

The Times' leading article on the Soviet commentary in "Pravda" and in "Moscow News" about the expulsion, on the 18th of December, 1939.

Soviet Commentary.

The Tass news agency, whose opinions are of course dictated by the Soviet Government, has published an "appraisal" of the action of the League of Nations in expelling the Soviet Union. It consists for the most part of confused recriminations rather than argument and is chiefly interesting because it shows how idiomatically STALIN can use the now conventionalized language of totalitarian diplomacy — that strange jargon in which "provocation" meant the resolution of a small people to defend its borders and its treaty rights, the invasion of a neighbouring country and the bombing of its towns are not "aggression," and a pretender nominated and controlled by a foreign Power is "the people's democratic government." An attempt is made to belittle the authority behind the League's judgment, and the utmost value is extracted from the qualification of the unanimous vote by certain abstentions. There is no remaining member of the League but deeply deplores its present shrunken state; nevertheless its judgment is that of all those nations which remain loyal to its original purpose of organizing peace. If its strength is now reduced it is because some members, planning war, have had at least the honesty to withdraw before openly breaking the Covenant, and one, by embarking upon naked aggression without that formality has forced the League itself to declare the necessary consequence of such an act.

There is little in this turgid and confused document on which it is necessary or possible to make reasoned comment, for it seems to possess no rational basis as reason is commonly conceived. The contention that, because of some private compact between STALIN and his puppet KUUSINEN, the Soviet hosts now invading Finland from three sides are not engaged in war is not, presumably, meant to be taken seriously by anybody. The Administration under which the Finns are now fighting with the heroic loyalty characteristic of a free people when its liberty is at stake is persistently referred to as "the bankrupt Mannerheim clique" — a piece of meaningless abuse, which merely measures the spite and rancour felt by the Soviets on finding that the famous soldier who beat them twenty years ago it still not to be intimidated even by overwhelming weight of numbers. The attacks on Great Britain and France largely cancel one another out. Having vaguely denounced the unspecified acts of aggression by which, at long past dates, the British and French Empires are alleged to have been built up, the "appraisal" first maintains that the overbearing might of these Imperialists has forced the voters in the League Council to register their tyrannical will, and then goes on to depreciate the puny strength of the combination claiming to expel so great an empire as the Soviet Union.

This manifesto is, in short, no more than a perfunctory smoke screen, put up in the hope of concealing some part of the dark deeds now being done in Finland. For light upon the doings of the Soviet it is necessary to go to other sources, and a very interesting piece of new information is contained in COUNT CIANO'S speech in the Chamber of Fascios on Saturday. We now learn that, while the Kremlin was conducting its negotiations with RIBBENTROP unbeknown to the British and French delegations then its guests, Berlin was keeping the secret no less closely from its partner in the Axis. COUNT CIANO was not informed that the Russo-German pact was in contemplation until two days before RIBBENTROP flew to Moscow to sign it. It seems to have been produced as a trump card to convince SIGNOR MUSSOLINI that there was no occasion to attempt a peaceful settlement of the Danzig problem — since now Great Britain and France would not dare to fight. A week earlier the DUCE had made the first of several moves in the interest of peace, and HITLER had replied with a refusal, saying that the dispute had already passed out of the diplomatic into the military sphere. This was

eighteen days before the invasion of Poland. So much for that persistent claim of Nazi propaganda about the origin of the war — the patience of the FÜHRER .
