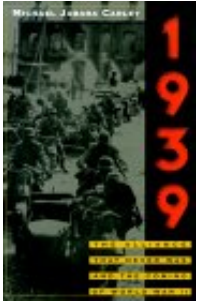

1939: The Alliance That Never Was and the Coming of World War II by *Michael Jabera Carley* (1999), 320 pages.



No doubt our members will be attracted by the title of this book because many of them were personally affected by that eventful year or have had a chance to listen to horrifying tales of their parents, grandparents, older friends, or cousins. Thus this work is likely to be read in a somewhat different manner than if perused by the general reader interested in things historical. Author advances a controversial thesis while providing substantial documentation in support of his view, The controversy concerns his argument that both France and Britain made a grave political mistake by not linking up with the Soviet Union against Germany when that opportunity presented itself in the spring and summer of 1939. The Canadian writer leads us through a maze of diplomatic steps and missteps and offers his contention that a powerful alliance could have been created, placing Hitler in an untenable strategic situation

Thus the devastating World War II could have been virtually avoided.

The author argues that the Nazis could easily have been stopped if Soviet troops had rapidly moved across northern Poland, near Lithuania, and through southern Poland via Lwów and Kraków, right to the border of the former Czechoslovakia, a German protectorate. The Polish Army would be supporting this dramatic move while in the West, the military forces of France and Britain proceeded to take the Rhineland.

One wonders why the author does not recognize the realities of the European situation as it existed in the spring of 1939, and follows his adopted concept that borders on wishful thinking. For example, he is unhappy to record that Poles were inclined to think of the Soviet Union as Enemy No. 1, which automatically shifted Germany to the milder category of Enemy No.2. While this is debatable, it is true that the Polish government categorically refused even to consider the Soviets' march across Poland. Did the Poles know something that Michael Carley does not know?

Indeed, 1939 proved to be a terrible year, but none of the events were totally unexpected. After all, in March 1936 , the Rhineland was remilitarized by Germany in violation of the Versailles Treaty; two years later the *Anschluss* made Austria a province of Germany, and that autumn the Sudeten areas were occupied; the Munich Pact made a radical change in the concept of small countries' sovereignty. They were no longer subjects in the political world but mere objects. The book covers this period thoroughly. But the momentous actions, always initiated by Hitler, began soon thereafter: in January came the first hints that Hitler was ready to deal harshly with Poland; in March Czechoslovakia ceased to exist, and the Lithuanian city of Klaipeda was annexed. In rapid succession Britain offered guarantees to Poland, and Warsaw rejected Germany's demands. While the West really did not know what to do, it dispatched a minor team of "experts" to Moscow, seemingly looking for a new solution. Alas, they sailed by a slow freighter. At the same time Ribbentrop and Molotov were signing, their infamous pact on August 23, 1939. The Western-Soviet alliance was not meant to beat that time. However, in June 1941 the Germans invaded Russia and the Soviets became allies of the West.

George Suboczewski