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France

The French Underground Press after the Total Occupation

The French clandestine press has continued to appear in spite of the German occupation of the former non-occupied zone.

The journal "Libération" has only two pages. In a leader entitled "France takes her place once more in the fight" it hails the North African operations as the beginning of victory, but attacks the turncoats of Vichy. They publish messages to de Gaulle from the resistance movements demanding the removal of Vichy officials in Africa, suggest the seizure of officers in Africa, who are loyal to Vichy, as hostages to protect political prisoners in the hands of Vichy. The workers must prepare strike action and insurrection for the decisive hour.

"Combat" now appears in four pages. It publishes news of the strikes which occurred in October and other information on workers resistance in occupied countries. It calls on peasants to see that workers who resist the "Relève" (recruiting of workers for Germany in exchange for French prisoners of war) get food. The Frenchman's right of insurrection is headlined. The paper reports that the work of organising resistance in France continues in spite of the occupation and asks members of the resistance movements to act in a disciplined way under the orders of the same leaders.

A supplement to "Combat" entitled "Towards Victory, the Battle begins, Resistance goes on" **[1]** contains a statement in favour of de Gaulle.

A leaflet issued by "Combat" published without comment de Gaulle's proclamation of November 16th.

The "Franc Tireur" of November 20th is a four page edition. An article on Darlan headed "We forget nothing" says that an army at war may accept cooperation from suspects for a time, but men will struggle until freedom is won. Another article states that the true Republic will be born, out of this war but not unless there is a regime of freedom and justice in Britain which will resist the plutocracy of industrial and financial interests. It prints a message to French railwaymen from British railwaymen.

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The Opinions of Industrialists in Vichy France (written October 31st, 1942)

One of our friends who recently spent some time in Vichy France had several detailed conversations with French industrialists. We have already published many and full reports revealing the attitude of the workers, the socialists and trade unionists of every shade of opinion, and we think it may be interesting also to hear the point of view of the

leading French industrialists. - They have obviously been much influenced by Goebbels's propaganda.

Anglophobia

"One is immediately struck by the fact that all these people are shockingly ill-informed about what is actually happening outside unoccupied France. They shower you with questions about Germany, and in doing so repeatedly reveal their admiration of the German genius for organisation. None of these people, for example, had the slightest idea of Germany's transport difficulties, or of the shortage of raw materials in that country. They are absolutely convinced that, with their great organising ability, the Germans will find ways and means of overcoming their difficulties. The blind hatred of England expressed by all these members of the ruling class is amazing. They go as far back as Jeanne d'Arc [2] to prove that historically England has always been the enemy of France; they declare that England's economic hegemony during the whole of the 19th century was a catastrophe for France. The opinion is often expressed that France would certainly be better off under the economic leadership of Germany than under an Anglo-American hegemony. Their feeling of hatred against the English is now also directed against America. They instance the time when France was overrun by American tourists and the exploitation of France by Britain and America after the last war.

At the present time Britain is condemned for her alliance with Russia. It is generally asserted in these circles that the British had already tried to disintegrate France by supporting the Front Populaire government and wanted France to turn communist. Their present alliance with Russia was merely the outcome of their desire to divide the whole of Europe into British and Russian spheres of influence.

The big industrialists' fear of the Front Populaire is in my opinion not altogether without foundation in view of the lack of understanding generally shown by the French employers in regard to the conditions in which their workers live. The cleavage between rich and poor is growing daily. Workers have to manage on starvation wages of 1400-1800 frcs. per month: (the equivalent in pounds would be £ 4/10/- to £ 6/-/- per month. The real prices for the necessities of life are, however, not taken into consideration in this calculation) the average office workers get a salary ranging from 2500 to 4000 frcs. (£ 8/6/- to £ 13/6/- per month) Under such conditions it is little wonder that the resentment is growing amongst the people against those who make fat profits and obtain every luxury in the Black Market. The French industrialists welcome the German occupation and German influence as the only defence against this growing revolutionary feeling in France.

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De Gaulle and Laval

If you talk to these people about the German terror-régime in the occupied countries and about the executions etc., they usually reply that what the Germans have done and still do is nothing in comparison with the crimes of the British. Even if a few Communists and Jews were shot, this is a matter only of a few thousands, whereas England by her blockade is causing millions of people to die of hunger and is ruining the health of the population of many countries for years to come.

The following details from certain conversations are of interest: de Gaulle was described as a traitor, an idiot, an imbecile. Laval was spoken of as a clever politician

who later on would perhaps prove to be the saviour of France. He was carrying out a policy of wait and see, only yielding when it was absolutely necessary, and had thereby foiled most of Germany's plans. He was convinced that even if Germany did not actually lose the war she would in any case not win it; Germany and Russia would so weaken each other that France would be able once again to occupy a leading position in Europe. Laval knew that it was cheaper to play the role of a 'neutral'; this only cost France 200 Millions per day, whereas ten times as much would be needed for a war. In addition France was now not compelled to sacrifice her youth which Germany and Russia had to do and as Britain would certainly have to do in the future. France's attitude of neutrality made it possible for her to provide her youth with a splendid education such as they get to-day in the 'Camps de Jeunesse'. Here under the direction of officers who had formerly been on active service, the youth received a political training which would later on have very good results. (I must confess that the members of the 'Camps de Jeunesse' in their green uniforms make on the whole a very good impression, and that this pre-military education of the French youth is viewed with great favour amongst French military circles.)

In the course of another conversation Laval was described to me as a hero. He was the man who to-day took all responsibility on his shoulders although he knew that if England were in the end to win the war his own position would be extremely precarious; and that even in the case of a German victory he would forfeit his life since he had shown too much opposition to Germany. In the event of the outbreak of an internal conflict in France Laval would also be in danger since he was hated by Gaullists, Collaborationists, and the adherents of the Front Populaire alike. He was therefore the man who was standing firm in the midst of the storm and it was a pity that he was so misunderstood in the neutral countries and amongst the allied nations.

Weapons from Heaven

During my stay in Lyons I heard from various people that large canister bombs had been dropped in the district of St. Etienne near Bourg in Bresse, each containing some 30 revolvers and a dozen light machine guns and ammunition, and some of them also first aid material. The reaction of some of the industrialists was immediately to accuse Britain of beginning to arm the Communists, whilst the military circles with whom I came into contact believed that these arms were meant for defence against the total occupation of France.

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More and More Germans

In reality the total occupation of France has already been effected. During the last few weeks various new emissions have appeared in the large towns and suburban districts of unoccupied France. Thus for example 120 SS men and Gestapo officials have recently installed themselves in a little casino in Charbonnière, a suburb of Lyons. These people spend their time going every day about the town, spying and nosing into things everywhere. The excuse of the dispatch of these people is this action of the British in dropping arms. In Grenoble about 80 men are said to have arrived up to now in small detachments of 12 to 18 men. It is quite typical that while the rich upper classes welcome these Commissions, the common people feel it as a humiliation that Vichy allows itself to be treated in such a way.

Profits versus Patriotism

The lack of solidarity which these people exhibited towards the inhabitants of the occupied zone is strikingly illustrated in remarks such as: 'Why not let Germany have Alsace and Lorraine? We have no interest in keeping them.' - Lyons and the textile district of St. Etienne-Loire have always been anxious to get rid of the unwelcome competition of Alsace. St. Etienne would be glad to see the mines of Lorraine and the Alsatian armament factories outside the French customs barriers.

Other remarks such as: 'Who cares about Roubaix and Lille, they can be occupied for 100 years as far as we are concerned', are quite usual. In these circles there is no sign whatever of any feeling of patriotism or solidarity between Frenchmen. Acts of sabotage in the occupied zone are regarded as 'sheer madness'; and the terrible German reprisals are accepted as a matter of course.

Corruption

The criticism of the former conditions in France is especially striking and is summed up most clearly in the following description of a French industrialist whose wife was the daughter of a German industrialist. In the past this gentleman could not find words strong enough to express his dislike of the excessive German organisation, the Prussian officials and so on. To-day the exact opposite is the case. Now he talks of the French Civil Service both of the pre-war period and the present day as a lot of idlers; they are uneducated people, badly paid and badly trained. The cause of their inadequacy, he declares, is the French system of education; even secondary schools apart from the private schools, are mere 'cramming establishments' where they try to stuff the young people with a multitude of facts instead of bringing them up to be real gentlemen and citizens. Apart from military or semi-military institutions he criticises the highest training colleges on similar lines; their spiritual needs are nowhere cared for as in present-day Germany.

Almost in the same breath such a man would brag about how he was able to obtain oil and benzine by bribing the chauffeur of the German armistice commission; how he had obtained a pass for the occupied zone by bribing officials in the German consulate; how he had secured a permit to travel to and fro by car between the occupied and unoccupied zone by bribing a German official in the Kommandatur in Paris and had thus been able to travel all over France by car; and finally how he had managed to get from the same German official, again for a small 'payment', a pass enabling him to stay out after eleven at night, quite unashamed at being described on the pass as a gigolo at Maxim's.

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The Youth

In contrast to prominent middle-aged industrialists of this type, the younger ones, many of whom have been in the war, are fanatic French patriots. They are working for the reconstruction of France, though sometimes only by organising contacts among their former school-mates, or army comrades; they take jobs in the North African colonies and in this way directly or indirectly help their families whom they can supply from there at least with vegetables. They strongly oppose the attitude of the older generation towards the belligerent powers; not having as yet profited from the boom in the war industries that the needs of Germany have produced, their point of view is similar to that of the small wage earners. For these young people the Germans are still the

military enemy, or the guards in the prison-camp or, in the case of the S.S. men, just the torturers of the people. Their deep aversion against everything German is unquenchable."

Report of a Swiss athlete on his visit in Lyons.

"The town was full of flags and flowers. People wept tears of joy when we distributed cigarettes and food amongst them. There were never ending shouts of `Vive la Suisse'.

In the town-hall the mayor welcomed us and there we were informed that the authorities had just issued an order forbidding the match to take place.

On Sunday we learnt the probable reasons for this order. A number of outrages had been committed in Paris which were followed by the shooting of 100 hostages and the prohibition of all gatherings. Furthermore the Lyons branch of the organisation `Free France' had distributed a leaflet asking people to buy tickets for the match between Switzerland and France and to use this occasion to make a demonstration. Judging by the welcome we received from the people in Lyons, one can be sure that a big demonstration would have taken place. The German authorities know only too well the attitude of the population of Lyons and the Southern Departements. Supporters of Laval & Co. are scarce there. When the suspension of the match became known in Lyons the mood of the people became threatening and a lot of police and military turned out to maintain law and order. At nearly every street-corner about 15 men were posted. People were indignant and our hosts were disappointed that we had to part in this way. The French really hate the Germans, at least those who have suffered losses at the hands of the Germans. These men and women are the moving spirits whose function it is to arouse the people from their apathy and summon them to resistance. They have influence; it was thanks to them that we got such good food. I was told that a great part of it was bought on the Black Market so that we should not have to go without.

Vegetables, which used to be the main source of nourishment during this season are almost completely lacking. Owing to the fact that there was no rain for four months the crops are very bad, and a great part of what there is must be surrendered to the authorities. In the morning people storm the vegetable shops; we saw people standing in long queues and by the time their turn came in most cases they did not get anything.

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People in Lyons hardly know what butter and eggs look like. In the streets many people are absolutely in rags. Cigarette ends which we threw away were picked up immediately and put in a pipe. Ladies' stockings, once the pride of the French women, have been unobtainable since February. During the five days we spent in France we hardly saw five people wearing stockings.

In the Rhone harbour we saw several people cook their meals of refuse from the market in old jam tins, - a horrible picture.

In Pouny, a German frontier station with swastikas and elegant officers, we were stopped and our identity papers were examined. In the meantime the two firemen and the engine driver left the train and went to the station building. When they came out of the building they had to pass our carriage. We gave them some cigarettes and chatted with them. One of the German officers gave the right away. The French railwaymen, however, refused to hurry, they calmly put another cigarette in their mouths and continued the conversation. When one of the Germans shouted: `You swines, is that

your idea of being on duty?' we thought now we shall have to resume the journey. But even this remark - which the railwaymen understood very well - in no way disturbed them and they tarried for another five minutes before departing.

Those of our athletes who, not knowing French, nevertheless tried to enter into conversation with the French people, several times found that the latter just turned their backs on them. Obviously the French mistook them for Germans.

Some Frenchmen went with us as far as Bellegarde; they wept as we parted.

Although we did not get into direct contact with workers we still had the feeling that we were amongst comrades who were all striving towards the same aim; to be independent and to have a decent life. One thing is certain: In the Southern Departements, no less than elsewhere resistance against Germany and her present rulers will break out. The friends and relatives of the innumerable hostages who have been shot will undoubtedly do their share in the work of liberation. It is said that in France alone over 100,000 people have been shot. Many outrages have been committed which have never been heard of."

Editorische Anmerkungen

1 - *"Towards Victory, the Battle begins, Resistance goes on", Supplement von "Combat".*

2 - *Jeanne d'Arc = Jungfrau von Orleans (1412-1431), französische Nationalheldin, führte die Franzosen im Hundertjährigen Krieg gegen die Engländer und erreichte eine entscheidende Wende des Krieges, Gefangennahme durch die mit den Engländern verbündeten Burgunder (1430), Auslieferung an die Engländer, Verurteilung durch ein geistliches Gericht unter Leitung eines Bischofs, Tod auf dem Scheiterhaufen, Aufhebung der Verurteilung (1456), Heiligsprechung (1920).*