

# THOSE NAZI-SOVIET DOCUMENTS

**T**HE "Battle of the Documents" now raging between the United States and the USSR sounds like the old nursery-rhyme controversy as to "Who Killed Cock Robin?" Who made it possible for Hitler to precipitate the Second World War?

Was it Stalin, by signing a non-aggression pact with Germany and safeguarding Russia's interests in the Baltic states and Poland "in the event of a territorial and political rearrangement" in these areas? Was it Chamberlain and Daladier? Was it Roosevelt, by failing to throw the weight of the United States against German plans for expansion before and after Munich? In the midst of this debate, there is great danger we shall forget that, after all, it was Germany which started the conflagration.

Whatever may be the final verdict of future historians, their task will hardly be eased by the current tendency of the pot to call the kettle black. Publication by the United States of a volume of Nazi documents covering the years 1939-41, which not only some American commentators but also British Foreign Secretary Bevin have criticized as being "out of context," was bound to be answered by Russia's threat to publish German documents on negotiations between the Western powers and Hitler from 1933 to 1939. From the historian's point of view, what is needed is not piecemeal publication by this or that great power of documents that happen to implement its particular case, but an objective and complete presentation of international developments in the inter-war years.

**Skeletons, arise!** If Washington's decision to publish the Nazi documents was determined by propaganda purposes, it must be admitted that this form of propaganda has proved both a dud and a boomerang. It is a dud in Europe, for the Europeans were well aware in 1939 not only of the German-Russian pact, but also of Munich and its grim aftermath. Our publication of the documents is also a boomerang,

by Vera Micheles Dean

because it gives the Kremlin a welcome opportunity to bring skeletons of pre-war Western diplomacy out of its closets. But these skeletons, too, are quite familiar to Europeans.

Now what do all these blasts and counter-blasts add up to? The case made against Russia by a number of American observers is that Stalin's acceptance of the German non-aggression pact constituted a betrayal of the West, and that Russia precipitated World War II. It has also been said, with hindsight, that had Stalin been really shrewd, he would have joined the Western powers and ensured Germany's defeat.

It would be difficult to demonstrate, however, that under the circumstances existing in the summer of 1939 Russia owed anything to the West, which had clearly indicated at Munich that it felt under no obligation to safeguard either Eastern Europe or Russia. It is difficult to believe that Russia, by mere inaction, would have prevented Germany's expansion, long planned by Hitler and proclaimed by him in advance to the world. Inaction on the part of Britain, France and the United States did not prevent Hitler from seizing the Sudetenland, Austria and Bohemia and Moravia.

**The facts.** Critics of Russia's actions in 1939-41 are on stronger ground in saying that, even if Russia was unable or unwilling to join issue with Germany over Poland, she should have remained aloof and abstained from sharing in the territorial changes in Eastern Europe. Few responsible non-Soviet commentators would undertake to justify the dissolution and partition of the Polish state or the forcible incorporation of the Baltic countries into the USSR. In view of Hitler's previous record, however, which had gone unchallenged by the Western powers, it seems more than probable that, had Russia abstained, Germany would have simply occupied all of

Poland, as well as the Baltic states, and used Finland as a springboard for her ultimate attack on Russia.

The Western critics need to demonstrate that Britain, France and the United States were not only willing, but militarily able, in 1939, to give immediate aid to Russia from the West, though even when the United States entered World War II in 1941, it took two years to open a second front in Europe. The Western powers would also have to demonstrate that, in 1939, they had cooperated in creating a real system of collective security on which Russia could rely.

**Good case.** With respect to the non-existence of a system of collective security Russia has a strong case against the Western powers, and had Soviet spokesmen been astute, they would have built Russia's retort to the United States entirely around this point. It is a matter of record that the Soviet government, both in the Disarmament Conference, 1932-34, and in the League of Nations, which Russia entered in 1934 following the departure of Germany (with the United States still absent), unremittingly urged collective action without aggression; and that civil war in Spain, Italy's invasion of Ethiopia and Japan's conquest of Manchuria brought from the Western powers either protestations of neutrality or exhortations unsupported by concrete action.

Where Russia is on weak ground in her criticism of the Western powers is when she blames the United States for financial aid to Hitler. It is true that private American loans to German undertakings of various kinds materially aided the rapid recovery of Germany, and that this recovery facilitated eventual German rearmament under Hitler—but, as the Soviet declaration of February 9 itself states, these loans were granted for the most part in the period 1924-29, before Hitler had appeared on the scene. The historian of the future, however, will

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grace and a sly, dance-hall humor, she controls the play from beginning to end. She is hard, foolish, sensual, glib, defeated, as the play demands, moving from one emotion to another with absolute confidence and certainty. The theater may have found a magnificent new star on Bleecker Street.

Mary Hunter has directed the play, in its simple, stylized setting, with precise violence, getting excellent performances out of all but one of the cast.

Among the actors, John Marriott, as the hunted Negro, admirably solved the problems presented by a character

who had to be fearful, humble, honorable and conquered in the short space of a few small scenes. Only Kar Weber, as the Senator's son, seemed oratorical and stiff.

**Inferior companion.** To go with Sartre's play, there is "Church Street," a fantasy of Irish middle-class life by Lennox Robinson. It is a lame little play, not up to the Irish playwright's other work, and it is miserably presented. A search should be instituted immediately for a more fitting companion piece to "The Respectful Prostitute."

IRWIN SHAW

**Those Captured Nazi Documents**

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want to know a good deal more than has yet been published about attempts of the Western powers to placate Hitler, and to bargain with him about political and economic arrangements.

**Self-interest.** Neither the United States nor Russia can pride itself on having voluntarily entered World War II to save nations menaced or attacked by Hitler. Russia was drawn into the war only after she had been invaded by Germany. The United States, although already aiding Britain through lend-lease and other measures, became actively engaged in the war only after Pearl Harbor. The two great powers which have a good record on this score are Britain and France. It is, of course, true that Russia gained by her non-intervention in acquiring eastern Poland, the Baltic states, Bessarabia and certain areas of Finland—all of which had been part of the Czarist Empire for varying periods of time before 1917.

In weighing these Russian and American acts—or failures to act—it is essential to bear in mind that the world of 1939 was not an ordered world ruled by law, but a scene of vast confusion and conflict, where every power was out for itself and the devil take the hindmost. We should recall this prewar atmosphere now not for the

sake of further name-calling, but for the sake of trying to discover how we can create a more orderly international society, where the attitude of "dog-eat-dog" might be replaced by concern on the part of each nation for the welfare and security of all.

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**William's Ghost**

Drama critic Percy Allen reported today that he had contacted William Shakespeare, the Earl of Oxford and

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