

THE GERMAN-SOVIET NON-AGGRESSION PACT OF 1939

(This paper was presented by Bill Bland at a seminar organised by the Stalin Society in London in February 1990.)

Introduction

One of the many stories which circulate about Stalin is that, while the Soviet government was negotiating for a collective security pact with Britain and France directed against German aggressive expansion, he initiated the signing of a pact with Germany which precipitated the Second World War.

Of course, not everything that happened in the Soviet Union at this time was done with the approval of Stalin. In the case of the Soviet-German Non-Aggression Pact of 1939, however, we have the testimony of Stalin's closest collaborator, Vyacheslav Molotov, that:

"Comrade Stalin . . . suggested the possibility of different, unhostile and good neighbourly relations between Germany and the USSR. . . .

The conclusion of the Soviet-German non-aggression pact . . . shows that Comrade Stalin's historical foresight has been brilliantly confirmed".

(V. M. Molotov: Speech at 4th (Special) Session of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR, 31 August 1939, in: 'Soviet Peace Policy'; London; 1941; p. 16).

The charge that this was a serious mistake on Stalin's part must, therefore, be examined seriously.

The Reorientation of Soviet Foreign Policy

In his notorious book 'My Struggle', written in mid-1920s, the Nazi leader Adolf Hitler expressed frankly the foreign policy the Nazis intended to follow:

"We National Socialists consciously draw a line beneath the foreign policy tendency of our pre-War period. . . . We stop the endless German movement to the south and west and turn our gaze towards the land in the East. .

If we speak of soil in Europe today, we can primarily have in mind only Russia".

(A. Hitler: 'Mein Kampf'; London; 1984; p. 598, 604).

Thus, the coming to power of the Nazi government in Germany in January 1933 heralded a situation in Europe which clearly presented great danger to the Soviet Union -- and not, of course, to the Soviet Union alone.

The Marxist-Leninists in the leadership of the Soviet Union, concerned to defend the socialist state, responded to this new, more dangerous situation by reorientating Soviet foreign policy, by adopting a policy of striving for collective security with other states which had, objectively, an interest in maintaining the status quo in the international situation.

The Objective Basis of Collective Security

The objective basis of the Soviet policy of collective security was that the imperialist Powers of the world could be divided into two groups.

One group -- Germany, Italy and Japan had a relatively high productive power and relatively restricted markets and spheres of influence. As a result, these Powers had an urgent need to change the world to their advantage; they were relatively aggressive Powers.

Another group of imperialist Powers -- Britain, France and the United States -- had relatively large markets and spheres of influence and thus had objectively more need to keep the world as it was than to see it changed; they were relatively non-aggressive Powers.

Stalin, who argued that the Second World War had already begun, summed up this position to the 18th Congress of the CPSU in March 1939:

"The war is being waged by aggressor states, who in every way infringe upon the interests of the non-aggressor states, primarily, England, France and the USA. .

Thus we are witnessing an open re-division of the world and spheres of influence at the expense of the non-aggressive states."

(J. V. Stalin: op. cit.; p. 14).

As a socialist state, a working people's state, the Soviet Union had the strongest interest of any state in the preservation of peace.

The Soviet government's policy in the 1930s, therefore, was to strive to form a collective security alliance with the European non-aggressive imperialist states, Britain and France -- a collective security alliance strong enough either to deter the aggressive imperialist states from launching war or to secure their speedy defeat.

The Soviet Government summed up this post-1933 foreign policy in 1948:

"Throughout the whole pre-war period, the Soviet delegation upheld the principle of collective security in the League of Nations".

('Falsifiers of History: Historical Information'; London; 1948; p 15).

Appeasement

Although, as we have seen, Stalin maintained that the British and French imperialists had, objectively, an interest in joining the Soviet Union in such a collective security alliance, the governments of Britain and France, led respectively by Neville Chamberlain and Edouard Daladier, did not recognise this objective fact because of their detestation of socialism and the Soviet Union and their wish to see it destroyed.

As Stalin told the 18th Congress of the CPSU in March 1939:

"England, France and the USA . . . draw back and retreat, making concession after concession to the aggressors.

Thus we are now witnessing an open redivision of the world and spheres of influence at the expense of the non-aggressive states, without the least attempt at resistance, and even with a certain amount of connivance. .

How is it that the non-aggressive countries . . . have so easily, and without any resistance, abandoned their positions and their obligations to please the aggressors?

Is it to be attributed to the weakness of the non-aggressive states? Of course not! Combined, the non-aggressive, democratic states are unquestionably stronger than the fascist states, both economically and militarily. . .

The chief reason is that the majority of the non-aggressive countries, particularly England and France, have rejected a policy of collective security, of collective resistance to the aggressors, and have taken up a position of 'non-intervention'.....

The policy of non-intervention reveals an eagerness, a desire, not to hinder Germany, say, . . . from embroiling herself in a war with the Soviet Union. . .

One might think that the districts of Czechoslovakia were yielded to Germany as the price of an undertaking to launch war on the Soviet Union".

(J. V. Stalin: op. cit.; p. 14-15, 16).

British Foreign Secretary Lord Halifax is on record as telling Hitler in November 1937 that

"He and other members of the British Government were well aware that the Fuehrer had attained a great deal. . . . Having destroyed Communism in his country, he had barred the road of the latter to Western Europe and Germany was therefore entitled to be regarded as a bulwark of the West against Bolshevism. . .

When the ground has been prepared for an Anglo-German rapprochement, the four great West European Powers must jointly set up the foundation of lasting peace in Europe".

('Documents on German Foreign Policy: 1918-1945', Series D, Volume 1; London; 1954; p. 55).

Nevertheless, the Soviet Marxist-Leninists understood that this policy of 'appeasement' ran, objectively, counter to the interests of the British and French imperialists and counter to the interests of the British working people They therefore calculated that, if the Soviet government persisted in its efforts to form a collective security alliance with Britain and France, sooner or later the appeasers in Britain, which dominated France, would be forced out of office by the more far-seeing representatives of British imperialism (such as Winston Churchill and Anthony Eden) in cooperation with the British working people.

(This, of course, actually occurred in 1940, but only after war had broken out in Europe).

The Anglo-French-Soviet Negotiations

On 31 March 1939, without consulting the Soviet Union, the British government gave a unilateral guarantee to defend Poland against aggression.

The leader of the liberal Party, David Lloyd George, told the House of Commons:

"I cannot understand why, before committing ourselves to this tremendous enterprise, we did not secure beforehand the adhesion of Russia. . . . If Russia has not been brought into this matter because of certain feelings that Poles have that they do not want the Russians there, . . . unless the Poles are prepared to accept the one condition with which we can help them, the responsibility must be theirs".

(Parliamentary Debates. 5th Series, House of Commons, Volume 35; London; 1939; Col. 2, 510).

The Anglo-French guarantee stimulated public pressure on the appeaser governments to at least make gestures in the direction of collective security.

So, on 15 April 1939 the British government made an approach to the Soviet government suggesting that it might like to issue a public declaration offering military assistance to any state bordering the Soviet Union which was subject to aggression if that state desired it.

Two days later, on 17 April the Soviet government replied that it would not consider a unilateral guarantee, which would put the Soviet Union in a position of inequality with the other Powers concerned. It proposed:

Firstly, a trilateral mutual assistance treaty by Britain, France and the Soviet Union against aggression;

Secondly, the extension of guarantees to the Baltic States (Estonia, Finland, Latvia and Lithuania), on the grounds that failure to guarantee these states was an open invitation to Germany to expand eastwards through invasion of these states;

Thirdly, that the treaty must not be vague, but must detail the extent and forms of the military assistance to be rendered by the signatory Powers.

On 27 May the British and French governments replied to the Soviet proposals with the draft of a proposed tripartite pact. The British Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain commented on the British draft in a letter to his sister at this time:

"In substance it gives the Russians what they want, but in form and presentation it avoids the idea of an alliance and substitutes declaration of intention. It is really a most ingenious idea".

(Neville Chamberlain Archives, University of Birmingham, 11/1/1101).

Vyacheslav Molotov, who had just taken over the post of People's Commissar for Foreign Affairs from Maksim Litvinov, rejected the draft on the grounds that it proposed in the event of hostilities not immediate mutual assistance, but merely consultation through the League of Nations.

On 2 June the Soviet government submitted to Britain and France a counter-draft making these joints.

The British and French governments responded by saying that Finland, Estonia and Latvia refused to be guaranteed.

The Soviet government continued to insist that a military convention be signed at the same time as the political treaty, in order that there might be no possibility of any hedging about the application of the latter. On 17 July Molotov stated that there was no point in continuing discussions on the political treaty until the military convention had been concluded.

On 23 July the British and French governments finally agreed to begin military discussions before the political treaty of alliance had been finalised, and a British naval officer with the quadruple-barreled name of Admiral Reginald Plunkett-Ernie-Erle-Drax was appointed to head the British delegation. No one, apparently, had informed the British government that the aeroplane had been invented, and the delegation left Tilbury by a slow boat to Leningrad, from where they proceeded by train to Moscow. When the delegation finally arrived in Moscow on 11 August, the Soviet side discovered that it had no powers to negotiate, only to 'hold talks'. Furthermore, the British delegation was officially instructed to:

"Go very slowly with the conversations";

('Documents on British Foreign Policy;', 3rd Series, Volume 6; London; 1953; Appendix 5; p. 763).

Nevertheless, the military talks began in Moscow on 12 August.

On 15 August the leader of the Soviet delegation, People's Commissar for Defence, Marshal Kliment Voroshilov, told the delegates that unless Soviet troops were permitted to enter Polish territory it was physically impossible for the Soviet Union to assist Poland and it would be useless to continue discussions.

This point was never resolved before the Anglo-French-Soviet negotiations where negotiations were adjourned indefinitely on 21 August -- after the Soviet government had decided to sign the non-aggression pact with Germany.

Warning Shots from Moscow

At the risk of sounding chauvinistic, I think it is fair to say 'that no diplomats are more expert in hypocritical double-dealing than British diplomats.

Nevertheless, the Soviet leaders were no fools and, as the negotiations for an Anglo-French-Soviet mutual security pact dragged on month after month, a number of warning shots were fired from Moscow.

On 11 March 1939 Joseph Davies, the former US Ambassador in Moscow, now posted to Brussels, wrote in his diary about Stalin's speech to the 18th Congress of the CPSU a few days before:

"It is a most significant statement. It bears the earmarks of a definite warning to the British and French governments that the Soviets are getting tired of 'non-realistic' opposition to the aggressors. . .

It certainly is the most significant danger signal that I have yet seen".

(J. E. Davies: 'Mission to Moscow'; London; 1942; p. 279-80).

Then, on 3 May 1939 the resignation was announced of Maksim Litvinov as Soviet People's Commissar for Foreign Affairs, and his replacement by a close colleague of Stalin, Vyacheslav Molotov. Although the Soviet government denied that this signified any change in Soviet foreign policy, it was significant that Litvinov's name was particularly associated with collective security and he was known to be personally sympathetic to the West.

On 29 June the leading Soviet Marxist-Leninist Andrei Zhdanov published an article in 'Pravda' which, most unusually, revealed that there were differences in the leadership of the CPSU on whether the British and French governments were sincere in saying that they wished for a genuine treaty of mutual assistance:

"The Anglo-French-Soviet negotiations on the conclusion of an effective pact of mutual assistance against aggression have reached a deadlock. . . .

I permit myself to express my personal opinion in this matter, although my friends do not share it. They still think that when beginning the negotiations with the USSR, the English and French Governments had serious intentions of creating a powerful barrier against

aggression in Europe. I believe, and shall try to prove it by facts, that the English and French Governments have no wish for a treaty . . . to which a self-respecting State can agree. .

The Soviet Government took 16 days in preparing answers to the various English projects and proposals, while the remaining 59 days have been consumed by delays and procrastinations on the part of the English and French. .

Not long ago . . . the Polish Minister of Foreign Affairs, Beck, declared unequivocally that Poland neither demanded nor requested from the USSR anything in the sense of granting her any guarantee whatever.....However, this does not prevent England and France from demanding from the USSR guarantees . . . for Poland. . .

It seems to me that the English and French desire not a real treaty acceptable to the USSR, but only talks about a treaty in order to speculate before the public opinion in their countries on the allegedly unyielding attitude of the USSR, and thus make easier for themselves the road to a deal with the aggressors.

The next few days must show whether this is so or not."

(A. Zhdanov: Article in 'Pravda', 29 June 1939, in: J. Degras (Ed.): 'Soviet Documents on Foreign Policy'; London; 1953; p. 352, 353, 354).

A final warning shot was fired on 22 July, when it was officially announced that Soviet-German trade negotiations were taking place in Berlin.

The Soviet-German Negotiations

At the 18th Congress of the CPSU in March 1939, Stalin described the basis of Soviet foreign policy as follows:

"We stand for peace and the strengthening of business relations with all countries. That is our position, and we shall adhere to this position as long as countries maintain like relations with the Soviet Union and as long as they make no attempt to trespass on the interests of our country".

(J. V. Stalin: Report on the Work of the Central Committee to the 18th Congress of the CPSU (b). in : 'The Land of Socialism Today and Tomorrow'; Moscow; 1939; p. 18).

On 17 April 1939, the Soviet Ambassador in Berlin, Aleksei Merekalov, had a conversation with the German State Secretary, Baron Ernst von Weizsaecker, who asked him whether there was any prospect of the normalisation of relations between Germany and the Soviet Union. The Ambassador's reply was in line with Soviet foreign policy:

"There exists for Russia no reason why she should not live with us on a normal footing. And from normal, the relations might become better and better".

('Nazi-Soviet Relations: 1939-1941', Doc. 1; Washington; 1948; p. 2).

On 29 July the German Foreign Office instructed the German Ambassador in the Soviet Union, Count Fritz von der Schulenburg, to tell Molotov:

"We would be prepared . . . to safeguard all Soviet interests and to come to an understanding with the Government in Moscow. . . . The idea could be advanced of so adjusting our attitude to the Baltic States as to respect vital Soviet interests in the Baltic Sea".

('Documents on German Foreign Policy: 1918-1945', Series D, Volume 6; London; 1956; p. 1,016).

On 14 August the German Minister of Foreign Affairs, Joachim von Ribbentrop, cabled Schulenburg, instructing him to call on the Soviet People's Commissar for Foreign Affairs, Vyacheslav Molotov, and read him a communication:

"There is no question between the Baltic Sea and the Black Sea which cannot be settled to the complete satisfaction of both countries. . . . The leadership of both countries, therefore, should . . . take action. . . .

As we have been informed, the Soviet Government also feel the desire for a clarification of German-Russian relations. . . . I am prepared to make a short visit to Moscow in order, in the name of the Fuehrer, to set forth the Fuehrer 's views to M. Stalin. In my view, only through such a direct discussion can a change be brought about, and it should not be impossible thereby to lay the foundations for a final settlement of German-Russian relations."

('Documents on German Foreign Policy: 1918-1945', Series D, Volume 7; London; 1956; p. 63).

Schulenburg saw Molotov on 16 August and, as instructed, read to him Ribbentrop's message. He reported to Berlin the same night that Molotov had heard

"With great interest the information I had been instructed to convey. . . . He was interested in the question of how the German Government were disposed towards the idea of concluding a non-aggression pact with the Soviet Union".

('Documents on German Foreign Policy . . .'; op. cit., Volume 7; p. 77).

Ribbentrop replied the same day, directing Schulenburg to see Molotov again and inform him that:

"Germany is prepared to conclude a non-aggression pact with the Soviet Union. . . . Further, Germany is ready to guarantee the Baltic States jointly with the Soviet Union. . . .

I am prepared to come by aeroplane to Moscow at any time after Friday, August 18, to deal, on the basis of full powers from the Fuehrer, with the entire complex of German-Russian relations and, if the occasion arises, to sign the appropriate treaties".

('Documents on German Foreign Policy . . .'; op. cit. Volume 7; p. 84).

On 17 August Molotov handed Schulenburg the Soviet government's written reply. The Note began by recalling Germany's policy of hostility to the Soviet Union in the past and welcoming the prospect of an improvement in German-Soviet relations. It proposed a number of steps in this direction, beginning with a trade agreement and proceeding 'shortly thereafter' to the conclusion of a non-aggression pact.

On 18 August Ribbentrop sent a further urgent telegram to Schulenburg saying that the 'first stage' in the diplomatic process (the signing of the trade agreement) had been completed, and asking that Ribbentrop be permitted to make an 'immediate departure for Moscow', where he would:

"... be in a position . . . to take the Russian wishes into account, for instance, the settlement of spheres of interest in the Baltic area".

('Documents on German Foreign Policy . . . ' ; op. cit., Volume 7; p. 123).

On 19 August Schulenburg replied that Molotov had agreed that:

"The Reich Foreign Minister could arrive in Moscow on August 26 or 27. Molotov handed me the draft of a non-aggression pact".

('Documents on German Foreign Policy . . . ', op. cit., Volume 7; p. 134).

On 20 August Hitler himself intervened with a personal letter to Stalin, saying that he accepted the draft of the non-aggression pact but pleaded that Ribbentrop should be received in Moscow

"At the latest on Wednesday, August 27th."

('Documents on German Foreign Policy . . . ', op. cit., Volume 7; p. 157).

Stalin replied to Hitler on 21 August, thanking him for his letter and saying:

"The assent of the German Government to the conclusion of a non-aggression pact provides the foundation for eliminating the political tension and the establishment of peace and collaboration between our countries.

The Soviet government have instructed me to inform you that they agree to Herr von Ribbentrop's arriving in Moscow on August 23".

('Documents on German Foreign Policy . . . ', op. cit.; p. 168).

Ribbentrop and his delegation arrived in Moscow on 23 August, and the non-aggression pact was signed later the same day. Its text was almost identical with the Soviet draft which had been submitted to the Germans on 19 August. Neither party would attack the other and should one party become the object of belligerent action by a third Power, the other party would render no support to this third Power.

Even more strongly criticised than the pact itself has been a 'Secret Additional Protocol' to the pact which laid down German and Soviet 'spheres of interest' in Europe.

But the term 'sphere of interest' does not necessarily have implications of imperialist domination. Where two states are likely to be affected by war but wish this not to involve them in mutual conflict, then the demarcation of spheres of interest is a legitimate and desirable act.

The 'secret additional protocol' declared:

"1. In the event of a territorial and political transformation in the territories belonging to the Baltic States (Finland, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania) the northern frontier of Lithuania shall represent the frontier of the spheres of interest both of Germany and the USSR. . .

2. In the event of a territorial and political transformation of the territories belonging to the Polish State, the spheres of interest both of Germany and the USSR shall be bounded approximately by the line of the rivers Narew, Vistula and San".

('Documents on German Foreign Policy . . . ', Series D, Volume 7; p. 246-47).

In ordinary language, this meant that the German government promised that, when German troops invaded Poland, they would not attempt to advance beyond the 'Curzon Line', drawn by the British Foreign Secretary Lord Curzon, after the First World War as the ethnic boundary separating the

Poles from the Ukrainians and Byelorussians. The area east of this line had been Soviet territory which was seized from the Soviet Union following the Revolution.

Germany had thus agreed that it would raise no objection to the Soviet government taking whatever action it considered desirable east of this line.

The Effect of the Non-Aggression Pact

Speaking to the Supreme Soviet of the Soviet Union on 31 August, Molotov described the Soviet-German Non-Aggression Pact as:

"A turning-point in the history of Europe, and not of Europe alone".

(V. M. Molotov: Speech to Supreme Soviet of 31 August 1939, in: 'Soviet Peace Policy'; London; 1941; p. 18).

Molotov accepted Zhdanov's conclusion -- that the British and French had never been serious in their attitude to the negotiations:

"They themselves displayed extreme dilatoriness and anything but a serious attitude towards the negotiations, entrusting them to individuals of secondary importance who were not vested with adequate powers. . .

The British and French military missions came to Moscow without any definite powers and without the right to conclude any military convention. Furthermore, the British military mission arrived in Moscow without any mandate at all".

(V. M. Molotov: *ibid.*; p. 13).

Molotov declared that the breakdown of the Anglo-French-Soviet negotiations was only superficially the refusal of Poland or accept Soviet assistance, since:

"The negotiations showed that Great Britain was not anxious to overcome these objections of Poland, but on the contrary encouraged them.

Poland . . . had been acting on the instructions of Great Britain and France. ."

(V. M. Molotov: *ibid.*; p. 12, 14).

He stressed that it was not the Soviet government's action in signing the pact which had disrupted the Anglo-French-Soviet negotiations. On the contrary, the Soviet government had signed the pact only after the Anglo-French-Soviet negotiations had been irrevocably sabotaged by the British and French governments:

"Attempts are being made to spread the fiction that the conclusion of the Soviet-German pact disrupted the negotiations with Britain and France for a mutual assistance pact. . . . In reality, as you know, the very reverse is true. . . . The Soviet Union signed the non-aggression pact with Germany, amongst other things, because negotiations with France and Great Britain had . . . ended in failure through the fault of the ruling circles of Britain and France".

(V. M. Molotov: *ibid.*; p. 20).

The same point was made by the Soviet People's Commissar for Defence, Marshal Kliment

Voroshilov, at a press conference on 27 August 1939:

"Military negotiations with England and France were not broken off because the USSR concluded a non-aggression pact with Germany; on the contrary, the USSR concluded a non-aggression pact with Germany as a result, inter alia, of the fact that the military negotiations with France and England had reached a deadlock".

(K. Y. Voroshilov: Press statement of 27 August 1939, in: J. Degras (Ed.): 'Soviet Documents on Foreign Policy'; London; 1953; p. 361).

Furthermore, Molotov emphasised that the Soviet negotiations with Germany were on a completely different level to the Soviet negotiations with Britain and France:

"We are dealing not with a pact of mutual assistance, as in the case of the Anglo-French-Soviet relations, but only with a non-aggression Pact."

(V. M. Molotov: *ibid.*; p. 18).

So that, as a result of the signing of the German-Soviet pact:

"The USSR is not obliged to involve itself in war, either on the side of Great Britain against Germany or on the side of Germany against Great Britain."

(V. M. Molotov: *ibid.*; p. 21).

Even such anti-Soviet writers as Edward Carr agree that the Soviet government's decision to sign the non-aggression pact with Germany was an enforced second choice, which was taken only with extreme reluctance:

"The most striking feature of the Soviet-German negotiations . . . is the extreme caution with which they were conducted from the Soviet side, and the prolonged Soviet resistance to close the doors on the Western negotiations".

(E. H. Carr: 'From Munich to Moscow: II', in: 'Soviet Studies', Volume 1, No. 12 (October 1949); p. 104).

Indeed, some Soviet leaders -- notably Maksim Litvinov, the former People's Commissar for Foreign Affairs -- urged that more time should be given for the British and French governments to be pressed by public opinion in their countries into serious negotiations for a pact of mutual assistance.

What precipitated the acceptance of the pressing German proposals for a rapprochement was the discovery by Soviet intelligence that the Chamberlain government was secretly negotiating for a military alliance with Germany, so threatening the Soviet Union with aggression from four Powers - - Britain, France, Germany and Italy -- combined. The British Ambassador in Berlin, Sir Nevile Henderson, describes in an official report to Foreign Secretary Lord Halifax, dated 29 August 1939, a conversation with Hitler and Ribbentrop:

"Herr von Ribbentrop asked me whether I could guarantee that the Prime Minister could carry the country with him in a policy of friendship with Germany. I said that there was no possible doubt whatever that he could and would, provided Germany cooperated with him. Herr Hitler asked whether England would be willing to accept an alliance with Germany. I said, speaking personally, I did not exclude such a possibility".

('Documents concerning German-Polish Relations and the Outbreak of Hostilities between Great Britain and Germany on September 3, 1939'; (Cmd. 6106); London; 1939; p. 130).

The fact that both German and Soviet troops entered Poland has been used to equate Fascist Germany with the socialist Soviet Union. But, of course, a socialist state cannot be equated with an aggressive imperialist state. It has to be noted,

Firstly, that Soviet troops entered what had been Polish territory only on 17 September -- 16 days after the German invasion of Poland - when the Polish state had collapsed, as Molotov stressed to the Supreme Soviet on 31 October 1939:

"Our troops entered the territory of Poland only after the Polish State had collapsed and actually had ceased to exist. . . . The Soviet government could not but reckon with the exceptional situation created for our brothers in the Western Ukraine and Western Byelorussia, who had been abandoned to their fate as a result of the collapse of Poland".

(V. M. Molotov: Speech to the Supreme Soviet of the USSR, 31 October 1939, in: 'Soviet Foreign Policy'; London; 1941; p. 32).

And the correspondents of the capitalist press agree with Soviet contemporary Soviet sources that the Red Army was welcomed as liberators by the Ukrainian and Byelorussian population concerned. Molotov reported:

"The Red Army . . . was greeted with sympathy by the Ukrainian and Byelorussian population, who welcomed our troops as liberators from the yoke of the gentry and from the yoke of the Polish landlords and capitalists."

(V. M. Molotov: *ibid.*; p. 33).

In the House of Commons on 20 September, Conservative MP Robert Boothby declared:

"I think it is legitimate to suppose that this action on the part of the Soviet Government was taken . . . from the point of view of self-preservation and self-defence. . . . The action taken by the Russian troops . . . has pushed the German frontier considerably westward. .

I am thankful that Russian troops are now along the Polish-Romanian frontier. I would rather have Russian troops there than German troops".

(Parliamentary Debates, 5th Series, Volume 351; House of Commons; London; 1939; Col. 996).

It is outside the scope of today's seminar to discuss one of the most absurd of the anti-Stalin stories - that Stalin trusted the Nazis to adhere to the pact and was completely taken by surprise when the German army invaded the Soviet Union in 1941.

Who can forget Stalin's prophetic words in 1931:

"We are fifty or a hundred years behind the advanced countries. We must make good this distance in ten years. Either we do it, or we shall go under".

(J. V. Stalin: 'The Tasks of Business Executives', in: 'Works', Volume 13; Moscow; 1955; p. 41).

Exactly ten years later, in 1941, came the German invasion.

The test of the correctness or incorrectness of Stalin's policy is whether or not it strengthened or weakened the ability of the socialist Soviet Union to defend itself against the future aggression which its leaders knew was inevitable.

Even such virulent anti-Soviet writers as Edward Carr admit that the signing of the German-Soviet non-aggression pact enabled the Soviet Union to put itself in an incomparably stronger defensive position to meet the German invasion:

"The Chamberlain government . . . as a defender of capitalism, refused . . . to enter into an alliance with the USSR against Germany. . . .

In the pact of August 23rd, 1939, they (the Soviet government -- Ed.) secured:

- a) a breathing space of immunity from attack;
- b) German assistance in mitigating Japanese pressure in the Far East;
- c) German agreement to the establishment of an advanced defensive bastion beyond the existing Soviet frontiers in Eastern Europe; it was significant that this bastion was, and could only be, a line of defence against potential German attack, the eventual prospect of which was never far absent from Soviet reckoning. But what most of all was achieved by the pact was the assurance that, if the USSR had eventually to fight Hitler, the Western Powers would already be involved".

(E. H. Carr: 'From Munich to Moscow: II', in: 'Soviet Studies', Volume 1, No. 2 (October 1949); p. 103).

Questions put by the audience to the speaker and his replies

Question 1:

It has been suggested that Litvinov was removed from his post simply because he was a Jew, and as such would have been regarded as unsuitable as a negotiator by the Germans. Is there any truth in this?

Reply:

In my opinion, no. We know that Stalin supported the replacement of Litvinov and Stalin was known to have been opposed not only to racism but to any concession to racism. Litvinov had, personally, been strongly associated with the policy of collective security and reliable sources testify to his conviction that, with more time, the British and French governments would sooner or later endorse this policy. As soon as the Soviet leaders began to give consideration to the possibility of a rapprochement with Germany, therefore, Litvinov ceased to be a reliable instrument of Soviet foreign policy.

Question 2:

Did Litvinov actually oppose the signing of the non-aggression pact?

Reply:

I have no concrete information as to whether he opposed it on principle, but he is known to have held the view that more time should be given to allow the Anglo-French representatives 'to see sense'. But he is on record later as declaring that it had been 'a mistake' resulting from Molotov's 'lack of understanding of the functioning of Western democracy'.

Question 3:

In one of Molotov's speeches following the occupation of Eastern Poland, he referred to the Polish state as being the illegitimate child of Versailles and commented that, happily, it had disappeared. This has been interpreted as demonstrating that the Soviet Union always had territorial designs upon Poland. Was the Soviet position one of supporting the destruction of the Polish state?

Question 3a.

Does this mean that the Soviet Union was prepared to deny the aspirations of the Polish people to have their own state?

Reply:

There is no doubt that the Polish people constitute a nation, and Marxist-Leninists have always recognised the right of any nation to have its own independent state. The Polish state which existed in 1939, however, did not have its boundaries drawn on ethnic lines; it included, for example, millions of Ukrainians and Byelorussians and I feel sure that it was such facts which lay at the basis of Molotov's statement. In other words, it was not any Polish state but that existing in 1939 which Molotov depicted as a monstrosity. However, that Polish state was not destroyed by the Red Army, but by the German army; the Red Army's occupation of Western Ukraine and Western Byelorussia began only after the Polish state had collapsed and ceased to exist. The Polish state was restored after the United Nations victory over Germany in 1945.

Question 4:

Was a protocol signed as part of the non-aggression pact which led to a line being drawn across Poland dividing the spheres of interest of the Soviet Union and Nazi Germany? Is this the secret protocol referred to in the West and did such a protocol really exist? Was the dividing line the Curzon Line?

Reply:

The Anglo-American imperialists published the 'secret protocol' after the Second World War, claiming that it had been discovered in the captured archives of the German Foreign Office. I know that the late Soviet President, Andrei Gromyko, denounces the 'secret additional protocol' as a forgery in his memoirs, but he was a notorious revisionist and not a source I would place any reliance on. As far as I recall, the Soviet government of the time neither confirmed nor denied its authenticity. However, in the Soviet Information Bureau published in 1948, *Falsifiers of History*, no charge is made that the document is spurious, and this official pamphlet states:

"The Soviet Union succeeded in making good use of the Soviet-German Pact to strengthen its defences, . . . in moving its frontiers far to the West and in barring the way of the unhampered eastward advance of German Aggression".

('Falsifiers of History'; op. cit.; p. 45).

It would seem that this cannot possibly refer to the treaty itself (which makes no mention of spheres of interest or frontiers), but only to the 'secret additional protocol'. As I said before, I do not accept the view that 'spheres of interest' between states are necessarily a phenomenon to be condemned. A socialist state may have its own spheres of interest which it sees as essential to its defence and, where these may conflict with the spheres of interest of other states, it seems to me correct to try to reach agreement with these other states, to map them out in order to maintain peaceful relations

with these other states. On the evidence available to me at present, I believe the published 'secret protocol' to be genuine.

Yes, the dividing line ran along the old Curzon Line.