

THE FRENCH POPULAR FRONT  
AND  
THE FRANCO-SOVIET PACT  
1935 - 1938

by

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ABSTRACT

The Franco-Soviet Pact of mutual assistance, signed by the Flandin-Laval government in May 1935, was never complemented by the conclusion of a military accord, as the Russians hoped. This study comprises an analysis of the value of the Pact in these circumstances, and an examination of why and how the French Popular Front Government allowed the Pact with the USSR to deteriorate beyond repair. Thus the numerous adverse pressures on the Government are evaluated: fear of alienating France's allies, particularly Great Britain, as well as the desire not to antagonise Germany further; and fear of domestic opposition, both in parliament and from the military leaders.

This study suggests that the single most important factor linking these considerations was dislike of communism; the attitudes of France's allies towards the Soviet Pact were predominantly coloured by fear of bolshevism; the conservative tendencies of the General Staff clouded its judgement of Soviet military usefulness; the Popular Front Government itself was primarily concerned with the activities of the French Communist Party; while, ironically, its own association with the communists made any Popular Front attempt to extend the Pact subject to vociferous domestic opposition. In effect, the Franco-Soviet Pact was unlikely ever to be reinforced as long as fear of communism remained stronger than fear of German fascism.

Thus it may be said that the failure to consolidate the Pact represents the broader French unwillingness to recognise the true nature of Hitlerism, and so to defy British reticence and take an effective lead in the struggle against fascism. In this way, an analysis of Popular

CONTENTS

Front policy towards the Soviet Pact can be seen as an integral part of an understanding of the whole of French foreign policy during the later 1930's.

	Introduction: the nature and legitimacy of the Franco-Soviet Pact.	5
1.	Manufacturing difficulties towards the Soviet Pact within the First Popular Front government.	20
2.	Evolution and Franco-Soviet relations.	35
3.	The Popular Front and Hitler's Germany.	75
4.	The decline of French influence in Central and Eastern Europe.	94
5.	The Franco-Soviet Pact and France's western European allies.	110
6.	The French General Staff and the Franco-Soviet Pact.	136
7.	Franco-Soviet contacts, 1935-6.	176
8.	The strategic value of Soviet aid.	197
9.	Chamberlain and the Franco-Soviet Pact.	222
10.	The Pact as a means of preventing Soviet-German rapprochement.	241
11.	Continuation: The French Popular Front and the Franco-Soviet Pact.	
	Bibliography.	247
	Appendix.	269
	Appendix A.	269
	Appendix B.	285
	Appendix C.	300
	Appendix D.	302

CONTENTS

<u>Chapter</u>		<u>Page No.</u>
1.	Introduction: the nature and legality of the Franco-Soviet Pact.	5
2.	Conflicting attitudes towards the Soviet Pact within the First Popular Front government.	20
3.	Communism and Franco-Soviet relations.	35
4.	The Popular Front and Hitler's Germany.	75
5.	The decline of French influence in Central and Eastern Europe.	89
6.	The Franco-Soviet Pact and France's Western European allies.	110
7.	The French General Staff and the Franco-Soviet Pact.	136
8.	Franco-Soviet contacts, 1935-8.	176
9.	The strategic value of Soviet aid.	199
10.	Czechoslovakia and the Franco-Soviet Pact.	222
11.	The Pact as a means of preventing Soviet-German rapprochement.	249
12.	Conclusion: The French Popular Front and the Franco-Soviet Pact.	271
	Bibliography	287
	Appendix I	300
	Appendix II	304
	Appendix III	305
	Appendix IV	306
	Acknowledgements	308

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION : THE NATURE AND LEGALITY OF THE FRANCO-SOVIET PACT

Paul Reynaud describes the Franco-Soviet Pact in his memoirs as "l'instrument diplomatique le plus confus et le plus inefficace que la diplomatie française ait jamais mis au monde" (1). Pierre-Etienne Flandin, the French Premier when the Pact was signed, disputes this interpretation, insisting that the Pact was even clearer and more precise in its obligations than the French undertaking to Poland and Czechoslovakia signed in October 1925 (2). In fact the two are describing entirely different facets of the Pact. It was precise in its scrupulous wording, designed to ensure that it did not counter France's obligations under either Locarno or the League of Nations Covenant, and as such it was entirely legal. Where the Pact was confused, as Reynaud claimed, was that while under article 2 it was stipulated that in the event of either party being the victim of an unprovoked aggression by a European state then "l'URSS et réciproquement la France se prêteront immédiatement aide et assistance", there was nowhere any definition of what form the envisaged mutual aid and assistance should take. It was this point which was in fact the most crucial, since it dealt with the actual nature and value of the Pact, but it was the first, that is the question of its technical legality, which initially caused the most controversy.

In spite of the rapprochement which had produced a non-aggression pact in 1932, the Franco-Soviet Pact was not initially conceived as a bilateral agreement : Louis Barthou, who was responsible for much of the groundwork for the Pact, had originally envisaged it as an integral

part of an 'Eastern Locarno', a non-aggression treaty of consultation and mutual assistance between those Eastern European states actually interested in such an agreement for regional reasons, which was to be guaranteed by a complementary pact between France, Russia and if possible, Germany (3). Only once German and Polish opposition to such a scheme became apparent did the idea of a purely bilateral Franco-Soviet agreement emerge, 'comme dernière ressource' (4), though the hope that such an arrangement could still become part of an Eastern Pact persisted in French governing circles. This French reluctance to conclude any agreement which might resemble a formal alliance meant in practice that negotiations with the Russians were extremely complex, often foundering on the French insistence that a direct reference be included that the Pact must not operate contrary to the provisions of Locarno or the League of Nations Covenant, stipulations which the Soviets saw as unnecessary. In addition, Barthou's successor at the Quai, Pierre Laval, was far from enthusiastic about such an agreement, although with persistent encouragement from the Ambassador in Moscow, Charles Alphan, who constantly urged that "l'accord avec Moscou est le seul moyen de rétablir l'égalité de fait sinon de droit, détruite par le réarmement de l'Allemagne" (5), the tortuous negotiations were allowed to proceed : finally, on May 2nd 1935, seven months after the assassination of its primary architect, Louis Barthou, a Franco-Soviet Pact of mutual assistance was concluded in Paris.

Just three weeks after the signature of the Pact, on May 25th the German government circulated a memorandum to the other Locarno powers in which it challenged the legality of the new Pact, or rather, of the Protocol which accompanied it. Two fundamental objections were raised: the first, that Germany was being encircled by unfriendly powers : the

second that by attacking Germany, whatever the circumstances, France would be violating Locarno (6). One month later, the official French reply to the memorandum was handed to the German chargé d'affaires in Paris (7). On the charge of encirclement the French case was weakest (8). Although it had originally been inspired by fear of Germany, the French argued that the Pact itself specified only "un Etat européen", and pointed out that it had initially been conceived as part of an "eastern Locarno" between the Soviet Union, the Baltic States, Poland Germany and Czechoslovakia, to be guaranteed by France. Moreover, it was still open to those powers which wished to join it (9). In fact, though, this accord was to have been complemented by an assistance treaty between France, the Soviet Union and Germany, and paragraph 4 of the Protocol stipulated that the Franco-Soviet undertakings would operate only "dans les limites envisagées dans l'accord tripartite antérieurement projeté" : thus, the Protocol did effectively single out Germany as the object of Franco-Soviet mutual action, and the French insistence that Germany herself could still resolve this problem by agreeing to extend the Pact into a tripartite accord was merely disregarded by the Germans.

The French were on stronger ground when denying the charge of violating Locarno and the League Covenant. The text of the Pact and Protocol repeatedly referred to the wish of the contracting parties to ensure the 'precise application' of the terms of the Covenant, making specific reference to articles 15,16 and 17. Moreover, article II of the Protocol specified that no action taken as a result of the Franco-Soviet Pact could contradict any obligation previously undertaken by either France or Russia towards a third party, or expose either to the possibility of international sanctions. This last point had little



importance for Russia, but referred directly to the provisions of Locarno, in effect making any French action under the Pact dependent on the acquiescence of Great Britain and Italy, the Locarno guarantors. The French memorandum even maintained that if "une obligation découlant du traité franco-soviétique apparaissait comme étant en contradiction avec une obligation découlant pour la France du traité de Locarno, le traité de Locarno devrait prévaloir". Finally, the French sought to dispel any further argument by pointing out that the terms of the Protocol (article I) ensured that the application of the envisaged "aid and assistance" would not be automatic since it would be made dependent on referral of the dispute to the League Council.

It was in fact this clause which raised the most criticism, since it included the proposal that France and Russia should act together to obtain the Council's recommendations regarding article 16 of the Covenant as soon as possible, but added that "si néanmoins le Conseil, pour une raison quelconque, n'énonce aucune recommandation ou s'il n'arrive pas à un vote unanime, l'obligation d'assistance n'en recevra pas moins application". German opposition to this provision, expressed through various international channels, was two-fold. Firstly it was argued that since France and the USSR were both members of the Council, they could always ensure that there was no unanimity in the vote and would therefore, under article 15, paragraph 7 of the Covenant, regain their freedom of action (10). In fact, that same article specified that the vote would not be open to the "representatives of the parties in dispute", although of course it was likely that either France or Russia would not at that stage be officially involved in the dispute in question.

The second objection was more fundamental. Under article II of Locarno, Germany and Belgium, and Germany and France, mutually agreed not to attack each other except : when exercising the right of legitimate defence; when acting in pursuance of article 16 of the League Covenant; or when acting as a result of a decision taken by the Council in pursuance of article 15, paragraph 7 of the Covenant, provided that the action was directed against the state which was the first to attack. In aiding Russia in the event of an unprovoked German attack, France claimed that she would not be violating Locarno because she would be acting in accordance with article ii of that treaty, that is in pursuance of article 16 of the Covenant. Dr.Gaus, the Director of the Legal Department of the German Foreign Ministry, argued however that this obligation in the Pact (to aid the attacked party even if no unanimous recommendation were made by the Council under article 16), was inconsistent with article 16 itself, maintaining that military action of any kind could only be taken under article 16 in pursuance of a recommendation by the Council (11). In fact, Dr.Gaus was here really taking issue with the League Covenant rather than the Franco-Soviet Pact, for while article 16 did provide for joint military action against a flagrant aggressor by the League members, it nevertheless nowhere precluded the kind of bilateral assistance envisaged by the Franco-Soviet Pact. Moreover, the Pact merely constituted an extension of the open-ended provision contained in article 15, paragraph 7, which declared that in the event of the Council not reaching a unanimous decision, then the League members would regain their right to act "as they judged necessary for the maintenance of right and justice".

In spite of German attempts to cast doubt on the legality of the Pact

the French position was supported by the other Locarno powers. In April 1935, Sir John Simon had expressed British fears that the Franco-Soviet agreement might oblige France to attack Germany in circumstances which would bring into operation the British guarantee to Germany under Locarno (12), but after repeated reassurances from Laval and Léger that the Pact was entirely compatible with both Locarno and the League Covenant (13), the British government declared that the Pact was entirely legal. Thus in July, led by Great Britain, the other Locarno powers, Belgium and Italy, replied to the German memorandum that they were in complete agreement with the views expressed in the French government note of June 25th, and on consideration of the German objections, were satisfied that there was nothing in the Franco-Soviet treaty which either conflicted with Locarno or modified its operation in any way (14). The three powers also agreed to confirm, in accordance with the request made in the German memorandum, that the provisions of Locarno could not legally be modified or redefined by the fact that a treaty had been concluded by one of the signatories.

Although the legality of the Pact was no longer really in question, the French continued to minimise its implications in order to justify its existence. Thus during the Chamber debate on ratification supporters of the Pact sought to counter the arguments of those such as Fernand Laurent and Jean Montigny who insisted that the Pact constituted a dangerous military alliance, by stressing the Pact's restrictions. Henri Torrès, for example, the socialist 'rapporteur' of the Pact in the Chamber, was so anxious to ensure its acceptability to the right-wing opposition that he listed all its limitations while saying virtually nothing of its potential value. For instance, according to the Pact the aggressor state must be European (which excluded the

possibility of French involvement on Russia's behalf against Japan); the aggression must be against the victim's own territory (which meant that France would not be obliged to act in the event of a German attack on the Baltic states, even though Russia would regard this as a threat to her own security); and finally, of course, the assistance would not be of an immediate or automatic nature. Moreover, Torrès argued that in fact the Pact "comporte une assistance qui n'a pas un caractère aussi diligent que l'assistance prévue par les accords de Locarno", under which French obligations to Poland and Czechoslovakia were of a more vigorous and automatic nature than those now linking France to Moscow (15).

Similarly Flandin, who was Premier when the Pact was signed and Foreign Minister when it was ratified, did everything possible during the Chamber debate to make it appear harmless (16). In fact, French officials seem to have been unsure about what exactly French obligations under the Pact comprised. Before the Foreign Affairs Committee of the Chamber in November 1936, for example, Torrès sought to show that while the only available public definition of "assistance" was that of Cannes, which envisaged "une totalité des forces publiques militaires, terrestres et aériennes", France would nevertheless retain sovereignty of action devolving from article 16 of the Covenant, and so could not be held to its obligation to assist unless it had decided itself that it must do so (17). Indeed, as late as December 1938, jurists at the Quai d'Orsay were still attempting to ascertain the nature of French obligations under the Pact (18).

While the French anxiously sought to prove that the Pact was entirely legal, however, it was becoming painfully clear that Germany was

anxious to maintain that France had destroyed Locarno merely so that she could turn this apparently new situation to her own advantage. This was demonstrated by the German refusal to countenance any French attempts at conciliation. For example, in June Léger, the General Secretary of the Quai d'Orsay, indicated that the French government might be prepared to give an official undertaking to the effect that in the event of France being enabled to act on Russia's behalf in pursuance of article 15, paragraph 7, the French government would still not take any military action against Germany without first consulting and obtaining the agreement of Great Britain and Italy : the Berlin government merely replied that such an attack by France on Germany was contrary to the provisions of Locarno, and the fact that Britain and Italy concurred made no difference to the legal position (19). The French also proposed that the Pact be submitted to an arbitration tribunal such as the Hague Court of Justice, but received no reply from Germany. Similarly, by February 1936 the German press had begun to argue that while the letter of Locarno might have been respected, its spirit had been violated in that the Pact would bring dangers to Germany which Locarno had aimed to remove, as well as creating the possibility of French intervention in parts of Europe for which Locarno had made no provision (20).

That Germany simply chose to regard the Pact as rendering Locarno obsolete for her own purposes was appreciated by the French government, which noted in January 1936 that "on ne peut se défendre de l'impression qu'il cherche là un prétexte pour se débarrasser des engagements pris à Locarno, qui le gênent considérablement dans sa réorganisation militaire actuelle" (21) Such fears were justified. On the 7th March as German troops marched into the Rhineland, the German government

issued a memorandum to the other Locarno powers in which it declared that France had infringed the Rhine Pact by signing a military alliance with the Soviet Union directed exclusively against Germany. Thus, "the Locarno Rhine Pact has lost its inner meaning and ceased in practice to exist. Consequently, Germany regards herself for her part as no longer bound by this dissolved treaty.....and (has) today restored the full and unrestricted sovereignty of Germany in the demilitarised zone of the Rhineland" (22) While opponents of the Pact saw Hitler's action as a justification of their criticisms, the real lesson of the Rhineland coup was in fact exactly the opposite. Hitler clearly believed, or was at least prepared to gamble, that the Pact did not constitute a real threat to Germany, and as such he was able to use the Pact's existence as a pretext, while having no fear of the consequences. In other words, in spite of his own assertion to the contrary, Hitler did not believe that the Franco-Soviet Pact comprised a military alliance.

In this assumption, as French supporters of the Pact had pointed out throughout, Hitler was quite correct. Indeed Pierre Laval, who had signed the Pact, had never intended that it should become a military alliance. Ironically it was the Protocol, on which the Germans chose to base their criticisms of the pact, which had the effect of depriving the Pact of its value, since by including the recommendations that any dispute be first referred to the League Council, the automatic operation of the Pact's obligations was excluded. In the words of one Russian historian, this would give Germany, launching a sudden attack, time enough to conquer the country before the act of an aggression had been formally established (23). Moreover, the restriction implied by the Protocol was entirely intentional. The Soviet Ambassador to Paris at the time recalls that "les collaborateurs diplomatiques de Laval..... s'efforçaient, par tous les moyens, de donner au futur pacte franco-

soviétique un caractère purement formel" (24), while Laval himself openly admitted to the Foreign Affairs Committee of the Chamber that "j'ai toujours considéré que dans le pacte franco-soviétique il ne devait pas y avoir d'automatisme" (25). Similarly he told a meeting of the French High Command in November that although the Parliament would probably ratify the Pact, there was no cause for alarm since "j'en ai extrait le plus dangereux" (26).

It is significant that critics of the Pact were virtually unanimous in their praise of Laval. The Polish 'Czas' newspaper, for example, congratulated him on limiting the engagement of assistance by the addition of the Protocol, which it saw as a "véritable chef d'oeuvre diplomatique" (27), while the 'Journal de Genève', an avowed opponent of Franco-Soviet rapprochement, praised Laval's prudence in resisting the pressure for a more binding alliance (28). Similarly, the right-wing Spanish newspaper 'El Debate' rejoiced that "le pacte du 2 mai est bien loin d'être une alliance" (29). Furthermore, Laval's own dislike of the Soviets and marked preference for a Franco-German rapprochement was well-known. He was said to have remarked among friends that "protéger et secourir le régime bolchéviste ne valait pas les os d'un seul paysan d'Auvergne" (30), while 'Humanité' claimed that he told press representatives that "ce que je voudrais en vérité, c'est m'entendre avec Hitler, plutôt qu'empêcher la guerre en signant avec Litvinov" (31). In fact, as early as June 1934, Laval had declared himself at a Cabinet meeting "categorically in favour of an agreement with Germany and hostile to a rapprochement with Russia, which would bring us the Internationale and the Red flag" (32).

Laval was presumably irritated that he had to sign an agreement with

Russia at all but, recognising that he would have to respond to considerable pressure from Cabinet colleagues, particularly after the re-establishment of military service in Germany in March 1935, seems to have decided that his best course of action would be to conclude the Pact, while weakening it as much as possible. Thus, having insisted on the inclusion of the Protocol, Laval then proceeded to delay the ratification of the Pact for as long as possible, insisting on its being brought before Parliament. In fact, as one official of the Quai pointed out, the government would have been acting perfectly within its powers and in accordance with several precedents had it proceeded with ratification without first obtaining parliamentary approval (33), but Laval continued to insist that ratification could only take place after a general vote of confidence by the Chamber in the government's foreign policy (34). His ploy deceived no-one, of course. The British Ambassador to Germany remarked, for instance, that "M. Laval is wriggling like a devil in holy water and keeps postponing from day to day on one pretext or another the ratification of the Pact" (35), while Ambassador Potemkin recollects that "il devenait plus en plus évident que Laval accordait à ce document l'importance d'un simple chiffon de papier qu'il ne pourrait utiliser qu'au cours de ses négociations avec l'Allemagne, pour se donner plus de prix" (36). Indeed, on July 27th, Laval told the German Ambassador to Paris that if Germany would only agree to sign an obligation not to attack the Soviet Union, then France would "hand her paper back to Russia" (37).

The Soviets were not only critical of Laval's refusal to submit the Pact for ratification, but also of his evasion of their repeated requests for military talks. In the words of Paul Reynaud, the Russians, unlike many Frenchmen, had read 'Mein Kampf', and "en avaient tiré



la conclusion qu'il fallait faire avec la France quelque chose de plus sérieux que le pacte vidé de son contenu que leur avait fait signer Laval" (38). It was, after all, only reasonable that if potential Soviet assistance in the event of a German attack on France, or, by virtue of the complementary Soviet-Czech assistance pact, on Czechoslovakia, were seriously envisaged, then detailed military discussions should be undertaken. Moreover, since Russia had no common frontier with Germany, then any Soviet aid would necessarily have to cross Poland or Roumania who, as allies of France, could have been involved in such discussions. Thus the Soviet government was naturally encouraged by Laval's assurance to Stalin during his visit to Moscow that he was ready to open Staff talks (39). And yet, General Gamelin recollects that, having returned from Moscow, Laval "qui me savait des relations suivies avec l'attaché militaire des Soviets, m'avait demandé, sinon spécifiquement de 'freiner', tout au moins de ne pas travailler sur le plan des grades élevés de l'Armée" (40) Laval had no regard for the Red Army and, in the words of his Minister of War, Jean Fabry, "ayant évité, dans les articles du pacte, de lier la France par un texte trop rigide, le Président de Conseil n'avait aucun goût pour l'automatisme brutal d'une convention militaire". In fact Fabry, a vociferous anti-communist, shared this opinion fully, and throughout 1935 he resisted Potemkin's requests for military collaboration which, he believed, "laissait trop de chances à la guerre" (41).

Clearly, as long as the Laval government remained in office, no consolidation of the Franco-Soviet Pact could be expected. This was fully recognised by Litvinov who "a le sentiment que M. Laval a signé ce pacte à contre-cœur, qu'il ne lui attribue pas la même valeur que

Moscou et qu'il ne tient pas du tout à le renforcer" (42) Moreover, in his policy of rapprochement with Germany and his conduct during the Italo-Ethiopian dispute, Laval had shown himself to be totally disinterested in the Soviet policy of collective security and collaboration with the western democracies. In contrast, 1935 had witnessed the development of the Rassemblement Populaire, a coalition of Radicals, Socialists and Communists who included the organisation of French foreign policy along the lines of the Franco-Soviet Pact in their political programme, and as early as October 1935 Litvinov had enquired of Mme. Tabouis of 'L'Oeuvre' about the possibility of a Popular Front government taking office and of Herriot, recognised as one of the architects of Franco-Soviet rapprochement, becoming Foreign Minister (43). Hitler's reoccupation of the Rhineland had demonstrated that the Franco-Soviet Pact gave France all the disadvantages of a military alliance, and none of the security : the victory of a Popular Front coalition in May 1936 provided a fresh opportunity to rectify the situation, and to endow the Pact with the substance denied it by Laval.

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CHAPTER 2

CONFLICTING ATTITUDES TOWARDS THE SOVIET PACT WITHIN THE FIRST  
POPULAR FRONT GOVERNMENT

The accession to power of a Popular Front coalition government in France in June 1936 was naturally welcomed in Russia, where Laval's overtly pro-German attitude, and in particular his blatant disregard of the Franco-Soviet Pact, had been viewed with considerable suspicion. The Rassemblement Populaire, on the other hand, was committed, by virtue of its programme published in January 1936, to a policy of international collaboration and collective security within the framework of the League of Nations, and to the negotiation of an arms limitation agreement with a view to achieving a general, simultaneous and controlled reduction of armaments in Europe. It was also pledged to extend, particularly in Central and Eastern Europe, a system of pacts open to everyone, along the lines of the Franco-Soviet Pact (1). On the 23rd of June, these aims were reaffirmed when the new government presented its declaration on foreign policy to the Chamber and the Senate. The government recognised that the aim of its policy must be to "ranimer chez tous les peuples de bonne volonté la confiance, si rudement ébranlée, dans le système collectif", and so it proposed to negotiate a system of regional pacts in Central and Eastern Europe and to seek a settlement in western Europe which would end the crisis begun by March 7th. In this policy the government felt sure of the assistance of Italy, England and the U.S.A., as well as of "nos amis de l'Union des Républiques Socialistes Soviétiques auxquels nous unit un pacte d'assistance ouvert à tous, que nous a dicté notre commun souci de la paix". In addition the new government would continue the

struggle for an entente with Germany, since it was recognised that "la propagande ou la lutte pour ou contre tel ou tel système politique ou social, ne doivent pas être des prétextes de guerre" (2).

The lack of any specific commitment towards the extension of the Pact with Soviet Russia was natural enough in a government elected with communist support and anxious to allay conservative fears. The government's immediate concern was to prove that, as the Popular Front Leader reassured Gamelin on June 10th, a socialist-led government did not mean that France's security would be endangered, since the Socialists fully understood the gravity of the European situation and had no intention of weakening France's national defences (3).

Similarly, it was stressed that the Popular Front government would not organise its foreign policy on the basis of ideologies. In a radio broadcast on September 17th, Blum emphasised that "les causes de guerre qui pèsent sur le monde sont déjà assez lourdes pour qu'elle (la France) ne pense pas à les aggraver encore par le dessein d'une croisade doctrinale" and that "il n'y a pas un seul contact, pas un seul entretien, pas un seul ordre de discussion auquel elle se refuse" (4). Thus the government would be fully prepared to undertake negotiations with both Nazi Germany and Fascist Italy if it were in the interests of peace to do so. On the other hand, inherent fears of communism-socialism which had already caused the massive flight of gold from France after the victory of the Rassemblement Populaire meant that any open commitment towards the negotiation of a military alliance with Communist Russia would have been singularly ill-timed.

In fact, the government itself did not have a very clearly defined attitude towards the Soviet Union. The Popular Front comprised a

coalition of Socialists Radicals and Communists who had allied in order to combat the threat of fascism, both within France and abroad, but who, understandably enough, had fundamentally conflicting views on many other issues, including foreign policy. Indeed, although the cohesion of the Popular Front was maintained in practical terms, at least during the lifetime of the first Blum government, this inherent divergence of views was to prove extremely critical in influencing the government's attitude to foreign affairs in general, and the Pact with Russia in particular. Even within the individual parties there were considerable differences of opinion. The new Premier's own internationalist policy had evolved only with difficulty since the advent of Hitler. During the 1920's Blum's attitudes had been firmly based on several fundamental tenets evolved from the thinking of his mentor and predecessor Jean Jaurès : he was acutely critical of Versailles, which merely represented the victors' attempts to assert their own dominance; he argued that the level of reparations should be adjusted to match the real capabilities of Germany to pay; all conflicts must give way to obligatory arbitration; and, above all, France must seek a disarmament settlement. Blum's attitude was seen perhaps at its clearest in his violent denunciation of the Poincarist occupation of the Ruhr in 1923, which he regarded as a resurrection of militarism and a dangerous provocation of the German nationalists (5). The accession of the overtly militarist and nationalist Hitler to power in Germany and the subsequent announcement of the German rearmament programme, naturally called into question the validity of Blum's views, and in particular his insistence on disarmament. In a speech at Soissons in November 1936 Blum seemed at last to resolve this conflict by clarifying the socialist attitude to war. Blum asserted that in a world where socialism had established its law of equality and justice,

"non seulement la guerre ne serait plus possible, mais qu'elle ne serait même plus concevable", but in the meantime, national defence did have an important place in society. To justify this position, particularly against those on his left who believed that war provided an opportunity for the revolutionary seizure of power, Blum cited Jaurès who, in the years preceding 1914 had argued, "Guerre jamais, sauf quand la guerre est imposée. Guerre jamais, sauf quand il s'agit de défendre le sol national. Guerre jamais, sauf quand il s'agit de défendre ce qui équivaut au sol national, c'est à dire l'existence et l'intégrité d'autres sols, dont l'existence et l'intégrité sont liées étroitement au nôtre". In this way, Blum sought to justify his government's decision to undertake a rearmament programme, although he continued to insist that "plus l'Europe arme, plus nous armons nous-mêmes, plus nous avons le devoir de ne pas laisser l'idée du désarmement, l'espoir due désarmement s'éteindre" (6).

The fundamental dichotomy in Blum's outlook was sharply reflected in his attitude towards the Soviet Pact. As early as October 1922 he had warned that the reopening of diplomatic relations with Russia should not lead to the re-establishment of the pre-war Franco-Russian alliance, directed against Germany, and as late as 1931 he had classed the Soviet Union in the same category as Fascist Italy (7). In July 1934 he stated unequivocally the party's attitude towards Franco-Soviet rapprochement when he warned in the 'Populaire' that, "MM. Doumergue et Barthou tendent manifestement à imprimer au rapprochement franco-soviétique le caractère de l'alliance franco-russe d'avant-guerre. Le parti socialiste doit déclarer, franchement et clairement, qu'il combattrà sur ce terrain comme sur tous les autres, le gouvernement du Bloc National" (8). By May 1935, however, largely as a result of the



reintroduction of military service in Germany, announced on March 16th, Blum's position had changed to one of cautious support for the Pact, although he still insisted that "le rôle de la France est d'éviter que les pactes particuliers...prennent le caractère des vieilles alliances armées" (9), and by 1936 his position had evolved sufficiently for him to vote for the ratification of the Pact. On the first morning of the debate, Blum explained in 'Le Populaire' that the socialists would vote for ratification, but would take particular care to emphasise why this pact differed from the former armed alliances which socialism had always condemned, and would show what consequences they hoped the Pact would have for the cause of peace (10). The following day he welcomed an alliance with "un Etat prolétarian" which provided a solid barrier to war (11).

It is difficult to follow the evolution of Blum's thought with similar clarity after he became Premier, since for the duration of his term of office he gave up writing his daily column for the party newspaper, 'Le Populaire'. What remains clear is that by May 1936 Blum had come to accept the Pact with Russia as a necessity and had even become to appreciate, as he himself claimed before the postwar investigative committee, that it would be necessary to endow the Pact with military significance (12). And yet, as in the rest of his international policy, the doubts persisted. Geneviève Tabouis, the influential journalist on the Radical organ, 'L'Oeuvre', recalls that Blum was in favour of the Russian Pact but "when I....clamoured constantly for the enforcement of the vital pact....I came up against Léon Blum, not against the President of the Council with a very realistic and nationalist viewpoint, but against the intellectual socialist who wrote in the 'Populaire': "this Franco-Soviet Pact creates a bad atmosphere in France" - and who

thus continued to provide powerful ammunition against the Pact!" (13). Thus it was with considerable difficulty that Blum overcame his own instincts and agreed to the initiation of the French rearmament programme and, in November 1936, to military talks with the Soviet Union.

Blum's views were not shared even by some within his own party. For Paul Faure, for example, the very popular and influential General Secretary of the party between 1920 and 1940, pacifism remained the dominant consideration, even after the advent of Hitler. For many years his views had closely resembled Blum's, sharing a passionate belief in disarmament and a fierce hatred of war. But Faure was violently hostile to the communists, opposing any idea of unity of action, and was convinced that the Soviet Union was trying to provoke a European War : as a result, he was consistently hostile to France's pact with Russia. Faure saw Russia's attempt at rapprochement with France as a final and desperate bid for an ally against Hitler, and shortly before the signature of the Pact he warned pointedly that, "a National security which is obliged to count upon uncertain alliances and cooperation with a foreign power whose cooperation is precarious and doubtful, is a false security" (14). Although his official reaction to the Pact was reserved (15), fellow members of the SFIO have since confirmed that he was totally hostile to any reliance on the Franco-Soviet Pact, and it has even been asserted that Faure and his supporters were anti-bolshevik "to such an extent that they detested Stalin more than Hitler" (16). Although by 1936 Faure's differences with Blum had not become openly apparent, the seeds of Faure's later support for appeasement and advocacy of collaboration with the German occupiers in 1940 were already present, in the form of a fundamental suspicion and

fear of Soviet motives which was merely exacerbated by the Soviet role in the Spanish Civil War (17). These views contrasted sharply with those of Jean Zyromski, the leader of the "Bataille Socialiste" tendency. In 1933 Zyromski had led a strong opposition to the proposal made by Adler at the Paris Conference of the Socialist International that all united front manoeuvres from Moscow should be opposed (18), and he had remained a firm supporter of a policy of united action with the French Communist Party throughout. At the same time he opposed Blum's definition of the "exercise" rather than the "conquest" of power, proposing at the Party Conference of May-June 1936 that the aim of the SFIO in government should be "attaquer la racine, le principe même de la structure de régime capitaliste" (19). Similarly, Marceau Pivert, the leader of the "Gauche Révolutionnaire", motioned that "cet exercice du pouvoir ne vaudrait rien, il n'aurait aucun intérêt pour le parti socialiste s'il ne constituait pas un élément de la marche directe à la conquête du pouvoir" (20)

In foreign affairs, however, and particularly with respect to the Soviet Union, Zyromski and Pivert failed to agree either with the Socialist leader or with each other. Zyromski, who felt a certain personal affinity towards the Soviet Union as the father of socialism, abandoned his former policy of revolutionary defeatism once he believed that Germany's aim was to attack the USSR. For Zyromski this realisation posed the same problem as it did for the French Communist party, for, in the words of the SFIO historian Nathaniel Greene, Zyromski's dilemma immediately became "how to conciliate his faith in mass action and predilection for movement with the need to employ the 'bourgeois' Republic in defence of the USSR" (21). Just as the problem was similar, so was the response, as Zyromski became a most

vigorous supporter of Franco-Soviet military rapprochement. Pivert's reaction was somewhat different. In an inflammatory brochure entitled "Révolution d'abord!", Pivert suggested that Zyromski had betrayed his socialist principles in accepting the international war policy of the bourgeoisie, arguing that the only way to prevent an imperialist war was to provoke a revolution. Thus he continued to advocate a policy of revolutionary defeatism, persistently condemning the "fièvre des alliances", and in particular, the Franco-Soviet Pact (22).

The serious internal divisions within the SFIO, which were already apparent when the Blum government took office, were only exacerbated by Blum's yearlong "exercise of power". Jean Zyromski, for example, joined with the Communist Party in denouncing the government's policy of non-intervention in Spain, while Marceau Pivert proved to be more extreme than the Communists themselves in his encouragement of the strikes in June 1936 with his slogan, "Tout est possible". A particularly clear example of the Party's divisions was the mixed reaction to Blum's decision to relinquish power after an adverse vote in the Senate in June 1937. At the 34th National Congress in Marseille, from the 10th to the 13th July, three motions were proposed: the first, signed by Léon Blum and Paul Faure, suggested that the Congress affirm its pride in the work accomplished by the first Popular Front government; a 'Bracke-Zyromski' or 'Bataille Socialiste' motion argued that "la capacité d'action des masses a été négligée"; and a motion by Marceau Pivert regretted that "the government constituted in June 1936 has abandoned the struggle in face of the opposition of the Senate...and withdraws the party delegation of the Socialist Ministers from the Chautemps cabinet". Although the Blum motion received 2,946 (54.7%) votes and with eighteen representatives a majority on the

Commission administrative permanent, the Zyromski tendency received 1,545 votes (28.7%) and nine representatives on the C.A.P. and the Pivertistes 894 votes (16.6%) and six representatives (23). Thus while Blum sought to reconcile his socialist ideals with the exercise of power in an unstable international situation, he was fully aware that serious divisions of opinion relating to his conduct as Premier were developing within his own party.

The second major component of the Popular Front government, the Radical-Socialist party, was similarly divided in its views on the Soviet alliance. It was the left-wing of the party, the so-called 'Young Turks' such as Pierre Cot, Jacques Kayser and Jean Zay, who were initially the strongest advocates of a united front policy, and supporters of the Soviet Pact. The most notable exception to this group was Edouard Herriot who, had been largely responsible for the initial Franco-Soviet rapprochement in 1932. In his tireless advocacy of a Soviet alliance Herriot was motivated purely by the realistic belief that "un accord avec l'Union soviétique est notre meilleure, notre plus forte garantie" (24). As leader of the party's right-wing Herriot certainly felt no personal affinity for communism, and he was the most reluctant of the Radical Socialists to accept the formation of a united front, but he remained convinced that domestic political considerations should play no part in the formulation of international policy. Although even Herriot was attacked by extremists as being pro-bolshevik, French communist leaders evidently recognised that a Radical Socialist might find it easier to make an alliance with Soviet Russia acceptable to the influential middle-classes than would a Socialist whose political convictions might seem dangerously close to communism. Moreover, Herriot, of all French politicians in the period

was the most outspoken supporter of rapprochement, and was considerably more committed to the policy than socialists such as Blum. For this reason the realistic communist leader, Thorez, began to cultivate the good opinion of Herriot. For example, during a debate in the Chamber in May 1935 Thorez made the rather astonishing statement that the Communist Party "would be ready to bring you our support, President Herriot, if you or any other head of your party wished to lead a Radical government - since the Radical group is the most important of the left-wing groups in this Chamber which would really apply the policies of the Radical Party" (26). Similarly, Soviet officials several times indicated that they hoped that Herriot would become Foreign Minister in a new Popular Front government (27).

Herriot in fact became President of the Chamber and while his position within the party remained strong, his direct influence on the Blum government was inevitably reduced. However, his party was well-represented in the Cabinet, taking thirteen out of thirty-six ministerial portfolios, and in particular monopolising the Defence and Foreign Ministries: Yvon Delbos became Foreign Minister, Daladier the head of the newly-created National Defence Ministry, as well as Vice-President of the Council, Pierre Cot the Minister for Air, and Gasnier-Duparc the Minister for the Marine. Delbos was something of an unknown quantity in comparison to Herriot, but he was known to be a confirmed anti-fascist and in November 1935 had violently attacked Laval's Italian policy in the Chamber. He had, moreover, been much impressed during a visit to the Soviet Union in 1932, and had returned believing that Franco-Soviet detente was necessary. Daladier, known primarily as the "fusilleur" of February 6th, was still seen as representing the left of the party against his arch-rival Herriot,

although he was to move increasingly towards social conservatism and the political centre during the next two years: his attitude towards the Soviet alliance was as yet unknown. Pierre Cot, on the other hand, had already distinguished himself as a firm advocate of the policy of rapprochement with the Soviet Union when, as Air Minister in a previous government he had headed a parliamentary Aeronautical mission to the USSR returning full of praise for the Red Airforce and declaring that "to every honest man it was apparent that the developing Soviet power was the only force that could be compared to the growing might of Hitler" (28). He was also, like Zyromski and many other left-wing intellectuals, scientists and politicians, a member of the Association des Amis de l'Union soviétique, continuing to be a committee member long after evidence of the harsh realities of Soviet life had disillusioned famous adherents such as André Gide (29).

Cot's enthusiasm for the Soviet Union was certainly not shared by all his fellow Radicals, many of whom remained uneasy in the association with the Communist party. In particular, the influential Radical group in the Senate, led by Joseph Caillaux, rapidly took fright at the wave of popular unrest which followed the victory of the Rassemblement. On the 24th June Pierre Dominique, a friend of Caillaux's, wrote an article in 'La République' under the title, "Les radicaux n'ont pas voulu cela", in which he denounced "anti-French communist agitation". The theme was echoed by Emile Roche, who published an article on June 26th entitled, "Contre la dictature communiste!" and another on July 2nd which proclaimed, "Rassemblement populaire? Oui. Dictature communiste? Non".(30). This press campaign naturally gathered momentum once the events in Spain became known in late July, and Georges Dupeux, in his study of Blum's parliamentary majority, has linked this

campaign directly to the Senate's disinclination to examine the Office du blé project, although he admits we cannot be certain whether there was an agreement between the Radical group in the Senate and 'La République', or if the newspaper campaign had the effect of bolstering the confidence of the Senators (31).

The lack of harmony between the Popular Front partners seemed to reach crisis proportions during the Radical party's National Congress at Biarritz in October, during which several party members violently attacked the communists and some even the government (32). The majority of Radicals were, after all, socially conservative, and the popular unrest combined with the Communist party's virulent attacks on the government's non-intervention policy, was causing many of them to doubt the wisdom of collaboration with what they saw as Moscow-controlled French communists. However, crisis within the Popular Front was averted on this occasion by a firm directive from Blum who, just a few days before the Congress opened, had made clear his own attitude towards divisions within the Popular Front in a speech at Orléans. If one of the groups adhering to the Popular Front were to withdraw its confidence, or if the common action which was indispensable among all the elements comprising the coalition could not be maintained then, said Blum, this would comprise a totally new situation, one which would in turn require a new majority. Since no other majority was possible within the present Chamber, "l'unique issue serait...la dissolution et le recours au pays souverain" (33). Probably as a result of this threat Radical speakers contented themselves with verbal attacks on the communists and then Congress reaffirmed the party's fidelity to the government.



Blum renewed this threat during the Chamber debate on the government's foreign policy in December, when it seemed possible that the communist deputies who had refused to accept ministerial posts but had pledged support might vote against the government. If the Communist party today wished to detach itself from the government's majority voluntarily then, warned Blum, the situation and consequences would be the same as he had outlined before Biarritz: the Popular Front would lose its raison d'être and Blum would be forced to go to the country (34). In fact, the communist contingent, having bitterly attacked the government's Spanish policy, merely abstained in the vote of confidence. Thus, despite antagonisms within the Popular Front, Blum was able to continue in office with an unchanged majority until he was brought down by the Senate in June 1937. But while he managed to retain this support in the Chamber, the fundamental conflicts between the various parties of the coalition, indeed within the SFIO itself, meant that Blum's freedom of action in both domestic and international affairs was necessarily restricted. In fact, it was in the sphere of the government's relations with the Soviet Union that the political structure of the government's majority, that is, its association with the French Communist party, played the most crucial role, for it was here that the government's domestic and foreign problems were seen to merge into one.

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CHAPTER 3

COMMUNISM AND FRANCO-SOVIET RELATIONS

The Popular Front's relations with the USSR were largely determined by the issue of communism. For some, the fact that the Soviet Union was a communist state was irrelevant : as Herriot, a right-wing Radical, pointed out, "Le tsar, jadis, tout despote qu'il était, a consenti à s'allier avec une République. Notre bourgeoisie, notre presse, seront-elles moins intelligentes? " (1). But for most Frenchmen, including some in the Popular Front Government, communism and the Soviet government were indistinguishable, and as such French attitudes towards the Soviet Pact were often based on an analysis of the activities of the French Communist Party, rather than on an objective examination of the value of the Soviet ally. Thus it becomes necessary to examine the somewhat obscure evolution of the new Soviet foreign policy of collaboration with the western democracies, and the extent to which that policy determined the initial communist participation in the Rassemblement populaire and the subsequent role of the French Communist Party in French political life, in order to assess the validity of such assumptions.

1) Soviet, Comintern & French Communist Party policy

In September 1934, after fourteen years of public hostility, the Soviet Union joined the League of Nations : henceforth its representative on the League Council, the Foreign Commissar, Maxim Litvinov, became the most ardent champion of collective security, stressing at every available moment that the Soviet Union "has never tried and will never by any methods, let alone forcible ones, try to thrust its ideology on

other states" (2). At the same time, the Soviet government continued to pressurise the French Republic for the logical conclusion of the process of rapprochement initiated in 1932, that is, for the negotiation of some form of political and military alliance. And yet in June 1930 Stalin had referred to France as "the most aggressive and militarist of all the aggressive and militarist countries of the world" (3), while the Communist International, widely regarded as an organ of the Soviet government, had repeatedly attacked Versailles as the "traité d'esclavage et de rapine" (4), and criticised the League of Nations as an instrument of war (5). It is perhaps scarcely surprising, therefore, that the credibility of the new Soviet foreign policy was immediately questioned.

The motivation behind the new policy is clear enough : Stalin was concerned not to undertake an ideological crusade against fascism, as communists claimed, but to secure the defence of the Soviet Union against possible German expansionism. The advent to power of Hitler in Germany had effectively ended the period of close political and military collaboration which had persisted throughout the 1920's under the terms of Rapallo (6), and which had been so beneficial to the USSR, while Hitler's anti-bolshevik tirades left no doubt about his aggressive intentions : thus at the Congress of Soviets in January 1935 Molotov drew attention to the statement in 'Mein Kampf' that "when we speak of new lands in Europe today, we can only think of Russia and her border states" (7). Stalin was, above all, a realist, and as soon as he detected a threat to Soviet national security, was prepared to change his tactics to the extent of disavowing all former Soviet policy, in order to gain allies among the western democracies. At the same time the massive programme of industrialisation envisaged in the Five Year Plans was now directed specifically towards the needs of defence and

the increased mechanisation of the Red Army (8), while the defence budget was increased from 1.3 milliard roubles in 1931 to 8.2 in 1935, and 14.6 in 1936 (9).

There is thus no reason to doubt that in the policy of collaboration with the democracies the Soviets were entirely sincere, since this constituted a fundamental question of Soviet national security, but at the same time the new policy completely contradicted the position of foreign communist parties with regard to their own governments. The Comintern had remained undeterred from its conviction that the task of all communists was "to accelerate the collapse of social democracy" even in the face of the growing menace of fascism in Europe, notably in Germany where the Communist party was told to support the NSDAP rather than the "social fascists", the SPD. Shortly before the Reichstag fire in February 1933 the SPD leader, Stampfer, was told by a secretary at the Soviet Embassy that Moscow believed that a period of fascist rule was an unavoidable transitional phase of development, while Pravda declared in November 1932 that greater fascist terror would intensify the class struggle and accelerate the growth of the KPD (10). Even after Hitler's accession to power, and the subsequent suppression of the KPD, the Comintern continued to advocate hostility to the social-democratic parties, and on May 6th 1933 Ivestia wrote, with reference to the prolongation of the 1926 Soviet-German treaty, that "the Soviet Union has nothing to change or to revise in its policy towards Germany" (11). Such a position was clearly untenable in view of the newly-evolved Soviet policy, and since the Soviet government and the Comintern were widely regarded as "siamese twins", (12) it was seen as Moscow's responsibility to ensure that the subversive activities of foreign communist parties should cease, as proof of the

sincerity of the new policy.

It was not in fact until August 1935 that the new tactics were officially announced, although they were adopted by the ECCI in the autumn of 1934. This delay seems to have been largely due to differences of opinion on the Executive Committee itself, where delegates supporting the new policy, notably Manouilski and Dimitrov, had considerable difficulty in overcoming the resistance of militants such as Bela Kun and Lovoski (13). For years the Comintern had opposed any unity of action with the "social fascist" leaders, on the grounds that any common action must be undertaken by the workers united under communist leadership : now, at the first Comintern Congress held for seven years, in July and August 1935, it was officially announced that the new policy of foreign communist parties should be to work towards a United Front from above, to include the peasantry, the urban petty bourgeoisie, and 'advanced' sections of the intelligentsia, united in their antipathy towards fascism. If an anti-fascist government were formed, then the Communists, "while remaining the irreconcilable foes of every bourgeois government, and supporters of a Soviet government, will nevertheless, in face of the growing fascist danger, be prepared to support such a government". The aims of the United Front were carefully worded in order to avoid any revolutionary implications and were in fact very similar to those adopted in the French Popular Front programme. For example, the People's Fronts were to try and bring about trade union unity, to enlist the support of the peasant and petty bourgeois masses, and to secure the disbanding of any fascist leagues or organisations (14).

In this way Moscow attempted to resolve the essential conflict between

national Soviet policy and that propounded by the Communist International. It would, however, have been more immediately successful had the Soviet government merely banned the Comintern from Russian soil altogether as many foreign governments wished, particularly since Georgi Dimitrov, when announcing the new tactics at the Congress, had added that the United Front was "the surest road to the overthrow of fascism and the capitalist system" (15). In effect, it seems that the policy of world revolution had been temporarily shelved in response to the suspected threat to Soviet security, but not abandoned : maintenance of the Comintern by the Soviet government, in spite of the very evident disadvantages, could mean little else. The French Ambassador to the USSR, Robert Coulondre, believed that, in fact, Stalin would never officially renounce the Comintern for two basic reasons. On the one hand, Stalin saw the Comintern as an instrument of national defence (16) : although the German Communist party had been officially dissolved by Hitler in 1933, it was naturally in the interests of Germany's enemies to encourage anti-governmental agitation wherever possible and indeed, in February 1937 the French consul in Munich reported an increased number of pursuits of communists in Bavaria and the anxiety caused to the authorities by the activities of the party, "le seul organisé en Allemagne" (17).

Secondly, Coulondre argued that the Comintern represented a fundamental and insoluble conflict within Soviet policy. Indeed, when in mid-1936 the sincerity of the newly-evolved policy was suddenly put to the test, its inherent anomaly immediately became apparent : Britain and France favoured non-intervention in the Spanish Civil War, while Germany and Italy, though officially supporting that policy, blatantly intervened on behalf of the rebels. Thus the Soviet government found it necessary



to decide whether to aid the legitimate Republican government which, as effective leaders of world communism, they were morally obliged to do, or whether to abandon Spain to the fascists in an attempt to maintain links with the western democracies. In this way the Spanish Civil War created a profound crisis in the conduct of Soviet foreign policy, and more than anything else promoted the suspicion that the USSR had not abandoned its aim to promote world revolution, and so could not be trusted as an ally.

The initial reaction to the Spanish crisis in Moscow was a joint meeting of the Secretariats of the Comintern and Profintern organisations, which immediately decided that aid should be sent to the Republican government (18). For Stalin the issue was not so simple, since while he realised that if he refused to intervene he could be accused of betraying the international proletariat, he also knew that if he openly intervened he would alienate the pacifist democracies (19). On this occasion, as in 1935 with the publication of the Popular Front tactics, Stalin seems to have decided that the revolutionary policy of the Comintern must be subordinated to the needs of national Russian policy, and on August 23rd the Soviet government issued its reply to the Franco-British initiative of the 8th calling for a non-intervention pact : although one of the shortest, the Soviet response was categorical, fully approving the non-intervention declaration, and was followed on August 28th by the introduction of a law in Russia forbidding the exportation of any kind of munitions, war material or armaments to Spain. Moreover, it does seem that the non-intervention agreement was applied quite strictly by the Soviets (20), undoubtedly in an attempt to co-ordinate its policy with that of France. In September, for example, Litvinov said that Russia had adhered to the pact "parce que la France craignait

que sans ce pacte, la guerre n'éclate" (21).

By September, however, the Soviet government was finding it increasingly difficult to adhere to the agreement. The Soviet press had always been lukewarm about non-intervention, and was quick to report German and Italian violations of the agreement, until finally, in October, the Soviets began openly to criticise the inertia of the London Non-Intervention Committee which, it said, spent most of its time considering matters of procedure, rather than co-ordinating non-intervention measures. Furthermore, it was claimed that there was now considerable evidence that Germany, Portugal and Italy had never adhered to the agreement, in spite of which, the London Committee continued to vacillate. On October 5th, for example, Pravda complained that "Les 'Junker' allemands et les 'Caproni' italiens exécutent leurs vols de nuit sur Madrid, semant la destruction et la mort. Et pendant ce temps-là le memorandum du gouvernement légal de l'Espagne, qui démasque l'aide systématique accordée par les fascistes aux rebelles, est mis sous le boisseau..."

(22). The Soviet government had always maintained that it would continue to adhere to the non-intervention agreement as long as the other parties did the same : on October 7th a statement was issued complaining about the consistent violations of the non-intervention agreement, and warning that if they were not immediately stopped, "the Soviet Government will consider itself free from the obligations arising out of the Agreement" (23). On the 15th of October, Soviet aid began to arrive in Spain.

The single most important reason for this decision by the Soviet government was undoubtedly the violent reactions which its policy had provoked among foreign communist parties. In particular, Stalin feared

that he might lose control over the communist masses, and Comintern leaders were quick to inform him that Trotsky was naming him the "liquidator and traitor of the Spanish revolution, abettor of Hitler and Mussolini" (24). In other words, Stalin need to maintain the Comintern in order "de sauver la face révolutionnaire", that is, as a channel into which excess revolutionary fervour, both abroad and within the CPSU itself, might be diverted (25). It is also possible that the Soviet decision to aid Republican Spain was occasioned by its fear that France would inevitably be weakened if she were surrounded by three fascist powers. Certainly Lord Chilston in Moscow thought that "the Soviet government's concern for the welfare of France - or rather, for the continued functioning of France as a container of Germany - was nowhere more unmistakably shown than in their reactions to the Spanish Civil War", believing that any pleasure which might have been felt at the possibility of communism being established in Spain was offset by the threat to France's international position which the Spanish conflict inevitably entailed (26).

Such interpretations gain credibility when it is considered that Soviet policy in practice was designed to prevent rather than promote revolution in Spain. George Orwell who, as a member of the P.O.U.M. militia in the early months of the war, had witnessed the application of such a policy, believed that the Soviet government's main consideration in this was the alliance with France, writing in late 1937 that "In Spain the Communist "line" was undoubtedly influenced by the fact that France, Russia's ally, would strongly object to a revolutionary neighbour and would raise heaven and earth to prevent the liberation of Spanish Morocco. The 'Daily Mail', with its tales of red revolution financed by Moscow, was even more wildly wrong than usual. In reality

it was the Communists above all others who prevented revolution in Spain" (27). Certainly, having found it necessary to intervene in Spain at all, there is no reason to suppose that the Soviets wanted to antagonise the western democracies further, which would certainly have been the result of revolution in Spain, and so if this were indeed the Soviets' motive, then Russian policy in Spain can be seen as a further attempt to maintain the newly-formed foreign policy. On the other hand, Moscow was possibly primarily concerned to prevent the Anarchists from gaining control of any revolution in Spain, or perhaps intervened actually to prevent the Republican forces from winning the war, in the hope that a prolonged conflict might divert Hitler's attention away from Eastern Europe.

It is beyond the scope of the present study to analyse Soviet motivation in the Spanish Civil War, but it is at least clear that it was not primarily Stalin's aim to provoke revolution in Spain, as was generally assumed. Similarly, there were several indications that the Soviet government was concerned that France should be a strong ally, rather than one weakened by internal dissension and civil war : the death of Barthou, hardly a man of the Left, but a firm exponent of Franco-Soviet rapprochement, was deeply mourned in Moscow (28), and Litvinov surprised Coulondre by lamenting that France no longer had a statesman of the same stature as a Clemenceau or a Poincaré (29). Litvinov also wanted to know the possibility of Herriot becoming the Popular Front Foreign Minister (30), and he subsequently said that he wished that Blum were more conservative. Coulondre believed that "ce qu'a voulu montrer M.Litvinov en parlant de 'bons patriotes' c'est qu'il plaçait, dans ses rapports avec l'Occident, les considérations de raison d'Etat au-dessus des considérations idéologiques" (31). As a result, there

was little enthusiasm in the Soviet press concerning the accession to power of the Popular Front and no particular emphasis was laid on the communists' part in the victory; a member of the British Embassy staff in Moscow even detected embarrassment on the part of the government at the extent of the communist success (32).

From the point of view of the French government and public, however, the real sincerity of the new Soviet tactics would naturally be judged solely on the basis of the activities of the French Communist party. Before 1935 the PCF had followed the Comintern line faithfully, constantly calling for the defence of the USSR, not against German fascism, but against French imperialism. Moreover, Thorez and other communist leaders argued not only for the liberation of the colonies from the French imperialist yoke, but also for the cession of Alsace-Lorraine, which they claimed had been subjugated to French domination by Versailles (33). At the same time the French communists resisted all suggestions from the Socialist leaders for unity of action against fascism, advocating instead a United Front from below, that is between communist and social-democratic workers united under solely communist leadership. One reason given for the expulsion from the party in May 1934 of Jacques Doriot, for example, the only leading communist who had advocated a United Front from above, was that he had wanted to liquidate the party by fusing it with social democracy, which was "totally foreign to the spirit of communism" (34). Then, only two months later, the French Communist Party officially renounced its opposition to social-democracy by signing a pact of joint action with the SFIO : the Party now concentrated its efforts on gaining Radical support, and even extended a hand of friendship to the Catholics. This abrupt reversal in policy gave party leaders no qualms : having consistently attacked

"social-fascism" for the past six years, Thorez now conveniently remembered that in 1875, Marx had said that it was absurd to treat the middle classes as forming a single reactionary bloc with the capitalist classes, and himself now declared that "the Communist Party refuses to treat all capitalist parties as a reactionary mass" (35).

Naturally enough, this reversal in tactics was widely seen in France as proof that the French Communist Party was controlled by Moscow : the historian Georges Lefranc writes for example that the new PCF tactics were dictated by "telegrams from Moscow" and telephone calls from the Soviet Embassy (36). On the other hand, communist historians such as Georges Cogniot, a representative of the party on the Comintern's Executive Committee between 1936 and 1937, have sought to show that the relationship between the Comintern and foreign communist parties was one of mutual consultation. Thus Cogniot emphasises that the individual parties were able to exercise greater autonomy after the Seventh Congress, where it was decided that henceforth the ECCI would concentrate on the elaboration of fundamental tactics, while avoiding direct intervention in the internal organisational affairs of individual parties. Indeed, in 1937 Dimitrov wrote that "les partis doivent de plus en plus voler de leurs propres ailes et être capables de définir par eux-mêmes, à n'importe quel moment, leur politique et leur tactique, ainsi que la direction opérationnelle" (37) Thus, says Cogniot, "il y avait, dans l'Internationale communiste, un perpétuel échange d'idées entre le centre et la périphérie, une aide mutuelle, une double impulsion intellectuelle et politique d'en haut et d'en bas" (38).

In the same way, Cogniot and other communist historians have claimed

that far from acting in mere response to Soviet orders, the French Party was itself largely responsible for the adoption of the new tactics by the Comintern. Thus it is suggested that the Comintern fully appreciated the dangers of fascism in Germany, but that the United Front tactics formulated by Lenin ten years earlier were attacked by sectarians such as Barbé and Célor : it was they who were responsible for the term "social fascist", it is said. Cogniot continues that once this group had been eliminated in 1931 Thorez was able to reintroduce the United Front policy, doing so with the full support of the Comintern (40), who eventually agreed to adopt the tactics as official policy. That the French party had close links with the Comintern can hardly be denied : Thorez and Cachin, the editor of *l'Humanité*, had since 1931 been members of the Executive Committee, and they were joined in 1935 by Jacques Duclos and André Marty, who also became a member of the Secretariat. This group visited Moscow frequently and often spoke at plenary sessions of the ECCI. In return a permanent representative Eugene Fried, known as Clément, was sent to Paris not, party members have since claimed, merely as a bureaucratic robot of Moscow, as critics said, but to supply information and advice, and contribute to the elaboration and application of party policy (41).

On the other hand, it does seem that although continuing to expound in public the Comintern policy of hostility to social democracy until the tactics were abandoned in favour of a United Front, the French party had itself long-since formulated such a policy as a response to what was soon as the growing threat of fascism in France. In December 1932, for example, Thorez wrote to Paul Faure expressing approval of a proposal for a joint SFIO-PCF bureau to organise meetings, and was reprimanded for doing so by Fried (42). Even Cogniot admits that the

Comintern sent the Italian communist, Togliatti ("Ercoli"), to Paris in October 1934 to express criticism of the party's initiative in favour of a Popular Front, although he adds that Thorez refused to withdraw, feeling the observations were unjustified (43). Moreover, several times since 1932 the French party had proposed unity of action to the Socialists (although usually in terms which would have meant the virtual absorption of the SFIO into the PCF), and had played a significant role in the anti-fascist Amsterdam-Pleyel movement. Thus, whether or not the new tactics were ultimately imposed by the Comintern, it is evident that the French party fully approved them, and was therefore more inclined to apply the new policy sincerely.

But in spite of the constant assertions that the PCF was not controlled by the Comintern, and that the Comintern was totally independent of Moscow, it remains true that throughout this period the activities of the French party mirrored almost exactly the aims of Soviet foreign policy. In fact, Thorez, who had emerged as leader in 1931 as an orthodox Stalinist, was always ultimately prepared to accept Moscow's decision. One such example was the party's reaction to the communique issued at the end of Laval's visit to Moscow in May 1935 in which "Comrade Stalin expressed complete understanding and approval of the national defence policy pursued by France, with the object of maintaining its armed forces at a level consistent with its security requirements" (44). It is probable that in obtaining this declaration, which represented a complete reversal of the long-established communist policy of opposition to military credits, Laval was trying to weaken the position of the strong communist contingent of Aubervilliers, where he hoped to be re-elected as mayor later that month. But after a brief stunned silence, the party simply produced a poster saying,



"Staline a raison", which explained that "Pour faire face au danger menaçant, l'Union soviétique, dont l'intérêt permanent est la paix, a raison d'agir de concert avec les puissances qui ont un intérêt momentané à maintenir la paix" (45). Thus it is reasonable to assume that the attitude of the French Communist Party to the French government, and in particular to the Popular Front government, could be expected to reflect accurately the attitude of the Soviet Union to its ally, the French Republic.

Although refusing to accept ministerial posts in the Popular Front government, the French communists were prepared to offer the "bourgeois" government full support, often to the extent of restraining left-wing enthusiasm in the interest of maintaining order. The most startling example of this was the Communists' reaction to the widespread strikes following the victory of the Popular Front in May, which were widely assumed to be communist-inspired. In reply to the enthusiastic claim by the left-wing socialist, Marceau Pivert, that "Tout est possible" (46), Marcel Gitton retorted in L'Humanité "Mais non, messieurs! Il n'est nullement question de chambardement ni d'anarchie" (47), which was confirmed by Thorez's statement to a meeting of militant communists on June 11th that "Il faut savoir terminer une grève". In a long article in the "Communist International" at the end of 1936, Thorez explained that "the party realised that a more rapid advance on the part of the working class risked its estrangement from the middle classes who were disturbed and made uneasy by the strikes"(48) Indeed, in domestic policy the communists were often more restrained than the socialists. For example, the communists opposed the inclusion of nationalisation in the Popular Front programme : Thorez explained that the working class must first win power as a result of a

victorious revolution and the establishment of a French Soviet Republic in order to apply this measure, although he was no doubt primarily aware of the need not to antagonise the Radicals. Similarly the communists made little objection when Blum devalued the franc in September 1936 and voted the Premier special powers to deal with the financial crisis in June 1937, even though the projects envisaged would primarily affect the poor.

Perhaps the clearest example of the lengths to which the Soviets were prepared to go in their support of the French alliance, as well as of the obedience of the PCF to Moscow, was shown by the Party's attitude towards the French government's Spanish policy. In their campaign on behalf of the Spanish Republic, the French communists were initially acting in advance of the Soviet government, which was at first prepared to support the non-intervention initiative. On August 25th, for example, Thorez made an impassioned plea at the Buffalo stadium for aid to Spain, arguing that since fascism was already installed over the Rhine, and to the south-east across the Alps, the struggle against Franco "ne s'agit pas de lutte entre démocratie et fascisme, il s'agit de la menace de Hitler contre la France et contre la paix" (49). That this call to action was incompatible with official Soviet policy was clearly recognised by Blum, who in a speech defending the non-intervention policy to the SFIO in September argued, "Do not let us forget that the international convention of non-intervention in Spain bears the signature of Soviet Russia. Yet one political group which adhered to this contract by the Popular Front parties appears to be criticising our actions. Does it wish to repudiate the contract?" (50).

The ultimate test of the party's loyalty came in December when, during a foreign affairs debate in the Chamber, Thorez felt obliged to declare that "le parti communiste n'a pas approuvé et n'approuvera jamais l'initiative néfaste du Gouvernement qui a organisé le blocus de la république espagnole" (51). In addition Thorez pointed out that his party had given the government consistent support in order to ensure the realisation of the Popular Front programme, and had even voted for the devaluation of the franc, but that the party now believed that "la politique extérieure du Gouvernement s'écarte du programme du Front populaire". Having delivered this, his first public attack on the Blum government, Thorez concluded that "C'est seulement par souci de l'unité du Front populaire, de la cohésion des masses populaires qui attendent beaucoup de nous tous, que nous ne voterons pas contre le gouvernement" : in the ensuing vote, the communist contingent merely abstained (52).

Thus it seems that in spite of communists' claims to the contrary, French Communist Party policy was determined largely by the interests of Moscow's foreign policy, and that as long as the Soviet government continued to have some hope in the possible consolidation of the alliance with France, then the French Communists would continue to support the Popular Front government. As a result, they continued to support the government under Blum's successor, the more conservative Radical, Camille Chautemps, making little criticism of his very orthodox financial measures or even of the new government's restrictions on the 40 hour week, which had been one of the major domestic successes of the Blum government. This moderate policy, which persisted throughout the summer of 1937, has been attributed to a desire to do well in the cantonal elections to be held in October :

indeed, as soon as those elections were over the communists launched a violent attack on the government's Spanish policy (53), and by December the party's relationship with the increasingly conservative Chautemps government had deteriorated dramatically, with the Communists openly supporting a strike at the Goodrich tyre plant, which Chautemps publicly held responsible for a sudden financial crisis in early January. Then, on the 13th, a communist deputy named Ramette, calling in the Chamber for "un véritable gouvernement du front populaire, à l'image du front populaire", provoked the fall of the first Chautemps government (54).

It was widely believed in political circles that the communist role in this debate was dictated by Moscow, where the government was anxious to be rid of Chautemps and Delbos as a result of their failure to consolidate the Pact (55). Indeed, the communist campaign against Delbos began only after he had refused an invitation from Litvinov in November to include Moscow on his tour of France's central and east European allies : the Soviet government took the snub badly, and in particular Delbos' stop in Berlin on his way to Warsaw, where he was met by the German Foreign Minister, von Neurath (56). Soviet anxiety was exacerbated by Halifax's visit to Germany as well as by the trip made by Chautemps and Delbos to London in November, where it was rumoured that Chautemps had suggested that a reinforcement of the Franco-British entente would enable him to abandon the Franco-Soviet Pact (57). On January 19th Gabriel Péri complained in L'Humanité that the essential moves of French policy had been subordinated to the consent of London, and had never taken into account the opinion of Moscow. He added that it was obvious that, in order to save the peace, "le ministre qui a sur les bras le déplorable bilan de M. Yvon

Delbos ne doit pas se reprendre sa place au Quai d'Orsay (58).

Clearly Moscow was losing patience over France's lack of interest in the Soviet Pact : on January 16th, for example, Andrei Zhdanov delivered a blistering attack on France at a meeting of the Supreme Soviet, asking "if the Pact exists or not" (59). Nor did the Soviets entertain high expectations from a return to power of Léon Blum (60): indeed, when Blum was called upon in March to constitute a new government after the fall of the second Chautemps cabinet, the communists were noticeably unenthusiastic, and although <sup>they</sup> must have been aware that the Blum government was now sending large supplies of military equipment to Spain, l'Humanité even launched a new campaign against the government's official Spanish policy. In contrast, the communists were initially prepared to support a completely new government under Daladier, even though he brought the pro-German Georges Bonnet to the Quai, making little protest against Daladier's financial decree laws, which raised taxes by 8% and further weakened the 40-hour week law. In fact, however, the communists' moderation lasted little more than a few weeks, after which they resumed the attack on the Popular Front government, which was now clearly so far from representing their interests in either domestic or foreign policy. As one party historian, Jacques Fauvet, has said, "le parti communiste veut maintenir une fiction pour sauver une réalité. La fiction, c'est le front populaire; la réalité, c'est la politique étrangère" (61).

Thus, when it finally became apparent to the Soviet government in September 1938 that the policy of rapprochement with France was definitely worthless in practical terms, the French Communist Party abandoned the Popular Front Government. In the Chamber, the whole

communist contingent, joined by only two other deputies, voted against a majority of 535 in refusing to approve the Munich agreement, while with five other deputies the communists refused to grant the special financial and economic powers requested by Daladier. The final test of the Party's devotion to Moscow came in September 1939 : once the Soviet government had abandoned the French alliance and signed a Pact with Nazi Germany, the Comintern announced the ending of the Popular Front tactics and the reintroduction of revolutionary defeatism. The French Communist Party obeyed. But that the French communists had continued to support the increasingly conservative and, in their opinion, reactionary, Popular Front governments until September 1938, approving policies which directly contradicted the bases of communist ideology, demonstrates clearly not only the undoubted subservience of French communists to Moscow, but more significantly the importance which the Soviet government attached to the preservation of the French alliance. To this extent, then, it seems probable that the existence of a Franco-Soviet alliance might have actually reduced, rather than increased, the potential communist threat to French domestic stability. In fact, the public loyalty of the French Communist Party to the Popular Front government did little to convince non-communists that the Party really had abandoned its long-avowed aim to subvert the political and social system of France.

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## 2. French attitudes to communism and the Soviet Pact

In June 1936 Thorez explained that after considerable deliberation his party had decided not to accept ministerial posts in the new Blum government, even though it had participated fully in the development of the Front populaire, since it was thought that "les communistes serviront mieux la cause du peuple en soutenant, sans réserves et sans éclipses, le gouvernement à direction socialiste, plutôt qu'en offrant, par leur présence dans le cabinet, le prétexte aux campagnes de panique et d'affolement des ennemis du peuple" (62). In fact, this physical dissociation from the Popular Front government was totally ineffective : in the minds of the conservative opposition, the Popular Front was directly equated with communism. Initially it had been relatively simple for those on the political right and centre, having always distrusted Soviet-German collaboration and fearing a resurgence of German militarism, to accept that Russia's concern was now national defence rather than world revolution, and so the Franco-Soviet Pact had been welcomed primarily as a means of preventing a return to Rapallo. But this objectivity was likely to remain intact only as long as foreign policy continued to operate independently of domestic political influences : as soon as this was no longer the case, conservative support for the Pact evaporated rapidly.

Traditional nationalists such as Henri de Kerillis, Emile Buré and Louis Marin had initially seen the Pact as constituting a necessary link in France's defensive system against Germany, while at the same time they were somewhat reassured that the alliance with Communist Russia was complemented by an agreement with Italy. Thus the break-up of the Stresa Front over the Ethiopian conflict immediately brought the desirability of the Soviet alliance into question (63).

During 1935 the Centre and Right gradually came to renounce their nationalist tradition by opposing sanctions against Italy while the usually pacifist Left, by supporting sanctions, became open to the charge of bellicism (64). Having once broken away from their traditional positions it was only a small step for the Left, on the one hand, to adopt the policy of firmness towards Germany implied in acceptance of alliance with Soviet Russia, and for the Right on the other to abandon its traditional opposition to Germany in favour of appeasement. It is thus significant that the minority on the Right who actually supported the sanctions policy, such as Reynaud, Mandel and Pezet, were also those who voted to ratify the Franco-Soviet Pact.

The developing identification between domestic and foreign policy was naturally intensified as a result of the growing strength of communism during 1935. When the Pact was signed, communism did not seem to pose a particularly serious threat in France, at least in electoral terms: the elections of 1932 had been a disaster for the party, whose vote was reduced from 1,063,943 in 1928 to 784,883 (65). Immediately following the signature of the Pact, however, the Communist Party made considerable gains in the municipal elections held on May 5th and 11th. Since the last elections in 1929 the communists had controlled only 150 councils : this was now increased to 297 (66). In the Department of the Seine, that is, the working-class suburbs surrounding Paris, the number of communist-controlled municipalities was increased from 9 to 23 (67). *L'Humanité* neglected even the Soviet Pact in favour of euphoric celebrations (68). In fact, the communist successes were very much confined to large towns and industrial centres, whereas in other, predominantly rural areas, the moderate Centre and Radical parties made substantial gains. But as François Goguel had said,



"sur le moment, on comprit mal la signification du scrutin. On s'hypnotisa sur les gains réalisés par l'extrême-gauche dans les grands centres, et l'on négligea le mouvement en sens inverse qui s'était produit dans les campagnes" (69).

At the same time, Stalin's National Defence declaration had removed the last practical obstacle to French communist collaboration with the social-democratic parties. On July 14th a massive popular demonstration held at the Buffalo stadium in Paris witnessed the signature of the official "Appel au Rassemblement" by forty eight national associations (70): the People's Front, uniting the Communist, Socialist and Radical parties, was rapidly taking shape. In the autumn the CGTU suddenly accepted all of Jouhaux's conditions, which it had so long opposed, and the two unions, communist and socialist, announced unity of action, while in October at the Radical Party Congress, Herriot declared his party's support for the new coalition, as well as for the Franco-Soviet Pact. Finally, on 12th January 1936, the programme of the Rassemblement Populaire was published.

Thus, when the slightly leftish government of Albert Sarraut finally brought the Pact before the Chamber for ratification in February, it immediately became clear that the Pact had become a largely domestic issue. Blum pointed out that had Laval still been at the Quai, then his faithful majority would have found it very difficult to criticise the Pact; since it was defended by Sarraut and Flandin, it would be easier for the Right to attack it. In effect, "les organisateurs de la propagande réactionnaire se flattent d'avoir découvert enfin en le pacte franco-soviétique la plate-forme électorale qu'ils cherchent en vain depuis des mois et des mois" (71). As a result, the arguments

put forward by opponents of the Pact against its ratification were dominated by fear of communism. Philippe Henriot, for example, claimed to have evidence showing links between Stalin and a M.Eberlein, who had been arrested by Strasbourg police and charged with spying against France, having apparently worked to promote revolution in France for the last seventeen years (72), while the complete lack of distinction between domestic communism and the Soviet Union was shown clearly by Fernand-Laurent who cried, "Une entente avec le peuple russe, pour la sauvegarde de la paix, sans réserve et cordiale, oui! Une entente avec l'internationale communiste, soviétique et révolutionnaire, jamais!"(73). 353 deputies voted to ratify the Pact (including 118 socialists, 12 communists and 138 Radicals, with nearly 50 moderate deputies following the example of Reynaud and Flandin) and 164 on the Centre and Right voted against it (74). Had the Pact been ratified one year earlier, when domestic communism still seemed relatively weak, it is probable that the voting in favour would have been much greater.

The Chamber debate also showed how in the minds of the opposition the future of the Pact was inextricably linked with the Popular Front coalition. In particular, M.Montigny warned that, "ratifier le traité d'assistance mutuelle, c'est signer un pouvoir blanc au gouvernement d'aujourd'hui et, surtout, à ceux de demain." (75). These instinctive fears seemed justified when in May, immediately following the victory of the Popular Front, a wave of sit-in strikes paralysed much of private industry. Recent analysis has shown that in fact the majority of strikes occurred in those areas where union and communist organisation was weakest, (76), and the role of the communist leaders in restraining the strikers does not suggest that

their main concern was to provoke revolution (77); indeed, although sources in Berlin asserted that Dimitrov and a number of Soviet officials were in Paris during the strikes, there is no concrete evidence to suggest that "agents provocateurs" sponsored either by the PCF or Moscow, were directly responsible for their outbreak (78). It was not, after all, in Moscow's interests to see France torn by civil war. But for most conservatives, and even some among the Popular Front' allies, the strike movements were interpreted as the forerunner to revolution. Thus throughout the life of the Popular Front government and particularly at times of renewed labour unrest, opponents of the government warned that the Communist Party was acting on the direct orders of Moscow, and planning to overthrow the French state. In October 1936 the National Republican press called on its readers to take "l'engagement solennel de combattre sans merci le plus perfide, le plus dangereux ennemi de la civilisation : le communisme" (79), while Jean Goy felt obliged to denounce "le caractère révolutionnaire de l'action déclenchée par les communistes" (80). In the press accusations were often supported by an array of 'facts' : 'Gringoire', for instance, claimed in January 1937 to have obtained detailed information of meetings and organised activities which proved conclusively that the Comintern, through the French Communist Party, was preparing a putsch which would install a Soviet regime in France (81). Similarly, the German press claimed that France was increasingly under communist control. The 'Volkischer Beobachter' reported the Clichy riots in March 1937 under the headline, "Communist terror and General Strike in Paris, 5 dead, 300 wounded, in the battle of the barricades" (82).

The violent anti-communist campaigns of the fascist and German press

were not accepted by everyone, but many moderates were also beginning to fear communist influence. As Alexander Werth remarked, "The stay in strikes of 1936 and the labour unrest generally had given many of them the idea that if France was not exactly 'Communist', the Reds were playing too important a part in her internal affairs"(83) In particular, claims that the French party were acting under orders from Moscow aroused deep -seated fears that Stalin was trying to weaken France internally so that she might seem an easy prey for German ambitions, which would thus be diverted away from Russia. 'Candide' declared in September 1936 under a hugh headline, "Le développement du plan communiste en France", that by initiating strike action, the communists were hoping to provoke civil war (84). On the 24th October 1936 the Parti Social Français and the Union nationale des combattants, considering that the principal threat to their independence was represented by the criminal propaganda of the Communist Party, agreed to form local ententes to denounce "l'action de Moscou" and to disarm "ceux qui préparent la guerre civile et veulent nous entraîner dans un conflit général" (85).

The belief that Russia was attempting to involve France in a war with Germany was seen to be confirmed by the Soviet policy with regard to Spain, and in particular by the French Communist Party's attempts to pressurise the French government to intervene on behalf of the Republic. Thus one French source reported that the Russians had been particularly pleased by the news that German troops had landed in Morocco, since they hoped that this would exacerbate Franco-German tension and so divert German attention from the east (86). At the same time it was assumed that Soviet intervention was designed to provoke revolution in Spain, and Coulondre warned Litvinov in November 1936 that "sur le

terrain de la politique extérieure, la poussée idéologique dont elle sent la pression dans l'affaire espagnole en particulier inquiète... l'opinion française" (87).

As a result of such fears it was widely asserted that anyone, whatever his political affiliations, who supported the idea of alliance with bolshevik Russia, was communist. Pierre Cot, for instance, was actually a member of the Radical party, but as the most outspoken supporter within the government of alliance with the USSR, he was immediately dubbed a Sovietophile by his opponents. Between July and September 1936 the extreme right-wing newspaper 'Candide' attacked Cot on at least seven separate occasions, accusing him of undermining the French airforce on behalf of his Soviet masters. Edouard Herriot, who was on the right of the Radical Socialist party but had been instrumental in the original rapprochement with the USSR, complained that every time he argued the importance of the alliance with Russia, "on me traite de communiste ou d'imbécile" (88), and indeed, following his attendance at a meeting of the 'Amis de l'Union Soviétique' in Lyon, the 'Echo de Paris' proclaimed, "Attention! Cet homme est dangeureux. C'est l'Ennemi public n.1!" (89). Even Paul Reynaud, a Centre-Right deputy who opposed the Popular Front on domestic grounds, was violently attacked as a result of his ceaseless campaign in favour of a Soviet alliance: two days before the May elections, the 'Action française' published a declaration by Marshal Petain against the Pact and added, "Nous pensons qu'il n'y aura plus personne dans cet arrondissement de Paris pour voter pour Paul Reynaud" (90).

Even Reynaud, it seems, would have had difficulty in consolidating the Franco-Soviet Pact: for a government elected with communist support,

the task was even harder. In fact, any attempt by the Popular Front government to establish further contact with the USSR brought down a torrent of abuse in the Chamber and the Press, not only from extremists, but also from moderates whose predominant concern was the communist threat. On July 6th 1936, for example, the 'Echo de Paris' revealed that Pierre Cot had agreed to sell the patent of the Hispano Suiza aeroplane canon to the USSR. Denouncing, in common with the German press, Cot's sovietophilia, the article accused him of "sending the Soviets the most valuable secrets of our national defence" and asked, "Have we already fallen under Russian dependence? Are we a dominion of Moscow?" ( 91). Then on the 10th, de Kerillis made an interpolation in the Chamber criticising the "sending to Russia of armaments which the national interest required to be kept secret". The '23' canon was in fact a very recent development of two earlier models of which Britain and Czechoslovakia had requested the patents : the fact that the Russians had specifically requested the most modern version, the '23', said de Kerillis, indicated that they had information not available to France's other allies.

Cot's reply was that Russia had already bought the patent to the engine before the Popular Front came into office and anyway the canon was not even a French invention or the sole property of the French government : its Swiss designer was entitled to sell the patent to whomsoever he pleased. Moreover, Cot insisted that he was fully prepared to undertake technical collaboration of this kind with any country prepared to sign a mutual assistance pact with France ( 92). To the aeronautical commission Cot also explained that in return for the sale, France was to have received help with the organisation of parachute units, although this information could not be made known in the Chamber.

Although the parliamentary debate led to the largest vote of confidence that the government had yet received, that is, 403 votes to 152, the fact that the 'Echo' had a widespread, fairly moderate readership meant that its accusations were far more damaging to the public image of the Popular Front than the consistent hate campaign of 'L'Action' or 'Candide'. Moreover, the 'Echo' had several famous retired military leaders, such as General Castelnau, on its staff and was often seen as the interpreter of General Staff ideas, and, it was said that half of the officers in the French Army read it. As a result, says Cot, when the newspaper made such claims "even decent people who lacked critical sense imagined that France was being betrayed by the Popular Front government" (93).

Fears of the possible repercussions of an alliance with Communist Russia on France's internal stability were in fact based on an over-estimation of the strength and influence of the French communist party. In electoral terms the successes of May 1936 marked the zenith of communist achievement, since the greatly increased vote probably did not represent an equally increased support for communist ideals. The British Ambassador suggested that it was the dishonesty of former governments and the despair of the small shop-keeper class which "made extremists of normally non-extremist elements" (94). In the months following the elections, many of these temporary supporters were alienated from the Communist Party, holding it responsible for the strikes, and disliking its aggressive policy towards the government on the Spanish issue : as a result, the communists lost a considerable number of votes to the socialists in the by-elections held in January 1937 (95). In the same way it was totally incorrect to assume, as did many of its opponents, that the Popular Front government was controlled

by the Communist Party. Blum himself was no friend of the communists, having emerged as the leader of the SFIO after the schism at Tours in 1920 at which the majority had voted to adhere to the Third International, thus forming the French Communist Party. He had since steadfastly refused all communist proposals for the unification of the two parties, which had been intensified after the formation of the United Front, since he was aware that this would merely comprise a communist takeover of the SFIO (96). Moreover, during the antagonistic period of Comintern policy, the SFIO had often been singled out for criticism. At the 13th plenum of the Comintern Executive Committee in December 1933, Thorez insisted that the SFIO was a fascist party, while the Hungarian communist Bela Kun insisted that "the central points of our attacks on the social fascists (in France) must be to split the Socialist party" (97).

It is scarcely surprising, therefore, that Blum himself, while realising that the change in communist tactics was a direct reflection of the needs of Russian foreign policy, asked himself in July 1934, "Comment s'assurer que la 3e Internationale ait renoncé à son hostilité de principe contre la 'social-démocratie', et que par des voies plus insidieuses, elle ne poursuive pas toujours le même dessein d'agression et de destruction?" (98). In fact, Blum never changed his policy in response to communist pressure. Certainly he was unprepared to lose communist support for his government : speaking at Orléans in October 1936, for example, Blum told the local Radical Socialist Federation that although some of the government's allies felt that as part of the original Rassemblement, their elimination from the coalition would make a dissolution and fresh elections necessary, and would constitute the first step towards the formation of a government of national union,



excluding the socialists and radicals as well as communists. He added that communist and trade union support was essential for the government to be able to steer a middle way between weakness and brutality in the preservation of public order (99). Indeed, faced with a violent communist attack on his government's foreign policy on December 5th, Blum immediately considered resignation. But the conduct of the communists during that debate actually demonstrated that Blum was effectively in a very strong position with regard to the communists, who could not afford to vote against the government since wither Blum would resign after a vote of confidence in the Chamber and hold new elections at which the communist vote might be reduced, or he would resign and be succeeded by a majority further to the right. Thus, as long as there remained a slight possibility that the Popular Front government would consolidate the Franco-Soviet Pact, it was the government who effectively controlled the PCF, and not vice versa.

It is ironical that the Popular Front government, far from being the tool of Moscow as was claimed, shared the same fundamental anxieties about Soviet-communist agitation in France as its own opponents. Indeed, this issue was to prove a fundamental stumbling block throughout the government's diplomatic relations with the USSR. When in October 1936 Robert Coulondre prepared to leave as the new French Ambassador to the USSR one of the very few instructions he received from the Foreign Minister, Yvon Delbos, was that he must demand that the Soviet government stop all interference in French domestic affairs. Although Coulondre was himself, like his predecessor Alphan, a vigorous supporter of the Pact, he too believed that Russia "était manifestement à l'origine de l'agitation sociale qui secouait notre pays", and remained convinced that such interference constituted the

single most important obstacle to the consolidation of the Franco-Soviet Pact (100). Consequently, Coulondre raised this issue at his first meetings with both Litvinov and President Kalinin, arguing that since the basis of the Franco-Soviet entente was the Non-Interference pact of 1932, then if that pact did not operate, the whole machinery of entente would collapse. In reply, Litvinov produced an official declaration that, "Le gouvernement soviétique n'a pas été et n'est en aucune relation soit directe soit indirecte ni avec l'activité du P.C.F. en son entier, ni avec les paroles des représentants de ce parti, ni avec les écrits de l'Humanité", and he insisted that his government had even forbidden its diplomatic missions to have any relations with the party (101). Indeed, this Soviet response to repeated French demands that the Soviet Union abandon the Comintern never wavered : in January 1938, nearly two years after the accession to power of the Popular Front in France, Delbos complained to Litvinov at Geneva, "Comment en effet ceux qui voient le gouvernement attaqué avec une telle violence par le parti communiste sur le plan notamment de la politique extérieure et qui constatent l'identité et le synchronisme de ces attaques avec les propos des dirigeants et des journaux soviétiques pourraient-ils croire à de bonnes relations entre nous?" Litvinov merely repeated that the Soviet government had no control over the Comintern, let alone the PCF (102).

In the same way, the French government was just as perturbed as its own opponents by evidence of Soviet intervention in Spain, though often on practical rather than ideological grounds. The practical difficulties caused by the Soviet position in the everyday running of the non-intervention committee, for example, were a source of considerable embarrassment to the French government. On September the 23rd, for

instance, the Sub-Committee on Non-Intervention met to consider the question of indirect assistance which had been raised by the Italian representative, but although a large majority of members felt that a discussion of the issue would be useful, the Soviet representative insisted that it was entirely outside the competence of the Committee and could only be examined directly between governments : since he refused to withdraw, the issue was adjourned (103). Similarly, in October 1937 the intransigence of the Soviet representative on the issue of belligerent rights, (the Soviets would consider the recognition of belligerent rights in Spain only after the immediate and total withdrawal of all foreign troops) led to a virtual breakdown in negotiations with the German and Italians (104), who could obviously cite Soviet obstructionism as a justification for withdrawing from the talks. The French government was clearly displeased (105), but failed to persuade the Soviets to stand down.

At the same time the French were clearly very concerned about the possible consequences of Soviet involvement in Spain. In October 1936 Alexis Léger sent for the Russian chargé (Potemkin was absent), to discuss the action of the Soviet representative on the NIC. It was the first time, he said, that there had been such a serious, and public divergence between French and Russian policy, and he felt obliged to point out that the present policy of the Soviet government would lead to war, which was contrary to the spirit of the Franco-Soviet Pact. The French government had reliable information that four or five Russian cargo boats had recently left the Black Sea for Spanish ports with cargoes of arms on board, and since these boats could have been intercepted before reaching their destination, thus provoking open conflict with Germany and Italy, Léger failed to understand how the

Russian representative could in all sincerity continue to attend the meetings of the NIC in London. Hirschfeld agreed with Léger's facts, though denying that the Soviet action would lead to war, and was confident that it would be possible to find a way of avoiding serious conflict. But, he added, whatever happened the Soviet government was now prepared to go to any lengths to help the Madrid government to resist Franco and prevent the establishment of another Fascist regime: Léger begged him to warn his superiors that the French government would regard this as a very serious statement, and indeed he himself told Mr. Lloyd Thomas at the British Embassy that "this disagreement on a major issue of policy might well affect the whole future of relations between France and Russia and of the workings of the Franco-Soviet Pact" (106).

Although Léger was probably exaggerating in this, it is clear that Soviet policy in Spain made an improvement in Franco-Soviet relations less likely. At the same time, French complaints about the activities of the French communists might in many ways have been justified: l'Humanité had, for example, conducted a personal campaign against Delbos in the early weeks of 1938, hoping that he would be removed from the Quai (107). But while insisting that the Soviet government admit its influence over the Comintern, and thus over the PCF, the French government seems never to have considered the possibility that Soviet control over the French Communists might, if Moscow felt that the alliance with France was worth preserving, work in France's favour. In July 1936 for example, the 'Courier Socialiste', a Russian emigré newspaper, claimed that when the Comintern Executive Committee had twice proposed to use the internal situation in France to provoke a revolution, the plan had been categorically opposed by the Moscow

government ( 108), and on several occasions the Soviets seem to have restrained the French Communists in their revolutionary zeal. The PCF's, and, by implication, Moscow's, opposition to the Popular Front became apparent only once the government's lack of interest in the Soviet alliance was finally recognised ( 109).

It is difficult to ascertain the extent to which fears of communist underground activity in France were justified. It is indeed possible that the French Communists might, in spite of instructions to the contrary from Moscow, have continued their subversive work in France throughout the years of the Popular Front governments, as their opponents so often claimed, although their reaction to the strike movement suggests that any such activity would have been the work of a zealous minority rather than official policy dictated by the Party's Central Committee, its own activities strictly monitored by Moscow. Undoubtedly the Soviet Union had not abandoned its aim to promote world revolution, but as long as it remained postponed it seems unlikely that the Soviet government would have encouraged, by means of the Comintern, activities within France which countered its own defence policies. The existence of the Franco-Soviet Pact might not in itself have restrained all communist subversion in France : it is unlikely, however, that it promoted it.

Moreover, the Popular Front government was not, as its opponents claimed, controlled by the Communists. Indeed, Popular Front governments were capable of acting quite independently of the French Communist Party, and in practice did so, most notably in the failure to consolidate the Pact. And yet, in spite of its determination to work without any ideological interference or prejudice in foreign affairs, the



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CHAPTER 4

THE POPULAR FRONT AND HITLER'S GERMANY

It was in the search for entente with Germany that the Blum government, rather surprisingly, acted most vigorously. In view of its left-wing bias, it was anticipated by supporters and critics alike that the new Popular Front government would adopt a firm, and perhaps rather intransigent, attitude to the fascist dictatorships, while being inclined as a result of a certain ideological affinity to draw closer to the USSR. Certainly the fall of Laval could only reduce the likelihood of a Franco-German rapprochement. Laval had made no secret of his aim to establish an entente with Germany (1), and in October 1935 the Paris correspondent of the "Munchner Neueste Nachrichten" warned his readers that after the fall of Laval a new offensive against Germany could be expected, since it was only "la nécessité de céder à l'influence de la gauche qui a empêché M.Laval de suivre son but idéal : une négociation franche et si possible directe sur les rapports franco-allemands" (2). Indeed, Laval had several times indicated to the Germans that if a Franco-German understanding could be reached, then "the Russo-French treaty would cease to exist altogether" (3).

The Blum government soon made clear, however, that it did not intend to undertake an ideological crusade against Germany, stressing that "democracies will peacefully tolerate the existence of dictatorial states alongside them" (4), and insisting that it would be prepared to undertake any negotiation which might aid the cause of peace. But after months of propaganda, resulting in the reoccupation of the demilitarised Rhineland zone, which had made clear the German attitude towards

France's pact with Russia, Blum must have been aware that the attempt to reconcile friendship with Germany and friendship with the Soviet Union would constitute the most difficult aspect of his foreign policy.

Many Frenchmen were evidently worried that continued French support for the Pact would give Hitler a pretext for yet further assaults on the European security system. This emerged particularly clearly from the ratification debate where opponents of the Pact, such as Jean Montigny, warned that its continued existence would prevent any rapprochement with Germany being possible (5), while Joseph Rossé, an Alsatian deputy, argued that although the government might insist that the Pact was not incompatible with Locarno, that it remained open to any powers who wished to join it, and that it was not directed against Germany, what really mattered was that "le Reich continue à interpréter ainsi le pacte franco-soviétique" (6). Moreover, although it was never explicitly stated, it was already apparent that Germany intended to make rejection of the Russian Pact by France a condition for Franco-German rapprochement. For example, shortly before the Pact was ratified, Hitler warned Bertrand de Jouvenal that "mes efforts personnels vers un tel rapprochement (franco-allemand) subsistent toujours. Cependant, dans le domaine des faits ce pacte, plus que déplorable, créerait naturellement une nouvelle situation" (7).

More specifically, German officials began to indicate that Germany was unwilling to participate in any agreement which included Russia, or even in an agreement with countries who were allied to Russia. In July 1935 the German Ambassador to London told Eden, then Minister for the League of Nations, that the position with regard to the proposed Eastern Pact had been profoundly modified by the conclusion

of the Franco-Soviet Pact, an alliance directed solely against Germany: to sign a non-aggression pact now would be to imply approval for the Franco-Soviet Pact, indeed, he said, that was one reason why the French and the Russians wanted such an agreement (8). Five days later von Hoesch, visiting Vansittart the Permanent Under-Secretary for Foreign Affairs, repeated his belief that it would be ridiculous to expect Germany to condone the conclusion of an anti-German alliance (9). Similarly, in September 1936 M. Arnal, the French chargé in Berlin, reported that officials at the Wilhelmstrasse had renewed their complaints against the Pact, now claiming that it presented an important obstacle to a German entente with the western powers in the matter of arms limitation, since Germany could not possibly consider a reduction in her means of defence, as long as Russia continued to threaten her (10).

The Popular Front Government was naturally unwilling to submit to such blackmail. In February 1937, in reply to a speech by Hitler which was remarkably favourable to France but violently anti-Soviet, Delbos felt obliged to reaffirm his government's fidelity to the Pact since otherwise, he explained, it might seem to Germany that France was abandoning her Pact with Russia. Thus Delbos sought to show that the French position was irrevocable by emphasising that the Franco-Soviet Pact, concluded in a spirit of peace and open to all, was still very much in existence. When asked by Gaston Bergery at a subsequent meeting of the Chamber Foreign Affairs Committee whether Hitler was effectively making the abandonment of the Franco-Soviet Pact a condition to be fulfilled before any Franco-German negotiations could take place, Delbos replied that while Hitler obviously implied that Germany was not prepared to participate in an accord to which Russia

was a party, he had nowhere explicitly made it a condition that before talking to any country, that country must first break off all relations with Russia. Indeed, as Delbos pointed out, he had replied to Hitler on behalf of the French government that "je n'admettrais pas qu'on posât des conditions là-dessus et qu'on demandât qu'un pays soit mis en dehors de la communauté internationale" (11).

In spite of this unusually stirring response from Delbos, however, the Popular Front government was anxious to make a positive attempt to improve Franco-German relations. The most spectacular demonstration of this was the visit to Paris, in late August 1936, of Hitler's Minister of Finance and Economics, Dr. Schacht, and his meeting on August 28th with the French Premier. Schacht proposed that if France and Great Britain would restore her colonies, then Germany would participate in an international disarmament conference. Blum replied that "je suis marxiste et je suis juif", but that "nous ne pouvons aboutir à rien si nous posons ces idéologies comme des barrières insurmontables" (12): indeed he did not think that ideologies played so great a part in international affairs as was sometimes maintained, recalling that the Franco-Soviet Pact had been preceded by an alliance between Radical France and Tsarist Russia. The only cure, he added, was to relieve France of the apprehensions from Germany which had brought about these policies. In his report to Hitler Schacht twisted this last remark to suggest that if Germany were to cease to be a menace to France then the Franco-Soviet Pact would lapse, though Blum hotly denied having made such a suggestion (13), which does indeed seem unlikely.

He does on the other hand seem to have been fully prepared to discuss

the practical bases of entente. He insisted, for example, that any undertakings on disarmament must apply to the USSR as well as France, in reply to which Schacht indicated that an indirect guarantee to Great Britain and France that she would not attack Russia might be possible (14). Blum's response was that while France could not envisage a bilateral accord with Germany, since she could renounce neither her undertakings nor her friendships, he would nevertheless be prepared to contemplate a general agreement, and he suggested that the return of German colonies was not impossible(15). Thus, while he refused to by-pass Foreign Minister Eden and contact Baldwin directly on the subject of the British-controlled colonies, as Schacht suggested, he agreed to raise the matter with the British government(16) adding that "Je suis prêt à engager la conversation tout de suite" (17).

In fact, the much-discussed Blum-Schacht exchange was not followed-up. Eden, who visited Paris a few days later, says that he was unhappy with the proposals, suspecting that the German government had no intention of agreeing to a general settlement but merely wanted to regain its colonies (18), while Blum himself recollects that Eden was horrified at the suggestion, reporting the proposals to Baldwin who confirmed Eden's attitude some days later in a letter to Blum (19). Nor was there any official response to the exchange from the German government, possibly because Schacht did not have the full confidence of Hitler, and perhaps did not even have his approval for the visit. But despite the failure of its first initiative, the Blum government did not give up hope of drawing Germany into a general settlement. On the 23rd of December Delbos allegedly promised Ambassador Welczeck that Germany's wishes would be satisfied in various areas in return for peace in Spain, as a result of which Welczeck commented that "Blum and Delbos



have now...undertaken the attempt to reach an understanding with Germany" (20). This was followed by a speech at Lyon on January 24th in which Blum repeated the French government's offer. There could be no bilateral Franco-German agreement, only an overall settlement of European problems, the basis of which might take the form of a contract: Germany might receive assistance, in order to overcome her serious economic difficulties, in return for which she would participate in the peaceful settlement of the European situation. Blum even alluded to the form which the assistance might take : the opening of credits and concessions in the supply of raw materials, and even in the sphere of colonies. Thus on this occasion Blum maintained his offer of talks on colonial matters, adding an offer of economic and financial co-operation (21).

In spite of these French initiatives, however, the German response remained negative. On the 25th of January, for example, Goebbels told François-Poncet that Blum's speech had introduced nothing practical or positive into the European situation. Similarly, when Schacht returned to Paris in mid-1937 he dismissed the idea of an eventual financial negotiation, saying Germany had no need of a loan, while maintaining German economic and colonial claims, and in particular insisting that Germany must be given a colonial base sufficient to feed her people. In return he offered nothing, thus deliberately avoiding Blum's insistence on the link between economic co-operation and the organisation of peace (22). In fact, by this stage Schacht, who was soon to be disgraced, was no longer a real representative of the Hitler government, and it has been noted that the Berlin press passed over his second visit in silence (23).

In addition to the Popular Front's own inclination to negotiate with Germany, it was under considerable pressure from external sources to modify its relations with the Soviet Union in order to appease France's traditional enemy. For example, the American Ambassador to Paris, William Bullitt, did everything possible to persuade the French government to reach an agreement with Germany. Bullitt had visited Russia, and even met Lenin, in 1919, and had returned full of enthusiasm for the great spirit of hopefulness he had seen there. He played a major role in the negotiations which led to the American recognition of the USSR in 1933, and one year later had returned to Moscow as the first U.S. Ambassador to the Soviet Union. But by 1935 his attitude had changed to one of open hostility. The reasons for this abrupt reversal are not altogether clear: in general terms he seems to have been bitterly disappointed by the tense atmosphere of Soviet life in 1934 as opposed to 1919, while more specifically he suspected that Litvinov was guilty of deliberately misunderstanding the accord with Roosevelt on diplomatic recognition in 1933, in claiming that the Americans had agreed to supply the Russians with funds to use however it chose, in contrast to the limited credit agreement envisaged by the Americans. Various minor disagreements, for example over the American Embassy building in Moscow, exacerbated Bullitt's irritation until finally, in 1935, he was outraged by the open meeting in Moscow of the Seventh Comintern Congress and its support for world revolution, which he saw as a direct contravention of the Soviet agreement in the 1933 accord to ban all organisations seeking to overthrow the U.S. government from its territory (24). Whatever the reasons for Bullitt's disillusionment, he undoubtedly became, for the next three years, as implacable an enemy of the USSR as he had formerly been a supporter.

In August 1936 Bullitt was appointed U.S. Ambassador to Paris, where he was said to have established considerable influence over Daladier (25). It was now Bullitt's belief that "Russia's great wish is to provoke a general conflagration in which she herself will play but little part, beyond perhaps a little bombing from a distance, but after which she will arise like a phoenix...and bring about a world revolution" (26), and he began increasingly to urge the French government to abandon its pact with Russia, and turn instead towards Germany. The U.S. Ambassador to Germany, William Dodd, claims that as early as mid-1935 Bullitt had warned the French government against the Pact, and had even tried to prevent a possible French loan to Russia in the autumn by informing a strategic official in the French government that Russia could never repay it (27). Once the Pact had been ratified Bullitt continued his campaign against it, and in late 1936, on hearing reports that France had agreed to military talks with the Russians, rushed to ask Gamelin if it were true : Gamelin reassured him that the rumours were false (28).

Moreover, it seems that Bullitt did not merely confine himself to criticising the Soviet Union, but offered practical suggestions and help towards Franco-German rapprochement. Thus he tried in December 1936 to negotiate between the German Ambassador to Paris, von Welczeck, and the Finance Minister, Georges Bonnet, both of whom had indicated an interest in rapprochement, and he told the French government that if it was decided to give Germany the Cameroons in an attempt at reconciliation, then the American government would not disapprove. Similarly, he suggested to Blum in 1937 that France and Germany should negotiate on the basis of removing the barriers to international trade and the limitation of armaments, and he encouraged Delbos when he

mentioned the possibility of negotiations with Hitler on the humanisation of warfare, saying that Hitler would probably agree (29). At the same time, Bullitt established close contacts with German agents in France, as well as with the British appeasers, informing a gathering at the Astors in May 1936 that "Blum depends on Russia and Delbos was Moscow's choice for Foreign Minister" (30).

Though not so hostile as Bullitt, many British officials were also anxious about the consequences of the Franco-Soviet Pact. In particular the British were worried that any news of Franco-Soviet military talks would be used by Germany as a pretext to withdraw from the tenuous negotiations for a new western pact (31). As early as January 1936 the German air attaché to London had indicated that Germany would have to contemplate a first-line strength equal to the total of the French and Russian air strengths combined, since parity with France alone would no longer be of any use once the Pact was ratified. Wenninger admitted that he was speaking unofficially, but nevertheless suggested that "if the English can stop the French from ratifying the Franco-Soviet Pact, we will sit around the table with you and the French and will agree to having equal strength. Each country could have a first-line strength of approximately one third of the Soviet strength". The British Air Minister, Air Vice-Marshal Courtney, believed that this request was not unreasonable, and Mr. Sargent at the Foreign Office stressed that as long as the Pact was not ratified, it would be a lever in French hands. Only Vansittart pointed out that the attaché's demarche constituted blackmail, adding that he very much doubted whether the German government had the slightest intention of concluding an air pact, anyway (32).

During 1936, however, even Vansittart began to fear that news of Franco-Soviet military contacts might seriously affect the chances of a successful five-power conference since, as he told the French Ambassador, German propaganda "dira que non seulement la France n'a pas voulu modifier le pacte franco-soviétique qui faisait obstacle à la continuation des pourparlers, mais qu'elle l'a renforcé de manière à en accentuer considérablement la pointe offensive" (33). Moreover, quite independently of any pressure which might have been exercised, the Blum government had itself no desire to ruin any chance, however slim, of bringing Germany into a Western European agreement. Thus Blum agreed with Eden in October that staff talks would seriously damage the proposed Five-Power meeting (34), and Delbos told Bullitt that the French government would not allow any such negotiations until a conference had taken place, or until it had become apparent that it would not take place, since it was anxious to avoid giving Germany a pretext to withdraw from the Conference (35).

At the conference on Leon Blum's government held in 1965, his Minister of Commerce, Paul Bastid, emphasised "cet effort poursuivi par le gouvernement Léon Blum en vue d'arriver à un arrangement satisfaisant avec L'Allemagne hitlérienne" (36). In fact there were many Frenchmen who thought that the government's maintenance of the Franco-Soviet Pact was the primary reason for the failure of this policy of "achat de paix", and indeed this was the reason given by the German government. At the same time the Russians clearly regarded a French agreement with Germany as fundamentally incompatible with the Soviet alliance. On 23rd of July 1936 Karl Radek wrote a biting article in Pravda criticising the indecisiveness of the western powers meeting at the London Conference (37), thus betraying the deep Soviet distrust of the negotiations for

a new Locarno, while in October Léger complained, probably with some justification, that recent Soviet action on the Non-Intervention Committee, as well as rumours spread by Litvinov of an imminent Franco-Soviet military accord, were designed to prevent the conclusion of any western agreement (38). Similarly, in a speech at the Renault factories on September 2nd, Thorez bitterly attacked the government for allowing Schacht to visit Paris just two days after Hitler had announced the creation of any army of 1,200,000 men (39).

The Blum government did not in fact abandon the Pact in response to German pressure, and even took care to reassert fidelity to it in public, but was undoubtedly anxious not to antagonise Germany further than this. Thus it was hoped that if Franco-Soviet military contacts were postponed, Germany would accept that she had nothing to fear from the Pact, and would be induced to join in a general European settlement. But postponement of the talks was not enough, and Germany continued to hope that France would denounce her alliance with Soviet Russia. Thus the German press claimed that news of the Purges constituted a moral catastrophe for those states which had believed in the USSR, and expressed the hope that France might now reject the Soviet Pact (40). At the same time Germany sought to separate France from her allies in Central and Eastern Europe, and to exacerbate Franco-Italian rivalry, while in France itself she attempted to exploit both the pacifist and anti-semitic and anti-bolshevik feeling which predominated among the conservative opposition to the Popular Front government, by means of propaganda carefully disseminated by the French department of the "Office Ribbentrop", run by Otto Abetz (41). Thus it is clear that the German insistence on French rejection of the Franco-Soviet Pact was part of a wider policy aimed at securing the isolation of France

in Europe, which could not be countered by the mere postponement of military talks.

In the attempt to reach an agreement with Germany, the Blum government was not, like later French governments, notably when Georges Bonnet was at the Quai, attempting to "appease" Germany at any cost, but was sincerely trying to draw Germany into a European settlement in return for what it saw as reasonable economic and colonial concessions. Indeed, it was in effect because Blum was not prepared merely to appease Germany that his attempts at entente were unsuccessful, since he stubbornly maintained that such concessions could not be made unless Germany agreed to negotiate a general settlement in return. Germany for her part, had no intention of making any such commitment, and possibly would not have done so even had France rejected the Pact, while the Russians remained totally distrustful of French attempts to negotiate a western pact, which it was feared would lead to a new Soviet isolation in Europe. Thus, for whatever reasons and with however much sincerity, the Soviets and the Germans both made total rejection of each other the basis of any understanding with France : the Popular Front, in its well-meaning attempt to compromise, merely succeeded in antagonising both.

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CHAPTER 5

THE DECLINE OF FRENCH INFLUENCE IN CENTRAL AND EASTERN EUROPE

It has been suggested that the most important factor influencing the Popular Front's attitude towards the Franco-Soviet Pact was the fundamental antagonism between the Soviet Union and France's allies in central and eastern Europe (1), while at the same time French maintenance of the Pact has been blamed for her loss of influence among her allies. This argument was frequently raised against the Pact by its opponents, who warned that the French association with Communist Russia would push Poland and the countries of the Little Entente towards the German-Italian orbit. Clearly the Popular Front government was aware of this possibility, particularly in view of the widespread loss of faith in France as a result of her failure to take effective action over the Rhineland coup (2), and it appreciated the truth of Alphant's warning that, "si nous n'arrivons pas à restaurer cette confiance, il est à craindre que de nouveaux groupements se forment d'où la France serait probablement écartée" (3). As a result, the new government adopted reanimation of the Little Entente alliance and improvement of French relations with Poland as one of the basic tenets of its foreign policy (4) : the possible alienation of her allies as a result of her Pact with the USSR was thus not a factor which the French government could afford to ignore.

During the 1920's successive French governments had sought to erect an elaborate security system in Central and Eastern Europe. In February 1921 a Franco-Polish accord was signed which provided for mutual collaboration in the event of unprovoked aggression : it was

supplemented by a secret military convention which explicitly outlined potential military collaboration. As part of the Locarno agreements in 1925, France, Czechoslovakia (5) and Poland agreed to offer immediate aid and assistance in the event of a German failure to respect her Locarno obligations resulting in an unprovoked recourse to arms. In 1926 France signed a political accord with Roumania providing for common action in the event of an unprovoked attack, as well as a secret protocol regarding eventual military co-operation in the event of necessity, which was followed in November 1927 by a Franco-Yugoslav treaty of guarantee and security identical to the one signed with Roumania, but with no military provisions (6).

Many Frenchmen in the 1930's were unaware of the exact extent of France's obligations in Central and Eastern Europe, indeed Pierre Cot visited Roumania in August 1936 believing incorrectly that a precise Franco-Roumanian military accord had long-since been concluded (7), but most were at least aware that the French undertakings were considerable. In fact, by the time the Popular Front came to power in 1936 there had developed a distinct shift of emphasis away from involvement in distant parts of Europe towards an inclination to isolate France behind a system of impregnable fortifications, that is, the Maginot Line. This was naturally confirmed by the very evident lack of interest expressed by the British government in the problems of Central and Eastern Europe, since the French had no doubt hoped that in spite of the lack of formal commitment, the British would nevertheless assist in the defence of France's allies, whereas it now seemed possible that France would find herself alone if called upon to fulfil her obligations. Interest, both French and British in the fate of Central and Eastern Europe needed to be revived : consequently

the new Popular Front government recognised that consolidation of the Pact with the USSR must not in any way detract from, or endanger, its avowed aim of reanimating the Little Entente.

Even before the Pact was signed, the French were made fully aware of Polish objections to it (8). Ever since the Soviet invasion of Poland in 1920 relations between the two had been poor, but throughout the 1920's Poland had sought to preserve a balance between her two very powerful neighbours, Germany and Russia. After the death of the francophile Marshal Pilsudski in 1934, however, Poland, under the guidance of Colonel Josef Beck, began to move increasingly away from France, to whom she was still bound by the 1921 alliance, and towards Germany. In 1934 the French and Russians were considerably alarmed by Poland's signature of a ten-year non-aggression pact with Germany, and her support for the German position in opposing negotiations for an eastern pact. Beck himself was an open admirer of Hitler's Germany and a fervent opponent of communism, while it was said that his dismissal by the French government from the post of military attaché to Paris in 1923 was responsible for his markedly anti-French attitude during the 1930's (9). Beck was not in fact strictly a Germanophile in as much as his predominant concern was to serve the interest of Poland: thus he was determined that no foreign troops whatsoever should be allowed to enter Poland and he stubbornly refused the frequent German offers of a military alliance against the USSR (10). His determination to improve Poland's standing in Europe was demonstrated further by his insistence that Poland ought to be involved in the negotiations for a new western pact (11), while his initial objection to the Franco-Soviet Pact was that it would relegate Poland to a secondary position in Europe (12). But Beck remained susceptible to

German flattery and in spite of his attempts to retain independence, became in effect a German tool in Eastern Europe.

Given the fundamental shift in Polish policy away from her traditional friendship with France and towards Germany, the signature of the Franco-Soviet Pact was unlikely to be welcomed in Poland. Polish objections were two-fold : on the one hand, the conservative Polish government disliked any association with Bolshevik Russia, while on the other, the Pact seemed to legitimise the passage across Polish territory of Soviet troops who, it was feared, "n'en sortiront plus jamais" (13). Thus the Polish government sought to combat Soviet influence whenever possible abroad, for example at Geneva, while in the domestic sphere conducting an incessant war against communism : in 1937 alone, ten thousand Poles were arrested for belonging to the communist party, of whom five thousand were charged and remained in prison (14). At the same time, the Polish press, such as the pro-government 'Czas' newspaper conducted a consistent campaign against the Pact similar to that of the German press, stressing its uselessness from the French point of view as opposed to the very real advantages it bestowed on the USSR, ending her isolation in Europe and strengthening her position against Japan(15).

A more disturbing indication of the evolution of Polish policy than the anti-Soviet utterances of Colonel Beck was the changing attitude of Poland's military leaders, traditionally the most pro-French element in the country. In January 1935, General Sosnkowski, a close associate of Pilsudski and an ardent francophile, warned the French military attaché that Poland could never contemplate any alliance or co-operation with a bolshevik country. Moreover, while he recognised the potential danger of a rearmed Germany, he regarded the

Russian danger as more immediate. The military attaché warned Paris as a result that at a time when many Poles wanted improved relations with France and when Polish diplomacy faced a choice between continuation of the recent policy or a return to the French orbit, "la question russe peut leur donner, pour éviter de s'engager dans cette voie du rapprochement, des motifs sur lesquels ils rallieront la quasi-unanimité de l'opinion du pays" (16). Eighteen months later Marshal Rydz-Smigly emphasised that Poland would not support France "au cas où celle-ci serait aux prises avec le Reich par suite du jeu d'obligations assumées dans le cadre du pacte d'assistance mutuelle franco-soviétique"(17).

In effect, the Poles seemed to be forcing France to make a choice between their Polish and Soviet alliances, and the French government was fully aware of, it. As early as April 1935 the 2e bureau reported that the signature of a pact with the USSR would mean the loss of the Polish alliance for France. As a result, Germany, covered by Poland against the Russian mobilisation, would be able to throw all her forces against France from the very beginning. Furthermore, while recognising that the total military aid to be expected from Russia was greater than than from Poland, the Staff argued that the Polish army would give assistance which would be both immediate and better co-ordinated with that of the Little Entente than any aid from Russia could be (18). Two years later, the 2e bureau prepared another, and more direct, note. Any Franco-Soviet military contact would, it was claimed, immediately provoke Polish-German rapprochement which would effectively give Germany control over a Polish army of fifty divisions, capable of being increased to eighty with German help. This would annihilate all the military benefit which might be envisaged by a closer rapprochement

with the USSR, and would result in "une diminution de sécurité pour la France" (19).

While the French Staff's assessments of the comparative military values of Poland and the USSR to France might have been inaccurate, the French government was nevertheless made very aware that the signature of the Pact had further damaged France's relations with Poland and had made a revival of the 1921 alliance even less likely. At the same time, France's association with Poland was resented by her new ally, Russia. In early 1937, for example, Litvinov complained that Beck's policy was to dislocate the Little Entente and, in particular, to bring about the solution of Czechoslovakia. To this end, he said, Beck had persuaded the Roumanian government to reject an assistance agreement between France and the Little Entente, and had tried to provoke incidents between Roumania and Czechoslovakia (20). These accusations were expanded in the violently anti-Polish press campaigns of Pravda and Isvestia, which accused Beck of hoping to liquidate the League and collaborating with German fascism against Czechoslovakia. Indeed it does seem that the Polish minority in Teschen, for example, was told to follow Heinlein's lead in provoking trouble for Czechoslovakia (21).

It is perhaps scarcely surprising that any indication of improved Franco-Polish relations was distrusted in Moscow, where Beck was seen as a Hitlerite agent. Thus, the exchange of visits between Generals Gamelin and Rydz-Smigly in the summer of 1936 was passed over in ominous silence by the Moscow press (22). These negotiations, initiated by Blum and Delbos in July 1936, constituted in fact the only real attempt by the Popular Front government to reassert French influence in Poland. Before the Foreign Affairs Commission of the Chamber in

December, Delbos explained that since Poland had been drawing closer to Germany, and the Polish representative in Roumania "jouait un rôle que n'était pas de nature à faciliter le rapprochement franco-roumain", the French government had felt that it must do something to regain its former position in Poland (23). The result of the Gamelin-Rydz Smigly visits was the signature, on September 6th, of the Rambouillet Agreement, by which France accorded Poland a credit of two milliard francs at a rate of 500 m.francs a year for four years (24). Although Gamelin had vaguely raised the question of Poland's relations with Soviet Russia and Czechoslovakia during the negotiations, he had received no satisfactory answer, and the French made no attempt to make the credits conditional on any reorientation in Poland's foreign policy (25). There were even some critics who thought that the generous French assistance might have been made dependent on Beck's removal from power. In fact, Rambouillet was followed by no change in the direction of Polish policy which remained firmly pro-German, in spite of the French loans (26). There was thus some truth in the Soviet criticism of the ease with which the Polish Marshal had bled the French Treasury, while being required to give nothing in return(27).

The French alliance with Russia had undoubtedly contributed to the alienation of Poland, but it was more than likely that this would have occurred anyway, given the nature of the Polish leadership. Similarly, changes in Roumanian domestic policy proved crucial to her relations with France and the Soviet Union. The Roumanian Foreign Minister until August 1936, Nicolae Titulescu, was a devoted advocate of rapprochement with the USSR. In May 1934 he had been responsible for the negotiations which led to the normalisation of diplomatic relations between the two countries (28) which he saw as "un des actes les plus



importants de ma vie politique" (29), and he was a firm supporter of Russian entry into the League. At the same time, he seems to have played quite a substantial role in the negotiations for the Franco-Soviet Pact (3), believing that "neither the Little Entente nor the Balkan Entente can exist without a Franco-Soviet agreement" (31). On 4th May 1935, Titulescu told Litvinov at Geneva that he saw the Pact as "une oeuvre de paix qui sera la base de la future organisation de la sécurité en Europe" (32), and throughout 1935 he negotiated with Litvinov for a Russo-Roumanian agreement on similar lines. Indeed, just as Beck's critics accused him of working for Hitler, so Titulescu was seen by his critics as the Soviets' agent in Roumania: in November 1937, for instance, Pierre-Antoine Cousteau wrote an article in the ultra right-wing 'Je suis partout' entitled, "L'or des Soviets M. Titulescu a essayé de m'acheter" (33).

In the Roumanian press, news of the Franco-Soviet Pact was initially well-received, particularly by the Left and Jewish press, while the Right were torn between their traditional distrust of Soviet Russia and their reluctance to criticise an act of which Titulescu fully approved (34). The arguments used by both critics and supporters of the Pact were familiar. In a lively press debate, for example, Gafenco, former Under-Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs and then director of the 'Argus', criticised the Pact as constituting a return to the pre-war system of alliances, while M. Filipescu, the leader of the conservative party and director of 'Epoca', argued that while it might be necessary to institute stricter controls against communism as a result of closer relations with the USSR, it was in fact alliances which effectively preserved the peace in Europe (35). In Parliament, anti-Pact feeling was mobilised most effectively by George Bratiano,

a Liberal Party dissident, who opposed any military co-operation with the USSR on the grounds that he refused to "transformer son pays en champs de bataille des impérialismes slave et germanique" (36). This was indeed a very real fear among many Roumanians, and Bratianu's constant interpolations on Titulescu's Soviet policy succeeded in swelling the opposition considerably.

In fact, while Roumanians as a whole were not so anti-Soviet as the Poles, Titulescu was, in his policy of improving relations with the USSR, "a long way in advance of public opinion" (37), and the policy did not have enough support to survive his ignominious removal from office in August 1936. On 30th August Tatarescu, the Liberal Prime Minister, tendered his government's resignation and was entrusted with the formation of a new government, in which the only significant changes were the removal of Titulescu and his Under-Secretary, Radulescu (38). While Titulescu's fall was certainly due to some extent to distrust of his policy of entente with the USSR, it seems to have originated in a general opposition to his rather dictatorial methods. In particular, he had antagonised the King, who seems to have resented his independence, and Tatarescu, who violently disliked his interference in domestic affairs and distrusted his relations with the opposition party, the National Peasants. There was also a certain amount of impatience with Titulescu's policy of threatening resignation if the government did not follow his wishes, as he had done most recently in August after a disagreement with Tatarescu (39).

The new government was at considerable pains to emphasise that the replacement of Titulescu by Antonescu at the Foreign Ministry would not lead to any reorientation in Roumanian foreign policy (40).

Antonescu himself stressed that he would continue to conduct foreign policy on the same lines, if less "brillamment et bruyamment" than Titulescu (41). King Carol told the British Ambassador that he had tried to make Titulescu understand that opinion in both Roumania and abroad was becoming impatient of the "headlong manner in which he had flung himself into the arms of M. Litvinov, who was the cleverest man at Geneva" and who had warped Titulescu's judgement and sense of perspective by his skilful and persistent flattery. He added, however, that "we shall stop kissing the Soviets, but not shaking hands with them" (42). But Roumanian reassurances were lost on opinion abroad. In Paris Titulescu's departure caused "a flutter" in both press and government circles, and much of the press was filled with apprehensive discussion of the expected anti-French reorientation in Roumanian policy (43). In the Polish press the news was greeted with satisfaction, the 'Kurjer Poranny' arguing that the Roumanian public had refused to accept Titulescu's attempt to lead them away from France and into alliance with the USSR (44), while in Italy the 'Regime Fascista' asserted that Titulescu, "an evil instrument in the service now of France and now of England", had seduced Roumania away from her natural inclination towards her "Latin sister" : Antonescu, on the contrary, was a friend of Italy (45). Finally, Alphand reported that in Moscow the fall of Titulescu "paraît constituer un succès indirect de l'Allemagne dans un pays que l'URSS s'habitue à considérer comme un des bastions avancés de sa propre défense"(46).

In practice, Titulescu's departure did indeed signify the termination of a pro-Soviet and pro-French foreign policy, corresponding almost exactly to a distinct move towards the right in domestic politics. Anxious to detect any sign of a change in policy, the Soviet press

reported in December 1936 that the Roumanians had recently conferred a decoration on the former Tsarist Minister to Bucarest, Poklewski-Koziell, who, it was claimed, had for some time been engaged in anti-Soviet 'White Guardist' terrorism (37), while more seriously it was rumoured in Prague that during a recent trip to Belgrade, Tatarescu had reached an agreement with the Yugoslav government on the adoption of a common policy opposing the extension of Soviet influence over the countries of the Little Entente (48). These rumours seemed to acquire a degree of authenticity when in December Antonescu and the Roumanian Chief of Staff visited Warsaw, in an attempt to revive Roumania's relations with Poland which had suffered during Titulescu's term of office. During 1937, foreign observers in Bucarest reported that Roumania seemed to be drifting increasingly into the German orbit, and during a visit to London in July 1937 it was noted that King Carol showed a certain admiration for Germany and hostility towards the Soviets (49). The King told Baldwin that he saw no signs of aggression in Germany, and that he had no desire to become further involved with Russia, who had been unreliable in the past and would be so again (50).

In spite of constant Soviet complaints about the new direction of Roumanian foreign policy, however, it was not until the end of 1937 that an openly anti-Soviet government came into office. The new cabinet was headed by Goga, the joint leader of the extreme fascist and anti-semitic National Christian Party; his Foreign Minister, Micescu, was strongly nationalistic and anti-semitic; and at the Defence Ministry was General Antonescu, who had spent the last two years in semi-disgrace and who had apparently considered accepting the presidency of the fascist 'Iron Guard' organisation (51). In France the new development was viewed with suspicion, since Goga was an open advocate of alliance

with Germany rather than France, while the Journal de Moscou warned that "it is to be feared that the definite orientation of Roumania towards a rapprochement with the aggressors may put an end to the reciprocal tranquillity established in recent years in the relations between Roumania and the USSR" (52). In February 1938, following the departure of the embittered Soviet Minister to Bucarest, Ostrovski, the Roumanian Minister in Moscow, M. Ciuntu, was recalled. Ciuntu, a close follower of Titulescu, had held the post ever since the re-opening of diplomatic relations between the two countries and had always maintained excellent relations with the Soviet government; his recall seemed to mark the final break with Titulescu's policy of Russo-Roumanian rapprochement (53).

France's Pact with Russia, while evidently arousing fears in Roumania, was not however the sole cause of her loss of Roumania as an ally. France herself must be held partly responsible for failing to take any steps to counter the growing German presence in Roumania. While l'Humanité's claim that Germany was maintaining sixty newspapers in Roumania and subsidising many journalists even in the democratic press (54) was probably exaggerated, German propaganda in Roumania was undoubtedly extensive, while there was little if any, French counter-activity. Moreover, as M. d Monzie argued after a visit to Roumania in 1935, it was totally incongruous to instruct Roumania to rearm herself and then refuse to buy her petrol: as a result of the lack of support from France, Roumania was buying all her canon, for example from Germany (55). As late as September 1938 King Carol warned the British Ambassador of the very serious danger of German economic penetration becoming irresistible unless the British and French governments gave assistance, such as purchasing the whole

Roumanian wheat crop for 1938 : his plea was ignored (56). In these circumstances it is scarcely surprising that Roumania, her belief in the value of her French ally severely undermined, and fearing the French association with the USSR, should turn to the welcoming arms of Germany.

Yugoslavian faith in the French alliance was already very weak when the Popular Front government came into office. For Yugoslavia, the main purpose of its alliance with France was that it should provide an insurance against possible Italian expansion in the Balkans. She was naturally antagonised, therefore, by Laval's policy with regard to Italy, first at Stresa in January 1935, and then over the Ethiopian War, during which he proclaimed French support for the League and collective security while in practice seeking to accommodate Mussolini. Suspicion that France would fight only when directly attacked by Germany was soon to be confirmed by the lack of response to the Rhineland coup. Indeed, French credit had sunk so low in Yugoslavia that many were prepared to believe the rumours that French freemasons and communists were supplying funds to Yugoslav extremists (57).

The conclusion of a Pact with Communist Russia certainly did nothing to improve the French position in Yugoslavia. The Yugoslavs had firmly supported the idea of an eastern pact (58), and officially saw the Franco-Soviet Pact as a "nouveaux pas sur le chemin de la paix" (59), but attitudes in governing circles soon became dominated by hatred of bolshevism. In particular, the Regent, Prince Paul, who had close personal links with the Tsarist regime, possessed an almost manic fear of communism which led him to oppose any suggestions of agreement with Russia. In July 1935, for example, Prince Paul went

to Bucarest in order to try and dissuade the Roumanian government from signing an agreement with Russia (60), and he openly rejoiced in the fall of Titulescu which, he said, would enable an improvement in Yugoslav-Roumanian relations to take place (61). While Prince Paul denied being pro-German, as the Russians claimed, he seemed to admire the Nazis' achievements and admitted that he saw Hitler's policy as the only one which could possibly save Europe from communism (62). Paul was clearly alarmed by the victory of the Popular Front in France, which he envisaged would lead to the establishment of a communist regime, and in March 1937 he claimed that the organiser of communist activity in Yugoslavia had been arrested in possession of about £4,000 worth of francs which he declared he had received from a French bolshevik organisation. As the British Ambassador to Belgrade remarked, "This is most regrettable as it has further confirmed (the) Prince Regent in his belief that (the) present French government is not to be trusted and that France is rapidly going communist". Indeed, Paul said he had received information to the effect that the whole of the southern part of France had been virtually bolshevised and that a Soviet regime had been established at Perpignan (63).

Paul's fears were undoubtedly exploited by the anti-French and pro-German Stoyadinović, since July 1935 Yugoslavia's Foreign and Prime Minister. The climax of Stoyadinović's policy was the signature in March 1937 of an Italo-Yugoslav Pact, which seemed to mark Yugoslavia's final break away from the French orbit. Both Stoyadinović and Ciano, the Italian Foreign Minister, agreed that this re-orientation in Yugoslav foreign policy was the main outcome of the Franco-Soviet Pact, although Ciano's assertion that "Stoyadinović is

a Fascist" (64) suggests that such a policy would have been probable in any case. On the other hand, there is no evidence of any French attempt to counter German-Italian influence in Yugoslavia. As early as December 1935, Pezet had warned the Foreign Affairs Commission of the French Chamber that intensive and skilful German propaganda was already producing an effect in Yugoslavia, often manifested by violent anti-French campaigns in the press. Moreover, as M. Baudouin-Bugnet complained, Franco-Yugoslav commercial relations were rapidly deteriorating as a result of French inactivity. At the request of the British and French governments, a Yugoslav economic mission headed by a M. Pilla, a known francophile, visited Paris and London in late 1935 in order to find a way of compensating for losses sustained by Serbian commerce as a result of the sanctions policy. In London the mission was well-received by the Foreign Secretary himself, but in Paris it received such an unfriendly, even hostile, reception from the Ministry of Commerce that the visitors made a complaint to their Embassy in Paris. Moreover, the mission received only 300,000 francs-worth of orders as opposed to the 30 million francs-worth requested, whereas in London the Yugoslavs received the full 40 million francs-worth of orders they required (65). During 1937 Germany began to take over the British position as Yugoslavia's main trading partner until, in early 1938, Germany proposed to take 50% of all Yugoslavia's exports. Unwilling to let the Yugoslav economy be further invaded by Germany, Paul hurried to London, without even thinking of France, and begged Chamberlain to increase British trade with Yugoslavia : Chamberlain decided that this was unnecessary, and the matter went no further (66).

In late 1937, Stoyadinović visited London, Paris, Rome and Berlin.



The enthusiastic welcome he received in the latter two cities contrasted sharply with his very average reception in London and Paris (67), and perhaps represents most clearly the essential difference in attitude which caused France to lose Yugoslav friendship, although undoubtedly Stoyadinović showed a marked propensity towards fascism as a system which made him an easy prey to German-Italian flattery. The Prince Regent, on the other hand, was less inclined towards fascism in itself but was dominated by an obsessive anti-communism which made him, too, susceptible to German-Italian propaganda and provoked his uncle, Prince Demidoff, to warn the French Minister to Athens in January 1938, that "la Serbie restera, de fait, éloignée du système politique dont Paris est le centre, tant que subsistera le pacte franco-soviétique. Paul y est décidé" (68).

The existence of France's Pact with Soviet Russia undoubtedly accelerated the decline of her influence in Central and Eastern Europe, but was not the sole cause. Domestically, the governments of Poland, Yugoslavia and Roumania all gravitated towards the Right and, with significant encouragement from Germany and Italy which was not similarly forthcoming from France, away from the French orbit. Indeed, France's failure to respond to the needs, both political and commercial, of her allies, must ultimately be held responsible for the Popular Front's lack of success in its avowed aim of reanimating the Little Entente. Recognising that French prestige was at its nadir as a result of the failure to respond to the Rhineland coup, the Popular Front governments nevertheless consolidated, perhaps subconsciously, the decline of French interest in Central and Eastern Europe which had been developing since the early 1930's. In fact, the growing 'Maginot mentality' seems to have permeated even the government of

Léon Blum to some extent. On June 7th 1936, on the initiative of Benes and Titulescu, the heads of state of the Little Entente meeting at Bucarest decided to propose to France that she sign a single mutual assistance pact with the Little Entente as a whole.

Paul-Boncour tells us that when on the 27th Titulescu raised the matter with Delbos at Geneva, the reception was cold. Following a meeting of the Roumanian Cabinet on July 14th, which fully approved the initiative, and after talks with Litvinov at Montreux, Titulescu again approached Delbos at Geneva, this time with a more positive proposition. Delbos replied, according to Titulescu, that for the present France was not inclined to undertake any new engagements. When, much later, Delbos tried to revive the idea of a mutual assistance pact, it was the Roumanians who were cold (69).

It was not until December 1937 that, in an attempt to reassert French influence, Delbos decided to embark on a tour of France's allies in Central and Eastern Europe as Barthou had done in 1934, "only to discover to what an extent France's standing had degenerated during the three years" (70). He was well-received by both government and people in Czechoslovakia alone, naturally enough the only one of France's allies to fully approve her Pact with the Soviet Union. In Belgrade, considerable pro-French demonstrations, construed by the government as anti-Stoyadinovič rioting, were firmly suppressed (71), while in Roumania "l'accueil fait à notre Ministre des Affaires Etrangères n'aurait pas eu d'ailleurs la même chaleur que celui réservé en d'autres circonstances à M. Barthou" (72). The satirical journal, 'Le Canard Enchaîné' suggested that when asked by Delbos what had become of the Franco-Roumanian friendship treaty, Tatulescu had replied, "un peu ennuyé,....qu'il était au grenier. On le

découvert en effet sous un tas de poussière. Une araignée veillait sur lui" (73). In practical terms the tour achieved nothing. In Warsaw Delbos listened to Beck's complaints about the Soviet Union and the Comintern, but failed to make any enquiries about the possibility of Poland improving her relations with the USSR and Czechoslovakia. Similarly, he made no attempt in either Warsaw or Bucarest to discuss the question of the passage of Soviet troops, although he had admitted before leaving that such a discussion would be desirable (74). It was indeed with some justification that Pierre Benard wrote in the 'Canard' that "les communiqués sont unanimes : l'accord est complet. Il ne s'agit plus maintenant que de savoir sur quoi" (75). The aim of Delbos' tour was sensible enough : the only problem was that, as L'Humanité complained, it came eighteen months too late. Thus, as with the Franco-Soviet Pact, the Popular Front government discovered that it was not possible for France to maintain her position of influence in Central and Eastern Europe without making a considerable effort to do so in return.

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CHAPTER 6

THE SOVIET PACT AND FRANCE'S WESTERN EUROPEAN ALLIES

1. The loss of the Belgian alliance

While it is relatively simple to understand why the governments of Central and Eastern Europe were concerned by France's new Pact with the USSR, it is less immediately obvious why France's allies in the West of Europe should have felt similarly involved. In fact, as early as January 1936 a War Ministry note warned the French government that Belgium was worried about the possible consequences of the Pact for Locarno, since a large section of public opinion feared that Belgium might be dragged by France into a conflict which arose as a dispute between Germany and Russia, but which had involved France by virtue of the Pact. Indeed, "la ratification du traité, et à plus forte raison un accord militaire franco-soviétique, risqueraient de produire de fâcheuses conséquences à notre égard en Belgique, au moment où s'accroît dans ce pays la propagande pour une politique de neutralité et où l'accord militaire franco-belge de 1920 est violemment battu en brèche" (1). These fears seemed to be confirmed when, on October 14th 1936 Leopold, King of the Belgians, announced that his government would henceforth adopt a position of neutrality in the event of war : Belgian policy must now be to possess "un appareil militaire de taille à dissuader un quelconque de nos voisins d'emprunter notre territoire pour attaquer un autre Etat" (2). Thus opponents of the Pact in France pointed to the loss of the valuable Belgian alliance as an undoubted consequence of the Popular Front's continued association with Soviet Russia.

concentrated their criticisms on its effects on Belgian security, there was, as in France, a strong current of anti-bolshevism underpinning their attacks. One 'eminent' Belgian complained to Reynaud of the unrest caused in France by the Popular Front, and in particular of the gangs parading with raised fists and singing l'Internationale, explaining that "C'est 1973 qui recommence...Et on n'aime pas cela chez nous, vous savez", while several days before the King's speech M.Sap, a former Minister of Finance declared that "pour la Belgique, le danger français était, en raison de l'alliance franco-soviétique et des communistes, au moins aussi grave que le danger allemand" (9). In a conversation with Eden in March 1937 Leopold explained that the Pact was unpopular in Belgium because it was feared that it might lead her into conflict, but when Eden replied that the Pact was, after all, only a defensive arrangement to come into force in the event of a German attack, and that France, a pacifist nation, was unlikely to rush into conflict, the King was forced to agree : he added, however, that he was apprehensive about possible communist influence on French policy (10).

It thus appears that Belgium, frightened by the apparent bolshevisation of France and fearing involvement in a far-away war, decided its own security would be enhanced only if it broke away from the long-standing military connection with France. In fact, the reasons behind the neutrality declaration were far more complex than simple fear of the Franco-Soviet Pact, as was claimed. In the first instance, Belgium's relationship with France, as signified by the military alliance, was the subject of deep political divisions within Belgium. In particular the Flemings were fundamentally anti-French, disliking the subordination



The Pact was certainly unpopular with large sections of the Belgian public, most particularly among the Catholics and the Flemings. In December 1934 Paul Struye wrote in the Catholic newspaper "Libre Belgique" that in spite of the denials from the Quai, there was definitely some truth in the worrying rumours of a Franco-Soviet alliance, and he insisted that it would be madness to try and build European peace on a reconstruction of "l'alliance franco-russe de fâcheuse mémoire" (3). Once the Pact was signed, the same newspaper claimed that it would effectively reduce Belgian security, since it would weaken France's obligations under Locarno (4), and it warned that "le resserrement des liens entre la France et la Russie crée, dans les milieux les plus divers, et notamment en Pologne et en Belgique, une impression de malaise et inquiétude qu'il serait puéril de dissimuler" (5). Similarly, all the Flemish newspapers were violently opposed to Franco-Soviet rapprochement, one warning the government that Belgium must not risk becoming involved in far-away battles on account of France's pactomania (6). In contrast, the Pact was well-received by the press of the Left: "Le Peuple", for example, the organ of the Parti ouvrier belge, argued as early as November 1934 that one day a Franco-Soviet military alliance would have to become a reality, in response to German rearmament and aggression (7).

The press was similarly divided in its attitude to the Soviet Union in general. On the 12th July the Socialist press was delighted to report the news of the formal recognition by Belgium of the Soviet Union, while the 'Métropole' of Antwerp merely observed that the USSR had given no assurance with regard to abstention from subversive propaganda in Belgium, or compensation for Belgian capital confiscated in the Soviet Union (8). Although the Pact's opponents usually

of Belgian policy to French, and as the Prime Minister, Van Zeeland, explained to Ambassador Laroche in July 1936, "une politique trop ouvertement francophile amènerait...de telles réactions du côté flamand que le gouvernement se verrait obligé de faire marche en arrière". In order to appease the Flemings Van Zeeland was hoping to conclude an entente with the Dutch, although he admitted that "une telle entente présenterait pour nous à ce titre un certain danger, car elle renforcerait le courant frontiste contre l'accord avec la France"(11). Evidently, then, the issue of the French alliance was one which was inextricably bound up in the intricacies of Belgian domestic politics. The Russians were naturally anxious to exploit this aspect,vehemently denying that the change in Belgian policy was the result of the Franco-Soviet Pact. The Soviet press emphasised that the reorientation was motivated by the growing influence of fascism in Belgium, and the collusion of royalists and Flemings; in addition it referred to the relations between the King and the House of Savoy, and to the visit of Colonel Beck in Belgium in 1935. In some respects the Soviet explanations were clearly valid : the 'Isvestia' of October 23rd, for example, blamed the frequent vacillations of French and British policy and the British refusal to bind itself formally to France and Belgium (12), and in particular the French weakness exhibited on the 7th March, "qui aurait contribué à ébranler la confiance de la Belgique dans la valeur de l'appui français" (13). That this was true was recognised by Blum, who later emphasised that "là aussi, les événements de mars 1936 ont déterminé un changement grave" (14): Belgium, in common with France's other European allies, naturally began to doubt French readiness to fulfill her obligations, in view of her total lack of response to the Rhineland coup, while her general faith in collective security had probably already been undermined as a result of the

League performance during the Ethiopian war.

Moreover, as Delbos pointed out, the neutrality declaration was not so unexpected as many people supposed. There had always existed, he said, a feeling of nostalgia concerning prewar neutrality, even at the time of the 1920 accords : in June 1932, for example, M.Poulet declared that Belgium should not be subject to any other group of powers (15), and on the 20th July 1936 M.Spaak expressed his hope that "la politique étrangère de la Belgique soit placée résolument sous le signe du réalisme" (16). Delbos believed that this fear of subordinating Belgian policy to France was exploited by incessant German propaganda in Belgium, such as Von Ribbentrop's visit in September 1935, and was aided by the personal feelings of the King, who was more inclined to favour autocratic than democratic powers (17).

It is perhaps at first surprising that French government representatives did not express more anxiety about the loss of the Belgian alliance, particularly since it was of tremendous importance in military terms : if Belgium did indeed remain neutral in the event of a Franco-German conflict, then France could no longer send troops and equipment through Belgium to attack Germany, and at the same time would have a virtually undefended frontier open to German attack. In fact, before the postwar investigating committee Blum revealed new information which seemed to suggest that the neutrality declaration, issued primarily to quiet domestic opposition, need not have prevented Franco-Belgian co-operation. At the end of 1936, at Van Zeeland's suggestion, two secret meetings were held, one in Paris, the other in Brussels, which were attended by Delbos, Blum, Chautemps and Van Zeeland. The Belgian Premier was anxious to clarify his government's position : it was Belgium's wish to

fortify the Meuse, but if the alliance with France were to persist, Parliament would not vote the necessary credits, nor would it approve a new military law. If, on the other hand, the government were to denounce the French alliance, it would receive the necessary approval and would then be able to build up the Belgian frontier fortifications which would in turn benefit France, since she would have 200 kilometres less of frontier to defend : however, Belgium would still expect France to guarantee her neutrality.

It was here that Blum saw the opportunity to turn the loss of the Belgian alliance to France's advantage. Arguing that France could only guarantee Belgian neutrality if Belgium were adequately defended he insisted that she must equip and fortify herself, and establish good relations with the French General Staff. This was subsequently confirmed by a diplomatic letter in which France claimed the right to make the nature of her operations on behalf of Belgium dependent on : i) the way in which the Belgian defence programme was undertaken; (ii) the manner in which the French frontier was defended; and (iii) the way in which military operations were concerted between the Belgian and French governments. Thus, claimed Blum, any French assistance to Belgium would be based on strategic, rather than purely contractual, considerations (18). It seems probable that Blum's explanation represents rather an optimistic interpretation, since military negotiations with the Belgians would undoubtedly have been easier without such a public rejection. Moreover, the French military attaché to Belgium, General Riedinger, complained in February 1937 that the Belgian General Staff were disinclined to pass on to him the kind of information they used to supply : the British military attaché in contrast apparently received much useful information which, he was

told, was to be exclusively for English consumption until the Belgian government was sure that the French would pass nothing on to the Soviets (19).

To some extent, then, the French alliance with Communist Russia seems to have contributed to the Belgian reversal, partly as a result of an instinctive fear of communism, partly from anxiety about involvement in a war which originated between Germany and Russia. Baron von Zuylen, for example, the Political Director of the Foreign Affairs Ministry, explained to the British Ambassador that although the Pact clearly was compatible with Locarno, the Belgian government doubted if it were politically expedient in psychological terms, given the German attitude to the USSR (20); similarly, an official at the Belgian Legation in Moscow told the U.S. charge, Henderson, that the major reason for the neutrality declaration was the Belgian government's determination not to be dragged, by virtue of the Franco-Soviet Pact, into a war primarily involving Germany and the USSR (21). But the reorientation had far more complex causes than this alone : on the one hand it represented a practical triumph for the powerful anti-French Flemish representatives in Belgian domestic politics; on the other, it constituted an expression of the fundamental crisis of confidence in the value of France as a leader in a tense international situation, which was far more worrying from the French point of view than mere anxiety about the Franco-Soviet Pact. However great her dislike of the Soviet Union, it was the threat to her security posed by the collapse of Locarno in March 1936, and not the signature of the Franco-Soviet Pact, which caused the Belgian defection from the military alliance with France.

## 2. Great Britain and the Franco-Soviet Pact

While fear of losing her allies might have exercised a restraining influence on the Popular Front in its contacts with the USSR, there is no evidence that the governments of Roumania, Poland, Yugoslavia or Belgium ever directly pressurised the French government to abandon the Pact to the extent that German representatives did. It has often been said that the British Government, on the other hand, in an attempt to keep Communist Russia out of European politics, was directly responsible for France's failure to consolidate the Soviet alliance with the conclusion of a military accord. The Popular Front government was indeed particularly anxious to accommodate British views both in the formulation and the execution of its policy. Even before formally assuming office, Blum asked Eden for the views of the British government on the Italo-Ethiopian affair "since he was most anxious to conform to them if possible" (22), while in June the British Embassy in Paris reported that the government seemed disinclined to commit itself on foreign policy without first consulting Vansittart, Eden and Baldwin (23). On June 23rd the new government expounded its foreign policy to the Chamber and Senate : stressing that "la coopération étroite et confiante de nos deux pays est la garantie essentielle de la paix en Europe" (24), the government indicated that the main tenet of its foreign policy was to be consolidation of the entente with Great Britain, upon which France's other alliances were to be built. Neither were such declarations of fidelity merely theoretical : for example, the two governments collaborated closely over the problem of non-intervention in Spain as well as in negotiations for a western pact, while on a different level the French devaluation of September 1936, although dictated primarily by domestic considerations, had the additional advantage of

bringing the franc into line with both the British and American currencies (25).

In retrospect, Pierre Cot cited British opposition to the Soviet alliance as an apologia for his government's lack of activity, arguing that "Léon Blum craignait très justement qu'une collaboration avec l'Union soviétique ne compromettre ce redressement de la politique française en direction de la Grande-Bretagne" (26), thus suggesting a fundamental incompatibility between alliances with the Soviet Union and Great Britain. But had the British government itself favoured a policy of increased rapprochement with the USSR, or had the French government retained some independence in the execution of its foreign policy, then the Soviet Union need not necessarily have feared close Anglo-French cooperation. In fact, as early as 19th June 1936, Sir George Clerk, the British Ambassador, described the outstanding feature of the French government's attitude as "their almost pathetic desire to be given a lead by, and to be closely associated with, His Majesty's Government" : this was underlined by the fact that the new French Foreign Minister, his Under-Secretary, the Minister of Commerce and the Minister for the Marine, all called on Clerk at the Embassy, instead of waiting for him to make the first call, as was customary (27), while Lauret of the 'Temps' declared that the Popular Front government did not have a foreign policy at all, apart from its desire to collaborate with Great Britain (28). Thus in view of the Popular Front's concern to do nothing which might antagonise Great Britain, it seems reasonable to assume that the British attitude to the Soviet Union and the Franco-Soviet Pact would have been of considerable importance.

It was often said that the British public was opposed to France's alliance with the USSR, fearing that the association might involve France, and thus Britain, in a war in Eastern Europe. Léon Blum wrote as early as April 1935 that the Pact must not acquire the character of a prewar armed alliance "dont l'opinion anglaise redoute le retour" (29), while Vansittart at the Foreign Office warned Corbin in April 1937 that although the British government was not in a position to pass judgement on French policy, "il serait vain de se dissimuler l'impression que pourra produire sur le public la nouvelle d'un accord militaire franco-soviétique prématurément conclu" (30). The only direct indication which either the French or Soviet governments had of British public opinion was of course from the press which, as in France, was very much divided. In general, the liberal press such as the 'Manchester Guardian' and the 'News Chronicle' were in favour of the Pact, while the conservative papers such as the 'Daily Telegraph' were critical. The 'Daily Mail' naturally led the most consistent campaign against the Soviet Union in general, and the Franco-Soviet Pact in particular, but more alarming than the 'Mail's' anti-bolshevik tirades were the more restrained criticisms of the 'Times', which many foreigners regarded as the official mouthpiece of government policy. Initially the 'Times' admitted that the Pact might have a salutary effect on German militarism but, in itself fundamentally hostile to the Bolshevik regime, expressed distrust of "this new-style alliance". During 1936-8 the 'Times' became increasingly critical of France's alliance with the USSR, arguing in May 1938 that this close association had made France vulnerable to Soviet-communist subversion (31). All that the government could do on such occasions was to reassure the Soviet Ambassador that the government did not share the views of the foreign leader-writer of



the 'Times' (32).

It was clear from foreign policy debates in the Commons that British politicians were divided in their attitudes towards the USSR in a similar way to those in France. The Labour Party, who faced a dilemma equivalent to that of their fellow-socialists in criticising the government's policy of conciliation towards Germany while at the same time opposing any suggestion of British rearmament, tended to support a policy of rapprochement with the Soviet Union : Hugh Dalton argued in the Commons that Russia could make an important contribution to European stability, while the trade union leader, Walter Citrine, was a consistent and vigorous supporter of Soviet policy. Similarly most Conservative politicians, who increasingly dominated the 'National Government', tended to dislike the Franco-Soviet Pact. There were some Conservatives who, as in France, continued to place national security considerations above their instinctive fear of bolshevism : Mr. Emrys-Evans, for instance, while expressing no personal admiration for the Soviet regime, emphasised that it would not be in Britain's national interest to join Hitler's anti-bolshevik campaign (33). But on the whole Conservative politicians, as well as some Liberal and Labour MPs, tended to see a strong Germany as a useful bulwark against the westward advance of communism.

A general feeling of distrust of communism was naturally exacerbated by news of the Franco-Soviet Pact. Many in Britain thought that the terms of Versailles had been too severe on Germany and that revision was therefore indispensable for the maintenance of European peace : the Franco-Soviet Pact now threatened to jeopardise any possibility of settlement with Germany. As one Conservative peer, Lord Queenborough,

explained on resigning from the Treasury of the League of Nations, "I would be lacking in honesty towards myself if I did not seize this opportunity to make known to the executive committee the precise motive behind my resolution : by that I mean the conviction of the menace that the USSR, in its alliance with France, is bringing to European peace" (34). Indeed it was from the Lords that the most vociferous criticism of the Pact was usually heard. Lord Rankeillour claimed in November 1937 that not only had the Pact resulted in the estrangement of Belgium and the alienation of Germany but that it had, almost imperceptibly, caused British policy to become subordinated to Moscow : this could be seen, he said, in Spain, where indirect Soviet pressure had caused the British to adopt a totally uncharacteristic attitude on the issue of belligerent rights (35). Lord Lothian, a well-known exponent of Anglo-German rapprochement, argued that the Pact was clearly outside the normal procedure of the League Covenant and as such constituted "a technical military defensive alliance of the traditional kind" (36).

Although not necessarily representative of official government policy, parliamentary debates, particularly on inflammatory matters such as this, were often reported in the foreign press, thus evoking a specific picture of British "public opinion". Similarly, in both France and Russia considerable publicity was given to the pro-appeasement aristocracy, as represented by Lord Lothian and his friends, Lord and Lady Astor. At their Cliveden estate the Astors frequently played host to such visitors as Geoffrey Dawson of the 'Times', Garvin of the 'Observer', the future Foreign Minister Lord Halifax and even, on occasion, the German Ambassador to London, Herr von Ribbentrop. Thomas Jones, a close confidant of Baldwin, recorded in his diary in

May 1936 that at dinner with the Astors, William Bullitt "made our flesh creep with his Bolshevik stories" (37), while von Ribbentrop repeatedly warned of the dangers of world communism to which France with their Soviet Pact, Popular Front government and Socialist Premier, were heavily contributing (38).

Although it was rumoured that through Thomas Jones this group had considerable influence over the Prime Minister, Stanley Baldwin, the trend towards appeasement did not really become apparent in British foreign policy until after the accession of Chamberlain in early 1937. Moreover, the opinions of the Astor circle were not representative of the majority view at the Foreign Office, at least when the Pact was signed (39), and it was, after all, the views of British officials which the French government really needed to accommodate. It is in fact even in this respect difficult to speak of a "British attitude", since opinions on the Soviet Union varied enormously at the Foreign Office. On the one hand the Permanent Under-Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, Sir Robert Vansittart, believed that in order to counter the menace of Germany it was essential to bring the Soviet Union into Europe: for this reason he assisted Russian entry into the League and supported the Pact as a means of preventing Soviet-German rapprochement. In February 1935 Vansittart prepared a memorandum in which he advocated helping France to find a way of giving Russia satisfaction without, however, her having to conclude a military alliance. But even this policy was attacked by some Foreign Office officials as too dangerous. This current of opinion was represented most vociferously by Orme Sargent, who felt he must protest that this memorandum "exaggerates the dangers of a Russo-German entente and underestimates the dangerous repercussions of a Franco-Russian alliance"(40).

Throughout 1935 Sargent used every available argument to put his case against the Pact: the existence of such an alliance would make the British public disinclined to honour its Locarno obligations to France; it would bring closer the possibility of a German-Japanese alliance, which would have immediate implications for British foreign policy in both Europe and the Far East; and, above all, it would hamper the possibility of agreement with Germany (41), which ought to remain the major objective of British policy (42). The answer, said Sargent, was to make a direct offer of Anglo-French military cooperation, so that France might be saved from "the fateful solution of a Russian alliance" (43).

This division of opinion was shown clearly by the diverse comments on the possibility of Herriot taking the Quai in January 1936. Ralph Wigram believed, like Sargent, that Herriot's accession would inevitably mean the submission for ratification of the Franco-Soviet Pact, which in turn would "increase our difficulties in any attempt it may eventually become possible to make, to come to some arrangement with Germany": as a result, he regarded the possibility of Herriot becoming Foreign Minister with dismay. Laurence Collier, the Head of the Northern Department and the most consistent exponent of a policy of rapprochement with the Soviet Union at the Foreign Office, considered on the contrary that Herriot was an infinitely preferable choice as Foreign Minister to Laval who, like the French Ambassador to Germany, André François-Poncet, was "tarred with the brush of the 'Comité des Forges'", and hence was interested only in obtaining agreement with Germany, regardless of the cost. Collier added that it was not proper, however, that the British government should try to influence French internal politics (44).

It was in fact on this particular issue that the most crucial divergence of opinion occurred, causing a lengthy debate within the Foreign Office. Sargent believed that the British government should seize every available opportunity to pressurise the French to abandon their alliance with the Soviet Union. Even after the Pact was finally ratified he continued to advocate this policy, arguing in August 1936 that "we ought to be able to strengthen the French government in its efforts - or indeed bring pressure to bear to force it to free itself from Communist domination, both domestic and Muscovite" (45). Others at the Foreign Office repudiated such interference in the domestic affairs of another country, though usually on practical rather than moral grounds. Vansittart recognised that Germany might become more belligerent if the Pact were ratified, but doubted that, "even if we could influence the issue (and we can't without raising a huge storm at home as well as abroad) it would pay us in the long run to have given way to what is, after all, illegitimate intimidation" (46). Furthermore, as Collier pointed out, any such advice would be bound to become known and would have a disastrous effect on Anglo-Soviet relations, as well as on British relations with Herriot and the Left in France (47). It was also perhaps doubtful if any advice against ratifying the Pact would have any effect, since at the end of 1935 Anglo-French relations were far from satisfactory. In addition the British had already expressed approval of the Pact, albeit cautiously. The French had been careful to keep their neighbour fully informed during the negotiations for the Pact (48), and on May 2nd 1935 the Soviet Ambassador was informed that if the Pact were concluded within the framework of the League, then no criticism from the British government need be expected (49); then, in July 1935, the British government issued a note fully supporting the French reply to the

German memorandum, thus agreeing that the Pact was indeed fully compatible with Locarno (50). In these circumstances it is difficult to see how the British government could reasonably have advised the French not to proceed with ratification.

It was in fact the French themselves who provided the first opportunity for the British government to voice its opinion. In January 1936, Flandin asked Eden for his advice on the possible repercussions of ratification : Eden replied that "it was scarcely possible for HMG to advise the French government as to any action which they should take in the matter since the ratification wa a matter of French policy" (51). This reply seems to represent rather a feeling of impotence than any real determination to keep out of French affairs: in a Foreign Office minute Eden said that he hoped personally that the Senate would postpone ratification but that "we can do nothing about it", while he explained irritably, and not altogether truthfully, to his Cabinet colleagues that "we had not been consulted before the signature of the Pact, and there appeared to be no reason why we should express any opinion now" (52). The British could not object to ratification which, they realised, was none of their business : but they seem to have felt rather differently when it became a question of supplementing the Pact with a military accord.

Vansittart, himself a supporter of Franco-Soviet rapprochement, indicated the root of British anxieties when in September 1936 he admitted that "the tenuous prospects of a western agreement or the meeting of a Five-Power Conference would almost certainly be destroyed if, during the preliminary exchange of views, it emerged that France had supplemented, or was contemplating supplementing, her Treaty with

Russia by a military agreement". Orme Sargent was naturally more direct, emphasising that the tales of increased Soviet pressure on the Quai to open military talks were very probably true and adding "If so, I don't think we should hesitate to put a spoke in their wheel" (53). When in October rumours reached London from various sources that Blum had promised Litvinov in Geneva that he would be prepared to initiate Franco-Russian staff talks, the British government made its first direct demarche. On October 10th Eden asked Blum whether these reports were true, and on receiving a categorical denial, "I told M.Blum that I was glad to hear that such staff conversations were not actual, for I shared with him the conviction that anything of the kind would gravely prejudice the Five-Power meeting" (54). In December Vansittart repeated this advice to Paul Reynaud, but only in response to Reynaud's own enquiry about his views.(55)

The most serious evidence that can be found to support the view that the British government virtually forced the French to abandon all thoughts of a military alliance with the USSR is that of Eden's advice to Delbos to that effect in May 1937 (56). But this second British approach was also partly the result of French solicitation for advice. On April 17th Corbin asked Vansittart for his private and unofficial views in the event of France entering into some limited military agreement with Russia, with a view to the implementation of the Franco-Soviet Pact. Corbin added that the French government had resisted such a measure until now but had for some time been subjected to increased pressure from the Soviet government, and did not feel it possible to hold out any longer without causing the Russians to lose interest in France and turn towards Germany instead. Vansittart

replied that he personally believed that the French government should postpone military conversations further if they could, because they would give Germany an excuse to wreck the western Pact negotiations. Vansittart repeated this advice to Daladier, at Corbin's request, although he was subsequently informed by Léger that Daladier had not transmitted this advice to his colleagues in Paris (57).

When Eden met Delbos on May 15th, the pattern of the Corbin-Vansittart interview was virtually repeated. In fact, Delbos' explanation was even more defensive than Corbin's. The French government had no intention of entering into any military agreement with Russia, he said, and had successfully resisted all Soviet demands in this respect. "What was now contemplated was something which, in their opinion, would be entirely harmless and reasonable, namely an exchange of information between the military attachés on both sides", since they could not continue to refuse this "limited collaboration" without seeming to refuse Russia an equality of status with her other allies. Eden replied that he very much regretted the French decision, since it would be bound to become public and "might easily, in his opinion, have most serious psychological effects, both in this country and in the lesser countries of Central Europe". Delbos, for his part, continued to insist that the envisaged contacts could not be postponed until a final effort to bring about a Five-Power Western Pact had been made, as Eden requested (58). But then, on May 28th, Vansittart was informed by Corbin that, "Having regard to the views expressed by the Secretary of State at a luncheon at his house at which M. Delbos and M. Léger were present, the French government were going to reduce to the smallest possible compass any further developments of the Franco-Soviet Pact...Not only would the French



government make no fresh agreement in regard to staff conversations; they would reduce any further contacts to the smallest possible proportions. The French government did not consider that anybody could possibly object to so anodyne an arrangement. They could not possibly make it more cautious and inoffensive, and they could not do less without letting the Franco-Soviet Pact go altogether, and that of course they were not prepared to do for very obvious and unanswerable reasons" (59).

There appears to have been no other occasion when the views of HMG were made known as directly as this, nor does it seem that the British ever gave completely unsolicited advice. In effect the French seemed to abdicate their own freedom of action in this as in other areas, without being submitted to undue pressure. Moreover, both Corbin and Delbos emphasised that the French government had resisted Soviet pressure for as long as possible, and even now had no intention of negotiating a military accord, and Delbos seems to have been very easily convinced that even the very limited contacts he had envisaged ought to be abandoned. Thus it appears that Eden's opinions probably confirmed a decision already reached by the French government at least by May 1937, and as such, the government's reluctance to consolidate the Pact cannot be directly attributed to British pressure. It was in fact the French government's own insistence on obtaining British views which indicated its reluctance to believe that an alliance with Soviet Russia could ever be reconciled to an entente with Great Britain.

The French had in practical terms made further development of the Franco-Soviet Pact dependent on an improvement in Anglo-Soviet

relations, and so the Soviet government viewed with anxiety the new trend of British foreign policy during 1937 and 1938. As the personal control of the new Prime Minister, Neville Chamberlain, tightened, it became increasingly apparent that the dominant aim of British foreign policy was now, as Sargent and others had advocated since 1934, settlement with Germany. Although official policy towards Russia remained unchanged, Chamberlain himself told a right-wing Tory, Sir Edward Grigg, that he believed Russia to be responsible for the current state of chaos in Europe and that if Russia did not cooperate, it would be necessary to "push her aside politely" which, moreover, would give France an opportunity to break her links with the USSR "in an elegant manner". One Foreign Office official told a member of the French Embassy in December that the Pact was "the most serious error of French policy", while Chamberlain's Secretaries on occasion openly criticised the Pact to the Press (60).

Fears of an Anglo-German settlement seemed confirmed when in November 1937 Lord Halifax visited Hitler at the Berchtesgarden. The visit was surrounded by rumours that it had been planned behind the back of the Foreign Office by the "Cliveden set", who had apparently decided that Halifax should propose that in return for an Anglo-German truce, Great Britain would not interfere with German expansion eastwards. In fact, at the weekend party in question, Eden and Cadogan from the Foreign Office were both present, while Halifax himself was not, but the story first published in "The Week", was given vast publicity both in England and, in particular, abroad (61). Soviet anxiety was further exacerbated by the visit of Chautemps and Delbos to London in December 1937, particularly since it was rumoured that Chautemps had suggested that a reinforcement of the Franco-British entente would enable him

to abandon the Franco-Soviet Pact (62).

That the Chamberlain policy was deeply resented in Moscow can be seen by the violently anti-British campaign conducted by l'Humanité as a result of the French Cabinet crisis in January 1938. For several months past, it was claimed, the British conservatives who provided the inspiration for the Chamberlain government, led by Lords Lothian, Halifax and Londonderry, had been trying to dislocate the Popular Front coalition. Having inspired the 'pause' and the non-intervention policy, the City financiers had then prepared to provoke the current French crisis by means of golf meetings on the Côte d'Azur between Flandin, Vansittart and Simon, who represented the pro-German, pro-Japanese element in the Cabinet. The aim of the British conservatives was to provoke the eviction of the Communist Party from the Popular Front government (hence Chautemps' totally unexpected and unprovoked action in the Chamber debate giving back the communists their liberty), and the eviction from the coalition of the CGT (which accounted for Chautemps' threats to the workers). Thus, said l'Humanité, Chautemps was working directly on the orders of British conservatives and financiers (63).

These accusations may seem far-fetched, but Soviet bitterness about French devotion to Britain is understandable, and it was with some justification that Gabriel Péri claimed in January 1938 that "les démarches essentielles de la politique française, si elles ont été toujours subordonnées au consentement de Londres, ne sont jamais préoccupées de l'opinion du contractant soviétique" (64). Although not linked by any formal alliance, France collaborated closely with Great Britain on virtually all matters of foreign policy, such as the

negotiations for a new Locarno agreement and non-intervention in Spain. Delbos even went to confer with his British colleagues before embarking on his tour of France's allies in Central and Eastern Europe in December 1937. These Soviet fears were finally justified by the Munich agreement in September 1938. Since one of the main contingencies in which the Franco-Soviet Pact was expected to operate was in the event of an attack on Czechoslovakia, then Russia could justifiably expect to be consulted about that country's fate, but at Munich Daladier, under Chamberlain's guidance, agreed to the dismemberment of Czechoslovakia without even the Czechoslovaks, let alone the Russians, being present. Just as they had feared throughout the Locarno negotiations, the Soviets had been isolated by the major European powers: the Pact with France had done nothing to prevent it.

The French government did not, of course, regard an alliance with Great Britain as valueless in practical terms and may have thought that, militarily, British support was more useful than Soviet : the French General Staff, for example, argued in June 1936 that news of Franco-Soviet military conversations would create an unfortunate impression in Great Britain, "et les conversations entre Etats-Majors français et britannique ne pourront qu'en souffrir" (65). But the real issue is that the French felt obliged to make this choice at all: there is, for instance, no evidence whatsoever to suggest that the Popular Front government ever tried to use its influence in London or Moscow to promote rapprochement between the two, as the Russians themselves hoped (66). Again, in May 1937 the French Staff justified its opposition to the idea of a military accord on the grounds that it was doubtful that English public opinion would approve (67). It is possible that, like Delbos, the French Military were using this British argument

to justify their own opposition to the Pact. Thus the crucial question becomes, not whether the British government pressurised France to abandon the Pact, but whether there was, in French governmental and military circles, any predisposition in favour of maintaining the Pact to be overcome. It is important to recognise in this respect that while entente with Great Britain was undoubtedly incompatible with the Soviet alliance, it was the French themselves, rather than the British, who effectively made it so.

(7) *HMCo. Comm. Clause 1 to 1941, 25th November 1934*

(8) *FO 371/19423, X229/650/2*

(9) *Review, op.cit. p. 357* \* \* \* \* \*

(10) *DFP, 2nd. Ser., No. 339*

(11) *DFP, 2d. Ser., No. 34*

(12) *FRUS, 1936, I, p. 309*

(13) *DFP, 2d. Ser., No. 340*

(14) *Blair in Commission, Vol. I, p. 339*

(15) *HM. CAB : 21st December 1935*

(16) *DFP, 2d. Ser., No. 34*

(17) *HM. CAB : 21st October 1936*

(18) *Blair in Commission, Vol. I, p. 339*

(19) *DFP, 2nd. Ser., No. 346*

(20) *FO 371/19883, C293-4/18*

(21) *FRUS, 1936, I, p. 305*

(22) *Blair, op.cit. p. 357*

(23) *FO 371/19887, C4355/1477*

(24) *Blair, op.cit. p. 357*

(25) *Blair, op.cit. p. 313*

(26) *Blair, op.cit. p. 305*

(27) *FO 371/19887, C4355/1477*

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- (16) DDF, 2e, III No.14
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- (19) DBFP, 2nd, XVIII, No.226
- (20) FO 371/19883, C213/4/18
- (21) FRUS, 1936, I, p.365
- (22) Eden, op.cit. p.381
- (23) FO 371/19857, C4355/1/17
- (24) Blum, op.cit. p.357
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- (27) FO 371/19857, C4467/1/17

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- (31) The Times, May 1938
- (32) DBFP, 2nd, XII, No.485
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CHAPTER 7

THE FRENCH GENERAL STAFF AND THE FRANCO-SOVIET PACT

Before the postwar investigative committee, Leon Blum indicated that on several occasions the Russians had offered to reveal the exact nature of the military and industrial resources which could be put at France's disposal in the event of a European conflict, if France would provide similar information in return. Blum continues, "J'ai posé plus d'une fois la question à M. Daladier et je me suis bien rendu compte que M. Daladier se heurtait à son tour, je ne dirai pas à une résistance de l'état-major, mais à une réticence de l'état-major".

The major reason for this "reticence", Blum explains, was that "à cette époque notre état-major ne considérait pas l'aide militaire de l'URSS comme une donnée d'importance primordiale" since "dans son for intérieur, l'état-major considérait les forces militaires de la Pologne comme supérieures ou en tout cas plus importantes pour nous que les forces militaires de l'URSS" (1).

It is quite understandable that the Blum government, in its relations with the Soviet Union, should have been considerably influenced by the views of its own military leaders : what is less immediately apparent is why the French Staff should have reached the conclusion that Soviet military assistance could be of no value to France, since the majority of information available from French diplomatic and military representatives in Moscow seemed to indicate the contrary. Thus it is necessary to examine how far the Popular Front government was hindered in its relations with the USSR by the negative advice of its Generals, and how far that advice was the result of a miscalculation,

intentional or otherwise.

Officially the most influential military leader in the period under consideration was General Maurice Gamelin. On 21st January 1935 Gamelin, a member of Joffre's Staff during the First World War and widely respected as the initiator of the manoeuvre which led to the Marne victory (2), succeeded General Weygand as Vice-President of the Conseil Supérieure de la Guerre, the army's senior military committee, combining this with his position as Chief of the Army General Staff, which he had held since February 1931. His chief collaborators were Generals Georges and Colson, who succeeded Gamelin as the Army Chief of Staff in January 1935. General Doumenc took over the direction of the 1er and 4e bureaux, being succeeded as Deputy Chief of the Army Staff by General Victor-Henri Schweisguth, who retained that post until September 1937. General Pujo was the Chief of the Airforce General Staff, later replaced by General Vuillemin, while Vice-Admiral Durance-Viel, and later Vice-Admiral Darlan, headed the Marine Staff.

Although these were officially France's major military figures when the Popular Front came to power, to them must be added two former leaders whose influence remained strong : General Weygand, who resigned his supreme position to Gamelin on account of his having reached retirement age, but who remained a significant military figure whose advice was still unofficially sought, and most important of all, Marshall Philippe Pétain. Pétain, the hero of Verdun who had been the dominant French military personality throughout the 1920's, had resigned his post as Chief of the Army General Staff to Weygand in 1930, but his influence as a hero of the Great War had continued unabated. In the

Doumergue government of 1934 Pétain was Minister of War, and even under the Popular Front he remained a member of the Conseil supérieure de la Défense Nationale and the Comité permanent de la Défense Nationale. A general unwillingness to contradict France's military hero (3) had led to his views on most military matters being widely accepted and so Pétain's emphasis on a defensive strategy and a continuous front, as well as his lack of interest in the value of the airforce as an independent armed force and dismissal of the role to be played by the tank in modern warfare as emphasised by de Gaulle, had by the mid-1930's become firmly imprinted on the whole of French military thinking.

On a practical level the General Staff could make known its views to the government in one of two basic ways. The first, and, it seems, least efficient, was through meetings of the National Defence Committees. The role of the Conseil supérieure de la Défense Nationale was to prepare plans and methods of operation in the event of war and to co-ordinate all ministerial action in matters relating to National Defence, but it was composed primarily of cabinet ministers : the Premier or President of the Republic who usually acted as Chairman, and the Ministers for Foreign Affairs, the Interior, Public Works, Finance, War, Navy, Air and the Colonies. In addition the meetings were attended by a Marshal of France, in other words, Marshal Pétain. The Haut Comité militaire, on the other hand, which was responsible for the military conduct of a war, had a more military composition comprising the Premier, the three service ministers, the Chiefs of the Army, Navy and Air General Staffs and the Inspector-General of territorial air defence, that is, Marshal Pétain (4).

One of the first acts of the new Popular Front government, however, was to replace this committee with a new "Comité permanent de la Défense Nationale", to work in conjunction with the newly-created Ministry of National Defence which had overall control over the War, Marine and Air Ministries. The new committee was to comprise the three service ministers, the Chiefs of the Army, Navy and War Staffs and Marshal Pétain, and was directly linked to the new ministry by a permanent administrative staff (5). The scope of the new committee was extensive, ranging from matters of colonial defence and military aid to allies through to the mobilisation of labour and the sale of French arms, but while it might have played an important role in the formulation of French military and national defence policy, it met only at irregular intervals, on average once every two months, and was only rarely attended by the Foreign Minister, who was not in fact a member of the Committee. Indeed, as Robert Young has shown, there was no real co-ordination in any of the committees between the civil and military representatives (6). In fact there seems to have been little effective collaboration between the two at any level : General Gamelin recalls that whereas he had been on friendly terms with Maurin and Fabry, both former Ministers of War, whom he could see whenever he wished, Daladier was difficult to contact since as head of the Radical-Socialist party he was often occupied with political matters. Gamelin found it necessary to request an audience, on one occasion waiting a month to see the Minister, and concludes that "Ce ne sont pas là les conditions d'une collaboration vraiment étroite, encore moins suivie, entre le ministre et le chef d'état-major général" (7). Indeed, Daladier did not even convey the details of the Blum-Potemkin exchange of 17th February to the General for his comments until the 9th April!(8).

A more effective means of making known its views on various issues was through the use of written notes to the Ministry, and it is from these that we can ascertain exactly the Staff's attitude to the Soviet alliance. Thus on the 24 April 1935 the 2e bureau prepared a note on the advantages and inconveniences, both political and military, of a Russian alliance (9). The 2e bureau also prepared papers on the possible consequences of a Franco-Soviet military contact for France's other alliances (10), and more specifically on the Franco-Polish alliance (11), as well as evaluating the purely military value of the Soviet accord for France. Usually the Staff's comments were solicited by the Quai, though it is not clear whether or not the government merely sought specialised military opinions on which to base its own judgement of the value of the alliance.

In addition the Staff could of course use entirely unofficial means of making known its views. While it might have been difficult for Gamelin to make contact with Daladier there seems to have been a fairly close working relationship with officials at the Quai : thus on 25th June 1936 General Colson sent Schweisguth to give Bargeton the views of the Army Staff on the consequences of Franco-Soviet staff talks (12), and Schweisguth was able to discuss his report on the Red Army manoeuvres extensively with Léger (13) and on one occasion with the Minister himself (14). On another occasion, after a Staff discussion on Franco-Soviet contacts, General Georges indicated that he would "act on" the director of Delbos' cabinet, M. Langier (15). Thus Gamelin's repeated insistence that the Military be kept aloof from any involvement in politics did not apply in practice, and the government was made fully aware of the political, as well as military, views of its General Staff.

Geneviève Tabouis recalls that when Herriot returned from Russia in 1932 advocating a close Franco-Soviet entente, "the most unexpected support for the plan came from General Weygand, who was more enthusiastic about the idea than anyone else on the General Staff"(16). Indeed, Weygand initiated secret talks with Soviet representatives in Paris, conducted for the French by the "aristocratic and reactionary" (17) General de Lattre de Tassigny, on the basis of which military attachés were exchanged in the spring of 1933, and he subsequently encouraged the attempts of Paul-Bancour and Herriot to prepare a mutual assistance pact (18). And yet, only three years later, and having been one year retired from public life, Weygand felt it necessary to make a dramatic intervention in the ratification debate, circulating a note among the deputies which stated, "As Inspector General of the Army, not consulted; as a private citizen, hostile"(19). At the same time Weygand denied ever having favoured the Pact, and he authorised the 'Journal', 'Gringoire' and 'Candide' to print articles saying it was wrong to call him the "father of the Pact" since "he had not even been consulted about it"(20).

It is unlikely that Weygand's astonishing intervention had any real influence on the voting, at least in the Chamber, but his apparent rejection of the Pact, when he was thought to have favoured rapprochement in its early stages, must have caused considerable confusion. Even more disquieting, perhaps, were the series of violently anti-Pact articles published in the press at the time of the debate by the venerable Marshal Pétain. Although not known as a supporter of rapprochement Pétain had said nothing against it when in the Doumergue Ministry, but in April 1936 the 'Journal' published an article by him which warned that "En tendant la main à Moscou, nous l'avons tendue au

communisme et nous avons amené a lui quantité de braves gens de chez nous, qui jusqu'alors s'en défendaient. Nous avons fait entrer le communisme dans le cercle des doctrines avouables. Nous aurons vraisemblablement l'occasion de le regretter" (21).

This was, of course, a major consideration for both Petain and Weygand (22), who had approved rapprochement before the change in communist tactics had enabled the French Communist Party to obtain a significant foothold in French politics, and while Cot's interpretation of Weygand as a fascist who hated democracy might seem a little extreme (23), he undoubtedly feared the growth of communism in Europe, and regarded Hitler as a possible bulwark against it. Philip Bankwitz interprets Weygand's change of heart more favourably, maintaining that he was motivated in 1933 by a morbid fear of the conjunction of resurgent German military power and French military weakness at the beginning of the 'lean years' in 1935 which led him to grasp at any chance of counterbalancing Germany : by 1936 the 'lean year' problem had, under Gamelin's management receded, and Weygand, now retired, could freely express his own opinions (24). Certainly there is no evidence that Weygand ever really envisaged a military alliance with the USSR, or ever regarded the Red Army as being of any practical use, but the severity of his reaction in 1936 seems to indicate a deep-rooted fear whose most likely cause was communism.

Although Weygand's and Pétain's dramatic warnings to the public in 1936 were not typical of the official views of the General Staff, there were already indications of the 'reticence' of which Blum later spoke. In his memoirs Gamelin claims that he agreed with Barthou that "la Russie représentait bien le seul grand contrepoids oriental

nécessaire vis-a-vis de l'Allemagne" (26) and the journalist Pertinax recollects that in February 1934 Gamelin "m'avait exhorté à expliquer au public la nécessité d'une politique nouvelle a l'égard de Moscou" (27). But there was no suggestion that Gamelin ever contemplated a military alliance with the Soviet Union, the consequences of which he appreciated fully. Discussing the imminent ratification with his colleagues on February 10th, for example, Gamelin indicated his hope that no mention would be made in the debate of the Pact's being directed against Germany (28), and on the 24th he suggested that ratification be postponed while the Pact were submitted to the Hague Court of Justice or the League of Nations for approval (29).

Unlike Weygand, however, it seems likely that Gamelin was sincerely motivated by fear of the Pact's consequences rather than an abstract fear of the Soviet Union. When asked by Massigli at the Quai whether Gamelin's suggestion was not merely a manoeuvre designed to undermine the Pact, Schweisguth explained that the Staff had received fresh information about the imminent reoccupation of the Rhineland, which it was hoped to forestall by removing Hitler's pretext (30). Moreover, whereas the victory of the Popular Front seems to have filled Weygand and Petain with fear, confirming their rejection of the Soviet alliance, Gamelin seems to have been able to dissociate domestic from foreign politics. Thus while in August 1935 he "semble flotter et osciller", suspecting Soviet propaganda among the lower army officers, this was according to Pertinax only a fluctuation, and Gamelin henceforth repeated continually to Daladier that "les sous-officiers sont immunisés contre le virus communiste" (31). He was naturally concerned that the accession of the Popular Front to power might have



repercussions on army morale, but was sufficiently reassured by Blum's insistence on the importance of national defence to conclude that "le président Blum savait mettre les intérêts permanents de la France au-dessus des luttes entre les partis" (32). Thus Gamelin seems to have felt no need suddenly to revise his attitude towards the Soviet Union and while he recognised that some Generals were clearly hostile to the new government, he considered he had enough authority to restrain their criticisms (33).

In fact, however, the General Staff had already begun to assert a negative influence on the government before the Rassemblement populaire was formed and before the Franco-Soviet Pact was even signed. In April 1935 the 2e bureau presented the government with an analysis of the possible consequences of the forthcoming pact from the juridical, political and military points of view. On the technical issue, it was advised that the alliance must be in the form of a mutual assistance treaty limited to Europe, and be compatible with France's existing alliances and Locarno. The military aspect of the alliance was examined summarily : in the event of conflict, Russia would have sixty infantry divisions on the European frontier, twelve cavalry divisions, 1,800 aircraft and 1,200 tanks. But the major section of the note concentrated on an analysis of the political consequences of the Pact. The advantages envisaged were that it would prevent a return to Rapallo and would facilitate the creation of a Franco-Slav bloc (excluding Poland). On the other hand the conclusion of the Pact would risk throwing Poland into the German camp, thus considerably improving Germany's position against France, and depriving France of valuable Polish aid; it would ally France to a government who had betrayed her in the last war, and ruined the small French creditors; and in particular

it would make France a target for Soviet German collusion : for instance, Russia, in German pay in the Baltic states, might provoke a *causus belli* and drag France into war at a moment which suited Germany to crush her. The note concluded with the advice that the government either renounce the alliance "ou bien ne s'engager que dans des termes qui nous laissent, dans tous les cas, notre libre arbitre, par exemple en prévoyant 'que les gouvernements se consulteront', sans conclure aucun accord militaire"(34).

Such advice even before the signature of the Pact hardly boded well for its future, making quite clear that the 2e bureau at least, albeit for largely political reasons, was opposed to the idea of a military agreement. The advice was often repeated. In response to a question from the Ministry that the Army Staff should give its opinion on the usefulness of conversations and military accords with the USSR, Schweisguth presented Bargeton on June 24th 1936 with a resume of the Staff's opinions. Since the ratification of the Pact had been used as a pretext by Germany for the remilitarisation of the Rhineland, it was only to be expected that the conclusion of a military accord would be followed by a new gesture of force by the German government; Poland would immediately turn towards Germany; the impression created in England would be unfavourable, and talks with the British Staff would undoubtedly suffer; and, finally, Soviet assistance to Czechoslovakia could not be envisaged without a five month delay. Thus it was concluded that "il n'y a pas de raison particulière de conclure les accords militaires avec l'URSS" since "ces dangers ne seraient pas compensés par la conclusion d'un accord militaire dont on ne voit pas qu'il puisse apporter une amélioration appréciable aux difficultés techniques existantes" (35). A similar conclusion was reached a year

later when the Staff advised that "tout nouveau rapprochement de la France vers Moscou risque de se traduire, au point de vue de la sécurité française, par un résultat nul ou même négatif" (36).

In all these instances the Staff was making a political, rather than a military, judgement, but nevertheless one which was in many ways justified. It was perhaps only natural that the Army should remember Brest-Litovsk more bitterly than anyone else and, like the government, the Military might have sincerely feared that an alliance with the Soviet Union would lead to the alienation of France's allies in Central and Eastern Europe, Great Britain and Belgium, and further antagonise Germany. What is less easy to understand is why the Staff totally dismissed the military value of the USSR per se. In retrospect the lack of faith in the Soviet Military has usually been attributed to two major factors : the critical report made by General Schweisguth on returning from the White Russia manoeuvres in September 1936 which, in the words of one historian, was adopted by the French Staff as their New Testament policy on Soviet Russia until 1939 (37), and the effects of the military purge in Russia which devastated the High Command in June 1937. But as early as June 1934 the British Ambassador to Paris reported that the French "do not anticipate that in the event of a German aggression on France the Russian army, even if it were possible to leave its own frontiers, would be of any great practical assistance" (38), and a Swiss newspaper reported in January 1935 that "l'Etat-Major français a une opinion assez peu flatteuse de la valeur combative de l'Armée rouge" (39). Thus it seems that the Schweisguth Report and the Purges merely confirmed, rather than produced, the opinion of the French General Staff.

It was of course difficult to obtain exact information on the nature of the Soviet military forces since the Moscow government was inclined to be secretive and public displays such as army manoeuvres were always highly selective. However, in view of her apparently close political relations with the USSR, France was in a better position than most other countries to assess the condition of the Russian forces, and indeed the French Staff did receive a considerable amount of detailed information from its representatives, both military and political, in Russia. In fact almost every French observer in Moscow sent back favourable reports on the Red Army and Airforce, and recommended closer collaboration between the French and Soviet Military. In particular the military attaches to Moscow during this period were usually very complementary about the Soviet armed forces (40). Colonel Mendras, the first military attaché, appointed in 1933, did everything possible to promote military rapprochement between the two countries, and when he was recalled in 1934 the Soviet Chief of Staff, Egorov, praised him warmly for facilitating the exchange of information between the two armies and for being ready to assist any project which might improve personal contacts (41). Pierre Cot claims that Mendras was recalled because he suggested that the French Army had much to learn from the Red Army (42), and while there is no concrete evidence to support this claim, it is striking that Mendras spent only one year in Moscow.

Moreover, he was succeeded by a lesser-ranking officer, Lt.-Col Simon, who was certainly less enthusiastic. The Russians themselves were unhappy with the new appointment, arguing that the USSR was surely important enough for France to be represented by a Colonel, or even a General (43) : indeed, France was represented by General Renondeau

in Berlin, General Faucher in Prague and General Musse in Warsaw, while from January 1937 General Semenov occupied the post of Soviet military attaché in Paris. In addition the Russians seem to have found Simon unacceptable personally. In October 1936, for example, Ventsov complained to Schweisguth that while Simon was clearly an excellent soldier he was excessively reserved, particularly with regard to the General Staff, with whom his contacts "ne sont pas suffisants étant données les bonnes relations existant entre les deux armées" (44). And yet even Simon, without noticeably recommending closer collaboration, reported quite favourably on the strengths of the Red Army. In 1937 Simon was replaced by Lt.-Col Palasse who, like Mendras, was extremely impressed by what he saw of the Soviet Military, and consistently recommended improved relations between the two armies.

The attachés were agreed on the tremendous assets of the Red Army. The most immediately obvious was the sheer numerical strength of the effectives, and vast reserves of manpower. It was estimated that in 1936 the Soviet Union had peace-time effectives numbering 1,300,000 men, and the mere size of the adult male population meant that reserves would be virtually inexhaustible; the regular troops, though perhaps poorly educated, were physically strong and had a high morale; the officers tended to be young and lacking in initiative, but were generally adequate. In terms of equipment it was estimated that Soviet capacity was very much improved : under the Five-Year Plans Stalin was tending to neglect the consumer industries and agriculture in favour of developing the heavy industry necessary for war, and this conscious diversion of resources, in addition to the importation of quality engineers and machinery from the USA and Germany, meant that by 1936 a significant improvement in the production of the established heavy

industries, such as coal (which increased to 126 million tons in 1936 from 9 million in 1913), cast iron, steel and petrol, could be clearly discerned (45). One of the most notable results of this improvement was the production, by 1938, of between 5,000 and 8,000 combat tanks (46), while it was thought that the Soviet factories were producing about 6,000 aircraft per year (47).

On the other hand the reports from the attachés were not uncritical, and fully acknowledged the very evident weaknesses of the Soviet Military. It was thought, for instance, that army manoeuvres showed too great a dependence on the lessons of the civil war and that the High Command had failed to adapt their strategic doctrine to the requirements of a modern European war, continuing to disregard the use of firepower (48). In particular Russia's major weakness, her poor communications, was recognised as critical. In June 1935, for example, Simon made a trip to the Volga and North Caucasus, and while he was surprised to note that the material well-being of the people seemed much improved, and that the industrial centres of the Volga and Donetz basin showed that colossal efforts in industrialisation were being made, he saw no noticeable improvement in the very poor railway network, which had failed to expand like other branches of the economy. While efforts were being made to improve the existing organisation there had been no attempt to create the profound transformation which was really necessary, and Simon concluded that the railway network could probably not withstand a full mobilisation, and would be unable to keep the armies at the front supplied (49). During the next two years there were significant attempts to improve the network, and by February 1938 the French Embassy was able to report that while the 94,000 kms. of track envisaged by the second Five Year Plan had not

been constructed, there were now 86,200 kms. of track as opposed to 58,500 kms. in 1913, and that plans for the increased circulation of traffic had surpassed the target figure by increasing from 55,000 loaded wagons per day in 1935 to 100,000 in 1937 : there were, however, still significant problems which Stalin and Kaganovitch, the People's Commissar for Heavy Industry, were trying to eradicate (50).

While the General Staff simply accepted such problems as insurmountable, making Soviet military assistance worthless, the attachés continued to recommend closer collaboration. In April 1938, for example, at Coulondre's request, Palasse submitted a detailed report on his personal view of the military potential of the Red Army. It was a balanced, objective account. Palasse estimated that Russia had a force of approximately 100 infantry divisions, 30 cavalry divisions which could be reinforced after a few months by a further 60 infantry divisions, and she had between 5,000 and 8,000 combat tanks which could be mobilised rapidly. Her armaments were modern and of sufficient quantities, though her artillery needed improvement, and, apart from rubber, she was self-sufficient in raw materials. However, her communications network still needed further improvement, and the value of the High Command was doubtful following the purges. As a result he did not suggest that the Red Army would be able to sustain a long offensive war against Germany but he argued that nevertheless Russia could very well defend herself and could carry out a limited but brutal and extremely effective 'choc' offensive (51). The report was sent, with Coulondre's full approval, to the War Ministry in April : several weeks later Palasse received a reply which rejected his figures outright, and harshly told him to employ more moderation in his evaluation of Soviet strength (52).

Thus it seems that the Army Staff was in no mood to listen to the recommendations of its own representatives in the USSR. Moreover the Air Staff, although holding a more favourable view of Soviet air-strength, was similarly disinclined to respond to positive suggestions from its attaché in Moscow. In early 1937 the Air Staff estimated that Russia had a front-line strength of 4,600 aircraft, the majority of which would be based on the western frontier, and she seemed to be producing 450 machines per month. In addition, two new and more efficient models had been introduced during 1936, the I16 fighter plane and the SB medium bomber, while the organisation of the Airforce had been considerably improved with the creation of an independent airforce arm, intended to undertake purely airforce operations, rather than just supporting the land army (53). While the Air Staff recognised that the strategic use of the Red Airforce would be limited if she were restricted to operating from her national airbases (54), it was nevertheless maintained that, if only in terms of numbers, the Soviet air arm constituted a force which could not possibly be ignored (55).

Backed by an eager Minister of Air, it might have been expected that the Air Staff, recognising the undoubted strength of Soviet aviation, would press ahead with Franco-Soviet collaboration. There were weaknesses, of course : it was suspected that the vast quantity of aircraft had often been obtained at the expense of quality, since the Soviet authorities had been forced to accept mediocre performance in exchange for ease of construction, while the continual increase in the number of front-line squadrons made it difficult to constitute the indispensable reserves (it was estimated in January 1936 that Russia had only 750 aircraft in reserve) (56). Moreover, since the Soviet



aeronautical industry was still relatively new, Russia had to rely heavily on foreign aid in the construction of her aircraft, as well as importing foreign prototypes and motors, largely from the United States. But as the Air Attaché, Commander Donzeau, recognised, far from merely accepting this as an inherent weakness in Soviet air strength, the Russian reliance on foreign imports gave France a valuable opportunity, for as he urged the Air Ministry in September 1935, for example, "la collaboration technique entre les maisons français et soviétiques est le plus sûr moyen, à la portée de nos constructeurs, pour s'implanter sur le marché aeronautique soviétique dans le domaine moteur" (57). In other words, while the Army Staff might argue with some justification that the Red Army had more to learn from the French Army than vice versa, the same could not be said of the Red Airforce, whose superiority was widely recognised. Thus it appears that the unwillingness to collaborate with the Soviet Union shown by all three Defence Staffs was often maintained in spite of considerable advice to the contrary.

Perhaps the clearest example of the French Staff's determination to ignore information from its representatives which seemed to counter its own preconceived views was its treatment of the report on the Ukraine manoeuvres submitted on his return in September 1935 by General Loiseau (58). Loiseau was not uncritical, but was on the whole impressed by what he saw of the Red Army. The men were vigorous and well-disciplined with a high morale; the officers and lower officers worked hard but lacked general initiative and a spirit of decision, and seemed poorly taught; the Command was brilliant conceptually but seemed to have difficulty putting its ideas into practice; the war material was new, modern and abundant, and potential industrial

mobilisation limitless; and communications, though much improved, still required a significant effort. Loiseau was particularly impressed by the parachute manoeuvre, informing his superiors in Paris that it was indispensable to undertake the necessary studies to introduce this new arm into the French Army as soon as possible. Loiseau's enthusiasm was shared by his fellow officers on the mission, Colonel Mendras, who reported on the manoeuvres in general, Captain le Gouest, who reported favourably on the assault tanks used, and the second-in-command of the Air Staff, Lt.-Col. Romatet, who believed that under the energetic direction of Vorochilov "l'aviation soviétique ...ne tardera pas à se placer aux tous premiers rangs des aviations militaires mondiales" (59). The general conclusion of the Loiseau mission was forthright : "le potentiel militaire soviétique ne saurait être négligé dans les années à venir : il ne faut à aucun prix l'avoir contre soi".

It was not so much the report itself, however, as the subsequent publicity surrounding it which made it so suspect in the eyes of the General Staff. At an official dinner given by General Yakir before the mission returned to France, Loiseau praised the high level of technical equipment, the useful work of the Airforce, and the unique parachute corps. The following day some French newspapers reproduced large, exaggerated extracts from the Soviet press, which quoted Loiseau as praising the technique of an "extraordinary level", the "first place in the world for tanks" and a "formidable airforce". Loiseau's fate was sealed when the Moscow correspondent of the 'Temps' after quoting Loiseau on the attachment of the population for their soldiers, added that "les défenseurs actuels de l'URSS, animés par un sentiment patriotique extrêmement vif sans cesse renforcé par le succès

du Parti, sont certainement mieux préparés que tous les autres à subir les épreuves d'une guerre nouvelle" : he failed to add that this was his own, and not Loiseau's comment (60). The 'Temps' subsequently asserted that the words had been incorporated into Loiseau's speech only as a result of a printing error (61), but General Loiseau's reputation as a sovietophile preceded him home, and the General Staff proceeded to ignore his report on the White Russian manoeuvres.

Moreover, the accuracy of Loiseau's report was seriously questioned by the submission of a totally contradictory report by General Schweisguth one year later on October 5th (62). From a purely military point of view Schweisguth admitted that the troop seemed well-trained, with modern and abundant equipment, and was excellently disciplined, though the value of the High Command was doubtful and the communications difficulties meant that there would be serious problems involved in moving troops. He concluded that the Red Army was insufficiently prepared to fight a war against any large European power. More importantly, the Minsk manoeuvres apparently confirmed everybody's worst fears about Soviet intentions. If the USSR were attacked by Germany, maintained Schweisguth, then obviously she would prefer to have a powerful and faithful France as her ally : for this reason Russia was encouraging France in her rearmament programme, and pressing for a military alliance. But, he warned, "l'URSS préférerait naturellement de beaucoup que l'orage éclate sur la France, et il semble que depuis quelque temps ce soit surtout cette carte qu'elle joue, tout en continuant à agir en apparence comme si elle appliquait loyalement le pacte franco-soviétique, afin de pouvoir revenir, le cas échéant, au 1er tableau". Thus Russia's plan was to tempt Germany, by

showing that France was an easy prey, and to tempt France by pushing her into conflict with Germany in Spain, by persuading France that she would be Hitler's first victim if she did not resist immediately, and by showing her the dangers which rapprochement with Germany would bring.

The assertion that Russia would prefer a war in France to a war in Russia need not have caused much surprise, since there were, after all, many Frenchmen who hoped that Hitler would satiate his appetite and at the same time conveniently eradicate bolshevism in a war with Soviet Russia. But what was particularly worrying about Schweisguth's claim was that his analysis of the Soviet plan seemed to have a substantial ring of truth : Soviet policy in Spain, although not by September 1936 in full flight, was nevertheless already causing alarm; suspected communist-inspired strikes were weakening France, and thus in effect making her an easier target for German expansionist designs; and several Soviet officials, such as Biejanoff, the head of the Central European section of the Foreign Commissariat, Kalini and Weinstein, Litvinov's representatives in White Russia and Leningrad, maintained to Commander Villelume that Hitler aimed to attack neither Czechoslovakia nor Russia, but France (63)

Moreover, in purely military terms Schweisguth's Report suggested that the Soviet Union could not fight a European war, whereas Loiseau had suggested just the opposite. Reading this, Léon Blum asked the General Staff for a copy of the Loiseau Report so that he could compare the two, but he later recalled that he received it only with great difficulty, and after a certain delay; when he finally read it he

realised that virtually every line in the Schweisguth Report contradicted that submitted one year earlier (64). In fact, from an examination of the circumstances in which Schweisguth was sent to the Russian manoeuvres, we can see that the conclusions he reached are really not surprising. In the first instance, Schweisguth himself was not an impartial observer of the Soviet Union, and there have been several early indications of what his subsequent attitude might be. For example, when learning that General Loiseau was to attend the 1935 manoeuvres, Schweisguth wondered whether this might not be too important a personage to send, even though he himself had attended the Swiss manoeuvres earlier that year (65). Then, in April 1936, several months before he visited Russia, Schweisguth was outspoken in his comments on the Soviet Military in conversation with the British military attaché, Beaumont-Nesbitt. Indeed, "according to Schweisguth this Pact has no military clauses and no military value for France" : from the military point of view, the USSR could do nothing in the event of war with Germany, since even if she could obtain passage through either the Baltic States, Poland or Roumania, the railways were hopelessly inadequate. Similarly, for air assistance against Germany to be effective the Soviets would need to obtain right of passage. Schweisguth clearly did not envisage any solution to these problems, since he concluded that "it was obvious, therefore, that the military assistance to be expected from Russia was nil". In addition, Schweisguth maintained that Russia had gained substantially from the Pact since France, unlike Russia, would be in a position to intervene against Germany (66).

Whether or not this represented the view of the whole General Staff, as Beaumont-Nesbit believed, it is clear that General Schweisguth was already deeply distrustful of the Soviet Union and dismissive of

potential Russian aid some months before he was asked to take a mission to Red Army manoeuvres. It would however be wrong to assume that this attitude was exclusively of Schweisguth's own making, for he was given several indications of the conclusions expected of him prior to his departure. On September 20th 1935, Schweisguth noted General Colson's discontent with the Loiseau Report (67), and he would obviously have been aware of the subsequent publicity surrounding it. Then, on the eve of his departure, he received very specific instructions from Daladier : "être prudent sans être renfrogné; tâche de vérifier l'exactitude du rapport Loiseau qui est cité constamment dans un but politique" (68). Thus, when he returned with a report which refuted that of General Loiseau, he was greeted with widespread approval. On the 8th October Schweisguth discussed the report with Alexis Léger at the Quai : from the military point of view, said Schweisguth, the Red Army presented a good facade but little else, and "quant aux possibilités stratégiques de l'armée russe dans un conflit contre l'Allemagne, elles me paraissent a peu près nulles". Léger entirely agreed, explaining that the Quai had only ever favoured rapprochement with the USSR in order to prevent a return to Rapallo (69). On the 22nd Schweisguth saw General Georges who "est d'avis de se libérer du pacte franco-soviétique et ces conséquences", and who fully approved his report on the manoeuvres (70). Finally, on the 31st October, Schweisguth discussed his views with Daladier. Although he did not agree with Schweisguth's doubts concerning Soviet industrial mobilisation, Daladier shared his opinion of the illusory nature of researching the possibility of land assistance from the USSR, and agreed with Schweisguth's suggestion that the only assistance to be expected from Russia was that of industrial aid to the Little Entente : indeed, "c'est un accord industriel que nous devrions signer, mais c'est un accord militaire que veulent les

Soviets" (71).

It thus appears that far from causing the French Staff's doubts about the value of the Soviet alliance, General Schweisguth's report was merely a manifestation of those doubts. On the other hand, Schweisguth's warnings about the weakness of the Soviet Military were naturally seen to be confirmed with the news of the military purge in mid-1937 (72). In military terms the effects of Stalin's purge of the Soviet forces were devastating. Although it was obviously difficult to ascertain the exact extent of the Purges, it is now estimated that there were 35,000 victims in total, which comprised half of the officer corps : the victims are thought to have included three out of five marshals; 13 of the 15 army commanders; 57 out of 85 corps commanders; 110 of the 195 divisional commanders; 220 out of 406 brigade commanders; all 11 vice-commissars of war; 75 out of the 80 members of the Supreme Military Council; 90% of all generals; and 80% of all colonels (73). In terms of districts the purges fell heaviest on the Moscow, Leningrad, Kiev, Belorussian and Far East commands (74). As a result, inexperienced young officers, often party hacks, were rapidly promoted to fill the vacant posts and the calibre of the Soviet Command fell drastically.

Contemporaries were not of course immediately aware of the extent of the Purge but its devastating effects were readily appreciated, particularly by the French. In Moscow Lt.-Col. Simon immediately recognised that the loss of Tukhachevsky meant that "la première conséquence du procès est de priver l'Armée soviétique d'un chef sur lequel on faisait fond". He was also aware that the new commanders, and in particular the three new commanders of the vitally-important western districts, were much less competent and experienced than their predecessors : Boudenny, for example, was promoted from being an

inspector of cavalry to the command of the Moscow district, while the new commander of the Transcaucasian district, Kouibychev, was a former army corps commander. Simon concluded that in view of the decimation of the High Command, combined with the recent stagnation of industry during the last few months, "on doit admettre que la crise intérieure que traverse l'URSS a amoindri sérieusement son potentiel militaire" (75).

Nor were the Purges confined to the Army alone. The Head of the Fleet since 1932, Admiral Orlov, the Commander-in-Chief of the Baltic Fleet, Sivkov, and the head of the Naval Academy, Ludry, were all executed (76), while the Airforce was thought to have lost 50% of its officers and higher ranks (77). Moreover, by the following year the more lasting, long-term effects of the Purges had become apparent, particularly in industry. The Purges had deprived the Soviet Union of a good proportion of her builders, engineers and technicians which in turn had hit the aeronautical industry particularly badly. Skilled engineers such as Toupolev, the aircraft designer, had been lost, and there had been a considerable drop in industrial production, while, as in the army, the airforce cadres had undergone a serious crisis in moral. By mid-1938 the worst of the Purges appeared to be over, but the French Air Staff stressed that "il n'en demeure pas moins que l'aviation rouge, profondément atteinte dans ses oeuvres vives, ne pourra que difficilement et lentement reprendre la place de choix que treize années d'efforts incessants lui avaient permis d'acquérir parmi les aviations militaires mondiales" (78).

For France, however, the Purges did not only represent a military weakening of the Soviet Union. On a practical level the Purges



introduced a marked increase in Soviet xenophobia, as all foreigners, including Frenchmen, were suddenly excluded from many walks of Soviet life : thus the French military and air attaches found that it was much harder than formerly to gain any information on the condition of the Soviet forces (79). More specifically, Tukhachevsky was ironically regarded as a francophile and as early as February, when his disgrace was first rumoured, Coulondre had warned that "s'il disparaît du premier plan, son départ privera d'un contrepoids appréciable l'indiscutable germanophile du Maréchal Egorov, Chef d'Etat-Major général" (80). In addition Tukhachevsky was thought to be particularly talented and Simon warned that his successor would undoubtedly be intellectually inferior (81). On a more fundamental level the faith of the French Staff and government in the Soviet ally was naturally severely shaken. the charge of collaboration with Germany was soon discounted by French representatives both civil and military, in Moscow, but could obviously still be used as an argument by opponents of the Soviet connection in France. Moreover, as Simon pointed out, even if the charges were untrue, "quelle peut être la valeur d'un régime que veulent détruire des hommes énergiques et instruits qui le servent depuis près de 20 ans ?" (82). Judging by the Soviet military performance in the Second World War it is now possible to see that the Red Army was perhaps not weakened so severely by the Purges as was thought at the time or as the figures of victims would suggest, and that while the High Command was obviously weakened, the troops were were relatively unaffected, except in terms of a temporary loss of morale, and by early 1939 there were already signs of a resurgence in industrial production. But this could not have been apparent at the time, and so French doubts about Soviet military strength as a result of the Purges are at least understandable.

On the other hand, lack of faith following the Purges cannot be used as a blanket excuse for opposition to the Soviet alliance. In his memoirs Gamelin claims that when he met Tukhachevsky after the funeral of George V in January 1936, they agreed to intensify relations between the two armies. He was unaware of the real reason for Tukhachevsky's fall, but emphasises that "ce n'était guère fait pour nous encourager dans la voie des rapports personnels étroits et suivis. Je ne rencontrai d'ailleurs plus l'occasion d'en renouer et je demeurai sur ma tentative inopportune" (83). Gamelin thus seems to be justifying eighteen months of inactivity in the sphere of Franco-Soviet military relations by citing the fall of Tukhachevsky, but in December 1937 he told Sir Eric Phipps that while the recent executions in the Red Army must have seriously impaired its efficiency, France had never in fact attached much importance to the part that the Soviet Army might be expected to play in the event of war (84). The British Ambassador to Moscow believed that the Purges had seriously undermined the faith of the French government and General Staff, as well as the nation as a whole, in the value of the Soviet Union as an ally, and caused the authorities to abandon outright any idea of initiating military talks (85). In fact, the French Staff had long since discounted Soviet potential aid : the Purges were seen merely to vindicate their opposition.

Since it is difficult, even today, to assess accurately the strength of the Soviet military forces in the 1930's, one of the easiest ways of analysing the accuracy of the French Staff's assessment is to compare it to the judgements made by other foreign observers. To some extent these views were coloured by the relations which each individual country maintained with the USSR. Thus by far the most optimistic views on

the Red Army came, naturally enough, from Czechoslovakia. In September 1935 General Krejci led a mission to the Russian manoeuvres, returning with a highly favourable report on Soviet military strength (86), and declaring that "l'armée rouge forçait l'admiration de tout expert militaire par sa discipline, son moral et son armement" (87).

Moreover, the Czechoslovaks continued to praise the Red Army even after the Purges : in September 1937, for example, President Benes told the British Ambassador that Russia had been less weakened by the recent executions than was often thought (88). Similarly, General Fequant told de Lacroix, the French Ambassador to Prague, that from his conversations with various Czechoslovak officers he had the impression that the effectiveness and vigour of Soviet industry had been less severely hit by the purge of the higher personnel than was generally supposed, and the new Secretary-General of the Foreign Ministry, Bodhan Pavlu, until recently the Czech Minister to Moscow, affirmed that the Russian army had not been weakened, and that it was still abundantly supplied with excellent war material(89). Thus, even in May 1938 the Czech Consul-General at Kiev stressed the "enormous effort" accomplished by the Soviet army in the last couple of years with regard to the problem of transport, and maintained that Soviet Airforce squadrons were ready to fly in force to the defence of Czechoslovakia after a journey of only 40 minutes (90).

These views sharply contrasted those expressed by Polish representatives. General Sosnowski, for example, believed that the Red Army modernisation programme was fundamentally incompatible with the existing condition of the Soviet forces, explaining to the British Ambassador in February 1936 that "with this belief in modern material, they had a very primitive, ill-trained personnel, more specifically as regards officers,

and he could not help feeling that when put into practice, their modern ideas would break down " (91). The Purges served only to confirm Polish suspicions, indeed "les milieux gouvernementaux de Varsovie estimerait pour leur part que la Russie a cessé pour un temps indéterminé de compter comme grande puissance", and a former Polish military attaché to Moscow declared openly that, as a result, Poland would be in a position to resist any Russian attack in the event of war (92). In an attempt to analyse the contradiction between the Czech and Polish interpretations of the Red Army crisis, Daldier pointed out that the Czechoslovak government had a decided tendency to over-estimate Soviet military strength since, as Krofta stressed, it was thought to be in the interests of both Czechoslovakia and France to keep announcing that Russia was strong, while the Polish government was fundamentally biased against all things Russian (93).

The German government reacted slightly differently, since it hoped to use apparent Soviet military strength to its own advantage. Thus Goering and other German leaders claimed that the Russian Airforce was exceptionally well-equipped and well-trained, using this as an excuse for increased German rearmament. In fact German representatives in Moscow sent back fairly balanced analyses to Berlin. The Ambassador, von Schulenberg, told the Wermacht Academy in November 1937 that although the USSR had at its disposal numerous submarines, tanks and aircraft, the young Soviet aeronautical industry was still ill-prepared for the demands of war, and that the Soviet Union "has reverted to the old Russian principle of operating on the basis of quantity and not of quality" (94). Similarly the military attaché, General Koestring, doubted the Russian ability to achieve the same standard of organisation and technical efficiency as elsewhere in Europe, but believed that "the

technical troops, Airforce, Tank Corps etc. are well-equipped, well-trained and must be regarded as a serious factor in a European war" (95). Like his colleagues, however, Koestring believed that the effects of the Purges would be devastating, and he told Colonel Firebrace that as a result "the Soviet Army is no longer of international importance" (96). Indeed, it seems that it was largely on the evidence of the military purges that Hitler based his miscalculation of Soviet armed strength which led him to believe in 1941 that the Red Army was not fit for modern war and could not hope to match a modern and well-led enemy (97).

Perhaps the most impartial analysis might have been expected from the British who had no alliance with the USSR but on the other hand no particular source of antagonism with her either. In some respects British representatives were initially more critical of Soviet potential than the French. The air attaché to Moscow believed that the aeronautical industry would find it difficult to expand in the event of war, since Russian factories were already working to maximum capacity, and there was no reserve of either skilled or unskilled labour; similarly, the railways were already taxed beyond capacity, and so the burden of mobilisation would cause excessive strain on an already over-strained structure. Wing-Commander Collier believed, however, that "the Soviet airforces as they exist today might provide a very real threat to any likely opponent in the early stages of war" (98). Similarly a report prepared by the Chiefs of Staff Sub-Committee on Imperial Defence in February 1937 concluded that the Soviet Army and Airforce were the largest in the world and that "in defence, the Soviet army is already a power to be reckoned with : in attack it would probably be less effective" (99).

The British were just as suspicious as the French when it came to analysing Soviet motives. Lord Chilston believed that Litvinov's demand for immediate mutual assistance was designed to prevent Germany from attacking Russia while she was engaged in the Far East against Japan, and that "he has no idea, really, of the Red Army ever marching, or the Red Airforces ever flying, against Germany for the sake of France" (100). Similarly, Sir H Kennard in Warsaw told General Sosnowski that "we had few illusions as to the value of the Russian army outside its own frontiers, beyond, perhaps, its airforce, and that no doubt the leopard had not changed its spots and that their present tactics were to filter into Europe and establish Trojan horses in such countries as Czechoslovakia" (101). In retrospect, Anthony Eden was very critical of this attitude, pointing out that while "it was excusable to regard Communist Russia as the anti-Christ, it was a mistake to defend that attitude with the argument that any way the Russians were not any good" (102), and indeed, "there was an almost universal opinion in Britain that the military power of the Soviets was in disarray and of poor quality. When Stalin executed the leadership of the Soviet armed forces in 1937, critics combined to see in this the ruin of any military efficiency the Russians might have possessed. These exaggerated estimates were damaging to Anglo-Russian relations up to the moment when German troops crossed the Russian frontier" (103). Thus it appears that in Britain as in France, Soviet military strength was inseparable from Soviet motives, and that distrust of Soviet communism was ultimately triumphant.

But in purely military terms, assessment by British experts were often quite favourable. Most notable in this respect is the report of the British mission to the Minsk manoeuvres in September 1936, which was

considerably more complimentary than that submitted by General Schweisguth. General Wavell reported that the equipment of the army had already reached a high level of technical efficiency, and that in design and performance of armoured vehicles the Russians were in many respects ahead of the British; the personnel, though young and lacking in experience, seemed keen and confident. His major complaint was that the tactics used would have resulted in a severe loss of aircraft, tanks and infantry. Wavell concluded that the Red Army would be very formidable in the defence of its own territory, and though it would be clumsy and less redoubtable in attack, its size and the extent of its mechanical equipment would nevertheless make it dangerous (104).

His assessment was supported by that of the RAF representative on the mission, Wing Commander Wigglesworth, whose main criticism of the Red Airforce was that of tactical performance: in particular it was used almost solely in direct support of the fighting land-troops, usually in the form of low-flying "storm" attacks, and there was no conception of serious air-fighting. The Soviets were however aware of this weakness, and the Deputy Chief of the General Air Staff had recently been to France to study special air fighting exercises and so it was anticipated that these tactical difficulties would soon be resolved. Wigglesowrth concluded that, "Judged by our own standards, the Russians have still much to learn regarding the strategical employment and the tactical handling of the air arm. Even as at present constituted and controlled, however, the airforces would form a real threat in the opening stages of a war and prove a strong deterrent to any nation contemplating war against the USSR" (105).

While Czechoslovak confidence can be dismissed as wishful thinking, and Polish criticism the result of a strong anti-Soviet bias, it must be said that judged by similar criteria the French assessment of Soviet military strength suggests a country which was at best a neutral observer, and certainly not a Russian ally. In fact, in making its judgement the French Staff was allowing itself to be influenced by the same prejudices discernable throughout western Europe. While Gamelin might have doubted the extent of communist influence in the French army, nevertheless even he was aware of a potential threat, and he was determined that "nos relations nouvelles avec Moscou n'eussent pas de répercussions sur notre politique intérieure et, par là, sur l'Armée, j'entends sur son unité morale" (106). In fact, there were many in the French army who were fundamentally anti-communist. This attitude, perhaps not surprising given the overtly anti-militarist stance of the French Communist Party before 1935, was exacerbated by frequent anti-Soviet articles carried in newspapers such as 'France Militaire', and the 'Echo de Paris', and was evident in comments such as that made by Colonel Lainey, formerly head of the 2e bureau, who told Lloyd Thomas at the British Embassy in June 1937 that "personally he was strongly opposed to any closer co-operation between the French and Russian armies" since he did not think that the Red Army would ever be of much assistance : he warned incidentally of the danger of disorder in France, particularly in the south-west around Toulouse "which has been contaminated by the Spanish poison", and in Paris itself (107).

There were also those officers who were prepared to put their anti-communism into practice. In January 1937, for example, General Gerodias on his own authority distributed documents throughout the regions pertaining to the organisation of communist 'putschs' in France.



Gamelin discovered on investigation that the documents had in fact been given to G erodias by Loustanau-Lacau, a member of P tain's staff, who explained that P tain had thought it would be useful to communicate these documents, supposedly containing instructions circulated among Spanish revolutionaries, to the regional military authorities. In fact, Loustanau-Lacau had already written that "the Army must be purged of the cells that the Communist Party is developing with the objective of destroying discipline and wrecking morale" (108), and Gamelin notes that Loustanau-Lacau was already suspected, in January 1937, of having links with the extreme right-wing movement, the 'Cagoule' (109).

Even those who did not fear communist infiltration in the army often distrusted Soviet intentions, memories of Bres-Litovsk remaining strong. Thus Colonel de Lattre de Tassigny, formerly a member of Weygand's Staff where he was known as the "Red Colonel" because of his early support for the Pact, and now on the Staff of General Georges, told the British military attach  in April 1935 that he distrusted the increasing influence of Russia over the Little Entente since its aim was to use the Little Entente as a means of getting a deeper French commitment to the USSR: French policy, he explained, was to commit herself only sufficiently to neutralise Russia and to deny her resources to Germany (110).

Finally, underlying the French Staff's attitude towards the Soviet Union there was a specific state of mind usually known as the "Maginot mentality", as advocated essentially by Marshal P tain, for whom "L'exp rience a d montr  l'inviolabilit  des fronts continus et fortifi s...Donc la d fensive sera la reine de la guerre" (111).

Thus, during the 1930's the French Staff came increasingly to believe that in the event of war, France would be safe behind the Maginot Line which had been conceived as a continuous defensive front against Germany. The fact that the fortifications were not yet completed, although begun in 1930, as well as the huge gap between the Maginot line and the sea effectively created by the Belgian defection of September 1936, seemingly failed to shake the French Staff's confidence in France's impregnable defences. In addition the "Maginot mentality" meant that France was simply not capable of carrying out her obligations, since her military forces had been developed along purely defensive lines. Thus while the General Staff refused to discuss with the Soviets potential French aid against Germany since, in view of the common frontier with Germany, French assistance was "obvious", it was in fact with considerable justification that Pierre Taittinger pointed out during the ratification debate that "nous n'avons pas, présentement, l'armée de choc nécessaire pour pouvoir aider immédiatement le peuple qui ferait appel à notre concours".

The point was reiterated by Paul Reynaud in "Le problème militaire français" published in 1937, and although Léon Blum proclaimed at Lyon in January that "Nous avons contracté des obligations auxquelles nous demeurons pleinement fidèles", the "Maginot mentality" remained dominant among the General Staff. As General Maurin remarked, "Comment peut-on croire que nous songions encore à l'offensive, quand nous avons dépensé des milliards pour établir une barrière fortifiée?" (112). As a result, the Staff were wary of additional undertakings towards Communist Russia made possible by the Franco-Soviet Pact, particularly since they had always regarded the Pact as negative in value : for, as General Schweisguth had explained in

April 1936, "the sole factor which had carried weight with the French General Staff was that they could not afford to allow Russia and Germany to combine" (113).

In October 1936 Commander Petibon told Colonel Beaumont-Nesbitt that as a result of the Schweisguth Report, the French General Staff would have to revise their estimate of the military value of the Red Army (114). In fact, the attitude of the Staff had long-since been established. It underestimated the purely military value of the Red Army, despite considerable evidence from its representatives in Moscow to the contrary, since it was fundamentally prejudiced against Communist Russia, and distrusted Soviet motives. The Staff then used the Schweisguth Report and the evidence of the Purges to justify its assessment of military strength, and it turn used this assessment to justify its opposition to Staff talks. Indeed, General Gamelin, in spite of his insistence that the military be kept aside from politics, told Beaumont-Nesbitt in October 1936 that as long as he held the position he did in France, he would advise against Franco-Soviet military conversations (115). Thus, having examined the attitude of the French General Staff, it becomes necessary to analyse how far the Staff exerted an influence on the government, and so how far its 'reticence' constituted a decisive factor in the failure of the Popular Front Government to consolidate the Franco-Soviet Pact.

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of various types of military equipment, which was to be used for the exchange of information and materials, with the aim of providing a means of communication between the two countries, and in addition, to facilitate military negotiations which would prepare for the "effective operation" of the Franco-Soviet Pact. Thus, Soviet representatives in Paris and Moscow pressed consistently throughout this period for the exchange of spies and military missions to any number, improved technical collaboration and the initiation of detailed staff talks. The French attitude is at first more difficult to define since the government made few direct approaches to the Russians, but through an analysis of the French government's response to the repeated Soviet demands, a very clear picture of its attitude to the various forms of collaboration envisaged by the Russians, and thus its view of the Franco-Soviet Pact as a whole, is open to emerge.

To a large extent, the relations maintained between France and Russia following the conclusion of the Pact in May 1935 were such as might have existed between any two friendly nations; indeed, the exchange of officers for short-term visits as well as for military manoeuvres,



CHAPTER 8

FRANCO-SOVIET CONTACTS 1935-1938

It was against this background of pressures and predominantly negative advice that the Popular Front government had to apply its policy with regard to the Soviet Union. Moreover, its position was further complicated by the lack of clarity in the Pact itself, which was so loosely worded as to provide sufficient opportunity for a wide diversity of interpretations as to what form Franco-Soviet collaboration might take. For the Russians, "collaboration" encompassed both technical exchanges of information and materials, with the aim that France should replace Germany as Russia's major supplier of equipment, and in addition close military negotiations which would prepare for the practical and effective operation of the Franco-Soviet Pact. Thus, Soviet representatives in Paris and Moscow pressed consistently throughout this period for the exchange of stagiaires and military missions to army manoeuvres, improved technical collaboration and the initiation of detailed staff talks. The French attitude is at first more difficult to define since the government made few direct approaches to the Russians, but through an analysis of the French government's response to the repeated Soviet demarches, a very clear picture of its attitude to the various forms of collaboration envisaged by the Russians, and thus its view of the Franco-Soviet Pact as a whole, is seen to emerge.

To a large extent, the relations maintained between France and Russia following the conclusion of the Pact in May 1935 were such as might have existed between any two friendly nations : indeed, the exchange of officers for short-term visits as well as for military manoeuvres,

as the Soviets requested, was a practice which had begun when rapprochement first took place in 1933. In August of that year Pierre Cot, the Minister for Air, took a mission of military and technical experts to Moscow, with the aim of studying "the bases of a rapprochement between Soviet and French aviation" (1) : the visit was returned in August 1934 by a Soviet aviation mission led by General Unslicht, the head of Russian civil aviation, which toured the principal French aircraft industries and made a special visit to Lyon, as guest of the mayor, Edouard Herriot. It seems that the French government made every effort to ensure the visit's success (2). In the same year three Soviet officers completed long-term stays in French instruction centres and different army units, while two French officers, one infantry and one cavalry, visited the USSR (3). Soviet hopes that the exchange of officers and missions might increase in numbers after the conclusion of the Pact were not, however, immediately realised. During 1935 only two stagiaire officers were exchanged between the two armies, while in August a mission of six Soviet Commanders, headed by Sedyakin, the Deputy Chief of the General Staff, attended French manoeuvres and visited various battlefields of the Great War and French frontier zones (4). In return, General Loiseau took a mission to the White Russian manoeuvres in September.

As the Russians complained, such exchanges required nothing more than a basis of friendly relations, (an Italian mission also attended the Russian manoeuvres), and whenever possible they pressed for an intensification of relations in accordance with the spirit of the Franco-Soviet Pact. On occasion, such pressure was successful. In September 1935, for example, Vorochilov asked Loiseau whether two or three Soviet officers could be authorised to visit France to learn about

the methods of anti-aircraft defence used in the French army. The ministers of War and Aviation agreed that the visit of such specialists would bring considerable advantages in the field of technical collaboration, and in November Laval indicated that he had no objection to the visit (5), which took place the following June. At the same time the new Air Minister, Pierre Cot, initiated a series of visits by airforce personnel. In the second half of August, for example, twenty-two parliamentary air delegates visited Moscow, as well as a delegation of aircraft constructors who visited all the air-frame and aero-engine factories of importance. In return, a number of Soviet airforce officers attended the Aero-Show in Paris that winter, as well as visiting various French air establishments and factories (6). Then, in March 1937, a French aeronautic mission spent three weeks in Moscow, headed by General Keller, the Inspector-General of Aerial Defence, and including among its members Inspector-General Dumanois, Engineer-in-Chief Rougeron of the technical services, and M.Devilliers, the Chief Engineer of the Maison Bréguet (7).

Similarly, civil delegations occasionally visited Russian. In early 1937 a medical mission, led by Professor Dezernaud, spent some days in Moscow, and sometimes groups of young people, such as a delegation from the Union Sportive des Jeunesses Socialistes, visited the Soviet Union, but as Coulondre noted with regret, there were only two or three such visits during his two years in Moscow, becoming further apart as the political relations between the two countries slackened (8). In fact, there seems to have been a distinct lack of encouragement from the French authorities to promote any type of exchanges. In June 1936 the Soviet military attaché, Commander Ventsov, asked General Schweisguth if it might be possible to arrange for long-term exchanges

of officers between the two armies, particularly for the Russians in artillery and the French, for example, in aviation and tanks : one year might be spent in the regiments, he suggested, and a further two in the schools (9) Several months later Schweisguth made clear his own attitude to the proposal when he suggested to Gamelin that the Russian officers be treated as belonging to a most-favoured-nation, but nothing more. This would allow the eighty artillery officers requested to visit only in rotation, and in those areas already open to foreigners. Moreover, they would spend only six months in the troop, instead of the year requested. Gamelin and Daladier agreed (10). Thus the Military, at least, seem to have regarded Russia as a friendly, rather than as an allied, nation.

Daladier was even reluctant to take the fairly routine decision to exchange missions for the manoeuvres during the summer of 1936. Asking Delbos' advice on a question he saw as "D'ordre essentiellement politique", Daladier worried that the Russian manoeuvres were expected to take place near the Polish border at a critical time when Marshal Rydz-Smigly had just agreed to visit France, while the publicity surrounding a Soviet mission attending French manoeuvres "peut éveiller des susceptibilités du côté de nos alliés belges, tchécoslovaques, yugoslavs et roumains" (11). Indeed, it was only in response to considerable pressure from the Russians that the French government finally agreed to an exchange of missions with its ally the Soviet Union, in the autumn of 1936.

To some extent the French reluctance to promote exchanges of personnel was undoubtedly due to the belief, however justified, expressed by the 2e bureau in June 1935 that "l'Armée rouge a, en effet, beaucoup à

apprendre de nous, qui n'avons d'intérêt qu'à connaître simplement sa situation matérielle et sa valeur morale" (12). It does, however, seem to have been recognised that it would be in France's interests to improve her commercial relations with the USSR. For example, by encouraging the Soviets to place orders for material in France, the government could hope to redress the adverse balance of French trade with the USSR (since while France imported a substantial quantity of raw materials from Russia her exports to the Soviet Union amounted to only  $\frac{1}{2}$ % of her total exports (13), while at the same time France could seek to replace Germany as a major supplier to the Soviet Union, thus forestalling the temptation towards a return to Rapallo. Moreover, the policy would have practical advantages for both countries : France could supply Russia with the technical knowledge and prototypes which she was still having to import from abroad while Russia, with her vast production capabilities, could assist France, particularly in the supply of aircraft.

It does seem that the Popular Front government did at least encourage the Soviets to place orders for war material in France. In August 1936 Delbos gave authorisation for the Russians to enter into negotiations with the Société d'Explosifs Alsacienne at Mulhouse with regard to the eventual purchase of an installation for the automatic charging of shells (14), while on September 22 Delbos and Gérodiás, representing the War Ministry, both approved the Soviet request to purchase seven hundred rocket detonators (15). Similarly, in December the Foreign and National Defence Ministries gave permission to the Société d'optique et de mécanique de Haute précision to supply the Russian government with stereoscopic range-finders similar to those used by the Geographic Service of the French Army (16).

That the French government authorised commercial negotiations with the USSR was not, however, always sufficient. In June 1936, for example, the USSR had given France a number of orders for the purchase of heavy artillery to equip the cruisers being built in the Black Sea, and to which it was known that Stalin attached particular importance. On several occasions during the autumn of 1936 Blum received complaints from Potemkin, asking him to pressurise the company supposedly carrying out the orders, Creusot, to speed up its production. Then, in February 1937, Potemkin informed Blum that he had been contacted by M.de Saint-Sauveur, the Creusot manager with particular responsibility for relations with the USSR, who had indicated that if he could obtain from the French government an undertaking that the Creusot company would not be nationalised, as was proposed, then the Soviet orders would be carried out with more rapidity and better grace (17). The ploy was unsuccessful since the Blum government proceeded with the nationalisation, which came into effect on the 11th of March, but the incident is significant in that it indicates that even when the government authorised contact with the USSR, it had no guarantee that its directive would be carried out.

Nor was the Creusot affair an isolated example. Pierre Cot's attempts to supply the Russians with the Hispano '23' aeroplane canon were effectively crippled by the virulent anti-Soviet press campaign led by the 'Echo de Paris' in the summer of 1936 (18), with the result that the Soviets gave the contract to the Prague armaments firm, Skoda (19). While this did not seriously damage French political interests, it nevertheless indicated the danger that, thwarted in her attempts to make purchases in France, Russia would accept any alternative. In July 1936, for example, Ventsov complained to Colonel Petibon about

the attitude of the Navy Ministry which had forced him to spend a credit of 50m. francs in Italy rather than in France : he now had a further 30m. francs to spend on anti-aircraft defence naval artillery, but was still receiving no response from the French (20). Similarly, in July 1938 Benes urged the French government to profit from the Soviet interest in the Schneider company to assist with her naval armaments programme, warning that if France failed to respond to the Russian demarche, then the order would be placed with the Italians (21). Indeed, as late as February 1939 President Kalinin complained bitterly to the new French Ambassador, Paul Naggiar, that at a time when Poland, Germany and Italy were all trying to improve their relations with the USSR, the Soviet government was inclined to see the non-execution in France of Soviet orders for national defence material as an indication of the French government's true attitude towards the USSR. As a result, Naggiar urged Bonnet to ensure that the Russian orders were carried out (22).

Moreover, it seems that the Russian complaints were quite justified. When in October 1936 Kalinin had first complained to Coulondre that Franco-Soviet rapprochement "doit s'exprimer par une collaboration réelle dans le domaine des fournitures intéressant la défense nationale: Or, il n'en a rien été jusqu'ici du côté français", the Ambassador was forced to admit that the grievance was well-founded, since French technicians, particularly in the War and Marine departments, had been very slow in carrying out Soviet orders (23). He soon recognised that the Air Department was similarly responsible for breaches of promise, such as the '23' canon which was never supplied. In April 1938 Coulondre told Bonnet that the situation had deteriorated to such an extent that whenever the French made any new request, the

Russians demanded that France should first keep all her other promises, and he warned that "il faut renoncer à ces méthodes qui, inspirées du désir d'être agréables à nos interlocuteurs, n'aboutissent en fin de compte qu'à les indisposer contre nous" (24).

It was in the sphere of aviation that Franco-Soviet technical collaboration was in fact the most vital. At a meeting of the Comité permanent de la Défense Nationale in June 1936, Cot emphasised that without a policy of close collaboration with her allies, France could not hope to equal German aircraft production. In addition, Soviet factories were the only ones which could escape German bombing and so, unlike the British factories during the war, which simply under the threat of German attack had shown a reduced production of 10%, Soviet factories could, in the event of war, continue to function at full strength, and thus revitalise France and the Little Entente. It was therefore essential to send skilled technical personnel to Russia in order to increase her production capabilities (25). Similarly, the Air attaché in Moscow, Commander Donzeau, insisted on the importance of becoming established in the Soviet aeronautical market by supplying the material which she was still finding it necessary to import from abroad (26). In return, as Coulondre constantly stressed, the Soviet Union, whose aeronautical industry was so-organised that it could mass produce aircraft, would be able to supply France with the aircraft which she so desperately needed, but which her own industry could not yet produce.

However, the French government was, it seems, even reluctant to help itself. Acting on instructions from the Air Minister in Paris,



Donzeau and Coulondre initiated in March 1938 negotiations with the Soviet Airforce Commissar with a view to the eventual purchase of an I16 fighter. On the 17th they were given detailed characteristics of the aircraft which Coulondre, confident in an assurance of support given by Gamelin in October 1936 that he would regard favourably the supply of Soviet aircraft to France, encouraged Donzeau to take to Paris. Donzeau returned saying that while the Air Minister had expressed interest in the plan from the technical point of view, he had nevertheless told him to drop the matter immediately : Donzeau was not to examine the possibility of buying the aircraft in series, but was to offer only an exchange of prototypes. This, as Coulondre recognised, was a quite farcical suggestion, since it was well-known that Russia was in no position to supply prototypes, and he concluded that "on ne veut plus, au ministère de l'Air, de collaboration technique avec Moscou" (27).

In a bewildered attempt to understand the Ministry's change of heart, Coulondre suggested to Bonnet that if the Air Minister had merely disliked the characteristics of the I16, it would be possible to arrange to have one of the latest French prototypes reproduced in Russia. He already acknowledged, however, that "l'expérience apprend que vis-à-vis de ce pays-ci, les questions sont trop souvent traitées sur le plan sentimental" (28), a view which was confirmed when, some months later, he challenged Gamelin on the issue. Gamelin explained that he had supported Donzeau in his attempt to promote the I16, but that the Chief of the Airforce Staff had exclaimed, "jamais une pareille humiliation" (29). Thus the French continued to refuse the frequent Soviet offer, repeated by Potemkin as late as February 1939, to supply those aircraft which France most needed, as a result of

those same prejudices which had prevented Pierre Cot from realising his varied projects for Franco-Soviet technical collaboration. Bargeton at the Quai, for example, was deeply suspicious of Soviet motives even in this field : in attempting to purchase from France heavy artillery for naval use, he told Coulondre, "ils cherchent à nous compromettre" (30). But whatever the reasons, the results of French disinterest in exchanges with the Russians were clear. As Coulondre bitterly pointed out, "la collaboration technique était la seule suite concrète donnée au pacte franco-soviétique d'assistance mutuelle : renoncerons-nous à en tirer quelque avantage pour n'en garder que les inconvénients" (31).

Thus the existence of the Franco-Soviet Pact seems to have contributed little towards an improvement in technical collaboration between the two. For the Russians, however, this was not the main interest of Franco-Soviet rapprochement, for they undoubtedly hoped that the signature of the Pact in 1935 would lead to the opening of military staff talks, with a view to the conclusion of a military accord. On the 4th of May 1935 William Bullitt asked Litvinov whether military talks would begin at once : Litvinov replied "with a broad smile" that this was a military matter beyond the competence of his Commissariat. The journalist Karl Radek was more direct, informing Bullitt that the only real importance of the Pact was that it allowed Franco-Soviet staff talks to begin, and he was confident that they would be initiated at once (32).

Furthermore, the Soviets did have considerable justification for their optimism. In his meeting with Stalin on the 16th of May, Laval agreed that in order to ensure the peaceful operation of the Pact "il convient

de prévoir le pire et d'envisager dès maintenant les dispositions techniques propres à lui donner son plein effet". He insisted, however, that staff talks could only really be useful after the conclusion of an accord between the Soviet Union and Czechoslovakia, but "(M.Litvinov) m'ayant alors informé de l'accord réalisé entre M.Bénès et lui, je me suis déclaré prêt à proposer au Gouvernement l'ouverture de ces conversations entre Etats-Majors dans les conditions de discrétion habituelle" (33). When questioned by Bullitt Laval insisted that staff talks would naturally take place, but that it was probable that "nothing spectacular" would be done as he was particularly anxious to ensure that the Pact appeared to the world as an instrument of peace, not as an alliance for war (34).

It is, of course, most unlikely that Laval ever had any intention of initiating staff talks, and certainly as long as he was at the head of the government, the constant proposals made by Ambassador Potemkin and the military attaché in Paris were consistently evaded (35). Once the Blum government took office, however, the Soviet pressure was renewed. When passing through Paris in June 1936, for example, Litvinov asked that conversations be commenced at once(36). Similarly, at an official dinner given for the visiting Soviet D.A.T. mission in June, the Soviet chargé, M.Hirschfeld, insisted to General Schweisguth that it was now essential "de mettre au point nos rapports militaires comme suite au Pacte franco-soviétique" (37). For some months after taking office it seemed that the Blum government, too, was attempting to resist these and many similar Soviet demarches, but by October Soviet patience was clearly wearing thin, and Blum might have thought that some response was inevitable. For example, a member of the Soviet Embassy in Paris complained bitterly to a French journalist that

"l'attitude de la France à l'égard de l'URSS est inqualifiable; un pacte est un pacte, et une signature est une signature!" (38) while at Geneva Litvinov suggested in conversation with Krofta that Russia no longer intended to rely on French aid in the event of conflict, and so would look for other allies instead (39).

It was at about this time that reports suddenly began to appear in the press to the effect that Blum had promised Litvinov at Geneva that he would soon initiate staff talks. Such suggestions first appeared in the "News Chronicle" of October 8th, which claimed that Blum had had to go to Geneva the week before because "the delegates of Soviet Russia and of the Little Entente had expressed the strongest dissatisfaction at the attitude of the French delegation towards the final implementation of the Franco-Soviet Pact, which provides for Staff talks between the two powers". Sharing the British fears of the effects of such talks on the Locarno Conference, Delbos was said to have endeavoured to pacify Litvinov and the Little Entente "with vague expressions of good will", but Blum on his arrival had realised that Russia was prepared to dissociate herself from the Little Entente: "he therefore gave verbal assurances that once the Locarno Conference was over, and whether it succeeded or not, Franco-Soviet staff talks would begin" (40). The British Ambassador reported from Paris that he had information to suggest that Blum had indeed told Litvinov that once the Five-Power Conference was over, France would agree to "unify" her obligations to the Little Entente in some kind of mutual pact of guarantee, as well as to the initiation of staff talks, provided that they had no official character, and entailed no written obligations(41)

In Paris a similar story was expounded by Geneviève Tabouis of 'L'Oeuvre'

while the Army Staff Intelligence Service sought to ascertain the truth of information received from a "competent and generally well-informed source" to the effect that Blum had formally promised Litvinov that "les conversations entre les états-majors français et soviétique prévues paraît-il au moment de la signature du pacte franco-soviétique, sont entamés incessamment" (42). We still do not have any evidence to confirm the existence of what was, by all accounts, a verbal promise, but what is now clear is that during November of 1936, the Blum government did finally make the decision to undertake, in the utmost secrecy, preliminary talks with the Soviet military attache in Paris. Official records of these contacts are fragmentary, presumably since the obsession with secrecy made them purely verbal, with documentation minimal, but it is now possible, from various memoirs and in particular from the notes made by the French representative, General Schweisguth, to trace the development of what were, in the end, the only Franco-Soviet military talks to take place as a result of the Franco-Soviet Pact.

On the 7th of November, 1936, Gamelin recounted to Schweisguth a meeting which had taken place the day before in the presence of Blum, Chautemps, Cot, Daladier, Delbos, Gasnier-Duparc, Auriol, Rucart and Léger. Two groups had formed on the subject of the desirability of staff talks, one led by Daladier and Chautemps, the other by Cot and Rucart. After much discussion it was decided that through the intermediary of the military attachés, the Soviets would be asked to define exactly their conception of military assistance. It is interesting to note that the suggestion was actually made by Gamelin, "pour que la Guerre reste maîtresse de ces conversations et qu'elles ne soient pas menées par l'Air". The following day Schweisguth reached agreement

with Bargeton that the talks would be held in Paris, and that before commencing the French would await the arrival of Ventsov's successor, soon to be appointed, "pour qu'il n'y ait plus qu'un seul Russe dans le secret" (43). Several days later Gamelin reiterated that it was difficult to postpone such talks any longer without incurring the risk of the Air Ministry taking control, and committing imprudences(44).

Although this decision was taken in early November, it was not until January that General Schweisguth, appointed to conduct the talks, prepared a note outlining their envisaged content. The note emphasised that the sole aim of the contact would be to ascertain from the Soviet military attaché the aims of the Russian General Staff with regard to aid which Russia might bring in the event of conflict, although it also suggested that ultimately, and in accordance with the results of this first meeting, representatives of the Airforce and Navy might participate in exchanges of a wider scope. The note added that in order to maintain absolute secrecy in this contact, it would be in the form of a tête-a-tête between Generals Schweisguth and Semenov, with only Commander Villelume present as interpreter. Gamelin approved the note, adding that the Air Ministry should in no circumstances be allowed to take the lead in this affair (45).

Villelume says that two initial meetings with Semenov took place, one on January 7th and one on February 2nd (46), although Schweisguth refers to only the second of these, at which Semenov was asked what assistance France could expect from Russia if either she or Czechoslovakia were attacked by Germany. On February the 17th Semenov returned from Moscow with the reply of the Soviet Staff : if Poland and Roumania were to fulfil their duty, either by a spontaneous

decision or on the advice of the League, and allow the passage of Soviet troops across their territory, then the Soviet Union would lend assistance "avec toutes armes"; if they refused, then Soviet aid would be restricted to land forces sent by sea, and assistance supplied by the airforce. He added that in both cases the conditions of this assistance would need to be determined by specific accords. In return, the Soviet Staff wanted to know what assistance France could give to Russia if she were attacked by Germany, and how much war material she could supply (47).

Dismissing the Soviet request for information as superfluous, since France, having a common frontier with Germany, could naturally intervene with all her forces, Schweisguth insisted that the Russians clarify their answers by giving more precise information : how many troops would they send, how long a delay was envisaged, how would the problem of passage be overcome? Stalemate quickly arose, with Semenov insisting that such matters could only properly be discussed through official staff talks, and Schweisguth maintaining that these problems must be discussed and resolved before any more official contacts could be envisaged (48). Villelume explained to the postwar commission that since Semenov refused to reply to these questions, "nous avons pensé, le général Schweisguth et moi, qu'engager, dans ces conditions, des conversations officielles dont l'ampleur, à défaut même de l'évidente intention des Russes, n'aurait pas permis de cacher longtemps l'ouverture, serait une entreprise pleine de périls... Une fois ....engagés dans des négociations officielles, nous étions condamnés à les faire aboutir coûte que coûte, en passant par toutes les exigences des Russes" (49). As a result, Schweisguth reported to Daladier that while he had been able to carry out the first part of his

task, that is, to ascertain the nature of Russian aid, he had been unsuccessful in determining the breadth and conditions of such aid, and so he proposed that "les sondages en cours doivent être poursuivis dans ce sens, sous leur forme actuelle, et qu'il soit prudent d'ajourner jusqu'à leur complet achèvement toute décision relative à l'opportunité de passer à des conversations plus directes" (50).

On the 19th of March, over one month after Semenov's reply, Generals Gamelin, Colson and Schweisguth visited Daladier in order to discuss the question of the Soviet talks. Daladier fully approved Schweisguth's conclusions reached from his exchanges with Semenov, and emphasised that the aim must continue to be "gagner du temps, sans rebuter les Russes et sans passer à des conversations d'Etat-Major, ce qui nécessite une décision gouvernementale" (51). In practical terms Daladier was content to approve yet another questionnaire, asking the Russians to define the conditions of envisaged assistance, which was handed to Semenov that afternoon. The attaché warned that the Soviet Staff would be unlikely to agree to answer more questions, believing that this should only be done through official talks, but he agreed to take the note to Moscow (52). In fact, Semenov never returned, and the Schweisguth-Semenov exchanges were never renewed.

While the French seem to have been prepared to accept the disintegration of these talks, the Soviets clearly were not. On the 7th April, Hirschfeld asked Delbos to reanimate the staff talks (53), while on the 9th Potemkin made a similar appeal to Blum (54). According to General Colson both Blum and Delbos were sufficiently concerned by these requests to approach Daladier, emphasising the very damaging effects which a rejection of the Russians might have in provoking a



return to Rapallo. Daladier's response was typically feeble : sending for Gamelin, he asked him whether he could not meet some Russian military personage, perhaps taking advantage of the forthcoming coronation of George VI, to which Gamelin merely replied that while he did not refuse, he was unwilling to act behind the backs of England and Poland (55). While the French were still trying to find ways of gaining time, however, Russian patience was becoming severely strained. On April 23rd General Keller, having just returned from Moscow, reported Vorochilov's anger at the new French questionnaire : the staff talks had been opened, complained Vorochilov, the Soviet Staff had indicated Soviet potential action, and had asked France to reciprocate : the French only replied with more questions. He therefore considered that the talks were dead, and refused to discuss further any technical questions until the two governments had officially agreed to open formal negotiations (56).

It was not in fact until mid-April that the French gave any indication of the assistance which they were prepared to offer the Russians which was even as detailed as Semenov's reply. On February 17th Potemkin had repeated to Blum the Soviet reply in the same terms as Semenov to Schweisguth, asking in return for details of possible French action on behalf of Russia (57). Gamelin replied that if France herself were not attacked, then she would be prepared to use all her forces in an offensive against Germany, although she could not be expected to supply Russia with any arms since she would need all her resources herself. He added that the state of France's conversations with Poland and Roumania did not suggest a solution to the problem of Soviet passage (58). This reply naturally did not satisfy the Russians any more than theirs had pleased the French.

On the 22nd of May, at a meeting of the Defence Ministers, Delbos, Blum and Léger, the question of pacifying the Russians was again discussed. On this occasion it was decided to send word immediately to Coulondre in Moscow instructing him to assure the Soviets that the Pact still retained its value for France, that Staff talks constituted its natural accompaniment, and that the French and Soviet Staffs could be authorised to open them (59). But it does not seem that this note was ever sent to Coulondre : Bargeton told Schweisguth on the 23rd of June that the note had not yet left the Quai (60), and certainly Coulondre makes no mention of having received it in his memoirs. He does however refer to a "project for a pre-military accord" which he was given by the Quai before leaving Paris on April 15th. This might refer to a secret War Department note of the same date now preserved in the diplomatic papers, which directly envisaged those conversations which the Russians had so long claimed. The note explained that since the USSR and Germany had no common frontier, the General Staffs of the Russian and French armies must research the means of making Soviet aid effective, while at the same time there should be technical conversations between the Staffs to ascertain the nature of mutual aid : thus the French Staff was authorised to pursue with the Russian Staff exchanges within this defined framework (61). However, no reference to this note is made in any other source, and clearly the directive it contained was never pursued. The same must be said of Blum's later assertion to Coulondre that the question of staff talks had been broached between the French Chief of Staff and the Soviet military attaché to Berlin (62), while in September 1938 Bonnet informed him that contacts had been established by the French Staff with the Soviet military attaché and conversations of a technical nature would soon follow (63). Similarly, Villelume

recollects having heard that an attempt was made to renew the talks, on this occasion by the 2e bureau, although he was sure that nothing came of them, and Coulondre does not remember any further contacts after the Schweisguth-Semenov exchange (64). What remains clear is that whether or not any further talks did take place, no agreement was ever reached, and certainly no military accord was ever signed.

General Schweisguth himself recognised that the French and Russians had entirely different aims in their pursuance of these contacts : the Soviets hoped that formal negotiations would lead to an agreement which would give them a fresh measure of security, while the French Foreign Ministry hoped to reduce the negotiations to purely technical talks, without any tightening of the assistance links so vaguely stipulated in the Pact's text (65). It is indeed clear that the French would much rather not have had any talks of this kind with the Russians but, realising that some attempt must be made to pacify the impatient Soviets and, at least from Gamelin's point of view, fearing that without official leadership the Air Ministry under Pierre Cot might embroil France unwisely in negotiations with the Russians, it was decided that some form of entirely harmless "preliminary" discussions should be authorised : Daladier, at least, seems to have hoped that the talks would never reach any suitable conclusion which might make the promised second stage of talks, that is between the respective staffs, difficult to avoid.

Thus the choice of General Schweisguth as the French representative in these conversations, a man already noted for his dismissive attitude of the value of the Soviet Pact, is perhaps not surprising. Obsessed by the need to prevent any knowledge of the talks becoming public,

(he was horrified to hear General Gamelin discuss the progress of the negotiations in May in the presence of Generals Colson, Jeannel and Gauché, all members of the General Staff (66),) he was well-suited to execute the French policy of temporising. Indeed, the Soviet complaints about this constant stalling were entirely justified : the French did not agree to the initiation of even preliminary talks until eighteen months after the Pact was signed, and even then they insisted on postponing the talks until January, ostensibly to await the arrival of the new Soviet military attaché. Moreover, the Soviet reply to Schweisguth's questions came from Moscow only days after his meeting with the attaché in Paris : when on February the 17th Potemkin asked Blum that the French reciprocate, his request was not even conveyed to General Gamelin for consideration until the 9th of April.

Thus it seems that the most fundamental reason for the failure to conclude a Franco-Soviet military accord was that the French government as a whole, whatever might have been the views of its individual members, did not want such an agreement. When Litvinov said at a reception for Laval in May 1935 that "I trust that the signature of the pact will not be the culmination but the beginning of collaboration between the Soviet Union and the French Republic"(67), he undoubtedly envisaged a future of practical collaboration. In contrast the French decision to authorise contacts with the Soviet military attaché in Paris in November 1936 merely represented a further attempt to gain time in response to repeated Soviet pressure, and by mid-1937, this was finally recognised by the Soviets themselves.

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CHAPTER 9

THE STRATEGIC VALUE OF SOVIET AID

Although the French government evidently had no desire to negotiate bilaterally with the Soviets, the Franco-Soviet Pact need not necessarily have remained inoperative as a consequence. Indeed, France was particularly well-placed to assist in the resolution of those very real difficulties which she herself was inclined to regard as rendering Soviet intervention in Europe impossible. For in one respect at least the French Staff's criticism of the Pact with Russia was justified : while France would in theory be able to assist Russia immediately in the event of a Russo-German conflict, by virtue of her common frontier with the aggressor, the geographical position of the USSR meant that Soviet assistance, either in the form of a direct attack on Germany or assistance to a beleaguered Czechoslovakia, would necessarily be limited. Distances between the Russian and German frontiers varied from 300 to 1500 kilometres of often difficult terrain, such as the vast marshlands of Pinsk and Pripet extending almost as far as Pskov on the Estonian border down to Kovel on the Polish border (1). Moreover, in order to reach Germany or Czechoslovakia Soviet troops would have to cross either Roumania, Poland or the Baltic states which, in view of the somewhat strained political relations they had with Soviet Russia, constituted a diplomatic problem of considerable magnitude. Thus the question of Soviet aid in accordance with the terms of the Franco-Soviet Pact raised problems of both a technical and a diplomatic nature which were regarded by some French officials, both civil and military, as insurmountable, and which were constantly cited as proof of the worth-



lessness of the Soviet alliance. In fact, as the Soviets themselves insisted, although the problem was immense, there were some indications, even on occasion from the Poles, that some form of agreement could be worked out, and in the negotiations which would be required France, as an ally of Poland and Roumania on the one hand and the Soviet Union on the other, could naturally play a vital role. It was therefore in this respect that the French failure to reanimate her Central and East European alliances was to prove most critical.

In April 1935 the Minister of War, General Maurin, noted that Latvia and Lithuania, who feared Germany more than Russia, were unlikely to refuse passage to Soviet troops (2). If this were so, then Soviet troops concentrated to the south of Leningrad, between Pskov and Polotsk, could, after crossing Latvia via Daugavpils, use the two single-track railways which ran across Lithuania via Tilsitt or Kaunas (3). By these rather complicated routes Soviet troops could avoid crossing Poland and still reach the frontier of Eastern Prussia after a journey of approximately 600 kilometres. In this way, estimated Captain Lelaquet at the Ecole Supérieure de Guerre, between six and eight Soviet divisions could be immediately transported, and then supplied. However, this whole operation would be difficult and slow, since the Russian railway tracks differed in size from those in the Baltic countries which meant that all troops and material would have to be transferred onto different trains at the border. Furthermore, warned Lelaquet, the proximity of the sea on one side and the Polish border on the other might make this a very hazardous journey (4).

An alternative possibility was to send Russian men and material to Czechoslovakia from the Ukraine through Roumania, which bordered both.

Unfortunately, however, the Russian and Roumanian railway systems intersected at only one point, at Tirespol on the Dniestr, and since the two railway gauges were of different sizes, this too would require a complete transfer. At all other points where the tracks came close there was not actual point of contact, and so a second transfer on to land vehicles would be required. An alternative route would be for Soviet troops to cross the eighty miles from Odessa to Constanta or Galatz by sea, which would be a relatively simple operation since the terms of Montreux, in July 1936, made the Black Sea virtually an internal lake of the USSR in war time (5). The troops could then use Roumanian railways as far as the Sub-Carpathian region of Satu Mare, from where a single-track line crossed into Slovakia (6). This route would in theory allow for the transportation of one division per day, but since it was to be expected that the Roumanians themselves might need to use the railways in the event of conflict with Hungary, it was estimated that even in the most favourable conditions, it would not be until the fiftieth day after mobilisation that a force of between twelve and fifteen Soviet divisions could be assembled in Moravia. If on the other hand the Hungarian threat had already been contained by the Little Entente, then this route could be of considerable benefit to the Russians (7).

By far the easiest land route between Russia and both Czechoslovakia and Germany was that across Poland, "dont l'attitude détermerait étroitement les conditions de l'appui soviétique contre l'Allemagne" (8). Indeed, with Polish consent or in the event of a hostile Poland allied to Germany, Soviet troops could threaten Germany or assist Czechoslovakia from several directions. From Minsk, for example, Soviet troops could use the double-track railway via Brest and Warsaw

to Eastern Prussia or to the German frontier itself, while from Vinnitza it would be possible to travel via Lvov and Cracow into Czechoslovakia. Alternatively, troops could travel via Vilna and Kaunas to Koenigsberg in Eastern Prussia, a distance of 450 kilometres from Minsk, or across the 700 kilometres to Breslau in Upper Silesia via Lvov (9). Thus the Russians would have considerable choice of strategic possibilities, and Germany could be threatened from a particularly sensitive direction with relatively little delay. Indeed, taking into account the concentration of Polish troops which might have to be moved first, the French Staff estimated that a Soviet force of between twelve and fifteen divisions could be at the German frontier within thirty days (10).

It was expected that the most effective Soviet aid, however, would come from the Soviet airforce. In September 1938 the French Airforce General Staff set down clearly its views on possible Soviet action in the event of conflict with Germany, analysing separately Soviet potential from its own airbases, and from hypothetical ones in Poland (11). A rapid and smooth mobilisation of Soviet airforces could be expected from Russian bases since the Russian terrain lent itself easily to the installation of airbases (about one hundred had already been identified by the French from the Gulf of Finland down to the Black Sea), and the units stationed there were in a state of almost permanent alert in peacetime. However, their range of action would necessarily be limited. All Soviet aircraft could operate en masse up to a distance of 400 kilometres away, that is, approximately as far as Warsaw or Koenigsberg (12), but the 1931-model R5 reconnaissance and assault plane, whose maximum speed was only 200 kilometres per hour, could reach no further. The SB bombers, of which there were

500 in service, and the 150 TSKB 26 bombers, all with a maximum speed of 420 km./hr. had a range of 800 kilometres, which meant that they could comfortably reach the whole of Eastern Prussia. Finally the TB3 and TB4 heavy bombers, of which there were 500 in service, as well as the newly-introduced 115 and 116 fighter planes, all with the capacity to carry 1500 kilograms of bombs, could operate, with a range of 1,000 kilometres over Eastern Prussia and over all Reich territory situated to the east of Frankfurt-on-the-Oder. The major difficulty with the TB3 and TB4 heavy bomber, however, was that they were equipped with out-moded apparatus, and their cruising speed of only 150 and 170 km./h. respectively meant that they could only operate effectively at night, and even then with considerable risks.

Thus the much-vaunted Red Airforce seemed able to offer only restricted assistance in the event of a European war if it were forced to operate from its national airbases. Moreover, international aviation law meant that Russia would have to have the agreement of Poland or Roumania in order to fly over their territory. The situation could be considerably improved, therefore, if Soviet forces could be stationed directly on Polish territory. The French Airforce Staff estimated that Russian planes could be ready to operate from Polish bases a mere 24 to 36 hours after the mobilisation, although it was stressed that such an operation would need considerable military and diplomatic preparation first. Moreover, it was thought that there were only ten landing sites between the German-Polish border and Warsaw which would be suitable to take Russian aircraft and, assuming that five were made available, this meant that Soviet strength would be limited to approximately sixty aircraft. However, these sixty would constitute a considerable threat to Reich territory : those with a range of 800 kms. (the SB and TSKB 26)

could reach Frankfurt, while the TB3 and TB4 bombers could effectively operate over the whole of Germany.

Similarly, the potential of Soviet assistance would be considerably increased if she were able to obtain air passage, and possibly even landing sites, in Roumania, and airbases in Czechoslovakia. Roumania had only twelve landing sites big enough to accommodate the Soviet bombers, that is 1,000 by 1,000 metres, of which five were in Transylvania, but if she were to lend three sites the Soviets could base a total of six groups there. General Vuillemin, the chief of the General Airforce Staff, estimated that if the indispensable material preparation had been carried out, then the Soviet aircraft could arrive at the sites ten hours after the mobilisation, and leave for their first attack ten hours later (13). The major difficulty would be supplying the airbases as a result of the difficulties in railway communications with Russia, but even if the use of Roumanian airbases proved impossible, free passage over Roumania would certainly be a valuable asset. Czechoslovakia was naturally the most inclined of the Central and East European countries to collaborate with the Soviet Union, since she was the most directly threatened by Germany (14), but her airbases were too few and too small to enable the heavy Russian bombers to land there. She could on the other hand accommodate fighter planes and the lighter SB or TSKB 26 bombers, although considerable bomb reserves would have to be built up first since Czechoslovak bombs could not be mounted on to the bombreleasing equipment with which the Soviet aircraft were fitted. Thus the key factor, if the Soviet Union were to aid France or Czechoslovakia in a conflict with Germany, either on land or in the air, was that preliminary negotiations must be undertaken with those countries separating Russia from Germany.

Roumanian reluctance to agree to the passage of Soviet troops was understandable. At the peace settlement at the end of the First World War Roumania had received Bessarabia from Russia, an area populated by a considerable number of Russians and Ukrainians as well as Roumanians : Russia had ever since refused to acknowledge this loss of territory, and so the Roumanian government was naturally concerned that if they were once allowed to re-enter Bessarabia, Soviet troops would never leave. Thus, when Delbos visited Bucarest in December 1937 he was reminded that three times in the past Russians had entered Roumania "avec une forte tentation d'y rester" (15). This danger was naturally emphasised by opponents of an agreement with Russia such as the Liberal party dissident Georges Bratianu, who published in June 1936 a facsimile of a review which had appeared in Moscow under the title of 'Red Bessarabia' (16), while one French observer noted in 1935 that an official Soviet map he had seen at the Soviet Embassy and the Soviet Economic Agency in Paris included Bessarabia within the USSR as an area occupied by the Roumanian army (17). On the other hand, it was possible that the question of the recognition of Bessarabia could be used by the Russians to induce Roumania to agree to passage and indeed, Litvinov admitted to Paul-Boncour that "Je ne tiens pas à la Bessarabie, mais je veux garder la question ouverte comme une monnaie d'échange, comme un moyen de pression" (18).

As long as Titulescu remained Foreign Minister there was a substantial likelihood that some form of Russo-Roumanian agreement might be reached, since he recognised that "I must get on well with Soviet Russia, I must improve my relations with Soviet Russia and thus try to safeguard myself because I am convinced that in the event of any warlike conflicts, Soviet Russia would march into Roumania; nor would she be satisfied

with merely occupying Bessarabia, but would march on into Moldavia" (19). It thus appears that far from having a naively trusting attitude towards the Soviet Union as his critics claimed Titulescu realised that the best hope for Roumania lay in obtaining Soviet recognition of Bessarabia, possible with a French guarantee, since he anticipated a Soviet invasion regardless. As a result, in spite of the constant denials issued by the Roumanian government (20), rumours persisted throughout 1935 and 1936 that a Russo-Roumanian mutual assistance pact, including a specific reference to the passage of Soviet troops, was about to be concluded. In February 1936, for example, Flandin told the Foreign Affairs Committee of the Chamber that once the Franco-Soviet Pact had been ratified, a similar agreement between Russia and Roumania would be signed (21)

Although Titulescu later vigorously denies having considered according free passage to Soviet troops, it seems that he was involved in detailed negotiations with the Russians throughout this period. In June 1935 Benes received a telegram in which Titulescu declared that, following a conversation with King Carol, he was in a position to envisage the eventual passage of Soviet troops, again emphasising that "nous ne pourrions nous soustraire; il vaut mieux, dans ces conditions, l'accepter dès maintenant, en régler les conditions et obtenir quelques contreparties" (22). What is perhaps the most striking aspect of this telegram is that Titulescu claims to be acting in accordance with the wishes of the King, who later insisted to Eden that Titulescu had proceeded much further than his mandate had allowed in his negotiations with the Russians (23), and who was widely regarded as the principal opponent of an agreement with Russia (24). In fact, Paul-Boncour claims in his memoirs that King Carol assured him after the

funeral of George V that, "Je la ferai, cette entente...J'ai d'assez mauvais souvenirs personnels, ils ont tué mes tantes, etc.etc.Mais je vous le promets, je sens l'intérêt qu'y attache la France, et je ferai cette entente", although he asked for time in which to accustom his people to the idea. One year later the King's attitude had changed since "depuis un an il s'est passé bien des choses", such as the abdication of France as a Great Power, Paul-Boncour suggests (25), but as late as September 1937 he assured General Gamelin, attending the Roumanian manoeuvres, that he would allow Russian troops to cross the northern part of his territory to reach Czechoslovakia (26). It is possible that the public differences between Titulescu and Carol during 1936 were, as the German charge to Bucarest believed, just a front, Titulescu maintaining the Russians' interest while Carol preserved the Polish alliance (27): on the other hand, Carol might have been merely anxious to evade public responsibility for an unpopular measure. But whatever the true picture, it is clear that the possibility of an agreement with Russia was closely associated with Titulescu personally.

In fact, it now seems that an accord was in preparation when Titulescu was removed from power in August 1936. At the Montreux Conference in July, Titulescu and Litvinov agreed in principle to a draft text in which Roumania undertook to let Russian troops and war material to cross her territory in the event of German aggression against a state allied to both by a mutual assistance treaty, while Russia agreed not to let her troops remain after the cessation of hostilities "west of the Dniestr" (28). Thus the Soviets were required to make no formal recognition of Bessarabia, but the effect of the agreement would be to secure Roumanian retention of the area. That such an agreement



had been reached was confirmed by Litvinov himself, who told Coulondre in June 1938 that he had agreed with Titulescu that when the fighting was over, Russian troops would withdraw to the Russian bank of the Dniestr (29). It seems that it was decided to adjourn the signature of the accord until September, by which time Titulescu had been replaced by the much less favourable Antonescu, and the project was abandoned.

It has been suggested that Litvinov might have deliberately provoked this fatal delay, since Titulescu had insisted that the accord be made dependent on the execution of the Franco-Soviet Pact (30), while Titulescu himself explained to the German Minister to Bucarest that Litvinov had shown no understanding of the kind of treaty he envisaged, that is, a frontier guarantee together with a mutual assistance obligation in the event of attack (31). However Litvinov must have recognised that Titulescu was the most likely person to conclude an agreement and indeed after his removal from office the negotiations foundered. In April 1937 the Soviet Foreign Office denied a Roumanian report that the USSR was about to renounce its claim to Bessarabia (32) and in May Litvinov complained to Coulondre that the Roumanians were continuing to insist on de jure recognition of Bessarabia : he had given a verbal de facto assurance to Titulescu, he said, and intended to proceed no further with Antonescu, whom he accused of supporting the anti-Soviet block which Beck was trying to establish (34). In July 1937 the 2e bureau noted that conversations between Roumania and the USSR were taking place in Bucarest but that since Litvinov had excluded all possibility of the explicit recognition of the Dniestr frontier, the negotiations were likely to be fruitless (34). It seemed increasingly unlikely therefore that any agreement would be

reached by means of bilateral discussions, and increasingly Soviet representatives began to suggest that France might adopt a mediating role. Thus in May 1938 Litvinov told Bonnet at Geneva that since France had a friendship pact with Russia and an alliance with Roumania, the French government was particularly well-qualified to obtain the right of passage for Soviet aircraft and troops (35). Similarly, the Czechoslovak Ambassador to Russia urged Coulondre in April that if any military collaboration with Russia was to be possible, then the Bessarabian question would have to be solved, and in this French help was indispensable (36).

It could hardly be denied that it was in France's interests rather than Russia's to ensure that Soviet intervention in Europe be made effective, and it was made abundantly clear by the Russians that such assistance was directly dependent on the attitude of Poland and Roumania. In February 1937, when asked by Blum what form Soviet aid would take, Ambassador Potemkin replied that if France's allies, Poland and Roumania, were to accept their responsibilities and allow Soviet troops across their territory, either by their own decision or that of the League, then the Soviet Union would "prêter son assistance avec le concours de toutes armes, et ceci dans la mesure indispensable qui doit être définie par un accord spécial entre les états intéressés". If Poland and Roumania were, for some incomprehensible reason, to refuse, then Soviet aid could only be sent by sea or air. When asked by General Gérodiás why he did not envisage passage through Lithuania, Potemkin explained that the possibility of passage was being examined only across those countries who were allies of France, and that if other alternatives were possible, then it was up to France, in agreement with the USSR, to make the necessary preparations

(37). Thus on this and on countless other occasions the responsibility for obtaining the right of passage was placed firmly with the French.

Indeed some form of guarantee given by the French government that Russian troops would be withdrawn from Bessarabia after the cessation of hostilities might have considerably eased the tortuous Russo-Roumanian negotiations. Little could have been expected from the Laval government and indeed, it seems that late in 1935 the French government actually advised the Roumanians to slow down the rapprochement with the USSR (38), but it might have been thought that the Blum government would make a more positive attempt to facilitate an improvement in Russo-Roumanian relations. In fact, though the French government was informed of the Titulescu-Litvinov meeting at Montreux, it seems to have shown little interest in trying to intervene when the talks collapsed, and it gave little support to the attempts at mediation made by Herriot and Paul-Bancour at Geneva. As late as September 1938 the Minister to Bucarest, who had been very active in advocating the desirability of allowing Soviet troops and aircraft to cross Roumania, explained to Mr. Farquhar of the Foreign Office that he was acting on his own initiative, and not on any instructions from his government (39).

In view of the increasingly widespread decline of interest in the problems of Central and Eastern Europe (40), it is perhaps scarcely surprising that France under the Popular Front singularly failed to inspire confidence in its allies and, more specifically, failed to mediate between its allies and the Soviet Union. Before leaving for his tour of Central and Eastern Europe in November 1937, however, Delbos admitted to the Foreign Affairs Committee that the efficient

functioning of the Pact made the passage of Russian troops across Roumania desirable, and he added that "il y a une action à exercer qui, au cours de mon voyage, pourra être envisagée" (41). Less than three weeks later, in reply to a question before the same committee, Delbos explained that the possible passage of Soviet troops "est une question que nous n'avons pas discutée, car je n'étais pas allé là-bas pour modifier les accords, mais simplement pour éprouver leur solidarité" (42). He added that he would try to infuse a spirit of conciliation into both sides, and that efforts in this direction had already been made in Geneva.

Given the lack of real French initiative to improve Russo-Roumanian relations, it was hardly to be expected that the Popular Front government would successfully persuade Poland to agree to the passage of Soviet troops. Memories of the war with Russia in 1920 were still strong in the minds of many Poles : on the one hand they remembered that in August 1920 Russian troops, led by Tukhachevsky, had reached the walls of Warsaw, on the other they recognised Soviet anger that by the treaty of Riga approximately six million Ukrainians and White Russians had been brought into Poland. At the same time Poland was on poor terms with Czechoslovakia who, by an agreement reached at Spa in July 1920, had received the major part of the economically important area of Teschen, which included 80,000 Poles (43). It was thus highly unlikely that Poland would be willing to allow Soviet troops across their territory to assist Czechoslovakia, particularly since this would make her likely to become a Soviet-German battleground. Thus in February 1936 the German government was informed that the Poles would never, in any circumstances, allow Soviet troops to set foot on Polish territory (44) and the Belgian Prime Minister, Van Zeeland,

returned from a trip to Warsaw in April with a similar impression (45). In April 1938 the French Ambassador to Poland reported that if Germany were to attack Czechoslovakia, then Poland would do nothing. In fact "sa seule préoccupation sera, en massant des troupes sur la frontière sud-est, d'empêcher toute intervention soviétique a travers son territoire. Il en sera ainsi tant que M. Beck sera au pouvoir" (46).

It was also rumoured that Poland was attempting to prevent Roumania from coming to any kind of agreement with the USSR. In June 1935 the French chargé to Berlin reported that many Poles, fearful of the negotiations between Litvinov and Titulescu at Geneva and fearing that any treaty would be incompatible with the Roumanian-Polish treaty of 1921, were indicating that Poland could not possibly tolerate the intervention of the Red Army into Roumania or the Baltic States (47), and the leader article of the Journal de Moscou claimed at the end of the month that the Polish government had protested at Bucarest against the supposedly imminent conclusion of a Russo-Roumanian mutual assistance pact (48). Similarly, the British Ambassador to Bucarest believed that Germany and Italy were trying to convince the Polish government that it would be in their interest to obtain a definite undertaking from Roumania not to allow Russian troops to enter her territory (49), and in June 1938 the German Minister to Roumania reported that Poland was exerting great pressure on the Roumanians to prevent Russian transit flights (50). Moreover, there were even suggestions that Poland might oppose the intervention of Russian troops on her own territory by force : in September 1938, for example General Stachiewicz warned the French military attaché that if Russia tried to help Czechoslovakia by crossing Poland then Poland would declare war on Russia (51).

Although it is possible that any French pressure would have been unsuccessful, this does not explain the Popular Front's failure even to discuss the question of Soviet passage with the Polish authorities. In retrospect Daladier admitted that there should have been an attempt to solve this whole question at the time of Rambouillet (52), but the French failed to act on the suggestion of the Soviet military attaché to Paris that France might use the opportunity to make her considerable financial aid dependent on a Polish agreement to allow the passage of Soviet troops through Eastern Galicia (53). It might at least have been possible to make French aid dependent on the removal of Beck, since the anti-Soviet, pro-German and increasingly anti-French policy of the Polish government was one which was strongly identified with Beck personally, but the issue was not raised during the Rambouillet discussions. Similarly, Delbos did not refer to the question of Soviet passage during his tour of Central and Eastern Europe, either in Warsaw or Bucarest (54). In fact the Poles did show some inclination towards allowing Soviet air passage, an inclination which ought to have been fully exploited. In the summer of 1936, General Gamelin, during a visit to Warsaw, enquired of Marshal Ridz-Smigly about the possibility of Soviet passage across Poland. The Marshal replied that while Poland would never allow Soviet troops onto her territory, he was nevertheless prepared to discuss the question not of permanent bases but of temporary land-sites which could be used by Russian aircraft on their way to Czechoslovakia (55) : the offer was never taken up.

It was not in fact until after the Anschluss and the consequent deterioration in the international situation that the French government began to make a positive attempt to solve this vital problem. On the

9th of May Bonnet asked Litvinov for the first time what help could be expected from Russia in the event of a German attack on Czechoslovakia : Litvinov repeated that Russia would need the consent of Roumania or Poland to enter or fly over their territory (56). On the 12th Bonnet approached Comnen, the Roumanian Foreign Minister, and was told that Roumania could not agree to passage. On approaching the Poles Bonnet received a similar negative. In June the French Minister to Bucarest renewed the initiative and was told that Roumania did not regard the Soviet assurances about withdrawing her troops after hostilities as having any value, while a member of the Soviet legation to Bucarest admitted that Russia, in refusing to admit the annexation of Bessarabia, was reserving the right, in the event of a German aggression and if Roumania maintained neutrality, to reoccupy a territory to which she had never renounced her claim (57). Similar demarches were repeated as the Czech crisis approached, but the Polish and Roumanian answers never varied.

As late as September 1938, Litvinov insisted to Herriot that the problem of passage across Poland was one which it was a French responsibility to solve (58). There were of course many Frenchmen who believed that this insistence, and the subsequent conduct of the Russians during the Czechoslovakian crisis, emphasising that Soviet troops would march only after French troops did so, was merely a manoeuvre on the part of the Russians to evade their responsibilities. On the other hand, it is difficult to see exactly what other course of action the Soviets could have taken, other than violating Polish or Roumanian territory by crossing without permission. This is certainly a possibility which had been considered and, it seems, rejected by the Soviets. In March 1936 the Russian journalist, Karl Radek, often

used as a government mouthpiece, told Jacques Chastenet of the 'Temps' that if Germany were to attack France then Russia would not hesitate to cross Poland (59), while a high-ranking Soviet officer claimed that "le haut commandement rouge est prêt à exécuter cette opération même si l'accord n'est pas réalisé avec la Roumanie" (60). Similarly the Soviet Ambassador to Tokyo told his French colleague that Soviet aircraft would fly over Roumania "avec ou sans son consentement" (61). Official Soviet comments were on the whole more reserved, such as Litvinov's assertion to a gathering of foreign journalists that "means would be found" (62), or Vorochilov's comment to the British military attaché, Colonel Firebrace, that "where there was a desire to fulfill ones obligations a way could be found" (63).

During 1938, however, such claims became increasingly rare, and Soviet representatives began to insist on another alternative, that of awaiting a League decision which would oblige Roumania and Poland to permit Soviet troops to cross their territory. This view was increasingly expressed by Litvinov, who emphasised that Russia would not use force and would only enter these countries with the authorisation of the League Council (64). Indeed, as Massigli pointed out in a departmental note in September, the USSR was perfectly entitled in accordance with article 16 of the Covenant to cross neutral countries in order to aid Czechoslovakia, provided that the League Council agreed that Germany was the aggressor, and the member states could even force Roumania and Poland to accept this decision (65). Thus in August Litvinov replied to Payart's enquiry about the nature of Soviet aid by saying that since the forced passage of Soviet troops was unthinkable without the authorisation of the League, then the League should be alerted immediately so that its mechanism would be ready to go into operation



as soon as an aggression had occurred (66). However, as Daladier later pointed out, the League of Nations in September 1938, in the absence of Germany, Italy and the United States and including among its members Poland and Roumania, was scarcely likely to reach a unanimous decision on this issue, let alone was it strong enough to impose its decision on Poland and Roumania (67), and so the Soviets' insistence on a League decision was seen by many as a further attempt to escape fulfilment of their engagements.

Although Czechoslovakian officials continued to believe that in the event of a German attack on Czechoslovakia the Soviet government would present an ultimatum to Poland, threatening to declare war if Poland refused to grant passage (68), it seems that the most the Soviets ever contemplated was to send air assistance, by flying over Poland or Roumania. Moreover the Roumanians, at least, recognised that there was very little they could do to prevent such a violation. Comnen told Bonnet in September 1938, for example, that while Roumania could never officially agree to Soviet air passage, Roumanian defence artillery was so mediocre that it would be impossible to reach the Soviet aircraft if they flew high enough (69), and he was said to have told Krofta at a meeting of the Little Entente in Bled that while Roumania might object to the passage of Soviet troops, "par contre elle pourrait fermer les yeux sur le survol de son territoire par des avions" (70). Both the Polish Ambassador to Bucarest and Colonel Beck told British diplomats that the Roumanian government would probably ignore Soviet aircraft flying overhead, and Comnen told Lord de la Warr in Geneva that he saw no difficulty in allowing the transit of Soviet aircraft (71). The French Minister to Bucarest, M.Thierry, said in retrospect that between the 10th and 15th of September

Roumania officially consented to allow the passage of Soviet aircraft, claiming that 200 were in Czechoslovakia by the time of Munich, and he even asserted that according to General Delmas, the French military attache to Bucarest, when one Soviet aircraft was forced to land, Roumanian technicians repaired it and allowed it to take off again(72). There is no other evidence available to support these claims, but what does seem certain is that the Roumanian government was prepared to ignore the passage of Soviet aircraft and possibly also the transit of war material to Soviet troops in Czechoslovakia.

There is, on the other hand no indication that either Poland or Roumania had any intention, by September 1938, to allow the passage of Soviet troops by land. In April 1938 the Roumanian Minister to Paris told his American colleague that "the present Popular Front Government" had been urging the Roumanian government to agree to passage but the government had flatly refused, adding that Roumanians "would fight to the last man" to oppose Russian troops entering their territory, since they knew this would mean the end of Roumania (73). With hindsight it appears that Polish and Roumanian fears had considerable justification. The Nazi-Soviet Pact signed in August 1939 envisaged a new partition of Poland and recognised Bessarabia as belonging to Russia ; in September 1939 Russia occupied a sizeable portion of eastern Poland and absorbed the Baltic states into her sphere of influence, and in 1940 she annexed Bessarabia and North Bukovina. On the other hand it is possible that had the French government given a firm guarantee to its allies in Eastern Europe that Soviet troops would be withdrawn once hostilities against Germany had ceased then, as Titulescu believed, Roumania and Poland might, by agreeing to Soviet passage, have been making their own position more, rather than less, secure.

Furthermore, the agreement of Poland and Roumania to allow passage would have made the Franco-Soviet Pact a viable political and military force, and so would have removed the need for Stalin ever to turn away from the French alliance and to seek instead an agreement with Nazi Germany.

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- 11) Reproduced in La Chambre testimony, Commission II, pp.314-320
- 12) See maps. Appendix IV p.306-307
- 13) DDF, 2e, XI No.295
- 14) See p. 222
- 15) AN, CAE : 12th December 1937
- 16) DDF, 2e, II No.318
- 17) Marquès-Rivière, Jean. L'URSS dans le monde : l'expansion soviétique  
de 1918 a 1935. p.195
- 18) DDF, 2e, IX No.112
- 19) DGFP, C, IV, No.175
- 20) e.g. DGFP,C,V No.432
- 21) AN, CAE, 12th Feb.1936
- 22) MAE, Z978 : Teleg. from Alphand, 11th June 1935
- 23) FO 371/21184, R5097/16/37
- 24) e.g. DGFP,C,IV, No.353

- 25) Paul-Boncour testimony in Commission III, p.796
- 26) Gamelin , op.cit. p.196
- 27) DGFP, C, IV, No.175
- 28) Paul-Boncour testimony in Commission III p.796
- 29) DDF, 2e, X, No.6.
- 30) Pordea, G.A. in Revue d'histoire diplomatique, op.cit. p.165
- 31) DGFP, C, V No.432
- 32) Beloff, Max. The Foreign Policy of Soviet Russia 1929-41  
Vol.II: 1936-41 p.71 N.2
- 33) DDF, 2e, V No.396
- 34) EMA/2e, 7N 2522 : Compte rendu 7th July 1937
- 35) Bonnet, Georges. Défense de la paix, vol.II, p.125
- 36) DDF, 2e, IX, No.199
- 37) Ibid. IV No.457
- 38) DGFP, C, IV No.401
- 39) FO 371/22462, R7893/441/37
- 40) See particularly pp.104-105
- 41) AN, CAE : 24th November 1937
- 42) Ibid. 12 December 1937
- 43) Wiskemann E. Europe of the Dictators, p.29
- 44) DDF, 2e, I No.247
- 45) Ibid. Vol.II. No.142
- 46) Ibid. Vol.IX, No.112
- 47) MAE, Z978 : Telegram from Arnall, 18th June 1935
- 48) FO 371/19466, N3386/754/38
- 49) FO 371/21184, R2219/16/37
- 50) DGFP, D, II No.267
- 51) DDF, 2e, XI No.205
- 52) Daldier testimony in Commission, I, p.32

- 53) EMA/2e, 7N 3131 : Compte rendu du Lt.-Gen.Gauché  
22nd October 1936
- 54) AN, CAE : 12th December 1937
- 55) Gamelin , op.cit. p.230
- 56) Bonnet, op.cit. p.125
- 57) Ibid.
- 58) Herriot, E. op.cit. p.644
- 59) FO 371/20349, N 1753/307/38
- 60) EMA/2e, 7N 3130: Renseignement, 24th February 1937
- 61) DDF, 2e, IV, No.36
- 62) DBFP, 3rd, I, No.92
- 63) FO 371/22299, N2278/954/38
- 64) e.g. DDF,2e,XI, No.95 and DDF, 2e, X, No.543
- 65) Girault, René. "La decision gouvernementale en politique extérieure"  
in Edouard Daladier, chef de gouvernement, avril 1938  
Septembre 1939. p.212.
- 66) Daladier in Commission I, p.32
- 67) Ibid.
- 68) e.g. the Czechoslovak military attaché to Paris  
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- 69) DDF, 2e, XI No.9.
- 70) Ibid. Vol X No.534
- 71) FO 371/21777, C10864/5302/18
- 72) Cited in Duroselle, Les relations germano-soviétiques de 1933  
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CHAPTER 10

CZECHOSLOVAKIA AND THE FRANCO-SOVIET PACT

It could be argued that the French government failed to assert its influence over Poland and Roumania in order to secure free passage for Soviet troops as a result of its not unnatural assumption that any such pressure would be totally futile. However, the same could hardly be said of Czechoslovakia, whose attitude towards the Franco-Soviet entente, by virtue of its own precarious position in Central Europe, fundamentally contrasted that of its Little Entente allies. The predominant concern of the Czechoslovak government after 1933 was the threat from Nazi Germany, and so the overwhelming aim of her foreign policy became to ensure her own security by a system of alliances directed against that power. Having herself been allied to France since the mid-1920's Czechoslovakia welcomed the signature of the Franco-Soviet Pact, complementing it just two weeks later with the conclusion of her own mutual assistance pact with the USSR. In this way the Franco-Soviet Pact became an integral part of a tripartite security system in which the major concern of the French was to secure Soviet assistance in the event of a German aggression against either France herself or her ally, Czechoslovakia, and in which the Russians sought to secure French aid if Germany were to attack the Soviet Union, while ensuring that she would not be called upon to defend Czechoslovakia against Germany unaided.

Moreover, the Czechoslovakian government was particularly anxious not to proceed in its negotiations with the USSR without French backing, and so continually proposed that there should be tripartite military

negotiations in order to co-ordinate Franco-Soviet-Czechoslovak action in the event of German aggression. France was thus presented with a significant opportunity : by obtaining a Soviet commitment to the defence of Czechoslovakia France's own burden would be slightly eased; by ensuring the co-operation of Czechoslovakia she could facilitate the efficient operation of the Franco-Soviet Pact, and thus reinforce her own security; and by publicly emphasising the close relationship with Czechoslovakia, France could divert attention from negotiations with the USSR, and thus avoid unpleasant publicity. Moreover, unlike Poland and Roumania, Czechoslovakia was willing, indeed anxious, to co-operate.

The French military connection with Czechoslovakia had its roots in the foundation of the Republic at the end of the First World War. In February 1919 a French Military mission arrived in Prague to act as technical advisor to the Czechoslovak army, but during the Slovak campaign against the Magyar bolsheviks in the Spring of 1919 the role of the mission was considerably enlarged and its head, General Pelle, was named Chief of Staff and Commander-in Chief of the Czechoslovak forces. This status was maintained until January 1926, when the second head of the mission, General Mittelhauser, passed his functions as Chief of Staff to a Czech officer, while being himself succeeded by his deputy, General Faucher, who was to remain technical advisor throughout the 1930's. Faucher records that he twice suggested that the mission be ended, once in 1929 and again in 1936, believing that the Czechoslovak army no longer needed French assistance, but on both occasions it was decided to retain the mission. In fact, Faucher believes, the mission's political importance was increasing as its military usefulness decreased, since the maintenance of the mission



gave the Czechs a certain confidence that France would fulfil her obligations to Czechoslovakia (1). Thus, while continuing to offer advice on matters such as building of fortifications, the French military mission to Prague came primarily to symbolise the close political co-operation between the two countries.

Moreover, the treaty relations between the two were quite clearly defined. On 25th January 1924, a Franco-Czechoslovak treaty of friendship was signed in Paris, in which the two governments undertook to co-operate in external matters which were likely to jeopardise their security or undermine any peace treaties to which either party was a signatory(2). The treaty was supplemented by a secret exchange of notes by the respective foreign ministers at the end of January, in which it was agreed that the General Staffs would continue to collaborate in the establishment of concerted plans to contain any aggression against either by a common enemy, and in studying the means of assistance to be used in the event of common interests being menaced. On October 16th 1925, as a complement to the Treaty of Guarantee signed on the same day with Germany, Belgium, Great Britain and Italy, France signed treaties with Poland and Czechoslovakia, in which it was stipulated that in the event of France, Czechoslovakia or Poland suffering from a failure to observe the day's undertakings between them and Germany (Czechoslovakia and Poland had signed arbitration treaties with Germany), in which the failure resulted in an unprovoked recourse to arms, then each undertook to lend the other immediate aid and assistance in accordance with Article 16 of the Covenant. If the League Council failed to reach a unanimous decision, then the undertaking would still apply in accordance with Article 15, paragraph 7(3). Thus France's obligations to Czechoslovakia were on paper very similar

to those undertaken with regard to the Soviet Union in May 1935.

In the case of France and Czechoslovakia, however, real military collaboration did take place. In addition to the maintenance of a French mission to Prague, and French assistance in the development of Czechoslovakia's National Defence programme several French Army chiefs visited Czechoslovakia : Pétain in 1929, Franchet d'Espérey in 1930, Gamelin in 1934 and Schweisguth in 1936. Moreover in January 1933 General Syrový accompanied Faucher to Paris, and in talks with General Gamelin it was agreed that it was necessary to study the conditions of eventual intervention, to exchange information and to direct the Little Entente General Staffs towards defined common aims. From this date onwards biennial meetings between the two Staffs took place, in Paris in the Winter and in Prague in the Spring (4), contacts which resulted in the signature, on 1st July 1935, of the secret "Convention FTA". This agreement, the only military accord to be signed between the two, provided for the collaboration of the French and Czechoslovak airforces in the event of conflict. Based on the principles of collaboration already approved by the two governments in 1933, the convention stipulated that in the event of a conflict where both countries were simultaneously involved against Germany, France was to send a certain number of aerial units to Czechoslovakia, with the aim of relieving the Czechoslovak airforce in reconnaissance and bombing at the outbreak of hostilities, (this aid was increased to an aerial army in November 1938). There followed a very detailed analysis of the conditions of collaboration, such as the designation of Czech landing sites for French aircraft, and the supply of war material for the French units by Czechoslovakia (5). Thus Czechoslovakia could reasonably expect considerable French assistance in the event of

a German attack.

In her search for security against Germany, however, she was not prepared to rely on France alone, hoping that she could establish similar relations with the Soviet Union. This was not a policy which had unanimous support within Czechoslovakia : the Sudetendeutsche party naturally emphasised the dangers of collaboration with the USSR and called for improved relations with Germany, while the Slovak People's Party, motivated like the Agrarian Party by fear of communism, warned that "the alliance between Soviet Russia and Czechoslovakia was the beginning of another White Mountain tragedy". On the other hand the policy did receive support, perhaps surprisingly, from the Catholic Church : in the Chamber on the 17th June 1936 Monsignor Svetlik, leader of the Catholic (Church) Party, declared that in the struggle for supremacy between the two rival dictatorships, Czechoslovakia could neither rely on Italy, whose main motive was 'sacro egoismo', nor trust Nazi Germany, and so she should keep aloof from both, lean upon Russia's increasing power and help the Little Entente to preserve an independent Central Europe (6).

More importantly the governing Czechs and in particular the Foreign Minister, Edouard Benes, who succeeded Masaryk as President in late 1935, were firmly in favour of a policy of rapprochement with the USSR. Benes, however, having engineered the entente with France in the 1920's, was particularly anxious not to alienate this close ally, and so he was naturally delighted at the conclusion of the Franco-Soviet Pact on the 2nd May, in the negotiation of which it has been suggested that he played a considerable mediating role. That relations with Russia had already been improving was shown by the

almost immediate signature, on May 16th, of a Czechoslovak-Soviet mutual assistance pact which was virtually identical to the Franco-Soviet Pact in wording except for one essential addition : according to Article II of the Protocol the two governments recognised that the undertakings to render mutual assistance would operate between them only insofar as assistance might be rendered by France to that party which was the victim of the aggressor (7). Thus the operation of the Czech-Soviet Pact was made directly dependent on French fulfilment of her obligations under either her alliance with Czechoslovakia, or her Pact with the USSR. In this way the Soviet government sought to ensure that she would never be called upon to aid Czechoslovakia while France remained aloof, and the Czechs hoped that they could improve their collaboration with the Soviet Union, without alienating her ally, France.

Moreover, Czechoslovakia's intentions in the policy of collaboration with the Soviet Union were, unlike France's, totally sincere. By June 1935 both parties had ratified the Pact and on returning from Moscow Benes urged Laval to do the same (8). Similarly in October he stressed to the French Ambassador to Prague, Paul Naggiar, that the rupture in the Stresa Front caused by the Ethiopian War made consolidation of the rapprochement with the USSR even more essential, and he repeated his hope that the Franco-Soviet Pact would soon be ratified (9). The Czechoslovaks were also anxious to improve military relations with the USSR, particularly since there was an increasing belief that France either could not, or would not, fulfil its treaty obligations to Czechoslovakia. Léon Blum recollected after the war that even Czechoslovakia, France's most secure and faithful ally, began to doubt the value of French support as a result of her failure to respond to

the Rhineland coup (10), and, like Russia, Czechoslovakia feared that if she were to conclude a western pact agreement with Great Britain, France would abandon her former policy of including Central and Eastern Europe in her negotiations for a system of collective security (11). Czechoslovakia needed real military support which, if it were not forthcoming from France, she hoped to secure from the USSR.

In this the Czechoslovakian government was anxious to utilise any available means, both official and unofficial. For example, a steady exchange of officers and missions was maintained in order to facilitate collaboration. In April 1935 a Soviet air mission visited Czechoslovakia and a return visit was made by General Fajer at the end of May; in July 1936 another Soviet military aviation mission, headed by General Alknis, visited Prague, and on his invitation three Czechoslovakian aviators visited Russia in October. Similarly missions were exchanged each year for army manoeuvres, the Czech missions always returning full of enthusiasm for the Red Army. Writing in 'France Soir' in 1948, Benes sought to explain his motives, emphasising that he had never been motivated by ideological criteria, but simply had the impression that "dans le conflit qui allait avoir lieu, la victoire pencherait du côté ou se trouverait finalement l'Union soviétique". Benes adds that, worried by German preparations, the Czech government agreed to supply Russia with special armaments which she had not been able to obtain from France or elsewhere, and admits that when a new Soviet military mission visited Prague in the summer of 1937, "nous conclûmes certains accords, principalement au sujet de l'aide que l'aviation soviétique devait nous apporter en cas d'attaque allemande" (12).

On a more practical level, it seems that the Czech government attempted

to improve her lines of communication with the USSR by offering financial assistance to Roumania if she would improve the Bukovine railway line. Officially, the Czech-Roumanian accord signed on July 14th 1936 provided for substantial Czech loans to Roumania for a variety of purposes, one of which, declared Antonescu, the Roumanian Finance Minister, was "la facilitation de la construction de chemins de fer, intéressant les liaisons entre les deux pays" (13). The news immediately provoked speculation in diplomatic circles that in encouraging the completion of the single-line railway between Czernowitz and Nagyabanya, the Czech government was seeking to facilitate the passage of Soviet troops, and indeed the Czech Minister for Foreign Affairs was said to have told a supporter that Czechoslovakia was financing a strategic railway through Roumania to link Czechoslovakia and the USSR and that she had "made necessary dispositions with the latter, with French consent" (14). Comnen, on the other hand denied that such a railway was a feasible proposition in engineering terms (15).

Conflicting evidence such as this provoked a lengthy debate at the British Foreign Office, both in terms of whether such a railway line could be built and, if so, what its strategic value would be for the Russians. Colonel Paget of the War Office maintained that with a loan of 95m. Czech crowns (£884,000), lines were to be built linking Viscul to Salva and Vatra Dornei to Ilva Mare, which when completed would form part of a direct railway communication by 4'8½" gauge between Czechoslovakia and the Russian frontier, though the difficulties raised by the 5' Russian gauge would still apply (16). The British Legation in Bucarest, on the other hand, believed that the new railway construction was intended to provide a reserve line of defence running north-south

between Craiova and the Czech frontier, since the existing line in that direction on her western frontier (the Arad-Oradea-Satu Mare line) was uncomfortably close to the Hungarian frontier. Thus it was asserted that the new track was intended as a reserve strategic line of defence, rather than an attempt to improve Czechoslovak-Soviet communications(17).

From all this confusion, two points emerge clearly : the Czechoslovakian government did give substantial financial assistance for the improvement of the railway leading to her own border; and it subsequently showed considerable anxiety that the work be concluded quickly. Probably the most likely explanation of the conflicting aims and denials was that given by General Mittel, returning from a visit to Roumania in December 1936 : Mittel had noticed considerable disagreement between the Czechs, who were offering the 300 million francs for the improvement of the railway link with Russia through the Bukovine, and the Roumanians, whose predominant concern was to double the track near the Hungarian border (18). Moreover, it is quite understandable that Czechoslovakia should have wanted her money to be used in a way which might eventually benefit her, just as it was natural that Roumania, in view of her reluctance to allow Soviet passage, would try to avoid improving the channel between Czechoslovakia and Soviet Russia, and indeed it seems that the envisaged improvements to the Roumanian railways proceeded only slowly and inefficiently. Thus it seems that the Czechoslovak loan to Roumania merely represented an unsuccessful attempt by the Czech government to improve its military communications with the USSR.

It was made even more difficult to ascertain the exact extent of Czech-Soviet military collaboration as a result of the violent anti-Czechoslovak campaign conducted by the Nazis after the conclusion of

the Czech-Soviet Pact. In particular, Germany concentrated its attack on alleged collaboration between the Czechoslovakian and Russian airforces. On the 17th May 1935 the Berlin press published news of the signature of the accord, adding that it would soon be followed by an air convention (19), while on the 25th the German Foreign Minister issued instructions to its diplomatic missions abroad that the agreement be attacked as forming a single military instrument with the Franco-Soviet Pact and, more specifically, rendering Czechoslovakia nothing more than a deployment area for Russian troops. It was also to be noted that an agreement had been reached for a regular air service between Prague and Moscow, which was scarcely justified by the volume of traffic (20).

As with the Franco-Soviet Pact, however, it was the German intention to use the Czech accord to its own advantage and apart from occasional references, such as Goering's complaint to Phipps in May that there were already twenty seven Czechoslovakian aerodromes at Russia's disposal (21), it was not until March 1936, that is almost a year after the conclusion of the Pact, that the German campaign began in earnest. On the 11th March General Milch, of the German Air Ministry, told the British Ambassador to Berlin that twenty-eight Czech aerodromes had been designated for the use of Russian aircraft, and that a considerable number of Soviet military personnel were already based at certain aerodromes (22). The campaign was readily taken up by the German press. The 'Gazette de la Bourse', for example, sought to support these assertions by offering, on April 1st, a series of 'proofs' : Taittinger's "indiscretions" after a meeting of the army committee in the French Chamber the year before; the visit of the Chief of the Czechoslovakian airforces, General Fajer, to Moscow; the presence of a Russian mission



at the last Czech manoeuvres; and, most important of all, a memorandum addressed to the League by the National Slovak Council protesting against the development of runways and the construction of underground hangers, obviously destined for the use of the Soviet airforce (23). The 'Local Anzeiger' reproduced the usual accusations in June, but added a wealth of detailed information designed to demonstrate that a close military agreement between the Czechoslovakian, Soviet and French Staffs had long since been concluded (24).

More seriously, the accusations began to be increasingly used by German leaders. On the 8th March Goering warned the Czechoslovak Minister to Berlin that if the Czech government allowed their country to be a twin aircraft carrier for the Soviet Union, then Czechoslovakia would be completely wiped out of existence (25), while Hitler's anti-Czechoslovakian diatribes reached fever-pitch at Nuremberg in September. Similarly, Goebbels spoke in February 1937 of the dangers of the Czech-Soviet military alliance for Europe, and added that "Czechoslovakia today is the aircraft mother-ship of Moscow" (26). Naturally enough, Czech government representatives issued constant denials of the German accusations : on 13th March Benes assured the British Ambassador that Czechoslovakia had no military agreement with the USSR, and was not preparing any aerodromes for Soviet aircraft; there were no Soviet military personnel at Czech aerodromes; and Czechoslovakia had no intention of allowing Soviet aircraft on their way to France to land there (27). On June 4th Colonel Hajek, head of the Czechoslovak Intelligence Service, insisted to Schweisguth that no aerodromes had been prepared for Soviet aircraft, as German and Polish propaganda was suggesting : the extent of collaboration was that the two had exchanged missions for manoeuvres, and Czechoslovakia had sent three officers

for a short visit to Russia (28).

It is not altogether clear whether the Germans themselves believed their own accusations. In June 1936, for example, a "memorandum on the militaro-political repercussions of the Franco-Soviet and Czech-Soviet Pacts of mutual assistance in Czechoslovakia and Roumania" was circulated by the Foreign Ministry to all diplomatic missions for their confidential information and guidance on the language to be used. It was maintained that the Moscow-Prague air service established in May 1935 was of a primarily military and strategic character; concrete decisions on airforce collaboration had been taken during the exchanges of missions; new aerodromes were being constructed in Slovakia with the help of Soviet officers; and the Soviet Military had permanent offices in the Czech War Ministry (29). Whether or not these stories were believed at the Wilhelmstrasse is not clear, but they were certainly regarded with scepticism by the German military attaché to Moscow, General Koestring, who was regarded by most foreign observers as an important authority on Soviet military matters. Koestring doubted that the Moscow-Prague line would soon be operative, and thought it unlikely that Russian instructors and technical personnel were being used to supervise the aerodrome construction in Czechoslovakia since airforce officers were rated too highly by the Russians. It was moreover unlikely that the Russians would leave their most valuable weapon, the light bomber, in the sole protection of the Czechs, as was suggested (30).

But the German accusations were naturally taken up by those powers whose own relationships with Czechoslovakia were poor : thus the Polish chargé to Moscow claimed that an agreement had been reaching according

to which thirty six of the Soviet aircraft purchased by Czechoslovakia were to be allowed to fly over Roumania as long as they were flown by Czech pilots (31). Similarly the Hungarian Minister to Bucarest, while admitting that it could not be said that any aerodromes in Czechoslovakia were actually controlled by the Soviet airforce, nevertheless insisted that reports from the Hungarian Legation at Prague showed that there were far more aerodromes in Czechoslovakia than were required for her own civil and military purposes (32). There were even some officials at the British Foreign Office, however, who were unwilling to dismiss the rumours. It was thought to be suspicious that Krofta and Benes were always careful to distinguish between military and civil services when denying the existence of an air route between Moscow and Prague, and Krofta, while denying that any agreement had been reached, had nevertheless admitted that "if this country were attacked the government would then naturally call Soviet Russia to its assistance and allow them the use of its aerodromes" (33). There was even a suggestion from the War Office that the Russians themselves, in an attempt to provoke a conflict before the Germans were ready, were responsible for circulating the rumours about the Czechoslovakian aerodromes (34), as well as a suspicion that there were indeed military understandings behind the Franco-Soviet and Czech-Soviet Pacts, though in a form which enabled them to be officially denied with truth (35).

From a position of greater intimacy with both the Czechoslovaks and the Russians, it might have been expected that the French might have been able to obtain more precise information on this issue than the British. Specific accusations could certainly be analysed and, usually, refuted. François-Poncet, for example, on analysing the 'proofs' offered by the Gazette de la Bourse (36), discovered that Pierre Taittinger, far from

revealing secret information about Czech-Soviet military negotiations, had merely commented on collaboration between the Staffs, and that the memorandum to the League complaining of Czech preparations for Soviet aircraft was in fact signed by only three Slovak deputies who happened to be particularly hostile to the Czech majority (37). Similarly, Coulondre found that an article in a Soviet newspaper in February 1936 entitled "new aviation bases in Czechoslovakia" had been reproduced in the 'Berliner Boersenzeitung' in August under the title, "Our airbases in Czechoslovakia" : the falsification was exposed at the beginning of September by the 'Prague Presse', but it was nevertheless the basis of a communique by the official German newsagency, the DND, in October which said, "Le témoignage documentaire publié par le journal soviétique montre clairement combien l'Allemagne a raison d'affirmer le danger de l'alliance soviéto-tchécoslovaque. En présence d'une telle preuve, tous les démentis sont inutiles" (38)

The French were little better informed than the British however, on the exact extent of Czech-Soviet collaboration, possibly because in spite of the close relations there was no French military attaché to Prague, and General Faucher, who in his many years as head of the military mission had won the respect and esteem of the Prague authorities, felt that he would be taking advantage of his privileged position if he were to betray secrets confided to him which did not directly concern France (39). The French Ambassador, Lacroix, believed that the question had been studied by the Czech and Soviet Staffs and indeed landing sites had been designated, but his information was limited to the knowledge that the Skoda factory had given Russia important aeronautical material. Indeed, as late as April 1938 Paul-Boncour, then Foreign Minister, stressed that France must ascertain whether any Czech-Soviet staff

accords had been concluded (40).

By far the easiest way for the French to obtain such information would have been to accept the formula which the Czechs and the Russians themselves envisaged : tripartite collaboration. Indeed there were numerous indications that the Czechs were unwilling to embark on, or at least pursue fully, military negotiations with the Russians without French approval. As early as June 1936 Lacroix reported his impression "que les Tchèques se tiennent sur la réserve à l'égard des Russes en matière militaire et qu'ils attendent que les conversations d'états-majors franco-russes aient pris tournure pour se prêter à des pour-parlers réalisateurs" (41) and indeed in August Benes told Schweisguth that he had waited for the French to sign their Pact before signing his, and would do the same over a military accord : he had therefore told General Krejci that when attending the White Russian manoeuvres he could listen to Soviet proposals, but must not reply (42). It was certainly not unreasonable that the Czechs, although anxious to obtain Soviet support, should nevertheless tread carefully for fear of antagonising their French ally, and at every opportunity Benes took care to stress that "ma politique est une politique occidentale : je ne veux collaborer avec l'URSS que dans la mesure où la France le fait elle-même" (43).

The French Military's response to suggestions from both the Czechs and the Russians that tripartite negotiations be initiated was hardly enthusiastic. In October 1936, for example, when informed by Potemkin that at informal talks held in August in Prague between Egorov and Czech Staff representatives it had been agreed to subordinate all future negotiations to talks with France, Schweisguth irritably pointed

out that the two Pacts had, after all, been signed independently (44). The most that could be proposed was that, as Schweisguth told Benes, "le jour où nos gouvernements estimeraient opportune une conversation d'ordre militaire avec les Soviets", such conversations should be preceded by an official entente between the Czech and French General Staffs to determine the nature and means of co-operation which was to be requested of the Russians (45). Even this idea became somewhat reduced in scope, however, when Gamelin agreed in July that there should be talks with the Czechs on what Russian aid might be through the sole intermediary of General Faucher (46). Clearly, as in the case of bilateral Franco-Soviet negotiations, the initiative would have to come from the government rather than the General Staff.

The value of tripartite negotiations was readily appreciated by Pierre Cot, whose major concern was that the Red Airforce be made operative against Germany. Recognising the vast political difficulties raised by a direct negotiation with Soviet Russia, Cot says that he discussed with Blum the possibility of conducting negotiations with the USSR through the intermediary of "son complément aérien, la Tchécoslovaquie". Czechoslovakia possessed a useful airforce, strategically situated at the heart of Europe, and Cot believed that by maintaining close relations with the Czechoslovak airforce and profiting from the relations between the Czech and Russian airforces, France would virtually be treating directly with Russia (47). In effect, "Czechoslovakia formed, from the aerial point of view, a bridge or landing stage between France and Russia. A network of military agreements between France and Czechoslovakia on the one hand, and between Czechoslovakia and Russia on the other, was a substitute for the Franco-Russian alliance, which France obstinately refused" (48). Acting on Blum's instructions, Cot wrote

to Benes explaining this plan, and a close collaborator of Benes' soon arrived in Paris to discuss the matter. Cot claims that when he left office in January 1938 a tripartite aviation pact was ready to be signed, but says that "after the fall of the Popular Front, these projects were abandoned. My successor in the Air Ministry lacked imagination on an international scale and nourished the usual prejudices of his circle against Soviet Russia" (49).

There is in fact no record of such a draft agreement, but given Cot's vociferous campaign on behalf of the Soviet alliance, it seems very likely that he would have attempted to use such means to make the Pact effective. For example, at a meeting of the Comité permanent de la Défense Nationale, called on June 26th 1936 to discuss the question of how Czechoslovakia might be assisted in the event of a German attack, Cot insisted that she could not be abandoned because of her relations with the USSR, since the only way to reach Berlin was via this platform (5)). On this, and probably on other occasions too, his assertion met with little response from the other government and military representatives present, including Blum, although Cot claims in retrospect that Blum fully approved his attempt at tripartite negotiations. In fact, there is no evidence to suggest that the government took any real initiative in this matter throughout 1936 and 1937, and certainly, despite Cot's attempts, no such accord was ever signed.

The deteriorating international situation as signified by the Anschluss in March 1938, however, seems to have finally prodded the French into action, opening a spate of Franco-Czech-Russian diplomatic activity. In April the Czech Ambassador to Moscow, M. Fierlinger, told Coulondre that Czech-Soviet negotiations had been reopened in February, on the

instructions of Prague. At the time of the Russian manoeuvres in September 1936, he said, the passage of Soviet troops across Roumania had been the predominant subject of discussion, as a result of which Czechoslovakia had given Roumania a substantial financial contribution to rebuild the Bukovine railway network; the possible assistance of the Soviet airforce had also been discussed. When the negotiations were resumed in February 1938, only the last point had been taken up again, Fierlinger obtaining a promise of the immediate delivery of sixty SB bombers, twenty of which had already reached Oujorod aerodrome in Slovakia by May (51). On April 23rd, however, when Lacroix told the Czechoslovak government of the importance which Paris attached to the Czech-Soviet military negotiations, he was told that it had been decided to postpone such talks until the French position was clear (52).

Coulondre, for his part, had continued to press for the initiation of tripartite talks and was therefore pleased when, during a visit to Paris, he was finally instructed by Bonnet on May 20th to open talks with the Soviet military authorities. On 23rd May Coulondre submitted a text outlining the envisaged procedure of the talks, being careful to stress that "en vue d'éviter des réactions inopportunes à l'étranger, les conversations conserveront un caractère secret et auront toujours lieu à deux : entretiens tchéco-français, tchéco-sovietiques, franco-soviétiques" (53). The text was cautiously approved by Daladier and officials at the Quai, and by a suddenly hesitant Bonnet. Indeed, Bonnet's support for the project was extremely short-lived : almost as soon as he returned to Moscow Coulondre noted a distinct lack of interest from Paris which he was at a loss to understand, until on July 1st he received a report from Osuski, the Czechoslovak Minister to Paris,



which stated that "Le gouvernement français ne donne pas suite, pour le moment, aux projets de conversations militaires franco-soviétiques pour ne pas éveiller les susceptibilités des conservateurs anglais". Coulondre concluded that a remark made during his visit to Paris, transmitted by Geneviève Tabouis to Polyakoff of the Daily Telegraph had succeeded in alerting the British government to the possibility of a Franco-Czechoslovak-Soviet military accord (54).

In fact, very late on the evening of May 22nd, the British Ambassador to Paris had communicated to Bonnet a telegram from Lord Halifax, which warned that "if the French government were to assume that His Majesty's Government would at once take joint military action with them to preserve Czechoslovakia against German aggression, it is only fair to warn them that our statements do not warrant any such assumption" (55). Thus the French government was made fully aware that even if she were to concert her action to save Czechoslovakia with the USSR, she could expect no support from Great Britain. Bonnet was quick to respond, agreeing to put any pressure on the Czechoslovak government which Britain thought desirable, and even suggesting that "if Czechoslovakia were really unreasonable the French might well declare that France considered herself released from her bond" (56). Thus Bonnet was acquiescing to a policy laid down with extreme clarity by Halifax to Phipps on June 17th. Believing that "it may well be the root of the German-Czech difficulty is not so much the situation of the German population in Czechoslovakia as the foreign relations of Czechoslovakia and, in particular the undertakings of assistance she has received from and given to France and the Soviet Union", Halifax proposed that "in order to satisfy what is reasonable in Germany's complaint and at the same time to reduce the liability of France's being called upon to

honour her treaty obligations", Czechoslovakia should be "invited" to "remodel" her treaty relations with France, Great Britain and the USSR: this would include Czechoslovakia being relieved of her obligations to go to the assistance of France or the Soviet Union in the event of an attack by Germany, which would have the effect of reducing the probability of France and so Russia, having to fulfil their undertakings to Czechoslovakia (57). It is difficult to believe, that Czechoslovakia would have been inclined to believe that such a plan would improve her own security.

In spite of the lukewarm reception in Paris, however, Czechoslovak representatives continued to pressurise France throughout 1938. On July 12th Benes once again raised the question of tripartite negotiations in a discussion with Faucher. His policy had, he stressed, always been to subordinate Czechoslovakia's actions to those of France, but he felt that there was danger in the uncertainty of the military collaboration with the Soviet Union, and he wondered if "le moment serait maintenant venu d'examiner, comme nous y avons pensé autrefois, en commun, quelle attitude nous pourrions avoir vis-à-vis de l'état-major de Moscou, quelles propositions nous pourrions leur faire après nous êtres concertés, Paris et Prague" (58) In particular, Benes proposed that the French government respond favourably to Soviet requests for the participation of the Schneider firm in her naval armaments programme, stressing that the Italians were likely to win the order if France refused. On the 18th July Gamelin sent a record of this conversation to Daladier with the comment that this was a matter for diplomatic study, that is, for the National Defence Ministry in conjunction with the Marine (59).

Daladier in his turn consulted Bonnet, who replied on August 12th that the Czech and French military attachés in Moscow, in conjunction with the Ambassadors, should work out the suggestions ultimately to be made to the Soviet military authorities. Then, he hoped, conversations would be undertaken between Czech and Soviet technicians, with the French military and air attachés intervening eventually at a moment judged opportune by the Embassy, thus avoiding all tripartite negotiations (60). Daladier informed Gamelin on the 20th that it was necessary to organise preliminary conversations between the French and Czech Staffs, and on the 22nd, that is, six weeks after Benes' original enquiry, Faucher was informed that the project had been accepted on condition that the talks were exclusively between French and Czechoslovakia and in the utmost secrecy (61). Finally, on August 30th, General Fiala, accompanied by General Faucher, met representatives of the French Staff in Paris for the long-awaited talks. However, the minutes of this interview indicate that its scope was limited : it was merely decided that in order to study, together, the value of Soviet military aid, both the French and Czech Staffs should establish a synthesis of the information in their possession on the military and aerial potential of the USSR and the methods of execution; the results would then be compared, and any differences discussed, at a later meeting (62). This second meeting, it seems, never took place.

Such an exchange as this was hardly what the Czechs, Soviets, and those such as Pierre Cot envisaged when they spoke of tripartite negotiations, but it was the closest the French government came to an attempt to activate the Franco-Czech-Soviet security system. Moreover, even if an exchange of information between the Czech and French Staffs on the Red Army might have been a useful preliminary, such discussions could have

been held at any time from 1935 onwards, rather than waiting until August 1938. The obvious conclusion of the French failure to accept the role envisaged by Czechoslovakia and Russia was to create an atmosphere which made the Munich agreement possible in September 1938. After years of political and military collaboration with Czechoslovakia, and despite repeated assurances that France would honour her obligations, the French government agreed at Munich to a plan whereby the Czechoslovaks were to begin, on October 1st, the evacuation of all territory where, according to German claims, more than 50% of the population was German : this was to be completed by the 10th October. In other words, the French government accepted the German dismemberment of the Czechoslovak state.

Daladier seems to have recognised that France was betraying her Czech ally, but faced with a General Staff assuring him that France could not fight, and fully aware that no support could be forthcoming from Britain, who had long since made clear her lack of interest in the problems of Central and Eastern Europe, Daladier had little choice. Furthermore, there is no evidence that the French government gave any credence to the repeated assurances from Russia that she would march on behalf of Czechoslovakia if France did, that is, she would fulfil her obligations under the terms of the Czech-Soviet Pact. Whether or not Russia was sincere in this may well never be known, since it is quite possible that she was convinced that France would do nothing, and thus hoped to escape any action herself. The Soviet position certainly won the everlasting gratitude of President Benes, on the other hand, who insisted after the war that Russia had been the only power who had wanted to crush Germany for her violation of Czechoslovakia in 1938 (63), though his opinion could derive from Czechoslovakia's bitterness at being

abandoned by her other ally, France. Furthermore, the Czechoslovaks had been noted throughout the 1930's for their optimistic praise of the Soviet Military, and unbounded confidence in Soviet loyalty.

On the one hand positive action on Czechoslovakia's behalf by the French government would certainly have brought stronger pressure to bear on the Soviets, possibly forcing them to act : on the other, the Russians could be forgiven if they showed a certain disinterest in the fate of Czechoslovakia since they were not even invited to the Conference at which it was decided, while it was possible to argue from a purely technical point of view that the tripartite security system in which Czechoslovakia had such confidence need not have come into operation as a result of Munich : Hitler could not be designated an aggressor since France, Great Britain and Italy had given their official approval of his plans for Czechoslovakia. But the "shameful relief" which Blum felt when he first heard of the agreement was surely indicative of the deterioration of the French position in Europe : the sacrifice of Czechoslovakia was a moral surrender by the French government and a complete violation of the spirit which had led to the creation of the French security system, and had been particularly symbolised by the Franco-Soviet Pact.

Indeed, although Georges Bonnet declares that "le pacte franco-soviétique sort donc intact des accords de Munich et il garde toute sa portée" (64), others were immediately aware of the potential practical consequences of the agreement for the future of Franco-Soviet relations. The German Counsellor in Moscow, von Tippleskirch, reported on October 3rd that, as a result of Munich, Litvinov's policy had become a complete fiasco, since faith in the League and collective security had collapsed.

He estimated that the Kremlin would soon return to the revolutionary Comintern line, and added that since France had lost much of her value as an ally, the circumstances were considerably more favourable for the conclusion of a German-Soviet economic accord (65). Coulondre reached the same conclusions. The Soviets had lost all faith in collective security, and so "nous devons nous attendre en France à un redoublement d'activité du Komintern"; in addition, Moscow no longer relied on the Franco-Soviet Pact, preserving it in form only so that she would not appear isolated, and would probably now turn towards Germany (66).

Although the official Soviet response to Munich was muted and, as Coulondre pointed out, the agreement was not followed by an immediate Soviet rejection of the Pact, it was clearly regarded as an attempt by the four major western powers to isolate Russia in Europe, and the Russian press, at least, was free to voice its criticisms : on October 4th, for example, the Journal de Moscou asked, "who will believe again the word of France? Who will remain her ally? Why would the French government, which has just annuled 'of her own accord', her Pact with Czechoslovakia, respect the Franco-Soviet Pact?" (67). At Munich France not only lost thirty-five Czechoslovak army divisions, and any remaining prestige in the eyes of Poland, Roumania and Yugoslavia, who now redoubled their frantic attempts to reach a settlement with Germany : in addition, as Coulondre bitterly pointed out, "pour autant que nous ayons jamais trouvé l'URSS, on peut considérer que nous l'avons perdue à Munich" (68).

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CHAPTER 11

THE PACT AS A MEANS OF PREVENTING SOVIET-GERMAN RAPPROCHEMENT

It could be argued that the Popular Front government should not be criticised for failing to make the Franco-Soviet Pact a positive and effective factor in the maintenance of European peace, since it was never intended that the Pact should play anything more than a purely negative role, that it, to prevent Russia from returning to a policy of collaboration with Germany. Certainly this aim was uppermost in the minds of French negotiators of the Pact, who had been fully aware of the danger to France of the Soviet-German contacts which had taken place during the 1920's. Under the Rapallo treaty, signed in April 1922 and confirmed by the Treaty of Berlin in 1926, Germany and the Soviet Union had undertaken to consult each other on all political and economic problems concerning them both, and to remain neutral if the other were attacked by a third power. More importantly, secret military clauses meant that throughout the 1920's Germany was able to train military forces, forbidden to her under Versailles, on Russian soil, and import quantities of raw materials from Russia, while in return the Red Army received German technical assistance. Although the accession of the violently anti-Russian Hitler to power was immediately followed by assurances on both sides that relations would remain unchanged, the Reichstag fire and the dissolution of the German Communist Party meant that relations soon became strained, and it seems that in mid-1933, at Soviet instigation, military contacts between the two ceased (1).

The importance of the deterioration in Soviet-German relations and the

subsequent Soviet policy of entente with the western democracies was readily appreciated by the French government, whose predominant concern was that Germany should be denied the vast natural resources of Russia. Thus, when in early 1934 the Soviet Ambassador to Paris, Dovgaleski, proposed a close Franco-Soviet alliance, Barthou admitted that "if we do not take advantage of it, we would be throwing the Soviets into the arms of the Germans (2). Once undertaken, it was necessary to continue with the negotiations, since to drop them would be, according to the journalist Pertinax, "to restore to the Treaty of Rapallo and the Russo-German agreement of April 1926 all the vigour that Hitler's madness had stripped them of". He added that the most important tangible result of the Franco-Soviet negotiations was that "the Reichswehr had been definitely cut off from Russia's formidable reservoir of raw materials and manpower" (3)

In view of the value to Germany of Russian natural resources, the negative role of the Franco-Soviet Pact was certainly of paramount importance, and was frequently stressed as a justification.(4)'Le Temps' argued, for example, that it would be a grave error if the Pact were not ratified since "a défaut d'un tel accord, un nouveau glissement de la Russie soviétique vers l'Allemagne est une éventualité qui ne devrait pas être écartée" (5). In fact, although Barthou and Herriot, and committed supporters of the policy of rapprochement with the USSR, hoped that a Franco-Soviet Pact would also have a positive value, that of providing for Soviet military assistance to France in the event of a Franco-German war, for many, particularly among the Military, it seems that prevention of Soviet-German rapprochement was the sole motive for the Pact. General Gamelin believed that because of the dangers of a new partition of Poland, and the consequent alteration

in the balance of power in Central and Eastern Europe, "il importait, surtout et avant tout, d'éviter une collusion germano-russe" (6), while a former member of Weygand's Staff, Colonel de Lattre de Tassigny, explained that France, in her policy of rapprochement with the USSR, intended to commit herself only sufficiently to neutralise Russia and to deny her resources to Germany (7). General Schweisguth, the Deputy Chief of Staff, told the British Military Attaché in April 1936 that "the sole factor which had carried weight with the French General Staff was that they could not afford to allow Russia and Germany to combine", and also claimed that according to Leger, "le Quai d'Orsay n'a jamais été partisan du rapprochement avec la Russie que pour éviter la continuation ou la reprise de la politique de Rapallo" (9). Since this was apparently the main, indeed possibly the only, reason for Franco-Soviet rapprochement, it is therefore necessary to examine the value of the Pact as it existed in May 1935, and as it remained throughout the next three years, in the same terms as those in which it was originally conceived, and in which even opponents of the Pact were inclined to agree that it might have a role to play : that is, how far the Franco-soviet Pact was an effective means of preventing a return to Rapallo.

The French government was well aware that important elements within both Germany and Russia continued to favour rapprochement, in spite of the antagonism between the two governments. Official German policy towards Russia was at best reserved. In 1934 the German Ambassador to Moscow, Rudolph Nadolny, whose overriding personal ambition was to restore cordial relations between Germany and the USSR, returned to Berlin with his own proposals for a rapprochement. Incensed by Hitler's refusal even to consider his proposals, Nadolny resigned (10). He was replaced by Count von Schulenberg, a close friend of the Foreign

Minister, von Neurath, who instructed the new Ambassador to keep open all possibilities without antagonising anyone, but without ever taking the initiative : for the next six years, von Schulenberg followed this policy faithfully (11). In fact, the German anti-Soviet policy seems to have been very strongly identified with Hitler personally, whom both General Blomberg and Goering saw as the sole obstacle to rapprochement between the two (12). A typical example of Hitler's attitude towards the Soviets was his refusal in January 1936 to receive the Soviet General, Tukhachevsky, who was passing through Berlin after representing Russia at the funeral of George V in London : he also forbade any of the Military to establish any contact with him (13). And yet, in spite of Hitler's uncompromising opposition to Soviet Russia, considerable sympathy for the USSR persisted, particularly in military circles. In April 1937 the French Ambassador identified three major areas of support for Soviet-German rapprochement : among diplomats who remained faithful to the Bismarckian tradition of foreign policy, industrialists who saw the USSR as the best market for German products, and who were particularly concerned by the loss of Russian supplies of manganese and petrol, and members of the General Staff who had established close ties with the Red Army during the 1920's (14). When members of the Estonian General Staff visited Berlin in December 1936 both Generals von Blomberg and von Fritsch indicated that the Reichswehr was strongly in favour of rapprochement with the USSR (15), and there were suggestions that Field-Marshal Goering preferred Russia to Italy as a potential ally (16). It is significant, moreover, that the German Military was represented in Moscow by General Koestring, who replaced the lesser-ranked Colonel Hartmann in 1935, since Koestring had been brought up in Russia and was a much-respected expert on Soviet military affairs (17). Moreover, before leaving Berlin Koestring was

instructed by Generals Fritsch and Beck, as well as by General von Stulpnagel, head of the military attachés section, to try and improve relations between the two armies (18). Indeed, the British Military Attaché believed that "the General Staff still hope that they may eliminate Herr Hitler's other advisors as they eliminated Captain Roehm. If and when this happens I feel confident that their objective is to come to an understanding with Russia" (19). Similarly, an important official at the Foreign Office declared to the American Ambassador in February 1936 that he and others at the Wilhelmstrasse were actually working for an improvement in Soviet-German relations, adding that "the last word has not been said on both sides" (20).

In the same way it was recognised that influential sections of opinion in Russia favoured a return to Rapallo. Karl Radek, for example, the journalist with the responsibility for preparing the Russian public for the change in foreign policy in 1934-5, privately told Krivitsky that "only fools can imagine we could ever break with Germany" (21) and frequently emphasised that nothing could permanently block Russia's road to friendship with that country (22). Moreover, on several occasions Soviet officials publicly expressed regret at the deterioration in Soviet-German relations. At a regional party conference in January 1934, Kaganovitch lamented that Hitler's policies were compelling the Soviet government to discontinue its dealings with Germany, while in his speech to the Seventh Congress of Soviets in January 1935 Molotov said that even the Nazi doctrine of a German master race need constitute no obstacle to mutually friendly relations. Gustav Hilger, an official at the German Embassy in Moscow, found among many Soviet leaders "a deep and lasting nostalgia for the old days of German-Soviet collaboration" (23), but says that nowhere was this nostalgia stronger

than among the army officers. In October 1933, for example, Tukhachevsky told the German charge, von Twardowski, that in spite of recent political developments, the sympathy and goodwill of his fellow officers towards the Reichswehr had not in any way diminished, and that the German Army's invaluable aid in building up Russia's forces during the 1920's would always be remembered (24). Indeed, in Russia as in Germany, it was among those who had collaborated under Rapallo that sentiment in favour of rapprochement was strongest. Marshal Egorov, who had collaborated closely with the Reichswehr in the 20's, was recognised by the 2e bureau as the strongest exponent of a policy of rapprochement within the Red Army : General von Blomberg indicated that the German Staff placed its greatest hopes on the possibility of Egorov establishing a pro-German military dictatorship and the Estonian Chief of Staff, General Laidoner, a former Staff officer in the Tsarist army and as such an associate of Egorov, warned the French Minister to Tallinn that the realisation of German hopes was not unlikely (25). There was also a strong belief within French and British Intelligence circles that the pro-German tendency among the Soviet Military was actually led by the Soviet Chief of Staff, Marshall Vorochilov (26).

Fully aware of the tendencies towards rapprochement already existing in Moscow and Berlin, the French government also received a considerable amount of information concerning Soviet-German contacts during this period. Officially the negotiations were of only a commercial nature. In April 1936 a fairly routine trade agreement was signed with the aim of reviving the traffic of merchandise between the two countries, but the agreement was surrounded by rumours : the French Embassy in Moscow reported that Germany, anxious to obtain supplies of Russian petrol,

manganese and wood, had offered a credit of one milliard marks, reimbursable after a five year delay (27), while the Berlin Embassy suggested a figure of 500 million marks (28). Similarly, in December 1937 the 2e bureau received information that the German government had recently offered a credit of three milliard marks to Russia, the greatest part of which was to be subscribed by the Krupps firm (29). On January 22nd 1938 the British Ambassador learnt from a member of the German Embassy in Moscow that the German government had offered a credit of 200 milliard marks, Goering having apparently decided that Germany could not afford to sacrifice to ideological prejudices the immense possibilities offered by the USSR both as a market for German products and a source of raw materials; but, the informant added, there could be no political rapprochement (30).

That such negotiations existed is confirmed by German sources. In July 1938 a German Foreign Office memorandum explained that in order to secure from the Soviet Union the flow of raw materials which Germany so badly needed, negotiations had been opened with the Soviet Trade Mission in March for the granting of a large credit to the USSR for the purchase of German-finished goods : by July the negotiations had still not been concluded because of "dilatatory treatment by the Soviets" (31). In February 1939 the Director of the Economic Policy Department noted that on the orders of Goering and with the agreement of von Ribbentrop negotiations had been in progress for some time, with the aim of increasing German imports of raw materials from the USSR. The current offer was for a credit of 200 million reichsmarks to be granted if the USSR undertook to make definite deliveries of raw materials to Germany during 1939-40, amounting to a value of 300 million marks (32), but on this occasion the negotiations were broken off by the German government, which felt that the German export



capacity was not sufficient to supply the Russian orders (33).

Since the commercial accord which had been rumoured for so long was not actually signed until August 1939 (only days before the Nazi-Soviet Pact), it might be supposed that the Russians were indeed very unwilling to respond to German pressure. For example, when Eden visited Moscow in April 1935 Stalin, denying that the Soviet government had ever made the first approach, described how the German government had recently begged for Soviet orders, offering a credit of 200,000 marks. In order to test German sincerity the Soviets had included in their lists of orders some important contracts for war material, and were astonished when the Germans accepted. Eden, however, was sceptical of this astonishment since, as he had learnt when visiting the Junkers aircraft factory near Moscow, there had been many such orders before (34).

Furthermore, there is evidence to suggest that the initiative for a political, rather than purely economic, rapprochement came from the Russians rather than the Germans. Gustav Hilger claims that in July 1935 the head of the Soviet Trade Delegation to Berlin, David Kandelaki, thought to be one of the few people in Stalin's confidence, abruptly asked Schacht in the middle of routine commercial negotiations whether it would not be possible to improve political relations between the two countries (35). Hitler is said to have rejected the proposal, but indicated that it might be more acceptable if the Soviet Union were to move away from the idea of international communism and towards the establishment of an absolute despotism, preferably under the Military (36). The Russians continued to press the issue until the end of 1935, but in the face of Hitler's opposition gradually lost

interest (37). In early 1937 the initiative was renewed when on January 29th Kandelaki delivered to Schacht a verbal proposal from Stalin and Molotov that the Soviet and German governments should open direct negotiations. On February 10th the proposals were conveyed to Hitler, and on the 11th von Neurath informed Schacht that no practical result could emerge from pursuing the Soviet suggestion(38).

Many observers believed that it was Hitler, and not Stalin, who was the real obstacle to Soviet-German rapprochement. Krivitsky, the Chief of Soviet Military Intelligence in Western Europe at that time, maintains that the consistent aim of Stalin's foreign policy throughout the 1930's was to come to an agreement with Germany, indeed "the true picture of their relations was that of a persistent suitor who would not be discouraged by rebuffs. Stalin was the suitor" (39). Krivitsky suggests that the Nazi victory only strengthened Stalin's desire for entente, since his overriding belief was that it is essential to come to terms with a superior power, and the whole of Soviet policy throughout these years is interpreted as a series of manoeuvres designed to improve Russia's bargaining position. Thus Soviet entry into the League, rapprochement with the western democracies and policy in Spain, were all intended to put pressure on Germany to reach an agreement with Russia (40). Although these claims were written when Krivitsky was in America after breaking with Stalin, and as such should be treated with some caution, they seem to be confirmed by other sources. The Polish Ambassador to Moscow between 1932 and 1936, Lukasiewicz, got the impression that any possible German-Soviet understanding would depend on Hitler entirely, since Stalin was always ready to come to an agreement (41), while the Finnish Ambassador in Moscow said he believed that "Russia would end in half an hour the

agreement with France, if only Germany would sign a Pact" (42)  
Similarly, a Polish Army Chief told the French Ambassador in December 1937 that a possible Soviet-German entente "ne dépend que des Allemands" (43).

Although the French government could not have known Stalin's personal views on Soviet policy towards Germany, they were obviously aware of the various rumours circulating about the possibility of Soviet-German rapprochement. In April 1937, only weeks after the Kandelaki demarche in Berlin, 'L'Ordre', the 'Petit Parisien' and the 'Manchester Guardian' simultaneously published information regarding a direct Soviet approach to Germany, which was thought to derive from articles in the Czechoslovak and Polish press (44). Immediate denials were issued in the Russian and German press, the latter claiming that the rumours were the work of the Soviets themselves and those countries "seeking to justify in this way their own collaboration with bolshevism" (45). Perhaps in response to this scare the 2e bureau prepared a memorandum on April 16th examining the possibility of Soviet-German rapprochement. It was noted, for example, that the German press had recently begun to adopt a more moderate tone towards Russia, and that the Soviet press had begun to concentrate its attacks on Italy rather than Germany. Also, in November Goering had told Ward Price of the 'Daily Mail' that "the Russian army is constantly proposing that we bury our ideological quarrels and divide the world between Nazism and Bolshevism", while during a visit to Berlin the Japanese Ambassador to Rome, M. Sugimura, was told by German leaders that the Rapallo treaty "est toujours en vigueur". The note concluded that while there were no actual facts to support claims of Soviet-German contacts, there was certainly evidence of a growing desire among the Reichswehr and the Red Army for improved relations (46).

The possible existence of Soviet-German military contacts seemed to be dramatically confirmed by the news in June 1937 that Marshal Tukhachevsky and seven Red Army Generals had been arrested and executed on charges of treason : they were specifically charged with having indulged in counter-revolutionary sabotage at Trotsky's instigation on behalf of enemy powers, by implication, Germany and Japan (47). Stalin's motive in extending the purge to the armed forces, and thus undermining Soviet military strength, have ever since been a subject of debate, but it is now generally agreed that the charge of collaboration with Germany was completely false. It now seems probable that Stalin himself passed on information alleging contacts between the Soviet Generals and the Reichswehr to Heydrich of the SD via a double agent named Skobline. An incriminating dossier of 'evidence' was then prepared by Heydrich and fed back to the OGPU, possibly by deliberately leaking the information to the Czechoslovak government (48). Certainly, Benes warned Léon Blum at the end of 1936 that "les dirigeants du grand état-major soviétique entretenaient avec l'Allemagne des relations suspectes"(49), and he later told Churchill that the Czechoslovak police had passed all their information on to the Russians (50).

A slightly different interpretation is given by Krivitsky who maintains that the conspiracy was planned at least six months before the alleged discovery of the plot. The evidence itself was, he believed, completely faked by the Gestapo who passed it through the "Goutchkov circle" (a very active group of White Russians who had intimate links with German Military Intelligence), to General Miller, a White Russian emigré living in Paris. The intermediary, Skobline, was a member of Miller's group but also an OGPU agent, and so the information was filtered back to Stalin. Since Miller was one of the few who knew of Stalin's

involvement, says Krivitsky, Stalin then had him liquidated, which accounts for his disappearance in September 1937 (51). The Russians themselves, on the other hand, claimed that the information had been supplied by the French government : Potemkin argued that the 2e bureau had had evidence of an army plot since February 1937 (52).

Whatever the truth behind the 'Tukhachevsky plot', the French government was naturally alarmed by the possibility of Soviet-German military contacts. On 27th June, for example, the French were disturbed to learn that the British government had information suggesting that General Kork, one of the executed Generals, had indeed been in treasonable correspondence with the Reichswehr, and there were indications that the Germans were alarmed at the speed with which the negotiations had been broken (53). But while Blum claimed that it was Benes' warning which had caused him to abandon his hopes of Franco-Soviet military contacts (54), it seems that once the conspiracy became known in June the accusations were given very little credibility, either in France or elsewhere. The U.S.Ambassador to Moscow, Joseph Davies, was virtually the only foreign observer to believe that the charges might actually be true. Believing that Stalin was a "clean-living, modest, retiring, single-purposed man with a one-track mind, devoted to communism and the elevation of the proletariat", Davies reported to the Secretary of State that the Soviet government had felt threatened by a counter-revolutionary conspiracy which had the support of the foreign enemies of the Soviet Union, and so had been forced to act accordingly (55). This view was not shared by the other members of the American Embassy, who felt that Davies' training in American law had made him rely too heavily on the appearance of public trials, although the sole 'evidence' used was that of a series of monotonous confessions by the accused : no documentary

evidence was produced. Five days before Davies addressed the above to the Secretary of State the American chargé, Henderson, had written that not a single foreign observer of any value in Moscow believed that the officers were guilty of the crimes attributed to them (56). In February 1938 the Czechoslovak Military Attaché to Moscow, Colonel Dastich, told Henderson that he had never found any confirmation of the charges that Tukhachevsky and his colleagues were in the service of a foreign government and had never believed that they were (57). Similarly, the Italian Ambassador to Germany, who had formerly been the Ambassador to Moscow, Bernardo Attolico, believed that Tukhachevsky could not possibly be accused of treason towards his country (58), while the Moscow Chancery of the British Embassy denied that any of the liquidated Soviet Generals could have been in German pay (59). Naturally enough, the French were particularly alarmed at the suggestion of Soviet-German military contacts, but after considerably analysis, reached similar conclusions. The military attaché in Moscow, Lieutenant-Colonel Simon, believed that the accused were neither in contact with foreign powers, nor plotting to overthrow Stalin (60), pointing out that Vorochilov had escaped the Purge even though he had apparently been responsible for appointing traitors as the heads of the White Russian and Kiev military districts, the Military Academy and the Ossoaviakhim. Simon concluded that the trials were essentially political, possibly due to Tukhachevsky's opposition to the newly-created military councils (61). Coulondre agreed, believing that Stalin's motive was to remove all potential, rather than actual, opposition, and that Tukhachevsky and the others had merely been too free with their criticism (62).

After years of close military collaboration with the German Staff, it

was probable that Tukhachevsky and the Generals, most of whom had been trained at the German General Staff College during the 1920's, had retained considerable admiration for the Reichswehr, and might have wished to see an improvement in German-Soviet relations (63), but this did not mean that they were in treasonable correspondence with the German Staff. Moreover, paradoxically, Tukhachevsky was generally regarded as a francophile while the two leaders considered by the French, as well as the Germans themselves, as being the most pro-German, Egorov and Vorochilov, escaped any connection with the affair. Hilger believes that it is absurd to suggest that the Generals were in treasonable correspondence with the Reichswehr since any feelers which they might have put out had the approval of the highest Soviet Chiefs of State and, moreover, Tukhachevsky had been one of the first to warn against the German danger and to endorse the Litvinov-policy (64). Similarly, King Carol of Roumania gave no credence to the accusations, but warned that a Soviet-German detente was in fact possible under the leadership of Vorochilov (65), while Krivitsky even claims that Tukhachevsky and the others were arrested as German spies at the very time when Stalin himself was negotiating with Hitler (66).

Some observers did indeed recognise that the Tukhachevsky affair, while it did not indicate the existence of Soviet-German contacts, did not, on the other hand, preclude the possibility of rapprochement taking place. Coulondre, for example, while disbelieving the accusations against the Generals, nevertheless saw sufficient evidence in Moscow to warn Paris repeatedly of Soviet-German detente. He cited, for instance, the silence of the Soviet press, which during 1935 and 1936 had been full of invective against the Nazis; the favour with which Koestring was received in army circles, and even by Vorochilov, who was cold

towards Coulondre; the long meetings between Schulenberg and Litvinov; and the acute nervousness of the Baltic Ministers in Moscow (67). Similarly, the French chargé, M. Payart, warned in late 1936 that the deterioration in Soviet-German relations was not the result of differences in ideology, but rather the Soviet fear of German rearmament which would create an inequality of forces between the two countries, and he concluded that, "il convient de ne pas perdre de vue que le jour, s'il devait venir, où l'URSS aurait une armée puissante et un potentiel économique correspondant, les raisons qui l'avaient fait renoncer à la politique de Rapallo ne subsisterait plus" (68). In particular, Coulondre warned that if the French were to water down the Pact in any important respect, then the Soviet Union would throw herself into the arms of Germany rather than risk having to fight her single-handed (69).

The Russians were evidently anxious to exploit this threat to the full. In December 1937, for example, Luciani, the influential Moscow correspondent of the 'Temps', had an interview with Litvinov during which he enquired whether the Soviet Union could fairly be described as withdrawing into isolation. Litvinov replied, "Evidemment, puisque en ce moment, on ne veut pas de nous. Nous attendrons encore...et puis nous verrons". When asked specifically whether Soviet-German detente was possible Litvinov replied, "Perfectly !" (70). This thinly-veiled threat clearly constituted a Soviet attempt to put pressure on the French government to consolidate the Pact; indeed, many of the rumours concerning imminent German-Soviet detente were said to have originated in Moscow. The British government was particularly sceptical in this respect, maintaining throughout that there was little possibility of rapprochement as long as Hitler remained in power (71). For example, Vansittart saw the scare of 1937 as a deliberate Russian attempt to



force France into signing a military accord (72), and the German Ambassador to Moscow, von Schulenberg, was convinced that Litvinov frequently used the bogey of rapprochement with Germany in order to activate Soviet relations with France (73). This was undoubtedly true, but the aspect which seems to have been overlooked, particularly by the French themselves, was that such threats demonstrated clearly the Soviet dissatisfaction with the Pact and with Franco-Soviet relations in general, and as such indicated the ever-increasing likelihood of Soviet-German rapprochement.

The Germans, on the other hand, believed that exponents of the Pact in France used similar methods to justify their support. An interesting case in this respect was the publication in July 1938 of an article in the 'Revue des Deux Mondes' entitled, "After the Moscow trials, German-Soviet relations". In this article, Jean de Saint-Chamant claimed that the trials had revealed the existence of close relations between an anti-Stalinist opposition group and the Reichswehr. Tukhachevsky, it was claimed, had taken the opportunity of his visit to Berlin after the funeral of George V to establish fresh contacts with the German Staff, while another of the accused, the Military Attaché to London, General Putna, was known to be in close contact with his German colleague (74). While it might be assumed that the purpose of this article was to secure France's abandonment of the Pact, the German Ambassador in Paris, Count von Welczeck, believed that the article was actually written by Georges Luciani with the backing of the Quai, and that by suggesting that Germany was trying to establish contacts in Russia, the French government was seeking to revive the fear of a return to Rapallo. Since the fundamental basis of French policy was that "National Socialist Germany must be kept away from

the Soviet Union's reservoir of raw materials and manpower", the article thus represented a plea for the reinforcement of the Franco-Soviet Pact (75). Although this interpretation might not seem very credible with regard to this particular article, the general conclusion which Welczeck was outlining was a perfectly viable one which does not, however, seem to have been drawn widely from the Tukhachevsky affair. Coulondre was one of the few to argue consistently that if there were indeed a substantial element in Russia which favoured rapprochement with Germany, then only consolidation of the Pact would ensure that the Litvinov-policy remained dominant.

In November 1937, Delbos told the American Ambassador, William Bullitt, that "he doubted the wisdom of abandoning the Soviet Union at this moment as he still feared greatly that Germany and the Soviet Union would come to an immediate agreement if France should abandon Russia altogether" (76). This attitude was based on the erroneous assumption which persisted throughout this period that the mere existence of a mutual assistance pact with France, devoid of any military content, would be sufficient to prevent a return to Rapallo if such a policy were in Russia's interests. In April 1938, for example, a Departmental note at the Quai d'Orsay claimed that "l'existence du pacte franco-soviétique a précisément servi de frein jusqu'ici à ce courant germanophile" (77). It is even now difficult to ascertain the full extent of Soviet-German negotiations during the 1930's, but it seems certain that a measure of contact was maintained throughout. During the ten years of the Rapallo era the Russians had not only established strong links with the Reichswehr, but had also received much valuable military and technical aid, and the loss of this assistance was undoubtedly felt severely. The Soviet hope was that France should become a

replacement while at the same time, fully aware of the very real danger posed by Nazi Germany's expansionist aims, the Soviet government sought to reinforce her own security by a policy of collaboration with the western democracies, and in particular with France. As early as April 1937, Paul Reynaud had justified his advocacy of a military agreement by warning that "il ne servirait de rien aux hommes légers qui raisonnent avec leurs nerfs de verser des larmes de sang le jour où la Russie tomerait d'accord avec l'Allemagne, ce qui n'est pas péril imaginaire" (78). Indeed, once it became fully apparent that the policy of rapprochement with France held little practical value, either in political or military terms, the Soviet Union returned to the very policy which the Pact had been designed to avoid, but which she had carefully maintained as an alternative throughout : that of alliance with Nazi Germany.

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CHAPTER 12

CONCLUSION : THE POPULAR FRONT AND THE FRANCO-SOVIET PACT

In its relations with the USSR, the Popular Front was subjected to considerable outside pressure, often implied rather than explicit, which undermined any attempts which might have been made to consolidate the Franco-Soviet Pact. It emerged from the Blum government's declaration on foreign policy in June 1936 that policy towards the Soviet Union would be developed within the framework of France's other alliances, and so the views of Great Britain, Belgium, Poland and the countries of the Little Entente, as well as those of the potential enemy, Germany, would naturally have been taken into consideration when policy towards the Soviet Union was being formulated. At the same time the government found itself obstructed by its own General Staff, who advised against further development of the Pact. It is not, however, sufficient merely to accept these factors, influential though they were, as an explanation of the deterioration in France's relations with the USSR : it is necessary first to examine how far the Popular Front governments attempted to overcome these objections, and thus to ascertain whether there was, among the Popular Front itself, any real will to animate the Franco-Soviet Pact.

To some extent it is difficult to speak of a "Popular Front foreign policy", since policy obviously fluctuated in many respects as the political composition of the governing coalition shifted towards the right after the fall of the first Blum government. There was, however, considerable continuity in personnel, particularly in the Foreign and Defence Ministries. Yvon Delbos, who became Foreign Minister in June



1936 under Leon Blum, retained the post during the two Chautemps Ministries until he was replaced by the Independent Socialist, Paul-Boncour, in the second Blum administration of March 1938; Edouard Daladier remained as Minister of National Defence and War until he succeeded Blum as Premier in April 1938; Pierre Cot persisted at the Air Ministry until January 1938, when he was replaced in the second Chautemps government by Guy la Chambre. The most significant changes in personnel were the loss of Léon Blum from the head of the government returning after his fall in June 1937 only to preside for one month during the Austrian crisis of March 1938; the promotion of Chautemps who, from Minister of State in the first Blum government, rose to hold the office of President du Conseil between June 1937 and March 1938; and the growing influence of Georges Bonnet, who was brought back from his virtual exile under Blum as Ambassador to the U.S.A. to serve as Chautemps' Finance Minister in June 1937 and then, in April 1938, Daladier's Foreign Minister, a position he retained until September 1939. It is therefore in an examination of these key figures that the development of any overall "Popular Front foreign policy" is likely to emerge.

In their attitude to the USSR, Pierre Cot and, to a lesser extent, Blum and Delbos, were initially the most sympathetic. Blum was ever-anxious to stress in public that France would always maintain the Pact: speaking to the Chamber on December 5th he defended his government's policy unequivocally saying "nous avons...entretenu dans sa réalité et dans sa vérité ce pacte franco-soviétique...dont nous ne rougissons pas et dont personne ici, pas même ses adversaires, ne supporterait, j'imagine, qu'une pression étrangère quelconque prétendît nous imposer l'abandon" (1). And yet, only three days earlier, Blum had told

Philip Jordan of the 'News Chronicle' that "he wished to see it preserved, but not to grow teeth " (2), and in February 1937 the British Ambassador reported that "while M.Blum undoubtedly regards France as bound by the Franco-Soviet Pact he has, as far as it is possible to ascertain, shown himself up to the present opposed to the idea of military conversations with the Soviet Union" (3). In fact, Blum had already agreed to the initiation of military talks in November which suggests that while these comments might have reflected his personal feelings, he was nevertheless prepared to make some positive response to Soviet pressure. His subsequent readiness to abandon the attempt as a result of Benes' warning about the possibility of secret Soviet-German military contacts, was almost certainly the result of his personal misgivings about the morality of military alliances which he had managed to overcome only superficially in response to the growth of the Hitlerite menace.

Yvon Delbos, although deeply committed to the cause of peace, does not seem to have been troubled by such doubts to the same extent as Blum. For him, the most important obstacle preventing consolidation of the Pact was the Soviet Union's continued interference in French domestic affairs. Indeed, this issue contributed substantially to his deteriorating relationship with Maxim Litvinov. Signs of strain were already evident in October 1936 when Litvinov requested to meet Blum at Geneva without Delbos being present, a move which was attributed by the 2e bureau to differences in policy over Spain, Ethiopia and Danzig : "d'ailleurs, M.Delbos ne cache pas son peu d'enthousiasme pour les Soviets" (4). But it was not until early 1938, following Delbos' tour of Central and Eastern Europe from which Moscow was excluded, that the mutual bitterness emerged fully. Meeting at Geneva in January, Litvinov

handed Delbos a list of complaints about French policy, Delbos denied that he had told Beck in Warsaw that the Franco-Soviet Pact was unpopular in France and that it had lost much of its value, as Litvinov claimed, and he denied on Chautemps' behalf a statement attributed to the Premier while in London that a reinforcement of the Franco-British entente would permit a relaxation in the links between Paris and Moscow. In addition, Delbos underlined that France had always refused to modify her policy as expressed by the Franco-Soviet Pact, and had made no diplomatic demarches likely to influence it without first informing the Soviet government and gaining its approval.

Delbos then listed his own complaints. He was angered, he said, by the recent virulent attacks on French policy made by Molotov and Zhdanov, and remained dissatisfied with Litvinov's reply that Zhdanov was not a member of the government, since he was, after all, the head of the Foreign Affairs Committee, and his assertion that Molotov had made no such comments, upon which Delbos produced the text of Molotov's speech. In addition, Delbos pointed out that while in France it was the opposition press who attacked the Soviet government, in Russia it was the official press who attacked France. His major complaint, however, concerned the activities of the French Communist Party. Refusing to accept Litvinov's juridicial distinctions between the Comintern and the Soviet government, Delbos insisted that when the Communist Party attacked the French government, provoked social agitation and called on its militants to make violent demonstrations against members of the government, it was acting, under the influence of Moscow, in direct contravention of the spirit of the Franco-Soviet Pact, and in so doing seriously damaging the chances of improved relations.

Litvinov, for his part, continued to insist that the Soviet government had no control over the activities of foreign communist parties, and to lament that the general tone of the French press, of Parliamentary debates, and sometimes even the declarations of French Ministers "ne donnent point l'impression que les relations entre les deux pays soient telles qu'elles devraient résulter du Pacte d'assistance mutuelle que ces pays ont conclu". He also, perhaps surprisingly, claimed that the Soviet government had never pressurised the French government for the conclusion of a military accord, as the French press claimed, and he asked that the French government take every available opportunity to deny this. Delbos agreed, but in his report of the meeting added in parentheses that "En réalité-mais je ne puis en faire état auprès de M.Litvinov-si le Gouvernement soviétique n'a rien demandé explicitement, son désir d'un renforcement militaire du pacte ne paraît pas douteux" (5).

This "highly acrimonious discussion" (6) is interesting in that it demonstrates the extent to which a fundamental and entirely mutual distrust still permeated Franco-Soviet relations. To some degree, both were justified in their complaints. The Soviets were understandably bitter that, in spite of the early promise by Laval that the conclusion of the Pact would soon be followed by the initiation of staff talks, the French government had failed to show any interest in the further consolidation of the Pact : thus, on 24th January 1938, Litvinov, in conversation with Luciani of the 'Temps', "took the opportunity to deliver a violent diatribe against M.Delbos, adding that if the French did not mend their ways, the Soviet government might well be driven into the arms of Germany" (7). Similarly, the validity of many of Delbos' complaints about the Soviet press, as well as the French

Communists, could hardly be denied. On 15th January, for example, 'Pravda' had attacked the policy of compromise pursued by the Chautemps Cabinet in foreign affairs, adding that "Lors de son récent voyage en Europe Centrale et dans les Balkans, M.Delbos s'est montré impuissant a rétablir le prestige de la France dans ces pays" (8). At the same time, 'L'Humanite' launched a violent attack on the Popular Front Foreign Minister. In particular it was critical of the government's devotion to England, arguing that "après la mésaventure du tour d'amitié, M.Delbos étant ministre, il nous est impossible, à moins de nous adresser au F.O., de savoir comment se définit la politique de la France" (9), and on January 13th it called on the government to provide a foreign minister "capable de pratiquer une politique extérieure démocratique" (10). When Delbos finally left the Foreign Ministry in March, 'L'Humanite' concluded that "son éviction salutaire est même très certainement le trait le plus heureux du gouvernement nouveaux" (11). As long as such attacks were permitted by Moscow then, as Delbos saw it, no further improvement in Franco-Soviet relations was possible : from the Russian point of view, such attacks would continue until there were signs of an improvement in Franco-Soviet relations.

In spite of this belief, however, Delbos clearly never had any intention of renouncing the Pact, as Germany hoped. Like Blum, Delbos argued in the Chamber that campaigns against the Pact would have no effect since "c'est un pacte de paix auquel nous restons attachés et auquel les passions politiques ne sauraient enlever ni son caractère, ni sa valeur" (12), while at St.-Dizier on May 9th 1937, he pleased the Soviet press immensely by explaining that he "yielded to no-one in rendering homage to the desire for peace of the Soviet Union. No-

one was more determined than he to respect the Franco-Soviet Pact, and to preserve its significance" (13). Similarly, in a rare moment of accord, Delbos and Litvinov issued a joint communique on the 18th May which stated that they had "réaffirmé leur fidélité au pacte qui unit les deux pays et leur volonté de poursuivre dans le cadre de la Société des Nations une loyale politique de collaboration internationale" (14). Delbos was, however, unwilling to develop the Pact, and was thought to be opposed to even the limited negotiations initiated by Blum (15). Indeed, Coulondre later recalled that Delbos never regarded France's relations with the USSR "avec une particulière chaleur" (16), and certainly, the remarkable speed with which he accepted British criticisms of military contacts with the Russians, does not suggest any personal inclination in favour of consolidating the Soviet Pact. It is difficult to ascertain whether Delbos would have been fully prepared to develop the Pact even had the Soviets been willing to abandon the Comintern, but it remains clear that as long as he detected the hand of Moscow in the activities of the French Communist Party, then the Popular Front Foreign Minister would continue to oppose the extension of the Pact.

Pierre Cot seems to have been totally untroubled by such considerations. Throughout his term of office at the Air Ministry Cot made every attempt to promote the Soviet Pact, urging the government to open military talks and trying to facilitate an exchange of information and material, but in so doing he incurred considerable hostility and criticism not only for the opposition, but also from many of his Cabinet colleagues. Indeed, when forming his Ministry in June 1937 Cot's fellow-Radical, Camille Chautemps, attempted to exclude him from the government altogether, and was only prevented from doing so as a

result of a threat by the Socialist Ministers to withdraw their support if Cot were not retained at the Air Ministry (17). Moreover, Cot's attempts to establish contacts with the Russians were often thwarted by party colleagues, and in particular by Daladier. At a meeting of the Comité permanent de la Défense Nationale in June 1936 Cot asked that talks with the Soviets be opened and that a mission be sent to the Russian manoeuvres : Daladier dismissed the suggestion(18) Similarly, Daladier opposed Cot's plan in October to hold a conference which would announce the initiation of airforce conversations, saying that this was a question which the government must settle first (19). Then, in January 1937, Cot asked Daladier to send to Moscow Colonel Mendras and a French airman in order to establish contacts, but Daladier refused (20). Pierre Cot's enthusiastic pursuit of the Soviet connection was hardly sufficient in itself to overcome such obstructions from within his own government.

As Minister of National Defence Daladier exercised overall control over the three Defence Ministries, and as such, his attitude towards the Soviet alliance was crucial. Having hesitated even to send a mission to the Soviet manoeuvres, he fully approved Schweisguth's interpretation of Soviet motives as well as military strength, and in October 1936 advised Delbos that "dans les circonstances actuelles, ces conversations d'Etat-Major, susceptibles d'alarmer certaines puissances amies et de fournir à l'Allemagne le prétexte facile d'une tentative d'encerclement, présenteraient à mon sens de graves inconvénients, dont vous êtes mieux à même que moi d'apprécier la portée" (21). It has been said that Daladier was considerably influenced in this respect by the anti-Soviet American Ambassador, Bullitt (22), as well as by the French General Staff (23), who

persuaded him that Russia could not take any offensive action to help Czechoslovakia (24); in addition, he seems to have become increasingly dominated by anti-bolshevism. Having led his party into the Popular Front Daladier moved steadily towards the right in domestic politics until in March 1938 he refused to join Blum's second ministry if it were to include the communists (25). Once Daladier was himself Premier, leading a government in which neither the Communists nor the Socialists participated, his relationship with the PCF deteriorated alarmingly, as the Communists increasingly attacked his government's domestic and foreign policy, while Daladier accused them in return of warmongering and of causing social unrest (26). Although in retrospect Daladier claimed that an attempt should have been made to solve the question of Soviet intervention at the time of Rambouillet, there is every indication that, largely as a result of his own growing anti-communism, he himself would have opposed such a move.

When visiting France in July 1937, King Carol of Roumania gained the impression that the new Chautemps government was inclined to relax France's ties with the USSR (27). Chautemps himself was more explicit when, in conversation with Bullitt in December, he explained that "he would be quite ready to give the Germans all the assurances possible that France would never make a military alliance with the Soviet Union directed against Germany, or indulge in military conversations with the Soviet Union, and he would tell them frankly his own highly unfavourable opinion of the Soviet Union and Bolshevism, but he could not formally abandon the treaty of mutual assistance with the Soviet Union" (28). That Chautemps' own views on the USSR were dominated by his attitude towards the French Communist Party was clear from his definition of "National Government" during the ministerial crisis of



early 1938. Chautemps explained that he would insist on the exclusion of the communists from any government which he might form, since "they would report every conversation to Stalin" : the Socialists would consequently refuse to participate and, in the absence of any working-class representatives, the government would be constantly menaced by strikes if it did not follow a policy approved in Moscow. He added that "Chamberlain had telephoned him that Paul Reynaud's statement that he, Chamberlain, favoured the inclusion of a Communist in the French Government and military conversations between the French and Russian General Staffs was the exact contrary of the truth".

Chautemps continued that if Blum were to form a government, on the other hand, he would insist on the inclusion of the communists, and so the Centre and Right would refuse to join, thus making the government unworkable. The third alternative was that Herriot could form a government without actual communist participation, since the communists' faith in Herriot was such that they believed he would carry out their policy without a party member being included in the government : the danger of this alternative was that the communists would demand the immediate inauguration of military talks and public military support for the Spanish government which, Chautemps feared, would lead to a declaration of war by Germany (29). Thus Chautemps' attitude to the USSR was representative of that of many French politicians and military leaders in the period, as well as large sectors of the public, in that it was influenced not by any adverse assessment of the value of the Soviet military nor solely by fear of antagonising France's allies, as is often claimed, but predominantly by the belief that the French Communists, acting on orders from Moscow, were creating social unrest in an attempt to undermine the

French nation, and thus lead her into war with Germany.

Pierre Cot claims in his memoirs that Bonnet destroyed the Franco-Soviet Pact by his negotiations with Von Ribbentrop in the winter of 1938 (30). In this, Cot is optimistically attributing some of his own unwavering support for the Soviet connection to his colleagues in the French government, possibly because he was writing in America at a time when many former Popular Front leaders stood accused of causing the fall of France, at the Riom trial under Vichy. For although it was not until Bonnet became dominant in foreign affairs that France had a leader openly devoted to the policy of appeasement at any cost, including the abandonment of the Franco-Soviet Pact, it had already become evident that the Popular Front had no real intention of expanding the Pact. Under the terms of the text itself, the Pact would not technically have lapsed until early 1941, but it is unlikely that anyone seriously regarded the Pact as having any value at all after the Czechoslovak crisis of September 1938. Certainly, during the tripartite Franco-British-Russian negotiations of spring 1939, which might at first sight appear to represent the culmination of the Franco-Soviet rapprochement of the preceding five years, the Franco-Soviet Pact played no significant role. The negotiations were undertaken in entirely new circumstances following the German occupation of Czechoslovakia in March, not least of which was a direct reversal in positions : France and Great Britain now pursued a reluctant Russia. Moreover, by this time the decisive shift in Soviet policy had already been signalled with the announcement, on May 3rd, of the removal of Litvinov, who had so long worked to make Franco-Soviet rapprochement an effective reality.

That France could wait until May 1939 before initiating talks with the Russians only underlines the weakness of the Popular Front in failing to develop the Soviet alliance during the three years when the Russians would undoubtedly have responded favourably to any French demarche. Indeed, had the government been truly committed to such an undertaking, to the same degree as Pierre Cot or Paul Reynaud, than it might have been possible to overcome the many obstacles. Moreover, a reinforcement of the Pact would almost certainly, by virtue of the very association between the French Communist Party and the Soviet government of which successive French governments complained, have ensured the Communists' loyal support for the Popular Front. Indeed, apart from sporadic attacks on the government's Spanish policy, which even then did not result in an adverse vote, the Communists continued to support the governments of the Popular Front, in spite of increasingly reactionary domestic policies, until it became clear that the Soviet Pact was being disregarded by all of them. In the same way, the Communists attacked only those politicians whom it saw as responsible for the disintegration of the Pact, such as Chautemps, Daladier and ultimately, Delbos, while unreservedly praising men of the political right and centre such as Herriot and Reynaud. Similarly, fortification of the Pact might have improved, rather than further undermined, France's international standing since in so doing she would have needed to assert her independence from Great Britain, to whom she in effect abdicated control over much of her foreign policy, while at the same time recovering some of the prestige which she had lost in the eyes of her smaller allies as a result of the Rhineland coup, by reasserting her position as the champion of democracy in the struggle to prevent the spread of fascism.

In this way, the Popular Front's failure to animate the Pact is vitally

important in an understanding of the whole of French foreign policy during the later 1930's, since it reflects closely the French attitude towards Germany, and in particular the unwillingness of the western democracies to recognise that Hitler's aggression could be stopped only by force. The first Blum government was initially more inclined to adopt a bold policy towards Germany than its successors or its counterpart in Great Britain, showing itself willing to offer concessions but only in return for global discussions, and in doing so showed that it was prepared to overcome its own instinctive revulsion from fascism : but it had neither the will, nor the real ability, to complement such a policy successfully by strengthening the Pact with Russia. We cannot know for certain whether the conclusion of a Franco-Soviet military accord would have provoked Germany to declare war, as was feared, or if it would have deterred Hitler in his plans of aggression, but it was already clear by June 1936 that Hitler did not regard the Pact as a serious threat; rather he saw it as a convenient pretext for his denunciation of Locarno. Moreover, it was argued that Germany might use any news of Franco-Soviet military talks as a pretext to withdraw from the Five-Power Conference, or as a justification for further acts of aggression in Europe : no Franco-Soviet military accord was in fact signed, but the negotiations for a "new Locarno" and arms limitation agreement were still unsuccessful, and Germany proceeded with her aggression against Austria and Czechoslovakia regardless. Finally, though it might have helped to postpone it, the Pact failed to prevent a return to Rapallo, as had been intended. The Popular Front government, compromised from the beginning by its relations with the Communist Party, and torn between its fear of losing its allies, and fear of Soviet-German rapprochement, would not abandon the Pact, but would not extend it as the Russians wished.

As a result it did nothing, and the Franco-Soviet Pact under the Popular Front rapidly lost the little value it had ever had.

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- 1) J. O., Ch., Debate, 12th January 1936, p. 11
- 2) J. O., Ch., Debate, 13th January 1936, p. 11
- 3) J. O., Ch., Debate, 14th March, 1936
- 4) J. O., Ch., Debate, 15th March, 1936
- 5) J. O., Ch., Debate, 16th March, 1936
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- 7) J. O., Ch., Debate, 18th March, 1936
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- 9) J. O., Ch., Debate, 20th March, 1936
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- 11) J. O., Ch., Debate, 22nd March, 1936
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- 16) J. O., Ch., Debate, 27th March, 1936
- 17) J. O., Ch., Debate, 28th March, 1936
- 18) J. O., Ch., Debate, 29th March, 1936
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- 20) J. O., Ch., Debate, 31st March, 1936
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- 28) J. O., Ch., Debate, 8th April, 1936
- 29) J. O., Ch., Debate, 9th April, 1936
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- 9) L'Humanite, 12th January 1938
- 10) Ibid., 13th January 1938
- 11) Ibid., 14th March, 1938
- 12) J.O., Ch., Debats : December 5th 1936 p.11
- 13) FO 371/20685, C3494/18/17
- 14) DDF, 2e, VI, no.64
- 15) FO 371/19880, C7262/92/62
- 16) Coulondre, op.cit., p.135
- 17) FO 371/20684, C4778/18/17
- 18) Schweisguth, 351/AP3/9 : Memento, 27th June 1936
- 19) Ibid, 351/AP3/10 : Memento, 27th October 1936
- 20) Ibid., 351/AP3/11 : Memento, 25 January 1937
- 21) EMA/2e, 7N 3143 : Daladier to Delbos, 13th October 1936
- 22) Farnsworth, op.cit., p.154
- 23) Girault, op.cit., p.423
- 24) FRUS, 1938 Vol.I, pp.493-5
- 25) FO 371/21598, C1660/55/17
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- 27) FO 371/21184, R5076/16/37
- 28) FRUS, 1937 Vol.I. pp.186-8
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APPENDIX I

1. FRANCO-SOVIET PACT OF MUTUAL ASSISTANCE

Le Président de la République Française et le Comité Central Exécutif de l'Union des Républiques Soviétiques Socialistes,

Animés du désir d'affermir la paix en Europe et d'en garantir les bienfaits à leurs pays respectifs en assurant plus complètement l'exacte application des dispositions du Pacte de la Société des Nations visant à maintenir la sécurité nationale, l'intégrité territoriale et l'indépendance politique des Etats,

Décidés à consacrer leurs efforts à la préparation et à la conclusion d'un accord européen ayant cet objet, et, en attendant, à contribuer, autant qu'il dépend d'eux, à l'application efficace des dispositions du Pacte de la Société des Nations,

Ont résolu de conclure un Traité à cet effet et ont désigné pour leurs Plénipotentiaires, savoir:

Le Président de la République Française:  
M. Pierre Laval, Sénateur, Ministre des Affaires Etrangères.  
Le Comité Central Exécutif de l'Union des Républiques  
Soviétiques Socialistes:  
M. Vladimir Potemkine, Membre du Comité Central Exécutif,  
Ambassadeur extraordinaire et plénipotentiaire de l'Union  
des Républiques Soviétiques Socialistes près le Président  
de la République Française.

Lesquels, après avoir échangé leurs pleins pouvoirs reconnus en bonne et du forme, sont convenus des dispositions suivantes:

Article premier

Au cas où la France ou l'U.R.S.S. serait l'objet d'une menace ou d'un danger d'agression de la part d'un Etat Européen, l'U.R.S.S. et réciproquement la France s'engagent à procéder mutuellement à une consultation immédiate en vue des mesures à prendre pour l'observation des dispositions de l'article 10 du Pacte de la Société des Nations.

Article 2

Au cas où, dans les conditions prévus à l'article 15, paragraphe 7, du Pacte de la Société des Nations, la France ou l'U.R.S.S. serait, malgré les intentions sincèrement pacifiques des deux pays, l'objet d'une agression non provoquée de la part d'un Etat européen, l'U.R.S.S. et réciproquement la France se prêteront immédiatement aide et assistance.

Article 3

Prenant en considération que, d'après l'article 16 du Pacte de

la Société des Nations, tout Membre de la Société qui recourt à la guerre contrairement aux engagements pris aux articles 12, 13 ou 15 du Pacte est ipso facto considéré comme ayant commis un acte de guerre contre tous les autres membres de la Société, la France et réciproquement l'U.R.S.S. s'engagent, au cas où l'une d'elles serait, dans ses conditions et malgré les intentions sincèrement pacifiques des deux pays, l'objet d'une agression non provoquée de la part d'un Etat européen, à se prêter immédiatement aide et assistance en agissant par l'application de l'article 16 du Pacte.

La même obligation est assumée pour le cas où la France ou l'U.R.S.S. serait l'objet d'une agression de la part d'un Etat européen dans les conditions prévus à l'article 17, paragraphes 1 et 3, du Pacte de la Société des Nations.

#### Article 4

les engagements ci-dessus stipulés étant conformés aux obligations des Hautes Parties Contractantes en tant que Membres de la Société des Nations, rien dans le présent traité ne sera interprété comme restreignant la mission de celle-ci de prendre les mesures propres à sauvegarder efficacement la paix du monde ou comme restreignant les obligations découlant pour les Hautes Parties Contractantes du Pacte de la Société des Nations.

#### Article 5

Le présent traité, dont les textes français et russe feront également foi, sera ratifié et les instruments de ratification seront échangés à Moscou aussitôt que faire se pourra. Il sera enregistré au Secrétariat de la Société des Nations.

Il prendra effet dès l'échange des ratifications et restera en vigueur pendant cinq ans. S'il n'est pas dénoncé par une des Hautes Parties Contractantes avec un préavis d'un an au moins avant l'expiration de cette période, il restera en vigueur sans limitation de durée, chacune des Hautes Parties Contractantes pouvant alors y mettre fin par une déclaration à cet effet avec préavis d'un an.

En foi de quoi, les Plénipotentiaires ont signé le présent Traité et y ont apposé leurs sceaux.

Fait à Paris, en double expédition le 2 mai 1935.

(L.S.) (Signé) Pierre LAVAL.  
(L.S.) (Signé) V. POTEMKINE.

## 2. PROTOCOLE DE SIGNATURE

Au moment de procéder à la signature du Traité d'assistance

mutuelle franco-soviétique en date de ce jour, les Plénipotentiaires ont signé le Protocole suivant qui sera compris dans l'échange des ratifications du Traité.

I

Il est entendu que l'effet de l'article 3 est obliger chaque Partie Contractante à prêter immédiatement assistance à l'autre en se conformant immédiatement aux recommandations du Conseil de la Société des Nations, aussitôt qu'elles auront été énoncées en vertu de l'article 16 du Pacte. Il est également entendu que les deux Parties Contractantes agiront de concert pour obtenir que le Conseil énonce ses recommandations avec toute la rapidité qu'exigeront les circonstances et que, si néanmoins le Conseil, pour une raison quelconque, n'énonce aucune recommandation ou s'il n'arrive pas à un vote unanime, l'obligation d'assistance n'en recevra pas moins l'application. Il est également entendu que les engagements d'assistance prévus dans le présent Traité ne visent que le cas d'une agression effectuée contre le territoire propre de l'une ou de l'autre Partie Contractante.

II

L'intention commune des deux Gouvernements étant de ne contredire en rien, par le présent Traité, les engagements précédemment assumés envers des Etats tiers par la France et par l'U.R.S.S. en vertu de traités publiés, il est entendu que les dispositions dudit Traité ne pourront pas recevoir une application qui, étant incompatible avec des obligations conventionnelles assumées par une Partie Contractante, exposerait celle-ci à des sanctions de caractère international.

III

Les deux Gouvernements, estimant désirable la conclusion d'un accord régional qui tendrait à organiser la sécurité entre Etats contractants et qui pourrait comporter ou que pourraient accompagner d'autre part des engagements d'assistance mutuelle, se reconnaissent la faculté de participer, de leur consentement mutuel, le cas échéant, à de semblables accords dans telle forme, directe ou indirecte, qui paraîtrait appropriée, les engagements de ces divers accords devant se substituer à ceux résultant du présent Traité.

IV

Les deux Gouvernements constatent que les négociations qui viennent d'avoir pour résultat la signature du présent Traité ont été engagées, à l'origine, en vue de compléter un accord de sécurité englobant les pays du nord-est de l'Europe, à savoir l'Union des républiques soviétiques socialistes, l'Allemagne, la Tchécoslavie, la Pologne et les Etats baltes voisins de l'Union des républiques soviétiques socialistes; à côté de cet accord devait être conclu un Traité d'assistance entre l'Union des républiques soviétiques socialistes, la France et l'Allemagne, chacun de ces trois Etats devant s'engager à prêter assistance à celui d'entre eux qui serait l'objet d'une agression de la part de l'un de ces trois Etats. Bien que les circonstances n'aient pas jusqu'ici permis la conclusion de ces accords, que les deux parties continuent à considérer comme désirable, il n'en reste pas moins que les engagements énoncés dans le Traité

d'assistance franco-soviétique doivent être entendus comme ne devant jouer que dans les limites envisagées dans l'accord tripartite antérieurement projeté. Indépendamment des obligations découlant du présent Traité, il est rappelé en même temps que, conformément au Pacte franco-soviétique de non-agression signé le 29 novembre 1932 et sans porter par ailleurs atteinte à l'universalité des engagements de ce Pacte, au cas où l'une des deux Parties deviendrait l'objet d'une agression de la part d'une ou de plusieurs tierces puissances européennes non visées dans l'accord tripartite ci-dessus mentionné, l'autre Partie contractante devra s'abstenir, pendant la durée du conflit, de toute aide ou assistance directe ou indirecte à l'agresseur ou aux agresseurs, chaque Partie déclarant d'ailleurs n'être liée par aucun accord d'assistance qui se trouverait en contradiction avec cet engagement.

Fait à Paris, le 2 mai 1935

(Signé) Pierre LAVAL  
(Signé) V. POTEKINE



APPENDIX II

Votes cast in Chamber of Deputies, 27th February 1936:  
ratification of the Franco-Soviet Pact

<u>Party</u>	<u>Votes</u>		
	<u>For</u>	<u>Against</u>	<u>Total</u>
Communist	12	0	12
Groupe d'unité ouvrière	5	0	5
S.F.I.O.	118	0	118
Union socialiste et républicaine	9	0	9
Parti socialist français	4	0	4
Républicain socialiste	20	0	20
Républicain radical et Radical socialiste	40	2	42
Radical socialiste	99	2	101
Radical indépendant	0	4	4
Indépendant de gauche	9	4	13
Gauche radicale	6	12	18
Gauche démocratique	2	2	4
Alliance démocratique	16	32	48
Démocrates populaires	3	7	10
Union républicaine et démocratique	3	27	30
Centre républicain	0	24	24
Fédération républicaine	1	20	21
Indépendant	3	15	18
Non-inscrit	3	13	16
All parties	353	164	517

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APPENDIX IV

Possible action by Soviet airforce in the event of conflict with Germany

f. From Russian Airbases



Fig. 1

Aircraft with range of 800 kilometres operating from Russian airbases.

----- from Minsk.  
———— from Jitomir.



Fig. 2

Aircraft with range of 1,000 kilometres from Russian airbases  
----- from Minsk      ——— from Jitomir

2. From Polish airbases

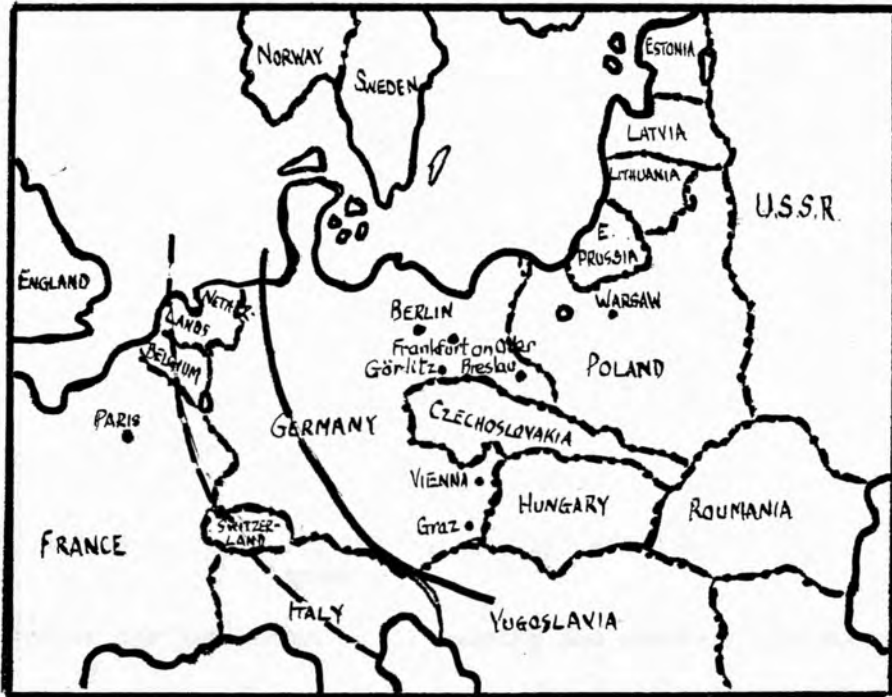


Fig. 3

Aircraft with range of 800 and 1,000 kilometres operating from Polish airbases.

--- range of 1,000 kilometres

— range of 800 kilometres

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