

Mr. Le Rougetel to Viscount Halifax.

(No. 139.)
(Telegraphic.)

Moscow, March 31, 1940.

FIRST reaction here to M. Molotov's [speech](#) before the Supreme Council on 29th March is that it was intended primarily for home consumption. This is borne out by the fact that three-quarters of it was a vindication of the war in Finland, and that, apart from one or two cheap gibes at Japan and a nasty thrust at Roumania, references to other countries contained nothing particularly startling or offensive. Abuse of France and Great Britain was on familiar lines and appears to have been mainly intended to concentrate attention and criticism in that quarter.

2. Although his expression "public opinion" is not applicable to Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, reaction of the man in the street in Moscow to the war in Finland has been the controlling of mingled indifference and apprehension. Throughout the conflict he has been haunted by the spectre of a famine in the spring and at the moment he is almost entirely concerned with the aversion of that calamity.

In Moscow, which is the spoilt child of the Union, the omens are not unfavourable, but I am told that the situation in many country districts is extremely serious.

3. In these circumstances it is not surprising that Government should adopt a strict defensive attitude. Everything I have heard lately confirms my impression that Stalin regards settlement with Finland as the best way out of a difficult situation, and that from now on he will concentrate on diverting national interest and energies into other channels. First prerequisite is a breathing-space in which to repair, as far as possible, the weaknesses which this campaign has revealed both in the army and in organisation of domestic supply and distribution.

4. M. Molotov met what is considered here to be Allied threats in the south with a veiled counter-threat to Roumania and an ominous chilliness towards Turkey, whose name was for the first time-linked with that of Iran.

5. His references to Germany were the reverse of enthusiastic, and I am told that the German Ambassador reacted sourly to his description of Germany as a "dangerous competitor" for imperialist western Powers. Statement that this country will never be the tool of foreign Governments may also be unpalatable to Germany, but any apparent abatement of the co-operative ardour which there may be now will not necessarily last and fundamental antipathy to democracies remains a constant factor in Soviet policy.

6. General tone of the speech is considered moderate and pacific by most experienced observers here. Delivery and strength were lack-lustre to a degree, especially if compared with atmosphere of November session.

7. Full translation of the speech telegraphed to Reuters on 29th March has been checked and is correct.

Source: British Documents on Foreign Affairs. Reports and papers from the Foreign Office confidential print. Part III. Series A (The Soviet Union and Finland.). Volume 1, document nr. 221. University Publications of America, 1997.