

JUNE 23rd

By MASS-OBSERVATION¹

The attack on Russia has overshadowed everything else this week. Reactions to the attack are, however, heavily coloured by preceding morale and prevailing mood. There were marked signs during last week of accelerating anxiety about the course of the war, a decline in confidence in our control of the war situation—encouraged by slow Syrian advances, doubtful Libya moves, and the Turkish-German pact. While people were still confident in victory, doubt about the method had much increased and with this, some impatience with the war—the desire to get it over and done with; associated with this, a tendency to try to put the war out of mind altogether whenever possible—a tendency rather unfavourable to industrial efficiency, etc. Offsetting this, the biggest constructive factor in the past week has been the fine weather, which has greatly assisted those who want to see the bright side; as typically put by a working-class housewife:

‘This weather does you good. Nothing like a bit of sun to make you feel alright with the world. Trouble is, it isn’t. Still, I’m sure it’s all going to come out right in the end.’

The lovely summer throws the grim events of war into sharper contrast, the sunshine nostalgically recalling days of comparative ease and calm.

Into this situation favourably impacted the Sunday morning news of Russia and the Sunday evening speech of the Prime Minister. These are treated separately below, Churchill’s broadcast being correlated with other investigation done in the week in continuation of points raised previously.

A. REACTIONS TO RUSSIA

Detailed study of Russian reaction was made from Sunday morning onwards in five London areas, Bolton, Ipswich and Oxford. Results from all these places closely correspond, and for all practical purposes the reaction may be treated as general,

¹ Part of one of ‘Mass-Observation’s’ routine day-to-day reports on the impact of war upon civilian mind and mood. Written 23/6/41.

local differences being much less important than individual and temperamental differences within the locality.

The *prevailing reaction now* is exceptionally keen interest, a great deal of confusion, a majority glad at the attack, extensive disagreement on Russia's prospects, some strong anxiety (especially among women) at the war spreading, and in general an extremely fluid state of public opinion which might easily move in several directions, according to leadership and propaganda.

In the following analysis we will attempt to indicate the relative strength and quality of various elements in the present reaction at the mass level.

First Reaction

Up till the last, for every one person who expected Germany to attack Russia, three thought it was a bluff or that they would compromise. Few people believed that Hitler could be so strong as to take on Russia at will, and the general feeling for some months past had been that the *initiative lay with Russia*.

Many people thought the press were exaggerating the whole thing. The fact that the press was right has indeed surprised many people into unusually favourable comments on the press, and thereby been one step up in press prestige—after many steps down.

First reaction was, therefore, one of considerable amazement, coupled with bewilderment (Sunday morning and afternoon).

Second Reaction

Churchill's speech was well timed and exerted a necessary leadership on Sunday evening (for reactions to speech see Section B). The attack, which at first had seemed rather *remote*, now became more our own affair, part of our war. *Interest* increased, and by evening there was a high degree of spontaneous conversation on the subject; the only war news which has provoked comparable interest in the past year has been Hess. Both Russia and Hess contain some of the same elements of astonishment and mystery.

Effect of Attack on Morale

The major effect of the attack has been to make people feel much better about the war and its future; but this is by no means a universal reaction:

43 per cent were glad of the attack
18 per cent were half-and-half
16 per cent were sorry
23 per cent. were undecided or unopinionated

It should be stressed that throughout there is no general agreed reaction, that there is *an exceptional degree of differing opinion and doubt.*

Reasons for being glad

People were glad about the news chiefly for the following reasons:

- (i) The attack would keep Germany busy and give us a rest—this was largely a ‘selfish attitude’ often connected with mention of air-raids, and sometimes associated with cynical comments like ‘good thing somebody else is carrying the baby’.
- (ii) That whatever the outcome, Germany is bound to lose many men and much equipment; and that at the best Russia might beat her (see below on public opinion on the probable outcome).
- (iii) The attack will give us *more time* to prepare. Those holding this view often showed signs of complacency or carelessness, repeating some of the Chamberlain slogans about time, etc.
- (iv) It will give us an ally, and we have no other ally at the moment. People mentioning this clearly got a feeling of relief from feeling that somebody else was fighting with us, and the same feeling underlies many people’s attitude. But on this, as on practically every point, there is confusion not only between different individuals, but also within the minds of individuals. For instance, this typical reaction:

‘I think it is a very good thing Russia coming into the war, we have no allies that are fighting and now we have got one. We can probably win now; Germany can’t beat Russia and she will probably use a lot of men up in the battle which will mean she can’t concentrate on us so much. I think it will slow up America, I don’t think she will come in until she sees what is happening to Russia.’

- (v) Some people were glad that something had just *happened* again, something to make the war more interesting and less boring. A break in the clinches, an uppercut bringing the spectators to their feet!
- (vi) 'When thieves fall out, it's good for honest men'.

Reasons for being sad

It should be noted at this stage that there is really very little anti-Russian feeling in this country, especially among the working and artisan classes.¹ Therefore, the question of the Russians themselves, and how fightable they are, only seldom came into people's conversations.

- (i) Consequently, there is neither appreciable pleasure at the Russians being attacked as human beings, and not much regret on the same grounds. But quite a common humane attitude, especially among women, is sympathy and sorrow at anyone and anywhere being bombed or blitzed.
- (ii) There is considerable anxiety, especially among older women, at the war being extended in this way:
 - 'It seems to be going all over the world.'
 - 'Where will it ever end?'
 - 'They'll be fighting in heaven presently.'
- (iii) Associated with the above, is the idea already stressed in previous reports that the whole pattern of civilization is getting out of control. The feeling that unpleasantness and horror may unexpectedly explode anywhere. And with this, worry about *whatever will happen next?*
- (iv) Others feel that the attack will lengthen the war, and there is quite a lot of comment on this theme, especially stressing it will make it last an 'extra two years'.
- (v) People are depressed because they take the very fact of a German attack as being a mark of German strength. They say that Hitler has always known what he was doing up till now, and so go on to conclude that he has only attacked Russia because he is certain he can overrun it without difficulty.

¹ A particular characteristic of this war is the lack of mass hatred for any enemy, including German (still called by the affectionate bedroom term 'Jerry' by nearly all civilians). The press gives a rather misleading impression of the private attitudes.

- (vi) There is also strong feeling that if Russia is beaten, there is nothing left to keep Germany under control. Here there is a tension point for the future. Many people expect that if Russia is beaten, Germany is free to plan the invasion of Britain one hundred per cent, and need think of nothing else in the world.
- (vii) Finally, some people think that Russia hates us just as much as Germany does, and are anxious that if she beats Germany, she will then attack us. There is quite a striking degree of comment along this line:

‘Well now, this country will have to change her tone a bit. I suppose it will be Stalin dear, from now on. We’re always such hypocrites, we’re bound to say Russia is our ally. It’s absolutely no use our pretending that Russia has come into the war because she believes in our cause, because she loathes our guts.’

‘I think it’s a very dangerous thing Russia coming into the war. Whoever wins we will have to fight. I am afraid people will imagine it’s a good thing, but it isn’t a good thing. Russia hates us more than she hates Germany.’

Public Estimate of Prospects

Again, there is a wide difference of opinion on this subject. On the whole, men tended quite strongly to think that Russia would at least *resist* successfully, while women tended to think that they would not be able to do much against the Germans.

The Finnish campaign is often adduced as evidence of Russia’s weakness. But more often, the argument is simply that the Germans are so efficient and so well equipped they can do what they like and overrun anything.

At present, only a small minority think that Russia will actually beat up Germany, and very few indeed visualize Russia driving the Germans back and in her turn overrunning Germany.

On the other hand, few people at present really expect that the Germans will gain very much, even if they are successful. The commonest argument there is of the *Russian colossus*, so enormous as to be unbeatable, a great sponge which can absorb any attack. The Japanese war on China and the experiences of Napoleon are

often adduced in support of this line. The vast man-power of Russia, and its enormous resources, are also stressed.

While there is no clear-cut opinion on the subject, probably the main idea people have at the moment is that *Russia cannot beat the Germans*, but that the Germans are stronger and will be more militarily successful, though they cannot cope with the size of the Russian problem and will in the end exhaust their resources on this account, leading to some sort of stalemate. Typical comment on this:

‘Russia is so enormous they really couldn’t be beaten, they are capable of absorbing shock as China can. I am sure that Russia can’t win either, so heaven knows what will happen.’

Questions in the Public Mind

Already there are a large number of questions developing out of this expected turn in the war. People have got it fairly clear in their minds that we represented the ‘democracies’ fighting the ‘dictators’, of which Russia was one. People did not feel strongly anti-Russia or anti-Stalin, and indeed there has long been considerable pro-Russian feeling among a large section of the population who are not interested in Communism (there are a number of published pre-war surveys illustrating this).

People had also got fairly clear in their minds the line they thought the war was taking, and the rôle of Russians the cunning onlooker who would *choose its own time* to do what it wanted to do, whatever that was. The German attack has therefore raised many queries of which the following are among the most important:

Is Russia really a dictatorship? Or was that all propaganda?

What is our attitude now towards dictatorships?

What about the ban on the *Daily Worker*?

What will happen if Russia wins?

Isn’t Poland at war with Russia? How about that?

Wasn’t it only a short time ago we were backing the gallant Finns against Russian aggression? How about that?

What are the Japanese going to do—will they attack Russia?

But stronger than any of these questions is the extreme ideological confusion now produced by our sudden co-operation with a country against which our national press (in particular) and American films have developed continuous hostile propaganda, and against which a wide range of our statesmen have warned us, especially since the war. The exact quality of this uneasiness can perhaps be best expressed in the following typical verbatims:

1. 'Russia is all communists and we are all capitalists, that's what we are, and that's what they are. How can we mix?'
2. 'The whole thing is a bloody mess up. I suppose this is what is meant by a class war.'
3. 'It's a funny turn up, isn't it? We shall solve the mystery of things one of these days.'

B. THE PRIME MINISTER'S BROADCAST: AND HIS PRESTIGE

(i) *Churchill's Speech*

The Prime Minister's broadcast on Sunday night was generally approved and received more favourable comment than any of his recent broadcasts. People commented that in it he recaptured some of the vigour and toughness which people expect from him and which some thought he had rather lost. Perhaps the most typical comment was:

'One of his best.'

There was, however, some adverse comment on alleged insincerity, the way he had always been against Russia and now turned round, but without frankly saying so, mixing it up with 'maidens still smiling', etc. One comment, representative of a minority feeling was that Churchill had said to himself:

'I wonder if I can get away with this speech.'

In general, reaction to this broadcast has stepped up the Premier's speech prestige again. There had been a decline (on a small scale) in enthusiasm for his speeches lately, with one person in five making unfavourable comments. The most frequent criticism, especially amongst women, of recent speeches and broadcasts:

F40B: 'Very evasive.'

F40C: 'Well, there's no change in them from when he was first Prime Minister.'

F25B: 'They're boring.'

M25B: 'Not much. He seems to be trying to impress people with cheerfulness.'

There were also a few more general criticisms:

M25C: 'I don't think much of them.'

M25B: 'Not very impressive.'

(ii) *Churchill as post-war P.M.*

Detailed opinions (London only so far) on the subject of whether or not it would be a good thing or a bad thing for Churchill to be Prime Minister after the war, were collected in mid-June with the following results:

	<i>Male</i> per cent	<i>Female</i> per cent	<i>Total</i> per cent
Good	45	36	40
Bad	45	35	40
No opinion	10	29	20

Opinions are thus very even on this point, with men more against than women. Some significant comments:

M40B: 'I think he's too revolutionary for peacetime.'

M60C: 'I think he deserves a better reward than that.'

M60D: 'Oh yes, certainly. He's had the sour, he can have some of the sweet.'

M35D: 'No. After the war we want to have social reform.'

M40D: 'I don't like 'im. Mr. Churchill's never been a pal of mine.'

F50C: 'I think he's too much of a dictator for a peacetime Prime Minister.'

F50C: 'I don't think he'll be strong enough to continue.'

F45C: 'I think he's too old.'

The replies show that for all Mr. Churchill's popularity, there are a large number of people who would not trust him in peacetime, or who feel his personality is only suitable to war. And this in spite of the general atmosphere of warmest praise of Churchill which exists at present.

(iii) *Alternatives to Churchill*

Londoners were asked who they thought would make the best Prime Minister if Churchill died suddenly. About one person in ten thought there was no one to take Churchill's place, and rather more had no interest or opinion on the subject:

'I'm damned if I know.'

'I wouldn't care to support anyone, they're all mediocre.'

'One of our errand boys—we've got none left.'

Three people stand out as candidates, in the following order:

1. Eden
2. Bevin
3. Beaverbrook (nearly equal to 2)

Eden is far and away the most popular candidate, being mentioned more than three times as often as Bevin. He has always been one of the most popular politicians, and in several pre-war polls he was better favoured for the premiership than Churchill.

The only other Conservative mentioned with any sort of frequency was Duff Cooper. The only significant Liberal candidate was Hore-Belisha, who is one of the most popular also-rans. But there are a wide range of Labour men mentioned—Morrison, Attlee, Cripps in that order, also Dalton, Alexander, Greenwood, Pritt, etc.

PEACE AIMS

The German attack on Russia is likely to raise again in people's minds the problem of war aims, of what we are fighting for. The idea that we are fighting *against* dictatorship, including Stalin's, was fairly well fixed in the public mind, though there is little mass antagonism to Russia itself, and the new situation is bound to lead to some changes in focus. Just before the attack on Russia, a repeat of surveys made in April 1941 and December 1940, showed that public opinion on the subject of the Government declaring its war aims had not appreciably changed, except in one respect—a steady increase in those saying we had already declared our war aims. This group were represented as follows:

- 8 per cent in December 1940
- 12 per cent in April 1941
- 19 per cent in June 1941

This steady growth in those clear about our war aims is likely now to be put back :

As before, people were asked what they thought our war aims should be. The only appreciable change in recent months is a tendency to increase negative statements (destroy the Nazis, etc.), a slight increase in stress on home policy changes, and a slight decrease in general ideological peace aiming with the whole of humanity as its scope.

The things people spontaneously named most often as our war aims were as follows, in order of frequency:

1. Destroy Nazis, etc.
2. For freedom or anti-Dictatorship
3. Reforms of Home policy
4. World peace, humanity, etc.

Another significant feature is a sharp *decrease* in those having no opinion on this subject.

Post-war Pessimism

Closely associated with peace aims are people's feelings about the post-war world. In a series of surveys undertaken by M-O and by the National Institute of Economic and Social Research (see *Economic Journal*), it has been shown that a very extensive economic pessimism exists in a whole series of areas surveyed throughout the country. A recent repeat survey in five London boroughs showed a further slight increase in pessimism since February—there is considerable error in the figures, which are indicative only of a general trend.

Attitude to Post-war Economy	PERCENTAGE ADOPTING THIS ATTITUDE	
	In Feb. 1941 per cent	In June 1941 per cent
Optimistic	21	18
Pessimistic	59	63
Uncertain or no opinion	20	19

This subject has now been studied in a badly blitzed town,
. . . . , as part of a very detailed survey of the whole population

of four streets. Here, the figure for economic pessimism reached a record high level and optimism a record low level.

7 per cent were optimistic

78 per cent pessimistic

15 per cent were uncertain or un-opinionated

FANTASIES

The Russian news, with its confusing impact, has had some curious semi-rumour effects, in producing peculiar semi-rumour theories of a rather unusual type, e.g.:

1. Turkey has become definitely anti-British and is also about to attack Russia.
2. Now that Russia has come into the war, America won't—you can't expect them both to.
3. Stalin was drunk when he kissed Matsuoka and said 'We're both Asiatics,' and this did a lot of harm in making the Axis think Stalin was loosing his grip.
4. Some Russians have landed at Dover! (This seems to be a hangover of the bearded Russian rumour of the last war.)

WILLIAM SANSOM

THE WALL

IT was our third job that night. Until this thing happened, work had been without incident. There had been shrapnel, a few enquiring bombs, and some huge fires; but these were unremarkable and have since merged without identity into the neutral maze of fire and noise and water and night, without date and without hour, with neither time nor form, that lowers mistily at the back of my mind as a picture of the air-raid season.

I suppose we were worn down and shivering. Three a.m. is a mean-spirited hour. I suppose we were drenched, with the cold hose water trickling in at our collars and settling down at the tails of our shirts. Without doubt the heavy brass couplings felt moulded from metal-ice. Probably the open roar of the pumps drowned the petulant buzz of the raiders above, and certainly the ubiquitous fire-glow made an orange stage-set of the streets. Black water would have puddled the City alleys and I suppose our hands and our faces were black as the water. Black with hacking about among the burnt-up rafters. These things were an every-night nonentity. They happened and they were not forgotten because they were never even remembered.

But I do remember it was our third job. And there we were—Len, Lofty, Verno and myself—playing a fifty-foot jet up the face of a tall City warehouse and thinking of nothing at all. You don't think of anything after the first few hours. You just watch the white pole of water lose itself in the fire and you think of nothing. Sometimes you move the jet over to another window. Sometimes the orange dims to black—but you only ease your grip on the ice-cold nozzle and continue pouring careless gallons through the window. You know the fire will fester for hours yet. However, that night the blank, indefinite hours of waiting were sharply interrupted—by an unusual sound. Very suddenly a long rattling crack of bursting brick and mortar perforated the moment. And then the upper half of that five-storey building heaved over towards us. It hung there, poised for a timeless second before