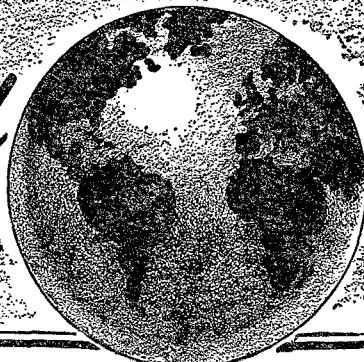


# World Events

INTERPRETED BY SCOTT NEARING



Friends:

January 1947

**N**O ONE FULLY UNDERSTANDS what is happening to Europe. The scene is so vast and the experiences are so unfamiliar that the individual mind has trouble grasping and interpreting events. I suppose I am as limited in this respect as the next person, yet I think that I begin to detect the major themes of the drama that Europe is enacting. Perhaps I strain a point or draw on my imagination, but it appears to me that defeat and despair are dominant in West Europe, while the will to survive and to rebuild dominates the eastern part of the continent.

**S**OME days ago I began reading Malaparte's *Kaputt* (N. Y., Dutton, 1946). The book was written during the war years, when the author, an Italian correspondent, was assigned successively to practically all the fronts open to Axis newsmen.

The book does not present a connected argument, nor does it attempt to advance any thesis about the major trends in European life. The title, *Kaputt*—a German colloquialism meaning wrecked, ruined, done for—is far more outspoken than the text. As a well known writer and a captain in the Italian army, the author had the entree to upper-class social circles. The settings for most of the book are the dining-rooms and lounges of fashionable people in Scandinavia, the Balkans and Italy. At intervals, descriptions of battle havoc, devastation and oppression are introduced in story form.

Malaparte is preoccupied with the senseless ostentation of the Germans, the terrible suffering of the Jews, the cruelty of the Rumanian leaders, the cynicism of the higher-up Italians, the stoicism and determination of the Soviet partisans. The last-named are the heroes of the book, Italians are the stooges, Germans are the buffoons and villains, Jews are the martyrs. The descriptions of the Warsaw ghetto are unforgettable. So are two chapters, "Red Dogs" and "The Glass Eye," dealing with Russian partisans.

We are here concerned with the impressions of a keen, sensitive observer who was able to move freely among Axis policy-makers during the war years. While the masses in the Axis-dominated countries toiled, suffered and died, the policy-makers were eating like hogs and

drinking like sailors ashore after a three-months' voyage. Many of the drinking scenes might have been written by Remarque in his descriptions of Germany after World War I. The policy-makers were not only cynical about the war; they were unprincipled, ruthless, cruel, greedy and shockingly unaware of what was happening to the peoples for whom they were making decisions and executing policies. They were not leaders in any formal sense, but brigands sated with power and pickled in alcohol.

*Kaputt* does not contain a single description of either Britain or France, though there are many references to pre-war life in Paris, as when Malaparte recalls "the shadows of young men with brows marked with drink, lack of sleep and lust." Youth in the Axis countries is even more repulsive. A young German officer whom he met in Lapland was "old." "He was no longer the young Friki of Rome, Florence and Forte dei Marmi; yet something of his former gentleness remained, but his gentleness now had in it something corrupt . . . The other officers, Friki's companions, were young too, perhaps twenty, twenty-five or thirty, and they all bore the same marks of age, decomposition and death on their yellow, wrinkled faces. All of them had the humble and despairing eyes of reindeer." In Italy, "around Galeazzo (Ciano) and his elegant and servile court, the desert landscape of indifference, contempt and hatred, which was by then the moral landscape of unfortunate Italy, was daily closing in." From these and many similar observations there was only one possible conclusion in "a Europe humiliated and defiled by hunger, by hate and by despair." "There was nothing pure, nothing

truly young any more." "All that is noble, gentle and pure in Europe is dying."

The defeat which Malaparte describes is not primarily military defeat. It is not the defeat of the European peoples, but rather of their leaders and policy-makers. More than that, it is the defeat of a class and of the social order which that class dominates or dominated.

Malaparte did not discover European disintegration; it has been stressed often enough in essays, poetry and political dissertations. But he voices it poignantly and with bitter regret over "the odor of dead Europe."

Disintegration began at the top. Malaparte paints only that part of the picture. How far down has it moved in the social scale? His appreciation of the Russian and Rumanian peasants and of the people of Florence during an air raid leaves the reader with the feeling that there are still plenty of sterling qualities remaining among the masses.

**T**HIS FEELING is shared by many observers. In my December letter I referred at length to Mr. Sulzberger's report on his trip through Yugoslavia. An equally favorable report from Russia was published in *The New York Times* magazine section for December 8, in which the author, Drew Middleton, begins with a comment on the widespread interest felt among all segments of the Soviet population concerning the success of the new Five-Year Plan. The people are behind the plan because they believe it will answer "two questions that have been asked for ages: When will we have plenty? and When will we be truly secure?"

Government agencies are checking on waste and inefficiency "preparatory to plunging into the battle of industrial expansion." It is to be a hard battle and everyone knows it, but the Soviet people have faith in their leaders and in their own ability to win. The widespread desire for sufficiency and security are making the Russian people work "as few peoples have worked in history." "It is a commonplace to observe that the completion of this and the subsequent five-year plans will make a tremendous change in the life of the average citizen of the Soviet Union. Those changes are already beginning and work itself is one of them. It is a common boast here that no one is idle."

Mr. Middleton then comments on the very wide participation, throughout the Soviet Union, in professional and amateur dramatics, folk-singing and dancing. He adds: "It will be charged that this is an idyllic picture. These are things, however, I have observed. By and large the worker is a warm-hearted fellow, made to feel proud of his part in the great national task and hungry for his share of its results. He likes his drink of vodka, a good dinner, the old folk-songs of his country and a walk in the park with mama and the children."

If such an article appeared in *New Masses*

or *Soviet Russia To-day* or the *Bulletin* of the Soviet Embassy, it might be questioned as presenting a partisan view of the situation. But in the *Times* and coming from Drew Middleton, whose attitude toward the Soviet Union has been on the whole sharply critical, it strongly supports what Malaparte observed concerning the sturdy determination of the Russian peasantry to come out of the turmoil with at least a measure of improvement over its pre-war status. Furthermore, it carries a conviction that the Soviet leadership and the rank and file are working together toward a goal in which both have a stake and in which both believe.

**S**HARPLY CONTRASTED with Middleton's picture of the Soviet Union is the situation in post-election France. The country has finally adopted a new constitution and elected a new parliament. Yet it seems as incapable of forming a responsible ministry as at any time since the war. Meanwhile, inflation threatens, economy stagnates, the political life disintegrates and unrest grows.

What is the matter with France? The immediate answer is a simple, technical one—under the political assumptions behind the western democracies, a majority decides and then proceeds to govern in accordance with those decisions. In France, however, there is no majority and, for all practical purposes, there has been none for three decades. Not even during the crucial days of the Spanish Civil War was there a majority. What France had at that time was a weak coalition, directed by a timid and unimaginative premier. At no period of its existence did the Popular Front represent a real majority. To-day the Communists, the Catholic Party and the Socialists differ fundamentally regarding French policy. No one of the three parties has a majority or anything like a majority. In the last three elections their respective positions altered very little and there is no reason to suppose that another election would yield a different result.

France is effectively divided into three major political minorities and a score of lesser political groups. There is no majority in sight.

There are several possible reactions to this situation. One is to say that the French people are incapable of democratic self-government. This is the explanation commonly advanced when a dictatorship is set up in Rumania or Poland, but it is hardly valid for France, which is one of the traditional centers of European bourgeois society.

Another reply is that capitalist economy in France has reached an impasse and that the paralysis of capitalist economy automatically paralyzes the capitalist state apparatus. This explanation seems to be more in accord with the facts. Competitive capitalism having come a cropper, the competitive state, with its multi-pressure groups and multi-parties can no longer

operate. (Essentially the same situation exists in Italy.)

If this second explanation of the French deadlock is accepted, Harold Laski is right when he asserts that "the principles of the dominant economy can no longer fully exploit the forces of production that are at their disposal. Its capacity to expand is exhausted; its contradictions have become the master of its purpose" (*Reflections on the Revolution of Our Time*, N.Y., Viking, 1944, p. 167). Sumner Welles is more cautious than Laski, but he also senses the coming dissolution: "If the present chaotic condition of Europe persists much longer, economic ruin and political and social upheavals are inevitable and cannot fail to bring about the collapse of what is left of modern civilization." (*Where Are We Heading?* N.Y., Harper, 1946, p. 112). The facts in the case, supplemented by comments like those from Laski and Welles, compel one to assume that what the French need is not a new ministry, nor even a new constitution, but a new social system.

MR. WELLES feels in his bones the correctness of this assumption, but he is not willing to follow it to its logical conclusion. A person of more than ordinary capacity, with a long period of top-ranking diplomatic experience, he writes and speaks as though the bourgeois-democratic economic and political garment could be refitted to the measure of the French, the Czechs, the Yugoslavs or any other Europeans, no matter what the level of their cultural advance or decline. Thus he misses the entire conception of social evolution. The economic and political institutions of yesterday do not necessarily fit peoples to-day. In fact, if marked changes in technology or political orientation have occurred in the meantime, the institutions of yesterday can be guaranteed not to fit to-day.

Europe is passing through exactly this experience. The years since 1910 have seen profound changes in the structure of European society, as well as in the relation between Europe and such other parts of the world as North America and the colonials of Asia and Africa. New wine requires new wine-skins.

Ignoring this obvious necessity of adjusting social institutions and practices to changing conditions, Mr. Welles assumes that, when the Czechs or the Yugoslavs set up some form of collective economy, they are either yielding to Moscow pressure or else copying Moscow. The difficulties in Europe to-day, he asserts, are due to the understanding "reached between Generalissimo Stalin and Mr. Churchill during their first stormy meeting in Moscow." At that meeting the East and West spheres of influence were blocked out. That understanding, he maintains, has prevented the possibility of agreement during the intervening period. "The safety of the Soviet Union would be lastingly assured by

the establishment of free and democratic governments in all of the countries of eastern Europe" and "the foundations for a free order in Europe would already be under construction" (pp. 150-2).

Mr. Welles follows this generalization about European reconstruction with a slashing attack on the Tito government in Yugoslavia. The Communist Party is in complete control, he avers. "The once exceedingly influential class of businessmen has been obliterated." Workers are employed by the government, which has "established chain stores throughout the country." "The objectives set forth in the constitution of 1946, namely, government nationalization of industry and ownership by government-sponsored co-operatives as the mainstay of the state, have very nearly been achieved. . . . Over and above this entire intricate system of economic controls and political unification is the all-powerful Federal Planning Commission." "All foreign concessions in Yugoslavia have already been abrogated" (pp. 157-8).

Then comes the conclusion: "The people of Yugoslavia to-day are as much under the Soviet political and economic system as if they had become an integral part of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics. The same condition very largely obtains in Poland, in Rumania, in Albania and in Bulgaria, and the tide in Hungary seems to be running in the same direction."

But what can these peoples do? If France, a victor in the war, and Italy, a loser in the war, are both perishing of the same malady—bourgeois democracy—shall the peoples of eastern Europe run after them and jump into the open grave with them? Is not the decision of President Benes of Czechoslovakia much sounder? "After what happened to us in 1938-39," said he, "we can never trust our fate in the hands of the western powers. Henceforth our future is tied up with the future of the Soviet Union."

Mr. Welles and those who, like him, are trying to pump oxygen into the collapsing lungs of a dying social system, insist that eastern Europe also put its trust in artificial respiration.

For many years the Balkan peoples were dominated by British and German economic interests. To-day the Soviet economic pattern is being installed and Soviet political influence is paramount. British and German interests kept the Balkans divided and in turmoil, as a part of their traditional divide-and-rule policy. If, as Mr. Welles charges, Balkan economy is being co-ordinated under Soviet direction, does this not promise the unification of eastern Europe and, perhaps, in the not distant future the unification of all Europe under one economic and social plan? Will such a result be better or worse than the artificially maintained divisions, the costly economic conflicts and the bloody wars that have devastated Europe and harassed mankind through the past centuries?

**U**NDER THE COMPLEX NETWORK of present-day European relationships are deep-rooted forces, reaching back beyond the Middle Ages—the causes, sequences, wise choices, follies, blunders, co-operative efforts and fratricidal struggles for wealth and power out of which Destiny has woven the current pattern of European life. Could we but get a clear vision of the past thousand years, events today would be as obvious as highways and water-courses on an airplane photograph.

Two facts are becoming plain, however. The first is that western Europe is dying, not of communism but of free-enterprise economy and bourgeois democracy. The social system which held the world in its mailed fist until 1910 is being wrecked by its own inner forces.

The second fact is the rise of an alternative social pattern. The Soviet Union has taken the lead in pioneering that pattern. Other peoples are adopting it perforce; there seems to be no other way of escape from the fate that is dragging bourgeois Europe to its doom.

**T**WO EXCEPTIONS should be noted to this statement. The first concerns Scandinavia, with its mixed economy—state enterprise plus private enterprise plus a network of consumer and producer cooperatives, all functioning under a government controlled by trade unions, cooperatives and socialists. Thus far, no other section of Europe has been able to duplicate the Scandinavian achievements.

The second exception is Great Britain. The British Labor Party, in office for a year and a half, has begun the nationalization of key economic units—the central bank, the coal mines and transport. It is also proposing the nationalization of major economic units in the British-dominated zone of Germany. As an offset to this collectivism, foreign secretary Bevin is doing his best to preserve the structure of the British Empire. Certainly, it is too soon to guess what effect these moves are going to have on France, Holland, Belgium and Italy. The growing unrest in India and French Indo-China will also play a considerable part in determining the outcome.

One thing is certain, however. U.S.A. businessmen and their spokesmen among the politicians are worried and chagrined at the outcome of their efforts to stabilize British-French-Dutch economy. In addition to lend-lease, chiefly a war measure, they have ventured some five billions of public funds and additional private funds, for underwriting economic recovery among what they took to be their fellow free-enterprisers across the Atlantic, only to see the money used for the purposes of nationalizing and collectivizing.

After World War I, U.S.A. business interests made some bad guesses on Latin American loans. Those blunders cost them only their

money. This new venture may cost them their economic system as well.

**B**EFORE LEAVING the European scene, we should note the movement of French squatters into unoccupied dwellings, the seizure and division of land by Italian peasants, food riots and the looting of food shops in and near Florence and the increased border tension along the frontier of Greece. The masses have not yet said the last word about the balance of social forces in post-war Europe.

**U**NITED NATIONS Assembly sessions have ended for 1946. The Trustee Council was established. Franco Spain was handled with gloves. A resolution favoring disarmament was passed on to the Security Council for approval and action.

The accomplishments were far from noteworthy, but they are the first feeble steps of a new organization, born in the midst of unprecedented confusion and turmoil and threatened on every side by mighty forces pressing for the elimination of U. N. and all it stands for. Under the circumstances, the survival of U. N. is no mean achievement.

Concrete U. N. gains have been few and meagre. One thing the organization has done, however, is to keep the problem of worldism on the front page of world consciousness. Issues have been sharply drawn and bitterly contested. They might have been fought out among diplomats behind closed doors; in the U. N. forum they were debated in public. Even committee meetings were public affairs. U. N. has thus helped greatly to make the world conscious of world problems and has provided a focus for the formulation of world public opinion.

**B**IG FOUR foreign ministers, after some ninety sessions, have agreed upon treaties for Italy, Rumania, Bulgaria, Hungary and Finland. The treaties are scheduled to be signed on Feb. 10; one month later the Big Four foreign ministers will meet in Moscow to draft treaties for Germany and Austria. None of these treaties is an agreement—that is, a meeting of minds. Each is a dictated document, imposed by the victors upon the vanquished. It is a peace of vengeance, providing for indemnities, dismemberments, humiliations, military occupation. Such a peace is little more than a flimsy armistice, which will last until preparations are completed for the next round of military struggle.

**C**HILE IS RECEIVING economic support from Argentina. President Videla, of Chile, in reviewing the new trade pact between the two countries, stated that Chile will get \$150 million to develop industry, advance public works and promote Argentine-Chilean trade. With trade barriers lowered and closer economic

collaboration, President Videla said, "both Chile and Argentina can seriously hope for economic independence."

This simple announcement points up an epoch in Latin American history. Not since the Latin American colonies won their independence from Spain has there been a development of equal significance.

Since throwing off the yoke of Spain, Latin America has been politically independent but economically colonial; British and U.S.A. capitalists have dominated the field and profited by the exploitation of Latin American resources and labor power. World War I forced the Latin Americans to build up industries or do without manufactured products. World War II cut off Latin America even more sharply from sources of manufactures; at the same time, it made a market at high prices for all the war materials and food products Latin Americans could produce and ship. The result of this economic pressure was the development of manufactures, notably in Argentina, Brazil and Mexico, and during the recent war, the build-up of heavy balances of payments due the Latin Americans on goods shipped to the war-makers.

Argentina benefited extensively. The resulting prosperity enabled the country to industrialize rapidly. Two years ago, Argentina was able to report that more than half of the national income was derived from business rather than from agriculture. The Argentinian business class had arrived.

No wonder the State Department is worried. Only a few years ago, if Chile wanted \$150 million, there was only one place in the Western Hemisphere to which she could apply. Now there are at least two; Argentina has become a rival of Wall Street in the export of capital. In this role, Argentina can develop a South American economic bloc and ultimately a South American centre of political power.

Clumsy State Department efforts to defeat Perón in the recent Argentine elections merely guaranteed his success. Now the Perón government comes forward with three propositions: (1) a declaration that capitalism is done for, (2) an elaborate economic plan for Argentine economy and (3) an economic and political tie-up with neighbor states, of which the recent deal with Chile is a sample. These developments mean more than mere capitalist rivalry. They mean that Latin America is turning its back on free-enterprise economy and moving toward collectivism. It is too early to define the type of collectivism with positiveness. Enough for the moment that it represents a repudiation of the basic principles for which the National Association of Manufacturers and the U. S. State Department stand.

Add to this economic trend the long period of obnoxious dollar diplomacy, Latin American dread of "the Yankee peril" and resentment of the assumption of racial superiority with which

USA citizens ordinarily approach Latin Americans, and you have at least a partial explanation of the rise in the U. N. Assembly of a Latin American bloc, controlling nearly forty percent of the Assembly vote and going its own way, with a semi-hostile eye on Washington.



A READER OF *WORLD EVENTS* who lives in New York wants to know what I meant by writing in the November letter that, if we are to avoid disaster, a mass-production apparatus must be "carefully guided and controlled." Did the New Deal go far enough in guiding and controlling? he asks. "If you think something further is necessary, could you sketch briefly what guide and control you would advocate?"

I replied: "Your letter raises the question of the amount of guidance and control necessary. I answer, 'Just enough.'"

"We are watching a good parallel in New York City. Problem: How much parking restriction is needed to keep traffic moving in midtown? The answer is being determined by experimentation.

"The same method can be applied to our economy as a whole.

"Question: How much control is required to provide an adequate and regular flow of goods and services to the members of a modern, mass-production-based urban community? Answer: Just enough.

"Without traffic regulation in midtown New York, you have snarls, accidents and paralysis. Without adequate controls, the world economy is snarled, smashed by war and paralyzed by depressions.

"It is the same kind of problem to which Lincoln gave his famous answer. 'How long should a man's legs be? Long enough to reach the ground,' he replied."

I know of no problem, in either natural or social science, to which there is any other answer. If, for example, we want to construct a bridge on concrete piers, we figure out theoretically how much weight a given volume of concrete would have to support and then we take the concrete to a laboratory, put it in a press and by a gradual increase of measured pressure, discover its crumbling point.

Solutions for social problems are tested out in like manner, only the laboratory is a unit of society—a going community. For example, the Soviet Union since 1920 has been testing out various types of social planning, control and administration. The entire modern world owes the Soviet Union a debt of the most profound gratitude, not because the USSR has succeeded or failed, but because they have tried. Insofar as they have succeeded, we may benefit by their example; insofar as they may have failed, we can learn by their experience.

Go into any laboratory. You will find for-

mulas and models which record successful experiments. But you will also find a huge scrap-  
pile of accumulated failures. I suppose the  
average ratio of laboratory successes to failures,  
even under the direction of wizards like Edison,  
Steinmetz and Burbank, is anywhere between  
1 to 10 and 1 to 1000. When we review such  
a record, do we condemn these men because they  
failed nine times and succeeded only once? Of  
course not. We praise and honor them for the  
one success and charge up the failures to the  
inevitable profit-and-loss of experimentation.

William Henry Chamberlain, Norman  
Thomas, Reinhold Niebuhr and other Soviet-  
baiters make themselves ridiculous by attack-  
ing the USSR for its failures without even  
mentioning its successes. I once had a public  
discussion with Harry Paxton Howard on the  
USSR. He took the usual Socialist Party line—  
denunciation of the USSR from A to Z. After  
he had finished, I asked him two questions:

1. Was there a revolution in Russia in 1917?
2. Did the Russian people derive any benefits  
from it? He grudgingly admitted that there  
had been a revolution, but denied that it had  
brought any benefits.

I hold that the attempt of the USSR to cor-  
relate sociology and technology, or to work out  
and apply an over-all social (and economic)  
plan, or to bring agriculture to the technical  
level of industry by collectivizing it and mech-  
anizing it, or to provide a working formula  
for satisfactory relations between racial minor-  
ities has constituted as important a contribu-  
tion to sociology as any experiment in an en-  
gineering laboratory is a contribution in its field  
of science.

A laboratory reports failures as well as suc-  
cesses. History will record Soviet failures and  
Soviet successes. We provide the laboratory  
worker with a good living and respect him for  
his efforts to increase knowledge in his field.  
If we could free ourselves from the ideological  
poisons fed to us by profit-seekers and power-

grabbers who own USA industry and own and  
control the "free" press and radio of the coun-  
try, we would not only respect the USSR for  
its profoundly important experiments in eco-  
nomics and sociology, but would subsidize the  
experiments with gifts of material equipment  
and technical know-how.

During World War II, Washington turned  
over to Moscow generous supplies of lend-lease.  
The argument was, If they shed their blood to  
defeat the common enemy, what less can we do  
than provide material assistance?

The same argument holds for the Soviet ex-  
perimentation in search of an alternative to the  
disintegrating social pattern that has plunged  
the West into the costly depressions and suicidal  
wars of 1910-1946. If only for trying to find  
answers to the problems that have confronted  
us with such baffling difficulties and involved  
us in such intolerable material and human losses,  
the Soviet people deserve the recognition to  
which all pioneers are entitled. If they fail,  
well, were not the fine boys who died on battle-  
fields between 1936 and 1946 the sacrificial  
victims of *our* failures? We all fail at times;  
for the past 35 years the West has been failing  
catastrophically. If the Soviet people—or any  
other people on this planet—succeed against  
towering obstacles in carrying out some ambi-  
tious social experiment designed to increase  
human well-being, then honor and glory to  
them! If they fail, they at least deserve the  
respect we should accord to any experimenters  
who risked time, energy, limb and life in a  
gamble against Destiny, with the odds 10 to 1  
or 1000 to 1 against them. Their heroic efforts,  
whether attended by failure or success, put the  
entire human race in their debt.

*Scott Nearing.*

Jamaica, Vermont

*NOTICE. In order to free the Washington committee for extension work, a  
Philadelphia group, under the leadership of Mildred Ryder, has taken over the  
circulation department of World Events. Henceforth all communications and  
remittances relating to subscriptions, renewals, changes of address, extra copies  
etc. should be addressed to World Events, 2006 Walnut St., Philadelphia 3, Pa.  
Correspondence with regard to books, pamphlets, leaflets, press releases, lectures,  
etc. should be directed to World Events Committee, 125 Fifth St. N. E., Wash-  
ington 2, D. C.*

*The contents of this letter may be reproduced, in whole or in part, without special permission.*

*"World Events" is published monthly at 2006 Walnut St., Philadelphia 3, Penna. Subscription,  
\$2.00 per year. Extra copies will be supplied without charge to subscribers desiring them  
for free distribution with a view to interesting others to subscribe.*

*Special introductory offer to new subscribers, eight issues for one dollar.*