed to "these menaces, conjured up from the Continent to confuse us."[1] When the outlines of the Anglo-French plan for Czechoslovakia had filtered down to the press an Express leader talked of "bad rumours"; namely, reports that Britain was to guarantee "all the hedges and ditches" of the new Czech frontier.[2] Then, surveying the conference results, the only note of doubt a leading article on 1 October expressed was on the subject of the guarantee. Not, it must be added, because the U.S.S.R. was not included; rather because the guarantee was "without precedent in the history of British policy". Furthermore, the Express commented

1. Daily Express, 30 September 1938.
2. Ibid., 20 and 21 September 1938.

that it was a guarantee which Britain was quite without the means to implement. That means was obviously the U.S.S.R.

The attitude of the Conservative Times and the Daily Telegraph contrasted with that of the Daily Express, as far as the guarantee was concerned. Both papers endorsed the guarantee from a compensatory point of view. The Telegraph's attitude to a British guarantee in Central Europe had been defined on 21 September. A leader at that time, commenting on the Anglo-French plan, claimed that a guarantee in Central Europe was a departure from traditional British practice. "It is something," the leader argued, "which we could never offer but in the last extremity, and it could never be worthwhile unless as the price of a peace that is truly enduring." On 30 September the Telegraph urged the Czech acceptance of the Munich Agreement on the grounds that such action would "secure a guarantee of the diminished State by this country as well as by France...." And perhaps in a mood of remorse at the state of the reduced Czechoslovakia, the Telegraph reasoned that Czechoslovakia was threatened "with an economic, if not political, vassalage, against which they may justifiably look for the protection of Great Britain and France."[1] Nowhere, does the Telegraph stop to reason how Britain could fulfil this obligation. The Times, the informal spokesman for Government policy, commented on the Munich Agreement that it was "not only a settlement but a hopeful settlement."[2] No mention of the guarantee was considered necessary, merely, the reliance on hope. For the Times and the Telegraph the guarantee represented a gesture of British good-will, a departure from policy and tradition to appease Czechoslovakia and a

1. Daily Telegraph, 1 October 1938.
2. Times, 1 October 1938.

section of British opinion.

It was not, as might be expected, the Liberal, Labour, and Independent press that totally opposed the guarantee. To this third, of the three groups mentioned earlier, the problem of the guarantee was related to the U.S.S.R. For example, in the days following the Munich Agreement, the Daily Herald in effect had very little to say about the guarantee per se. However by implication the guarantee, the product of a four-power conference, stood condemned. Slightly in contrast, the Manchester Guardian was more actively concerned with the Annex to the Munich Agreement. It shared with the Daily Herald the appreciation of the fact, that because of the 26 September press communiqué, a European conflict involving a German attack on Czechoslovakia "would have seen Britain, France and Russia ranged against her."[1] Hence on 1 October the Guardian criticised the bilateral nature of the Anglo-German declaration, and condemned totally the guarantee which was being presented as "political protection" for economic vulnerability. The leader continued vehemently: "What is it worth? Will Britain and France (and Russia, though, of course, Russia was not even mentioned at Munich) come to the aid of an unarmed Czecho-Slovakia when they would not help her in her strength?"

In a similar note of pessimism and fear, the weeklies too viewed the guarantee. The New Statesman leader on 8 October complained that talk of guaranteeing the new Czechoslovakia was a horrible mockery, if only because there was no frontier to be guaranteed. The Spectator agreed that it was impossible "to implement effectively a guarantee of the frontier of a small State in Central Europe."[2] It, indeed, argued

1. Manchester Guardian, 30 September 1938.
2. Spectator, 7 October 1938.

against British participation and concluded with perhaps the most prophetic remarks in this whole discussion: "The controversy regarding a guarantee for the new Czechoslovakia may soon be settled by the disappearance of any Czechoslovakia to guarantee."[1]

In the House of Commons, from 3 to 6 October 1938, dissident Conservatives and the Opposition subjected the government to a line of criticism closely following the picture of press opinion which has preceded. Sir C. R. Attlee criticised the Government for its "cold-shouldering of the U.S.S.R."[2] Sir A. Sinclair, exhorted Chamberlain, on the subject of the U.S.S.R. and the guarantee, to "Bring her in, and let her join in the guarantee to Czechoslovakia."[3] A rather odd request as Sinclair had just completed criticising the Government for its exclusion of the Soviets from the conference. Eden, too, criticised Chamberlain for trying "to organise Europe on a basis that excludes any great power...."[4] In reply to these criticisms and others, Sir Samuel Hoare was content to remark on the exclusion of Russia, that: "To say, as the hon. Gentleman (i.e. Hugh Dalton) said, that the Soviet Republic was cold-shouldered is a complete exaggeration of the position."[5] As to the guarantee Chamberlain, or other Government spokesmen, remained vague and indefinite.

The press covered these Parliamentary debates very closely. On the one hand, Conservative newspapers followed the Government's lead in

1. Spectator, 7 October 1938.
2. Parliamentary Debates. House of Commons, Fifth Series, Vol. 339, 3 October 1938, Col. 58.
3. Ibid., Col. 74.
4. Ibid., Col. 86.
5. Ibid., Col. 152.

remaining editorially silent on those aspects centring on the guarantee. Slightly different was the attitude of the Daily Express. Always fanatically opposed to the guarantee on isolationist grounds they seemed to find in Hoare's defence of Government policy an open invitation to the U.S.S.R. to participate in the guarantee. "Sir Samuel," commented the Express cautiously, "did not in any way contemplate the exclusion of Russia from such a guarantee. In fact he foresaw that a guarantee by Britain, France, Russia, Germany and Italy would make the new Czechoslovakia as safe as that country had been in many generations past."[1] Furthermore, as the Economist critically noted: "On Monday the Prime Minister seemed to suggest a policy of Four-Powers without Russia."[2] And then the Economist continued, pointing out the obvious vagueness in Government policy on this issue: "On Wednesday, the Chancellor of the Exchequer hastened to repudiate this narrow conception and to mention the Soviets by name." This was a reference to the following remark by Simon - the obvious answer of the Government to the mounting press criticism of Anglo-Russian relations. Simon stated:

> ... it is our hope that Russia will be willing to join in the guarantee of Czechoslovakia. It is most important that she should do so. The Government have no intention whatever of excluding Russia or trying to exclude Russia from any future settlement of Europe. If outstanding differences are to be resolved it must be on the basis of free consultation with all European Powers.[3]

1. Daily Express, 4 October 1938.
2. Economist, 8 October 1938.
3. Parliamentary Debates. House of Commons, op.cit., 5 October 1938, Col. 346.

It proved most unfortunate that this statement of Government policy was never fruitfully acted upon until the Spring of 1939. Nor in fact, did it particularly influence the press as to its sincerity. The volume and scope of press criticism of Anglo-Russian relations as pursued by the Chamberlain Government continued to mount.

It will be remembered that Chamberlain, along with the Conservative and Isolationist press, had greeted the conclusion of the Munich conference and the German-British declaration as a major diplomatic success. The two prime, overt objectives of appeasement had been achieved: war had been averted and the way to improve Anglo-German relations had been opened. Furthermore, Germany's encirclement fears had been assuaged by the weakening of the Soviet-French-Czech system of treaties. Chamberlain outlined these aims in the 28 September 1938 dramatic review of his foreign policy in the Commons. His main goal he claimed was in "promoting a peaceful solution of the Czechoslovak question." That aim was later accomplished via Munich. Chamberlain went on to argue in the same vein, and one must emphasize this pre-occupation with avoiding war, that France and Britain "were guided by a desire to find a solution which would not bring about a European War...." The implication being that any other course of Anglo-Russian relations would have eliminated the chances of a peaceful solution. The Prime Minister stressed the necessity for "a solution which would not automatically compel France to take action in accordance with her obligations." (Action one must add, which would also have triggered off the Soviet-Czech Treaty.) "It was agreed," he continued, "that the only means of achieving this object was to accept

the principle of self-determination." Having done this, Chamberlain explained that Britain promised "as a contribution to the pacification of Europe, to join in an international guarantee of the new boundaries of the Czechoslovak State against unprovoked aggression." Or in other words, the purpose he had in mind was "substituting a general guarantee ... in place of the existing treaties with France and Soviet Russia, which involve reciprocal obligations of a military character."[1] It was obvious from this, that Chamberlain envisaged as a general pacification of Europe the dismantling of the French-Soviet-Czech complex of treaties. He aimed thereby to satisfy the long-standing German opposition to this French security arrangement, and satisfy German complaints of encirclement.

Was the press aware of this? Did it see the relation between the guarantee offered to Czechoslovakia and the Czech-Soviet, Franco-Soviet Treaties? And how was this related to their respective view of the Soviet Union? The Conservative press had followed a rather consistent policy with respect to the Soviet Union throughout the crisis. The Times more so, the Daily Telegraph slightly less towards the end of September and early October, gave full support to the Government policy of appeasement. While the Times largely ignored the Soviet aspect of the crisis, the Telegraph had given it only slight coverage. In late September the latter newspaper had given headline coverage to the three-power warning to Germany. Furthermore, unlike the Times, it did sense that German ambitions might know no limit. It sensed, too, that Hitler aimed at "a stranglehold upon Czechoslovakia ... whose bare existence is a stumbling block to his dreams of paramountcy from the Rhine to the

1. Ibid., 28 September 1938, Col. 16-17.

Black Sea - and beyond."[1] Furthermore, as has been noted, the Paris correspondent reported that German policy had always been to drive " a wedge between France and Soviet Russia and the Powers of the Little Entente...."[2] Two days later, he described the gloom and apprehension felt in Paris: "the agreement means a great humiliation to France and to Britain and probably entails the virtual extinction of Czechoslovakia. A blow has been struck," he commented, "at the influence of both Western Powers in Eastern Europe." He concluded with the relevant observation that "nobody can tell whether Russia will not break away from the moorings of the Franco-Soviet Pact".[3] Perhaps using this as a basis for observation, the Telegraph's diplomatic correspondent speculated along a line of thought which, while fairly obvious and implicit in appeasement diplomacy, struck very few observers. To quote in full:

> It is implicit in the offer of Britain and France to guarantee the boundaries of the reduced Czechoslovak State that Prague will relinquish its pact of mutual assistance with Moscow. The new State is intended to be fully neutralised under joint international guarantee.[4]

One can only conclude in light of prior and subsequent policy that editorially the Telegraph agreed with this course of events. In succeeding days the Telegraph did grow more critical of the Munich Agreement. But nowhere did it comment upon or speculate as to the implications of its diplomatic correspondent's observations; namely, the further diplomatic isolation of the U.S.S.R.

Turning to the Times, one is confronted with a more faithful exposition

1. Daily Telegraph, 28 September 1938.
2. Ibid., 29 September 1938.
3. Ibid., 1 October 1938.
4. Ibid.

of Government policy. Echoes of Chamberlain's 28 September speech and 3-6 October, House of Commons defence formed the basis of its editorial policy. It had termed the Munich Agreement "a hopeful settlement" which had produced the "unavoidable" loss of Sudeten territories to Germany.[1] And in this same leader the Times, in commenting on the issue of a negotiated settlement versus a settlement by force, produced an editorial blunder which yet further strengthens the emphasis that has been here attributed to the 26 September press communiqué. The Times stated that if Germany had forced the issue the Czechs would certainly have resisted. In that case "France would have been drawn in by direct obligations to Czechoslovakia; Great Britain and the Soviet Union would have been certain to come to the help of France..." and a world war unleashed.[2] Consistently ignoring the Soviet Union throughout, in this faux pas the Times revealed that they too, like the Liberal-Labour press, counted on the Soviet Union in a moment of crisis. Fortunately, the leader continued a "bloodless transfer of authority" had been achieved, the alternative to which would have been a "savage swarming of armies over a country that war could not have saved and even a victorious peace would never have reconstituted in its old form."[3] One can only infer that a contingent of these "savage swarming of armies" would have been from the Red Army. But editorially it largely ignored mention of the U.S.S.R.

Rather, the Times used the convenient device of its correspondents in Berlin, Riga and Paris to cover the Soviet aspect of affairs. In

1. Times, 1 October 1938.
2. Ibid. Emphasis mine.
3. Ibid., 3 October 1938.

their dispatches a similar attitude and analysis can be seen, the same as that reflected in the Daily Telegraph. Namely, that the Franco-Soviet-Czech system of alliances had been shattered, Czechoslovakia neutralised, and Germany, as a result facing eastwards. The Times Berlin correspondent stated that German policy certainly envisaged

> ... a Czechoslovakia incapable of obstructing the extension of German political and economic influence in Eastern Europe. That presupposes the reduction of Czechoslovakia to military insignificance, and as a corollary to the dropping of the Russian alliance, the reform of Czechoslovak internal politics in such a way as to meet the vague German demand that Czechoslovakia cuts loose from Communism.[1]

To this policy the Times would have obviously no great objection. Goebbels' propoganda depicting Prague as a centre of Bolshevism had usually been reported. The correspondent concluded that German writers content themselves with generalities about the gain for peace represented by the exclusion of the Soviet Union from the concert of Europe. The Paris correspondent concentrated his attention on the implications for French foreign policy. All that remained of the former system was the French-Soviet pact, and it was "by no means clear yet whether even that has been left intact." As to the future, he asserted that possibly France, seeing no further point in maintaining the alliance, would tacitly accept German predominance in Central and Eastern Europe.[2] Finally, the diplomatic correspondent added his reflections. He admitted

1. Times, 3 October 1938.
2. Ibid.

that in London many people were asking themselves "what effect French action in Czechoslovakia ... may have on France's relation with Soviet Russia in general and on the Franco-Soviet Pact in particular."[1] He need only have read the Paris correspondent to find out. As the issue of the Soviet Union gradually figured more prominently in the post-Munich press debate the Times became more outspoken and less subtle in its opinions. The editorial column zealously defended the whole calendar of Chamberlain's appeasement policy. And if the anti-Chamberlain newspapers waxed warm about the Soviet Union, the Times turned all the venom that incensed leader writing can produce onto the issue of Anglo-Soviet relations.

In a long and comprehensive leader, assessing Britain's role in September, the Times argued inter alia that amont the benefits achieved by Chamberlain's astute handling of the crisis was that "the chief potential cause of war in Europe has been removed". What the Times emphasized as having been among the prime dangers to peace was stated thus: "The policy of encirclement of Germany, long since discredited, has finally broken down with the abandonment of a frontier that no longer merited the description of strategic."[2] And this particular argument became one of the major tenets in the Times' defence of Government policy at Munich as the press debate continued into October. Again and again the Times referred to the justice of German claims of self-determination, and to the injustice of the policy of encirclement. Again and again the Times viewed with approval the discredit into which the Franco-Soviet and Soviet-Czech treaties had fallen. Therefore late in October 1938 the

1. Times, 3 October 1938.
2. Ibid, 5 October 1938.

Times approvingly reported: "One of the most important demands Germany made for the readjustment of Czechoslovakia was fulfilled ... when the Foreign Minister, M. Chvalkovsky, informed the Soviet Minister to Czechoslovakia, M. Alexandrovsky, that Czechoslovakia is no longer interested in the continuation of the pact of mutual assistance with Soviet Russia."[1] The Times further went on to report something which even the French had not yet decided upon: "The renunciation of the pact with France is expected to follow."[2] Two days later a leading article expanded on this particular news item. In commenting on the post-Munich settlement relating to France and Germany the Times claimed that "the whole fabric of interlocked alliances so laboriously built up beyond Germany's Eastern frontier" had now collapsed, and that the policy consistently pursued by French diplomacy since the War had proved "a costly failure".[3] "It was a policy," this same leader continued, "which was always regarded with misgiving by many people as an attempt to create an artificial stability, which moreover was certain to be resented in Germany as an attempt at encirclement and was thus likely to provoke the very catastrophe it was designed to avert." As for France, the leader continued, encirclement was perhaps logical in view of the French desire for security. But: "The alternative - to work for a real and lasting appeasement with a defeated Germany - seemed to most Frenchmen at the time to be too utopian for political consideration." However, now the Times' view posited that the Munich Agreement provided for a lasting appeasement of Europe: German encirclement fears had vanished, the French security system weakened

1. Times, 22 October 1938.
2. Ibid.
3. Ibid., 24 October 1938.

and Czechoslovakia, a potential trouble spot, neutralised. And if by implication the policy invited some pessimistic predictions as to the future course of Anglo-Soviet relations, the Times saw these as secondary to the primary mainstream of European diplomatic appeasement.

If so much of anti-Soviet opinion appears by implication in the sophisticated leader columns of the Conservative Times and Telegraph, one need only turn to the outspoken editorials of the Daily Express to find a straight-forward statement of these very opinions. While arrived at from a different point of view similar conclusions resulted. It will be recalled that the Daily Express had pursued a policy of isolationism throughout the September crisis. As far as policy involving the Soviet Union the Daily Express was quite direct. As early as 7 September 1938 and continuing regularly throughout the month the Express was emphatic that the cardinal issue of the crisis was the Czech alliance system.[1] The obvious solution therefore was for the Czechs to relinquish it. As soon as the Munich conference was complete, when the other organs of the British press began the evaluation, the Express exclaimed: "back to normal. Back to our peace-time occupations." And the British public was urged not to argue "too much or too violently."[2] Three days later in a passing reference to Churchill's criticism of the Government in the House of Commons, Munich debate, an Express leader saw fit to agree and label "consistent" Churchill's criticism that the Government had failed to rearm the country. But "What about his foreign policy?" asked the leader. Churchill, it continued, called Germany "a Power which vaunts the spirit of aggression and uses with pitiless brutality the threat of

1. Daily Express, 7, 12 and 19 September 1938.
2. Ibid., 3 October 1938.

murderous force. He wants us to ally ourselves with Russia against them. Not so long ago Mr. Churchill was calling the Russians 'foul filthy butchers from Moscow'.". While true as to Churchill's inconsistentcy with regard to Soviet Russia the Daily Express saw fit to end with this flourish its editorial participation in the post-Munich debate on Anglo-Russian relations. But several items received notice. On 4 October a reporter from Berlin quoted the "Deutsche Allgemeine Zeitung" to the effect that Soviet Russia was excluded from European Affairs. One can recall a similar report in the Times. Then the correspondent continued with great satisfaction no doubt: "The gloomy period in which Moscow's diplomacy played an unholy part in Geneva and many European capitals is over. Moscow is forced out of Europe." The same sentiment endorsing the isolation of the U.S.S.R. appeared in a long article by Lord Castlerosse. After approving the British program for rearmament he remarked: "Germany's domestic business is not my business ... I will go further: If Germany chooses to expand at the expense of Russia, I consider it is not my affair either."[1] And with this flourish the Express ceased coverage of the U.S.S.R. until the Spring of 1939.

The tentative conclusion to be drawn from a reading of the Conservative and Isolationist press as to its attitude to the Soviet Union, suggests that the exclusion of the U.S.S.R. from the concert of Europe was condoned. Approval was also given to the guarantee with the tacit and sometimes explicit knowledge that such a step in effect meant the replacement of the Soviet-Czech and Franco-Soviet pacts. This explains why the Conservative press seemed so untroubled with a British promise

1. Daily Express, 13 October 1938.

for a guarantee in Central Europe. Indeed there was very little mention of the guarantee after the Munich conference. On 4 October, Sir Thomas Inskip, Dominions Secretary, said in the House of Commons that Britain was under "a moral obligation" to Czechoslovakia to stand by the guarantee.[1] But in the Conservative press the subject was quickly dropped.

The rather placid outlook of the Conservative press on the nature of Anglo-Soviet relations, and their policy by inference attitude is extremely deceptive. They had very little to say about the Soviet Union after as before the Munich meeting. A reading of the leading articles, correspondence columns, and reports on speeches would have given the general reader very little idea of the deep cleavage of opinion occasioned by the Munich conference. Around one of the main topics of discussion, the course of Anglo-Soviet diplomatic relations, a far greater volume of discussion, argument, and news coverage appeared than one could gain by only reading the Conservative press. This difference assumes importance if the point made at the outset is recalled. It was then noted that the demand for the inclusion of the U.S.S.R. as an active collaborator for peace varied with the editorial determination of the respective journal to resist German foreign policy demands. Hence the Conservative press, pursuing editorially a policy similar to the Chamberlain Government, chose to view the U.S.S.R. as has just been outlined.

A sharp contrast is provided by the Liberal, Labour, and Independent weekly press. In their columns the issue of the Soviet Union and the Munich Conference became a very contentious one indeed. Chamberlain was criticised, his handling of Anglo-German relations maligned, and his

1. Parliamentary Debates. House of Commons, op.cit., 4 October 1938, Col. 303.

exclusion of the Soviet Union from the concert of Europe condemned. All the implications of the Munich conference for Anglo-Soviet relations, while hinted at with tacit approval in the Conservative press, were here expressed with a blunt and almost rude honesty.

It will be recalled that when analysing the Conservative press, attention was drawn to its implicit recognition that there existed a close relationship between the British and French promise to guarantee Czechoslovakia and the Soviet-Czech-French triangle of treaties. That is to say, the guarantee to Czechoslovakia was intended as a diplomatic neutralizer to replace the Franco-Soviet and Czech-Soviet treaties, and satisfy German fears of encirclement.

To this second group of journals the relationship was never so stated nor emphasized. The issue seemed otherwise. It will again be recalled that while essentially opposing the guarantee the Guardian, Herald, Spectator, Economist, and Statesman had directed their criticism elsewhere. The Daily Herald claimed that real appeasement in Europe could not be achieved bilaterally, but rather "at a conference of all the Powers". From which it follows that "any attempt to isolate Russia must be fought absolutely, for such a policy would be disastrous to European peace, and from the standpoint of Britain's real interests - suicidal."[1] And fight the Daily Herald did. In one leader after another the Herald hammered away at the same points. Soviet press excerpts were used to claim that Munich-type diplomacy merely stimulated the aggressors appetite. Letters to the Editor monotonously intoned that the only hope for European peace consisted of "a real attempt at collective security, in which Russia must most emphatically be included."[2] Moreover,

1. Daily Herald, 1 October 1938.
2. Ibid.

editorial opinion specifically singled out the British Prime Minister for attack. A leading article launching the anti-Chamberlain campaign said: "It would appear, indeed, that Mr. Chamberlain is deliberately setting himself out to drive Russia into an isolation which will enormously reduce the forces of collective security against aggression in Europe."[1] Two days later, reviewing the House of Commons debates, the Daily Herald again complained that in light of recent events "one has to ask oneself whether dislike of Russia is not a keystone of our present foreign policy." The leader continued to blatantly ask, whether the Government was to "set ideological differences above peace?"

The attack of the Daily Herald upon the Government's conduct of foreign affairs and Anglo-Russian relations in particular was long and bitter. The Herald criticised the exclusion of the U.S.S.R. from the concert of Europe and especially her rebuff from what was contemptuously referred to as the "Four-Power Pact". Then the Herald turned to the implications of the new French and Soviet positions. On two separate occasions reference was made to the "Journal de Moscou", a French language, Moscow publication, considered to express the opinion of the Soviet Foreign Commissariat. On both occasions this weekly asserted that the Franco-Soviet pact was rendered worthless because of France's capitulation at Munich. This in effect destroyed the eastern pact system claimed the "Journal" and left the French without allies. Moreover, France "has provoked the mistrust of the U.S.S.R. ... simply in order to follow the policy conducted in England."[2] The Moscow correspondent reported that one should not expect any abrupt Russian action to

1. Daily Herald, 3 October 1938.
2. Ibid., 5 and 12 October 1938.

abrogate the Franco-Soviet pact despite the question raised by the "Journal de Moscou". His own interpretation was that Moscow desired the French Government to realise the full extent of the Soviet disquiet over what it considered to be the disregard of obligations to the Czechs.[1] A different aspect of the same problem was voiced by the diplomatic correspondent of the Herald who claimed: "The line of thought in Berlin seems to be that the breaking of Czech-Soviet pact frees Germany from any serious danger in the East, and that the 'Russian menace' need no longer be taken gravely into consideration."[2] In effect he implied what the "Journal de Moscou" too argued: that Germany was now able to step into the vacuum in South-East Europe as a result of the dismemberment of the elaborate French-Soviet-Czech pact system. And whereas the Isolationist and Conservative press condoned this move, the Herald, analysing French post-Munich policy and its pro-German orientation plainly stated: "The opposition (i.e., in France) to 'giving Germany a free hand in Central Europe' has become a little unreal since she clearly has it any way."[3]

The Liberal Manchester Guardian similarly sounded a critical note. It observed the similarity of opinion on "the lessons of the crisis" in the Liberal and Labour parties and the proximity of its conclusions with the dissident Conservatives.[4] The particular points the Guardian emphasized were those generally current with anti-Chamberlain attitudes. Politically, the Guardian recognized that Czechoslovakia was "rendered

1. Daily Herald, 6 October 1938.
2. Ibid., 13 October 1938.
3. Ibid., 25 October 1938.
4. Manchester Guardian, 24 October 1938.

helpless" as a result of the four-power agreement, "with all that means to the balance of forces in Eastern Europe." It warned that Hitler would advance again with relative facility and increased power. The Guardian assumed that the net effect of Munich was that "Central and Eastern Europe come under the German might". There was instead a "new conception of a European order governed by the four States holding two opposite views of life."[1] Like the Daily Herald, the Guardian objected to this on several grounds. Firstly, as to the subject of the guarantee, the Guardian pointed out: "It could only have military value if it included Russia, and since in no syllable did Mr. Chamberlain mention Russia (in the House of Commons) we must conclude that he has ruled her out. Have we," asked this leader, "'sold' the Czechs a second time?"[2] The warning that Germany had secured her free hand in Central Europe seemed to provide the answer. Secondly, as to its suspicion that Chamberlain was trying to "establish a Four-Power Pact" of the "many objections" to such a plan the Guardian found most trenchant the exclusion of Russia.[3] To Sir Samuel Hoare's pledge that the Government did not contemplate the exclusion of Russia, the Guardian retorted that "if this is true it would be a denial of the Four-Power Plan, since five into four will not go." The conclusion this journal apprehensively reached was that notwithstanding Halifax's explanation in the House of Lords on Soviet exclusion because of Hitler's and Mussolini's objections, the same policy in future seemed guaranteed.

The New Statesman, the Spectator, and the Economist voiced similar

1. Manchester Guardian, 3 October 1938.
2. Ibid., 4 October 1938.
3. Ibid., 5 October 1938.

criticisms with differing emphases in their treatment of the guarantee, its relation to the Franco-Soviet and Soviet-Czech treaties, and the new political status of the U.S.S.R. The Spectator argued clearly against British participation in the guarantee, claiming that it was impossible "to implement effectively a guarantee of the frontier of a small State in Central Europe."[1] It concluded that the Munich decisions clearly meant that Britain had abdicated east of the Rhine. The Economist emphasized that: "Most disastrous of all, the great strength of Russia, has been lost to the coalition that stood for peace and resistance to aggression."[2] As to the possible future course of Soviet policy the Economist guessed that "it will require some active solicitation of Moscow by London and Paris to prevent the great power of Russia retreating into isolation - and the further guess that the active solicitation will unfortunately not be forthcoming."[3] And finally the New Statesman aimed its acrimonious criticism at Chamberlain himself. Mr. Churchill fears Hitler more than he hates Stalin, argued the Statesman in reviewing the Commons Munich debates, and continued: "Mr. Chamberlain fears Stalin and gets on not too badly with Hitler."[4]

3. "PREVENTIVE WAR" or COLLECTIVE DEFENCE

The discussion of the press' attitude towards the Munich conference and Anglo-Soviet relations presented in the preceding pages, has revealed

1. Spectator, 7 October 1938.
2. Economist, 15 October 1938.
3. Ibid., 8 October 1938.
4. New Statesman, 8 October 1938.

fundamental differences beneath the intensity of emotions aroused. Three views of the whole complex of issues: the projected four-power guarantee of Czechoslovakia, the status of the Franco-Soviet and Soviet-Czech treaties, and the past and future roles of the Soviet Union in European diplomacy were clearly visible.

Firstly, the Isolationist Daily Express judged the issues in extreme insular terms. It urged that Britain must not become involved "in quarrels over foreign boundaries" that do not concern her.[1] Furthermore, Chamberlain had preserved peace. This was the essential quantity Britain needed both for domestic purposes and to develop the British Empire. And finally, the Express stated clearly: "Britain accepted the Munich Agreement because our defences were not in a condition enabling us to take any other decision."[2] That "any other decision" one can only surmise meant resistance on the stand represented by the 26 September press communiqué the Express had so prominently featured in the darkest hour of the crisis.

The Times presented not so much a contrast to the Daily Express as an elaboration of that point of view. A similar emphasis was placed on the fact that peace had been preserved. Furthermore the Times insisted that the issue was a simple one of self-determination - of conceding to Germany on a principle of policy Britain too upheld. In this respect the Times argued on 5 October that to have mobilized between the Berchtesgaden and Godesberg meetings "would have been to mobilize against justice, or at best to become frankly partisan." War at that time, it went on would have put Britain on the wrong side in a struggle whose main issue

1. Daily Express, 14 October 1938.
2. Ibid., 3 October 1938.

would have been self-determination. Obviously the Times gave little attention to those urging collective defence with the Soviet Union. One can recall its deliberate playing down of the 26 September press communiqué. The only point of potential resistance conceded was in the week after the Godesberg meeting. Only then could Britain have reasonably envisaged resistance, when "the issue had been narrowed down to the means, whether by negotiation or by violence, of carrying out the agreed settlement."[1] Nor was the Times unaware of the Munich critics' attitude of urging "a stand against the dictators".

On this point the Times during early October proved most venomous and uncompromising. Again and again it denounced that section of the press which had urged collective defence in concert with the Soviets: a policy the Times labelled contemptuously "preventive war". A leading article on 5 October called this alternative policy: "The feeblest of all attitudes" for it "ingeminates mistrust of every German action or profession, (and) calls for 'a stand against the dictators'...." It furthermore argued that Chamberlain's critics had never explicitly defined this "wholly conjectural" policy, but that "implicit in all the argument is the barren, suicidal policy of preventive war...."[2] War the Times asserted was not necessarily inevitable. To believe otherwise was to distrust dictatorships, fearing that they were intent on destroying democracy, to search for "armed alliances," and refuse to negotiate with the dictatorships. This the Times termed the "whole grammar of despair" which was editorially denounced as incompatible with democracy.[3]

1. Times, 5 October 1938.
2. Ibid., 6 and 19 October 1938.
3. Ibid., 7 October 1938.

The second Conservative journal, the Daily Telegraph shared with the Times the belief that a "wider understanding and more enduring appeasement" [1] was necessary in the post-Munich period. More overtly than the Times it hinted that the hopes placed on the Munich settlement would be considerably enhanced could Hitler's assurances that he had ended his territorial demands be fully accepted. The Telegraph's greatest single source of uneasiness was the consciousness that "the method of the threat" had succeeded very well for German diplomacy.[2] But on the specific issue with which the Times was so concerned there is little commentary. The Telegraph continued its September policy of ignoring the Soviet aspect of foreign affairs. Among the only references to the Soviets, appeared on 4 October in an article by Winston Churchill. He discussed the "ruin and neutralization of Czechoslovakia", the collapse of the little Entente, the defection of Poland and "the possible departure of Russia from the European system, which lay open the path down the valley of the Danube to the Black Sea ... to exultant Nazidom." This aspect was never taken up editorially by the Telegraph. Its only real reference to the problem which preoccupied the Times, came at the end of October 1938. In reviewing a Labour party manifesto, a leading article sharply attacked the "Socialists" who could not make up their minds whether they wanted "defiance for dictators and resistance for aggressors or the policy of peaceful accommodation." The manifesto was dismissed as avoiding the choice by assuming that there was no incompatibility.[3] How true was this?

1. Daily Telegraph, 19 October 1938.
2. Ibid., 3, October 1938.
3. Ibid., 29 October 1938.

The Liberal, Labour, and Independent press, the third group of journals, provided a ready answer. Taking the Daily Herald as a representative spokesman a three-fold attitude was evident. Firstly, it was relieved that war had been averted but concerned at the price paid for peace. Secondly, the Herald argued throughout and the Liberal and Independent press agreed that Chamberlain and Daladier were in a strong position when they went to Munich. They had "the support of Russia in the stand that had been made against the threat of aggression".[1] But at Munich, the U.S.S.R. was not consulted, "although she was expected to be ready to assist in opposing aggression if the Conference to which she was not invited broke down."[2] Following from this the Herald accused Chamberlain of "deliberately setting himself out to drive Russia into an isolation" the effect of which would be to "reduce the forces of collective security against aggression in Europe". And finally, the Herald criticized the bilateral nature of Chamberlain's foreign policy. It stressed that any hope of real European appeasement could only be achieved at a conference of all powers. The problems of Europe the Herald argued "cannot be settled by narrow private conversations ... which merely seek temporary relief from threats of war by a private bargain with those who threaten war."[3]

The policy of the Herald, therefore, combined the two components of "collective resistance to aggression" with "a removal of the causes of war".[4] While the Telegraph's characterization was true, the Herald

1. Daily Herald, 30 September 1938. See too Manchester Guardian, 3, 5 and 12 October 1938; Economist, 8 October.
2. Daily Herald, 3 October 1938.
3. Ibid., 5 October 1938.
4. Ibid., 3 October 1938. See too, ibid. 7 October 1938.

nonetheless saw the two objectives as mutually compatible. Furthermore, the Herald unlike the Telegraph, saw the U.S.S.R. as an integral component of this mutually interlocking policy. And unlike the entire Conservative press, the Herald claimed that the fleeting embodiment of its policy of collective security was crowned in the 26 September press communiqué. It was this incident that convinced the Liberal and Labour press that war had been avoided.

> We were brought to the edge of war because we have refused to take collective security seriously. We were saved from war because at the last moment it was called into being through the collective preparedness of Britain, France and Russia.[1]

It was this policy that the Times preferred to call the "grammar of despair" and "preventive war". In reality the Herald was equally committed to an appeasement policy; but in combination with collective resistance in situations such as Czechoslovakia which transcended a "border dispute". Nowhere was there mention of war against the dictators on principle.

The conclusion on the press post-Munich debate suggests therefore a basic tripartite difference of opinion and interpretation. The Isolationist press considered the Munich conference a surrender to superior military force. A wise state of affairs if it meant a retreat into isolationism, and British non-involvement in European affairs. It meant, too, granting Germany a free hand in Eastern Europe at the expense of the Soviet Union. The Conservative press ostensibly could

1. Daily Herald, 3 October 1938. See too New Statesman, 8 October 1938 for a parallel analysis.

point to Munich as a landmark on the path of appeasement and European pacification. German desires to be rid of French-Czech-Soviet encirclement were fulfilled. Furthermore, the exclusion of the U.S.S.R. from the conference, indeed from the whole series of negotiations, was condoned. The attitude of the Conservative and the Isolationist press, suggests that it did not have as yet a Soviet policy. Indifference and condonation served as a policy - a policy by implication. The third group of journals; Liberal, Labour, and Independent argued that Britain had sustained a qualified defeat; that Britain had surrendered to force, needlessly. There will be recalled the emphasis that this group of newspapers placed upon the 26 September Foreign Office press release; the headline coverage that they afforded these stirring words. In effect, this third group of newspapers created a sort of press myth which they used to argue that the Munich conference witnessed the failure of a policy of collective defence; that in the days before the Munich conference Britain had stood defiant with the collective help of France and the Soviet Union; and that, the exclusion of the Soviets had weakened Britain's negotiating strength. The threat this time was the isolation of the U.S.S.R. and her withdrawal from the concert of Europe.

One point of agreement that the entire British press concurred in as a result of the crisis was the necessity for an invigorated rearmament program.

PART TWO

THE NEGOTIATIONS WITH SOVIET RUSSIA

CHAPTER THREE

1. INTRODUCTION

The German occupation of Prague on 15 March 1939 was dramatic enough to mark a dividing point in subsequent historical narratives. However to interpret the events of 15 March 1939 as a turning point in the pursuit of British foreign policy as engineered by Neville Chamberlain is only partly true. To assert that as a response to this particular German move Chamberlain irrevocably abandoned appeasement and substituted instead a policy of collective defence in which would be included the U.S.S.R. is patently false. It would perhaps be more accurate to suggest, that while appeasement may have been less publicised in the coming months, it still remained a tenet of British policy. In this light must be seen the Anglo-Soviet negotiations in the Spring and Summer of 1939; that is, as part of Chamberlain's policy of conciliation through greater strength. To rearmament he now added territorial guarantees. And to these guarantees he wished, within certain imposed limits, to add the support of the U.S.S.R. Pressured inter alia by press agitation, he also sought later a Soviet-British mutual assistance pact.

With this latter perspective in mind a reading of the British press for the several months prior to the outbreak of war is extremely illuminating. For the contemporary press was equally divided in its interpretation of Chamberlain's post-Prague policy. Its editorial columns reflected precisely that dichotomy of opinion. The Conservative press, specifically the Times, stood closest to an exact appreciation of the limits within which Chamberlain was to act; especially, the role reserved for the U.S.S.R. In this latter respect it will be shown to follow

logically from Conservative press attitudes to the U.S.S.R. during the Czech crisis of September 1938. On the other hand, the Liberal, Labour, and Independent press tended to misinterpret and often misrepresent Chamberlain's policy. While perhaps closer to the currents of public opinion urging an Anglo-Soviet understanding in the Spring and Summer of 1939, they surged too far ahead in appointing a role for the U.S.S.R. within a collective security policy; a policy the Government had no intention of implementing.

The preliminary impact on the British press of the German occupation of Prague was devastating. Leader writers unleashed a torrent of invective, abuse, and scorn. Epithets ranged from "heinous duplicity", "undisguised brigandage", "a monstrous breach of faith", "a cruel and brutal act", to "an act of war". The press seemed generally agreed however that there would be no war for Czechoslovakia. As each paper took a second long look at the projected four-power guarantee discussed at the Munich conference, there emerged tacit agreement that no casus belli existed: not, it is to be emphasized, that war at this point was ever seriously discussed. However, after each newspaper had finished venting its shock and/or abuse, two points were then discussed. Firstly, the state of appeasement policy was examined. Secondly, a British response was clearly seen as necessary.

The policy of appeasement, so assiduously supported by the Conservative press, had been buttressed inter alia by the assumption that at Munich Hitler had completed the last of his claims based on the self-determination principle. This latest move on Prague seemed to hint at rather more ambitious Napoleonic plans. Faced with this possibility, the Conservative press initially voiced their sense of shock at the Prague

coup. Leading articles at this point displayed disappointment, with not a small touch of disillusionment, at what was regarded as a move inconsistent with the spirit of the Munich Agreement. No regrets were voiced in the Times at the wisdom of the original Munich diplomacy. The Daily Telegraph did go one step further to describe the Munich spirit as reduced "to a complete and utter mockery". It further claimed that while appeasement had suffered a severe setback what was changed was "not the objective but the method".[1] In the thought of the Conservative press appeasement diplomacy had received a major reversal. The shock felt by these newspapers plus the outcry of many others especially critical of the Government since Munich were enough to force an outright advocacy of appeasement out of leading articles.

It is perhaps at this point that the word appeasement receives its defamatory connotation. This was clearly expressed in Liberal, Labour, and Independent journals. The Prague coup was greeted here as the definitive end to the policy of appeasement. In the coming months any hint of further German conciliation was immediately labelled as a revival of appeasement and soundly condemned. Francis Williams, Editor of the Daily Herald, in a signed article asserted that Chamberlain's conception of foreign policy had been finally proved untenable. Both the Prime Minister's assumptions of the German desire to peacefully redress grievances and his equation of collective security with the two ideological blocs idea which he wished to avoid, had been proved false.[2] Indeed, the Herald called for the resignation of Chamberlain as Prime Minister on 18 March, and two days later asserted: "Our relations with Germany are

1. Daily Telegraph, 18 March 1939.
2. Daily Herald, 17 March 1939.

at an end. The era of discussions with Herr Hitler is finished." The Guardian was equally outspoken in asserting that appeasement had been unsuccessfully tried, and that the events of mid-March conclusively attested to its failure. The character, aims, and methods of Hitler had invalidated Chamberlain's policy, now "in ruins". The Guardian pointed out that many Conservative journals in which were included the Daily Mail, Birmingham Post, Scotsman, Daily Telegraph, Yorkshire Post, and the Times, had adopted a critical attitude towards the continued pursuit of an appeasement policy.[1] The Economist likewise opined that "collective resistance" has taken the place of "retreat" and that the Government "have been converted to the Opposition view", that is, collective security.[2] The Spectator was even more explicit, saying that Chamberlain had embarked on "a frank return to the principle of collective security...."[3]

Clearly, the seeds were thus sown for a misreading of Chamberlain's policy by a large section of the press. Thus, the Manchester Guardian could assert that when Chamberlain spoke at Birmingham on 17 March, he had "announced the collapse of the Government's Munich policy and its intention to adopt another."[4] This was clearly overstating the point. Similarly, the Daily Herald could claim that when Halifax spoke in the House of Lords on 20 March he was "heralding Britain's adoption of the policy of collective security."[5] This was an overly sanguine view.

Whether appeasement diplomacy was interpreted as having suffered a

1. Manchester Guardian, 16 and 17 March 1939.
2. Economist, 25 March 1939.
3. Spectator, 24 March 1939.
4. Manchester Guardian, 29 March 1939.
5. Daily Herald, 21 March 1939.

set-back or terminated definitely, the press was clearly aware that Britain need take the diplomatic initiative. This awareness was further heightened by gloomy press predictions that the German seizure of Prague was a prelude to a total German domination of South-Eastern Europe. The Daily Express declared its indifference, noting that "Munich decided that Germany was the boss in Eastern Europe".[1] While the Economist very apprehensively did not dismiss the possibility that the absorption of Bohemia and Moravia was not a step to the East "but a securing of the rear before a joint Italo-German offensive against the west".[2] Whichever view was entertained some thought was devoted to future exigencies.

The Conservative press seemed willing to wait for the Government to clarify its position and posit guidelines as to the next step. The most it would initially offer were suggestions for a "greater emphasis on vigilance" or that the major powers "confer forthwith".[3] It immediately became clear, however, to the Liberal, Labour and Independent press that in any new diplomatic arrangement urged upon the Government, some role for the U.S.S.R. had to be reserved. Therefore, when, as shown previously, they editorialised on the death of appeasement and spoke of its replacement with a collective security program, they envisaged in effect a triple alliance of Britain, France, and Russia. The Daily Herald immediately called for "a determined policy of co-operation with France, (and) with Russia...."[4] The New Statesman spoke of a "Grand Alliance", while the Guardian pressed the urgency of "drawing closer to Russia".[5]

1. Daily Express, 15 March 1939.
2. Economist, 18 March 1939.
3. Daily Telegraph, 16 March 1939; Times, 17 March 1939.
4. Daily Herald, 16 March 1939.
5. New Statesman, 25 March 1939; Manchester Guardian, 16 March 1939.

It was not surprising therefore, that Eden's remarks in the House of Commons on 15 March, wherein he had urged the formation of a common front including Russia earned the approval and enthusiastic support of the Opposition press. It was this type of statement that most clearly expressed its sentiments, and won the publicity that had previously been accorded to the 26 September 1938 press communiqué at the height of the Munich crisis. Whatever the press viewed as the next step there was immediate agreement that common action, involving several powers, need be concerted to resist any further German unilateral move to upset by force the status quo in Europe. Indeed the exact form this was to take and the precise position of the U.S.S.R. in it, was the theme preoccupying the press during the months preceding the war.

2. PRELUDE TO THE NEGOTIATIONS, 18 March - 13 April 1939

Sir William Seeds, British Ambassador in Moscow, inquired of the Soviet Government on 18 March what the U.S.S.R. would do in the event of an attack by Hitler on Rumania. The Soviets replied with a suggestion for an immediate conference of Poland, Rumania, Britain, France, the U.S.S.R. and Turkey. On 19 March the British refused the Soviet proposal. Two days later they suggested instead a scheme for the immediate publication of a declaration signed by four powers - Britain, France, the U.S.S.R. and Poland - to the effect that in the event of a new act of aggression, the powers concerned would immediately consult in order to discuss the measure to be adopted. In this the Soviets concurred but the Poles refused to be a co-signatory with the U.S.S.R.[1] (see page 62)

This week-end of 18 and 19 March and the following week constituted the inaugural period of intense diplomatic inter-action between Britain and Russia. Aside from perhaps the Metropolitan-Vickers Trial in 1933, the 'thirties did not witness a similar period wherein Anglo-Russian relations so consistently preoccupied the British press. The movements of Ivan Maisky, Soviet Ambassador in London, and Sir William Seeds, the comments of politicians, etc. were all closely watched and carefully analysed. The merits and demerits of each proposal put forth from either side was fully weighed and thoroughly publicised.

When covering this speedy exchange of proposals, the British press was divided. The Times seemed to favour a policy of specific engagements carefully entered upon, leaving no opening for prior general commitments which would split Europe. Its policy clearly reflected Chamberlain's speech on 17 March to the Birmingham Unionist Association, wherein the Prime Minister repeated that he "was not prepared to engage this country (i.e. Britain) by new unspecified commitments operating under conditions which cannot now be foreseen...."[2] But circumstances were soon to overtake this policy. The Daily Telegraph hinted cautiously at a "closely concerted" policy between the powers. Then on a note, which would bring it later in May to a point of view in line with the Liberal and Labour press, the Telegraph observed that there was to be found in Britain a "greater readiness to consider the acceptance of wider mutual obligations, in return for mutual support". And concluded daringly that "collective security had become something more than a pious phrase."[3]

1. Documents on British Foreign Policy 1919-1939, Third Series, Vol.IV, pp. 372, 385, 392-3, 429.
2. Chamberlain, op.cit., pp.419-420.
3. Daily Telegraph, 20 and 21 March 1939.

Both the Times and the Telegraph viewed with approval British proposals for a declaration, as opposed to the Soviet conference suggestions, as the most practical first step. The Times focused its attention on the preparation needed and strategic considerations that had yet to be ironed out. The Telegraph noted sympathetically Polish embarrassment about joining a declaration. Both newspapers published reports of German disapproval of Britain's new course of "'throwing herself into the arms of Bolshevism'."[1] Finally, both noted coldly the sudden emergence of Russia into European diplomacy, but supported no proposals for closer Anglo-Soviet relations except in context of a wider European declaration. Under no condition were they to uphold a policy to put Britain, in the company of the U.S.S.R., at the head of an anti-German coalition. Instead, there was evident the reliance on methods of diplomacy aimed at impressing but not threatening Nazi Germany.

The Daily Express preferred a reticent attitude towards these negotiations, giving them only secondary coverage. It described Hitler's Prague coup as a "German gold raid", limited in nature, and with no aggressive intent. Its only comments during this week of negotiation were to recognize that appeasement was "abandoned and finished";[2] that collective security was put in its place; and to eulogize the remarks of Lord Arnold, who in the House of Lords voiced his opposition to the "reversal" in British foreign policy.[3] Its final comment was to note cynically:

The projected marriage between Neville Chamberlain and

1. Quoted, Daily Telegraph, 22 March 1939.
2. Daily Express, 21 March 1939.
3. Ibid., 22 March 1939.

Josef Stalin is in slow motion. Stalin does not want to propose and Chamberlain does not want to accept.[1]

The Express' answer to the European crisis was for Britain to turn her back on the troubles of the continent, introduce compulsory national service and strengthen Empire defence. The Daily Express was not to walk the road to Moscow - not for a while.

The reactions of the Liberal, Labour, and Independent press to these preliminary sounding in London and Moscow were, clearly, positive, enthusiastic, and urgent. Carried away with a self-generated excitement, these journals believed their Soviet policy to be in the embryonic stage of acceptance. Anglo-Soviet relations became a subject for analysis per se, rather than seen as part of a larger scheme. It was now taken as axiomatic that the supposedly subtle intentions of Britain to divert German eastwards were ended. The Economist editorialised that: "the facts of the past twelve months offer no evidence to deny that the Western democracies' policy, faute de mieux has been to encourage the Drang nach Osten."[2] It therefore endorsed Britain's proposals to France, Russia, and other powers for a joint agreement for collective resistance. Its desire for a Soviet connection was based on the assumption that the German program of expansion involved at some stage a reckoning with the Western powers. Does Britain, asked an Economist leader on 25 March, "wish to face that reckoning with allies, who can force Germany to fight on two fronts, or without?" The Economist answered that the "anchor" of any such defensive coalition must be the U.S.S.R. And, as if in reply to unspoken criticism, the

1. Daily Express, 24 March 1939.
2. Economist, 18 March 1939.

Economist continued:

> The doubts felt in Western Europe about the efficiency of post-purge Russia may or may not be justified. But whatever the exact degree of her strength, Russia cannot be called a weakness to her allies.

The final point made by the Economist was that "The doctrine of limited commitments must go." For all prior attempts to so limit them had not prevented Britain from having them forced upon her at the end.

The Economist has been dealt with at length, as it voiced with independent moderation those sentiments and opinions held dogmatically and perhaps, less eloquently, by a variety of other journals.

The Daily Herald supported the Soviet conference proposal for reasons which were to bear strongly on later events. "... the 'National' Government's conversion to collective security," claimed the Herald, "has been so rapid and so belated that perhaps only through the exchange of views, possible at an immediate conference, can full confidence in its intentions be created among the Powers concerned." The main power the Herald had in mind was the U.S.S.R., whose suspicions of British intentions "by its past history", the Labour journal never tired of parading.[1]

The Manchester Guardian shared the Economist's observations that there was an "uncomfortable grain of truth" in Soviet allegations that the democracies desired to turn Germany eastwards[2] and that Chamberlain "has deliberately played Hitler's game through his fear of Russia and the 'Red Bogy'."[3] This belief, that British foreign policy was based on the hope

1. Daily Herald, 23 March 1939.
2. Manchester Guardian, 13 March 1939.
3. Ibid., 25 March 1939.

that Hitler would continue to drive east and ignore the west was shared by the New Statesman.[1] However by 25 March, in light of the previous week's Anglo-Soviet consultations, the Statesman felt sufficiently reassured to comment that this policy of making Britain "safe from Bolshevism" had failed.

Little more than ten days after the German action of 15 March 1939, the urgency of an immediate concrete response to the crisis seemed to have passed. Diplomatic correspondents noted that there was to be expected a lull in the crisis. A variety of journals commented that the immediate necessity for a four-power declaration and/or a six-power conference seemed to have been dissipated. The German move towards Rumania had not materialised. The seizure of Memel evoked comment but of a passive nature. While the difficulties experienced over Poland's reluctance to be associated in a declaration with Russia, although receiving sympathetic consideration, were seen to make such a move quite unlikely. In light of these considerations, the press seemed aware that "public declarations and conferences of a general kind must recede, for the time being...."[2] The Herald opined that there would now be "more leisurely, and perhaps more thorough, discussion of possible ways and means of rebuilding some system of collective security."[3] It clearly recognized, two days later, that the original purpose of this diplomacy - "a speedy international reaction to German aggression" - had failed.

1. New Statesman, 18 March 1939.
2. Manchester Guardian, 21 March 1939.
3. Daily Herald, 29 March 1939.

The initial attempt at the co-ordination of Soviet and British policy for resistance to further German aggression thus drew to a close by the end of March 1939. The press could report nothing conclusive nor concrete. Some derived satisfaction from this new activity in Anglo-Soviet diplomatic relations; others rebuked the National Government for failure to successfully spearhead a collective defence front; while others pointed helplessly to continued Soviet press manifestations of anti-British suspicions. While finally, others rested content with the initial contacts that had been made, and waited upon the Government to initiate the next step.

The Isolationist and Conservative press rested content that Germany had been exposed as an aggressor power, and the democracies stood prepared with a new awareness. They waited upon the Government for "action". The Liberal, Labour, and Independent press had seen all their suggestions for concerted action meet with no visible response. The course of action that was still demanded by this section of the press, rather amorphously termed "collective security", a "collective defence front", or an "anti-aggression bloc", was in a state of suspended animation. It was a policy far in excess of anything planned by the Government at this stage: far more comprehensive that the slower, step by step, policy to be initiated of impressing Germany through a cluster of guarantees to select states in Eastern Europe. Chamberlain still stood opposed to a definite splitting of Europe into contending ideological blocs of countries.[1] Seen in this light, the Times and the Daily Telegraph stood closest to a comprehension of the exact aims of Chamberlain's foreign policy. The

1. Keith Feiling, The Life of Neville Chamberlain (London, 1946) p. 408.

stalemate this period represented for the larger section of the press may have continued indefinitely had not the Prime Minister given a new direction to British foreign policy; that is, the guarantee to Poland.

On 31 March 1939 the Prime Minister announced in the House of Commons the first definitive step in Britain's reaction to the Prague coup. He made two general points; firstly, that the Government was still of the opinion that "there should be no question incapable of solution by peaceful means...."; and secondly, that "certain consultations are now proceeding with other Governments." However, in order to clarify Britain's position while those consultations were continuing, Chamberlain announced that

> ... during that period, in the event of any action which clearly threatened Polish independence, and which the Polish Government accordingly considered it vital to resist with their national forces, His Majesty's Government would feel themselves bound at once to lend the Polish Government all support in their power. They have given the Polish Government an assurance to this effect.

Then in reply to further questioning by Mr. Arthur Greenwood, Chamberlain again emphasized that the statement was meant to cover "an interim period"; that he welcomed "the maximum amount of co-operation" with the Soviet Union; and gave an assurance that there were no ideological considerations impeding Anglo-Soviet relations.[1] (see page 69)

While the Times claimed that "Seldom has a British statement been so widely welcomed among diplomats and others in London as Mr. Chamberlain's,...",[2] one cannot claim that type of unanimous reception in the press. Chamberlain's announcement met with approval and reservation. It distressed that section of the press seeking a limitation of British commitments in Eastern Europe; was applauded by others seeing the necessity of positive commitments to encourage smaller powers to rally to Britain's side; and was greeted with qualified approval by others who desired a more general and comprehensive policy of collective security.

The Daily Express, still a consistent advocate of British isolation, warned that Britain "should not enter into commitments in Eastern Europe, where no British interest is at issue."[3] But by 4 April the Express was ready to see Britain's pledge to Poland as a move to permit Poland to negotiate "in an atmosphere free from menace and threat". This view proved very similar to that adopted by the Conservative press. Furthermore, although the Express displayed prominently on its front page of 4 April Lloyd George's warning that Britain was trapped if she went in without Russia, a leading article preferred to argue that consistent Polish unwillingness "to invoke Russian backing and aid against the possibility of a German onslaught" was a hopeful sign. The leader continued:

> If war came, Russia could give effective help far more easily than Britain. Clearly, therefore, by refusing to overcome their distaste for a Russian alliance, the Polish Government showed that they were still contem-

1. Parliamentary Debates, House of Commons, Fifth Series, Vol. 345, 31 March 1939, Col. 2415-2417.
2. Times, 1 April 1939.
3. Daily Express, 30 March 1939.

plating a peaceful settlement with the Germans.
The leader concluded by emphasizing the necessity for a negotiated settlement between Poland and Germany. Clearly the Express intended to treat this situation in a markedly similar manner to the Czech crisis of 1938. And if in that crisis the Soviets had to a great extent been ignored, the Daily Express intended to localise this event in the minds of its readers in a similar manner.

The Times stood closest to an understanding of the precise nature of Chamberlain's announcement. A leader on 1 April pointed out that the essence of the declaration on Poland was that Britain stood committed to "fair and free negotiation", for "a return to decent and normal methods of diplomacy". Its intent was not to perpetuate blindly the status quo, rather to restore independence in negotiation to "the weaker party". For this principle had Britain "entered upon a course which diverges widely from her traditional aloofness from the affairs of Central Europe." The 15 March coup had once again proved that Britain must be strong in negotiations; hence, the guarantee. But Germany was still "bound to be the most powerful Continental State". The Times emphasized in a most conciliatory tone that the guarantee did not constitute the embryo of an "anti-German coalition".

One of the few references to the U.S.S.R. in the Times issue on 1 April was the brief mention by the diplomatic correspondent that the guarantee was a preliminary before concerting action with other powers, amongst whom he included France, the U.S.A., and the U.S.S.R. However, during the week-end of 1-2 April, the problem of the relation of the U.S.S.R. to this new British move received sufficient publicity in other journals, meetings, speeches and in the Commons to warrant comment. On 4 April the Times in its tone of admonition with conciliation, firstly

advised Germany that Britain would resist any attempt at a forcible domination of the continent. Then, turning to the U.S.S.R., it commented that no power was excluded from the British

> ... foregathering of Germany's neighbours.... The British refusal to accept ideological differences as a line of international division applies no less to relations with the Soviet than to relations with Nazism and Fascism.

The leading article continued that this was made clear "whatever the stage at which the U.S.S.R. may decide to enter the consultations." Aside from placing the burden of participation upon the U.S.S.R., the leader criticized Lloyd George for commenting on Britain's inability to militarily implement the guarantee without Soviet aid. His views were described as "an outburst of inconsolable pessimism". The Times was content to report that the Soviet Ambassador in London had had repeated conversations with Lord Halifax. And with that it dismissed continued Soviet press manifestations of suspicion as to British intentions. Under no condition was the Times to commit British policy to a firm triple alliance. This consideration served as a basis for policy throughout the forthcoming Anglo-Soviet negotiations. Its focus throughout was limited, its purpose consistent, the method unchanged since the Munich crisis, that is, appeasement plus rearmament to which were now added guarantees in Eastern Europe. The Times, like the Daily Express, interpreted the guarantee as an interim move to strengthen Poland's negotiationg strength and not as a military commitment to wage war.

The Daily Telegraph, pursuing its policy of independent support of the Government, had been perturbed at the "apparent lag between intent a and act."[1] (see page 72) On several occasions it had urged the Govern-

ment if necessary to enter into commitments which it called "the indispensable cement of any anti-aggression front".[2] The guarantee therefore met with the Telegraph's total approval. It was that type of positive commitment to give confidence to the smaller powers, otherwise fearful of provoking Germany. Furthermore, as the "first-fruits" of two weeks of diplomatic consultations, it showed the Government as no longer hesitant, but pursuing a path that firmly established "the nucleus of a powerful defensive alliance against aggression... (to which) every country that is potentially menaced will know where to look for concrete support."[3]

Herein are contained the hints of that more vigorous attitude which would in two months time convince the Daily Telegraph to align itself, albeit temporarily, with the group of newspapers urging an Anglo-Soviet alliance. For the meantime, the Telegraph preferred to take a more reserved attitude to the U.S.S.R., whilst assuring Germany that Britain was not aiming at an encirclement policy. Although the Moscow correspondent reported accurately Russia's adverse reaction to the guarantee and her general suspicions of British intentions, editorial comment limited itself to assuring readers that whatever ideological difficulties existed in Anglo-Soviet negotiations "they would not count in a question of this kind".[4] The Telegraph waited for the Government to initiate any further contacts with the Soviet Union.

If the Conservative and Independent Conservative press emphasized

1. Daily Telegraph, 29 March 1939.
2. Ibid.
3. Ibid., 1 April 1939.
4. Ibid., 4 April 1939.

the letter of the declaration, the Liberal, Labour, and Independent periodical press saw the move in terms of a step towards collective security: an anti-German coalition at most, a mutual assistance defensive front at least. In thus interpreting Chamberlain's announcement, they went far beyond the Government's intentions. Thereby were sown the seeds that gave rise to so much of their exasperation with Anglo-Soviet negotiations in the coming months. While the Conservative press' initial reaction was to place the emphasis of the declaration on strengthening the bargaining hand of Poland, the Liberal and Labour press saw the declaration as a weak effort in the direction of collective security. From this obviously arose their criticism as to the exclusion of the U.S.S.R., and as to how Britain was to effectively aid Poland militarily without Soviet support.

Even before the guarantee was officially announced in the Commons on 31 March, the Daily Herald, having gotten word of the Government's intentions, sternly proclaimed that same morning: "It should be made clear that this emergency action is no substitute for the wider plan of collective security."; and that in light of Soviet readiness to act against aggression, Britain must co-ordinate her policy with the U.S.S.R.[1] When the next day, the Daily Herald headlined "WIDER PACT SOON TO INCLUDE SOVIET" and the diplomatic correspondent wrote: "The first big step towards the rebuilding of collective security in Europe has been taken.", this paper was obviously indulging in wishful thinking. Indeed, the editorial comment, entitled: "The First Step" welcomed this clarification of British commitments, but immediately warned: "There must be no delay in drawing up and signing the full policy."[2] For the Herald

1. Daily Herald, 31 March 1939.
2. Ibid., 1 April 1939.

the test of the sincerity of Chamberlain's policy would be the inclusion of Russia: "without Soviet co-operation, no real system of collective security is possible."[1] It constantly pointed out that British strategy with Poland had "deepened Russian suspicions that the British Government does not mean business". The refusal of Britain to co-operate with Russia during September 1938 was given as the reason for the latter's sceptical attitude to Chamberlain's policy.

The Manchester Guardian reacted in a markedly similar manner. While expressing its astonishment at the "audacity" of the move, a leader also entitled "The First Step" voiced its concern at the Government's delay "in passing from its incomplete 'interim' policy to the final scheme". A second point for concern, similar to the Daily Herald, was the need to include Russia within the plan. Britain must show, concluded the leader, that her "foolish policy towards Russia is finally at an end".[2] Soviet scepticism as to the sincerity of the British guarantee was here also fully covered. Soviet press reports appealing for genuine collective security and warning Britain against trying to direct aggression eastwards were prominently featured. In this manner the Liberal and Labour press often used Soviet newspaper excerpts, wherein they saw reflected their own doubts as to the conviction behind British declarations, and above all, fears for what, in their eyes, would constitute a revival of appeasement.

A number of the periodicals displayed that same lack of precise appreciation of the limits Chamberlain had set for his Soviet policy. The House of Commons declaration had come too late in the week for

1. Daily Herald, 3 April 1939.
2. Manchester Guardian, 1 April 1939.

immediate comment. But the New Statesman on 1 April, in light of the German press campaign against Poland, had asked the Government along with France and the U.S.S.R. to "pledge themselves to immediate military action in the West in the event of a German attack upon Poland." There reaction, the following week, to Chamberlain's guarantee was therefore mixed. While welcoming the guarantee, the leading article pointed out "the dangers involved in this interim policy of 'mutual aid'", and insisted that only "full collaboration" with the U.S.S.R. could build "a successful peace alliance".[1] It made, too, the additional pungent remark that had the Statesman handled the affairs of the country it would have put the inclusion of the U.S.S.R. as a pre-condition to Colonel Beck before granting a British guarantee. The Economist called for "a full defensive military alliance" with Russia when offering her critical approval of the guarantee to Poland.[2] As to Soviet reticence, the Economist noted casually: "Russia is suspicious, but willing to assist."[3] However, among the most misguided readings in the press of Chamberlain's policy occurred in the Spectator. This journal welcomed the guarantee but added its observations. Chamberlain, it declared, was "driven back" by Hitler to a collective security policy and was "committing himself to it without reserve".[4] In regards to the role of the Soviet Union, the Spectator declared itself aware of the complications involved, then naïvely noted: "What is needed immediately is to bring Russia and Rumania into the eastern defence agreement."[5] For in spite

1. New Statesman, 8 April 1939.
2. Economist, 1 April 1939.
3. Ibid., 15 April 1939.
4. Spectator, 7 April 1939.
5. Ibid., 14 April 1939.

of some consultations, Moscow's suspicions, it claimed, had by no means been dissipated.

As the problem of the susceptibilities of the Eastern European States becomes the major issue in the forthcoming Anglo-French-Soviet negotiations it is necessary to examine the initial attitude adopted by the press towards Poland. Her refusal to compromise her neutrality policy by accepting a Soviet guarantee split the press very sharply. Initially there was, among British newspapers, a very clear-cut understanding of the fence-sitting foreign policy pursued by Colonel Beck. It will be recalled that Poland's refusal to join a four-power declaration had received a sympathetic press. Indeed, Liberal and Labour newspapers originally interpreted Polish hesitations as a sign for the Government to show greater vigour and imagination in undertaking commitments in Eastern Europe. How could such countries join a peace front, they had argued, and risk German antagonism if Britain was not prepared to commit herself militarily to their defence. Once, however, the British gave their guarantee to Poland, and still the larger project envisaged by certain press organs was nowhere nearer completion, then did the British press seem to divide in its opinion of the Poles.

The Conservative press still found reason to sympathize with continued Polish refusal to submit to any Soviet guarantee, or enter a defensive treaty of mutual assistance with the Soviet Union. "Nor does she," commented the Telegraph in referring to Poland, "desire to see the new security system built up in the form of a bloc of nations opposed to

Germany. Poland, as is readily understandable," continued the Telegraph, "conceives that to proceed along these lines would be to present a challenge to Germany which might result in defeating its own object of preserving the peace."[1] The Times was at pains to reassure Poland that the object of British policy was not the encirclement of Germany, and showed a sympathetic understanding of Poland's reluctance to enter into any closer agreements with Soviet Russia. It pointed towards two reasons. Firstly, because the Poles "had no wish to antagonize Germany, secondly, because they were chary of having troops carrying the Red Star in Poland."[2]

The Liberal, Labour, and Independent press at this point were not quite so kind to the Poles. If, as has been noted, they were interested in seeing the Government pursuing a more comprehensive collective security program, their attitude to Poland would be one of exhortation and encouragement to make a positive commitment in that direction. They were no less sympathetic, appreciative and concerned with the thorny dilemma of Polish-Soviet relations. Rather, they understood that problem as having a subsidiary importance to the larger issues at hand; that is, a collective defence front. The Daily Herald recognized Polish hesitation at closer relations with Russia, but stated categorically: "That hesitation must be overcome." No clear suggestions were offered. Instead the Herald went on to point out, that Polish anxieties were "largely unfounded, a relic of the past which overlooks the U.S.S.R.'s record as a good neighbour and an honest and unremitting worker for

1. Daily Telegraph, 6 April 1939.
2. Times, 5 and 6 April 1939.

international peace."[1] Polish objections, therefore, had to be overridden. With this attitude the Manchester Guardian wholly agreed. It termed Polish reluctance to provoke Germany "understandable enough", but the overriding consideration was that Britain's ability to assist Poland "would be dangerously limited were Russian help not to be counted upon". The Guardian stressed, in a most emphatic manner: "Difficult though Poland's choice may be, it is the Government's duty, on the most practical grounds, to ensure Russia's full participation in the general scheme."[2] (For good measure the Guardian added the Moscow press' criticism of Poland's refusal to join a collective security program.) A more sobering remark was offered by the diplomatic correspondent. He astutely argued that to force a Russo-Polish alliance would ruin the work so far accomplished. A Russo-Polish alliance he termed an "impossibility".[3] Editorial opinion persisted in claiming that the difficulties with Poland "can be, and ought to be, got over".[4] The Statesman shared the Guardian's uncompromising views. Since Britain could not directly aid Poland, the Statesman declared emphatically that she "must accept aid from the U.S.S.R. or face Hitler alone".[5]

The Economist proved not quite so outspoken in its views on Poland. It recognized the difficulties involved, but asserted that both Russia and Poland were equally essential for the peace front: Poland, "because of her geographical position, Russia because of her great potential strength...." It placed the burden of compromise upon the Poles whom it

1. Daily Herald, 3 April 1939.
2. Manchester Guardian, 4 April 1939.
3. Ibid., 5 April 1939.
4. Ibid., 6 April 1939.
5. New Statesman, 15 April 1939.

exhorted to "abandon their ... pipe-dreaming, that they may be left in neutrality while Hitler drives West ... if Poland prefers possible death at Nazi hands to the dishonour of association with the Soviets, then it is among the foolish virgins that she will rank, not the wise ones."[1] In more moderate tones the Economist spelled out what it considered to be a feasible solution. It urged a practical arrangement for the supply to Poland of Soviet aid, "sufficient to strengthen their resistance, but not so overwhelming as to threaten their independence."[2] The Economist continually declared that the essential task for Anglo-French diplomacy was to find the means of enlisting the co-operation of both Russia and Poland. Unfortunately, a solution was never found.

The difference of interpretation with which the press viewed Chamberlain's total policy was, therefore, herein reflected. The Conservative press, having emphasized the limitations of the peace front, the essentially diplomatic manoeuvre behind the guarantee, could not see their way to pressuring Poland into acceptance of Soviet military support. They no doubt hoped that situation would never arise. The Liberal, Labour, and Independent press interpreted the guarantee as the genesis stage of "collective security". In common with the Conservative press, they showed sympathy and understanding of the Polish dilemma and a history of Polish-Soviet enmity. But they could see no other way of implementing the guarantee and securing a British-French-Soviet defence pact, than by persuading Poland - with various degrees of coercion if necessary - of the need to commit herself. This latter group of newspapers were again to be baffled by this problem when discussing the place

1. Economist, 1 April 1939.
2. Ibid., 22 April 1939.

of the Baltic States in the forthcoming Anglo-Soviet negotiations. Finally, when a decision was needed as to whether to maintain moral probity by preserving the principle of territorial sovereignty, or risk censure to secure the overriding considerations of a collective defence front, they opted for the former.

The thorny problem of Polish-Soviet relations had preoccupied the press to an astonishing degree in the week following the announcement of the guarantee. It was suddenly forgotten in light of an Italian move in the Mediterranean. On the morning of 7 April 1939 - Good Friday, as was generally pointed out - Italy invaded Albania. Leader writers on the following Saturday morning indulged in a total, unrestrained, and earthy denunciation of Italy. Only the Express wrote if off as "essentially an internal affair".

The Times viewed the Albanian annexation as the Italian "reply to the movement of consolidation among the non-aggressive Powers" and repeated Britain's determination to defend in that area her "vital interests".[1] Two days later the Times tempered these remarks with a repetition of Chamberlain's efforts of doing "everything possible by conciliatory diplomacy to bring international needs and issues within the reach of friendly negotiation and settlement". Implied was the Times' conviction, that were force denounced this still held true. And up to August 1939, the Times, in face of every German or Italian move, emphasized the conciliatory and non-aggressive character of British diplomacy: that "the

1. Times, 8 April 1939.

proper way to settle differences and to remove grievances is by discussion and agreement, not by the use of force or the threat of force."[1] The Telegraph however was outspoken on the lessons of Albania. The crisis seemed to heighten the paper's editorial resolve to strengthen the peace front. The Manchester Guardian and Daily Herald reacted in a predictable manner - critical, denunciatory of Government policy, and urging greater commitments in Eastern Europe.

A further aspect of the Albanian crisis concerned the nature of the Soviet reaction as presented in the columns of the Moscow correspondents' dispatches to London. On 11 April 1939 all the newspapers herein analysed printed extensive reports on Soviet press reaction to the Albanian coup. While the conclusions varied, the points emphasized by the correspondents were markedly similar. They stressed, firstly, the continued Soviet suspicion of British policy and intentions. The Telegraph quoted the "Journal de Moscou" to emphasize that journal's approval of British press comment on Moscow's distrust of Chamberlain's policy.[2] Secondly, Russia's "new wave of indignation" against aggression in Europe was indicated. And thirdly, the Soviets complained that the British version of a united front against aggression left far too many "loopholes".[3]

The conclusions that were drawn from Soviet reactions to the latest European crisis varied. The Conservative press, having gotten over the initial shock of the Italian coup, reverted to traditional attitudes. While perhaps not sympathetic to Soviet conceptions of international

1. Times, 12 April 1939.
2. Daily Telegraph, 11 April 1939.
3. Times, 11 April 1939; Manchester Guardian, 11 April 1939.

relations, it understood the differences in British and Soviet solutions as to how to meet the challenges of aggression. The contrast between the Soviet scheme of collective security as opposed to the British "patch-work" policy was clearly drawn.[1] On the Liberal and Labour press the seizure of Albania had the greater effect in producing definite conclusions. Both argued consistently and vociferously in favour of the Soviet conception that "effective resistance towards an aggressor must be directed against all aggression everywhere."[2] But upon the British Government they lay the burden of leadership and initiative in organizing decisive resistance. In this respect the Albanian coup proved of temporary interest to the Conservative press. It emphasized the importance of continuity. While the Liberal and Labour press proved uncompromising in their basic views.

> Without Russia no policy can be complete. Defence pacts with individual nations are stop gaps. It is the full system of collective security alone that guarantees peace.[3]

This was as succinct a statement of their views as ever made.

The recall of Parliament from its Easter recess in light of European events seemed to answer some press criticism for a more activist Government policy, especially towards the U.S.S.R. However, Chamberlain's further steps in a very tentative probing foreign policy satisfied some press organs, while leaving others still critical. This sitting of

1. Daily Telegraph, 12 April 1939; Times 11, 12 and 13 April 1939.
2. Daily Herald, 10 April 1939.
3. Ibid.

Parliament on 13 April 1939 proved notable. The British Government, extending its program of guaranteeing the states of Eastern Europe individually, announced unilateral guarantees to Greece and Rumania. These guarantees clearly satisfied the Times. Here was the type of step which did not threaten Germany with encirclement, but would simply declare "that certain actions, which are themselves neither necessary nor inevitable would have certain inescapable consequences."[1] In a similar manner, the Telegraph in a leader entitled: "A Resolute Policy of Cool Calculation" totally approved.[2]

Dissatisfaction with these moves came from two divergent sources. As might be expected, the Express noted with visible disfavour and apprehension the "new and serious extension of British commitments in Eastern Europe".[3] The second source of discontent was the Liberal and Labour press. Most outspoken was the Daily Herald which continued its campaign of opposition to specific guarantees not preparatory to a wider scheme. It urged the Government to implement a defence pact with the U.S.S.R., in order to avoid the dangers of guarantee politics. Similarly, the Guardian, while complimenting Chamberlain on his pledge of "resistance to the march of force", commented that more than "words" Britain had to put/teeth into this "abstract formula". And like the Herald, the Guardian continued its campaign of criticism of "piecemeal" guarantees that "were not part of a more visible system".[4] The weeklies, too, based their reaction on that division of opinion regarding territorial guarantees

1. Times, 14 April 1939.
2. Daily Telegraph, 14 April 1939.
3. Daily Express, 14 April 1939.
4. Manchester Guardian, 14 and 15 April 1939.

versus collective security. "It is perfectly true," commented the Spectator, "that a series of bilateral agreements ... will not meet the need; real collective security in Europe must be established."[1] The New Statesman stood defiantly opposed to "a compromise policy of piecemeal pacts ... which amount to a caricature of collective security."[2]. The following week, a Statesman leader blandly termed the guarantee to Rumania "absurd" without Soviet co-operation. The Economist on 15 April called the guarantees "dangerous in the extreme".

The continuing policy pursued by the Government of individually guaranteeing Eastern European states met with both applause and condemnation in the press. But if there was one point in common that all newspapers felt compelled to comment upon, that was the continued problem of Anglo-Soviet relations. The Conservative press rested content with the Government assurances in the Commons that no ideological prejudices delayed co-operation between Britain and Russia, and that there was no objection in principle to an Anglo-French-Russian military alliance. Furthermore, both the Times and the Telegraph had rather sobering remarks on the pro-Soviet sympathy dominant among certain groups in Parliament. The Times flatly stated that "Russian participation will go the length of Russian interests...."[3] As for collective security which had become "a party wrangle" in the Commons, the Times termed it "a delusion without the substance of British initiative and example". The Telegraph noted sarcastically that "to go about Europe asking favours" was not the most auspicious method to form an anti-aggression front.[4]

1. Spectator, 14 April 1939.
2. New Statesman, 15 April 1939.
3. Times, 14 April 1939.
4. Daily Telegraph, 14 April 1939.

If the Conservative press could thus derive satisfaction, the same cannot be said for various other journals. The Isolationist Daily Express, while in principle opposed to the guarantees, observed that Russia "would be a valuable signatory to the Rumanian guarantee. She would be an excellent addition to the forces defending that country."[1] The Express was not advocating an Anglo-Soviet alliance, rather making the observation that Britain needed help to defend Rumania. While the Times and Telegraph had rested content with the Government's remarks on the U.S.S.R., the Daily Herald, in contrast, reported that Chamberlain had had to be prodded by Labour M.P.'s to offer a comment on Anglo-Soviet relations. Co-operation between France, Britain and Russia, claimed the Herald, was "the only foundation upon which a collective security system in Europe can be built".[2] The Guardian, the Economist, the Statesman, and Spectator all expressed themselves similarly and forcefully on Britain's need to seek an Anglo-Soviet alliance. Therefore, while some newspapers were satisfied with the direction of Chamberlain's policy, another group continued a veritable campaign of criticism and pressure to secure the larger scheme of an Anglo-Soviet alliance. Such was their impact that Sir William Seeds felt forced to anxiously cable Halifax that the Opposition press, on which the Russian Government "naturally feed", were justifying Soviet fears as to British intentions.[3]

1. Daily Express, 14 April 1939.
2. Daily Herald, 14 April 1939.
3. Documents on British Foreign Policy 1919-1939, Third Series, Vol. V, p. 224.

CHAPTER FOUR

1. THE NEGOTIATIONS WITH SOVIET RUSSIA, 14 April - 4 May 1939

The campaign of pressure on the British Government by certain journals, and the restraint of others, were undercut by a new turn of affairs on 15 April 1939. On that day a new British approach to the U.S.S.R. captured the attention of correspondents and leader writers. The press reported that on 14 April, Maisky had been informed of a British proposal to secure the co-operation of the Soviets. On 15 April Seeds presented this proposal to Litvinov in Moscow, suggesting the Soviet Government publicly declare its readiness to assist any of its European neighbours to resist aggression, and to make her assistance available if requested. The Soviet reply two days later consisted essentially of a proposal for an Anglo-Soviet-French mutual assistance pact, reinforced by a military convention and a guarantee of all states bordering on the U.S.S.R. from the Baltic to the Black Seas.[1]

The actual Anglo-Soviet negotiations thus begun, remained for months a primary topic of interest to the press. The space devoted to reports, analysis, and criticism exceeded all other issues. It should also be noted that the attitude adopted by the various journals constituted generally an extension of their prior views. The Times presented a remarkably consistent editorial front. It offered the most exact appreciation of the actual limits within which the Chamberlain Government was to conduct the negotiations with the Soviets. It argued firstly that the British Government, by guaranteeing states in Eastern Europe,

1. For texts of proposals, see ibid., pp. 206, 228-229.

had shown proof of its sincerity and desire to resist aggression in areas from which it traditionally held aloof. Having thus made her attitude clear to the world, it now remained, said the Times, "to be seen whether Soviet Russia will make her attitude equally plain."[1] What seemed to add greater incisiveness to this view was the Times' observation (made in common with the Telegraph and Manchester Guardian) that Britain had guaranteed almost the entire Soviet frontier. The Times was therefore ready to welcome any sign that the Soviets were willing to co-operate. In contrast, the Telegraph, which had equally shared the Times' misgivings as to Soviet willingness to participate, now headlined with obvious excitement: "SOVIET ALLIANCE PROGRESS" and "READY TO RESIST AGGRESSION WITH FULL RESOURCES". Its commentary noted that the Soviet proposals (i.e., of 17 April in reply to Britain) "establish beyond doubt its willingness to join with Britain and France in pledging the three nations' entire forces in resisting aggression in Europe." This, the Telegraph continued, as if in answer to the Times' comments, would remove "Certain doubts which have found expression in British circles as to the extent of the help which the Soviet would be ready to pledge in support of a European system to resist aggression...."[2]

A further element of the Times' attitude to this new phase in Anglo-Soviet relations concerns the susceptibilities of Eastern European States. This has previously been referred to mainly in terms of Poland. The Times asserted repeatedly that the Government had to act within certain prescribed limits.

It is fundamental in a Europe as conceived by Great

1. Times, 19 April 1939.
2. Daily Telegraph, 21 April 1939.

> Britain ... that every organized State should be the sovereign master of its own political and economic destinies. Great Britain in the several pledges already given to Poland, Greece and Rumania ... has made herself, in fact, as she always has been in theory, the champion of this principle.[1]

This principle the Times upheld as the justification for the Government's policy, in asking the Soviets to "give their help in a form that would be convenient and acceptable to the countries on their western borders."[2] To further strengthen their case, the Times added the lessons of historical experience. It reminded the U.S.S.R. that Poland and the other border states having once had "experience of a Bolshevist regime within their frontiers, will not in advance come into a formally proclaimed United Front with Soviet Russia." The conclusion reached by the Times was that if Russia persisted it would mean that she would "stand aloof from active open participation in an eventual clash of arms with the 'aggressors'."[3] A regard for the susceptibilities of these states, for their reluctance to associate openly with the Russians, was supported by this newspaper as an insuperable difficulty within which Great Britain had to work.

The Times was not alone in maintaining this view. An independent organ such as the Economist seemed equally concerned. In trying to weigh the nature of the negotiations between Britain and Russia, an Economist leader maintained that they contained inter alia "a practical arrangement

1. Times, 27 April 1939.
2. Ibid., 25 April 1939.
3. Ibid.

for the supply to Poland and Rumania of Russian help sufficient to strengthen their resistance, but not so overwhelming as to threaten their independence." But, while understanding the dilemma of the Eastern European countries in their unwillingness "to see Russian armies on their soil", nonetheless, they know, argued the Economist, that the Russians "are indispensable if their own armies are not to be beaten down before a German advance."[1]

The Liberal Guardian and Labour Daily Herald extended a point of view which first crystallized when the Polish guarantee was given. In respect to the beginning of direct Anglo-Soviet negotiations and the inherent difficulties of small states' rights, they continued to maintain a rather uncompromising attitude. A Daily Herald leader declared that the problem was not one of safeguarding "individual interests" but the whole "community of nations."[2] The Guardian blandly opined that Polish and Rumanian objection to inclusion in an alliance were "difficulties that can be, and ought to be, got over."[3] It offered no suggestions as to how this was to be done. Nor did it seem that the Guardian or Herald were aware at this juncture that Britain had only asked the Soviets to declare her assistance would be available, if desired. With this, the Times had agreed. The Liberal and Labour press, on the other hand, demanded that the British Government accept the idea of an Anglo-Soviet military alliance - to which all considerations were to be subordinated.

The one point on which a majority of the press seemed to strike a harmonious tone was in the continued expression of optimism as to a

1. Economist, 22 April 1939.
2. Daily Herald, 15 April 1939.
3. Manchester Guardian, 14 April 1939.

final successful outcome of the negotiations. This essentially sanguine disposition has a two-fold importance. It accounts for the relative short-sightedness with which the press analysed the resignation of Litvinov. Ominious interpretations were offered, but usually dismissed. Secondly, it explains the wave of enthusiasm sweeping the press as the negotiations seemed by the end of May 1939 to verge on success. Molotov's speech on 31 May destroyed this widespread enthusiasm, from which certain journals never recovered. For the initial period of April and May 1939, the press seemed to vie with each other in expressions of optimism as to the progress and outcome of the talks. In fact, seldom did the U.S.S.R. so command the attention of British journalism as at this point. The Daily Telegraph emphasized that the Anglo-Soviet negotiations were "progressing favourably". The Telegraph made the further observation that the tone of the Soviet press was markedly favourable towards the British. This change the Telegraph described with satisfaction.[1] The Times likewise viewed the negotiations with Russia as being "well advanced in the right direction," and awaited a successful conclusion "with confidence".[2] The Opposition press was not to be outdone in expressions of optimism as to the outcome of the talks. The Daily Herald predicted that a definite agreement was possible. To its readers, the Guardian indicated that the negotiations, having made "good progress", "a solution satisfactory to both parties" was "well on the way."[3]

It is important to note that this optimism on the part of the majority of the press is essentially an expression of the general good-will with

1. Daily Telegraph, 17 and 19 April 1939.
2. Times, 18 and 26 April 1939.
3. Manchester Guardian, 17 and 26 April 1939.

which these negotiations were covered. It is not an expression of a concrete assessment of progress made. While much has been made of the knowledge the press possessed of the details of the negotiations at a later date,[1] this was not generally true of the earlier stages. During April, the press despaired that "little that is reliable has been disclosed", or: "there is absolute reticence as to the nature of the suggestions."[2] As late as 25 April both the Times and Express noted that information was still "meagre". The second point in connection with this phenomenon of press optimism leads directly to a further significant event. As early as 15 April, the Guardian had offered the rather astute observation that one of the striking things about British reaction to post-Prague events, was "the unanimity of British opinion and the rapidity with which it has rallied to this central idea of a combination of the 'peaceful nations'. That opinion is ahead of the Government."[3] This proved an extremely accurate assessment of a substantial section of press opinion. Calling for an Anglo-Soviet alliance, they became so convinced of its necessity, that they not only hypnotised themselves; misread Government policy, as has been indicated; but also misread the significance of the change in Soviet Foreign Commissars.

1. A. J. P. Taylor, The Origins of the Second World War (London, 1961), pp.283-284, presumes that "someone in the British foreign office" leaked information on the talks. Halifax suggested to Seeds that the leakages emanated from the Tass representative in London. See Documents on British Foreign Policy 1919-1939, Third Series, Vol. VI, p.386.
2. Economist, 22 April 1939; Daily Herald, 15 April 1939.
3. Emphasis mine.

While the British press was daily awaiting the formulation of a reply to the Soviet proposals, news came of the abrupt dismissal of Litvinov as Commissar for Foreign Affairs. The reports of his downfall captured headlines on 4 May 1939. Surprise and shock were clearly felt, and voiced in all quarters. In the wave of analysis and speculation that followed, while all possible interpretations were offered, editorial opinion seemed reluctant to suggest what in light of later events seemed the most ominous. Foreign correspondents, on the whole, did take a rather pessimistic view. Some claimed it portended a Soviet retreat into isolation; or worse, a Soviet-Nazi agreement. However, leader writers displayed a too facile optimism. The Times, although generally suspicious of Soviet motives, argued that Litvinov was primarily concerned "with the tactics rather than with the high strategy of diplomacy." Therefore, there was "no reason to anticipate from his resignation any change in the prime objectives of Soviet foreign policy."[1] The Telegraph reported that there was as yet no evidence of a departure from the Soviet's line of co-operation with Britain and France.[2] The Daily Herald and Manchester Guardian, while noting the rather "strange" timing of the move, agreed that "the resignation betokens no marked change in policy...", and that it "need not lead to any change towards isolation."[3] The most the New Statesman would venture was that the Soviets were determined "to limit their obligations to the east of Europe."[4]

With the events of August 1939 in mind, it is easy to read much into

1. Times, 5 May 1939.
2. Daily Telegraph, 6 May 1939.
3. Daily Herald, 5 May 1939; Manchester Guardian, 5 May 1939.
4. New Statesman, 6 May 1939.

the resignation of Litvinov. However, the British press in April and May 1939 were wholly absorbed and convinced of a successful outcome to the Anglo-Soviet negotiations. They could treat the Litvinov event in no other manner than to superficially dismiss its possible symbolic significance. Indeed, some journals went to the length of attributing Litvinov's departure to Stalin's desire for a swifter conclusion of an alliance. Possibly the most balanced observation was made by the Daily Express. It described Molotov as a "Russia for the Russians" man, and warned that the Soviets were to pursue a more nationalistic policy.[1] A further point raised by the Guardian has equal relevance. Litvinov's resignation, it claimed, was a recognition of the fact that in Soviet eyes foreign affairs now counted, and thus, Stalin himself was to take a greater share in directing policy.[2] Yet the press did not pause too long for reflection. The negotiations soon recaptured their undivided attention.

2. PRESS CAMPAIGN FOR AN ANGLO-SOVIET ALLIANCE, May 1939.

The impatience expressed by certain newspapers at the delay in Anglo-Soviet negotiations, and reports of an impending British reply to the Soviet proposals of 17 April, led in early May to a renewed interest in the diplomatic exchanges. It took the general form of intricate, detailed, and comprehensive analyses of the policies being pursued by Britain and Russia. Throughout the month of May 1939; after the British

1. Daily Express, 4 May 1939.
2. Manchester Guardian, 5 May 1939.

proposals on 8 May, the Soviet rejection a week later, and the very comprehensive British draft treaty submitted to the Soviets on 27 May, the press continued its detailed reports. Finally, news coverage at this point was characterized by fairly exact information as to the agreements reached at each stage of the negotiations. Where the press displayed differences was on the interpretation with which it treated the difficulties as they developed, and with whom they placed the burden of agreement. A tripartite division of press opinion is here discernible.

The view adopted by the Times to the May series of proposals and counter-proposals was a logical extension of its previous policies. Its attitude was one of stiff correctness in line with Government policy towards the U.S.S.R. The Times posited that while both Britain and Russia agreed on the general aim of resisting aggression there existed a basic difference in approach. The Soviets held to their views on the indivisibility of peace and that "a European pact should be organized on as wide a basis as possible." They had proposed a triple alliance "that would come into effect if one of three were attacked or were there an act of aggression in Eastern Europe, the whole to be confirmed on a military basis."[1] The British, continued the Times, have clearly shown their willingness to resist future aggression and have displayed their concern by mutual agreements with France, Poland, Portugal and Egypt; assurances to Rumania and Greece; continuing negotiations with Turkey (later to become an alliance), and the understanding with France. In each of these cases, Britain would be involved actively. She was asking the U.S.S.R., therefore, to make a parallel gesture of involvement by declaring "her readiness to help in resisting aggression in Eastern Europe, if asked by

1. Times, 2 and 4 May 1939.

the nations attacked...." Britain's response would be immediate and the Soviets would not be left to act alone. British and French help would already have been given to the country attacked. While not explicitly rejecting an alliance, the Government view was "first things first". The urgent need was Eastern European security, which was most immediately threatened. Therefore, the British requested the Soviets to declare themselves beforehand.[1]

With this view the Times was totally in agreement. To accede to the Soviet demand for a three power pact, it claimed, would be to ignore the reaction and repercussions among the other European nations. The Times argued that many Governments were suspicious of Soviet intentions. Rumanian and Polish reluctance to enter an open agreement with Russia was well known. The Times went so far as to declare that the negotiations "must depend for their final form on the contingent views of other countries...." Otherwise, the Times argued, these countries might compromise their policy of not provoking the Reich. Even when other papers were reporting that the Polish attitude was softening the Times said there is "no evidence to suggest Poland would be more willing to conclude a pact for mutual assistance with Soviet Russia to-day, than she was a month ago."[2]

Moreover, Soviet plans for collective security would make it impossible for Britain to stay aloof from "an ideological front". The Times even went further to argue that it did not "appear to be desirable that there should be such a triple alliance... as would finally divide Europe into rival armed camps - whose antagonism could only end, as it ended in

1. Times, 2 and 8 May 1939.
2. Ibid., 3, 4, 9 and 10 May 1939.

1914, in Armagedden." Britain, it continued at a later date, has always "been steadily reluctant to be drawn into any exclusive alignment of nations, preferring ... to conform to the League principles of resistance to aggression rather than to make treaties with/or this that country against another."[1] The Soviet scheme of anti-aggression, more comprehensive than the British

> ... raised the very difficulties which the British Government desired to avoid. It would ... have aligned Great Britain in an ideological front, which conforms neither to the general outlook nor to the interests of the British people. Great Britain stands for good faith and good neighbourliness in international affairs, not for Communism or Fascism.[2]

And finally, the Times Berlin correspondent on 13 May reported that German commentators hint that if the Soviet view prevails, then "Britain and France will have lost their freedom of decision in the matter of war or peace, and be automatically obliged to participate in a war begun by Russia." Ultimately, that was perhaps the greatest fear.

A further factor constricting the Times' interest in a binding Soviet understanding was its estimate of the potential military worth of the U.S.S.R. The effects of the purges on the Red Army were at this point never discussed. Rather, the Times would hint that these considerations were being kept in mind throughout the negotiations. The diplomatic correspondent, for example, would report that the Chamberlain Government

1. Times, 4 and 9 May 1939.
2. Ibid., 11 May 1939.

has been "considering reports on the military strength of Russia."[1] Or, questioning reports on the practicability and feasibility of Soviet military support were featured. A final objection raised by the Times, lay in its assessment of the future course of Anglo-German relations. In the view of the Times, an armed deadlock settled nothing. This meant, there were two possible courses: war, or "a settlement negotiated upon equal terms". Seen in this light, a "hard and fast alliance with Russia might hamper other negotiations and approaches...."[2] These "other negotiations" one must conclude, meant continued German appeasement.

It should now be obvious with the foregoing considerations in mind, that the Times' attitude to the series of reply and counter-reply of May 1939 was quite simple. It consisted of undeviating support of the stand assumed by the British Government. Furthermore, the Times took a very impatient view of what it regarded as Soviet obstinacy. Britain, claimed the Times, had asked the Soviets to "come in against the aggressor, if requested; and that she should say so beforehand." The Soviets, continued the Times, "instead of concurring in this simple proposition, advanced a more comprehensive scheme...."[3] This lack of sympathetic understanding coloured the Times' reaction to later Soviet proposals. On 9 May a Tass communiqué was published in the British press, revealing Britain's proposals asking Russia to aid Poland and Rumania when Britain and France already were fulfilling their obligations. Tass complained that the British made no offer to aid Russia if she was forced to fulfil her obligation to countries in Eastern Europe other than Poland and

1. Times, 3 May 1939.
2. Ibid., 18 April and 8 May 1939.
3. Ibid., 11 May 1939.

Rumania. The Times shortsightedly answered: "If the U.S.S.R. are ready to afford help against aggression, then it is a relatively trivial matter whether they are described as helping the country that has been attacked or the States which are helping that country."[1] To the Soviets, it was obviously no trivial matter. It involved the element of what they endlessly referred to as reciprocity; that is, a straightforward triple alliance as a preliminary to undertaking commitments to other countries. When the Soviet reply on 15 May became known, the Times ruefully noted that it "does not ... advance matters much". The Soviets were still demanding "complete reciprocity in liabilities, as a prerequisite before they can assume any further commitments...." The Times noted impatiently that a German attack via the Baltic States upon the Soviet Union still worried Russian negotiators.[2] A final point distressing the Times was that the Soviets "counted on finding a sympathetic echo in certain quarters", in order to strike a harder bargain than the British were disposed to conclude. The Times surmised that the Soviets would take this into account when framing their replies to British proposals.[3] The intense agitation of certain organs of the press in favour of Soviet proposals no doubt rankled the Times. However, it must be said, that given the satisfaction of its criteria, the Times was willing to see Britain negotiating from a position of strength - strength accruing to it from a declaration of Soviet intent to aid in Eastern European security.

The Times found adequate reasons to support the British Government's

1. Times, 11 May 1939.
2. Ibid., 16 May 1939.
3. Ibid., 15 May 1939.

views on Anglo-Soviet relations and to emphasize the difficulties involved in pursuing an alliance. However, a second, larger group of newspapers seemed equally determined to urge the British Government to accept the Soviet view as the best means of preserving the peace of Europe and as the most logical deterrent to German aggression. Among this second section of newspapers must be included the Daily Herald, the Manchester Guardian, the New Statesman, the Spectator and the Economist. In the actual presentation of differences between the British and Soviet approaches to the negotiations, these newspapers were on the whole as well-informed as the Times. The information on the negotiations was adequately and similarly presented. They do not merit repetition. The differences in the assessment of the difficulties that were encountered, and the side on which the burden of agreement was laid, will be examined.

The difficulty of the susceptibilities of the Eastern European States was not essentially ignored by these journals. As the Economist phrased it, they were aware of the "obvious embarrassments of transforming a policy of appeasement into a policy of collective security."[1] Rather, they preferred to see this complex matter as being of subsidiary importance to the larger problem at hand; that is, negotiating a triple alliance. Thus, by 11 May, a full two weeks before the Times reported the story, the Daily Herald claimed that the Poles had dropped their objections to a Russian-British-French guarantee of their integrity.

Where the Times had reiterated the necessity of not cementing two opposing blocs of nations, the other newspapers saw the situation differently. The Daily Herald, in remarks probably aimed at its bête noire - the Times - had argued:

1. Economist, 6 May 1939.

> That division of Europe into 'two camps' which Mr. Chamberlain used to explain his old policy of 'appeasement' was designed to prevent has now come about, as the world sees. As a result, both in Europe and outside it, nations are proclaiming where their sympathies lie and what their intentions are.[1]

The Economist similarly noted: "The two camps ... are busy recruiting friends and wondering what is the state of mind of the other."[2] While perhaps true of the realities of European politics, it was an obvious misreading of Chamberlain's intentions. It does, however, help explain the urgency with which the Liberal, Labour, and Independent press pressured the Government to bind the Soviets in an anti-aggression front. The Guardian urged the Cabinet to "make every effort to appreciate the Russian point of view and to convince the Soviet Government of its own determination and sincerity."[3] Only an acceptance of a formal alliance, opined the Herald, would in Russian eyes be regarded as "the acid test of the British Government's intention."[4] The Statesman declared on 6 May that without Russia "no one in Europe takes our guarantees very seriously." Hence, as for British resistance to alliance diplomacy, the Guardian argued that in spite of Chamberlain's declared repugnance to alliances, in view of pre-1914 experience, Britain already had firm commitments to France, Poland and Turkey. "Therefore it would be absurd to rebuff

1. Daily Herald, 13 April 1939.
2. Economist, 13 May 1939.
3. Manchester Guardian, 3 May 1939.
4. Daily Herald, 8 May 1939.

Russia because we do not want an "alliance".[1] The Economist rather astutely remarked on 20 May, that British objections to an alliance were "presumably matters of tactical expediency, for Sir John Simon has publicly stated that there is no objection in principle." No matter what objections these newspapers heard from any quarter their reply assumed a consistent monotonous repetition, that nothing justified the loss of Russia's adhesion to the peace coalition.

The Times had emphasized the necessity of limited Soviet commitments to specific areas in order to keep the German door open and avoid offending German anti-communist sentiment. The Liberal, Labour, and Independent press, on the other hand, warned the British Government against appeasement rearing "its ugly head". Above all else, they warned that what was calculated to increase Moscow's suspicions was "death-bed conversions from appeasement to resistance...."[2] The worst of all possibilities was for Moscow to suspect that the British Government "still secretly nourishes the hope that it may be possible to revive the disastrous policy of pre-Munich times."[3] Instead, these newspapers urged a more direct form of discussion between London and Moscow. The Guardian asked on 20 May: "Is it time for Mr. Chamberlain to get out the umbrella again?"

Finally, the Liberal, Labour, and Independent press had their answer to the Times' hints deprecating the military worth of the U.S.S.R. They simply held it as axiomatic that Soviet military might, whatever its strength - which they estimated to be high - must be found on the British side in the event of war. Desperately they argued, this was

1. Manchester Guardian, 20 May 1939.
2. Economist, 6 and 13 May 1939.
3. Daily Herald, 11 May 1939.

Britain's "last chance of building a decisively strong Eastern Front."[1] The German fear of a war on two fronts, was the central issue in being able to deter Hitler, and therefore, Soviet participation was the most pressing need.

In light of these considerations the attitude these newspapers took to the initial exchange of proposals between Britain and Russia was clear. Their correspondence columns were filled with letters urging an alliance with Russia and accusing the Government of anti-Soviet prejudice. All meetings, speeches, and protest marches supporting an alliance were extensively reported. In covering the actual negotiations, all moves whereby the Government seemed to edge closer to the Soviets' position were applauded. All reports of Government hesitations, etc., were condemned. The Daily Herald on 8 May termed "grave" reports that Chamberlain "does not favour the Russian plan for an alliance between Britain, France and Russia." It asserted boldly:

> The country is determined to have a Russian alliance.
>
> The country must have its Russian alliance.

And where the Times had felt concern over the manner in which the Soviets seemed to be using the strength of British pro-alliance sentiment, the Guardian claimed that apart from "an extremely small section, the opinion of the country is that a European Peace Front without Russia is no real front at all, and that great efforts should be made ... to get her in."[2] Two weeks later the Guardian's diplomatic correspondent noted, almost in awe, that the Government "simply dare not resist" the popular demand for a full Anglo-Soviet alliance.

1. Economist, 20 May 1939.
2. Manchester Guardian, 9 May 1939.

As the Soviets rejected each proposal or issued anti-British press statements, revealing supposedly secret negotiations, this section of the press attributed the "stickiness" to "Moscow's distrust of Mr. Chamberlain's intentions." The Herald made the further point that the suspicions were evidence that in Russia it was still thought "that Britain and France do not mean their guarantees seriously...." Two more causes for Soviet suspicion, the Herald added a day later. Firstly, there was the legacy of the "weakness and wrongness" of British policy throughout the 'thirties, and secondly, British unwillingness to enter into a full alliance with Russia.[1] When Molotov rejected Britain's proposals, these journals saw it as all the more reason to "Hurry Up And Agree", as the Herald entitled a leader on 16 May. "For the Russians are right," it argued, "in their judgement that the pact they propose is the most effective way of safeguarding peace." The Herald's diplomatic correspondent termed Soviet proposals "much better business and much more advantageous for Great Britain than ... the British proposal."[2] Perhaps the final observation on this very intensive journalist campaign can be given to Sir William Seeds. In a report to Halifax on 22 May 1939 Seeds commented how he "was disgusted with the flood of press reports and comments which with their inevitable inexactitudes were swamping the Anglo-Soviet conversations...."[3]

The intense interest of the British press in the negotiations, Liberal

1. Daily Herald, 10 and 11 May 1939.
2. Ibid., 18 May 1939.
3. Documents on British Foreign Policy 1919-1939, Third Series, Vol. V, p. 648.

and Labour editorial impatience with Government vacillation in meeting Soviet minimum demands, and press insistence on a swift and conclusive alliance can best be illustrated by examining the evolution of editorial opinion in the Daily Express and Daily Telegraph: the third division into which the press has been grouped. These two newspapers have here been separated to illustrate how an independent Conservative and an Isolationist newspaper became temporarily convinced of the necessity of a Soviet alliance. Under the impact of a general press campaign the Telegraph and Express were found to be advocating views quite indistinguishable from those of the Liberal and Labour press.

The Telegraph had throughout March offered the Chamberlain Government reserved and independent support. Equally, its editorial policy towards the U.S.S.R. had been one of polite indifference. March and April had seen almost no editorial comment on Anglo-Soviet relations. However by early May, the Telegraph, undergoing a change of attitude, urged "more rapid progress in the negotiation between Russia and the Western Powers ... to hasten the completion of the security system...."[1] It took the view as early as 4 May that there were left no "substantial obstacle" posed by Warsaw or Bucharest to a London-Moscow agreement. An article by Churchill urged Poland to realize "that the accession of Soviet Russia in good earnest to the peace bloc of nations may be decisive in preventing war...." He urged, as well, a British guarantee of the whole Soviet frontier. A further editorial comment on 10 May expressed the hope that "some suitable arrangement with Russia may ere long emerge from the present protracted discussions." On 11 May the Telegraph criticised the Government as to "why, in view of the urgency of an agree-

1. Daily Telegraph, 1 May 1939.

ment, the Anglo-French reply to the Russian proposals of April 16 was delayed till May 8." In the following days the Telegraph approved Soviet insistence on the principle of reciprocity and gave headline coverage to its demands for a full military alliance. And finally on 20 May a leader, reviewing the previous day's House of Commons debate, unequivocably stated its support for the Soviet view in the negotiations. This leading article criticised the lack of urgency on the British side, and urged reciprocity by supporting the Soviet view, that while Britain had a reciprocal agreement with Poland, Russia did not. Therefore, while Poland would aid Britain and France if attacked, Russia would not be the beneficiary of such help in similar circumstances. The leader totally endorsed the Soviet view as having the "advantage that it is much more likely to act as a deterrent against war than the British." It concluded in a tone recalling the urgency of the Liberal and Labour press:

> ... the Government would, we believe, be interpreting the general desire of the country if they rounded off their other signal successes in forming the peace front by coming to an arrangement with Russia with as little further delay as possible.

The Telegraph continued its pressure on the Government totally in line with Liberal and Labour demands. An even more categorical and uncompromising leader two days later called the continued lack of Soviet aid with her vast manpower and contiguity to the frontier Britain had guaranteed "a very serious gap." It criticised both Britain and Russia for "refining on formulas", and continued to argue that when Britain had already gone so far from her traditional policy "the nicely calculated

less or more becomes otiose and irrelevant. To deter from aggression would be even better than successfully to resist it; and nothing would more effectively contribute to that end than the enlistment of Russia in the anti-aggression front."

If one finds it surprising to see the Telegraph taking such a committed attitude, with an urgency of tone and sympathy for U.S.S.R. views, more characteristic of the Opposition press than a Conservative journal, the attitude of the Daily Express at this particular period was even more surprising. Whereas the Daily Telegraph arrived at its support from a Conservative viewpoint, the Express displayed the odd phenomenon of an Isolationist journal supporting a Soviet-British military alliance.

It will be recalled that the Daily Express throughout March and April of 1939 had pursued an isolationist policy: opposing British guarantees, and urging a continued policy of Anglo-German negotiation. As late as 6 May the Express, referring to Danzig, claimed: "There is still room for a deal." Through the early part of May, the Express gave rather indifferent coverage to Anglo-Soviet negotiations and maintained an editorial silence. It did remain optimistic as to an eventually successful outcome. On 11 May, in an odd editorial comment the Express noted the difference of approach between Britain and Russia. As to its own viewpoint, Isolationism and Empire defence, the editorial noted that they were, amidst the frenzy of press coverage and interest in Anglo-Soviet negotiations, "Disregarded and ignored." The following day the Express ruefully conceded that its policy had lost out to a policy of alliances and commitments. Isolation, it admitted "can have no practical bearing on affairs." Therefore, the Express was giving up its policy of opposition to the guarantees and to a Soviet military alliance. From

this date the negotiations began to earn Express headlines. It noted that "the sooner the Government make the alliance the sooner they will get into step with the public." The Express was thus making its bid to be popular - to align itself with the general press campaign in favour of an Anglo-Soviet agreement. "... the people all want to march in step with Stalin, so march it is. We have a nation of forty-seven million foreign secretaries. Their voice will prevail."[1]

Aside from catering to what it felt majority opinion to desire, the Express saw its way to endorsing certain military and geographic considerations swaying Liberal and Labour press opinion. An alliance with Russia, an Express leader opined: "follows logically from the commitments in Eastern Europe, we should be willing to include in our commitments the nation with the greatest man-power and the most resources."[2] Finally, and no doubt sensing the startling contrast with which these views must have struck its readers, the Express, in posing to itself the question as to why it did not oppose the Russian alliance, answered:

> "Why should we. The moment Poland was guaranteed there was nothing else for it but to bring Russia into the partnership. The Polish liability may become an asset when Russia joins the firm."[3]

In conclusion, the Express made the final point of criticizing the Government for not securing a Russian alliance before giving the Polish guarantee. "Britain," a leader on 27 May argued, "should have embraced the strong before the weak."

1. Daily Express, 20 May 1939.
2. Ibid., 22 May 1939. See too, ibid., 19 May 1939.
3. Ibid., 25 May 1939.

Under the frenzy of press activity, interest, and pre-occupation with the negotiations, the Isolationist Daily Express and Conservative Daily Telegraph were found by the end of May 1939, surprisingly urging an Anglo-Soviet alliance. Both, however, were soon to revert to their usual press attitudes and views. As on the rest of the press, a very sobering effect was to be produced by the 31 May 1939 speech by M. Molotov on the course of the Anglo-Soviet negotiations.

CHAPTER FIVE

1. OPTIMISM AND DISILLUSIONMENT

The optimism of the British press and confidence in the imminent conclusion of a three-power pact reached its height in the last week of May 1939. Two events specifically seemed to point the way. Halifax journeyed to Geneva to attend a League Council meeting, but stopped firstly in Paris for talks with Daladier and Bonnet on 20 May. The press claimed that Halifax had been convinced by the Paris and Geneva meetings of the need to meet Soviet demands for reciprocity by agreeing to a three-power pact. So delighted was the Daily Herald with reports cabled from Geneva and Paris that it anticipated most other journals in headlining as early as 22 May: "PACT WITH RUSSIA NOW LIKELY IN NEXT FEW DAYS". The leading article called it a victory for public opinion. Most newspapers, however, waited for more concrete information. And for these it came on Wednesday, 24 May. The Daily Telegraph reported that the principle of a triple pact of mutual assistance had been accepted during the Wednesday's Cabinet meeting. After the meeting, Chamberlain stated tersely in the Commons:

> ... I have every reason to hope that as a result of proposals which His Majesty's Government are now in a position to make on the main questions arising, it will be found possible to reach full agreement at an early date.[1]

This second event was immediately seized upon by the press as signifying

1. Parliamentary Debates. House of Commons, Fifth Series, Vol. 347, 24 May 1939, Col. 2267.

that agreement had definitely been reached. The Times commented that Chamberlain would not have spoken so confidently had he not been convinced that the British proposals met the Soviet case, and were also acceptable to other interested States in Europe. The editorial enthusiastically lauded the "diplomatic skill of the negotiators", and the identity of purpose between nations opposed to violence as a solution of political differences.[1] Both the Guardian and the Herald on 25 May were enthused, confident, and optimistic. The diplomatic correspondent of the Guardian claimed: "The alliance is now as certain as anything in politics can be certain." The Herald headlined with obvious relief and delight: "RUSSIAN PACT: GOVT. (sic) AGREES AT LAST", and noted that the announcement of the final form of the agreement was "merely a matter of a few days." "For public opinion," claimed the Herald, "is now so strong and well-nigh united that the Cabinet is in no position to resist its demands." The Daily Telegraph was at pains to emphasize that Britain had agreed to full reciprocity. The Daily Express produced this banner headline: "SOVIET PACT AGREED", and commented: "the Lion and the Bear will join together in common defence."

At this point in the negotiations with an agreement as good as signed - to judge by the opinion of the daily press - the weeklies presented a fascinating phenomenon. The Economist on 27 May went to press assured that an agreement would be signed. Its leading article, "Agreement In Sight", was produced and published with the mental assurance of a completed triple pact. Therefore, the leader embarked on a retrospective view of the Anglo-Soviet negotiations. While it assumed that the reasons for the Government's "long procrastination" would probably remain obscure,

1. Times, 25 May 1939.

it did posit several revealing possible difficulties. Firstly, the leader argued, Polish and Rumanian misgivings probably faded in face of a greater and more immediate German threat. A second source of delay was British reluctance to alienate Franco's Spain and further irritate Nazi Germany by too close contact with the Soviets. Furthermore, "a principle cause of delay may well have been an innate repugnance in Conservative circles, to making an infrangible agreement with a Communist Power." Finally, the Economist pointed out that the Soviets did have their suspicion and doubt "about the unreserved determination of the makers of the Munich Agreement to stand firm...." In spirit and psychology, the Economist continued, the Kremlin was very much further away from London than its physical distance of 1,500 miles. However, in spite of these difficulties and delay there had emerged a "great and welcome change" which the leading article attributed to three causes: firstly, the personal conviction of Lord Halifax that the agreement need be clinched at once; secondly, the active mediation of the French; and thirdly, "the rising pressure of British opinion, expressed in <u>all sections of the press</u>[1] and lately even on the Conservative back benches." The leader concluded with an appeal that both Germany and Italy be admitted into the peace front.

A rather similar error of over-anticipation was committed by the New Statesman. Its leading article on 27 May was confident enough in the chances of a mutual assistance pact to urge the Government to "publish at the same time an appeal to Germany and Italy to negotiate on equal terms with the new peace <u>bloc</u>." Overwhelmed with confidence and assurance

1. Emphasis mine.

that the peace front now included the Soviet Union, the weekly press had thus introduced what in its view constituted the next stage in the pacification of Europe. In light of coming events it remains as an historical curiosity.

Seeds presented the text of the new British proposals to Molotov on 27 May. Cast for the first time in the form of a draft treaty the proposals approved the idea of a three-power pact of mutual assistance, paid due regard to the rights and position of other powers, and were protectively hedged round by references to the League of Nations.[1] Only the Times and the Daily Telegraph hinted that the unwillingness of the Baltic States to accept Anglo-Soviet guarantees might possibly prove to be a stumbling block.[2]

While the official reply was not handed over until 2 June, the general nature of the Soviet reaction became known during a speech given by Molotov on 31 May, to the Supreme Council of the U.S.S.R.[3] The Russian Foreign Commissar declared that the British proposals were a "step forward" but several difficulties remained. He pin-pointed the odd reference to Article Sixteen of the Covenant, and the exclusion of the Baltic States from any guarantee as the main difficulties.

1. For text, see Documents on British Foreign Policy 1919-1939, Vol. 5, pp.679-680. The reference to the League was previously neither mentioned nor discussed in the press. There exists only a curious isolated reference in a Times leader on 20 May, where it was suggested that Britain, France, Poland and Russia should devise common action on the basis of Article Sixteen of the League Covenant. The suggestion was taken up by no other journal.
2. Times, 31 May 1939; Daily Telegraph 26 May 1939.
3. For text, see Degras, op.cit., p. 332-340.

Reports of Molotov's speech captured headlines on 1 June, and were the subject of long editorials and analyses. Coming as it did upon a wave of optimism, confidence, and "glowing prophecies that the Anglo-Russian Agreement was as good as completed, except for the applause", the speech hit the press like "a cold shower".[1] In every quarter of press opinion, there was disappointment with not a small portion of anger and irritation as well. The Daily Express headlined angrily: "MOLOTOV ASKS FOR MORE". The Telegraph bravely called the speech "somewhat indecisive" and "reserved". The Times noted wearily that it was neither a full acceptance nor a flat rejection. The Daily Herald, probably among the most chagrined of journals, disguised its disappointment by claiming the "clarification" stage was not yet over. Here the speech was termed "tepid, cautious, and non-committal." The Herald's first editorial comment came almost a week later, when a leader noted ruefully that negotiating with the Soviet Union was proving more difficult than was hoped or expected.[2] The Guardian, perhaps as uncomfortable as the Herald in view of prior optimism, did not conceal its impatience and anger. It called the speech "caustic" and "sceptical", while its correspondents used words like "setback" and"disappointing". The Spectator likewise termed the speech "disappointing" but did try to maintain a facile optimism.[3]

The press agreed that the U.S.S.R. was indeed prepared to continue the negotiations. Faith was also generally expressed in the Soviet's commitment to the eventual conclusion of an alliance. But never again -

1. Manchester Guardian, 1 June 1939.
2. Daily Herald, 6 June 1939.
3. Spectator, 2 June 1939.

neither during the announcement of the departure of Lord Strang to aid Seeds in Moscow, nor the beginning of Staff talks with the Soviets - was there to be a similar generated enthusiasm, confidence, and sureness as that which had gripped the press towards the end of May. Other considerations began to weigh heavily with certain newspapers Criticism was levelled where previously there had been none. The realities of negotiating with the Soviet Union became apparent where previously difficulties had been grandiloquently dismissed. The analyses of the state of the negotiations were usually left to the columns of diplomatic correspondents, rather than glibly reviewed in editorials.

2. STIFFENING PRESS ATTITUDES TO RUSSIA, June - July 1939

On first impressions, it was suggested by some that the differences between the Soviet and British views were merely "on points of detail and of procedure."[1] Others hinted that mutual suspicion and a lack of confidence on both sides constituted the recurring difficulty. Whereas previously this problem had been used to urge greater British concessions and flexibility it now foreshadowed a visible hardening in the attitude of certain journals. This was to become more pronounced as the months wore on. By far the most immediately outspoken was the Isolationist Daily Express. Barely a week after Molotov's speech, the Express suggested what other journals were possibly contemplating. A leading article on 6 June urged the Government to "wind up the negotiations for the Russian alliance." It claimed that they had "dragged on long enough",

1. Times, 1 June 1939.

and pointed to the length and number of diplomatic exchanges. The leader argued that the Russians were asking too much, and asserted that "a satisfactory bargain cannot be reached." It concluded:

> ... the advantages of a Russian alliance are doubtful. The difficulties are immense. And the embarrassments would tend to multiply.

Clearly, the Express was having second thoughts in regards to the Russian alliance which it had endorsed in May. A month later this journal was even more explicit and urged Chamberlain to "call the whole thing off."[1]

Another newspaper very forcibly expressing its disillusionment was the Manchester Guardian. It seems to have most deeply felt the rebuff of Molotov's speech. The leading article on 1 June, entitled "A Chill", interpreted Molotov's declarations as "a warning not to assume that the Russian Government is as anxious for an alliance as a great many people here." Not least among them the staff of the Guardian. Another leader, on the following day, was aimed at dispelling Soviet charges of British insincerity. Whereas previously the Guardian would have agreed, this time it eloquently recalled Chamberlain's references in the Commons to a "'veil or wall '" which was claimed existed between Britain and Russia. The leader remarked in clearly exasperated tones, that "those who govern Russia are so remote that they do not understand what has happened in this country." References were then made to the introduction of peace-time conscription, and Britain's far reaching foreign commitments as proof of British sincerity. Implied in the Guardian's changed attitude was the belief that reciprocity now existed; that British sincerity was clearly displayed; that Soviet suspicions were no longer valid; and that

1. Daily Express, 8 July 1939.

the burden of compromise now rested with the U.S.S.R. When after two more months of fruitless negotiations and agreement seemed no nearer, the Guardian retreated slightly to offer that the state of political intercourse was "abnormal" because the British Government had "reversed its policy".[1]

The Guardian's correspondents reflected this initially changed attitude. The Paris correspondent cabled that even the previously most enthusiastic about the triple pact were finding the Russians "excessively 'sticky'." He claimed that whatever may have been the "sins" of the British and French Governments in the past, especially during the post-Munich period, "when it looked as though Germany was being encouraged to 'appease herself' at Russia's expense...", the Russians should now realise that both the British and French Governments were earnestly pursuing "the peace-front policy." His conclusion was to the point, and was echoed in other journals as well. The impression in France, he wrote, "... is that there will be an agreement but that the price to be paid will be a heavy one - it will be the price that the Russians intend to exact for the errors of the Munich period."[2] The Moscow correspondent, calling the speech a "setback", urged that at least the Soviets should have made a declaration on agreed points.[3]

Several correspondents began also to scrutinize the seemingly deliberate use Moscow was making of Russia's negotiating position. The Paris correspondent noted that the Soviets were taking a "high hand", being aware of their strong bargaining position.[4] The diplomatic

1. Manchester Guardian, 21 July 1939.
2. Ibid., 1 June 1939.
3. Ibid.
4. Ibid., 2 June 1939.

correspondent was emphatic in pointing out the deliberate procrastinating tactics of the U.S.S.R., as they were "asking for more and more" whilst "offering less and less."[1]

The "bargaining stand" assumed by Molotov was similarly criticised in the Economist, as being "unjustified". Like the Guardian, it too was convinced that the British Government had indeed "gone a long way to repair the errors of the past." While these mistakes may have placed the Russians in a "strong bargaining position", the Economist admonished the Soviets for ill-advisedly trying to extract too much purely Russian advantage.[2] The Times was more forthright in a similar observation. It claimed flatly that Russia was "putting too high a price on her co-operation." And continued rather descriptively:

> The Soviets, it has been said, are Jews in making a contract and Russians in carrying it out. The Jews are hard bargainers and the Russians are unpractical people; if the Western Powers want a good bargain they must not be in a hurry and they must not expect too much.[3]

The Times too noticed that the Soviets were conscious of their strong bargaining position and intended to make use of it.

It was thus visible that the tentative Soviet reply contained in Molotov's speech had a very decided effect on the British press. The speech had obviously overreached itself. The Soviets were clearly seen to be using their stronger bargaining position and were accordingly

1. Manchester Guardian, 5 July 1939.
2. Economist, 3 June 1939.
3. Times, 3 June 1939. See too, ibid., 6 June, 3 and 10 July 1939.

criticised in a variety of journals. The Daily Express and the Daily Telegraph recoiled sharply from their sudden warm endorsement of a close Anglo-Soviet alliance. Those journals, which had urged the alliance with the intensity of a crusade, turned to a more realistic assessment of the difficulties involved. An assessment which foreshadowed a shift in attitude towards the Soviet Union. The difficulties now pointed to and discussed were to deadlock the negotiations from early June until late July 1939.

Among the most important points of disagreement noted by Molotov, in his 31 May speech, he mentioned that the Anglo-French proposals "... give no guarantee of help for the other States on the borders of the U.S.S.R. - Latvia, Estonia, Finland - unless these countries ask for such help." The difficulty of finding an acceptable formula to guarantee the Baltic States - later to become the problem of defining "indirect aggression" - proved most crucial. Firstly, because two months, June and July, were to be spent by the British and Soviet negotiators in deadlock over this problem. Secondly, the dilemma of the susceptibilities of the Baltic States, constitutes the first issue upon which a stiffening of the attitude of the press towards the U.S.S.R. is visible.

It would be fruitful at this point to recall the earlier discussion of press attitudes towards the countries of Eastern Europe. It was seen that an initially sympathetic understanding gave way to a twofold division of opinion. The Conservative press maintained that the sover-

eignty and territorial integrity of these states must not be subordinated to the larger scheme of mutual assistance. On the other hand, the Liberal, Labour, and Independent press were less sympathetic, and urged the subordination of all considerations to the completion of an Anglo-Soviet alliance.

As a result of a seemingly harsher assessment of Soviet motives and tactics, the press now argued with a surprising unanimity that no infringement of Baltic neutrality was necessary, nor should be permitted. In its own inimitable manner, the Daily Express seemed to speak for most of the press when a leader on 6 June claimed that a British pledge to guarantee the Baltic would be "a war to impose Russia's will on Latvia and Estonia." Such a war, asserted the Express, "would divide our people." The Conservative press treated Molotov's demands that all of the Soviet frontier be guaranteed in a very firm manner. The Telegraph commented that the attitude of these states was "bound to command respect", and noting the increasing conflict of British and Russian views, was determined to respect what it called, these "principles of capital importance", that is small states' rights.[1] What seemed to worry the Telegraph, was that to accede to Soviet definitions of indirect aggression would condon Soviet intervention in the Baltic States on almost any pretext.[2] The forthright insistence by the Telegraph on an Anglo-Soviet alliance, which had characterized its editorial policy in May, was now tempered with an increased awareness of the complexities involved.

The Times in a similar manner, expressed its appreciation of Russia's vital interest in the Baltic, but claimed that the British "cannot pledge

1. Daily Telegraph, 1 and 5 June 1939.
2. Ibid., 22 July 1939.

themselves to support Russia in any action she might wish to take unasked, in an emergency, on the territory of States with whom British relations are not only friendly but cordial."[1] Arnold Wilson, in a letter to the editor on 15 June, argued inter alia that "A pact with Moscow would be too dearly bought at the cost of loosing the good will of the Baltic...." The Times, along with much Conservative opinion, seemed to be as fearful of "visions of Russian soldiers advancing with rifle in one hand and leaflets in the other, and stacking arms for an indefinite period among the people they have rescued, and then proceeding ... to scatter Communist propaganda...", as they claimed the Baltic States were.[2] Yet it was clearly seen by the Times that the satisfaction of Russian wishes for security, while supporting the Baltic States to maintain their tenuous neutrality, would be a task requiring care and tact. In line with its previous stand on Poland and Rumania, the Times maintained its firm editorial policy. Characteristically, its Warsaw and Riga correspondents padded dispatches with Baltic press excerpts criticising Russia's fears for their independence, urging Britain not to give in to Soviet demands, and protesting their neutrality as between Germany and Russia.

The most pronounced change of attitude could be seen in the stiffer and less compromising policy adopted by the Manchester Guardian, the Daily Herald, and the weeklies. The Herald, for example, in the month following Molotov's speech, dropped its crusade-like tone, and became very reticent on the problem of the Baltic States, simply reporting the difficulties objectively as they arose. Where, previously, the Herald rode roughshod over Polish and Rumanian susceptibilities it now urged

1. Times, 2 June 1939. See too, ibid., 10 July 1939.
2. Ibid., 5 July 1939.

that Baltic objections be respected. The change in the Guardian's attitude was even more pronounced. Britain's proposals, for the defence of the Baltic, as here understood, were proclaimed "reasonable" and fully supported.[1] In stern and uncompromising editorials, the Guardian claimed that Britain should not guarantee states against their wishes, and that a formula should be found to safeguard Russia's north-west frontier without implicating the Baltic States directly.[2] The same view was stated in equally uncompromising terms in several weeklies. The Spectator found the Baltic States' complaints "intelligible" and conceded that reconciling the two might not be easy.[3] The radical New Statesman ruefully admitted that it was "not possible to guarantee a state against its will...."[4] It is well to recall how this view contrasts with the high-handedness with which Poland was treated at an earlier date. Finally, the Economist stated categorically, that the Baltic States' attitude, coupled with their recently signed non-aggression pacts with Germany, made it impossible for them to accept a peace front guarantee. The alternative, therefore, was "to find a formula which will satisfy the Kremlin without employing coercion on the Baltic States."[5] The Economist did offer several alternatives embodying that principle.

A further characteristic of the press' changing attitude towards Anglo-Soviet relations concerns comments, passed with increasing frequency, doubting the ultimate value of an alliance - even were it to be reached. In some quarters this took the form of claiming that the deterrent value

1. Manchester Guardian, 2 and 24 June 1939.
2. See, for example, ibid., 8 and 12 June 1939.
3. Spectator, 9 and 23 June 1939. See too, ibid., 28 July 1939.
4. New Statesman, 10 June 1939.
5. Economist, 10 June 1939.

of any alliance would be lost. Most journals, however, seemed to express anxiety over the continuing delay.

Part of the excitement which had gripped many newspapers throughout April and May was traceable to their belief that British diplomacy had seized the initiative with a bold and imaginative gesture towards the U.S.S.R. Faced with the hard-bargaining of the Soviets, a greater realization of the complexities involved, and coupled with a seemingly endless exchange of notes, drafts, proposals and counter-proposals, a variety of journals could not refrain from voicing their concern. Throughout May, the Guardian had observed, that to prolong the discussion indefinitely would be as dangerous as failure. The continual delay was here "regretted", termed "frankly deplorable", and seen as having done "incalculable harm".[1] The Guardian spoke for many journals when it declared: "Six weeks ago the initiative seemed for the first time to have passed into the hands of the democratic Powers; to-day we are back in the old, flaccid attitude of waiting for the dictators to move."[2] Or, as the Economist put it, the early conclusion of an alliance would have been "a crushing rejoinder to the rape of Bohemia...", and have flustered German diplomacy.[3] The Daily Herald, likewise, having almost given up criticising the Government's dealings with the U.S.S.R., in the immediate aftermath of Molotov's speech could only voice its continued concern as the delays increased. It preferred to see these delays as difficulties of detail which should be swiftly ironed out in face of agreement on general principles. But as the weeks wore on, this Labour

1. Manchester Guardian, 16 May, 2 and 24 June 1939.
2. Ibid.
3. Economist, 8 July 1939.

journal could not but avoid expressing its concern and anxiety:

> ... the negotiations cannot go on for another three months without losing much of their deterrent impressiveness and their long-run value. Both sides must maintain and display a sense of urgency if the original purpose of the conversations is to be achieved.[1]

This was obviously clearly lacking.

Similar observations appeared in the weekly press. The Spectator voiced its "considerable concern" with the delay, but no longer laid the blame upon the British Government.[2] The continued appearance of new difficulties and delays it asserted, could "only diminish the effect which, it is hoped, the proposed alliance will have on the policy of the Reich."[3] The New Statesman observed on several occasions that the deterrent value of the alliance had, due to delays, been largely dissipated.[4] The Economist, at this point concerned and suspicious of Soviet intentions, seemed to speak for most of the press in declaring that the negotiations were "a perfect example of the way in which the mere passage of time can take the bloom off an excellent idea...." It continued:

> The Soviet object from the first ... has been to enter their influence on European politics so as to avert war: we are now in the position that an alliance with Russia may no longer serve to secure the peace, as it would have done so easily in past years. The Nazis

1. Daily Herald, 19 July 1939.
2. Spectator, 26 June, 21 July 1939.
3. Ibid., 7 July 1939.
4. New Statesman, 1 and 22 July 1939.

> may be now beyond rational calculation, and the conclusion of an agreement between London and Moscow the mere hastening of the fateful blow. This, of course, is not to say that a pact should not be concluded, for if Hitler has decided for war, Britain, France and Russia will still need each other's aid. But it does mean that every delay in obtaining agreement, from now onwards, is more than ever to be regretted. [1]

A week later the Economist noted a further aspect of the delay in the negotiations. Having recognized that much of the deterrent value of a pact was gone, the Economist voiced its concern that the major importance of the negotiations lay not in the gain to be derived from its success, if that should come, but rather from the ensuing disaster that their failure would be. The consciousness of this possibility lay underneath all subsequent Economist commentary on the negotiations.

Indeed, it is this sense of the danger, and possible humiliation of a breakdown, that pervaded all press comments as the negotiations continued. And seemingly in response to this possibility, the Conservative press especially, found the occasion for editorially reiterating assurances to Germany that British policy was not one of offensive encirclement, nor did it involve "automatic hostility ... everywhere and in every respect." Rather, British endeavours were directed towards ensuring equality of negotiation for small states threatened by Germany. The Times, however, insisted that Britain was still interested "to establish Anglo-German relations on the basis of mutual confidence and good-will." The proviso

1. Economist, 1 July 1939.

being, as usual, that Germany give up the use of force which it had adopted in pursuing aims beyond the mere revision of the Versailles Treaty.[1]

Parallel with this reassertion of the basic principles of appeasement diplomacy, inspired largely by Lord Halifax's Chatham House speech on 29 June, Conservative journals especially, exhorted the Soviet Union to make some token concession to further the negotiations. Some went so far as to question the intention of the Soviets of at all desiring to conclude an alliance. The Times introduced a dubious and sceptical tone into its commentary on the negotiations. It claimed that "if the determination to do so is mutual ..." differences of detail could be ironed out.[2] The total burden of concession and compromise was now placed upon the Soviets. The Daily Telegraph asserted that the view held in "responsible British circles" was that "there should no longer remain any obstacle towards achieving an agreement if the Moscow Government genuinely desires one."[3] This note of questioning Soviet intentions was to grow stronger. On 7 July again, a leading article recognised that "some quarters" in Britain "have begun to hint at a suspicion that Russia does not really desire an agreement...." But it was conceded that the latter had as much to gain as the Western Powers. It will be recalled that on 8 July the Express had advocated that the negotiations be terminated. It returned to them two days later to claim that the British themselves were no more anxious for an alliance than the Soviets. It was obvious that any enthusiasm the Isolationist press had for the negotiations had long

1. Times, 29 and 30 June, 4 August 1939.
2. Ibid., 24 June 1939.
3. Daily Telegraph, 27 June 1939.

since been dissipated.

Yet enthusiasm still seems to have remained in some quarters. Because of the seemingly stagnant nature of the talks, the Daily Herald urged a broad pact on agreed points. However, seeing that the negotiations were "under fire" from quarters expressing pessimism or advocating a cession of talks, the Herald reiterated its loyalty to the basic course of closer Anglo-Soviet relations. "It is mischief-making rubbish," retorted the Herald, "to suggest that Russia has lost interest in the Peace Front." The leader concluded with a fervent plea that the negotiators agree quickly.[1]

Disappointment with the inscrutable attitude of the U.S.S.R.; confused by a complex, bewildering mass of details, (what the Times called the "curious and almost baffling phase in the negotiations"[2]) and impatient at the deadlock that had developed over a definition of "indirect aggression", the press began to accord the negotiations secondary coverage. During June, July, and early August, other issues dominated news coverage: the Thetis submarine disaster, the Royal visit to North America, the Tientsin crisis, and the worsening situation in Danzig. The latter issue seemed once again to rivet attention upon Anglo-German relations. The announcement of Lord Strang's mission in early June to aid Ambassador Seeds in Moscow, while generally approved, received desultory comment. Zhdanov's article in Pravda on 29 June, harshly critical of Britain, did not rouse the Opposition press to its usual chorus of criticism of the Prime

1. Daily Herald, 6 and 14 July 1939.
2. Times, 20 July 1939.

Minister. Indeed the article was hardly quoted.

On 24 July the ostensible morass into which the negotiations had sunk seemed to disappear. Seeds informed Molotov of Britain's willingness to proceed to ways and means of implementing the pact. Although a definition of indirect aggression had not been agreed upon, it was hoped that the political aspects would be ironed out simultaneously with discussions for a military convention. A Franco-British military mission was duly dispatched to the U.S.S.R., arriving in Moscow on 11 August.

The press followed these developments with a somewhat less than enthusiastic demeanor. The announcement earned few editorials, fewer headline notices, and little comment. The opening of military talks was generally approved and interpreted as a sign that full and complete agreement was forthcoming. Also, it was felt that progress was generally being made, with few remaining differences. The Times commented that "the soldier may be able to smooth the path of the diplomatist."[1] But even the usually sanguine Daily Herald felt compelled to warn against undue optimism. The most that the Guardian would venture was that staff talks would serve to impress the German High Command with British resolution and determination to carry through all its commitments. Otherwise, for the early part of August, the increasing tension over Danzig and concern with Hitler's intentions preoccupied the press. Editorial comments were mostly directed towards reaffirming Britain's determination to fulfil all her commitments in Europe. Indeed, the Daily Telegraph's Berlin correspondent reported that the "increasingly firm attitude" taken by the British press towards the crisis was evoking "eloquent 'indignation'" in German newspapers.[2] Other British journals expressed concern as to

1. Times, 3 August 1939.
2. Daily Telegraph, 19 August 1939.

whether the Germans were convinced of the changed atmosphere in Britain. Fears were also expressed on Britain's exposed position, in view of the half-finished nature of the peace front.[1] All these considerations were overshadowed by the headline news of 22 August 1939.

3. THE SOVIET-GERMAN NON-AGGRESSION PACT

"An official communiqué in Berlin last night (i.e., Sunday, 20 August)' announced signature on Saturday of a new trade agreement between Germany and Russia." The agreement provided for a German trade credit to the U.S.S.R.[2] This lackadaisical notice appeared in the daily press on Monday, 21 August, in briefest, non-conspicuous form. The next day headlines informed the British people of the imminent signature of a Soviet-German non-aggression pact. The shock of this announcement was not lessened by the fact that the British press with very few exceptions, had not prepared public opinion for such a turn of events. Indeed, the press was probably to a large extent guilty of insulating the public by a rather near-sighted treatment of Nazi-Soviet relations, and their bearing on the Anglo-Soviet negotiations.

It cannot be argued that the secrecy of Nazi-Soviet contacts exonerates the press. On the contrary. Reports of the movement of German and Russian officials in Moscow and Berlin were constantly published. The end of the anti-Bolshevist press campaign /in Germany was noticed, as well as the deletion of any anti-Soviet propaganda in

1. Daily Herald, 21 August 1939; Manchester Guardian, 1 and 16 August 1939.
2. Ibid., 21 August 1939.

several critical speeches by Hitler in the Spring and Summer of 1939. The press, too, noticed the ambiguous remarks on Nazi-Soviet relations, both in Stalin's speech on 10 March 1939 to the 18th Congress of the C.P.S.U., and in Molotov's speech before the Supreme Council on 31 May 1939. Finally, towards the end of June, a series of short notices appeared, describing German attempts to reach a political agreement with the U.S.S.R. The rule seemed to have been to accord Nazi-Soviet relations indifferent and unconcerned coverage. The one notable exception, before turning to the reasons for this phenomenon, was the far-sighted attitude of the New Statesman.

For all its desire to see the Soviets included in Britain's defensive schemes, the Statesman never lost sight of a possible Nazi-Soviet rapprochement. Its immediate reaction in the post-Munich debate was to predict a Soviet retreat into isolation. This possibility, buttressed with continuous reports on Nazi-Soviet contacts, was brought to its readers' attention throughout the Anglo-Soviet negotiations. Underlying this focus was an assumption much of the press ignored. "Power politics," the Statesman explained, "may always override ideological differences, and though Russia and Germany are poles apart ... the immediate interests of both Powers may seem best served by a realistic agreement."[1] Hence, when a Pact was announced on 24 August 1939, the Statesman was probably the least surprised of all British journals. Its comments then were: - why "indignation ...? Power politics is not a matter of Christian morality but of self-interest."[2]

Strongly in contrast to this attitude were the approaches of three

1. New Statesman, 4 February 1939.
2. Ibid., 2 September 1939.

representative journals exhibiting the more short-sighted views mentioned above. Totally convinced of the identity of Russia's interests with the Westerm powers, the Manchester Guardian did not miss the usual hints of a possible Soviet-German rapprochement. However, it was here taken as axiomatic that an alliance was "virtually impossible for political and ideological reasons which make the antagonism between Communism and Nazi Fascism fundamental and irreconcilable."[1] Hence, all reports of the contacts between Germany and Russia were treated as merely "flirtations" to increase the bargaining value of Soviet proposals. An alternate interpretation was to accuse the German Propaganda Ministry of trying to disturb the negotiations between Britain and Russia.[2]

The dispatches of the Times foreign correspondents accorded intensive coverage to the problem of Nazi-Soviet relations. Therein, it was generally noted that Germany was attempting to promote the failure of the tripartite talks. Also, it was argued that the Soviets were using "the bogy of a rapprochement with Germany" to strengthen their negotiating position.[3] But it was emphatically asserted that "Russian suspicion of ultimate German aims" would ensure the failure of any rapprochement between these two powers.[4] Aside from this, the Times could always assert that Western civilization's bulwark against Bolshevism would never compound with the enemy.

Thirdly, and finally, the coverage given by the Daily Herald was of a totally different character. Its attitude and policy to the U.S.S.R.

1. Manchester Guardian, 25 March 1939.
2. Ibid., 9 and 16 May 1939.
3. Times, 24 July 1939.
4. Ibid., 21 June 1939.

were based on the assumption of Russia's commitment to a policy of collective security.[1] To the Herald the possibility of Socialist Russia compounding with Nazi Germany was unthinkable. Hints of their mutual skirmishing - covered in most other journals - were here almost totally ignored, or blandly termed: "clumsy German propaganda".[2] The most shocked, outraged and disillusioned of British journals, in late August 1939, was undoubtedly the Daily Herald.

In the post-Munich period, the Liberal, Labour, and Independent press had observed that the Soviets might retire into isolation. Some, like the Statesman, mentioned a possible bargain with Germany. However, it was a commonly shared belief of the entire press during the tripartite negotiations, that Russia would eventually come to terms with Britain and France. Only after the outbreak of war was it generally accepted that Russia would act purely in terms of national self-interest.

The immediate emotion gripping the press when faced with the startling news was surprise and dismay. Indeed in retrospect, one notices that the press ultimately reacted with dignity and strength - attuned more to the needs of rallying opinion in a national crisis, than indulging in recriminations or anti-Soviet invective. The reasons for this reserve stems from an apparent Government directive. The Secretary of State informed Ambassador Kennard in Warsaw: "Guidance being given to British press is that report about Soviet-German non-aggression pact should be treated with calm and reserve."[3] The press generally obeyed with admirable

1. For extensive description, see above pp. 4-5.
2. Daily Herald, 11 May 1939.
3. Documents on British Foreign Policy 1919-1939, Third Series, Vol. VII, p.122.

loyalty.

A statement issued by Tass and published in the press on Tuesday, 22 August, said:

> 'After the conclusion of the Soviet-German trade and credit agreement there arose the problem of improving political relations between Germany and the U.S.S.R. An exchange of views on this subject ... established that both parties desire to relieve the tension in their political relations, eliminate the war menace, and conclude a non-aggression pact.'[1]

The statement concluded, by announcing the impending visit of the German Foreign Minister, Von Ribbentrop, to Moscow. The Daily Express called this "midnight news... sensational." The Guardian termed it "surprising", and "completely unexpected." The Daily Herald, the most stunned of British journals, rushed in a leader that called the news "so staggering as to appear hardly credible." It was described as "one of the most astounding and shocking reversals of policy in history...." The leader concluded by saying it was "a bigger betrayal of peace and of European freedom even than Munich." Both the Times and the Daily Telegraph refrained from any editorial comment, as they awaited more definite news. The most the Telegraph would venture, was to notice the "completely unexpected" nature of the announcement.

A day later, on Wednesday, 23 August, the British press displayed the sense of courage and public service mentioned above. The Times diplomatic correspondent remarked that the news "came as a surprise to the country at large, but it has left public opinion entirely unmoved...."[2]

1. Quoted, Times, 22 August 1939.
2. Ibid., 23 August 1939. Wrench, op.cit., p. 394, quotes an entry from

Indeed, the headline story was given over to publicising the Government's statement of the previous night. Therein, the Government had declared that any Russo-German agreement would not affect Britain's obligations to Poland. This note of resolution, and resolve to fulfil to the letter British commitments, was struck in leaders of all the journals herein analysed. From Isolationist, to Conservative, to Opposition opinion, it was everywhere commented upon that while both Russia and Germany no doubt expected the rapprochement to break British resolve and force her to abandon Poland to another partition, the contrary had instead taken place. With a unanimous voice the British press pledged support to Chamberlain's Polish policy.

Being still too early to estimate the precise nature a Russo-German agreement would take when complete, the press on Wednesday, 23 August, all vaguely hoped that an escape clause would be included; that is, a clause invalidating the pact should a German attack be launched against Poland. Some pointed out that Germany and Russia already had a non-aggression pact, signed in 1926, renewed in 1931, and confirmed by Hitler in 1933. However, any last hopes in the press for a less severe agreement soon disappeared. The harsh reality of a Nazi-Soviet non-aggression pact, signed on 23 August 1939, made the outlook seem "as black as ever."[1]

One of the points which the press seemed to dilate upon was what in some views appeared to be the inconsistency of Soviet foreign policy. Or, what the Times preferred to contemptuously term: "the twisting of the

the diary of Geoffrey Dawson, Editor of the Times, saying that the impending pact "justified the suspicion of Russian good faith which some of us had long held...."

1. Manchester Guardian, 28 August 1939.

swastika into the hammer and sickle...."[1] The fact that Hitler had always posed as Western civilization's bulwark against the spread of communism was noticed from time to time in British newspapers. As to how seriously they took these claims can perhaps never be exactly estimated.[2] But it was one of the curious facets of the August pact that several organs of the press took the occasion of referring to this in their commentary. The Economist remarked that one of the effects of the treaty was that Hitler had thus, "lost his most powerful propagandist weapon, his pose as the champion of civilization against Bolshevist chaos."[3] In a similar reference to this theme on 23 August, the Express saw the pact as "a cynical exposure of the value of Germany's word. By wooing the hated Russians," the Express continued, the Germans prove that "they are prepared to sacrifice their own ideals...." The Express buttressed this editorial with a long article of quotations by Stalin deriding Nazism, and by Hitler proclaiming Germany's function as a bulwark against Communism. The sudden right-about turn of "the leading member of the anti-Comintern Pact", worried the Times as "strange alike both to its friends and to its opponents." The Times found it "morally damaging to the Nazi regime ... that it should turn suddenly to a Government about which all its leaders have been scathingly contemptuous ... and against whose machinations they used to claim that National-Socialism was the one strong bulwark in the world."[4] Several times in the following days this Conservative journal was to return to the same

1. Times, 25 August 1939.
2. For an assessment of the views of Dawson on this aspect of Nazi Germany, see Wrench, op.cit., pp.362 and 376.
3. Economist, 26 August 1939.
4. Times, 23 August 1939.

theme. On 28 August, a long leader emphasized that the Russo-German pact

> ... has stripped the last rag of respectability from the pretence that the holy mission of the Nazi system was to be the bulwark of civilization against Bolshevism.

Other journals such as the Daily Herald, Manchester Guardian, and the Spectator simply noted that the pact had lost Germany the moral support of Spain and caused consternation in Italy and Japan.

Very few newspapers indulged in any anti-Soviet recriminations. Some comments were made on the secretive nature of the Soviet-German negotiations and their being conducted parallel with the tripartite talks. One of the very few recriminations directed towards the U.S.S.R. at this stage was the rather serious one as to Russia's responsibility for any German moves towards Poland. The first consequence of the announcement of the impending pact was seen to be that the international situation had become more critical than it was before. By abandoning the peace front, the Guardian claimed that Soviet action "may bring war on", and make it easier for Germany to carry out her aggressive plans.[1] The Daily Herald after venting its sense of outraged horror at the Soviet move claimed that the timing of the pact could only be "a direct incentive" to a German attack on Poland.[2] The Daily Telegraph and the Times suggested that the pact included some provision for a Polish partition. The outraged Economist stated flatly that the pact "encourages the Nazis to go further on their path of aggression", and makes it harder to stop them once in motion. Continuing, the Economist called the timing of the pact tantamount

1. Manchester Guardian, 23 and 25 August 1939.
2. Daily Herald, 22 August 1939.

to "provoking a world war".[1] Finally, the New Statesman, less shocked than other journals, and tending to take a detached "I told you so" view, interpreted the pact as bringing war "menacingly near". The Statesman preferred to lay the burden of guilt upon the British Government. It claimed that the past habit of Conservative cold-shouldering of the Soviet Union, and the refusal of a "full Anglo-Soviet alliance when it was honestly offered", had left the Soviets with only one choice - an understanding with Germany.[2]

This latter observation impinges upon a final aspect of the press' reaction to the Russo-German pact. It concerns certain press interpretations as to Stalin's motives and the possible sincerity of both Hitler and Stalin in concluding the pact. The New Statesman, the Manchester Guardian, and the Daily Herald, notwithstanding their respective outbursts of surprise and scorn, suggested that Stalin had been driven into this course of action. In a variety of ways, the Soviets' "serious mistrust" of Chamberlain, the National Government's exclusion of the U.S.S.R. from the Munich conference, and its "criminal hesitation" in negotiating with the U.S.S.R., were all brought forward to explain the Soviet reversal.[3] But simultaneously, it seemed, especially to the Guardian and Herald (the New Statesman took a more cynical stance), that the Nazi-Soviet pact was incompatible with Stalin's previous denunciations of German aims for European domination. To the Opposition press it seemed unbelievable, if not foolhardy, that the Soviet Union should aid in the acceleration of Germany's military plans. The Guardian simply asked: "... what can

1. Economist, 26 August 1939.
2. New Statesman, 26 August 1939.
3. Daily Herald, 22 August 1939; Manchester Guardian, 23 August 1939.

it gain from such a policy?"[1] The Guardian's correspondents emphasized on numerous occasions their bewilderment as to why the Soviets would sign a pact with Germany, when they too, had seen the valuelessness of a German-signed document. However, for the Daily Herald, the crucial determinant was still pending. The Soviets, it claimed, had still a choice: either neutrality, or an occupation of Eastern Poland. On this depended final judgement.[2]

Several other journals seemed also concerned with the motives behind the Soviet move, and in what direction Russia would take its next step. The Conservative Times seemed undecided between two views. Firstly, it envisaged the Soviets maintaining their neutrality, and remaining as long as possible aloof from a European war.[3] To this the Times had no special objection. Or, secondly, the Times did have visions of a dynamic expanding communism profiting from a protracted war. As early as 22 August, the Moscow correspondent cabled that Russia would remain a spectator in a war, waiting to see how hostilities developed before committing herself to a definite course of action. A subsequent leader declared its inability to fathom Stalin's "real intentions". But of one thing it seemed positive, that the Soviet dictator was "in no hurry to fight against aggression - or for anything at all, unless it be the spread of Communism...."[4] Continuing in the same vein, two days later, a Times leader claimed the Russians were most eager to keep "a free hand" for themselves. This, it was argued, was necessary, for "Russia ... wants

1. Manchester Guardian, 24 August 1939.
2. Daily Herald, 28 August 1939.
3. Times, 24 and 25 August 1939.
4. Ibid., 24 August 1939.

a long war ... which will produce the conditions for world revolt." This initial attitude towards the U.S.S.R. was to be strengthened during the forthcoming period of Soviet expansion.

Furthermore, the British press as a whole, was surprisingly sceptical as to the durability, the binding character, and sincerity of the Russo-German rapprochement. This attitude, adopted at such an early stage, was to be of decisive importance in the war years. For on the estimate of the Russo-German pact and the precise nature of Soviet neutrality largely depended the attitude each newspaper was to take towards Russia. To most, it immediately seemed "inconceivable that Stalin should be ready to stake the future of his regime on the Fuehrer's promise."[1] The conclusion generally arrived at was that any agreement between Russia and Germany would not necessarily be binding. As Harold Nicolson observed, in an article in the Telegraph, the pact, while temporarily advantageous to both, would be a long range source of uncertainty and distrust. As emphasis, he quoted Hitler's famous remarks to the effect that a Russo-German alliance would mean a second world war and the end of Germany.[2] Any agreement between Germany and Russia, bringing the former country closer to the Soviet frontier puzzled the Daily Express as well. Whereupon, it observed that "Stalin mistrusts Hitler as much as Hitler mistrusts Stalin." Both, the Express opined, have concluded a pact with very good reason.[3]

It is this note of scepticism, and cynicism as to the ultimate value of the German-Soviet rapprochement that seemed to characterize the press' attitude to the events of 23 August 1939.

1. Economist, 26 August 1939.
2. Daily Telegraph, 30 August 1939.
3. Daily Express, 24 August 1939.

PART THREE

SOVIET EXPANSION

CHAPTER SIX

1. INTRODUCTION

Having reaffirmed their support for Poland, and offered their respective comments on the Soviet-Nazi pact, it was evident that the attention of the press had shifted very swiftly and dramatically. "The shock of the Russo-German treaty of non-aggression is over...", the Daily Telegraph had declared editorially on 29 August 1939. The Times commented approvingly on "the remarkable sense of national steadiness and solidarity...."[1] Very rapidly the press adjusted to the new diplomatic situation, and focused all its attention on the European crisis that would lead in a matter of days to the outbreak of war. But the attitudes of British newspapers to the dilemma of Anglo-Soviet relations had changed, and was to change vastly.

The purges and terrorism can be said to have destroyed any illusions some British newspapers entertained as to the Socialist experiment in Russia. "Where is the humanity, the imagination, the statesmanship," lamented the Liberal Guardian, "which twenty years ago launched the greatest country in the world into the greatest experiment in history?"[2] The Nazi-Soviet pact and Stalin's wartime foreign policy were decisive in destroying a second belief. It had always been a tenet of Liberal and Labour press opinion especially, that Soviet conduct in foreign affairs had been farthest removed from "power politics" and was a model of support for a "system of permanent international order with a clear moral basis

1. Times, 28 August 1939.
2. Manchester Guardian, 10 March 1939.

of equal rights before the law...."[1] She was the power most wedded in public declarations to support for the League and collective security. As a "force for Peace in international relations," plotting no wars of aggression, "a defensive, not an offensive force...", Russia had earned a reputation in the Liberal and Labour press as being "in sharp distinction from these other Dictatorships...."[2] Furthermore, Russia had been

> firmer and more outspoken on behalf of honesty in international affairs than any other Great European Power; better than any of their Governments she had expressed the view of the ordinary decent man and woman. She had addressed Germany with ... distinctive bluntness.... She has denounced Hitler's action as 'arbitrary, violent and aggressive'....[3]

These convictions had been instrumental in shaping the crusading zeal with which the Liberal and Labour press had urged closer Anglo-Soviet collaboration during the Czech crisis and an Anglo-Soviet alliance in 1939. It was not without influence in converting certain Conservative and Isolationist newspapers to support temporarily an Anglo-Soviet alliance.[4] During the negotiations a leading article in the Times commented: "Whatever criticism may be heard ... of Soviet methods and outlook, military aggression is an international crime against which the U.S.S.R. has set its face as resolutely as any of the Western democracies."[5] That the

1. Daily Herald, 24 May 1939.
2. Ibid., 21 January 1939.
3. Manchester Guardian, 20 March 1939.
4. The case of the Daily Telegraph and the Daily Express is discussed above, pp.103-108.
5. Times, 4 May 1939.

Soviet Union could be an addition to the peace front - however unknown its military strength or political stability - had a most convincing ring.

For the Conservative press, however, the August pact and the Russo-Finnish war served to confirm prior convictions, both as to the nature of Stalin's regime and international communism. The Times was of the opinion during the Anglo-Soviet negotiations, that "notwithstanding Mr. Chamberlain's protestations of freedom from ideological prejudice, the capitalist and Soviet worlds regard each other with a mutual suspicion which time has not diminished...."[1] It was this journal's belief that the nature of isolation Soviet leaders had imposed upon themselves, their secretiveness and ideological complexion, naturally bred "suspicions and misunderstandings."[2] Soviet foreign policy in the coming months was to confirm many of these beliefs.

The conclusion of the Russo-German pact - bar the unorthodoxy and secretive technique - rankled deeply. Obviously, the move transformed press attitudes to the U.S.S.R. It was recognized by most that Stalin would act exclusively on nationalistic, non-ideological bases, guided only by Russia's strategic interests. That this was to take the form of expansion, rounding out Russia's historic borders, was the new phenomenon the press was called on to report.

There are two contingencies that must be mentioned by way of preface. Both reflect on the conditions under which the press' attitude to the U.S.S.R. must be examined. The first, concerns the changed nature of the press in wartime. While a complex topic in itself and one the press

1. Times, 22 May 1939.
2. Ibid., 25 May 1939.

regularly discussed, suffice it to note that wartime conditions restricted in some degree its freedom. Hence, its coverage of Anglo-Soviet relations, while no doubt indicative largely of each newspaper's attitude, would have to be tempered by the exigencies of Government policy. One such instance as early as 23 August has already been cited.[1] It is similarly possible to assert that the Government's desire in September and October 1939 to maintain friendly relations with the U.S.S.R. and re-establish trade activity, necessarily tempered the remarks of the press on the Soviet occupation of Poland and partial occupation of the Baltic. During the Russo-Finnish war no similar restraints seem to have been exercised. The second reflection that needs to be noted was that for the second time within a year, the activities of the Soviet Union; her motives, strategy, and policy, became a topic of prime concern to the press. With the period of the "phoney war" in the west, providing little newsworthy material, the sudden reassertion of an expansionist Russia occupied the attention of correspondents and leader writers.

2. SOVIET EXPANSION: POLAND AND THE BALTIC

During the first fortnight of September 1939, the press noticed the general strengthening of Soviet defences on the Polish-Soviet frontier. This was treated calmly in the reports of Moscow correspondents. They emphasized its essentially defensive character and explained that the measures were precautionary. The explanation offered was the swift German advance through Poland and the approach of these forces to the

1. See above p.131.

Soviet frontier. No credence was given to the notion that the Soviets intended to take the offensive as a partner in a Russo-German military alliance. The emphasis was on the essential pose of detachment and calm assurance that the Soviets had assumed in face of hostilities. On 15 September it was noticed that for the first time the Soviet press was adopting a hostile attitude to Poland, denouncing the Polish treatment of minorities, and alleging violations of Soviet air space. But the Daily Express and the Daily Telegraph asserted that no "carve up" of Poland was in the offing. The Telegraph on 16 September 1939 reported that Japan and Russia had reached an armistice agreement along the entire Manchukuoan and Outer Mongolian borders.

On 18 September 1939 the main news pages of the British press headlined the Red Army's march into Eastern Poland. In the early morning of 17 September a new partition of Poland had begun. Many newspapers did not initially spare their descriptive adjectives of abuse. The Soviet action was characterized as "cowardly", "murder", "dastardly", "imperialist", "rape", "stab in the back", etc. Interestingly, the Liberal and Labour press were more given to condemnation than other journals. What characterized the derision of the Daily Herald was the note of bitter disappointment at the Soviet betrayal of principle. Her conversion to power politics and a policy of territorial aggrandizement was condemned. Russia, commented a Herald leader on 18 September, "which might have set - which we once all believed would set - an example to the whole world in social justice and international fair dealing embarks upon war for the naked purpose of territorial gain." The leader continued by describing Soviet action as "clothed in phrases struck directly from the Nazi mint." Other newspapers similarly equated Soviet and Nazi techniques. The

Guardian, like the Herald, was stirred to a violent condemnation of Soviet "imperialism". "Is Stalin's policy, then," asked the Guardian, in tones reminiscent of Conservative journals, "to avoid war but to make profit out of the victims of war so that Russia will prosper while all around her the nations are wasted by ruinous strife? It would not be a pretty policy for the first Socialist State, but why was Catherine called the Great?"[1] A Guardian correspondent perhaps best summed up the state of the former pro-Soviet press when he commented that the "friends of modern Russia ... are silenced".[2]

The Conservative attitude was no less forthright in condemning the Soviet march into Poland. Nor could they refrain remarking on the obvious pained embarrassment to those quarters who once believed "that Russia was to be distinguished from her Nazi neighbour ... by the principles and purposes behind her foreign policy."[3] But there was a ready disposition to analyse some of the implications of the Soviet move. And many newspapers concluded, that however disastrous to Poland and embarrassing to the Allies, there was yet no need to assume "that the new move is necessarily to the disadvantage of the Allied cause."[4]

As to the position of Britain in relation to the events in Eastern Europe, the press supported the British Government statement on 19 September. It asserted that the Russian attack was unjustified, and that while the "'full implication of these events'" was "'not yet apparent'", Britain was determined to fulfil her obligations to Poland and

1. Manchester Guardian, 18 September 1939.
2. Ibid.
3. Times, 18 September 1939.
4. Daily Express, 18 September 1939.

prosecute the war against Germany.[1] None of the newspapers herein analysed, suggested that Britain break off diplomatic relations, let alone declare war on Russia. The latter move, it was generally appreciated, would not save Poland and would throw Russia into alliance with Germany - an event obviously to be avoided.

But if the press was wary of forcing Russia into the German camp, there was now available a clearer assessment of Nazi-Soviet relations. At the time the Nazi-Soviet pact was signed, it was suggested in a limited number of journals that a partition of Poland had been agreed upon. Fewer still suggested that the Baltic and the Balkans had also been divided. With this occupation of Eastern Poland, it was assumed definitely that the Soviets wanted "to make sure of the territories promised her under the Russo-German Agreement."[2] The Daily Telegraph was sure "that some quid pro quo was arranged".[3] The Daily Herald and the New Statesman now felt certain of a secret annex to the August pact.[4] The Guardian called the invasion "the price paid by Germany for the Russian pact."[5] The realisation then, that Russia and Germany had divided the spoils, destroyed the last illusions any journal may have entertained that Stalin had opted for a policy of isolation. The Liberal and Labour press began to suggest that Stalin was pursuing a new policy of "imperialism". While the Conservative press noted apprehensively, that this action was the first westward move by the Red Army in more than a decade.

1. Quoted, Llewellyn Woodward, British Foreign Policy in the Second World War (London, 1962), p.7.
2. Times, 18 September 1939.
3. Daily Telegraph, 18 September 1939.
4. Daily Herald, 18 September 1939; New Statesman, 23 and 30 September 1939.
5. Manchester Guardian, 18 September 1939.

The return of Russia to Eastern Europe, her reassertion as the dominant factor in the politics of that area while condemned was, as mentioned, seen as not totally without benefit. It was firstly argued that Russia's response was precipitated by the swift advance of the German army before the rapidly crumbling Polish resistance. As a result, it was generally commented upon, that the phenomenon of the Red Army facing the Wehrmacht was "ultimately ... precarious."[1] And in this the press seemed to derive some comfort. Furthermore, it was also pointed out, that there was now a Soviet presence in Eastern Europe, necessitating the stationing of considerable German troops on that front.[2] The Economist added the further observation that Russia now held the balance in Eastern Europe. She had, in effect, replaced Britain as Germany's Balkan opponent. Ultimately, the Economist contended, Russia was in a position "to challenge Nazi Germany's dominance in the Baltic."[3] But it was on the Siegfried Line that the Spectator asserted the ultimate fate of Poland would be decided.[4]

The third observation made by the press was a reiteration - though now with some dissenting voices - of the belief in the basic conflict of interests between Stalin and Germany. As in August, the press seemed puzzled that Stalin would allow a powerful Germany to be entrenched at his doorstep. "How long will it be," asked the Daily Express on 23 September, "before the greedy eyes of the great man in Berlin turn again to the Ukraine wheatfields?" The clear antagonism between Soviet and German

1. Daily Telegraph, 18 September 1939.
2. Economist, 23 September 1939; Daily Express, 18 September 1939.
3. Ibid., 23 September, 7 October 1939.
4. Spectator, 22 September 1939.

interests was also noticed in the Liberal and Labour press. The Daily Herald, while admitting its ignorance of the degree of collaboration between Germany and Russia felt that "almost certainly a deep suspicion of each other exists." Any agreement between the two, it added which "has no basis in morality, geography, ethnology or economics ... will not endure."[1] The Times, at this point venting its animosities to the fullest, claimed the pact rested "upon nothing but the honour that is said to prevail among thieves."[2]

Notwithstanding these general expressions of doubt as to the sincerity or durability of the Nazi-Soviet pact, first voiced in late August, the ease of the Soviet move, the clear, effortless benefits accruing thereby, impressed many newspapers. It was pointed out by the Times that the strong position of the Soviet Government enabled them to extract the utmost concessions.[3] For the foreseeable future, the Daily Telegraph noted, "the interests of the two dictatorships run parallel, and there is no reason to suppose that they are not resolved, for the present, to observe their pledges to each other."[4] The Economist, likewise opined, that while the relations between "the Nazi lion and the Bolshevik jackal are clearly not those of mutual trust ...",[5] Stalin

> may see a way of resolving to his own advantage the German-Russian conflict of interests in Eastern Europe, by giving the Germans what appear to them to be his substantial support and goodwill.[6]

1. Daily Herald, 19 and 23 September 1939.
2. Times, 19 September 1939.
3. Ibid.
4. Daily Telegraph, 29 September 1939.
5. Economist, 23 September 1939.
6. Ibid., 30 September 1939.

The Economist expected Stalin to continue echoing his gratitude to Germany.

On the whole, a variety of condemnatory remarks on the Soviet Government's policy were voiced. But there was also an awareness that there could be no question of breaking off relations. The situation was still seen to be one of great fluidity, especially as to Nazi-Soviet relations. At the same time as Molotov broadcast the rationalization for the invasion of Poland, he reiterated the Soviet desire to maintain a neutral status. To the press, anxious to unravel the Soviet enigma, the prime question of which was still the exact degree of collaboration Russia was to offer Germany, Molotov's declaration of neutrality came as a welcome relief. As the Economist so astutely contended:

> Our position is not so strong that we can gratuitously make enemies. The probability is that Hitler and Stalin are pursuing not merely different, but irreconcilable ends, and it would be foolishness on our part to throw them into each other's arms.[1]

The New Statesman, the Daily Herald, and the Daily Express argued emphatically along the same lines. All agreed that the Soviets were pursuing a policy of self-interest: opportunistic, non-ideological, independent of any single power, and guided exclusively by the exigencies of Soviet strategic requirements. A conclusion of this nature was indeed a major development, in contrast to such attitudes as the Liberal and Labour press had previously supported.

It is significant, therefore, that Ribbentrop's visit to Moscow on 27 September to conclude a treaty with Russia, while highly publicised in

1. Economist, 30 September 1939.

the press as all Soviet activities were at this point, generally aroused no surprise, nor did the results serve to alter accepted conclusions. A Russo-German treaty, signed on 28 September,

> established friendly relations between the two States on the basis of protecting their territorial gain against third parties. The Soviet Government promised to give Germany economic support and to consult with her regarding measures to be taken if Great Britain and France refused to bring the war to an end.[1]

The latter provision to consult left most newspapers unimpressed. It was felt that the situation had not materially altered; with Stalin still withholding from a military alliance with Germany and leaving his hands exceedingly free.[2] The Conservative press seemed confirmed in its opinion "that Hitlerism and Communism are two names for the same opportunist creed."[3] But it was equally conceded that there was no real issue on which Russian and Allied interests clashed. The few voices of caution merely suggested that the "Russo-German entente is very real."[4] The New Statesman on 30 September advised that the possibility of an alliance was an open question, the answer to which would depend on British policy. "Relations with Stalin," declared the Times, "will be decided by events as and when they disclose his own intentions, still far from clear." It added that both Britain and France would pursue a "policy of

1. Woodward, op.cit., p.7.
2. Times, 30 September 1939; Economist, 7 October 1939; Daily Herald, 30 September 1939.
3. Daily Telegraph, 30 September 1939.
4. Manchester Guardian, 30 September 1939.

refusing to allow 'ideological' differences to influence diplomatic relations...."[1] Whereas the Times had said this during the Anglo-Soviet negotiations, it probably carried more conviction in conditions of warfare. Again, the conclusions generally suggested that Soviet Russia, pre-eminent in eastern Europe, and pursuing a policy of self-interest and "imperialism" was, however, tending to a neutrality whose exact future course was still unclear. Churchill spoke for a wide section of the press when he broadcast on 1 October. He characterized Soviet policy as "a riddle wrapped in a mystery inside an enigma. But perhaps there is a key. That key is Russian national interest."[2]

Aside from the Red Army's occupation of part of Poland, several events further helped shape an emerging press attitude to Soviet policy and a picture of her intentions. The acceptance of that dynamic presence in Eastern Europe was conditioned in part by Russia's strategic consolidation in the Baltic.

In June and July 1939, the press had vigorously defended the inviolability of small states' rights. With the outbreak of war, they enumerated as one of Britain's war aims, the right of small nations to an existence free from the threat of force. Towards the end of September and in early October, simultaneously with the conclusion of treaty arrangements with Germany, Soviet diplomacy was active in the three border states of Latvia, Estonia and Lithuania. It was realized, as the Guardian pointed out on 9 October, that since the Nazi-Soviet pact

1. Times, 30 September 1939.
2. Churchill, op.cit., p.353.

and the partition of Poland shattered the balance of power in Eastern Europe, the bads of the Baltic States' independence had been undermined. The Times on 11 October referred to the fulfilment of Russia's "ambitions similar to those which leaked out during the abortive Anglo-Soviet negotiations in Moscow." But it did concede some such move was "almost inevitable" in the present conditions. Within a short period, Latvia, Estonia and Lithuania yielded to Russia naval, air, and military bases. These moves were greeted by the press as yet another manifestation of Soviet "imperialism". They were interpreted as further proof that Germany and Russia had agreed upon a division of the spoils. Stalin was characterized in the Conservative and Opposition press as a "new Peter the Great", attempting a restoration of Tsarist Russia.[1] Reports also ominously emphasized the anxiety felt in the Scandinavian States with "Soviet blackmail diplomacy".[2] Finally, great play was made, especially after the repatriation of the German Balts was announced, with the extravagant price Ribbentrop had paid for Soviet neutrality; in effect, the total surrender of Germany's position in the Baltic.[3]

It was seen, however, that these latest moves were essentially protective positions. They could ensure that in case of hostilities the Soviet fleet would not be bottled up in Kroenstadt. The Daily Herald claimed that Soviet activities in the Baltic were "intended as a check to the Nazis..." and that "the Westward advance of Russia looks more menacing to Germany everyday."[4] The Guardian, on 30 September, merely noted

1. Daily Herald, 20 September 1939; Times, 5 October 1939; Daily Telegraph, 30 September, 16 October 1939.
2. Daily Express, 7 October 1939; Spectator, 13 October 1939.
3. Daily Telegraph, 10 October 1939; Times, 14 October 1939; Daily Herald, 30 September 1939.
4. Daily Herald, 2 and 10 October 1939.

ominously that there were now two naval powers in the Baltic. While the Economist claimed that "the U.S.S.R. is now in a position to challenge Nazi Germany's dominance in the Baltic."[1] A final point that did not escape attention, was that Estonia and Latvia, while in effect reduced to the status of a "dependency" or "protectorate", had retained a nominal independence, and had also escaped a Bolshevisation program. On this point, the Times, the Economist and the Spectator expressed their satisfaction.

A second event to help clarify Soviet intentions was the reinstitution of Anglo-Soviet trade negotiations interrupted by the outbreak of war. On 11 October 1939, it was announced that an agreement had been concluded to exchange Russian timber for British rubber and tin. The press welcomed the agreement as keeping open economic relations between the two countries. It was interpreted as signifying Russia's need for trade and capital goods, reports of which the Economist had earlier interpreted as "one guarantee of Soviet non-intervention."[2] The strengthening of Britain's blockade of Germany by this move was universally commented upon with approval.

Finally, two speeches delivered by Molotov, one to the Supreme Council of the U.S.S.R. on 31 October 1939, the other on 6 November 1939, to celebrate the 22nd Anniversary of the Bolshevik Revolution, received feature coverage by the British press. Indeed, as the Daily Telegraph on 1 November commented, the Soviet Union was "so great and potent a factor in world affairs" that it would be "impossible to ignore the utterances of those who proclaim her opinions and intentions." What was

1. Economist, 7 October 1939.
2. Ibid.

especially emphasized, and underlined with much satisfaction, was Molotov's reiteration of Russia's intention to pursue a neutrality policy with "a free hand in international affairs". The Daily Telegraph in its leader entitled: "Russia Looks After Herself", claimed that "the kernel of the much-heralded speech" was the declaration of neutrality. The rest was dismissed as "solemn nonsense" and "lip-service" to Germany. The Spectator commented: "The passage that rings truest in the speech is the one insisting on Russia's neutrality."[1] The Economist, added the further relevant point that while satisfied with Molotov's reassurance, nonetheless, Soviet policy was benevolent towards Germany.[2] However, it was also generally noticed, that if in tone the speech was hostile to Britain and France, Germany could derive little satisfaction. While giving their verbal support to Germany, the Soviets still held back from a military alliance.

3. INTERIM JUDGEMENT

After more than two months of analysing the dynamics of the Nazi-Soviet rapprochement, its complexities, possible variations and future course, the press agreed on essentials but differed with regard to the impact the August pact had individually produced. It was generally agreed that the Soviets were most definitely intent on pursuing a policy of neutrality. It was further conceded that the Soviets would continue their policy of "enlightened self-interest" the benefits of which seemed

1. Spectator, 3 November 1939.
2. Economist, 4 November 1939.

clearly visible - the progressive expansion of Soviet influence. But these goals would be pursued with an eye to continued friendship with Germany. In the words of the Daily Herald: "The Russo-German association is no love-match, but a marriage of convenience."[1] Stalin intended to stay married. Or, as the Times first pointed out, Stalin, while continuing to look after his own interests, was pursuing a policy of German appeasement; the abandonment of which the foreseeable future held no hope. Most journals agreed with this realistic and not at all optimistic appreciation of Nazi-Soviet relations. Two months of war had seemed to confirm these opinions initially voiced in late August 1939.

Where the press divided was on its estimate of Soviet foreign policy per se. Stalin's role as a "new Peter the Great" meant different things to the Conservative and Opposition press respectively. For the Conservative press, the opportunism of Stalin was motivated by "a combination of Communism and the expansionist policy of the Tsars."[2] Stalin, it was here argued, was prepared to be "Nationalist or Internationalist, Tsarist, Pan-Slavist, or Pacifist as the circumstance of the moment prompts him - though through it all runs the undeviating purpose of increasing Russian influence and spreading Communism."[3] It is this latter element that constituted the essential anxiety of the Conservative press. The Times on 30 September claimed "as an axiom that Moscow's ultimate aim is the propogation of a Bolshevist revolution in Europe." Almost alone of the British press it filled columns with descriptions of Russia's Bolshevization of Poland: plundered churches, confiscated property, and the murder

1.. Daily Herald, 7 October 1939.
2. Times, 9 November 1939.
3. Ibid.

of the Polish nobility. The "protectorate" over the Baltic was received mildly, as Russia had here delayed her Bolshevization program. What also worried Conservative leader writers was the fear that a defeated Germany would prove a ready victim for a Bolshevik conquest. Hitler, through his pact with Stalin, had given the head to a westward move by Russia into the "very heart of East-Central Europe, with consequences which no one can as yet gauge."[1] The most feared consequence was a defeat of Germany with the resultant political vacuum into which Russia would step. Therefore, it was to be concluded that:

> The bloc between a Soviet Russia and a Nazi Germany, which is likely to represent a very uncertain alliance, seems less to be feared than a bloc between a Soviet Russia and a Soviet Germany, which would follow a Bolshevist revolution in the latter country.[2]

In contrast, the preoccupation of Liberal and Labour journals centered on the dilemma resulting from their previous ideological sympathy with Soviet policy, and now strained by the Hitler-Stalin agreement. Their concern was not a Bolshevist Europe. It was assumed that Stalin was pursuing a nationalistic policy aimed at securing an "iron belt" around the U.S.S.R. "It is doubtful," claimed the New Statesman, "whether Russia is still a force making for revolutionary change beyond her own borders."[3] The Conservative press would obviously disagree. However, what distressed the Opposition press was not an imperialism under which "Jews and landless peasants will gain by coming under Russian rule."[4]

1. Times, 26 September 1939.
2. Ibid., 30 September 1939. See too, Daily Telegraph, 27 November 1939.
3. New Statesman, 11 November 1939.
4. Ibid.

Rather it was the hint of this "lust for power" which was seen as a new development. What made the dilemma more acute was that this new turn of events contrasted so sharply with past professions of Soviet statesmen: "... it is distressing," wrote the Guardian, and the Herald would have agreed, "to read these astonishing statements by Soviet leaders who so recently spoke for international justice and urged resistance against acts of aggression."[1] After two months of intensive Soviet activity, the Opposition press recognized that Stalin had shaken off what the Statesman referred to as "the idealistic elements of Socialism." However, reconciliation did not immediately follow that recognition.

1. Manchester Guardian, 7 November 1939.

CHAPTER SEVEN

1. THE RUSSO-FINNISH WAR, December 1939 - March 1940

What especially rankled all sections of press opinion, though for different reasons as explained above, was the continued manifestation of the "new Soviet imperialism". The Russo-Finnish war (December 1939 - March 1940) placed a heavy strain on the attitudes thus far assumed towards the Soviet Union. A reaction, highly emotional in content, almost led the press to a total reversal. The Spectator shrewdly observed that Russia's "crime breaks as a climax of turpitude and treachery on minds already lacerated by the successive rapes of Austria, Czechoslovakia and Poland."[1] All the resentment felt against the Soviet Government for the August pact, so long restrained, was enflamed by this action against Finland. Seldom previously had the reputation of the U.S.S.R. sunk lower in the esteem of the British press; seldom was Bolshevist Russia's notoriety and infamy as the outlaw power equalled, as during the Winter war. The absorption of White Russia and the Ukraine could be condoned, admitting they were a racial part of the Russian family. The treatment of Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia could, too, be overlooked, if the polite fiction of their continued independence was accepted. But in the Finnish case, the press seemed to draw a line of resistance, and to hold Stalin to his favourite maxim of foreign policy: "'We want not a single foot of anybody's land.'"[2]

The tone for press coverage of the October and November 1939, Russo-

1. Spectator, 8 December 1939.
2. Quoted, Isaac Deutscher, Stalin, A Political Biography (London, 1949), p. 438.

Finnish negotiations was set as early as 7 October. Most newspapers carried reports of a Rome broadcast claiming that the Finns had refused Soviet terms. The press took note and extended its sympathy and verbal support to the spectacle of "little Finland ... standing up to Stalin."[1] Alone of all the Baltic States, the Finns seemed to excite the press with their resistance to Russian claims. It was early agreed that the Finns would be "a harder nut to crack than the other Baltic countries."[2]

Finland's position was stressed as being unique. It was noticed that she was part of the northern Scandinavian neutrality bloc, and that all her political, historical, and cultural connections were with Western Europe. "If Russia thinks it can treat Finland as a Baltic State," warned the Times on 9 October, "it will cause a violent reaction ... all over the civilized world...." Furthermore, behind Finland's desire to maintain her neutrality and unrestricted right of self-determination, the press emphasized that she could count on support from varying sources. U.S. diplomatic intervention, the sympathy of western Europe, the moral support of Sweden - material aid was termed problematical - and also, the understanding of Great Britain were enumerated. As to the latter point, the press retained a significant reticence. On one extreme, the Daily Express almost totally ignored the impending crisis. On the other, the most the Times would offer was that "in the political object of maintaining her independence ... Great Britain sees eye to eye with Finland...."[3] It was also emphasized by the press that given Finland's geographical location and the adverse climatic conditions of winter, the country was

1. Daily Express, 9 October 1939.
2. Daily Herald, 12 October 1939.
3. Times, 10 October 1939.

well situated to offer more than token resistance to attack. But, it was equally admitted, that Finland could not hope to hold out against aggression on a large scale. Finally, it was remarked, that any Soviet incursion into Finland would clearly brand the U.S.S.R. as an aggressor nation. The Daily Herald, visibly fearful of such a move, stated bluntly: "no dialectics about the meaning of the concept aggression can excuse an attack upon a country so peaceable ... as Finland."[1] Most newspapers agreed wholeheartedly.

The Soviet attack on Finland opened 30 November 1939. The reaction in the British press showed a marked similarity in all extremes. Chamberlain himself noted that Stalin's move "'provoked far more indignation than Hitler's attack on Poland, though it was no worse morally....'"[2] Indeed, the press violently and emotionally denounced the attack in a crescendo of abuse, scorn and vilification. Seldom had the British press raised itself to such a fever pitch, to indulge in such venomous, vituperative epithets of condemnation. While descriptive and interesting, in the present context they can largely be passed over in silence. What they reveal, in a moment of emotional laxity, is the intensity of feeling; the animosity, disappointment, or hatred that the Soviet Union stood capable of arousing in the British press.

The Conservative Times used the Russo-Finnish war for a remarkable outpouring of anti-Bolshevist sentiment. The Times evidenced this step as further proof of "Bolshevist aggressiveness", and added as support the Vatican concern with "the threat of a new advance by Communism in Europe."[3]

1. Daily Herald, 4 November 1939.
2. Quoted, Feiling, op.cit., p.427.
3. Times, 1 December 1939.

The attack was characterized as a "coldly calculated crime", proving conclusively that the "mask" that the Soviet represented "political idealism" was finally smashed.[1] Finally, the Times, as did the entire press, emphasized the fidelity with which Stalin had copied Nazi techniques of aggression. The Daily Telegraph was equally outspoken in denouncing Soviet "imperialism" and Stalin's "brutal and unconscionable technique of aggression". "Gallant unoffending little Finland", "stunned and bleeding", was portrayed as "holding the outer ward of the fortress of civilization against a storming seige of barbarism." Finland, claimed the Telegraph, rather descriptively, was threatened by "the ambition of tyrants and the fanaticism of a savagery hating all that has given more than brute value to human life...."[2] While the vehemence of the denunciation was readily apparent, the Telegraph was not at all blinded to some of the more interesting contingencies and implications of the Winter war.[3]

The Daily Express, almost alone of the newspapers, ignored the negotiation crisis, until the actual attack on 30 November 1939. Thereupon, the Express leader writer supplied the appropriate denunciation to the effect that "Stalin has out-Hitlered Hitler," having "aped the savagery of Hitler's Polish campaign at its worst." Having thus condemned the "blood lust" of Stalin, the Express immediately focused its attention elsewhere. While news coverage reported the war, editorial silence was only broken to repeat the need for British non-involvement.

Probably the most painful dilemma belonged to Britain's Labour and Liberal press. Until November 1939, they had tried with varying degrees

1. Times, 20 December 1939.
2. Daily Telegraph, 30 November, 2 and 23 December 1939.
3. See below p.164.

of success to rationalize Stalin's activities; to leave him with some particle of the principles they had so passionately attributed to Russia's foreign policy. The Russo-Finnish war totally destroyed their conception of the U.S.S.R., as pursuing a principled foreign policy. "We live in a jungle," cried the New Statesman as it saw the Soviets intent upon "national expansion and power politics."[1] The Manchester Guardian paralleled Stalinist to Nazi diplomacy, and contrasted Litvinov's and Molotov's foreign policies; a contrast it imputed to that between principled morality and realpolitik respectively. The Daily Herald was also aghast at the spectacle of Soviet Russia pursuing an "'Imperialist War'" for "reasons of power politics". It deplored the subordination of small states' rights to strategic exigencies. This move was rejected as "the philosophy of the old imperialism and the new Nazism."[2] Whatever Soviet motives were, claimed the Herald, "there can be no defence for it which will convince any sincere Socialist. We have not fought against the immorality of power politics at home," continued a leader on 1 December, "to acquiesce in these policies abroad because they are adopted by a dictatorship which once seemed as though it might provide a Socialist model for the world." The leader concluded: "The Union of Soviet Socialist Republics is dead. Stalin's new imperialistic Russia takes its place." By this aggressive move, Stalin had alienated "the affection and respect of the world-wide working-class Movement."[3] The close association between the attitudes of the British left-wing press and the Soviet Union reached an unprecedented low.

1. New Statesman, 2 December 1939. See too, ibid., 30 December 1939.
2. Daily Herald, 28 November, 1 December 1939.
3. Ibid.

Expression of sympathy for Finland, and condemnation of the U.S.S.R. did not abate in frequency or intensity throughout the war. Indeed, when the Finns surprisingly offered more than a token resistance to the Red Army, the chorus of applause and support appreciably increased. However, as was mentioned en passant above, beneath the tributes of support there existed in the press a basic appreciation of the complexities and implications involved in the Russo-Finnish war.

Firstly, and most important, was the attitude Britain was now to adopt towards the Soviet Union. The Foreign Office maintained that the prime objective was to avoid driving Russia into closer collaboration with Germany. Also, nothing could be done to prevent a Russian advance in the Baltic, which indeed might cause friction between Germany and Russia. The Foreign Office concluded therefore that unless Russia followed up its Finnish campaign with an attack on the Scandinavian States there were no grounds for any change in Britain's policy of avoiding war with the Soviets.[1] On this particular issue the press grudgingly assented. It was generally appreciated, and the Liberal and Labour press argued emphatically that a crusade against Bolshevism was to be totally rejected. The suggestions emanating from various quarters for an Anglo-German anti-Bolshevik bloc the Guardian termed "the merest moonshine."[2] Rather, all the journals herein discussed, maintained that the defeat of Nazi Germany remained the primary war objective of the Allies. "There can be no peace, no security, no hope for Europe ... without the defeat

1. Woodward, op.cit., pp.16-18.
2. Manchester Guardian, 13 December 1939.

of Hitler."[1] Hence, at all costs, Britain's war effort must not be diverted into the northern wing of Europe, however abhorrent for pro-Finnish sympathy. Above all, Britain must resist the dangerous policy of having to fight a Russo-German alliance. The Daily Express, on 7 December 1939, warned of the satisfaction an Anglo-Russian clash might give Hitler, and maintained throughout that Britain must only fight one aggressor at a time.

Continuing with the emphasis on Germany, the press frequently reiterated Germany's grave responsibility for present Soviet activities. Hitler was accused of having paid the price the Allies refused during the tripartite talks, and thus paved the way for the Soviet aggressions against Poland and Finland. The Daily Telegraph claimed that for the outrage against Finland Germany's guilt was as great as that of Russia.

> Stalin's offence is rank; it smells to Heaven;
> but he is not the arch-culprit. It was Hitler
> who contrived Stalin's crime ... and it is by
> Hitler's consent and connivance that he pursues
> his fell purpose. ... the root of the evil is
> not in Moscow but in Berlin.[2]

However, needless to say, the denunciation of Soviet policy continued unabated.

The consensus of press opinion not to divert the focus of the war effort was complicated by the League of Nations decision to expel Russia. The

1. Manchester Guardian, 13 December 1939.
2. Daily Telegraph, 12 December 1939.

British press received the news that on 3 December Finland had appealed to the League with little enthusiasm and more than a touch of embarrassment. It was agreed by all, that while Britain herself would not intorduce any motion of expulsion, she would of necessity vote with the majority. The Guardian opposed expulsion though approved of a comdemnatory motion. It noted that if Russia were forced to leave there would be only two major powers left at Geneva - France and Britain.[1] The greatest condemnation the Guardian voiced and often repeated, was that world opinion now thought of Russia's action as Litvinov would have thought in 1937. A leading article in the Daily Telegraph dilated on "the condition of the time" making unfavourable any effective use of the League's authority. It urged that the meeting "should finish quickly, as it cannot be effectual."[2] The leader concluded that any League resolution must not allow Britain's efforts to be deflected from her primary concern; that is, the war against Germany. The Daily Herald, although aware of the League's "apparent return from the grave", approved expulsion as a token gesture.[3] The Times on 16 December, likewise approved the gesture as an "act of discipline", while the Economist, slightly sceptical of the action, nonetheless offered its support. The Daily Express had no editorial comment. The whole incident was immediately forgotten, when the Admiral Graf Spee incident mercifully stole headlines.

A further complication endangering the basic consensus on the Anglo-Soviet-German triangle reached by the press, stemmed from a resolution

1. Manchester Guardian, 13 December 1939.
2. Daily Telegraph, 12 December 1939.
3. Daily Herald, 14 December 1939.

passed at the League calling on all members to aid Finland. This development had originally been posed when the Finns, unlike the Baltic States, had resisted any infringement of their sovereignty. It was further heightened by the surprisingly stout resistance they offered to the Red Army's initial thrusts. The press quite naturally played up Finnish military successes. There seemed to be a general admission by Conservative, Liberal, Labour, and Independent comment that the reputation of the Red Army had suffered a setback. The Times, on 29 December 1939, went so far as to say that the Finnish campaign had "effectively destroyed the prestige of the Soviet Union as a military power." The Daily Herald made much of the destruction of the "Red Army Myth".[1] Some journals, such as the Times, attributed the causes to the purges.[2] Others, such as the Daily Telegraph, the New Statesman, and the Daily Express, claimed Soviet reverses were due to an underestimation of Finnish strength, the allocation of second-line troops, over-confidence, and carelessness, as much as to Finnish resistance. The Express added Finland's "extravagant propoganda".[3]

But whatever view was taken, the obvious contrast between David and Goliath was never lost sight of. The Soviets' overwhelming weight in men and materials were clearly seen to be ultimately balanced against any prolonged Finnish resistance. There seemed little doubt, that alone, the Finns could not hope for final victory. In that case, there arose the problem of actively aiding Finland.

The press had generally rejected a military crusade against Bolshevism.

1. Daily Herald, 2 January 1940.
2. Times, 21 and 22 December 1939.
3. Daily Telegraph, 12 and 20 December 1939; New Statesman, 23 December 1939; Daily Express, 4 and 21 December 1939, 1 January 1940.

The British Chiefs of Staff's policy also was to avoid war with Russia.[1] And, as the Economist had very early pointed out, Britain and France could not consider antagonising Russia in "a venture that would be even more desperate than the defence of Poland...."[2] The Finns were not directly approachable by the Allies. Any program for aid needed the co-operation of Norway and Sweden which would not be forthcoming. However, the continued successful resistance of the Finns invited support. Caught in this dilemma, the press variously came to the reluctant conclusion that Britain should offer support to the limit of its material capacity, thought short of weakening its own war potential vis-à-vis Germany. The fiercest advocate of aid to the Finns, struggling "to hold civilization's fort" against "the menace of barbarism", was the Times. Its correspondence column was filled with letters, mainly from émigré Finns, urging aid for Christianity's struggle against heathen Bolshevism. Up to 5 March 1940, when the Finns were in retreat, the Times cried: "Finland should not be allowed to fall." The Daily Herald, reflecting the passionate sympathy and involvement of British Labour, ourged material support for Finland to "resist the advancing blizzard of international crime...."[3] Francis Williams on 15 December 1939 had warned Britain against dissipating its forces. C. R. Atlee, in a violently anti-Communist article, claimed "that the Finns should be able to obtain arms to defend themselves against open aggression, but we want no war with the U.S.S.R." He concluded with a reiteration of Labour's view that the "main concern" was still the meance of Hitlerism.[4] In a similar vein, the New Statesman, while claiming that

1. Woodward, op.cit., p.20.
2. Economist, 11 November 1939.
3. Daily Herald, 30 January 1940.
4. Ibid., 21 February 1940.

there were "strong reasons for aiding Finland", warned as well of the "strategic and political dangers of becoming too deeply involved...."[1] Leading articles continually stressed the necessity of not strengthening the belligerents by driving Stalin into Hitler's camp. The Statesman's calls for aid to Finland were on the whole rather half-hearted, and plans for a volunteer force were outrightly opposed. The Daily Express, emphasizing Britain's limited military resources, outrightly opposed aid; emphasizing that Britain "cannot police the world".[2] The Daily Telegraph urged British support, but equally called on the other states who had voted for the expulsion of Russia at Geneva to do their share.[3]

At the beginning of February 1940, the Soviets began a frontal assault on the Mannerheim Line, and continued to make steady progress in a campaign that was to end in victory. As the Finnish resistance progressively weakened the calls to save Finland increased, with the Conservative press advising more "men, munitions and aeroplanes."[4] The Labour and Liberal press likewise urged increased aid, but with the proviso of "remembering where our main duty lies...."[5] Finally, on 24 February, the Economist summarized astutely that given the attitude of the Scandinavian States, and the geographical and strategic difficulties of Finland's position, Britain could do little beyond an energetic provision of materials.

1. New Statesman, 27 January 1940.
2. Daily Express, 30 December 1939, 30 January, 5 March 1940.
3. Daily Telegraph, 6 January 1940.
4. Ibid., 29 February 1940.
5. Manchester Guardian, 23 February 1940.

It must be noted that whatever attitude each newspaper assumed towards aid all views were in reality contingent. If there was general agreement that Britain must not be diverted from her prime area of concern this was not to say the limit was not drawn. It was agreed that while the main war effort must be concentrated against Berlin, nonetheless, a watch need be kept on ultimate Soviet aims in Northern Europe. The press assumed by this time that Russia and Germany were acting in concert with a division of spoils having resulted from the Nazi-Soviet pact. However, there was continued speculation as to the exact allocation of interests, and ultimate Soviet ambitions in Scandinavia. The Daily Telegraph claimed the Soviets were aiming at Narvik; the Daily Herald, the Economist, and the Spectator feared an attack on Sweden; the Guardian and the New Statesman assumed a two-fold thrust to Petsamo and the Atlantic; and the Times inveighed most at a sweep of the tide of Bolshevism over all of Scandinavia. All newspapers at some point mentioned a possible Russian stab at the Swedish iron-ore deposits. However, it was clear as many pointed out, that in each of the above cases a decisive and immediate British counter-action would be required. This view accorded with that of the Foreign Office, which had agreed "that unless the Russian attack on Finland were followed by aggression against the Scandinavian States, there were no valid grounds for Britain to change her policy of avoiding war with the U.S.S.R."[1] However, a Russo-Finnish armistice overtook any further press speculation along this line. On 7 March 1940 the Finns were in Moscow to discuss armistice terms. Soviet terms were accepted five days later.

1. Woodward, op.cit., p.18.

2. PRESS CONSENSUS ON SOVIET RUSSIA

The debate on the consequences of the Russo-Finnish peace was swift and acrimonious. The burden of accepting Russian terms was laid totally to Finnish responsibility. The "crushing" peace imposed by the Soviets was sharply inveighed against and the need to support Finland to resist the influence of Bolshevism was dilated upon.[1] The Liberal, Labour, and Independent press admitted, that while Finland was gravely overshadowed by Russia, the Finns were still masters in their own house. They doubted whether the Russians, having once tested Finnish mettle, would embark on further military adventures in that direction.[2] Where the press did agree was in the awareness that Allied prestige had suffered in the esteem of the neutrals. It was further recognized that most countries directly or indirectly involved wanted to end the war, lest Scandinavia rather than the western front, become the battleground: Sweden caught between the pressure of the great powers, Germany in need of Soviet supplies wasting on the Finnish front, and Finland having reached the limit of its resistance capacities. As well, Russia, being drained by the war, pressured by Germany to whom she was losing the initiative, and with whom she had signed a pact to stay out of war, now faced the unwelcome prospect of substantial Allied strength on the Finnish front. Finally, Britain was being irrevocably pushed into a position which had been specifically advised against. As early as 8 March 1940, the Times, in reporting the consensus of Parliamentary opinion, claimed that it was agreed that "the key to the future is still to be found rather in the West than in

1. Times, 14 March 1940.
2. Manchester Guardian, 15 March 1940; Daily Herald, 14 March 1940; Economist, 16 March 1940; Spectator, 15 March 1940.

Scandinavia." Reviewing the House of Commons foreign affairs debate on 19 March, the Times emphatically restated the view that Germany must remain the main objective of British strategy. Peace on the Russo-Finnish border seemed ultimately desirable.[1] The Russo-Finnish War had had a very decided impact upon the British press. It provided a period of emotional release for all sections of press opinion. Conservative anti-Bolshevism with its fear of a Russian sweep over Europe, Liberal and Labour disillusionment with a supposed moral Soviet foreign policy, and Independent press scorn at a betrayal of trust were all given scope for expression. Yet beneath the unbounded emotionalism generated by Stalin's activities, there can be elicited a basic current of views that remained, albeit dormant, throughout the Winter war. A consensus of opinion had been formed that was to be the core of the press' attitude towards Russia until the astonishing events of 22 June 1941.

It is important to note that before the press became overwhelmed with the spectacle of the pygmy standing up to the giant, the Economist and the Spectator were emphatic in stressing what they considered to be the basic Soviet motives. The thrusts of the Red Army to make itself mistress of the Baltic and protect Leningrad and the newly-acquired Estonian, Latvian and Lithuanian bases were essentially to "forestall any future attempt by the Germans to use friendly Finland as a means of regaining what they have so notably lost."[2] Again, in a leading article on 2 December 1939, after fiercely condemning Stalin's aggression, the Economist asserted that "in the long run" it was possible to see "a vestige of sense" in the

1. Times, 20 March 1940.
2. Economist, 14 October 1939. See too ibid., 11 November 1939; Spectator, 17 November 1939, 15 March 1940.

Soviet case.

> Command of the Eastern Baltic has always been a tenet of Russian policy, and the importance of Leningrad did seem to require unusual measures of protection ... In claiming Finnish bases the Soviets were merely preparing against the day when Germany sets out to reconquer the Eastern Baltic. This may seem justifiable policy to the Kremlin but to Europe ... it is the act of an aggressor....[1]

Not all journals were as ready to grant the validity of Soviet strategic demands. The Manchester Guardian, for example, was equivocal. In a comprehensive leader on 1 December 1939, it was argued that whether Soviet action against Finland was defensive, that is, against Germany, or imperialistic, was unknown. But the only sure sign, claimed the leader, was that Stalin was "resolved by any means to establish his position against the uncertain future...." The much publicised strategic points of Russia, the Daily Herald pointed out on the same day, could increase Stalin's strength only against one power - Germany. Finally, in contrast, both the Times and Daily Telegraph totally rejected Stalin's security precautions as a "perfunctory and cynical pretext".[2] But the contingency expressed by other journals did not escape them either. "If the determination of the U.S.S.R. to be complete master of all the eastern Baltic," observed the Times, "is not the seeking of power for its own sake ... then it is obvious that there can be only one state against which precautions are necessary."[3] Under the impact of the Russo-Finnish

1. Economist, 2 December 1939.
2. Times, 30 November 1939.
3. Ibid., 14 November 1939.

war the above considerations were submerged. But, when the struggle drew to a close, both Conservative journals observed in a rare moment of calm that, as the Times put it, Soviet gains were "infact mainly directed against Germany and possible German schemes of aggression."[1] Russia's new strategic position in Europe had been acquired at German expense, and now stood as a bulwark to either eastwards or northern expansion.[2]

Furthermore, reports were consistently published which the press seemed to take at face value, especially in view of the strain imposed on Russo-German relations as the Finnish conflict wore on, that Stalin in the last resort[3] faced a conflict of interests with Germany. The Economist termed "inevitable" a clash between Nazi and Soviet ambitions.[4] The Daily Telegraph warned that "when it suits his book, we may be sure that Hitler will 'double-cross' Moscow...."[5] One must notice, however, that the spectacle of Germany's public disinterest, in face of a militant Bolshevist Russia, did place such reports at a discount. As early as 20 October 1939, the Times reported Germany had advised the Baltic States and Finland to settle their differences with Russia. And, as mentioned above, the press had concluded that a division of northern Europe had been agreed upon between Russia and Germany. Reluctantly, reports were published of the steps taken by Germany to strengthen Russia's hand in the north; for example, the holding up of arms shipments to Finland and warnings to Sweden and Norway to maintain their neutrality. The press,

1. Times, 14 March 1940.
2. Daily Telegraph, 15 March 1940.
3. Emphasis mine.
4. Economist, 9 December 1939.
5. Daily Telegraph, 12 January 1940.

therefore, could only conclude that Russia and Germany intended for the meanwhile to keep in step.[1] Any disadvantages in Ribbentrop's Soviet policy, claimed the Daily Telegraph on 4 December 1939, "were written off in advance by Hitler..." who had knowingly paid the Soviet price to avoid a two front war. Any hopes of an imminent rift between Russia and Germany, the Times warned, were "likely to be disappointed."[2]

It has been maintained that upon each newspaper's essential estimate of the strength and nature of the Russo-German connection, depended in the last resort their attitude to the U.S.S.R. As was seen, in spite of the Russo-Finnish war, the press agreed that while acting in concert Russia and Germany were not militarily allied. Molotov's 29 March 1940, speech to the Supreme Council of the Soviet Union reaffirming Soviet neutrality[3] was headlined with approval in the British press.

The only possible aspect that could alter the press' attitude was a change in its estimate of Russia's potential and desire[4] to economically supply Germany in quantities substantial enough to hinder the Allied blockade. The question therefore, as posed by the Economist, was this: "Would Germany's war effort be helped or hindered by a conflict between Russia and the Western Powers?" If Soviet assistance, continued the Economist, was "small and distrustful", then a Soviet-Allied war would push Stalin towards Hitler. If, however, aid were substantial and on the rise, war against Russia would, in effect, be a blow against Germany.[5] The assessment that the press derived in complete unanimity since early

1. See, for example, Manchester Guardian, 1 December 1939; Daily Telegraph, 29 November 1939, 18 January 1940.
2. Times, 5 January 1940.
3. For text, see Degras, op.cit., pp.436-449.
4. Emphasis mine.
5. Economist, 24 February 1940.

September 1939, was that the Soviet Union, with difficulties in transport and production, could for the immediate future contribute no appreciable quantities to the German war effort, sufficient to defeat the Allied blockade.[1] Furthermore, the willingness and the ability of Russia to assist Germany were, so far, not simultaneously operative. Indeed, as both the Economist and New Statesman remarked on 16 March 1940, Maisky's request that Britain convey peace offers to Helsinki, despite Russia's public hostility towards the Allies, proved Stalin did not seek total dependence upon Germany. The consensus of press opinion at the conclusion of the Russo-Finnish war was that "To jump to the conclusion," as the Economist asserted, "that - in spite of all her aggressions - Russia is really on our side is as short sighted as to go to the other extreme and assume that the Rome-Berlin-Moscow triangle has been successfully forged."[2] With this balanced assessment the British press faced another year culminating with the startling events on 22 June 1941.

1. See, for example, Daily Express, 19 September, 27 December 1939, 15 February 1940; Daily Telegraph, 7 September 1939; New Statesman, 28 October 1939; Times, 9 October 1939, 10 January 1940; Economist, 9 March 1940; Spectator, 22 September 1939, 16 February 1940.
2. Economist, 30 March 1940.

PART FOUR

CONCLUSIONS

CHAPTER EIGHT

British press attitudes towards the Soviet Union have constituted the subject of this study. Under the impact of several events, the developments in these attitudes towards Bolshevist Russia, Anglo-Russian diplomatic relations, and the position of Russia, both within appeasement diplomacy and in Britain's developing wartime policy, have been examined.

The period selected for analysis and description - September 1938 to March 1940 - has been especially valuable and instructive. It encompassed three concurrent, though distinct political events. These were firstly, the September 1938, Central European crisis and the Soviet role - or lack of role - therein; secondly, the negotiations with Soviet Russia in the Spring and Summer of 1939, and the surprising conclusion of a Nazi-Soviet pact; thirdly, the period including Soviet expansion into Poland, the Baltic States, and the Russo-Finnish war. Under the impact of each event it has been possible to elicit the various roles played by Russia, and the multifarious attitudes towards that country in the editorial thought of a select group of British newspapers. The three events constituted as well a complete structure. They exhibited the transformation of press attitudes from an initial period where suspicion and indifference (in the case of the Conservative and Isolationist press), or a projected idealism (as with the Liberal, Labour, and Independent press), finally emerged in a balanced assessment. The Soviet Union by March 1940 was accepted as pursuing a foreign policy based on the exigencies of national interest. However, it will be suggested below that the attitudes each journal held at the end of the whole period analysed, differed fundamentally though not completely from earlier opinions, beliefs,

and impressions.

Selections from the daily and weekly press have offered a cross-section of British press thought. Organs from the quality, popular, and weekly press exhibited attitudes including - Isolationist, Conservative, Liberal, Labour, and Independent. Wherever possible use has been made of the actual opinions expressed. It is hoped that this examination of the British press - perhaps the most fundamental component of public opinion - has clarified the hitherto unexplored problems of changing Britsh attitudes towards Russia in the crucial period prior to, and immediately following, the outbreak of war in 1939.

The analysis of the Central European crisis of September 1938 and the resulting press debate on the implications of the Munich conference, suggested that in the editorial columns of the Liberal, Labour, and Independent press, the Soviet Union played a larger role than in Chamberlain's foreign policy. Their attitude towards the U.S.S.R. was a combination of projected idealism and faith in the principled character of Soviet foreign policy. As a much publicized advocate of "making a stand against aggression", Russia was both admired and used as a foil by the anti-Chamberlain press. Her readiness and ability to fulfil her treaty obligations were not questioned. Due emphasis has accordingly been placed upon the 26 September 1938, Foreign Office statement to the press. This represented in essence these journals' conception of international diplomacy generally, and Anglo-Soviet relations in particular. The exclusion of the Soviet Union from the Munich conference was accordingly viewed as a major blow to Anglo-Soviet co-operation - actual and potential.

In contrast, the Conservative and Isolationist press faithfully reflected the subordinate, even non-existent, role assigned to Russia in a resolution of the difficulties in Central Europe. Supporting a negotiated settlement, and intent on the pacification of Germany these newspapers termed the Soviet role as "uncertain", and asserted that as to her intentions she remained "mute". The paucity of attention given to news coverage of Russia reflected adequately the unconcern with Anglo-Russian relations. The exclusion of Russia from the diplomacy surrounding the conference was tacitly condoned. Her participation was viewed as incompatible with Britain's aims. The alternative policy encompassing Soviet participation was termed "preventive war" and thus, to be rejected. As yet, the Conservative and Isolationist press did not have a Soviet policy. It was still thought better politics to satisfy Germany than to call in Russia to resist her.

The negotiations of 1939 were a period of intense Soviet involvement in press thought. The British Government, pursuing a policy of negotiation from strength, attempted to ensure Soviet participation in a defensive front. Its function was to be resistance against any German unilateral move to forcefully settle outstanding issues. The Opposition and Independent press campaigned intensively for an Anglo-Soviet alliance. They seemed convinced that a policy of collective security to which they believed Russia was irrevocably committed, was in the final stages of materialization. The Conservative and Isolationist press, more cognizant of the actual limits which Chamberlain had set for his Soviet negotiations, generally supported this new turn in Anglo-Soviet relations. The remarkable conversion of the Daily Telegraph and Daily Express was appropriately dilated upon. That the U.S.S.R. could be an addition to the "peace front", whatever her political stability, military strength, or economic

viability was most convincing. The phenomenal press campaign was perhaps ultimately more effective in the publicity it brought to the negotiations than in exerting decisive influence. The entire press shared the uneasiness and even disenchantment with the negotiations during June and July 1939. Fears increased and suspicions were roused that the Soviet Union was deliberately bargaining from a position of strength. The especial dilemma of the Opposition press was the awareness of the inherent complexities of a policy they had previously so glibly advocated.

The Nazi-Soviet pact on 23 August 1939 confused the entire press. It was a crucial stage in the development of attitudes towards the U.S.S.R. The Conservative and Isolationist press recoiled sharply from their prior warm endorsement of Soviet involvement with the "democracies". This new turn in Stalin's policy was interpreted as justifying prior suspicions of Soviet intentions. Furthermore, due attention was also paid to these newspapers' confusion on Hitler's abandoning his role as the protector of Western civilization against Bolshevism. The dilemma of the Liberal, Labour, and Independent press was obviously the more acute. The confusion of ideologies wrought by a Nazi-Communist pact, the destruction of all prior conceptions as to the supposed principled nature of Soviet foreign policy, and their acute disillusionment, demanded a re-evaluation of attitude.

This re-thinking proceeded under the impact of Stalin's wartime diplomacy. Its characteristics - national interest, opportunism, and expansion - forced upon the press an adjustment of attitudes. The change in the Conservative press was derived from the pressures of war-time conditions. These were firstly, the fluid nature of Nazi-Soviet relations; and secondly, the Foreign Office insistence, up to the Russo-Finnish war, of maintaining equable relations with Stalin. These

exigencies forced upon the Conservative press the acceptance of the potentially decisive influence of Russia upon the course of the war, and the recognition of her presence in Eastern Europe.

The Liberal, Labour and Independent press followed Soviet affairs with something less than their pre-war idealism. The Soviet Union was now recognised as pursuing a foreign policy based exclusively upon national interest. Stalin's "imperialism" and opportunism, were phenomena that, while recognised, did not bring reconciliation. The Russo-Finnish war, in spite of the violent emotions roused, and the strain imposed on Anglo-Russian relations, did not appreciably alter already transformed attitudes.

It was stated at the outset of these conclusions that the changes in press attitudes during the period analysed were not total or complete. Traces of former opinions and views understandably remained. In the Conservative press particularly, the latent suspicion was that Russia was intent on more than merely rounding out its historic Tsarist borders. It was feared that Russia was ultimately desirous of emerging as the tertius gaudens. She could then reap the benefits of further Bolshevist expansion unhindered by a prostrate Germany and an exhausted Western coalition. In the Opposition and Independent press, the suggested, but rarely expressed view, was that Stalin's German agreement was a temporarily expedient policy. At some point, the U.S.S.R. would again emerge as the deus ex machina - when the "power politics" of Molotov would give way to the principled Litvinov system.

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