“Stunned, Bewildered and Groggy with Disbelief”: The German and Soviet Reactions to the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact

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Introduction:
Approaching a Social History of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact

On the afternoon of 23 August 1939, the engines of two German Condor passenger planes pierced the Baltic sky as the flying convoy rumbled eastward. The chief aviator of the expedition was Adolf Hitler's personal pilot Lieutenant General Johannes Baur who, for the first and only time in his Nazi career, was flying someone other than the Führer himself. In his stead, the trip's guest log listed numerous diplomats, photographers and the German Foreign Minister himself, Joachim von Ribbentrop. Their destination was the heart of the Soviet Union: Moscow. As Baur circled the airfield flanked by the River Moskva, he noticed their Soviet hosts had organized a reception. When the planes touched down, the Germans were greeted by a guard of honour and a military band playing the German national anthem; behind them flags bearing the Soviet hammer and sickle flapped next to Nazi ones bearing the swastika.[1] As Ribbentrop stepped onto the tarmac, he was heartily welcomed by the Soviet Commissar of Foreign Affairs Vyacheslav Molotov. The Soviet national anthem soon began blaring from the shining brass instruments as Ribbentrop inspected the guard of honour, his arm raised in a Heil salute. Baur could hardly believe his eyes. "My God!" he thought. "Wonders will never end!"[2]

This was the first meeting between the German and Soviet foreign ministers after months of negotiations between their nations, culminating in the early morning of August 24 with the signing of the Nazi-Soviet Nonaggression Pact, also known as the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact.[3] This treaty, scarcely two pages long, utterly bewildered the international community and swung the European geopolitical balance in the German favour. The pact emboldened Adolf Hitler to invade Poland a week later despite the French and British guarantees, kicking off the bloodiest

[1] Unbeknownst to Ribbentrop and his entourage, the swastika flags were hastily taken from the set of an anti-Nazi film in production because the Soviet officials could not find them anywhere else.
[2] Hans Baur, *I was Hitler's Pilot: The Memoirs of Hans Baur* (Detroit: Frontline Books, 2013), 75.
[3] For the full text of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact, see appendix.

conflict in human history and forever changing the course of the twentieth century. For his part, the pact allowed Joseph Stalin to invade Poland soon after his new allies and annex parts of Finland, the Baltic States and the territories of Bessarabia and Bukovina before falling victim to a German invasion in the summer of 1941.

This alliance between two ideological nemeses could only be brought about during the unprecedented years in the lead up to the Second World War. As Hitler remilitarized Germany during the mid-1930s and eventually began expanding its borders with the annexation of Austria in March 1938, Stalin grew concerned about a potential German invasion. Stalin and his then Commissar of Foreign Affairs Maxim Litvinov tried currying British and French support against the mounting Nazi danger. The Western powers instead chose to appease Hitler's expansionist goals, likewise hoping to avoid another devastating European conflict. This approach came to a head in September 1938 with the Munich Conference in which Britain and France allowed Hitler to keep the Sudetenland region of Czechoslovakia, on the guarantee that the Führer would invade no more of the nation. Importantly, Soviet delegates were not invited to negotiations, thus marking the final collapse of Litvinov's pursuit of a common front with the West against Nazi Germany.[4]

Hitler, of course, did not respect the terms of the Munich Agreement and invaded the rest of Czechoslovakia a few months later. When exactly Hitler sought an alliance with Stalin is unclear, but his appointment of the highly unpopular Ribbentrop as Foreign Minister in February 1938 may have indicated this shift in his geopolitical aspirations.[5] Similarly, Stalin's replacement

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[4] Gerhard L. Weinberg, *Germany and the Soviet Union, 1939-1941* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1954), 6.

[5] For Ribbentrop's unpopularity within the German foreign office, see Hans-Adolf Jacobsen and Arthur L. Smith Jr., *The Nazi Party and the German Foreign Office* (New York: Routledge, 2007), 81-82; for interpretations of Hitler's motivations, see John Kolasky, *Partners in Tyranny: the Nazi-Soviet Nonaggression Pact, August 23, 1939* (Toronto: The Mackenzie Institute, 1990), 43, Weinberg, *Germany and the Soviet Union*, 5 and D. C. Watt, "The Initiation of the Negotiations Leading to the Nazi-Soviet Pact: A Historical Problem," in *Essays in Honour of E. H. Carr*, eds. Chimen Abramsky and Beryl Williams (London: Macmillan Press, 1974), 157-161.

of anti-Nazi Litvinov with the more opportunistic Molotov in May 1939 signalled his willingness to overlook his ideological principles. When Anglo-French negotiations with the Soviets finally failed in mid-August 1939, Stalin agreed to a rushed meeting with the German foreign minister on August 23, leading to the signing of the infamous pact.

Historians have long been fascinated by the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact, with the vast majority of their historiographical attention concerning the diplomatic nuances of its negotiations. Of these, Gerhard Weinberg's *Germany and the Soviet Union, 1939-1941* (1954) and Bernd Wegner's *From Peace to War: Germany Soviet Russia and the World, 1939-1941* (1997) are two of the foremost resources. There exist disagreements amongst historians as to the details of the pact's negotiations: which side initiated the talks, what their motivations were and when exactly their intentions were solidified. D. C. Watt explores these varying historical interpretations in his chapter "The Initiation of the Negotiations Leading to the Nazi-Soviet Pact: A Historical Problem" in *Essays in Honour of E. H. Carr* (1974). Other important monographs include Roger Moorhouse's *The Devil's Alliance: Hitler's Pact with Stalin, 1939-1941* (2014), Anthony Read and David Fisher's *The Deadly Embrace: Hitler, Stalin and the Nazi-Soviet Pact, 1939-1941* (1988), Ian Kershaw's *Nemesis: Hitler, 1929-1941* (2000), Stephen Kotkin's *Stalin: Waiting for Hitler, 1929-1941* (2014) and Alan Bullock's *Hitler and Stalin: Parallel Lives* (1991), all of which offer unique perspectives to the pact's diplomatic history.

In addition to this diplomatic approach, historians have noted the many different international reactions to the pact. The chapter "Contortions" from Moorhouse's monograph mentioned above describes numerous international reactions, Timothy Johnston's *Being Soviet: Identity, Rumour, and Everyday Life under Stalin, 1939-1953* (2011) includes many fascinating Soviet accounts and Wolfgang Leonhard's *Betrayal: The Hitler-Stalin Pact of 1939* (1989) is by

far the best resource for Communist reactions to the pact. Despite this massive literature, however, there remains a glaring gap in the historiography of the pact. There has yet to be a work specifically and exclusively examining how the German and Soviet citizens interpreted the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact using a social history, or 'bottom-up,' approach.[6] It is this void my project seeks to fill.

A social history approach requires examining primary accounts to gauge how the German and Soviet citizens received and understood the new alliance. The Soviet memoirs of Anatoli Granovsky, Victor Kravchenko, Anatole Konstantin and Grigori Tokaev are all extensively drawn upon, as are the German memoirs of Hans Baur, Friedrich Kellner, Victor Klemperer and Albert Speer. The accounts of English speakers living in these respective nations are especially crucial, being available without the need for translation. In the Soviet Union, these include the memoirs of Robert Robinson, Suzanne Rosenberg and John Scott and in the Reich, William Shirer. One should approach these accounts with caution as many were written long after the fact and thus could contain inaccuracies. Still, these accounts give insight into the rich tapestry of the varied reception of this diplomatic volte-face, whether written contemporarily or from memory.

Having assembled and assessed these accounts, the reactions can be categorized according to the most frequent. The first chapter dedicated to the Soviet reception begins with a section on the initial shock before examining the shifts in popular culture and propaganda, reactions from those who approved of the pact, those who disapproved and those who viewed it as an ideological betrayal, concluding with accounts of those who foresaw the incoming Nazi invasion. The second chapter on the Germans likewise begins with initial shock and shifts in

[6] I should stipulate that this work does not exist in English. Moreover, the definition of 'social history' is debated amongst historians. Some use it to describe micro-histories, others to describe any historical work with a grass-roots focus. The introduction to Alf Lüdtke's *The History of Everyday Life: Reconstructing Historical Experiences and Ways of Life* (1995) summarizes this debate well while arguing for the utility of social history. For my purposes, a social history approach is one that relies on primary accounts of 'ordinary' people over information from the state or those in power, like government records or diplomatic correspondences, for example.

popular culture and propaganda, then examines how the pact strengthened faith in Hitler, followed by accounts of those who disapproved and became disillusioned by the new alliance, and concludes with reactions from German Communists.

By relying on primary accounts, my project will fill the pact's historiographical void and will allow for fascinating comparisons between the German and Soviet populations. Germans, for example, were far more approving of the pact than their Soviet counterparts due to their genuine faith in Hitler and their belief that the alliance would prevent another war. For their part, Soviet citizens were far more apathetic towards the pact, stemming from the recent political purges and the relative lack of trust in the Soviet state. Nazi hardliners and die-hard Communists ironically reacted alike, being similarly devastated by the ideological volte-face. Likewise, there are similarities to be drawn between how the Nazi and Soviet governments presented the pact to their peoples; both changed state propaganda, both removed films critical of their new allies and both altered their efforts to defame the other abroad, though the Soviets more readily promoted German culture and more willingly banned anti-German literature. Ultimately, this project argues that a social approach to the history of the pact is not only another interesting and often neglected piece of the Molotov-Ribbentrop puzzle but also provides unique and valuable insights into the similarities and differences between the German and Soviet citizenry.

Chapter 1:
The Indifferent, the Ecstatic, and the Betrayed

The citizens of the Soviet Union were, not surprisingly, dumbfounded by the news of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact. Most Soviets had been fed anti-capitalist and fascist propaganda their entire lives. Now, without warning, Stalin had signed a pact of friendship with the state which they saw as embodying the zenith of capitalism and fascism. Shockwaves quickly spread throughout Soviet society, being felt by everyone from government officials to prisoners of the Gulag camps. Reactions ran the gamut. Many Soviets sat on the extremes, either embracing the pact as a stroke of genius or lamenting that their leader had betrayed the revolution. Others, battered by years of repression, passively accepted the pact as beyond their control. Still, many Soviets did their best to express their opinions with the limited options available to them, ranging from secretive conversations recorded in memoirs to anonymous letters sent to Soviet officials. Using these accounts, the many shades of the Soviet reactions can be deciphered and analysed.

i. Shock Permeates

The shock of the pact was its most universal quality. Factory director Victor Kravchenko recalled the pact crashing "meteorlike" into the Soviet consciousness, leaving the population "stunned, bewildered and groggy with disbelief."[7] Another anonymous Soviet later likened the event to an exploding bomb ripping through their lives.[8] The day after the signing, the American writer John Scott remembered the "huge queues" in Moscow for the morning paper. Most people, according to Scott, "registered astonishment. 'What the hell! Pact with the

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[7] Victor Kravchenko, *I Chose Freedom, the Personal and Political Life of a Soviet Official* (New York: C. Scribner's Sons, 1946), 332.
[8] Timothy Johnston, *Being Soviet: Identity, Rumour, and Everyday Life under Stalin, 1939-1953* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 22.

Fascists?'"[9] Jamaican-born engineer Robert Robinson was working in the USSR at the time of the pact; he compared the Soviet reaction to how Americans would react to an "alliance between the Ku Klux Klan and the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People."[10]

The effects of the pact were so universal across the USSR, they even shocked those sentenced to the Gulag. Former member of the Commissariat of Foreign Affairs, Evgeny Gnedin, learned of the pact from prison when his Soviet secret police (NKVD) interrogators presented him with incriminating evidence that had been supplied by the German Gestapo.[11] Vladimir Petrov, a young academician serving time in a work camp, recalled the changes brought by the pact. German citizens were freed and sent back to Germany and Russo-Germans instantly ascended the camp's social ladder. One inmate, Fritz, was nicknamed "friendly power" and was allowed to roam the camp freely, obtain supplementary supplies and send letters to loved ones, all while sporting a brand-new outfit.[12] In late January 1940, Austrian-born Communist Karlo Štajner remembered German inmates being called into separate cabins. The prisoners assumed that they were to be executed, but were taken aback when they were instead instructed to unload a supply truck. In an unusually friendly manner, the accompanying NKVD agents offered the prisoners new garments and sacks full of lard, bread and sugar as a gesture of goodwill. Štajner and his fellow inmates were astounded.[13]

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[9] John Scott, *Duel for Europe: Hitler versus Stalin* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1942), 28-29.
[10] Robinson, *Black on Red*, 137.
[11] Paul D. Raymond, "Witness and Chronicler of Nazi-Soviet Relations: The Testimony of Evgeny Gnedin (Parvus)." *The Russian Review* 44, no. 4 (1985): 394; the NKVD and the Gestapo did see some collaboration throughout the Nazi-Soviet rapprochement, exchanging information and handing over persons of interest. An observer at the initial meeting between Ribbentrop and Molotov commented on seeing a group of NKVD and Gestapo agents shaking hands: "They're obviously delighted finally to be able to collaborate. But watch out! This will be disastrous, especially when they start exchanging files." (Hans von Herwarth and S. Frederick Starr, *Against Two Evils* (London: Collins, 1981), 165.)
[12] Vladimir Petrov, *Escape from the Future: The Incredible Adventures of a Young Russian* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1973), 255.
[13] Karlo Štajner, *7000 Days in Siberia* (London: Corgi, 1989), 113.

Stunned by the ideological reversal, many Soviets outside the Gulag could not help but compare the new alliance with how these two powers had perceived each other until just recently. Russian author Elena Skriabina nicely summed up the previous state of affairs: "Throughout the 1930s none had railed more against the Bolshevik menace than had the Nazis; similarly, none had been more savage in their denunciation of the Nazi beasts than had the Soviets."[14] Another Soviet citizen, whose testimony was given through an anonymous survey, later remembered that before "1939 the Germans were the greatest enemy of the Soviet Union. In 1939 the Germans became the best friends of the Soviet Union. It was not said why."[15] Soviet mother Nadia Stakhanova poignantly stated the absurdity of her leader's new allegiances. "Stalin," she recalled, "was suspicious of his best friends, his fellow counterrevolutionaries, his family, and his own wife … but for some peculiar reason he trusted Hitler. The mistake nearly cost him his head."[16] Physicist and academician Grigori Tokaev highlights how unbelievable the situation seemed to many Soviets. "Hitler and Ribbentrop," he wrote, "yesterday's official monsters, were today peace-loving angels and friends of the Soviet Union."[17] Kravchenko describes how integral Nazi hatred had become in the lives of the average Soviet. Prior to the pact, children played games of Fascists-and-Communists, in which all the 'Fascists' were given German names and would always lose. Shooting ranges featured cutouts of brown-shirted Nazis waving swastikas for target practice. Indeed, Kravchenko argued that in the Soviet Union hatred of Hitler had become "almost as sacred an article of faith as the virtue of Stalin."[18] Even the

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[14] Elena Skriabina, *Siege and Survival: The Odyssey of a Leningrader*, trans. Norman Luxenburg (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1971), 159.
[15] Johnston, *Being Soviet*, 23.
[16] Nadia Stakhanova et al, *Separated at Stavropol: A Russian Family's Memoir of Wartime Flight* (Jefferson: McFarland, 2005), 77.
[17] Grigori A.Tokaev, *Comrade X*, trans. Alec Brown (London: Harvill Press, 1956), 166.
[18] Kravchenko, *I Chose Freedom*, 332.

Soviet leader himself seemed acutely aware of the optics. When Ribbentrop suggested they present the pact as the "natural friendship" between the Germans and the Soviets, Stalin replied:

> Don't you think that we have to pay a little more attention to public opinion in our two countries? For many years now, we have been pouring buckets of shit on each other's heads, and our propaganda boys could not do enough in that direction. And now, all of a sudden, are we to make our peoples believe that all is forgotten and forgiven? Things don't work so fast. Public opinion in our country, and probably in Germany too, will have to be prepared slowly for the change in our relations that this treaty is to bring about.[19]

Stalin's crudely worded reasoning was quickly manifest in Soviet state propaganda, which pivoted to the new geopolitical situation.

ii. Popular Culture and Propaganda

The state-directed shifts in popular culture and propaganda were reflected in the accounts of many Soviet citizens. Schoolboy Anatole Konstantin recollected that after August 1939, the Germans were no longer called 'Fascists' in propaganda but more respectfully 'National Socialists': "To us one Socialist was as good as another." Hitler likewise went from being an imperialist warmonger to a "good comrade Socialist," with the British, French and Americans taking his place as the evil saber-rattlers.[20] Austrian-born Communist Wolfgang Leonhard was living in the Soviet Union at the time of the pact and also remembered references to Fascism disappearing "over night." "In fact," he wrote, "it seemed as though Fascism had never existed," instead replaced by censure of "imperialism" which was mostly levied at the Western powers.[21]

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[19] Roger Moorhouse, *The Devil's Alliance: Hitler's Pact with Stalin, 1939-1941* (New York: Basic Books, 2014), 27-28.
[20] Konstantin, Anatole. *A Red Boyhood: Growing up under Stalin* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2008), 74-75; Gulag prisoner Josef Berger recalled something similar, describing how the term 'Fascism' disappeared and how criticism towards the French and English capitalists, or "plutocrats," increased. (Wolfgang Leonhard, *Betrayal: The Hitler-Stalin Pact of 1939* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1989), 61.)
[21] Leonhard, *Betrayal*, 57.

Soviet testimonies frequently echoed the Kremlin's attempts at shifting the ideological enemy westward. George Gushin, a British journalist in Moscow, wrote in 1940 that the "average Soviet citizen feels that Britain is now determined to launch an anti-Soviet crusade" against the USSR.[22] A Stalingrad factory worker observed that the "conclusion of a pact with Germany is more correct than with England and France. It has been clear for a long time that England is a country with a two-faced policy."[23] Another anonymous Soviet recalled that at the time he "thought that there must be a war with England and America," due to the state's propaganda efforts.[24]

By redirecting official censure away from Nazi Germany and onto the Western powers, the Soviet state undermined its opposition to Fascism, which many had held as a core tenet of Marxist-Leninism. On the day of Germany's invasion of Poland, Molotov gave a speech in which he tried to shift blame onto the Allies for the recently declared war. "One has to admit," he declared, "that there were some short-sighted people in our own country who were so carried away by oversimplified anti-Fascist agitation that they ignored the activities of the *provocateurs*."[25] Molotov later doubled down, adding that Fascism was, after all, "a matter of taste."[26] It seems there was an even more direct attempt to soften certain aspects of the Communist ethos. If Robinson is to be believed, soon after the pact was signed, Soviet state propaganda lessened its advocacy of a global Communist revolution and focused more on patriotic messaging; banners were erected in his factory that read, "Love your country first and

[22] Johnston, *Being Soviet*, 23.
[23] Ibid., 21.
[24] Ibid.
[25] Anatol Goldberg and Erik De Mauny, *Ilya Ehrenburg: Writing, Politics and the Art of Survival* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1984), 177-178.
[26] Kravchenko, *I Chose Freedom*, 333.

always" and nearby flowers were arranged to spell out "Love your Mighty Motherland always!"[27]

Many newspapers and radio stations, moreover, were not simply following the party line and hiding their contempt for the Nazis; they actively engaged in a bout of Germanophilia. Previously reviled papers like *Völkischer Beobachter* (People's Observer) began being cited with approval and Hitler's speeches were printed at length.[28] The most prominent greeting to Stalin publicized in the newspapers on his sixtieth birthday came from Hitler, in which he included his best wishes "for the happy future of the friendly people of the Soviet Union."[29]

In Moscow, German *Kultur* became the rage, with several exhibits on Nazi art, economic achievements and military glory on full display.[30] Any art that could be perceived as anti-German was quickly censored and the most virulently anti-Fascist books and authors disappeared from libraries.[31] In 1938, famous Soviet filmmaker Sergei Eisenstein had been commissioned to create the propaganda film *Alexander Nevsky* (*Алекса́ндр Не́вский*), named after the Russian prince who defeated the invading Teutonic Germans in the 13th century. Stalin had even personally taken part in writing the script to make the message clear about the then-present German threat.[32] It was quickly recalled from theatres following the pact's signing. One Soviet, simply going by 'Engineer D.,' wondered: "How are our historians going to feel about themselves now? They shouted about Alexander Nevsky, now they will have to shout about centuries of friendship."[33] Other films critical of the Nazis like *Professor Mamlock* (*Профессор Мамлок*, 1938) and *The Family Oppenheim* (*Семья Оппенгейм*, 1938) were likewise banned.[34] Wolfgang Leonhard's

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[27] Robinson, *Black on Red*, 138.
[28] Johnston, *Being Soviet*, 6.
[29] Catherine Merridale, *Ivan's War: Life and Death in the Red Army, 1939-1945* (London: Faber & Faber, 2005), 63.
[30] Kravchenko, *I Chose Freedom*, 333.
[31] Leonhard, *Betrayal*, 58.
[32] R. J. Overy, *Russia's War: A History of the Soviet Effort, 1941-1945* (New York: Penguin Books, 1998), 162.
[33] Johnston, *Being Soviet*, 22.
[34] Kravchenko, *I Chose Freedom*, 334.

young friend prophetically lamented the changes to come when the pact was announced: "Ah, what a pity, now we shall certainly never be allowed to see Charlie Chaplin in *The Great Dictator*!"[35]

Despite this being the new norm in the artistic sphere, some artists seemed to subtly reject the new status quo. Perhaps the best example was the prolific Soviet writer Ilya Ehrenburg, an outspoken opponent of Nazism and a Jew whose books were burned in Berlin in 1933. Even before the pact was signed, Stalin sought to remove Ehrenburg from the public eye during his courtship with Hitler. Ehrenburg learned of the coming pact when the Soviet newspaper *Izvestia* (The News) told him his dispatches and articles were no longer wanted.[36] When the official announcement broke, Ehrenburg was devastated and stayed cooped up for months unable to eat.[37] Still, he never lost sight of his contempt for the Fascists and did his best to subvert the wishes of the Soviet authorities. Living in Paris at the time of the Nazi invasion in 1940, Ehrenburg wrote numerous articles describing the fall of France to be published in the Soviet Union. While he carefully avoided direct criticism of the Nazi regime, Ehrenburg drew the readers' attention to the imposition of martial law and the abuse of Jews and Communists committed by the Germans. Contemporary Anatol Goldberg remembered being "amazed at how much Ehrenburg had managed to say in spite of the censor."[38] Other artists were likewise critical. When Konstantin Simonov's play *A Young Man from Our Town* was first staged in March 1941,

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[35] Wolfgang Leonhard, *Child of the Revolution* (Chicago: Henry Regnery Co., 1958), 53-54.
[36] Ilya Ehrenburg, *Memoirs: 1921-1941*, trans. Tatania Shebunina and Yvonne Kapp (New York: Grosset & Dunlap, 1966), 428.
[37] Anatol Goldberg, and Erik De Mauny, *Ilya Ehrenburg: Writing, Politics and the Art of Survival* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1984), 176.
[38] Ibid., 184-185; Ehrenburg hoped to warn all the "self-deluded" Soviets of the impending attack from the Nazis, but the Kremlin's suppression of his work limited his success. When the invasion finally came in 1941, Ehrenburg's anti-Nazi publications once again circulated and became must-read literature in the USSR.

for example, one observer noted that the actors were "adding more emotion to any lines that had anti-German implications."[39]

These small instances of defiance were the exception. On the whole, Soviet propaganda heavily pushed pro-German sentiments following the pact, which certainly swayed the population to view the new alliance in favourable terms.

iii. Acceptance and Approval

Many in the USSR were quick to accept the Kremlin's new line. A few surveyed Soviets later remembered that they had "real faith in the Nazi-Soviet non-aggression Pact," and "believed it was completely honest."[40] For those who truly sought to understand and justify the pact, however, the mental gymnastics could prove difficult. Polish writer Tadeusz Wittlin questioned a Soviet officer on how his government could possibly ally with the "sworn enemy of Communism." "It's really quite simple," replied the officer:

> The least dangerous régime from our point of view is the Fascist dictatorship, Hitler's régime to be precise. Tradition constitutes a much more serious threat to what we stand for. For that reason, England is our greatest enemy. The Fascist régime can only live as long as the dictator is there to inspire it. Hitlerism therefore will perish with Hitler. He's fifty years old now, so how much longer is he likely to live? Twenty or thirty years at the most, and that's the end of it … We made an alliance with Hitler to help him fight a war against England. And when they're both done bleeding each other we can attack the winner. Now, do you get it?[41]

Some Soviets positively welcomed the news. Suzanne Rosenberg recalled the pact being a "hard pill to swallow" for many, but others were ecstatic. One man she met was in positive "raptures" revealing, to her horror, "his adulation of Hitler."[42] When visiting peers with her

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[39] Johnston, *Being Soviet*, 13.
[40] Ibid., 21.
[41] Tadeusz Wittlin, *Reluctant Traveller in Russia*, trans. Noel E. P. Clark (London: W. Hodge, 1952), 34.
[42] Suzanne Rosenberg, *A Soviet Odyssey* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), 78.

husband in late August, Rosenberg remembered her pampered actor friend raising a toast: "Let us drink to the noble alliance of the Soviet Union and Hitler Germany, and that Britain may be wiped off the face of the earth." Shocked, Rosenberg threw down her glass and insisted she would drink to no such toast, but the rest at the table "swallowed the champagne at almost a single gulp, as though it were vodka."[43] Konstantin, a schoolboy at the time of the pact, was assigned by his teacher to find replacements for the derogatory references to Germans in a patriotic ditty the children sang during assemblies. He excitedly got to work by changing the stanzas celebrating victories over the Germans during the First World War with contemporary Soviet triumphs over the Finns in the ongoing Winter War.[44] Some were stunned they could not help but praise the authorities. In November 1939, a Soviet named V. I. Motorin wrote the Supreme Soviet to praise its diplomatic wisdom: "Ask yourself who truly could have read the articles in the newspapers and not been surprised and not had a smile on their face and not laughed…and [said] 'This is excellent!'"[45] Before long, German Communists in the USSR like Herbert Wehner were being congratulated for Nazi military victories in Poland.[46]

Yet, Soviets with positive views of the pact were deviating from the norm. Approval of the alliance was far less common in the USSR than it was in Nazi Germany, for reasons discussed in Chapter Two. Far more prevalent were those who reacted with doubt, indifference or indignation.

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[43] Ibid., 79.
[44] Konstantin, *A Red Boyhood*, 74-75.
[45] Johnston, *Being Soviet*, 22.
[46] Leonhard, *Betrayal*, 59.

iv. Disapproval and Indifference

Many Soviets could not deal with the ideological volte-face and developed very negative views of the new alliance. Robinson wrote that, while open discussion of the pact was too dangerous, in small groups people began by praising the Kremlin's wisdom, then innocently asked something like: "Isn't it possible that signing an accord with a fascist country will weaken our nation's ideological foundation?"[47] Political officers had serious difficulty explaining the pact to the Red Army, whose members frequently reacted with disapproval; the officers were soon "forced to draw upon the revolutionary rhetoric of historic progress" to confuse their audience into complacency.[48] Some political officers simply gave up.[49] Others wrote propaganda outlets to ask for help explaining the new state of affairs.[50] These troubles even reached the highest offices of the state propaganda organs. The head of the Directorate for Propaganda and Agitation, Andrei Zhdanov, received reports that propagandists were met with very negative reactions to the Kremlin's new official line.[51] The negative reception was so salient that in a speech on 31 August 1939, Molotov was forced to address what he called the popular "lack of understanding" regarding the pact.[52]

In addition to disapproval, the pact made many Soviets apathetic to the regime's politics or validated their existing indifference. The Soviet citizenry had just lived through one of the greatest mass oppression efforts in history, the Great Purge of 1937-38; in just two years over a million people were arrested, of whom many hundreds of thousands were sentenced to death.[53] In such an environment, most Soviets realized it was advantageous to keep their heads down and

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[47] Robinson, *Black on Red*, 138.
[48] Merridale, *Ivan's War*, 63.
[49] Ibid., 64.
[50] Johnston, *Being Soviet*, 23.
[51] Ibid., 22.
[52] Sarah Davies, *Popular Opinion in Stalin's Russia: Terror, propaganda, and Dissent, 1934-1941* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 97-98.
[53] Hiroaki Kuromiya, *Stalin* (Milton Park: Taylor & Francis, 2005), 125.

leave the politics to the Politburo.[54] They were not wrong to hold this view; Stalin was fond of saying that "an enemy of the people is not only one who undertakes sabotage, but one who doubts the rightness of the party line. And of those there are a lot among us, and we must liquidate them."[55]

General apathy, therefore, is reflected in numerous accounts, like the memoir of American John Scott. When Scott mentioned the pact to his friend - a steel worker in the city of Magnitogorsk - the latter simply shrugged it off: "Stalin did it. He knows what he's doing." The conversation ended there. This sentiment of political indifference, however, did not reflect a universal avoidance of confrontation with the Soviet authorities. At a workers' meeting in Moscow in 1940, Scott witnessed a heated debate in which subordinates criticized their plant director on matters of work productivity and product quality. But when the German-Soviet trade agreement was brought up, the discourse ceased and the workers unanimously passed a prepared resolution of approval. "There was no discussion," wrote Scott. "The Soviet workers had learned what was their business and what was not."[56] Kravchenko's memoir likewise typifies this political indifference. Kravchenko noted the initial shock amongst the Soviet citizenry as all wondered how they could possibly understand "such grave matters." "Our job was to build and run factories," Kravchenko admitted, "and to govern the people working in the factories, secure in the faith that our Beloved Leader could make no mistakes." Thus, before long, only a "recalcitrant few" continued discussing the pact; the rest were soon "as apathetic as the population at large."[57] Even some members of the secret police grew politically apathetic with the pact's signing. Former NKVD agent Anatoli Granovsky discussed the pact with his friend in

[54] The Politburo was a small committee of top Communist officials, including the General Secretary, which served as the Soviet government's chief executive body.
[55] Kuromiya, *Stalin*, 137.
[56] John Scott, *Behind the Urals: An American worker in Russia's city of steel* (Cambridge: Houghton Mifflin, 1942), 117.
[57] Kravchenko, *I Chose Freedom*, 334.

the service. Granovsky expressed his skepticism at the unnatural alliance and wondered why the government was attempting to deceive them. “It is very difficult to govern,” came the laconic answer from his friend. “I think they know best what they are doing. Anyhow, the policy has been decided on by Stalin, and there is the end to it.” Granovsky says his friend refused to discuss the matter further.[58]

It is unsurprising that many Soviet citizens under Stalin would view political avoidance as the path to safety. Yet for many the pact represented such a treacherous attack on their ideals that they had to express their indignation, despite the dangers.

v. The Ultimate Betrayal

For many of those still ideologically committed to Communism, the pact was the ultimate betrayal. Like most of his comrades, Leonhard wondered if there were no alternatives to safeguard the Soviet Union. Could neutrality not have sufficed instead of “concluding a friendship treaty with the mortal enemy of socialism and peace?”[59] Robinson recalled that for the faithful Communists, it was difficult to imagine “that their country, which championed equality, fraternity, and world peace, had overnight become linked with Adolf Hitler.” Some were so distraught that they openly wept in Robinson’s shop.[60] Many were perplexed at how “suddenly Stalin has become a friend” of the anti-Jewish “pogromites.”[61] Gabriel Temkin, a Polish-born Socialist whose family was forced to move to Leningrad once their nation had been divided between the Nazis and the Soviets, shared a similar sentiment. He writes of the shame he felt watching Communists side with Hitler and stab his homeland in the back. “Where were the high,

[58] Anatoli Granovsky, *I was an NKVD Agent* (Boston: Western Islands, 1962), 96.
[59] Leonhard, *Betrayal*, 50.
[60] Robinson, *Black on Red*, 137.
[61] Johnston, *Being Soviet*, 22.

noble principles I believed a socialist state would always adhere to?" Temkin wondered. "When these historical events caught up with me my expectations were shattered, my faith in Soviet Socialism undermined."[62] Indeed, many Soviets identified the pact as their "moment of awakening," when any of their remaining faith in the regime was finally crushed.[63]

Even important members of the Soviet government were taken aback and frequently distraught by the pact. Top Soviet officials were not consulted; the head of the NKVD Lavrenty Beria was presented with the pact as a "*fait accompli*."[64] Politburo member and future General Secretary Nikita Khrushchev recalled in his memoir that most party members understood the pact as a strategic maneuver, though none were allowed to discuss it openly. It still became evident to Khrushchev that many of his colleagues

> could not accept the idea that there could be some sort of agreement, even the possibility of peaceful coexistence, between us Communists and Hitler, when our ideas were absolutely opposed to those of the fascists. With Germans in general, yes, but with Hitler such a thing seemed impossible.[65]

The news of the pact came "out of the blue" for Soviet spymaster Pavel Sudoplatov. When Ribbentrop arrived the evening of August 23, Sudoplatov and his colleagues were still actively exploring espionage tactics against Germany.[66] Tokaev, at the time head of the Aeronautics Laboratory at the Zhukovsky Academy in Moscow and already skeptical of the present regime, wrote that despite knowing the pact was imminent, "it was still hard to believe that even the Stalin oligarchy could stoop so low."[67] Tokaev's close friend, a prominent party member shielded

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[62] Gabriel Temkin, *My Just War: The Memoir of a Jewish Red Army Soldier in World War II* (Novato: Presidio, 1998), 9.
[63] Johnston, *Being Soviet*, 41.
[64] Sergo Beria, *My Father, Beria: Inside Stalin's Kremlin*, trans. Brian Pearce (London: Duckworth, 2001), 51
[65] Nikita S. Khrushchev, *Memoirs of Nikita Khrushchev*, trans. George Shriver (University Park: Pennsylvania State University, 2004.), 230.
[66] Pavel Sudoplatov and Anatoli Sudoplatov, *Special Tasks: The Memoirs of an Unwanted Witness, a Soviet Spymaster* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1994), 97.
[67] Tokaev, *Comrade X*, 164.

by the pseudonym 'Comrade X,' was extremely disturbed by the unholy marriage. "If Ribbentrop comes to Moscow,' Comrade X said "with cold fury," "we must kill Molotov and him together."[68]

Indeed, most Communist hardliners were devastated by the pact, which ironically paralleled how the ardent Nazis frequently perceived it, as will be explored in Chapter Two. Both felt betrayed by their leaders and viewed the pact as undermining the foundations of their guiding ideologies. A glaring difference between the German and Soviet receptions, however, is the attitude to war. While Germans often viewed the pact as a means of stopping or forestalling a European conflict, the Soviets more commonly understood it as guaranteeing war.

vi. The Spectre of War Looms

The geopolitical situation changed as relations between the Nazis and Soviets soured in 1940. Consequently, many within the USSR began prophesying the ensuing catastrophe. One Muscovite plant director declared the pact was "plain foolishness" and pleaded to the authorities to better equip him for what he viewed as the inevitable war: "Hitler will strike! Are we prepared? No! My plant isn't! I keep saying it needs to be re-equipped to meet war needs. Do I get support from the top people? Again no!" While he was proven right during the early stages of the German invasion of the Soviet Union, his "defeatist talk" landed him in prison all the same. Remarkably, his absence was deemed so detrimental that he was soon released to continue his work.[69] Others were likewise skeptical. A Red Army Commissar confided in his diary that "with regard to the enemy we must be most careful when he swears his loyalty."[70] Despite the ample propaganda softening the image of the Nazis, a police report in Leningrad found there to be a

[68] Ibid., 165.
[69] Rosenberg, *A Soviet Odyssey*, 78.
[70] Johnston, *Being Soviet*, 22; date unknown.

profound "lack of faith in the German government."[71] NKVD agent Granovsky discussed the situation with his friend, both of whom assumed the Nazis and the Soviets were more than willing to stab each other in the back. "When you make friends with a murderer you must be prepared to use your knife," his friend joked. "Maybe that's how the Germans feel," Granovsky replied.[72]

For those in the know, war became an inevitability. As the German invasion grew near, Molotov himself recalled that "everyone expected the war," but no one knew when it would come.[73] For others, Hitler's invasion was a complete bombshell, due to the false sense of security created by the pact. Nadia Stakhanova wrote that while "Europe was on fire we thought we were secure. We had a non-aggression pact with Hitler."[74] Numerous Russians later told British author Alexander Werth that the pact created a "rather reassuring impression" and the ensuing 'bloodless' takeover of Eastern Poland gave the sense that "neutrality paid."[75] According to writer Skriabina, the Soviet citizenry, "while it had always felt that there was something unnatural about the friendship pact with Germany, had absolutely no inkling that war was imminent."[76] Soviet propaganda did not help prepare the population as Stalin continued to keep his head buried in the sand. A government declaration published on 15 June 1941, a week before the Nazi invasion, read: "According to the information of the USSR, Germany is observing the terms of the Soviet-German pact as strictly as the USSR. Therefore, in the opinion of Soviet circles, rumors about Germany's plan to break the pact and to undertake an attack on the USSR are quite unfounded."[77] But unfounded they were not. The Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact finally

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[71] Ibid.
[72] Granovsky, *I was an NKVD agent*, 95.
[73] Vyacheslav M. Molotov, Albert Resis and Felix Chuev, *Molotov Remembers: Inside Kremlin Politics, Conversations with Felix Chuev* (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 1993), 22.
[74] Stakhanova, *Separated at Stavropol*, 79.
[75] Alexander Werth, *Russia at War, 1941-1945* (New York: Carroll and Graf, 1984), 61, 65.
[76] Skriabina, *Siege and Survival*, 163.
[77] Temkin, *My Just War*, 31.

disintegrated when German troops crossed into Soviet territory in the summer of 1941, and, along with it, any hope of avoiding war between the USSR and Nazi Germany.

vii. Conclusion

The popular Soviet reception to the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact was highly varied. Some felt betrayed, others were relieved, and still others were overjoyed. Some mounted what resistance they could through political defiance or artistic subversion, but more simply accepted the new state of affairs. Most importantly, these accounts highlight the human experience of the pact, which are frequently muddled or forgotten in the whirlwind of the first months of the war. Despite the number of Soviets who disapproved of Stalin's alignment with the Nazis, the fact that the agreement came back to bite the USSR made the Soviet state seem more like the historical victims. But let us not forget the pact allowed the Soviet government to expand its borders and thereby engulf new populations into its terror and to ignore the pleas of the Western Allies while actively stoking the furnace of the Nazi war machine; it also allowed Stalin the peace of mind to bury his head in the sand, costing millions of Soviet lives. And yet, with Hitler dead and reviled and Ribbentrop executed as a war criminal, Stalin became one of the Big Three politicians shaping the postwar world and Molotov lived to the ripe age of 96. As Russian chess legend Garry Kasparov poignantly put it, the "real problem with hanging von Ribbentrop," whom the Allies executed in 1946, "was that Vyacheslav Molotov was not hanging next to him."[78]

[78] Garry Kasparov, "Do Not Forget the Lessons of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact," talk delivered in Toronto on September 12, 2019, transcription by the Macdonald-Laurier Institute, page 2, https://macdonaldlaurier.ca/mli-files/pdf/MLICommentary_Oct2019_Kasparov_FWeb.pdf.

Chapter 2:
"Machiavelli is a Babe in the Arms by Comparison"

The Germans were as stunned by the news of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact as their Soviet counterparts. The ideological reversal required a massive shift in propaganda that undoubtedly impacted how Germans came to understand the alliance. Many came to view the pact as perfectly justifiable given its intended prevention of war to the East, as had hampered the previous generation during the Great War. Still, Hitler recognized that some of the most ideologically committed National Socialists might need further explanation for the doctrinal volte-face. German diplomat Ulrich von Hassell recorded Hitler assuring his inner circle that the pact in no way altered his anti-Bolshevik convictions, but its ability to frighten the Western powers into backing down from war, so he thought, was of paramount importance. "One had to use Beelzebub," Hitler argued, "to drive away the devil."[79] This explanation satisfied most hardliners, though not all. For many opposing the Nazi Party, the pact vindicated their enmity and set in motion the inevitable downfall of the Third Reich. This sentiment, however, was not universal. At one time the largest thorn in Hitler's side, the German Communist underground on the whole chose to follow Stalin's party line and cease nearly all resistance efforts against the Nazi government throughout the two-year rapprochement.

i. Shock Permeates

The bombshell of the pact tore through German society and led to numerous reactions. "To see the names of Hitler and Stalin linked in friendship on a piece of paper," recalled architect and influential Nazi Party member Albert Speer, "was the most staggering, the most exciting turn

[79] Ulrich von Hassell, *The von Hassell Diaries: The Story of the Forces against Hitler Inside Germany, 1938-1944* (New York: Routledge, 2019), 67; in the New Testament, Beelzebub, sometimes translated as Lord of the Flies, is the prince of the devils. Mark 3:22 describes Jesus using Beelzebub to drive away demons, perhaps what Hitler's quote was in reference to.

of events I could possibly have imagined."[80] English-born German immigrant Christabel Bielenberg remembered the pact as "a diplomatic tour de force and also a political somersault which had caught" many a wise man "on the hop."[81] "It is not surprising," wrote long-time critic of the Nazi Party Friedrich Kellner, "even those with less tender natures have been knocked off balance, at least for a day or two, by the reversal of opinion regarding the danger from Russian 'common bloodstained criminals' and the 'scum of humanity' - as Adolf Hitler put it in *Mein Kampf*."[82] Jewish German diarist Victor Klemperer could not believe "the incredible turnabout, confusion, the incalculable situation, [or] the balance of forces after this volte-face." "Machiavelli," Klemperer eloquently penned, "is a babe in arms by comparison."[83]

ii. Popular Culture and Propaganda

Having created such a large body of anti-Soviet propaganda and art since the Party's earliest days, the Nazis were forced to make immediate changes following the pact. State rhetoric was altered, certain films were halted or banned and German writers were asked to put lipstick on the Soviet pig. These changes in propaganda were similar to those undertaken by the Kremlin, though the German state seemed more hesitant to remove negative portrayals of the Soviets from circulation. Despite being relatively limited, these changes shocked German audiences all the same.

Even months before the signing of the pact, as Berlin began courting Moscow, anti-Soviet propaganda slowed. After 24 August 1939, the theme of anti-Bolshevism disappeared

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[80] Albert Speer, *Inside the Third Reich: Memoirs*, trans. Richard and Clara Winston (New York: Macmillan, 1970), 194.
[81] Christabel Bielenberg, *The Past is Myself* (London: Corgi, 1984), 58
[82] Friedrich Kellner and Robert Scott Kellner, *My Opposition The Diary of Friedrich Kellner - A German against the Third Reich* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 30.
[83] Victor Klemperer, *I Will Bear Witness: A Diary of the Nazi Years, 1933-1941*, trans. Martin Chalmers (New York: Random House, 1998), 305, 306.

from the state's lexicon entirely and the Nazi press set out to justify the diplomatic reversal.[84] American journalist William Shirer wrote that newspapers in Berlin the day after the pact were "something to behold." The *Deutsche Allgemeine Zeitung* (General German Newspaper), which for years had been "violently attacking Bolshevism and Soviet Russia," had a front-page editorial of the "natural partnership" between Germany and the USSR on August 24.[85] The Nazi Party's official newspaper, *Völkischer Beobachter* (People's Observer), soon carried long excerpts of Molotov's speeches and exalted Soviet military triumphs during their invasion of Poland in late September.[86] Joseph Goebbels' newspaper *Der Angriff* (The Attack), "the most ferocious anti-Bolshevik sheet of them all," carried this message on its front page the day after the pact: "The world stands before a towering fact: two peoples have placed themselves on the basis of a common foreign policy which during a long and traditional friendship produced a foundation for a common understanding."[87]

In addition to internal redirect, foreign propaganda efforts were likewise altered by the signing of the pact. The Anti-Komintern was a propaganda office established by Joseph Goebbels with the primary directive of levelling criticism towards the USSR, both inside Germany and abroad. With the signing of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact, all anti-Soviet propaganda campaigns emanating from the Reich were forced to cease. During the early stages of the war, the Anti-Komintern's budget was slashed by two-thirds and its officers were relegated to more mundane tasks like monitoring foreign receptions of the pact.[88] With its central purpose being taboo in the new political climate, Goebbels officially dissolved the Anti-Komintern

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[84] Aristotle A. Kallis, *Nazi Propaganda and the Second World War* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 77.
[85] William L. Shirer, *Berlin Diary: The Journal of a Foreign Correspondent*, *1934-1941* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1941), 182.
[86] Roger Moorhouse, *The Devil's Alliance: Hitler's Pact with Stalin, 1939-1941* (New York: Basic Books, 2014), 126.
[87] William L. Shirer, *The Nightmare Years, 1930 - 1940* (New York Bantam Books, 1984), 426.
[88] Lorna L. Waddington, "The Anti-Komintern and Nazi Anti-Bolshevik Propaganda in the 1930s," *Journal of Contemporary History* 42, no. 4 (2007): 592.

during the Nazi-Soviet interlude.[89] It only resumed its duties once German troops crossed the Soviet border in the summer of 1941.

Next on the docket for the Nazi propaganda ministry was popular culture. The German film industry had a long history of anti-Soviet films which now had to be repealed. The film *Friesennot* (*Frisians in Peril*, 1935), which featured ethnic Germans living on the Volga River and suffering under Soviet oppression, was banned in September 1939.[90] Other ongoing productions were halted altogether. *Legion Condor* (1939), a propaganda film on the German exploits during the Spanish Civil War, had to cease filming due to its anti-Communist messaging.[91] More opportunistic films were created in place of the banned films, like *Bismarck* (1940) and *Der Postmeister* (*The Postmaster*, 1940). The former, commissioned by Goebbels, featured a scene in which German Chancellor Otto von Bismarck gives a speech in favour of a diplomatic and military volte-face against the Austro-Hungarian Empire to unify the German peoples.[92] The connection to the recent one-eighty in German foreign policy was certainly intentional. The latter film was a love story set in Russia and based on a short story by Russian author Alexander Pushkin. According to Armin Lehmann, a former Hitler Youth member, *Der Postmeister* had an "intriguing plot" with "masterful acting, and catchy music." So great was his enjoyment that it kicked off Lehmann's lifelong love of Russian literature.[93] Evidently, the films commissioned between 1939 and 1941 were successful in positively portraying Russian culture to some Germans.

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[89] Jan C. Behrends, "Back from the USSR: The Anti-Comintern's Publications on Soviet Russia in Nazi Germany: 1935–41," *Kritika* 10, no. 3 (2009): 549.
[90] Moorhouse, *The Devil's Alliance*, 129; *Friesennot* apparently made its way into Hitler's personal collection before its ban.
[91] Kallis, *Nazi Propaganda*, 202; if Shirer is to be believed, Hitler, Goebbels, Hermann Göring and Heinrich Himmler all saw completed portions of *Legion Condor* and praised it before its ban (Shirer, *Berlin Diary*, 289).
[92] Kallis, *Nazi Propaganda*, 204.
[93] Armin D. Lehmann, *Hitler's Last Courier: A Life in Transition* (Bloomington: Xlibris, 2000), 187.

While the new Nazi Party line appears to be clear given the changes to the German film industry between 1939 and 1941, other forms of popular culture muddy the picture. There were attempts at embracing Russian music, which played on German radio stations and in Berlin cabarets, but these were limited.[94] And while newspapers like the *Völkischer Beobachter* ran stories on Eastern European history, it should be noted that the emphasis was placed on the pre-Soviet, Tsarist past, rather than any post-1917 events.[95] Furthermore, while anti-Soviet literature was certainly harder to find, according to Shirer, anti-Bolshevik publications continued to sell well in spite of the new Party line; in particular, *Socialism Betrayed*, written by former German Communist Karl Albrecht.[96] Likewise, Kellner contended that "volumes" of anti-Bolshevik propaganda, or in his words "offensiveness and slander," were still very much available to the public.[97] In this sense, the Nazi Party did not follow the lead of the Politburo, which took active measures to ensure that all anti-Fascist propaganda was to be banned from public consumption, instead seemingly banning more in theory than in reality.

Still, the abrupt change in the Nazi Party's propaganda threw many Germans off kilter. As the former Social Democrat and Hitler oppositionist Kellner recalled, the alliance with the USSR seemed rather bizarre in light of the "long and drawn out campaign the Nazis waged against Russia in word and writing … in particular against the 'subhumans' there." On the other end of the political spectrum, Nazi Party ideologue Alfred Rosenberg lamented that the German press was "lacking all dignity" by abandoning their ideological principles as though their "struggle against Moscow had been a misunderstanding." Cuddling up to the Soviets, for Rosenberg, was "worse than embarrassing."[98] For evidence of the broader reaction to the Nazi

[94] Moorhouse, *The Devil's Alliance*, 130.
[95] Ibid., 126.
[96] Shirer, *Berlin Diary*, 240.
[97] Kellner and Kellner, *My Opposition*, 65.
[98] Moorhouse, *The Devil's Alliance*, 126.

Party's propaganda efforts, we should consult the mood reports from the Social Democratic Party of Germany in Exile.[99] A December 1939 report argues that the effects of the state's "unscrupulous and overwhelming propaganda" is particularly evident in the case of the alliance with the Soviet Union, stating that the "systematic manipulation of public opinion" has turned the initial shock into understanding and support for the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact.[100] Clearly, Nazi propaganda led many Germans to view this nonaggression pact in very favourable terms.

iii. Strengthening Faith and Avoiding War

Whether swayed by Nazi propaganda or not, for many Germans the pact was yet more "proof of the Führer's skill" and only confirmed their undying faith in Hitler.[101] It was so unexpected and unprecedented that many could but marvel at the diplomatic abilities of their leader. More than anything, most Germans rejoiced that the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact destroyed the chances of encirclement by the West and the Soviets; at least so they thought.

The feelings of excitement and support were immediately palpable the day the pact was announced. That day in the German capital, Shirer gave a report on the radio for an American audience in which he discussed the reaction throughout Berlin. "Everyone had their head buried in a newspaper," Shirer reported. "And in their faces you could see they considered that what they read was good news."[102] Another observer remembered that same day thus: "Everyone beaming with joy. Wherever one goes, everywhere people speak excitedly of the Agreement with

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[99] When the Nazis ascended to power in 1933, the Social Democratic Party of Germany fled to Prague, eventually moving to Paris and finally London. While in exile, the party became known as SOPADE and it kept tabs on the mood within Nazi Germany. These reports are essential for obtaining mood reports from a body other than the Nazi Party itself.

[100] SOPADE, *Der Pakt mit Russland*, 2 December 1939. http://collections.fes.de/historische-presse/periodical/pagetext/337978?query=pakt.

[101] Pierre Ayçoberry, *The Social History of the Third Reich: 1933-1945*, trans. Janet Lloyd (New York: New Press, 1999), 334.

[102] William Shirer, *"This is Berlin": Radio Broadcasts from Nazi Germany* (Woodstock: Overlook Press, 1999), 56.

Russia!"[103] A Bavarian doctor "could not believe" that Hitler and Stalin could make a pact together; he soon "began to marvel" at the Führer's "amazing diplomatic chess move."[104] When relaying the public's reception of his press conference the night in Germany that the pact was signed, Goebbels told Hitler: "The sensation was fantastic. And when the church bells simultaneously began ringing outside, a British correspondent fatalistically remarked: 'That is the death knell of the British Empire.'"[105] The German support for the pact was widespread, certainly more so than support for it in the USSR. The individual reasons often converge on the same point. The pact allowed Germany to avoid, or at the least forestall, the fate that befell the previous German war effort: the dreaded two-front war.

Searching the records of German responses to the pact, there is an inescapable sense of relief that Soviet encirclement had been dissipated. Luftwaffe general Adolf Galland recorded that the "general reaction in Germany" to the pact, which "could not be reconciled" with the state's previous anti-Bolshevik redirect, was rationalized as Hitler removing the danger to the German rear "should it come to war with the Western Powers."[106] Shirer, in his broadcast on the day of the pact's announcement, suggested that the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact "means for every man, woman, and child in Germany … that the dreaded nightmare of encirclement has apparently been destroyed."[107] Indeed, avoidance of another devastating conflict was the foremost concern for most Germans, as a report from the town of Ebermannstadt demonstrates. "Trust in the Führer will now probably be subjected to its hardest acid test," it read. "The overwhelming proportion of people's comrades expects from him the prevention of the war, if

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[103] Moorhouse, *The Devil's Alliance*, 127.
[104] Ibid.
[105] Albert Speer, *Inside the Third Reich: Memoirs*, trans. Richard and Clara Winston (New York: Macmillan, 1970), 194.
[106] Adolf Galland, *The First and the Last*, trans. Mervyn Savill (London: Methuen and Co., 1955), 40.
[107] Shirer, *"This is Berlin,"* 57.

otherwise impossible."[108] Paradoxically, belief in Hitler hardly abated with the ensuing Polish invasion and declarations of war from the West. Historian Pierre Ayçoberry noted that Hitler's standing according to German public opinion "by no means diminished" following the September invasion, "as people were still grateful for his efforts to find a peaceful solution" in the case of the Soviet Union.[109]

The strategic utility of the pact was likewise well-received by many within the German military. General Adolf Galland wrote that from "a military point of view, it appeared to be an ideal solution, and it coincided with the ideas of the German General Staff, which considered that it was absolutely essential to avoid a war on two fronts."[110] The German Navy, furthermore, was "enjoying particular benefits" from the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact, according to Grand Admiral Erich Raeder. The navy was "freed of any worry over the Baltic [Sea]," especially with the elimination of the Polish threat, allowing safe passage of German naval ships and Scandinavian merchant vessels.[111]

Hitler made certain to reassure his chiefs of staff that the new geopolitical situation did not change his fundamental principles. Field Marshal Fedor von Bock recorded a laconic diary entry the day of the pact's signing in which he referenced the Führer's "terrific speech."[112] Admiral Raeder likewise recalled Hitler's address, which he said impressed all in attendance. Their faith in their leader was only strengthened as they felt that another one of "Hitler's clever political chess moves was coming up, and that he would win peacefully again, just as he always

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[108] Ian Kershaw, *The "Hitler Myth": Image and Reality in the Third Reich* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 143.
[109] Ayçoberry, *The Social History of the Third Reich*, 204.
[110] Adolf Galland, *The First and the Last*, 40.
[111] Erich Raeder, *My Life: Grand Admiral Erich Raeder*, trans. Henry W. Drexel (Annapolis: United States Naval Institute Press, 1960), 333.
[112] Fedor von Bock, *Generalfeldmarschall Fedor von Bock: The War Diary, 1939-1945*, trans. David Johnson (Atglen: Schiffer, 1996), 34.

had done before."[113] Luftwaffe official Nicolaus von Below recalled that the "astonishment and relief were almost tangible" amongst the military heads. Those faithful to their Führer were vindicated and the pact had even "left the skeptics speechless."[114] While memoirs show extensive support amongst military officials, one should note how Hitler presented the pact. "Stalin and I are the only ones who visualise the future," Hitler declared in a meeting with his chiefs of staff. "So in a few weeks I shall stretch out my hand to Stalin at the common German-Russian frontier, and with him undertake to redistribute the world."[115] Lest anyone disagree with the new party line, Hitler made it clear that his word was final and that he was willing to "shoot everyone who utters one word of criticism."[116]

Still, many Germans were genuine in their praise. With the chances of encirclement nullified, some considered the Soviet alliance the pinnacle of Nazi foreign policy - yet another feather in Hitler's cap. Such a reception was evidently desired by Hitler himself. Historian Hannah Vogt noted that Hitler threw "all his ideological reservations to the wind" and had "convinced himself that a pact with Stalin would be considered as a stroke of genius and enhance his prestige."[117] He was certainly partially correct in his assessment, but there were still those registering strong disapproval.

iv. Condemnation and Disillusionment

As Hitler's bald-faced threats toward his chiefs of staff suggested, it is quite possible many Germans were too afraid to express their honest perceptions of the new alliance. "Who can

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[113] Raeder, *My Life*, 278.
[114] Nicholaus von Below, *At Hitler's Side: The Memoirs of Hitler's Luftwaffe Adjutant 1937-1945*, trans. Geoffrey Brooks (London: Greenhill Books, 2001), 27.
[115] Moorhouse, *The Devil's Alliance*, 124.
[116] Ibid., 125.
[117] Hannah Vogt, *The Burden of Guilt: A Short History of Germany, 1914-1945* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1964), 194.

judge the mood of 80 million people," Victor Klemperer asked, "with the press bound and everyone afraid of opening their mouth?"[118] Still, there are German accounts that make it clear that many were unhappy with the new alliance. The Nazi hardliners were indignant to cuddling up to their long-time enemy and less fervent supporters grew skeptical of Hitler's decision-making; those who opposed the Nazis had their disgust in the regime vindicated and people from across the political spectrum remained fearful of the spectre of war.

Many German citizens, including Nazi Party members, had their faith shaken by the pact. Wehrmacht soldier Siegfried Knappe wrote that the alliance "seemed very cynical" to him. His attitude towards his government, Knappe wrote, "was beginning to be a little less trusting."[119] Kellner recalled that some were growing apathetic toward the regime's foreign policy. "In politics everything is possible," he wrote, "but a little character and honesty must be there or people will lose all belief in treaties."[120] In the autumn of 1939, British Foreign Secretary Viscount Halifax prepared a secret memorandum on German-Soviet relations. He cited sources in Berlin that suggest that there was "growing dissatisfaction and disillusionment in Germany - in naval and military circles, amongst diplomats, on the part of [Hermann] Göring and his entourage, and in the Party - over the Russo-German Pact."[121]

The most fanatical Nazis frequently found the new party line difficult to reconcile with their ideological commitments. Party ideologue Alfred Rosenberg lamented that Ribbentrop's mission to Moscow was "an act of moral disrespect towards our 20-year struggle, towards our Party Rallies, towards Spain." "About 4 years ago," Rosenberg recalled, "the Führer said in my presence that he would not make a deal with Moscow, because it was impossible to forbid the

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[118] Victor Klemperer, *I Will Bear Witness*, 306.
[119] Siegfried Knappe and Ted Brusaw. *Soldat: Reflections of a German soldier, 1936-1949* (New York: Orion Books, 1992), 137.
[120] Kellner and Kellner, *My Opposition*, 123.
[121] Moorhouse, *The Devil's Alliance*, 128.

German people to steal and at the same time make friends with thieves."[122] Diplomat Ulrich von Hassell acknowledged the strategic utility of the pact but argued that it was also proof of Hitler's "absolute unscrupulousness and lack of principle."[123] Perhaps the pact solidified Hassell's antagonism towards the Führer as he would later participate in the plot to kill him in 1944. Hitler Youth member Armin Lehmann's grandfather was a long-time supporter of the Nazis. Once it had been announced, Lehmann recalled his grandfather being aghast at the "unholy alliance." Lehmann caught his grandfather wondering how "his Führer [could] have signed a non-aggression pact with a foe as despicable as Stalin?"[124] Kellner nicely summed up the internal conflict many Nazi supporters felt:

> Adolf Hitler wrote that if Germany should ever ally with Russia against England and France, "Its outcome would be the end of Germany." What should a simple man say about this, and what should the believers in National Socialism think? Is Prophet Hitler wrong and Chancellor Hitler correct, or the reverse? History will know how to tell it. Perhaps the last word in wisdom is this: The mills of God grind slowly but surely.[125]

The alliance with Russia bringing about 'the end of Germany,' as Hitler prophesied, was a sentiment many Germans echoed in their writings. "Despite Hitler's 'irrevocable' decision," wrote Field Marshal Erich von Manstein, "doubts remain as to whether he will go to war. The first order to attack is revoked! Doubts to the last. The die is cast!"[126] Field Marshal Fedor von Bock argued that Stalin entered the alliance hoping the Germans would be "bled dry" in a war against the West, at which time "he could fall upon it with bolshevism."[127] These accounts from Bock and Manstein reveal that Hitler's high command did not universally agree that the pact would stave off a Soviet attack. And indeed, others outside the German military felt similarly.

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[122] Ibid., 124.
[123] Von Hassel, *The von Hassel Diaries*, 62.
[124] Lehmann, *Hitler's Last Courier*, 127.
[125] Kellner and Kellner, *My Opposition*, 30
[126] Erich von Manstein, *Verlorene Siege*, trans. Dr. Kristin Semmens (Frankfurt: Athenäum-Verlag, 1955), 11.
[127] Bock, 207

Fritz Thyssen, an industrialist and long-time economic supporter of the Nazi Party, became disillusioned in early 1939 and moved his family to Switzerland. Thyssen, still a believer in the principles of the Nazi Party, wrote a letter to Hermann Göring in September of 1939 in which he expressed how "grotesque" it was for him to see "that National Socialism has suddenly discarded its doctrines in order to hobnob with Communism." "Even from the standpoint of practical politics," Thyssen argued, "this policy amounts to suicide, for the sole person to benefit from it is the Nazis' mortal enemy of yesterday, transformed into the friend of today - Russia."[128] In October, Thyssen wrote the Führer in appropriately grave terms: "Your new policy, Herr Hitler, is pushing Germany into the abyss and the German people into ruin." He concluded his letter by insisting that the Führer reverse his course, otherwise, it would mean "*Finis Germaniae* [The End of Germany]."[129]

Similar sentiments were shared by those in opposition to the regime. Klemperer noted that the "prospects of war and peace, the prospects and groupings in a possible war appear to fluctuate from hour to hour." "Everyone guesses" what will transpire, Klemperer wrote. "The tension is too great."[130] German journalist Ruth Andreas-Friedrich did not know "whether to heave a sigh of relief or to gasp with horror" upon learning of the pact with the USSR. For Andreas-Friedrich, a Nazi resister working with the German underground, the Soviet alliance only guaranteed war, which she reluctantly welcomed. "Now the end with its horrors," she wrote, "seems almost more bearable to us than horror without end."[131] Hans Bernd Gisevius, another member of the 1944 plot to assassinate Hitler, wrote that he "no longer doubted that the marching orders would be issued." To his mind, "the die had already been cast on August 23."[132]

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[128] Fritz Thyssen, *I Paid Hitler*, trans. César Saerchinger (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1941), 47.
[129] Ibid., 56.
[130] Klemperer, *I Will Bear Witness*, 305.
[131] Ruth Andreas-Friedrich, *Berlin Underground: 1938-1945*, trans. Barrows Mussey (New York: Henry Holt And Company, 1947), 45.
[132] Gisevius, *To the Bitter End*, 369.

There are interesting similarities and differences in the Soviet and German disapproval of the pact. Ideologically committed Soviets and Nazis both saw the alliance as a betrayal of their principles; for the Germans, however, while the pact created political cynicism and distrust in the Nazi government, it did not breed indifference as it did in the Soviet Union. Indeed, if the pact were forgotten in Germany it would not be due to apathy but from it disappearing from newspaper headlines during the highly successful campaigns of the early war. In both cases, disapproval of the pact failed to breed popular resistance against the regimes, which is particularly interesting when considering the group most caught between the signatory nations: the German Communists.

v. The Hammer and Sickle within the Reich

Perhaps the group most affected by the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact within the Reich were the German Communists. Though some were initially hopeful about the pact, thinking that it could have been a "blow for peace" which would allow them to emerge from the German underground, a rift soon formed within the Communist ranks.[133] Some wanted to accept the Kremlin's line and turn their attention to the other imperialist powers, while others could not stomach this ideological reversal. Despite the numerous voices raised against the pact, accepting the new alliance with Nazi Germany soon became the official party line of the German Communists.

The rift among German Communists began forming long before the pact. Paul Elflein, former head of the Communist group in the town of Hochheim, worried at the end of the 1920s about how dependent on the Kremlin the German Communist Party (KPD) was becoming. Once the pact was announced, Elflein was shocked and "no one approved of the pact" among the

[133] Moorhouse, *The Devil's Alliance*, 112.

fellow Communists he questioned.[134] KPD member Heinz Brandt, who had been held in the Brandenburg-Görden prison since 1933, noted that events like the Moscow show trials and the Kremlin's actions during the Spanish Civil War were highly divisive among the political prisoners. The pact was the final polarizing event; while some defended the Kremlin's choice, others like Brandt finally saw that "Stalin's state, although outwardly different from Hitler's, was also an inhuman despotism."[135]

As Brandt's reaction shows, for some the pact was a treacherous ideological turn that shook their faith to its core. Heinz Kuhn, a German Communist living in Brussels in August 1939, learned of the pact between the "red Vatican" and the "brown devil" the day after his wedding. Most of their fellow Communist cadres, he wrote, "lost their faith in the Party" and were nowhere to be found in the usual public meeting spaces.[136] Thorwald Siegel, a German Communist émigré in Paris, was so depressed by the Soviet invasion of Poland that he took his own life.[137] As Kellner noted, in August 1939 the "world's proletariats were given a drama never seen before, a sight for the gods: Stalin arm-in-arm with Hitler." "A decent man," he lamented, "could but turn away and retire to a remote island, mourning for everything that makes us human."[138] German Communist Hans Werner Richter did just so, returning to his birthplace on the island of Usedom when he learned of the "moral, political and psychological betrayal" that was the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact:

> It is August 23, 1939, the day on which all our hopes proved to be illusions, a day of utter humiliation and disappointment for me, yes of shame towards all those to whom I had, time and again, given hope with my arguments and persuaded to be patient. What were all the setbacks which we had experienced compared with this one day on which everything in which I had believed collapsed. No theory on the proper strategy against

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[134] Wolfgang Leonhard, *Betrayal: The Hitler-Stalin Pact of 1939* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1989), 76.
[135] Ibid., 80.
[136] Leonhard, *Betrayal*, 99.
[137] Moorhouse, *The Devil's Alliance*, 113.
[138] Kellner and Kellner, *My Opposition*, 140.

> imperialism, no matter how marvellous it might be, could ever blot this day out of my life. That day cannot be hushed up, covered up with lies, rendered insignificant or, as one did after the war for reasons which are easily understood, made harmless. That day remained what it was: a day of unparalleled, traditional betrayal.[139]

Whatever their internal struggles, whether abroad or underground, most German Communists eventually committed to following Moscow's party line. Eugen Eberle was a former KPD member and part of the anti-Fascist resistance within the Reich at the time of the pact. Though initially skeptical, Eberle eventually viewed the pact as "a legitimate albeit temporary means of defending the USSR."[140] Some were more enthusiastic. Ewald Munschke, German Communist and future Major General in the East German National People's Army, was living in the Netherlands in August of 1939. He recorded that his experiences in the USSR allowed him to "understand more quickly the reason underlying the tactical manoeuvres" of the Soviet foreign policy. He remembered "avidly" jumping into debates with fellow Communists in favour of the pact: "More than ever before it was important to discipline the comrades to iron unity."[141]

Indeed, following Moscow's line was soon adopted as the guiding principle of the German Communist Party itself. Leading members of the KPD, like Franz Dahlem and Alexander Abusch, who at the time were working in exile, made their position known in a statement sent out on August 25, 1939. They applauded the pact as an "act of the Soviet Union for peace" and suggested that all German Communists should accept it and all other future peace treaties, stressing the need to form a "revolutionary, unified party."[142] What this meant in practice was explained by one of the foremost German Communists Walter Ulbricht. "The fight for democratic liberties," he declared, "cannot be waged in alliance with British imperialism." He

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[139] Leonhard, *Betrayal*, 190-191.
[140] Ibid., 76.
[141] Ibid., 98.
[142] Ibid., 88.

suggested those who disagreed would "share responsibility for realising the predatory plans of [the] British and French." The "strongest guarantee" to hinder the plans of the evil imperialists, according to Ulbricht, was the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact.[143]

This ideological reversal of those who were once the most fervent of Hitler's oppositionists left a disgraceful mark on the history of the Communist movement in Germany. Even when upwards of 800 German Communists were handed over to the Gestapo by the Soviet authorities in the wake of the pact, they continued following Stalin's line.[144] Gestapo reports suggested that there was a monthly average of about 1000 Communist propaganda leaflets found by their agents in 1938; by December 1939, they found 277 and by April 1940 only 82.[145] Indeed, by June 1940, an SS report stated that one could "no longer speak of organised resistance from the communist and Marxist circles" within Germany.[146] This humiliating volte-face was why historian Hugh Trevor-Roper considered the German Communists from 1939 to 1941 to be "the most shameless of Hitler's accomplices."[147]

vi. Conclusion

As with their Soviet counterparts, German reactions to the pact ran the gamut. As the initial shock spread across German society, Nazi propaganda quickly pivoted to present the new alliance in the best possible terms. While this strategy certainly influenced those who viewed the pact favourably, it could not prevent some Germans from becoming disillusioned with their leader. Still, many more had their faith in Hitler strengthened by the pact, including, curiously, German Communists who supported the new alliance more frequently than not. Despite Hitler's

[143] Moorhouse, *The Devil's Alliance*, 115.
[144] R. J. Overy, *Russia's War: A History of the Soviet Effort, 1941-1945* (New York: Penguin Books, 1998), 53-54.
[145] Moorhouse, *The Devil's Alliance*, 116.
[146] Ibid.
[147] Hugh Trevor-Roper, introduction to *Germans Against Hitler*, by Terence Prittie (London: Hutchinson Heinemann, 1964), 13.

aspirations, however, the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact did not prevent Soviet boots from reaching German soil. As the Red wave crashed over Berlin in April 1945, the Führer gave up hope and took his life at the end of the month. After the war, Ribbentrop was sent to prison where he fell into a deep depression, desperately penning his memoir during his final days.[148] Following his sentencing at the Nuremberg Trials, he was executed on 16 October 1946 due in no small part to his involvement in the pact bearing his name.

[148] Col. Burton C. Andrus, *I was the Nuremberg Jailer* (New York: Coward-McCann, 1969), 28.

Conclusion:
Comparing the Soviet and German Reactions

The importance of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact is difficult to overstate. Geopolitically, the pact allowed Hitler security to his east for aggression to his west, it allowed Stalin to expand his borders while staving off war and it put the Western powers in a predicament that they only narrowly escaped. On a more human level, the pact disillusioned many with their guiding ideologies, forever changed countless individuals' perceptions of their governments and forced hundreds of thousands into the brutal Nazi and Soviet yokes. Examining the pact from a social history perspective not only fills a historiographical void, it also illuminates the many variations and nuances of the popular German and Soviet reactions. With that, much can be learned about the key differences and similarities between the two regimes and their populations.

Changes in the respective nations' propaganda were similar, with the revocation of anti-Soviet or anti-Nazi films, one-eighties in internal and international propaganda campaigns and a push to integrate the other's culture. This reversal, it seems, was much more seriously undertaken by the Soviet government, which took active measures to ensure anti-Nazi propaganda had been removed from the streets and more willingly incorporated German *Kultur*. This divergence likely came down to two reasons. The first was that the Soviet government, and Stalin in particular, were more fearful of war and thus sought to appease the Germans more energetically. The second was Hitler's distaste for his ideological reversal, which seemed to run deeper than Stalin's given the Führer's constant reassurances to his chiefs of staff and perhaps explaining why more anti-Soviet literature remained available to Germans after August 1939.

Regardless of their intentions, propaganda certainly impacted how the citizenry viewed the pact. Initial reactions differed slightly. While both populations were perhaps equally shocked by the announcement of the pact, Germans seemed to view it more as yet another surprising

diplomatic maneuver in a string of Hitler's recent gambits, with the added pain of the ideological volte-face. Soviets, by contrast, seemed to understand the pact as a more life-altering event, describing it as crashing or exploding into their lives. Once it had settled in, Germans tended to understand the alliance as further proof of Hitler's diplomatic cunning, while the Soviets became more apathetic, likely stemming from the recent political purges. The most ideologically committed Communists and National Socialists converged in their anger towards the pact; both groups found the alliance extremely difficult to reconcile, though more Soviet Communists, it seems, became disillusioned as a result. Interestingly, German Communists, despite much initial indignation, fell in line with the Kremlin's transformed stance following the pact, a complete reversal of the attitudes of the once staunchest Nazi oppositionists.

The popular Soviet and German understandings of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact has often been neglected by historians, which in turn disregards the numerous valuable insights from the respective citizenries. Moreover, if we historians merely focus on macro-scale change over time, we risk undermining the suffering and pain of those in the past or, at worst, we may fail to identify the perpetrators and their accomplices.[149] By allowing German and Soviet voices to speak through this project, the historiography of the pact can be reinvigorated with the emotions and sentiments of the time, thereby bringing the humanity back to a historical event which has frequently felt devoid of it.

[149] Alf Lüdtke, *The History of Everyday Life: Reconstructing Historical Experiences and Ways of Life*, trans. William Templer (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995), 5, 26-27.

Appendix:
The Text of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact

The Government of the German Reich and The Government of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics desirous of strengthening the cause of peace between Germany and the U.S.S.R., and proceeding from the fundamental provisions of the Neutrality Agreement concluded in April, 1926 between Germany and the U.S.S.R., have reached the following Agreement:

Article I. Both High Contracting Parties obligate themselves to desist from any act of violence, any aggressive action, and any attack on each other, either individually or jointly with other Powers.

Article II. Should one of the High Contracting Parties become the object of belligerent action by a third Power, the other High Contracting Party shall in no manner lend its support to this third Power.

Article III. The Governments of the two High Contracting Parties shall in the future maintain continual contact with one another for the purpose of consultation in order to exchange information on problems affecting their common interests

Article IV. Neither of the High Contracting Parties shall participate in any grouping of Powers whatsoever that is directly or indirectly aimed at the other party.

Article V. Should disputes or conflicts arise between the High Contracting Parties over problems of one kind or another, both parties shall settle these disputes or conflicts exclusively through friendly exchange of opinion or, if necessary, through the establishment of arbitration commissions.

Article VI. The present Treaty is concluded for a period of ten years, with the proviso that, in so far as one of the High Contracting Parties does not advance it one year prior to the expiration of this period, the validity of this Treaty shall automatically be extended for another five years.

Article VII. The present treaty shall be ratified within the shortest possible time. The ratifications shall be exchanged in Berlin. The Agreement shall enter into force as soon as it is signed.

[The section below was not published at the time the above was announced.]

Secret Additional Protocol.

Article I. In the event of a territorial and political rearrangement in the areas belonging to the Baltic States (Finland, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania), the northern boundary of Lithuania shall represent the boundary of the spheres of influence of Germany and U.S.S.R. In this connection the interest of Lithuania in the Vilna area is recognized by each party.

Article II. In the event of a territorial and political rearrangement of the areas belonging to the Polish state, the spheres of influence of Germany and the U.S.S.R. shall be bounded approximately by the line of the rivers Narev, Vistula and San. The question of whether the interests of both parties make desirable the maintenance of an independent Polish States and how such a state should be bounded can only be definitely determined in the course of further political developments. In any event both Governments will resolve this question by means of a friendly agreement.

Article III. With regard to Southeastern Europe attention is called by the Soviet side to its interest in Bessarabia. The German side declares its complete political disinteredness in these areas.

Article IV. This protocol shall be treated by both parties as strictly secret.

Moscow, August 23, 1939.

For the Government of the German Reich v. Ribbentrop

Plenipotentiary of the Government of the U.S.S.R. V. Molotov

[Retrieved from: http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/mod/1939pact.html, accessed 3 March 2025]

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