look forward to a boom of major proportions. If it is unneutral to sell munitions to only one side, which it is, why isn’t it just as unneutral and dangerous to sell other supplies? To give an honest answer to these questions the Borah bloc would have to propose a far-reaching program of social and economic adjustment at home—heavy government spending to prime the home market, heavier taxation to pay the bill, and a period of rough going while that program was developed. Most of the neutrals—La Follette and a few others excepted—won’t do this. Unless they do, they will deserve defeat.

The easy out proposed by some isolationists, the out given a nod by the Administration in calling the Panama City conference—increased trade with the Americas to compensate for loss of European markets—is not good enough. South and Central American countries can pay for American manufactures only with agricultural raw materials and some metals. Except for coffee and bananas, most of these commodities are competitive, and American farmers will yowl if they are imported in quantity. Moreover, development of South American markets calls for big credits, and the very isolationists who talk loudest about pan-Americanism oppose such credit extensions.

The trend in Washington is like nothing so much as the gyrations of a squirrel in a revolving cage. Roosevelt’s sincerity when he says his primary objective is to keep the United States out of war is unquestionable. But his policy is almost precisely Wilson’s with the tempo accelerated. The Allies are to be sold everything we can sell them. Presently there will be a demand to implement the trade with credits. Temporary domestic prosperity results. There is talk at the White House of turning off the brain trust, fountainhead of liberal thought; the big men of business file in and out of the President’s study, now decorated with war maps; according to Secretary Early there will be no censorship of press and radio “yet”; the President himself talks about hunting down radicals; Attorney General Murphy appeals to citizens to spy on their neighbors. Take 1914, 1915, and 1916 calendars, tear a month off every hour, and you have Washington in 1939.

Chamberlain’s Russo-German Pact

BY I. F. STONE

A GLANCE back over the newspaper reports and news of the past two years may help to clarify current discussion of the Russo-German non-aggression consultation pact. One way to judge the pact is to recall the cries of “canard” that rose from the pro-Soviet press when the first hints began to appear that an agreement of this kind was a possibility. The Communists were not alone in rejecting these reports. All of us who felt that the Soviet Union was the core of the world front against fascism shared their indignation and contemptuous disbelief. If a non-aggression pact were indeed a way to “stiffen the democracies” and “prevent a Munich”—I quote some of the apologists-after-the-fact—it is odd that no anti-fascist met these early speculations by asking whether a Russo-German agreement might not be a feasible and clever maneuver. On the contrary the idea was dismissed as either the propaganda of reactionaries or the wishful thinking of oppositionists who felt—as we all did—that a pact of this kind would discredit the Soviet Union. All this may seem elementary. It is already being forgotten.

I have been able to find three stories by foreign correspondents during the year 1938 which speculated on the possibility of some kind of rapprochement between the U. S. S. R. and Nazi Germany. On May 28 William Bird cabled the New York Sun from Paris that too little attention had been paid to the resumption of normal diplomatic relations between the two countries. He said the return of von Schuleamburg to the German embassy at Moscow and the nomination of A. T. Merekalov as ambassador to Berlin “cannot be regarded as simple routine. There is no doubt that Russo-German relations have taken a new turning . . .” Bird felt that “the important thing for Germany is to get access to the wheat fields of the Ukraine; the important thing for Stalin is to have the German machine-shop at his disposal when war comes in the East. It is no accident that a specialist in steel is the new Soviet ambassador to Berlin.” This dispatch was discounted on the ground that the Sun is anti-Soviet. Similar reasons made it easy to brush aside a cable sent by H. R. Knickerbocker from Prague on June 18, 1938, to the Hearst-owned International News Service. Knickerbocker said there was a report that von Schuleamburg was trying to negotiate a pact with Stalin. He wrote that “on the surface” this was to be a new pact of non-aggression, but a non-aggression pact of such a nature as to cancel the Franco-Soviet pact. The agreement since signed exactly fits that description. Knickerbocker went on to say that both countries denied this report and that the Czechs regarded it as an attempt to frighten England into giving Germany a free hand.

September 23, 1939

313
with Czechoslovakia. "One odd feature of the projected plan in its present version," Knickerbocker declared, "is that Hitler is said to have laid down two conditions. First, that Maxim Litvinov must resign as Soviet Foreign Commissar; second, that Gregori Dimitrov, of Reichstag-fire-trial fame, be removed from the chairmanship of the Communist International." Knickerbocker seemed skeptical of his own story. "Acceptance by Stalin of the plan itself, much less its conditions, is believed in authoritative circles to be absolutely excluded."

The next hint came not from a Hearst correspondent but from Walter Duranty, who had come to be regarded as an unofficial spokesman for the Kremlin. In a cable from Paris to the New York Times on October 10, 1938, he said, "There remains a possibility—I do not say probability—which makes the present leaders of France and England sleep uneasily at nights, namely, a Russo-German rapprochement, cooperation instead of war." Duranty declared that when one got down to "brass tacks" the only obstacle to the policy of Russo-German collaboration Bismarck had always advocated was "Hitler's fanatical fury against what he calls 'Judeo-Bolshevism.'" There followed a sentence that was cynical and shocking: "But Hitler is not immortal and dictators can change their minds and Stalin has shot more Jews in two years of purge than were ever killed in Germany." Duranty said that should Hitler decline to imitate Napoleon and prefer the iron and coal of Alsace-Lorraine to the "distant riches" of the Donetz basin, "there is no reason to believe that Russia would refuse collaboration with Germany or shed tears over the ultimate fate of France and the British Empire." Was this a wink from Moscow to Berlin? Or was Duranty off on some queer tangent of his own? At the time the latter alone seemed a plausible explanation. Any unpleasant taste was removed a month later by Dimitrov's speech on the twenty-first anniversary of the revolution. Dimitrov did, indeed, warn against "the policy of warlike agreement between the fascist aggressors and England and France," but made no suggestion of rapprochement with Germany as a way out. "Nothing can be accomplished," he cried, "with mere pacific declarations [non-aggression pacts?]. Active opposition against armed fascism is necessary to show the mailed fist of the people."

But the "canards" did not end. The first of the current year came on January 19. On that day the New York Daily News ran a copyright cable dated from London but declaring that "in Berlin tonight" economic and military collaboration between Soviet Russia and Nazi Germany "was envisaged." The News is a tabloid. Tabloids are sensational. The owner of the News is anti-Soviet. Union Square read and chuckled. The News said the first step would be taken the following week at a conference between German and Russian representatives either in Stockholm or Copenhagen. It declared the new move had been initiated by the Führer himself when he "astounded diplomats at his New Year's reception" by singling out the Soviet ambassador for a prolonged private conversation. Hitler had asked an exchange of views, given assurances on the Ukraine. Stalin had consented. "Maxim Litvinov's failure to attend the meeting of the Council of the League of Nations at Geneva, it was learned, was due to his opposition to the Hitler proposal. Stalin, it was said, ordered his chief foreign adviser of years past to remain, literally a prisoner, in Moscow." Germany, the News said, was ready to abandon its tie with Tokyo; Russia, "deserted during the September crisis by Great Britain and France," was ready "to cement new alliances." This cable, with its "it is learned's" and "it is said's" seemed a typical example of what is known on a newspaper as "a dope story."

Soon there came hints from Moscow itself. On January 31 Pravda quoted without comment the London News-Chronicle's warning that it would be "extremely unwise to suppose that the existing discord between Moscow and Berlin will necessarily remain an unchangeable factor of international policy"; and the Associated Press correspondent in Moscow noted, "The fact that Pravda failed to reject indignantly the suggestion of a possible Soviet-German rapprochement increased its significance to foreign observers." On March 11 in his speech before the eighteenth All-Union Congress in Moscow, Stalin accused enemies of Russia of trying to foment war between the Soviet Union and Germany, and the Associated Press correspondent in Moscow voiced what many felt—that "in its emphasis upon a lack of any genuine basis for war between Germany and Russia, his speech sounded almost like a rapprochement between these two countries." To that correspondent the speech seemed "strikingly reminiscent" of Stalin's speech in 1934 before the seventeenth All-Union Congress, the year before the adoption of the Popular Front line. At that time Stalin said the real issue in so far as Russo-German relations were concerned was not the new fascist regime. "Naturally we are far from enthusiastic about that," he said, but Russia had enjoyed good relations with Italy despite fascism. The real issue, he declared, was the struggle within the Reich "between advocates of cooperation with Soviet Russia and opponents of that policy." Note that he said "cooperation" and not merely good relations. It is, in fact, "cooperation" with the U. S. S. R. that one wing of the Nazi Party, of the Reichswehr, and of German industry has always wanted.

Stalin's speech was made on March 11. German troops occupied Prague on March 15. March 15 was the Continental Divide of British policy. From that day on "appeasement" became overwhelmingly unpopular, and the demand in Britain for a Russian alliance rose in volume until it included even the London Times, the
Cliveden set, and the formerly pro-Nazi Observer. I think two conclusions are possible on the basis of what we now know, though we are far from knowing all that occurred. The first conclusion is that by March, 1938, the idea of a Russo-German agreement was not absolutely excluded by the Soviet Union, and by agreement I mean a non-aggression pact, even a non-aggression pact which would prevent the U. S. S. R. from entering the peace front against fascism that it had so long sought to erect. The second is that London needed no corps of spies in Berlin and Moscow to inform it that a Russo-German rapprochement of some kind was a possibility. On the contrary, if so much had appeared in the press, it is safe to assume that at least a little more was known to the British Intelligence Service and therefore to Chamberlain. If Chamberlain had shared the popular revulsion in Britain against Munichism, these scattered hints alone would have been sufficient to make him hasten negotiation of a pact with the Soviets.

But if one goes back day by day over the news reports, one finds strong reasons to suspect that Chamberlain, although he finally bowed before popular pressure, did not share the general reaction after Hitler took Bohemia and Moravia. Although the London Times called the invasion “a crude, brutal act of oppression and suppression” and there were bitter questions in the Commons on March 15, Chamberlain’s statement that day could hardly be described as fiery. “I have so often heard charges of a breach of faith bandied about,” he said, “which do not seem to me to be founded on sufficient premises. I do not wish to associate myself today with any charges of that character, but I am bound to say that I cannot believe anything of the kind that has taken place was contemplated by any of the signatories of the Munich agreement. . . . But, finally, do not let us be deflected from our course.” What did he mean by “our course”? “It was clear,” Ferdinand Kuhn, Jr., wrote in his dispatch to the New York Times, “that he intended to pursue his policy of ‘appeasement’ whether Germany gave him any encouragement or not.” On March 16 in the Commons Chamberlain was asked to tell the Führer that British indignation would be intensified if there were any attack “on the lives or liberties of leaders of the Czech people.” He replied, “I think it would be wrong to assume that the German government has any such intention.” When Lady Astor leaped to her feet and asked the Prime Minister to let the German government “know with what horror the whole of this country regards Germany’s action,” Chamberlain showed himself many degrees cooler than Cliveden. He made no reply. It was not until March 17 that the Prime Minister recalled Sir Nevile Henderson from Berlin “to report” and made the famous speech in Birmingham in which he protested that Germany had extinguished the liberties of a “proud, brave people” and asked, “If it is so easy to discover good reasons for ignoring assurances so solidly and repeatedly given, what reliance can be placed upon other assurances which come from the same place?” Chamberlain was referring, of course, to Hitler’s assurances, not to his own.

In itself this emotional lag on the part of Chamberlain might not be sufficient to support the conclusion that he still favored “appeasement.” Mr. Chamberlain’s nature shows little tendency toward the passionate. There are other indications that “appeasement” had not been abandoned. The day the German troops marched into Prague the Federation of British Industries announced that its delegates at Düsseldorf had concluded an agreement with its Nazi counterpart, the Reichsgruppe Industrie, for joint exploitation of export markets. The news provoked protest, but not until four days later did Halifax announce that the government approval necessary to make the agreement binding “had to be and must be indefinitely postponed.” Postponed, not abandoned. Two days afterward Chamberlain dropped a hint to the Reich that the postponement might not be too extended. He told the Commons, “There is no desire on the part of His Majesty’s Government to stand in the way of any reasonable efforts on the part of Germany to expand her export trade. On the contrary, we were on the point of discussing in the most friendly way the possibility of trade agreements which would have benefited both countries when the events took place which, for the time being at any rate, put a stop to these discussions.” The italics are mine. Nor were indications of a desire to “appease” absent in the hectic months which followed. In May, after Chamberlain had called the story a “mare’s nest,” the Commons learned that the Bank of England had indeed handed over five million pounds in Czech gold to the Reichsbank. In July the government first denied and then admitted that Robert S. Hudson, head of the Board of Trade, had tried to “appease” Germany with a billion-pound loan, and Hudson escaped with the mildest of rebukes. Chamberlain’s long delay in making clear that Danzig was included in his pledge to Poland must be regarded as significant: the pledge to Poland was made on March 31; Danzig was not specifically mentioned until July 10. The long haggle over the five-million-pound cash loan the Poles needed to buy rifles was hardly calculated to stiffen Polish resistance; the loan never was granted. Sir John Simon was “standing firm” against the five-million-pound loan to Britain’s ally, Poland, at the very time that Hudson was discussing a billion-pound loan to Britain’s enemy, Germany.

*It is an indication of how far we may trust a government headed by Chamberlain that the Federation of British Industries agreement would have hit American export trade; that the billion-pound loan to Germany would have required the cooperation of the American money market; but that one reason for denying Poland a cash loan was that “the British were afraid that it would go to the United States and have a weakening effect on the pound.” (Robert P. Post dispatch from London, New York Times, July 27.)
Chamberlain's desire for further "appeasement" is shown, above all, in the interminable delay in negotiating a Soviet pact. For as the opponents of his policies stressed over and over again in the Commons, the pledge to Poland was worth little without Russian aid. The corollary, openly put forward in Berlin, was that without Russian aid Poland would be unable to resist and would be forced to surrender Danzig and the "corridor across the Corridor." The conclusion, after reexamination of the day-by-day record, seems to me inescapable that Chamberlain did not want a Russian pact, and that he did not want it, among other reasons, because he hoped the failure to obtain the pact would lead the Poles to surrender. I believe that certainly until the fall of Litvinov and probably for many weeks afterward the British could have had a Russian pact if they had wanted one, even though I also believe that the Kremlin was at the same time prepared to come to an agreement with Germany as an alternative.

The sequence of events before the resignation of Litvinov is instructive. The Russian proposal on March 20 for a nine-power conference against German aggression was countered by a British suggestion for a three-power declaration, but one which would be a warning rather than a pledge to fight. Negotiations dragged on from that point. On April 23 Chamberlain suddenly sent Henderson back to Berlin. On May Day, while Communists marched in London with flaming banners proclaiming "Britain and Russia—the Hope of the World," the New York Times ran a dispatch from Berlin, "Another 'Little' War Believed German Aim. Victory over Poland Without a Break with Great Britain Would Meet Hopes of the Nazi Regime." On May 3 the British Cabinet decided to reject the Russian offer of an alliance, and Chamberlain told the Commons he was ready to exchange non-aggression pacts with Germany. On May 4 Litvinov resigned. On May 8 Otto D. Tolischus reported from Berlin (I quote the headlines in the New York Times the next day), "Deal with Stalin Sought by Hitler. Reich Would Neutralize Soviet by Non-Aggression Treaty and Then Move on Poland." Tolischus wrote, "To facilitate the desired development the German government has issued orders to the press not to attack Russia and to go lightly even in the 'holy crusade' against Bolshevism."

I cannot at this time review in detail the tangled events that followed. It is sufficient to note that while the German press, and to a certain extent the Italian, set out to woo the Russians and to pave the way for an agreement, and while British opinion grew more and more restive at delay in obtaining a pact, Chamberlain pursued a policy certain to offend and exasperate Moscow: the vacation ostentatiously spent by Chamberlain with the anti-Soviet pro-Japanese retired diplomat, Sir Francis Lindley, at a crucial moment in the negotiations; the dispatch of an underling instead of Halifax to Moscow; the stories continually emanating from London of fear that a Russian pact might drive Mussolini closer to the axis, that it might antagonize the Japanese, and that it might offend the Vatican, Spain, Portugal, and "certain South American countries"—all this while the German press spoke more and more openly of its hope for an agreement with Russia. I think there is but one explanation for the Prime Minister's conduct, and the clue is provided, I believe, by a dispatch which Guido Enderis sent to the New York Times from Berlin under date of July 21.

Enderis said the Nazis still expected the peaceful and unconditional return of Danzig. Either the British would force the Poles to surrender as they had the Czechs or, Enderis wrote, "the other alternative in the unofficial German view is based on the conviction that Britain, failing to conclude a pact with the Soviets, would be in an even stronger and less prejudicial position to intervene in the Danzig crisis. Freed of automatic entanglements by a tri-power pact, Britain, so runs the private German thesis, would with greater freedom proceed to convince Poland of the futility of her stand on Danzig by warning Warsaw that it was confronted with the specter of Russo-German rapprochement, or, at any rate, with a neutral or negative military factor in Russia, leaving her at the sole mercy of a powerfully armed opponent in Germany. Such a development, it is believed here, would considerably enhance Britain's prospect of influencing Warsaw . . . ." The night Tolischus wrote that dispatch the Moscow radio announced that trade negotiations were under way between Germany and the Soviet Union. It is my belief that Chamberlain knew a Russo-German agreement was a possibility and did all he could to further it in the hope that it would make for a new Munich or "a little war" between Germany and Poland. I think that this also provides the clue to his delay in declaring war and in prosecuting it.

III

Under date of September 11 G. E. R. Gedye cabled the New York Times from Moscow that the Russians were worried over the German advance. "Originally," he said, "they believed that the Soviet-German non-aggression pact would make impossible Franco-British backing for Poland and that the Poles would be compelled to surrender Danzig and the Corridor and war would be postponed indefinitely." There I believe is the true reason why Moscow signed the pact, for this was the only reasonable estimate of what would happen if Poland were deprived of Russian help. London surrendered Czechoslovakia in the hope of pushing Hitler east, Moscow handed Danzig and the Corridor to Hitler in the hope that he would go West. I think that Stalin will be as rudely surprised as was Chamberlain unless Moscow is prepared to ally itself with Berlin.