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The Shape of Things

FEW MEN IN POLITICAL LIFE RATE THE tribute of public tears when they die. Franklin D. Roosevelt was one; Fiorello H. LaGuardia, another. People who had never seen New York's former Mayor in life wept as they filed past his coffin, and the sense of loss was apparent throughout the city. The genuine sorrow at LaGuardia's death reflected more than an appreciation of his color and his achievement, though they were great. The tireless, paternal, irascible, cocky, and often vituperative little man who raced to fires, delighted in surprise visits to city institutions, personally investigated the humblest citizen's complaint, read the "funnies" over the air during a newspaper strike, and, back in 1937, suggested making Hitler a central figure in the World's Fair Chamber of Horrors was without doubt, as one reporter describes him, "New York's most colorful mayor since Peter Stuyvesant." And his long record of accomplishments includes the breaking of Tammany power, the introduction of scrupulously honest municipal government, the unification of a fantastically scrambled transit system, and the building of enough parks, playgrounds, highways, housing projects, markets, and bridges to alter, to its vast improvement, the face of the world's largest city. But beyond all this was a warmth, a homey informality, and an identification with the people who had elected him that gave LaGuardia the status of a public protector. His utter scorn for party loyalty and "clubhouse loafers," on the one hand, and for the cold theorizing of traditional reformers, on the other, established a rapport with the voters that became the envy and awe of the professionals. LaGuardia's mayoralty proved brilliantly that political machines are no more inevitably a part of the modern city than typhoid epidemics. Citizens of Boston, Jersey City, and points west, take note.

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THE WORLD SUPPLY OF GRAIN IS FALLING short of the demand by 11,000,000 tons. Set beside this fact two others: Americans are consuming more food than ever before—they are, for instance, eating 25 per cent more meat than they ate in 1941, and meat is part grain; Europeans, on the other hand, will eat 5 to 10 per cent less food in the next twelve months than they have in the past twelve, and in the past twelve they have existed on 1,700 to 2,000 calories a day. The human answer to this state of affairs is as obvious as the steak on your plate. Those who have so much more than enough should share at least the excess with those who have so much less. Most Americans, as human beings, would accept that answer, and offer more. But that is not the answer Europe is getting from America. On the contrary, Europe is being told that it must tighten *its* belt. It is even being told that shipments of food to Europe have caused inflation of food prices here because the demands of Americans, who have thrown their belts away, outrun the unprecedented supply. Which is surely adding insult to injury when we consider that this inflation, which was induced not by any actual scarcity but only by a speculators' scarcity and was set off by the casual and triumphant removal of price controls, has cut Europe's capacity to purchase food by sharply reducing the value of the few dollars it has.

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AMERICA TODAY, IN RELATION TO THE REST of the world, is the biggest and blackest of black markets, and the fact that it "just growed" and that many Americans are also its victims is not readily apparent 3,000 miles away. The practical immediate way to curb this black market, as *The Nation* pointed out last week, is to restore price controls at the source of production in industrial and building materials, especially steel—whose masters have been "cleverly" preparing for, and preparing, a depression, by pushing up prices—and in basic farm commodities like grain and livestock. The Administration should move quickly toward that goal. And in the process, it should go to the people on the question of food for Europe. It should go to the people not merely with the self-serving arguments that if we let Europe starve, it will go Communist and that feeding Europe, even at our own expense, will be cheaper than another depression and another war. These are cogent but graceless arguments. The question that should be put to the American people with all the force at the Administration's command is the simple human question: "Shall we let Europe starve?" We know what the answer would be, and that answer would not only give Europe a new lease on life; it might also serve to halt the moral depression in this country which is already far advanced.

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ARE THE BONES OF DEAD MEN BLACK AND white? This question is suggested by the objections of Representative John Rankin to a measure authorizing War Department use of federally owned lands for national cemeteries. Some time ago, the War Department issued an order forbidding race segregation in such cemeteries. Annoyed by this, Mr. Rankin induced Representative Richard Welch of California to agree that the new authorization measure would have no application in the Southern states. The "white boys" of the South, as Mr. Rankin put it, will now be buried in local, segregated graveyards. No additional federal lands in the South will be used for burying veterans. That not a single member of the House had the decency to object to this, the crassest of Rankin's bigotries to date, is some measure of the mentality and moral fiber of the Eightieth Congress.

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IN ITALY, THE STRIKES AGAINST HIGH PRICES and food shortages had clearer political implications than elsewhere in Western Europe. The recent French work stoppages, for example, were limited to the main industrial centers; in Italy, they spread swiftly to the countryside, where 1,000,000 farm workers joined in the greatest agrarian strike Italy has ever experienced. The movement reached a climax last Saturday when the Socialists and Communists organized a gigantic demonstration to demand representation in the government. The speakers directed their attacks not only against the De Gasperi Cabinet but against the Vatican as well. The truce initiated some months ago when the Communist leader, Palmiro Togliatti, voted to ratify the Lateran treaties, is now over. In recent months, the Vatican has become increasingly outspoken in its support of De Gasperi, and Pope Pius's speech of September 7 was interpreted in left circles as an open challenge to the workers' parties. The extension of the political fight to the religious domain is deplorable, but the Vatican can no longer claim that it stands above politics; it has abandoned all pretense of neutrality and tossed its tiara into the ring. Though Saturday's demonstration was not the "prelude to revolution" which the rightist press has long been announcing for reasons of its own, it nevertheless was a clear indication of the present temper of the Italian masses. In Europe today, and particularly in Italy, where bitter memories of twenty years of fascist rule are still fresh, the people are determined to prevent reactionary governments from exploiting economic difficulties to stop the swing toward the left.

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PHILIP MURRAY IS REPORTED TO HAVE remarked that bickering among the leaders of the United Automobile Workers has "sunk to a level of complete moral degeneration." The president of the C. I. O., who is unusually sensitive to the dangers of factionalism, may

have been laying it on a bit thick, but there is no doubt that the country's largest union is about to indulge in a brawl that will have its effects on the entire C. I. O. On one level, the fight is the usual struggle between groups designated, with more convenience than accuracy, as left and right. More immediately, it is the campaign battle between Walter Reuther, running for reelection as president, and the faction led by R. J. Thomas, George Addes, and Richard T. Leonard. In electing Reuther last year, the union boxed him in with an executive board made up largely of his opponents. Reasonably enough, Reuther is out to get a board that will support him, and he is hitting hard. Against his present colleagues he makes two principal charges: that they have blocked his efforts to implement the union's constitutional provision barring Communists from office, and that they have sanctioned the "scandalous waste" of $500,000 in a fruitless and badly bungled drive to organize a single company in Cleveland. Reuther further accuses his opponents of "pork-chopping," or living off the union pay roll without delivering much in return, and of having made personal loans to individual delegates at the last convention. Confusing the issue almost beyond untangling are numerous personal feuds, with Thomas characterizing Reuther as a man "drunk with personal ambition" and Reuther returning the compliment by branding Thomas a "vindictive and poor loser." Perhaps, after all, Mr. Murray was right.

Candor on the Right

WE WOULD not blame Governor Dewey if on reading the remarks of his rival, Senator Taft, he should be more convinced than ever that Republican Presidential candidates should be seen and not heard. In the first week of a thinly disguised campaign tour, the Ohio Senator delivered himself of two boners either of which should be enough to wreck his chances. On the decisive issue of prices, he gave the press a field day with the formula "eat less meat and eat less extravagantly"—a bit of advice rendered the more piquant for having been delivered at a beefsteak banquet. And a few days later, he told an audience that while the Republican Party had a social-legisation program in mind, it was "loath to proceed" with it until 1949, when it could safely be "inaugurated under a Republican President."

Reporting Taft's "eat less" pronouncement from Los Angeles, Roscoe Drummond of the *Christian Science Monitor* wrote that "no one who heard him thought he was urging any heartless soak-the-poor program," and he admitted the next day that "there are a lot of people who can only just get enough" to eat. But the phrasing

Ezekiel Schloss

"Let 'em eat less!"

of his first comment was characteristically bourbon in its vast ineptness. As we point out on page 297, Americans are in fact consuming much more than their fair share of the world's food, but the distribution is so far from equitable within our own country that a flat prescription for voluntary retrenchment is hardly the answer to our run-away price problem. Lower-income Americans, now spending fully half their income on food, are perforce practicing the Taft eat-less formula right now—and it will doubtless work if only their diets get low enough. As one of Taft's party colleagues put it, "The cure for high prices is high prices," which is to say, there is nothing wrong with the economy that enforced malnutrition won't cure. No unhealthy boom that won't produce its own corrective bust.

More revealingly than by his prescription for prices, Taft's highly publicized candor is exemplified by the statement on social-welfare legislation. Here is probably the most cynical avowal by a major political figure since Andrew Jackson openly made a national policy of the wardheeler's slogan, "To the victors belong the spoils." As his party's chief in the Senate, Taft sponsored a mild and watered-down housing bill. This is his way of telling scores of thousands of homeless veterans that if they want even this degree of relief they will have to wait until 1949—and they will have to elect a Republican President to match a Republican Congress. It is his way of serving the same notice on teachers and parents who might have taken seriously his bill for federal aid to the schools, and on those who might have set some store by his bill for improving the public health. On none of these measures, carrying his name, has the Republican boss of the Senate pressed for action. Now we know why.

Yet there are those who profess to see in Mr. Taft's

frankness a redeeming quality—as though reactionary views and selfish politics were rendered less reactionary for being openly declared and less selfish for being flaunted. This is the inverted logic feared by the defense attorney who once told a jury: "My client may talk like an idiot and he may act like an idiot. But don't be deceived, gentlemen of the jury. He really is an idiot."

Lay Down Your Weapons!

BY FREDA KIRCHWEY

SINCE President Truman declared war—political and economic war—on Russia last March, the campaign has progressed steadily. The uncompromising speech by Secretary Marshall in the General Assembly last Wednesday opened a new, major offensive. Vishinsky's defiant counter-thrust was notice that no ground is being given by Moscow; it did not alter the terms of the conflict.

Secretary Marshall

Most of those who listened to Marshall's cold denunciation of Russian obstruction and his proposals for action described the speech as "impressive"; some said the same of Vishinsky's sarcasm, so reminiscent of Chicherin's biting attacks on the West after World War I. Impressive these speeches may have been, but so is a bomb exploding in a crowded street. Both men threw bombs—each after his fashion—and the effect of their action can be summed up in one word: dismay. Delegates at Flushing who tried to discuss, on its constitutional or practical merits, the Marshall proposal for parallel Assembly security machinery seemed to be wrestling with a shadow. Is it a good plan? Would Mr. Evatt's substitute plan work better? Could either be instituted without violating or rewriting the Charter? Could the Charter be changed with the veto in effect? In every mind, questions like these were overshadowed by the larger question: Was the new Marshall plan, or any proposed modification of it, more than a device to freeze the Western bloc into a U. N. within the U. N.—thereby undermining the organization as a whole without appearing to do so?

It was the French Foreign Minister, Bidault, who best expressed the profound anxiety of the other nations, caught up in the struggle of two clumsy giants prepared to force every issue to a showdown ending inevitably in stalemate. Bidault's sharpest words were directed to Vishinsky, who had accused the Western states of serving as tools of Washington by collaborating in the Marshall plan for economic aid. He denied this imputation with a vigor that time may perhaps justify; the issue is still unresolved. But on the broad problem of international cooperation, he said that France would attempt mediation and urge compromise up to the very limit of decency and honor. His central appeal was to both great powers to end their implacable hostility and begin to negotiate instead of continuing to denounce and obstruct.

Now that Mr. Marshall's proposal for a "Little Assembly" has been put on the agenda, it is likely to be adopted, since Russia's record of stubborn non-cooperation has stiffened the anti-Soviet majority. And if Mr. Vishinsky demands a vote on his resolution calling for U. N. condemnation of "criminal propaganda for a new war," it will almost surely be defeated. But the Marshall proposal will be regarded with skepticism and distaste even by those who vote yes; and those who vote against Vishinsky will do so recognizing that behind his reckless and ill-chosen accusations was a solid chunk of truth. The enthusiasm that greeted Bidault's eloquent plea for conciliation was a sign that the other Western nations understand this fact and bitterly deplore it. Even those most friendly to the United States, or most inescapably dependent upon us, would go no farther than to agree that Russia has so seriously obstructed the functioning of the existing international machinery that we had no choice but to scrap or retool it. None would assert that the Marshall proposal offered a serious hope of salvaging the U. N. as a world organization or of improving relations between West and East.

WHAT else could we do, faced with Soviet expansion in Eastern Europe, the threat of communism in Western Europe, and the Russian veto in the U. N.?

To answer that, one must ask another question. Is it established, beyond doubt, that Russia cannot be negotiated with but must either be isolated or fought? A well-known foreign correspondent, commenting on Vishinsky's speech last Thursday night over a major network, said that he and some of his fellow-correspondents had been reviewing the long series of misunderstandings between Russia and the United States in an effort to figure out where the trouble started—or started to get bad. They recognized that Russia's suspicion and intransigence had been problems even before San Francisco, but they agreed that the moment when the

whole thing got out of hand was during the winter of 1945-46 when Byrnes abandoned the tactic of patient, friendly negotiation followed by Roosevelt, and accepted the idea of a clique of Western states. The same analysis was offered in *The Nation* on August 24, 1946, in an article by our European editor, who used these words: "It is hard to fix the precise moment when things started to deteriorate, but I believe the United Nations meeting in London last January marked the point at which mutual distrust and ill feeling began clearly to dominate the relations between Russia and the Western powers. It was there that the talk of blocs and the organization of blocs emerged as a distinct factor."

The Washington analyst believed that the Marshall proposal at Flushing Meadow was the ultimate step in this process of bloc-building begun two years ago in London, and wondered whether the time had not come, in spite of the piling up of provocations, for the United States to lay down its weapons and make a last try for peace on the Roosevelt line. The man who spoke was not a radical; he did not question the difficulties we would face, especially now that the Russians feel themselves both challenged and affronted. He only believed that no difficulties could be as alarming to contemplate as a continued cold war, crystallized in the shape of the new Marshall plan for "world peace."

[*In a second article, Miss Kirchwey will discuss ways of breaking the deadlock between Russia and the United States.*]

Duel in the U. N. Assembly

BY J. KING GORDON

Flushing Meadow Park September 20

THE day the General Assembly opened, nineteen camera men surrounded Secretary Marshall as he took his seat on the aisle on the left of the American delegation. One of them put his chin and his camera on the Secretary's desk and shot him at a point-blank range of two feet. There was little doubt about who was Number One man in the second General Assembly of the United Nations.

Marshall's speech showed quite clearly that the United States had seized the initiative which, in previous meetings, it had left to others. Even Vishinsky's spectacular diversionary foray on Thursday failed to change the picture. Throughout Mr. Vishinsky's extraordinary display of sustained oratory Marshall sat calmly, his hands folded, listening impassively to the earphones. It will be the Marshall speech that will be the focus of discussion during the next few weeks.

The crux of the speech was the proposal that an Interim Committee on Peace and Security be established by the General Assembly to meet in constant session for a year. The Assembly, under the terms of the Charter, has certain powers that parallel those of the Security Council to investigate disputes and make recommendations for a settlement. Its successful intervention in the Palestine problem effectively established this authority. Only where matters are under the active jurisdiction of the Security Council has the General Assembly no right to intervene.

Sketches made from life by Oscar Berger

Vishinsky

What opens debate on this parallel right of the Assembly is the frank recognition that the free use of the Russian veto has frustrated the actions of the Security Council. It is proposed, then, that the General Assembly, through the interim committee of the whole, attempt to function where the Security Council has failed. In a sense, this "Little Assembly" will supersede the authority of the Security Council, to which the Charter gives primary responsibility for matters of peace and security. This will be the basis of the Russian attack. As Mr. Vishinsky put it: "In spite of the reservations in the American proposal to the effect that this committee would not impinge on matters which are the primary concern of the Security Council or of special commissions, there is not the slightest doubt that the attempt to create the Interim Committee is nothing but an ill-conceived scheme to substitute and by-pass the Security Council."

But according to opinions expressed public and privately by other delegates, a large majority are convinced that it is intolerable to permit the situation created by the veto-bound Security Council to continue. The second American proposal that the veto rights of the Security Council be waived in matters which fall under Chapter VI of the Charter (dealing with conciliation and the settlement of disputes) might be considered as an alternative means of achieving the same end. The difficulty here is that such a proposal falls outside the effective jurisdiction of