

# The Establishment's romance with Moscow

by Rachel Douglas

---

## **A Question of Trust: The Origins of U.S.- Soviet Diplomatic Relations. The Memoirs of Loy W. Henderson**

Edited, with an introduction, by George W. Baer  
Hoover Institution Press, Stanford, California,  
1986  
597 pages, \$44.95 hardbound.

---

A recent addition to the Hoover Archival Documentaries is this memoir by the late Loy W. Henderson, career officer in the United States Foreign Service. The series, initiated by archivist Milorad M. Drachkovitch, presents in book form various holdings of the Hoover Institution on War, Revolution and Peace.

The manuscript by Henderson, whose prose is as clear as his trained eye was attentive to detail, covers the first half of his career, when he was centrally involved in Soviet-American affairs, before and after the establishment of diplomatic relations in 1933-34. (After his 1943 removal from the State Department Soviet desk, on Moscow's insistence, Henderson served as ambassador to Iraq, India, and Iran, and as undersecretary of state for administration.) The book is particularly useful, for the light it sheds on Moscow's cultivation of members of the American elite and vice versa, and on the battles within the United States foreign policy establishment, over our posture toward the Bolsheviks.

Already in the 1920s, as a young officer at the State Department Division of Eastern European Affairs, grappling with the problem of recognition of the then-independent Baltic countries of Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania (he had worked there as a Red Cross volunteer during and after World War I), Henderson encountered a "strong pro-Great Russia atmosphere . . . in the White House and the State Department." He linked this to a cohort of department members who had sojourned in Russia during the war: "They had studied Russian, attended theaters, opera, and ballet. . . . They had been charmed by the exotic and beautiful culture of this ancient country. There was something impressive,

romantic, and even nostalgic about the grandeur of the old Russian empire with its majestic sweep of steppes, forests, tundras, deserts, and mountains, its great winding rivers, its teeming cities, and its many thousands of picturesque villages built around quaint and colorful churches and connected with one another during the long winters by snow-covered roads enlivened by jingling troikas and slow-moving sledges. It was only natural that members of the State Department whose interests had been centered on Russia should have been influenced, to an extent at least, by their experiences and associations in that country, that they should have tended to look at Eastern Europe from the point of view of St. Petersburg or Moscow, and that they should have little sympathy for the nationalistic aspirations of comparatively small ethnic groups who seemed to prefer devoting their energies to the setting up of their own governments to attempting to restore this imagination-capturing empire on a more democratic basis."

Here, as throughout the memoir, Henderson provides documentation: a 1921 memorandum from "one of the proponents of a Great Russia" in the department, who advocated a "policy of safeguarding Russian patrimony" in the Baltic region and asserted that "America has nothing to fear but all to gain politically from a strong and reunited Russia."

During this 1924-27 desk assignment and a 1927-30 stint at the U.S. legation in Riga, Latvia (it had a major intelligence-gathering function vis-à-vis the U.S.S.R., before there were diplomatic ties), Henderson "became convinced that the rulers in Moscow . . . were united in their determination to promote chaos and revolution in the noncommunist world until they could achieve their ultimate objective of a communist world with headquarters in Moscow." He subsequently was confronted with U.S. policies, based on quite different premises.

## **The Groton-Harvard set**

Leading State Department officials, Henderson reports, insisted that if "one would treat the Bolsheviks as gentlemen worthy of trust the Bolsheviks would respond as gentlemen." He attributes this view to Secretary of State Henry Stimson in the Hoover administration and later, under Roosevelt, to "prominent and successful professional men with a background similar to that possessed by Stimson," which background he characterizes with precision: "Secretary Stimson was a member of a rather closely knit fraternity of socially prominent Eastern business and professional leaders who, after graduating from exclusive preparatory schools and well-known universities and becoming affiliated with business or professional firms composed of people with similar backgrounds, tended to enter politics as liberals or progressives."

Henderson writes as an outsider to this clique. The son of a schoolteacher and Methodist minister, born in Arkansas and raised there and in Ohio (he received a good education at Rayon High School in Youngstown, concentrating on Latin,

Greek, English, and mathematics), he entered the Foreign Service by examination. He does not avoid to-the-point characterizations such as, "If, in a democratic country like the United States, it is permissible to use the term 'patrician,' it might be said that Bullitt was a member of one of the great patrician families in the United States." The attitude of State Department official Sumner Welles, who "tended to regard [Secretary of State Cordell] Hull as an unsophisticated product of the backwoods of Tennessee," Henderson attributes to the background of Welles—"like the President [Roosevelt], a graduate of Groton and Harvard. . . ." Most informative is Henderson's account of what he dubbed "the era of McCarthyism in reverse," under Roosevelt. Thus, in 1933, Acting Secretary of the Treasury Henry Morgenthau "was emotionally involved and obsessed by the fear that the State Department would find some way of sabotaging the negotiations" on recognition. In 1937, "largely as the result of pressure exerted through influential persons in the White House, the Division of Eastern European Affairs was abolished," in a process described by Henderson as "the purge"—strong words from the man who was the only U.S. diplomatic witness at the great Moscow purge trials the following year! He relates how "many of the valuable documents in the files of the division were mercilessly destroyed," erasing intelligence records on the Bolsheviks painstakingly gathered at Riga and elsewhere, and others survived only because Ray Murphy—a State Department expert on Soviet penetration of the United States, who had worked his way up from a clerical job—"was able secretly to salvage . . . them and to keep them hidden until the mania to destroy had subsided."

Henderson tells of Commissar of Foreign Affairs (and later Ambassador to the U.S.) Maksim Litvinov's success in having "his ideas conveyed to the White House through leftist friends of Mrs. Roosevelt and the President."

The missions of the first two U.S. ambassadors to the U.S.S.R., William Bullitt and Joseph Davies, are recounted in detail. Henderson was in the Soviet capital during both, and had to stand in for Davies a good deal, as the latter spent more than half the year traveling with his wife, General Foods heiress Marjorie Merriweather Post. President Roosevelt had informed Davies, the ambassador told Henderson, that "his main mission in Moscow was to win the confidence of Stalin, to be able to talk over Soviet-American relations frankly and personally with Stalin."

The book, which has been well organized by editor Baer and is set up in attractive and readable style, contains well-documented sections, interspersed in the chronology where they arise, on various topics: a diplomat's life in Moscow in the 1930s, Soviet-American trade in the 1930s, the purge trials, the Hitler-Stalin Pact, and others. Near the conclusion, writing about Europe on the eve of World War II, Henderson writes, "I felt as though I were a spectator in a gigantic theater of the ancient Greeks, witnessing a play that must almost inevitably end in tragedy."

## Foreign policy seen from the anti-hill

by Laurent Murawiec

---

### **Inside the Private Office: Memoirs of the Secretary to British Foreign Ministers**

by Nicholas Henderson

Academy Chicago Publishers, 1987

\$15.95 hardbound, 138 pages, illustrated.

---

This self-complacent gossip published as a book by Nicholas Henderson, Esq., a career British Foreign Office official who was ambassador to Poland, West Germany, and France before crowning his career with the Washington Embassy, displays its author's eye for the petty and the trivial, and his lack of insight into any historical events happening in the world he was a part of—except as ripples affecting the periphery of his vision. Praised as revealing, if not the secrets, at least some workings of British foreign policy-making, this book is the Foreign Office's bureaucracy gazing upon itself with its rituals and its mastery of the minutiae of Civil Service life.

Of course, so much of Britain's actual foreign policy is conducted privately, through the City, private clubs, and intelligence networks, that Mr. Henderson may be excused: As a bureaucrat, he only operated in the delicate balancings of the rhetoric that "eventually" became officially stated policy; his was the world of the sacred dances and the time-honored liturgies of diplomatic cant, the ant-hill battles and the wars of the mice.

What is to be learned from this book? Some sentimental junk, such as Foreign Secretary Bevin exclaiming in 1946: "You know, Henderson, we're capturing the moral leadership of the world" and again, "I think Stalin's decided that he had better come to terms with me." Of course, Bevin "hardly ever looked at a book." What wonder, then, that such types as flourish in the diplomatic services the world over—Foggy Bottom in America, the FCO in London, the Auswärtiges Amt in Bonn, the Quai d'Orsay in Paris, the Farnesina in Rome—produce disasters as lawfully as hens lay eggs? Their ability, exemplified by Henderson, to remain impervious to and unscathed by wars, depression, crimes, and misery, is only matched by their commitment to execute long-term policies thought out by others, the ideological and mental masters of the international game. But this is a chapter untouched and unperceived in this slim volume. The only question is: Why would any American publisher think of inflicting it upon the public?