

WILL EUROPE *Fight?*

BY FRED WARNER NEAL

AFTER more than a year and a half in Europe, trying to find out how the European people feel, I am convinced of two things:

1. Regardless of how wholeheartedly the present *governments* of Western Europe may be on our side, large numbers of *people* feel that although Communism is terrible, war is even worse. And if war comes they will not take part effectively unless morale is improved.

2. We in America, both people and government, are not sufficiently aware of this fact.

If I am right, the implications for American foreign policy are ominous. I do not assume that a war with the Soviet Union is an established inevitability. But much of our foreign policy efforts today are bent toward trying to establish a firm counterforce in Western Europe to prevent Soviet aggression or to stop it if it comes. That counterforce clearly will be inadequate if the morale of the people of Europe is not good.

I think we have misjudged the morale situation. An example is the American assumption that the send-

ing of arms, guns, and money will automatically improve morale.

But is such rearmament enough? All the guns in the world will not help if the people who have them won't shoot them.

We Americans seldom take the trouble to search out the basic discontent and desperation of the people of Europe. On the surface, things don't look so bad. The people whom Americans meet are opposed to Communism. Passers-by on the streets of Paris and Rome are usually well dressed. Restaurants abound with delicious food, and the shops are filled with fine, if expensive, goods. And thanks in large part to the Marshall Plan, trade seems to be booming.

But two good ways *not* to find out about morale are to look at the lovely shop windows and to sit in an office and study production statistics. An even better way not to find out about it is to talk only with prime ministers, their government colleagues, businessmen, and the kind of people Americans traveling in Europe usually meet. To get even an inkling of the situation it is neces-

sary to spend a great deal of time talking with and listening to and observing the great masses of ordinary people. This can be done, but it takes time and patience and effort.

Americans who do take the time and make the effort invariably find a very large consensus opposed to participation in any war, even a war of defense. They also find, to their chagrin and amazement, that this opposition to war is so strong that an American liberation is as much feared as a Soviet occupation — by some, even more so. And, inevitably, they find on the part of the local residents a growing irritation with and opposition to the efforts of the United States to save them from the Soviet Union. This is true even of many of those who appreciate and agree with our motives.

PERHAPS the biggest surprise of all to such Americans is that these opinions come not only from Communists — probably the average traveling American will never meet a Communist — but from ordinary people on all economic and social levels. For while the large Communist parties of Western Europe are serious and complicating factors in the low state of morale, they are symptoms, not the disease. If there were not a single Communist in Western Europe, morale would still be bad.

Another element in our misjudgment of Europe is the conditions under which American officials

abroad inevitably work and live. The duties of a diplomat are often onerous. They involve many necessary, time-consuming conferences with government officials and other diplomats, and much report writing. Almost constant official entertaining is a must. And when all these tasks are accomplished, there just isn't much time left to spend getting to know people with whom the diplomat's official duties do not require contact. It may well be that the State Department needs some people abroad who have no official connection with the embassies, whose job would be not to spy, not to be concerned with official politics, but merely to associate with the masses of people, to live in the poorer districts, to hang out in the less fashionable bars, and to get out of the capitals and into the hinterlands on more than occasional formal trips.

Now, why is the morale of Europe at the present time bad? The first answer to this question is the obvious one, and one that applies with equal pertinence throughout Europe. For the French people, this is an answer, we might say, that absolves them of any necessity of thinking up any other answer. It is a matter of general war-weariness, spiritual and physical, resulting from World War II, followed by occupation and liberation, at a time when the wounds of World War I were still unhealed. As I have said, this war-weariness is common to all of Europe; but the French of all classes and parties feel

particularly that they "have had it," and they do not want any more of it.

LET ME say right here that I have great affection and respect for France and the French. It is entirely understandable that they are as they are. It is as easy as it is wrong for Americans, so far unbombed, unoccupied, and unliberated, to criticize. It is more difficult and more important to understand the emotional and spiritual climate which produces a lethargy in nearly all aspects of a society. This is noticeable in science and philosophy and art, as well as in the political sphere. It often inhibits even the most well-meaning defense efforts. A French nobleman whose family was ancient before the Revolution reflected it when he told me of his job as an official in the war ministry.

"Sometimes," he said, "I just can't face it, a third World War. I know the horror and destruction of two wars. I have seen them destroy France. Where will France be after another one? When I think of this, I have to leave my office and walk and walk and walk. Of course, France will fight if we have to, but we must fix it so we don't have to. I don't know how, but we must."

This man's brother-in-law, who wears the *Croix de Guerre* for his bravery in World War II, won't fight again, though. Like many a Frenchman who can afford it, he's getting out — to South America.

"I hate to leave France," he shrugged, "but I must think of my family. And if the war comes, there won't be any France, in any case. Maybe we're done as it is, the real France."

A second cause of poor morale in France is that the people, particularly the workers and the poorer peasants, are oppressed by poverty and a sense of injustice. The great majority of them are not very much interested in saving or defending the kind of world in which they now fare so poorly. They feel helpless, beaten, cynical; they feel no necessity of choosing sides in a war. In any war, for *any* cause, they feel, they would have more to lose than to gain. Among great masses who are often "ill-housed, ill-fed, and ill-clothed" in a way seldom seen in America, life is a bitter and often unsuccessful struggle for marginal existence. That a large percentage of these people are Communists is not as surprising as that not more of them are.

Shortly before leaving France in the spring, I was present at a "*pot*," or drinking feast, at a little *bistro* near St. Denis, the Communist stronghold on the outskirts of Paris. It was located on *Rue Josef Stalin*. With about ten factory workers, still clad in the faded blue denims that so often mark their class, I sat in a back room drinking sour *vin rouge* that flowed from a barrel in the corner. Six of them were Communists, and I had been invited

because Georges Binault, the proprietor of the café, whom I knew through a mutual mechanic friend in Paris, was the brother-in-law of one of them.

THE Communists said just about what I thought they would. They were cordial to me personally. Except that a couple of them thought that M. Pleven was not a "stupid capitalist pig" but merely a "stupid capitalist," their observations sounded like a repetition of that morning's Communist newspaper, *L'Humanité*.

But I was most interested in what the four non-Communist workers had to say. The remarks of Louis Vignon were typical. When I asked M. Vignon if he agreed with his Communist drinking companions, he snorted so hard he dropped his half-smoked Gauloise cigarette. He stooped to pick it up off the floor and began his long speech: "The politics, it is not for me. It is not worth it. These fellows [the Communists] are all right, but they talk too much. Let them have their Communism and get it over with, if they want it. It's all the same to me. Thorez can't be any worse than Pleven. Maybe Stalin isn't any worse than Truman. The Russians will have to have gas, so they'll have to have gas workers. Children? They'll need them, too. Do you think the Communists would pay me less than 17,000 francs a month and still have a worker?"

I felt called upon here to say something about democracy, the right to vote, free speech. M. Vignon shouted down his colleagues, all of whom had begun to wave their hands and talk excitedly.

"Look, Monsieur," he said, "M. Binault says you are a good man. Maybe things in America are different. You had Roosevelt. But here? *Alors!* Vote? I voted for Blum, and what happened? We got the Cagouls and the Germans. I was for De Gaulle, but he is *ridicule*. I won't vote for anybody who supports the present lot of pigs. And I'm not a Communist. So why do I want to vote?"

"Liberty to speak? Why do I want liberty to speak? How many francs will it bring me?"

"Tell that to *le General* Eisenhower. Tell him to bring down the prices. The struggle against the Russians? Bah! It is nothing. But the struggle against the prices, we'll fight for that."

It is difficult to illustrate the plight of M. Vignon and his friends statistically, because the kind of income figures issued by our Commerce and Labor departments simply do not exist in France. But a glance at some of the figures the French do have is enough to tell the story. As of July, 1950, the Ministry of Labor and Social Security reported that more than 60 per cent of all French workers in industry and commerce (3,827,000 of them) earned 17,000 francs (\$48.57) or less a month.

Since that time there have been general wage boosts — making some of the more sub-marginal wages only marginal — and family allowances have added to total incomes. But none of these substantially alters the picture. The cost of living has risen steadily and is still mounting.

BUT, ask the Americans, if things are so bad in France, what has the Marshall Plan been doing? The answer is simple. The Marshall Plan did an enormous amount of good for France as a country, as an economic unit. Without it, the French might not have been able to conquer unemployment. Without it, the conditions of M. Vignon and his fellow workers might well be even worse than they are. But in general, the vast amount of Marshall Plan aid — \$2,444,799,000 through June 15, 1951 — did not percolate down to the masses of the people.

Why this is true is a more complicated matter. The biggest reason — and one which the administrators of the Marshall Plan have worried about helplessly—is that our aid has been poured not into a free, private enterprise system as we know it in America, but into a highly cartelized, tightly controlled economic society whose resemblance to American capitalism is mostly coincidental. And this system is manned at the top by businessmen who are surely the spiritual inheritors of the mantle of the Bourbons, of whom it was said that they never learned and

never forgot. So intent are some of these gentlemen upon cutting off their noses to spite their faces that their mounting profits obscure the view of the mobs gathering before the Bastille.

The owners of French capital, sitting astride the most powerful economy of Western Europe, are the bulwarks of a government which all but ignores their wealth for tax purposes. The income tax, except where it is collected on wages at the source, is a joke in France, and everybody knows it. It is obviated simply by not reporting income. Since there are no income statistics, except for wages, how is anybody to tell? The result is to increase both the burden and the sense of injustice on M. Vignon.

A strangled economy, low wages, high prices, a depressingly low buying power, a sense of social injustice, a sense of helplessness and despair — these conditions do not make the rank and file of Frenchmen eager to defend anything.

And then there are the Communists. They are clever in exploiting our mistakes, in fomenting and exploiting discontent; they are well organized and strategically distributed.

OF ALL things needed to repair morale in France, economic reforms are most imperative: price controls, augmentation of low-bracket wages, tax reform. These are measures, obviously, which a

French government itself will have to undertake. Because of the undisciplined state of the French economy, they would be difficult in any case. Because of the precarious balance of French politics, the French Government — any French government — is reluctant to attempt them. If such reforms are to be attempted at all, we will have to put pressure on the French.

It may well be, so important and difficult an undertaking is this, that an entirely new agency of the government should be set up to deal with the European morale problem. Such an Operation Morale, bringing in the best brains and abilities we have, should be able to give binding instructions to the State and Defense departments, to the Mutual Security Agency, and to the whole government, on how to start repairing European morale. It should become the general staff for a concerted American attack on the problem.

Such an Operation Morale should, if it could, establish contacts in France outside the government, and furnish leadership and funds to the French themselves to do the job.

It is far from certain, of course, that any such efforts would succeed, due to the internal French political situation. The Communists, probably, would find grounds for opposing them. A large segment of the Gaullists might join in crying "American interference," although it is not at all certain that General De Gaulle himself could not

be persuaded to co-operate if intelligent American attempts were made to establish friendly relations with him. But there is certainly a good chance of rallying the Center and non-Communist Left if we try, both because such a program is one that many of these politicians really desire but are afraid to propose, and also because their personal interests are intimately tied up with a continuation of American assistance. The so-called Third Force governments in France, indeed, are able to stay in power almost solely because of United States support.

Finally, what are some of the things we should not do, or quit doing?

1. *We ought to give up the "House Beautiful" type of appeal.* The superiority of our bathrooms is not a good line.

2. *It does not aid our cause in France to talk about the advantages of capitalism and free private enterprise.* These, to the great mass of French people, are discredited institutions. Not only to Marxists, but to people generally. When they think of capitalism, they think not of the American economic system, buttressed by the American political system, but of the archaic, restrictive, low-wage economic system of France. Capitalism in America is as different from capitalism in France as it is from Socialism in England. Our job is not to defend French capitalism but to win friends for United States foreign policy.



INSECTS &

“The Law of the Land”

By RENZO DEE BOWERS

INSECTS cannot be denied credit for backstage maneuvering to promote many of the colossal events and decisions that have shaken the equilibrium of the world. No telling what would have happened at Waterloo if a bee had not crept into the pants of a marshal on Napoleon's side and made him late in arriving, due to sensitiveness to the pressure of his saddle.

You would be surprised that things so small as insects could stir up as much trouble as they do between human beings.

Why, even the tiny gnat has been powerful enough in his innocent way to stir up the processes of the law and bring forth declarations of judicial opinion and policy.

For instance, Larry King, a bookkeeper, was whirling along a country road on a summer afternoon, having a wonderful time on his new motorcycle. He suddenly plunged into a swarm of gnats engaged in conducting an aerial party directly in his path. One of them, too slow in retreat, blew straight into Larry's eye, and he involuntarily closed the lid down over it.

King's efforts to dislodge the unwelcome caller over a period of several days proved abortive. The annoyance and distress it occasioned were acute. While at first he was not hindered from keeping books as usual, he was compelled to give up that occupation in time for other work that would not tax his vision. His eye gradually failed in sight until it finally became so weak that he could not distinguish light from darkness, and was unable to differentiate one object from another.

King held an accident insurance policy. He asked the company to pay up. It refused. Among other reasons for its refusal, it claimed that the gnat's entrance into the eye was not an accident. That was a point the company's lawyers argued strenuously when King sued on the policy. After painstaking deliberation and diligent research of legal authorities, the state supreme court ordered the insurance company to pay. So, out of the little zipping creature's activities that summer afternoon came this judicial edict for our guidance: If a gnat gets into your eye, its doing so is an accident.