

**Title: The Anglo-Soviet Alliance: What does Manchester think?**

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**Abstract:** An examination of the role of the UK Ministry of Information in the promotion of the Anglo-Soviet Alliance during World War II. The MOI's regional, local and divisional committee structure and the committees' roles are explained. The city of Manchester is used as a case study of the dissemination of MOI information and of how public opinion was monitored about the alliance.

**Key words:** Anglo-Soviet Alliance, Winston Churchill, Ivan Maisky, Stalin, Anglo-Soviet Friendship Committees, Ministry of Information, Public Opinion, Second Front.

**Introduction:**

In response to the Nazi invasion of the USSR on 22<sup>nd</sup> June 1941, the British Prime Minister Winston Churchill a veteran anti-Bolshevik, declared his support for the USSR. That same evening Churchill broadcast on BBC radio, declaring that, 'Any man or State who fights Nazism will have our aid.' Further that Hitler's 'invasion of Russia is no more than a prelude to an attempted invasion of the British Isles' and that, 'The Russian danger is therefore our danger and the danger of the United States just as the cause of any Russian fighting for his hearth and home is the cause of free men and free peoples in every quarter of the globe [8].' On 12<sup>th</sup> July 1941 the British and Soviet foreign ministers Sir Stafford Cripps and Vyacheslav Molotov, signed an Anglo-Soviet Agreement in Moscow. A Pathé newsreel of the signing shown in British cinemas, described the agreement as 'common-sense' [14]. Analyses of Anglo-Soviet relations during World War II tend to focus on intergovernmental relations and how the common enemy of Nazi Germany pushed these rival states into a temporary alliance. Curtis Keeble, HM Ambassador to the USSR, 1978-82 argues that, 'The bond between Britain and the Soviet Union, in so far as it existed, depended upon the common enemy and dissolved with his defeat [15, P. 168].' Britain, the Soviet Union and later the USA formed a grand alliance to defeat Nazi Germany, but the alliance was fraught with tensions, distrust of each other's wartime aims and post-war ambitions [11].

While governments form alliances, sign treaties and deploy military forces, they need their citizens to at the very least to work in the factories and on the farms and to fight. Therefore rather than examine the motivations for and the twists and turns of intergovernmental relations, this study will examine how the Anglo-Soviet alliance was explained and promoted to the British public and how public opinion viewed the alliance. Some academic research has already been undertaken on this topic. For example, Martin Kitchen in his, *British Policy towards the Soviet Union during the Second World War* cites a public opinion survey conducted just after the German invasion of the USSR, which showed British public opinion strongly favoured the closest possible cooperation with the Soviets. Home Intelligence Weekly Reports, revealed concern that Russia was fighting the war for Britain with insufficient help and that there were widespread complaints that there was not nearly as much enthusiasm at the top to help the Soviet Union as there was among the working class [16, P.100]. The most comprehensive study of British war-time public opinion is provided by P. M. H. Bell in his *John Bull and the Bear*. Bell uses the data gathered by the Ministry of

Information (Mol) to analyse the development of British public opinion about the Soviet Union 1941-45 and provides case studies such as British public opinion on the finding of the Katyn graves in 1943 [5].

This study digs a little deeper and rather than use the war-time Public Opinion Reports that were pulled together from information gathered all over the country, it instead focuses on one city – Manchester. Manchester was a port city, a major population and industrial centre, and as such was crucial to the British war effort. Weapons and equipment produced in Manchester were also transported to the USSR on the arctic convoys that made the perilous journey to Arkhangelsk and Murmansk. During WWII the Mol in London stood at the apex of a structure that oversaw the dissemination of government-approved information about the war. Information about public opinion concerning all aspects of the war flowed back up the Mol structure to London. The Mol's activities, meetings, documents and reports, including its public opinion reports were all confidential during the war [30]. The papers relating to the Mol's Manchester Information Committee (MIC) are held in the Manchester archives, which are now stored in salt mines just outside the city [1]. The documents have been analysed to create an understanding of how the British government's national information campaign to promote the Anglo-Soviet alliance was carried out in Manchester and to develop a picture of how Mancunians (the inhabitants of Manchester) viewed the USSR. The examination in this study of Mancunians' opinions about the USSR (which is usually called Russia in the war time documents) and calls for a second front in Europe focuses on 1942 and early 1943 as public opinion reports after this date were not found in the Manchester archives. This study is there linking the local – Manchester, with the national – Great Britain, and also with the international – the USSR.

### **The Ministry of Information: From London to the localities.**

As the international situation deteriorated in the mid-1930s, the British government began to draw up plans for a Ministry of Information (Mol). For Britain WWII began at 11am on 3<sup>rd</sup> September 1939 and the following day the Mol was formed; it was charged with 'news and press censorship; home publicity; and overseas publicity in Allied and neutral countries [2].' The Mol issued guidance to the media although within the constraints of war-time censorship, there was still room for editorial freedom and varying interpretations of the progress of the war. The main exception was the Communist Party newspaper *The Daily Worker*, which was banned in January 1941 for its continued opposition to the war. 'D' or defence notices were used to prevent the publication of militarily sensitive information. The Mol worked closely with the BBC, which tended to present the facts and to avoid comment. From 1940, the novelist and playwright J. B. Priestley became the voice of the nation with his hugely popular, inspirational talks called *Postscripts*, which were broadcast on the BBC after the evening news [36]. Initially the Mol's domestic propaganda did not always strike the right note with the British public, its poster with the slogan *Keep Calm and Carry On* was widely viewed as patronising [7, P. 18]. The Mol also experienced rapid changes in ministers, until Churchill and Lord Beaverbrook who was a newspaper proprietor and the minister of supplies, persuaded their close friend the Conservative MP Brendan Bracken to become Mol minister. Bracken also had newspaper experience as the publisher of the *Financial Times* and the *Economist*, he served as minister of information from 20 July 1941-25 May 1945. Cyril Radcliffe a leading lawyer was appointed Mol's director general and Francis Williams as head of censorship. Williams was the former editor of the Labour Party supporting

newspaper the *Daily Herald*. Before WWII the *Daily Herald* had been resolutely anti-Stalinist and had condemned both the Nazi-Soviet Pact and the Winter War with Finland [9].

The Mol in London stood at the head of a hierarchical structure; it appointed Regional Information Officers (RIO) to head the new Mol Regional Advisory Committees (RACs), which were organised in the country's twelve defence regions. The RACs were composed of community representatives and persons connected to the local political authorities such as county, town and city councils. In their turn the RIOs set up and appointed members to Information Committees (ICs), which were the next level down in the Mol structure and were usually based on parliamentary areas [25 P. 1-2]. The Manchester IC was located within the North-Western RAC and reported to the RIO Mr G. Mould and his deputy T. J. Hunt. ICs could also form district or functionally-based sub-committees, the latter might for example focus on organising Mol film shows or dealing with emergency situations. The Manchester IC had Central, Northern, Eastern and Southern Divisional Committees (DCs) as well as a Wythenshawe DC for the area to the south of the river Mersey [26].

The decision to set up DCs in Manchester was taken at an MIC meeting in March 1942. It was felt that Manchester was simply too large, 'to get the fullest value from the services offered by the Ministry of Information [31]. That while smaller towns were holding meetings addressed by speakers of national and even international reputation, documentaries and films. 'Apart from mass meetings in Belle Vue little if any work of this nature has been attempted so far in Manchester. . . A central body like the Manchester Information Committee is not in sufficiently close touch with the districts of Manchester to organise these lectures, etc. for smaller suburban audiences . . . [31].' Typically the heads of the new DCs were local councillors and the honorary secretaries worked in libraries. The DCs were also expected to have two members from each of the Conservative, Labour and Liberal parties as well as from the Church of England, Free Churches, Roman Catholic Church and Jews. Each DC could also recommend other committee members subject to approval by the Mol.

The most important members of the ICs were the local civic leaders who provided both a connection with the local area and a figure head for the committee. The ICs were expected to maintain a 'strictly non-party attitude to all questions [25, P. 2].' and to include at least two members of the main political parties; persons associated with important movements and welfare organisations and could also recruit those 'conspicuous in public work chosen on their own merits [25, P. 2]. A typical IC might have 20 members representing the local authorities, political parties, churches, trade unions, local press, chambers of trade or commerce, voluntary welfare societies, women's organisations, education and special interests such as youth. The ICs and their sub-committees had the vital role of disseminating the government information that had been transmitted to them from the Mol. They were expected to carry out this role not just in 'normal' or quiet periods, but after severe raids and similar circumstances. . . . [30].' Confidential guidance for IC members advised that, 'The Ministry of Information is responsible for stimulating the collective effort for victory and assisting to maintain the confidence of the people. In this country, the feelings, opinions and endeavours of the community depend on the people themselves, but the Ministry can help by publishing information, and assisting the public in understanding the issues at stake, and by keeping in touch with the trends of public opinion and feeling [25, P. 1].'

The role of the ICs was therefore not just to be a channel for centrally-devised information but also to help make this information relevant and accessible to local people. As the guidance for ICs notes, 'success will depend on adapting the work of the Ministry to the needs of the people in different localities [25, P. 1].' and that, 'The principal function of the Information Committee is to be a link connecting the Ministry with the people of the locality. . . [that the] . . . Committee will keep in touch with the public and will assist in maintaining the spirit of the community. They will help the population to resist the invasion of the mind, the chief aim of enemy propaganda [25, P. 3]. The ICs were therefore required to produce regular reports for the RIO on trends in public opinion, harmful rumours, and on issues likely to affect public opinion, which required a remedy or an explanation [25, P. 5]. Such issues might concern the conduct and progress of the war, the distribution and availability of goods, food; transport and other local difficulties [30]. If the ICs identified an alarmist or malicious rumour circulating they were expected to inform the RIO immediately. The ICs were also required to liaise with the RIO about what public meetings, lectures, speakers, posters, exhibitions, and films were needed in their area. In their turn the RIOs fed digests of this information to the Mol in London.

### **The Ministry of Information and the Anglo-Soviet Alliance.**

The Anglo-Soviet war-time alliance brought a new dimension to the Mol's work: selling the USSR to the British people. A Russian Relations Division or Russian desk was set up within the Mol's Foreign Publicity Division and was charged with overseeing the coverage of the USSR in the British media and producing materials to be used by the RACs and ICs. Bracken needed someone with knowledge of the USSR and journalistic experience to head the Russian desk; to change the image of Stalin from a tyrant and appeaser of Hitler to 'Uncle Joe', Britain's friend. Although it was not known at the time, Peter Smollett who was appointed by Bracken to head the Russian desk was a soviet agent. He was born Hans Peter Smolka in Vienna in 1912, settled in London in 1933, became a British national in 1938 and anglicised his name to (Harry) Peter Smollett. In the 1930s, while working as a journalist for the *News Chronicle* and *The Times*, he had been granted unique access for a foreigner to the USSR's Polar Regions. He wrote a series of extremely positive articles about the USSR for *The Times* and then a book entitled, *Forty Thousand Against the Arctic*, which was published in 1936. Smollett's entry in the UK National Archives now notes that during the war, 'his pro-Soviet sympathies were on record' and that he was later, 'assessed to have been implicated in Soviet espionage between (at least) 1930 and 1945' and certainly knew the soviet spy, Kim Philby in 1930s [38].

At the Mol Smollett had two priorities to, 'combat anti-Soviet feelings in Britain' and 'to attempt to curb exuberant pro-Soviet propaganda that might seriously embarrass the government [12].' To do this Smollett decided to keep, 'Russian-accented and openly partisan apologists at bay' and to use 'sympathetic British commentators instead [12].' Guy Burgess [13] who would later be revealed as a soviet spy was a senior BBC producer at the time and he worked with Smollett to ensure that soviet materials were broadcast. Unsurprisingly, Ivan Maisky, the soviet ambassador (1932-43) promised Bracken that he would help Smollett and he also worked with the BBC to promote the Anglo-Soviet alliance. An internal BBC memo reveals that Maisky and Lady Violet Bonham Carter who was a BBC governor, agreed that the best way to present the USSR was to stress its cultural

achievements rather than its political history [4]. Maisky and his wife Agniya toured the country and appeared in Pathé newsreels shown in British cinemas, one such film was about the *Tanks for Russia* week in September 1941, when all one week's tank production was for Russia. The film showed Maisky addressing workers at a British tank factory standing by a tank named Stalin [33]. The cinema newsreels typically stressed the vital nature of the alliance to both countries and often included footage provided by the USSR [11].

During WWII at a time before TVs were commonplace, radio broadcasts and cinema <sup>ii</sup> were powerful means of mass communication. The Mol had a stock of films which could be shown during *Anglo-Russian Friendship* weeks. These included: *A Day on the Soviet Front*, *Abundant Harvest*, *Odessa Besieged*, *Soviet Women*, *Salute to the Soviet*, *Daghestan*, and *A day in Soviet Russia*. The Mol did not lend films to be included in the ordinary cinema programmes, instead preferring to put together a programme of their own, including films about the Russian scene with films about the British contribution to the war effort such as, *Merchant Seamen* and *Food Convoy*. The Mol would help local ICs to pay for cinema hire and publicity for such programmes and would also loan films to the charitable *Aid to Russia Committees* [29]. The BBC broadcast Shostakovich's Leningrad (Seventh) symphony to mark the first anniversary of the USSR's entry into the war; a special broadcast dedicated to Stalingrad to mark the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Revolution in 1942; the 7<sup>th</sup> November 1943 was celebrated in the UK as Soviet National Day and the following evening's BBC broadcasts were in Honour of Russia. For Red Army Day in 1944 the BBC broadcast the reassuringly British-accented Poet Laureate John Masefield reading *Ode to the Red Army* and in December 1944 broadcast the premiere of Prokofiev's *Toast to Stalin* to mark Stalin's birthday.

Smollett also organised events throughout the country such as the celebration of the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the formation of the Red Army in 1943. Cinemas showed a short Pathé film called, *Russia 1918, Anniversary of Red Army*. The film was a mixture of old films clips showing burning Ukrainian villages during WWI, the signing of the Brest-Litovsk Treaty in 1918, and the duplicitous Germans then occupying Ukraine. Lenin is shown signing the document to create the Red Army followed by the Red Army marching into Kiev in 1919. The intertitle reads 'Year 1943 - Long Live 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Red Army' [35]. The resonances of 1918 and 1941 are clear, as is the might of the Red Army. In London, thousands gathered at the Albert Hall for this celebratory event, which included readings by the leading British actors Laurence Olivier and John Gielgud. In Manchester, the IC worked with the *Lord Mayor's Anglo-Russian Unity Committee* [10] to organise a *Red Army Day* on 21<sup>st</sup> February 1943. The lord mayors of Manchester and Liverpool presided over a celebratory event at the Kings Hall in Belle Vue, Manchester. First there were speeches and a procession of representatives of the British armed forces and civil defence organisations, which were followed by a dramatic pageant at nearby Ardwick Green. The Mol also produced posters, and sponsored a Penguin (publishing house) special entitled, *100 Questions About Russia*, which presented extremely positive answers about Russia [16, P. 100]. The Mol also had exhibitions about aspects of life in the USSR that could be lent to RAC and ICs.

### **The Anglo-Soviet Alliance and Manchester. <sup>iii</sup>**

In response to the agreement of the Anglo-Soviet Alliance, friendship committees variously called *British-Soviet Unity*, *Anglo-Soviet Unity* or *Anglo-Soviet Friendship* committees were set up at civic level across the country. The *Lord Mayor of Manchester's Anglo-Russian Friendship Committee* (MARFC) was formed on 13<sup>th</sup> October 1941 at a meeting convened by the Lord Mayor, Alderman R. G. Edwards J.P, at the Town Hall and attended by representatives of all shades of opinion in the city. The Committee's objectives were, 'To organise material aid and to foster friendship with our Soviet Ally [1]. One of its first initiatives was to organise an *Anglo-Soviet Friendship Week*, 2nd-9th November 1941, to coincide with the anniversary of the birth of the Soviet Union. The Mol and the friendship committees had the same aim of raising knowledge and understanding, but the friendship committees also had a charitable dimension and raised money to send medical aid and warm clothing to Russia. While they were formally separate organisations, the North West RAC was eager to work with any of the new friendship committees that were being set up the region. A North West RAC document noted that such friendship committees were, 'Responding to the national desire to demonstrate the friendship of Great Britain for the Russian people, and to develop Anglo-Russian relations – and, at the same time, demonstrate the vast contribution that Russia is making to the cause of free people in every part of the world [28].' The RAC document noted that it was no part of the Mol's role to form friendship committees but that, 'we know from experience the value of [the Mol's] meetings, exhibitions, cinema shows and friendship weeks' and wanted 'your Committee to know that the Ministry can be of service in supplying photographic and other excellent publicity material, and possibly films and speakers occasionally to support their valuable efforts [28].'

There was overlap in the membership of MARFC and the Manchester IC. In part this is because both organisations were recruited from the same types of people and organisations: political parties, religious leaders, trade unionists, charity organisations. The Town Clerk, who was Manchester's chief administrative office was a member of the Manchester IC and worked closely with the Lord Mayor. MARFC had 18 sub-districts and it is also possible to identify overlaps with the Mol at this level as well. For example, Mrs Gladys Lord, a former school teacher, conservative party councillor and chair of the Withington division MARFC was also a Mol speaker [18, P.3 & 19, P.3].

The two organisations cooperated in the organisation of exhibitions, demonstrations, pageants, concerts, films, lectures, *Anglo-Russian Friendship* and *Aid to Russia* weeks. Manchester also hosted Ambassador Maisky and Madame Maiskaya. On 26<sup>th</sup> January 1943 Madame Maiskaya presented an Album from the women of Moscow's Trekhgorka Textile Mill to the Lord Mayor for the women of Manchester. The event at the Opera House was attended by hundreds of women and girls, Mr. George Mould the Mol's regional officer was also in attendance [20, P. 6]. The main trade union committee the *Manchester and Salford Trades Council* (MSTC) supported the *Lord Mayor's Anglo-Soviet Friendship Committee* and its communist party secretaries first Jack Munro 1941 and then Horace Newbold and were also members of the Manchester IC and promoted production for the USSR. In October 1941 Jack Munro shared a platform with the conservative party Minister of Supply Lord Beaverbrook to promote production. The communist trade unionist and the conservative businessman was yet another unlikely alliance forged by the war against Nazi Germany.

### **Manchester Divisional Committees: Informing and listening to Mancunians.**

Charles Nowell, the city librarian and honorary secretary of the MIC played a crucial role in organising the committee's work in the city and liaising with the divisional committees (DCs) when they were established in 1942. The Mol had a list of speakers who travelled the country delivering 'war commentaries'; these were free public talks by speakers who offered their personal insights on a variety of topics. This is another example of the Mol using British voices to deliver their messages, it was hoped that the speakers would be engaging, authoritative but not party political. In addition to lunch time film shows, Charles Nowell organised fortnightly war commentaries on a range of topics not necessarily all USSR-related, in Manchester Central Library's 300-seat theatre. These proved so popular that they became weekly events. In order to make the war commentaries more accessible to Mancunians the DCs were asked to organise war commentaries in local libraries and church halls near where people lived. The ICs and DCs were provided with biographical notes about the speakers. Some of these biographical notes have survived, but frustratingly copies of the war commentaries actually delivered in Manchester have not been located in the local archives.

The Mol speakers who delivered war commentaries in Manchester included people who had spent time in Russia – USSR. Manchester's Eastern DC was particularly active in organising war commentaries, which were usually chaired by the local conservative party councillor Mrs Nellie Beer. Miss Kathleen Taylor a journalist who had spent 15 years in Russia gave a war commentary on *The strength of Russia* and Mr Kolni-Balozky, gave one simply entitled *Russia*. On 29<sup>th</sup> February 1944 Councillor Beer chaired a talk by Rennie Smith on *Russia at War* delivered to an audience of 48. Also, in 1944 Harold Gibson, who had won the Military Cross in WWI and in 1922 had been a commissioner for the League of Nations Intellectual Commission to Russia and General Director of University Relief, spoke on *Life in the Soviet Union*. Another speaker was Lady Fletcher, who is described as a Russian by birth, who had come to Britain shortly after the Russian revolution with her first husband Captain Hicks. She is described as having travelled extensively and as having produced summaries of soviet newspapers and books. Curiously, one line in her biography has been crossed out and no reason is given. The line states, 'Lady Fletcher was well-known in diplomatic circles and is mentioned in Bruce Lockhart's books [27].' Bruce Lockhart was a British diplomat and spy who was involved in anti-Bolshevik and British interventionist forces during the civil war.

Not all the war commentaries were well-received by all the listeners. Mr Joseph Rabin wrote a very long letter of complaint to the liberal party councillor Leonard F. Behrens who was the MIC member who had chaired a war commentary delivered by the Scottish authoress and traveller Mrs Eileen Bigland. Mrs Bigland who had a Russian mother and was the author of books such as, *The Riddle of the Kremlin* and *The Key to the Russian Door*. In an interview with Mrs Bigland entitled *She supped with Stalin* [24], she described how 'I went there [USSR] first at the age of twenty, with a copy of Karl Marx and a lot of illusions: I got rid of them both. But the more I see of Russia year after year the more vital and promising their future seems'. Before the war she had travelled in European Russia and from Siberia to Samarkand. Before coming to Manchester she had spent December 1941 travelling Britain speaking in support of the *Aid for Russia Appeal*. The Russian-born Mr Rabin still had relatives in the USSR, although at the time they were in the Nazi-occupied area. According

to Mr Rabin, Mrs Bigland's commentary with its comments about bug-ridden houses, erratic trains and Stalin arriving for a meal with her with 10-day old soup stains in his moustache, 'so far from contributing to a better understanding and a better relationship with the Russian people, seemed to me to be almost deliberately calculated to produce a coolness, not to say repugnance, among those present who may have been unaware of the facts and of the truth and to my mind was, from every point of view, a deplorable disservice in present circumstances.' Rabin describes Stalin as a 'very great leader' . . . probably one of the greatest of Russia's leaders in the whole of her fantastic history . . . 'and that when Kharkov and Stalingrad were threatened by the Nazi armies, 'whole vast factories, whole vast industries and living communities were transplanted to distant Magnitogorsk and other places in the Urals, with the miracle of speed and pertinacity, of which no other history, no other record, can make comparison . . . [45].' Unfortunately, it has not been possible to find the reply Mr Rabin received to his complaint.

### **Monitoring public Opinion**

The ICs as well as channelling information from the Mol to the public also had a second role of monitoring public opinion. According to Charles Nowell, committee members 'don't go round seeking information. They rather 'collect' public opinion and bring those details which they do learn to the notice of their Committee when they feel the national interests would best be served in that way [30].' The questions and unstructured discussions generated by public meetings such as the war commentaries were seen as an ideal opportunity for committee members to gather opinions [30]. When the decision was taken to set up DCs in Manchester, the gathering of information about public opinion within their district was described as 'first in importance' among their activities [31]. The reasoning for this was that each committee member was in touch with different sections of the community and so they could inform the committee about, 'the complaints, criticisms, recommendations and suggestions which have been brought to their notice.' The Mol was very anxious to keep its 'finger on the pulse of the people' and was particularly interested in issues such as, 'goods in short supply, poor quality, high prices, bad distribution; rumours and (especially) how they originate; the news, (war news and other) and its presentation, the B.B.C. news and other features [31]. It was emphasised that committee members should not ask direct questions and that, 'They should be observers of public opinion rather than creators of it [31].'

The gathering of information about public opinion in Manchester did not always proceed smoothly. Charles Nowell complained that public opinion reports were not coming in as they should in a large city such as Manchester. The ICs recruited DC committee members known as 'correspondents' to compile confidential public opinion reports. According to the Mol's Director of Home Intelligence Dr. Stephen Taylor, the reason the Mol adopted this method of gathering information about public opinion was due to the Treasury, which wanted to ensure that the government was getting a good return for the money it spent on campaigns. He noted that while Market Research firms had experience and did provide some guidance, their methods were found to be rather slow, so the decision had been taken to use ICs to gather public opinion information [23]. What he does not mention is that the correspondents were all unpaid volunteers; the Treasury must have liked the free labour. The Mol also specifically rejected the use of modern polling techniques and the actual practice of gathering public opinion varied in different ICs. According to Dr. Taylor, 'the aim of Home Intelligence was that correspondents should be persons who in the normal course

of their lives tend to meet many people every day; they should be reasonably level-headed, be capable of putting pen to paper, and have no bees in their bonnets and be capable of putting down objectively what reactions of the people they meet have been [23].’ Based on the public opinion information gathered by the DCs and ICs, regional weekly reports were sent to London, for government ministers, the war office, senior BBC staff and were also sent overseas for example to the British Ambassador in Moscow.

The Manchester DCs recorded their public opinion reports on 2-3 sided forms of A4 paper with pre-printed questions and space to fill in answers where appropriate. There were quite wide variations in how many sections the individual correspondents filled in and how much they wrote. The form was headed Confidential its contents were neither published nor made public and were passed up the Mol hierarchy. The first question was a general one about morale, asking whether people were happier or less content than at the time of the last report. Next section asked, ‘What are the events at home or abroad connected to the war, which are attracting most interest.’ There was a box below in which the correspondents could list the event(s) or factor(s) that were attracting the most attention and could indicate what was the ‘General view’ and what was the ‘Minority view’ about it. It was often in this section that comments about Russia-related issues were reported.

#### **Manchester Public Opinion and the Opening of the Second Front in 1942.**

The Manchester DCs were set up and their correspondents began compiling public opinion reports in 1942, when the opening of a second front in Europe was the major issue for the Anglo-Soviet Alliance. Ambassador Maisky was one of the leading champions of the second front and there was significant support for this view in Britain. For example, following the Nazi invasion of the USSR Churchill had advocated a raid on France to encourage the Germans to deploy more troops in the west. The armed forces chiefs persuaded Churchill that such an attack had no chance of success and would be a terrible waste of valuable resources, they advised that instead Britain needed to make good the losses incurred in France in 1940 and take the necessary time to prepare for an invasion [16, P. 58]. In 1942, the British government’s policy was that the second front would have to wait; Britain needed to rebuild its fighting capabilities and that the best way to support the USSR was to provide it with arms and aid [16, P. 100].

Confidential public opinion reports compiled in August 1942 reveal that Mancunians’ morale was closely linked to the course of the war in the USSR; what comes through is a very strong sense that the fate of Britain and the USSR were inextricably linked. When things seemed to be going particularly badly, such as when the Germans approached Stalingrad or went into the Caucasus, morale worsened. In one report dated 19<sup>th</sup> August 1942 the only event mentioned was, ‘The German advance into the Caucasus’ and the general view was, ‘That it may have very serious consequences for Britain as well as Russia.’ A report dated 18<sup>th</sup> August 1942, noted that morale was ‘Less Content. News from Russia more disturbing’ and that while the general view was, ‘Admiration for orderly [soviet] withdrawal. Realisation that Germany [was] not counting [its] losses.’

There was a widespread concern about the situation in the USSR, a strong desire to open a second front as soon as possible, but also major doubts amongst some that it was a viable option. Correspondent N. H. Booth of Allied Newspapers, reported that people were less

content that, 'they don't like the look of things in Russia'. That there was, 'A feeling of real crisis with question of a second front in the West in the background. It is impossible to summarise opinion on this matter, but while 'hopes' are strong. I think it can be safely said that people realise that only the highest authority has the information on which to decide.' This view reflects the fear of opening a second front too soon and that there was, 'Desire for [a] second front if possible but doubts as to [the] possibility.'

Correspondent Reverend Canon A. E. Horner, Rusholme, reported that people were, 'More war weary' and that the general view of the Second Front was, 'Stab Germany in the back'. A Report dated 17th Aug 1942 stated that the top concern was the, 'Grave situation in Russia' and that the general concern was, 'Can Russia hold till winter?' The second view stated in this report was on the, 'Necessity of opening second front against Germany on the Continent' and the general view was, 'This is vital to help Russia and end the war as quickly as possible.' A report on 18<sup>th</sup> August 1942, highlighted the situation in Russia as the main concern, and found the general view was that, 'Second Front desired 1942' while a minority view favoured 'more bombs on Germany and Italy'. Another report found a general view on the second front was that, 'Men beyond military age and those in reserved occupations enthusiastic for it.'<sup>iv</sup> That is those who will not have to fight are the champions of a second front. Another August report noted that morale was, 'Rather less content owing to the Apparent German successes in Russia.' The correspondent also noted that, ' . . .I would say that the Second Front is in the forefront of most peoples' minds, and many people are very anxious that a second front should be opened up as soon as possible' that people, 'Do not seem to appreciate the reasons for the delay in this and very often the opinion is expressed that after all the production etc. we ought to be able to assist [the] Russians by opening up [a] front in the west. I have several times heard the view that Japan will very shortly attack Russia who will then be in a very precarious position unless we can create a diversion in the West.'

Reports that Churchill was in Moscow [34] in August 1942 were a morale boost for some. A report dated 19<sup>th</sup> August 1942 noted that people were, 'Happier this week'. The first event for people was Churchill's visit to Moscow, the general view was that, 'The public are cheered by the news, are expecting things to happen now'. This report also mentioned that the general view of the Second Front was, 'Get on with it' while the minority view was that, 'The government will start when ready so why worry.'

Soviet resistance at Stalingrad was universally admired. A general view in a report on 23<sup>rd</sup> September 1942 was, 'Admiration and a spur'. A 26<sup>th</sup> September 1942 report noted that people were, 'Thrilled by [the] spirit of resistance. General desire to help'. A report on 28<sup>th</sup> September 1942 noted that the general view was that people were, 'Hopeful yet doubtful. That a common opinion expressed was that, 'I wish we could do more.' That a general view was that a second front was, 'Expected, but most people agree it must be left to the authorities to decide. While the minority view was that, 'There should be a 'Second Front Now', but the correspondent noted 'these people are mostly Communists.' In response to the part of questionnaire that asks whether the correspondent had heard any comments or criticisms on the way the news has been given to the people by the newspapers or the B.B.C., he replied, 'I found much criticism of the presentation by both B.B.C. and Press of

campaign news (e.g. Stalingrad) as though a German success was inevitable. The fall of Leningrad & Moscow was similarly envisaged last year, but did not happen.'

The confidential Public Opinion Reports were used to improve the Mol's information campaigns. By the end of 1942 the Manchester reports, with some reservations, indicated a strong desire to open a Second Front as soon as possible. The Mol produced sample *Questions and Answers* on the pressing issues of the day so that IC members at all levels had to 'right' answer to pass on to the public. Given the widespread concerns about the USSR's ability to hold on and support for a second front, it is understandable that at the end of November 1942, the ICs were issued with a sample answer that specifically addressed what Britain was doing to aid Russia. The sample answer headed **AID TO RUSSIA** reads:

'In addition to the supplies sent to Russia, we have relieved her considerably by forcing the Germans to maintain a large portion of their forces in the West. We have drawn and kept at least 33 German Divisions in the West, and one third of the German bomber force is being held there, mainly to repel any land attack by us. Including the Middle East and Malta fighting, we are ourselves engaging more than half the whole fighter strength of Germany. In addition there are 10 German divisions in Norway, and the main part of the German fleet has been for some months tied to the Northern fjords. There are about 350 of their best aircraft gathered in the Far North to impede our convoys to Russia.

Thus even without invading the continent of Europe, we are taking a considerable amount of military pressure off the Russians [22].'

### **Conclusion:**

The formation of the Anglo-Soviet Alliance was a life-line for the British people and they knew this well. The government for its part was keen to overcome any residual concerns or reservations about forming an alliance with Stalin and the USSR. The Ministry of Information became adept at fostering the image of Anglo-Soviet friendship, while seeking to counter sentiments, such as a call for a second front in 1942 that might damage Britain's chances of emerging victorious from the war. In Manchester, a city that had experienced the blitz in December 1940 [21] relief in the Anglo-Soviet Alliance was also touched with a strong sense that something had to be done to 'help Russia'. Public Opinion Reports from August 1942 reveal the depth of concern and the strong emotions that were generated by the progress of the war in the USSR.

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<sup>i</sup> Ministry of Information documents from the Manchester archives are stored in boxes beginning with the code M77/.

<sup>ii</sup> Film No. 8 produced by the British Universities Film & Video Council. Images of the Soviet Union at War 1941-1945. <http://bufc.ac.uk/newsonscreen/learnmore/videos-and-dvds>., explores the role played by British newsreels in creating and reflecting the growth of pro-Russian feeling in Britain during the Second World War.

<sup>iii</sup> For a detailed discussion of other aspects of Manchester and the Anglo-Soviet alliance, including the Lords Mayors Anglo-Russian Unity Committee, funding raising, exhibitions and events see: Danks, Catherine. Your fight is our fight: The Anglo-Soviet alliance during World War II // SPb gos universitet. Trudy Kafedry Istorii Novogo i Noveishego vremeni, 2015. No. 15. - c.118-138.

<sup>iv</sup> Reserved occupations were considered vital to the war effort on the home front and so those employed in them were not subject to conscription.