

"MISSION TO MOSCOW"

By KLAUS MEHNERT



Not long ago we received the book "Mission to Moscow" by Joseph E. Davies. It deserves particular attention, first of all because its author is among the leading American politicians; secondly because of the supremely important subject of the USA and the USSR; and thirdly because it is a best-seller read by millions of people all over the world. Unfortunately we are not in possession of the original edition but of a translation published in Switzerland. For this reason, passages quoted by us had to be translated back into English. The page numbers mentioned refer to the edition in our hands.

THE OFFICIAL COMMISSION

JOSEPH E. Davies, the successor of William C. Bullitt as US Ambassador to the USSR, left for his post on December 15, 1936. Immediately before his departure he was, according to a note in his diary, entrusted by the State Department with a special commission to be carried out together with his routine duties as Ambassador: he was to settle the problem of Russian debts to America.

As is well known, America had made loans to the Russian Government before the Bolshevik Revolution, loans for which the Soviets had always refused to accept any responsibility. This had contributed toward America's refusal to recognize the Soviet Government. When Roosevelt recognized the Soviet Union in 1933—for reasons which we explained in detail in our article "USA and USSR" (November 1943)—Litvinov promised in return for this recognition to satisfy the claims of American citizens and the US Government on the Soviet Union. A "gentlemen's agreement" containing a basic arrangement was signed by Litvinov and Roosevelt. As far as we know, the text of this "gentlemen's agreement" has never been published, and Davies also discreetly omits any mention of its details in his book in order to draw as little attention as possible to this embarrassing matter. However, at the time of Davies's departure for Moscow, the US Government took the stand that the Soviets had not lived up to the obligations they had assumed under this agreement. Hence complaints about the attitude of the Soviets in the debts question, and remarks about the great disappointment this attitude had proved to Roosevelt, played an important part in

Davies's conversations with the various representatives of the Soviet Government in Moscow.

A year and a half later, when Davies was transferred to Brussels and was preparing for his departure, he had not progressed a single step in this whole matter. It was only his farewell visit to the Kremlin which seemed to bring a change for the better. Davies describes how Stalin himself made certain proposals as to how this matter was to be cleared up. Davies took these proposals in the form of a written memorandum on his trip to America. Although he was no longer Ambassador to the Soviet Union, he was commissioned by the State Department to continue working on this matter.

The subject gradually disappears from the pages of Davies's book. The last occasion on which it is mentioned is in his letter to the State Department of January 17, 1939, from which it is quite apparent that by that date no settlement had been arrived at yet. From the fact that this entire complex of questions does not reappear again in the book, it is to be assumed that the problem had not been solved by October 28, 1941—the date of the last entry. Later it was, of course, overshadowed by the far greater debt problem of the Lend-Lease supplies.

... AND THE CONFIDENTIAL ONE

In going through the plentiful material contained in the book concerning Davies's official main task, we arrive at the conclusion that he was unable to settle the debts problem either during his time in Moscow or later. How, then, is it possible that such immense credit for the building up of American-Soviet relations is ascribed to Davies? Since his achievements are not

to be found in the field of his official commission, they must be sought in the carrying out of confidential tasks not acknowledged in his book and dealing with the political instead of the economic sector.

We were not present when Davies, before leaving for Moscow, paid his farewell call in the Oval Room on the second floor of the White House. Hence we submit it purely as a hypothesis that Roosevelt said something to the following effect to Davies on this occasion:

"Look here, Joe. There are three dangerous nations: Germany, Russia, and Japan. It would be disastrous if these three should ever get together. It is your job to see to it that they don't. Do your utmost to get Russia over on our side. Since war is inevitable, the best thing would be for the Nazis and the Soviets to kill each other off. Then we could step in and take care of what's left."

We repeat: this is only a hypothesis, but a hypothesis substantiated by all the political remarks contained in Davies's book. Davies's hatred for Germany permeates the whole book. On every few pages there are attacks on Germany, even when they have nothing to do with the subject. As for Japan, he has less to say; but it is clear that he feels similarly about this country. The possibility of an understanding between Berlin and Moscow weighs on Davies's mind like a nightmare. Naturally, he only touches upon this question very carefully. But it reappears time and again:

It requires hardly any explanation that a combination of German scientific and industrial methods, German talent for organization and discipline, with the wealth of human and natural resources of Russia would have a great influence on Europe and the world (p.320).

When this understanding was actually arrived at in August 1939, Davies called it a "disastrous calamity" (p.356); and when finally the war broke out between Germany and the Soviet Union, he spoke of this event as a "true gift of God" (p.378).

PARTNER LITVINOV

In his efforts to bring about an American-Soviet understanding, Davies was aided by the fact that his Soviet partner in the debt negotiations, Foreign Commissar Litvinov-Finkelstein, was just as fanatical an enemy of Hitler as he was. Davies tells us of numerous conversations he had with Litvinov; as soon as political questions were

touched upon, these conversations all took on an anti-Hitler note. Litvinov knew exactly how Roosevelt felt on this point. In his very first conversation with Davies, Litvinov (1) called Roosevelt a "very great man"; (2) hinted that America and Japan might find themselves in conflict; and (3) attacked Hitler and gave vent to his annoyance over England's and France's weak attitude toward Germany (p.44). Subjects similar to these reappeared later in every conversation between these two men. The better they got to know each other, the more openly did Litvinov speak. He even went so far as to interfere in questions of American domestic politics by declaring himself to be "very worried" over the neutrality legislation then being discussed in America, which was intended to keep America out of the imminent conflicts (p.61).

During the increase in tension brought about by the Spanish Civil War, Litvinov encouraged the democracies to threaten war on Germany and Italy and declared that both "were not yet ready with their war preparations" (p.83). After the incorporation of Austria, he demanded "a change of government or at least a change in the policy of Great Britain" toward Germany (p.225). And when Davies asked him to further American-Soviet relations by sending the Russian Ballet to the World Exhibition in New York, he refused this and promptly made a counterproposal to send the male choir of the Red Army (p.175).

As regards what Davies himself said in political conversations, the book shows far greater restraint. It is to be found only indirectly, for instance, in the letter written by Davies to Harry Hopkins, in which he urges the American Government "to encourage Russia not to yield in her support of collective security and peace" (p.337). Stripped of diplomatic phraseology, this is a request to stiffen the Soviet Union's back against Germany. In a word, the conversations between Litvinov and Davies had the main purpose of mutually reinforcing each other's attitude toward Germany.

WHERE DAVIES SUCCEEDED

How did Davies fulfill his task of bringing about a *rapprochement* between the Soviet Union and the USA? One year after his recall, the foundation for the German-Soviet understanding had been laid; Litvinov had been fired and replaced by Molotov.

who soon after concluded the pact with Ribbentrop. Had Davies published his book at that time, he would have had to call it "Failure of a Mission." But he did not publish it until the autumn of 1941, when the nightmare had passed and when Germany and the Soviet Union were at war with each other. Now Davies could be put forward as the great man who had prepared the field for the friendship between Moscow and Washington.

Ever since diplomats have existed, it has been a moot point whether decisions in the sphere of foreign politics are attributable to these diplomats or whether they are the result of objective forces. Many important trends have been the work of great diplomats; we need only think of the role of Talleyrand in Vienna or of Bismarck in Paris. But just as many trends arose without them. To what extent can it be attributed to Davies that the Soviet Union finds itself today in the same camp as the Americans? According to the text of the book, to none whatever. For, according to the book, he did not conclude any agreements of political significance with Litvinov; he only inveighed against Germany. In actual fact, however, his conversations with Litvinov probably went much further.

This is the only explanation for the fact that he is being so lionized in America at present, although he had hardly any visible successes to show during his period of office except for a trade agreement the effects of which, moreover, did not come up to expectations. The truth is that everything, including his failure in the question of debts, is of minor consideration in comparison to the fact that, together with Litvinov, he worked out the main principles of common American-Soviet policy. In his final report to the State Department, Davies insisted that foreign-political friendship with the Soviet Union was of far greater importance than the existing differences:

When in 1935 the Soviet Government did not fulfill its obligations with regard to the agreement on the debt settlement, loans, and the Comintern, our Government was genuinely pained At that time it was appropriate to insist firmly on the carrying out of every single obligation on the part of the USSR. . . . But the situation with regard to European peace as well as that in the Pacific Ocean and the Far East has changed entirely. . . . Today, greater problems are at stake. . . . In my opinion, it would be advisable for the mission here to be carried on in as friendly and harmonious a spirit as ever possible No attitude must be adopted which gives rise to distrust and hostility (pp.328,329).

Hence also Davies's acknowledged endeavors to keep differences between the two states as much as possible out of the press (p.273). Hence also his pressure on the British Ambassador to Moscow to cause him to sue for Moscow's friendship (p.250).

It is true that Stalin has always conducted his own purposeful policy and has never hesitated to go his own way, as was the case in 1939 when, by means of his pact with Ribbentrop, it led him without effort to Bessarabia, eastern Poland, and the Baltic states. But the anti-Hitler course worked out by Davies and Litvinov was not affected, and Litvinov needed only to be fetched back from obscurity at an opportune moment for continuing it. The significance of Davies's book is to be found in the very fact that it elucidates these connecting threads, and the book will one day be an important source for the history of diplomacy between the two World Wars. But this was naturally not the reason for its publication; the reason is to be found elsewhere.

THE PURPOSE OF THE BOOK

We do not know exactly when the American edition was published. Apparently the plan to publish the book arose in the autumn of 1941, when the Soviet Union was at war with Germany and thus had automatically joined the camp of the Anglo-Americans. At that time, there were two things Roosevelt was aiming at: (1) to win over the strongly anti-Bolshevist public opinion of America to co-operation with Moscow; and (2) to increase America's confidence in the Soviet fighting power. For both these aims, the book was eminently suited. By exploiting the American's faith in "documents," it skillfully seeks to invalidate all the reasons for the American's dislike for the Soviet Union.

(1) In the vexatious debts question, Davies pretends that, through Stalin's personal intercession before his own departure, everything had been settled. As we have seen, this was not the case.

(2) He tries to counter the American's repulsion toward the atheism in the USSR by little anecdotes; he narrates, for example, that there are many icons hanging in the room of Kalinin's mother and that Kalinin had said that the icons did not bother him and that he had nothing against them (p.184). Davies's favorite method of indirectly defending the religious policy of the Bolsheviks

consists of repeated attacks against the policy of the National-Socialist Government toward the Church.

(3) To do away with the dislike of the American upper classes of Bolshevism as an economic system, Davies declares that there is no such thing, for "the Communist principle has been abandoned in fact and in truth" (p.73).

(4) Naturally very little is said in the book about the Comintern. The first time he mentions the word, he interprets it in a footnote as "the organization of the Communist Party of which it is claimed that it supports and directs the Communist machinations . . . in non-Russian countries" (p.56). Davies uses the skeptical "it is claimed," although his own Government had his predecessor hand numerous notes to the Soviets which showed that there was plenty of proof of the existence of these activities.

(5) Stalin's purges of prominent Soviet leaders had started a wave of distrust of the Soviet Union in America. During Davies's term of office, the Radek and Bukharin trials as well as the execution of the generals and the liquidation of tens of thousands of other political and military leaders took place. In order to make these events palatable to the American public, Davies had an inspiration: he called all those who were liquidated "fifth columnists" and praised Stalin for having destroyed the "fifth column" in the Soviet Union by his purges. It goes without saying that, at the time of the trials, no one even thought of the "fifth column"; and, in order to harmonize the reports written at that time with this new theory, Davies would have had to rewrite them entirely. He preferred another method. In the middle of his book (pp.209-215) there is a chapter entitled "The Fifth Column in Russia" written four years *after* the trials. In it he describes how, in the summer of 1941, he suddenly realized the true significance of the purges. By means of this explanation, Davies makes out Stalin's annihilation of his political rivals to have been a patriotic deed.

(6) Davies's book was intended to help wipe out the bitter memory of Stalin's pact with Hitler and Stalin's actions in Eastern Europe in 1939-40. For this purpose, the book contains material reaching up to the end of October 1941, far beyond Davies's actual term of office. This enables Davies to enlarge upon his thesis that the Soviets had been driven to their pact with Hitler

by the "reactionaries in England and France."

(7) For years people in America had been accustomed to speak of National-Socialist Germany and Bolshevik Russia in the same terms, especially in the years 1939 to 1941. Now suddenly the two had to be separated and one to be described as evil and the other as good. Davies attempts to do this with the staggering argument that Communism is far closer to Christianity than National-Socialism. In proof of this thesis he states: "The Communist ideal is that the state should disappear. . . . The National-Socialist ideal is the complete opposite—the state as the supreme virtue in itself" (p.377). In this connection it is to be said that in the Soviet Union the state has long been a "thing in itself," not only in practice but also in theory, as is proved by an article on the Soviet state by Vyshinsky in the *Pravda* of June 16, 1944.

"FEVERISH WAR PREPARATIONS"

The second important aim of the book, we have said, was to enhance America's faith in the fighting power of the USSR, which was very necessary at a time when the Red Army had been thrown back thousands of kilometers. Hence numerous reports by the Ambassador dealing with questions pertaining to economics, especially armaments, have been included in the book. As the Ambassador made a number of extensive journeys and observed things with the eyes of an experienced economist, these reports contain a lot of material which, although it has meanwhile become obsolete, bears important witness to the early start of Soviet rearmaments, especially as it was published by a friend of the Soviet Union. As early as July 1, 1937, Davies writes that the Soviets were spending twice as much on armaments as England and France put together (p.125). On several occasions he speaks of "feverish war preparations"; and after his visit to the tractor factory in Rostov on the Don, the largest of its kind in the USSR, he made the following entry:

When we left the works, my unofficial advisers, the group of [American] journalists, agreed that the factory was being turned into a plant for the manufacture of caterpillar treads for large tanks (p.446).

Davies was hardly justified in representing his conclusions about the armament strength of the USSR as entirely new discoveries of his own. His reports on Soviet economics did not contain much more than what was

being reported at that time by all halfway efficient embassies and what such serious American students of the USSR as Harold Denny and Demaree Bess were continually publishing in *The New York Times* and the *Christian Science Monitor*. The novelty lay, not in that America heard of these things, but in the fact that Davies, with his close connections with numerous political and economic leaders of the USA, possessed a far greater resonance for such ideas in Washington's leading circles than his predecessor or the press.

DAVIES AND HIS BOOK

We have already briefly characterized Ambassador Davies in our article of November 1943. The only new fact we learned about him from his book is that once before, in 1913, he was considered by Woodrow Wilson for the post of Ambassador to Russia (p. xiii), in other words, that he is an old-timer in the Democratic Party. His reports and letters show that he is a typical successful American businessman and millionaire and that he has a very good opinion of himself and his ability. The ladies' luncheon to which his wife was invited by Mrs. Molotov is "the first ladies' luncheon in the Soviet Union"; his farewell on his departure from Moscow is "the biggest farewell." It strikes one as slightly curious in a highly political documentary work published with official support when one finds a letter written by Davies to his daughter and describing the farewell speech made by Litvinov in his honor to contain the following "inserted remark" by Mrs. Davies:

Daddy doesn't say so, but it was really a wonderful mark of honor for your brilliant father and the work he has done here. You would have almost burst with pride—like me (p.279).

Davies was in the Soviet Union between January 18, 1937, and June 10, 1938, actually off and on altogether only twelve months. But the five hundred pages of his book contain material covering five years—from November 16, 1936, to October 28, 1941—official reports to the State Department, personal letters, entries into two different diaries, footnotes, and explanatory additions. All this not very homogeneous material has been most skillfully composed and makes absorbing reading. However, it is necessary to make certain reservations toward the contents of a book written in war time about an ally for whom goodwill is to be created. Even if we assume that the official reports are authentic and untam-

pered with—although one cannot help remarking how smoothly they run and that there are no dots to indicate omissions which must have been unavoidable—we must bear in mind that only a very small and careful selection of these reports was included in the book. The numbering of the documents shows that, during his term of office in Moscow, Davies wrote no less than 1,348 reports to the State Department alone. Yet only some 50 reports are reproduced. With a selection such as that, almost anything can be proved.

The two diaries are not entirely convincing. Many quotations from them give the impression of having been entered afterwards in order to link up the actual documents in the desired manner. Examples of this are the many attacks on Germany, which have nothing to do with the subject. It is rather hard to imagine that the American Ambassador in Moscow spent his free time filling his diary with attacks against a government with which he had nothing whatever to do. One entry occupying a full page is devoted to Roosevelt's famous Quarantine Speech. Why should the Ambassador have bothered to copy into his diary a speech his President had made in Chicago? It had been reprinted in millions of newspapers and was at his disposal any time he needed it. Hence its place is hardly in the diary of an ambassador but certainly in a book of political propaganda. And finally, a father, even so proud a father as Davies, would hardly write about his own daughter in his private diary:

She speaks quite good Russian, has graduated from Vassar and is attending lectures at the Moscow University (p.101).

Whoever was in charge of editing the book has done a good job. The book contains only a few factual errors. (Davies calls the tune of the *International*—which was composed by a Frenchman—typically Russian; he speaks of the Armenian Mikoyan as a Georgian and calls the German Military Attaché von Koestrich instead of Koestring.)

Although the book contains nothing new for those who closely follow the trends and problems in the Soviet Union, it is interesting by reason of the vividness of its descriptions. It also throws some new light on questions affecting the Soviet Union only indirectly. When, for example, in October 1939 the Soviet Minister in Belgium submitted to Davies, who was then Ambassador to Brussels, the question of mediating peace

between Germany and the Western powers, Davies immediately gave him a wholly negative reply, declaring that the US Government "did not interfere in European affairs."

Seen as a whole, the book serves the Soviet cause more than the American one. The favorable reports on the Soviet Union by far outweigh the critical ones. Davies seems to believe that he can counterbalance this impression by frequently emphasizing his sympathies for the capitalist system and by his claim that Bolshevism has no longer anything to do with Communism. But in spite of this, we feel that the book may be regarded as a pacemaker of Bolshevik ideas

in America. The husband of a woman who by birth and first marriage belongs to the Hutton-Post-Woolworth clan with its admitted taxable property of 165 million American dollars is not likely to be sympathetic to Bolshevism; so whatever he says in favor of the Soviets must be true: this is the way the American mind is supposed to work. No wonder Litvinov publicly gave vent to his enthusiasm about the book.

The Soviet-propagandistic nature of the book is amazingly expressed by the cover design of the book, which is reproduced at the head of this article. The hammer-and-sickle flag waves above a curious version of the Stars and Stripes.

THE GERMAN STAGE IN 1944

By CHRISTIAN RETTNER

On September 1, 1944, all the theaters in Germany closed their doors in accordance with the country's total mobilization measures. But until that moment Germany's 325 permanent stages and 23 traveling troupes had been playing to capacity crowds, true to the traditions of a people in whose history the theater has always been regarded as the platform of its ideas and ideals. The following reviews, fresh from Berlin, give a picture of the German stage during the last season before temporary closure.—K.M.

THE long queues forming in front of the booking offices hours before they opened, and the fact that a curtain never rose except on a packed house, speak more eloquently than statistics of the nation-wide popularity of dramatic art in war-time Germany. More so than in times of peace, the war-time audience of the German theater was the German people—men and women from all walks of life, many in uniform and many still bandaged. And as it is after all the audience which determines the program, last season's program reflects the attitude and interests of the German nation in the fifth year of the war.

As in previous years, the program included the performance of numerous dramatic works by Goethe, Schiller, Kleist, and other classical German authors. But apart from these, last season witnessed what was perhaps a record number of *premières*. The German public today lives intensely in the present and consequently demands of the stage the presentation of dramatic subjects—not war subjects only, but every subject—in terms of the present. This demand has

created great opportunities for the modern playwright, opportunities which, as the wealth and diversity of new plays show, he was not slow to seize.

ANCIENT SUBJECTS

It was a bold step to turn again to those epic subjects to which we owe some of our greatest masterpieces. Nevertheless in this field of dramatic art four outstanding achievements were recorded in recent months:

In *Helena*, Hermann Rossmann does not destroy the mystery shrouding the immortal figure of Helen of Troy; she appears now as the sensuous beauty, now as the cool philosopher. The drama might more fitly have been entitled "Hector," as Hector is the central personality and perhaps the finest Rossmann has created. Of all the heroes of the Trojan War, Hector alone remains insensible to Helen's beauty, the cause of the then 9-year-old conflict; he only sees humiliation in the suffering engendered by a woman's charms. His one aim is to put an end to it. And so he leaves wife and child to decide the issue in single combat