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HOT SPOT

WHEN I was in Trieste not long ago (it was a week or so prior to that perennially uneasy city's recent eruption into the world's diplomatic news), I was told that an examination of the town's newspaper-printing facilities would afford me an interesting, if by no means typical, example of how the politically varicolored *Triestini* manage to get along with each other. The war, the occupation by the Germans, and the boisterous activities of the Yugoslav partisans who ran the Germans out have left Trieste (pop. 278,000) with only one modern rotary press, on which the city's five daily papers, seven weeklies and semi-weeklies, and the United States Army service magazine *Blue Devil* are printed. For convenience, all the newspapers, from the extreme Left to the extreme Right, have their editorial offices in the printing plant, which is owned by a private company called the Stabilimento Tipografico Triestino. On the second floor, opening on a long corridor, are the offices of the *Giornale di Trieste*, the city's conservative paper, backed by financial and big-business interests, and, next to it, the *Lavoratore (Worker)*, official organ of the Trieste Communist Party, and the *Corriere di Trieste*, which follows the line of the Nenni Socialists in Italy. There are no partitions or railings in the hallway to mark off practical or philosophical boundaries. In fact, the only ideological distinction that I could see when I dropped in at this magpie institution around noon one day was that in the offices of the *Giornale* the furniture was polished, the filing cabinets were new and shining, and the notices pasted on the walls were all written in Italian, whereas the *Lavoratore* region was characterized by drab wooden chairs, unscrubbed floors, pictures of Stalin, Tito, and Marx, and bilingual notices, in Italian and Yugoslav. The secretary general of the Stabilimento, Dr. Massimo Martini, a slim, harassed-looking man, who was showing me around, assured me that the bitter party

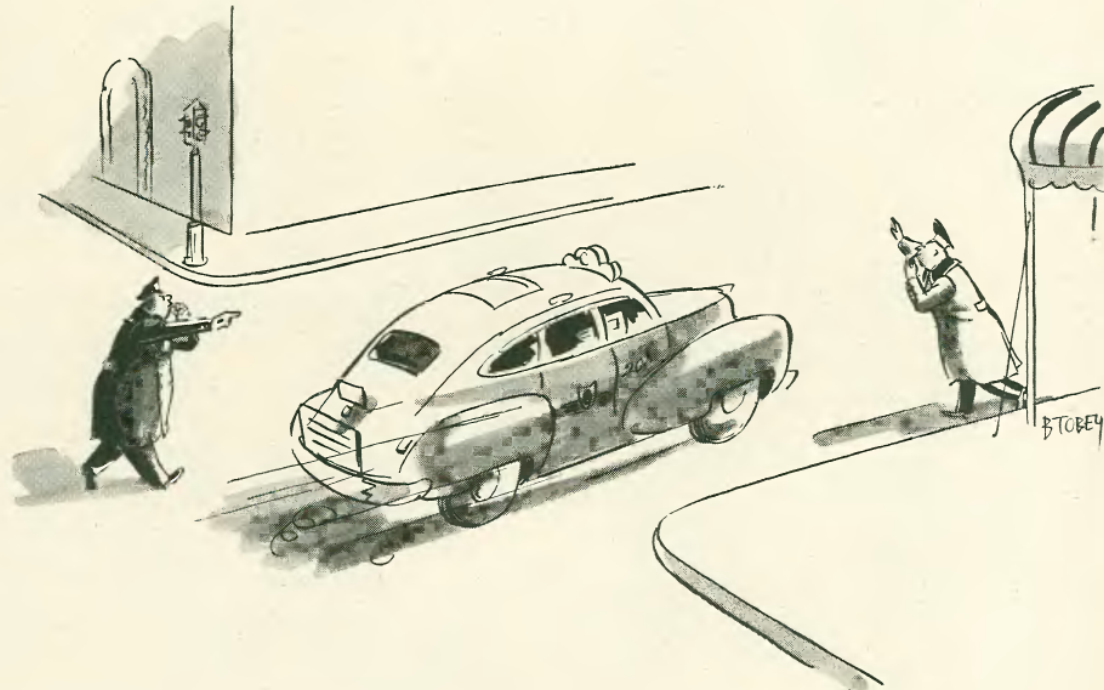
polemics, on which Trieste's newspapers traditionally thrive, are hardly ever carried over into inter-office wrangles. "Oh, of course, an editor will occasionally complain about the disappearance of an important piece of copy, which later turns up prominently in another paper," Dr. Martini said, "but such events are rather rare."

Down in the composing room, an airy, indirectly lighted place, where Dr. Martini took me next, the front pages of the Communist *Lavoratore* and the *Voce Libera*, a violently anti-Communist, Italian republican paper, were being made up on adjoining tables. While I was watching, a compositor at the *Voce Libera* table who seemed hard pressed for time asked a temporarily idle colleague of *Lavoratore* to help him out with a headline; the *Lavoratore* fellow went over with his composing stick and made up the headline, which, Dr. Martini later informed me with apparent satisfaction, contained a dreadful calumny on the integrity of the *Lavoratore*. A dapper gentleman from the *Lavoratore* table came up to speak to Dr. Martini and was introduced to me as Fransin Odino, one of the managers of the Communist paper. "The trouble with the *Voce Libera* is that they insist on having last-minute flashes," he said. "Our paper doesn't depend on such stunts, being concerned mainly with the broader issues of the day." At that point, a white-bearded patriarch, who looked as if he had just stepped out of

a Michelangelo painting, appeared with some copy, and Signor Odino hustled back to his table and started breaking up the *Lavoratore's* front page, evidently in anticipation of having to reconstruct one of the broader issues of the day. Dr. Martini said that these two competing afternoon papers had agreed to come out at the same time and at the same price—ten lire for a two-page edition, fifteen lire for a four-page one—in order to make things easier for the newsboys. Trieste's three morning papers—the pro-Allied *Giornale di Trieste*, the pro-Italian *Corriere di Trieste*, and the pro-Tito *Primorski Dnevnik*, which is written in Slovenian—have a similar agreement. Each paper is allotted four linotype machines, and all of them share the plant's photoengraving equipment.

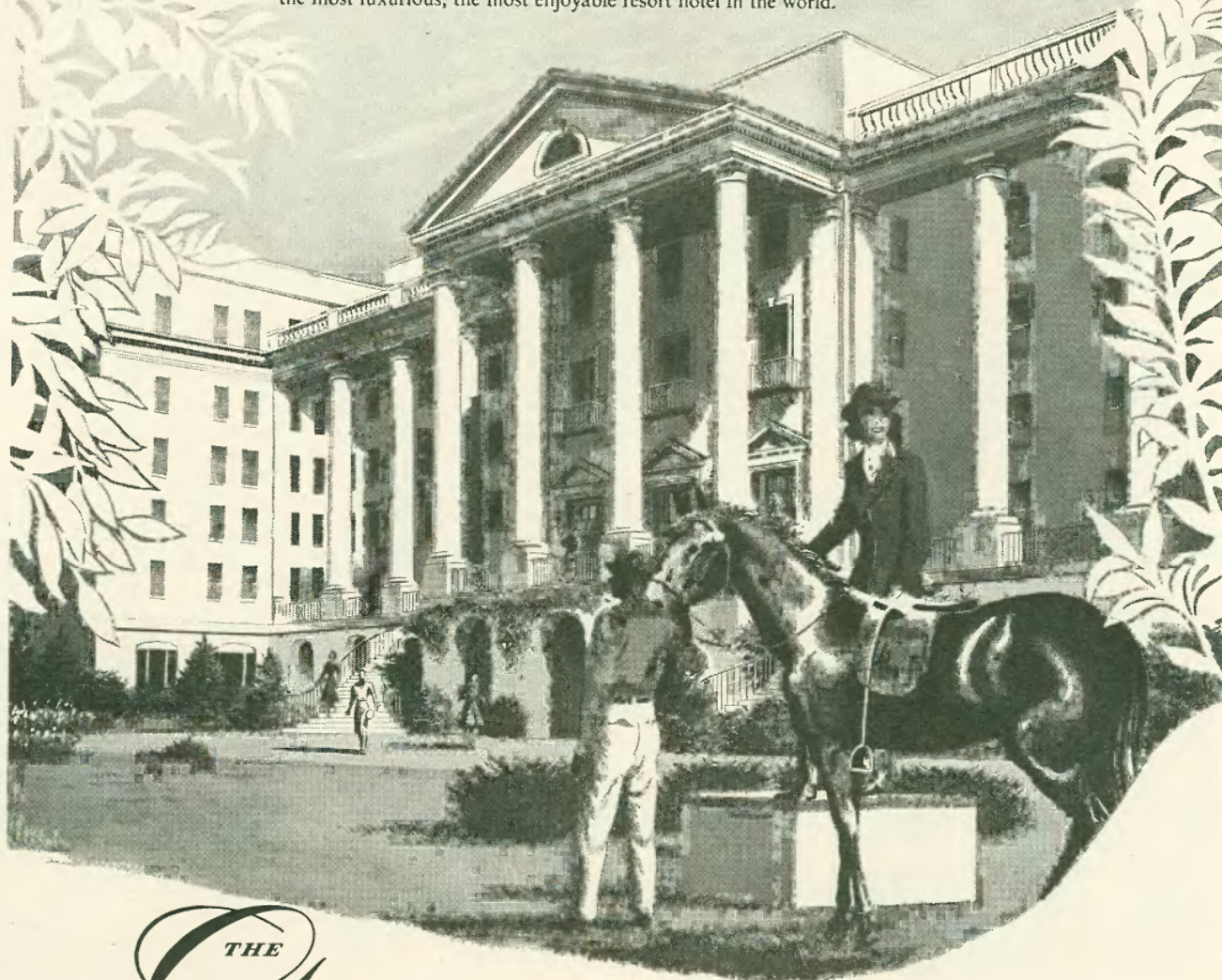
Soon a bell rang, indicating press time, and Dr. Martini led me to the pressroom, in the basement. A few minutes later, Trieste's one rotary press began to turn slowly, and the first, moist copies of *Lavoratore* and *Voce Libera* came out through two of the machine's four chutes. Dr. Martini picked up a copy of each paper. "Look at those front pages," he said happily. "Nothing but outrage and insults." The rollers started whirling faster, spitting out Left Wing and Right Wing papers at increasing speed.

REGRETTABLY, the all-party rotary press was one of the few cheerful phenomena that I came across during my stay in the Free Territory of Trieste, as the area is called in the



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peace treaty with Italy, signed on February 10, 1947, by all the nations that had been at war with her, and put into effect on September 15th. According to the treaty, which the Western powers would now like to rewrite, the Free Territory was to be jointly administered—until the United Nations appointed a permanent governor, at least—by the British, United States, and Yugoslav Military Governments. In practice, I found, it is almost as difficult for an American to get from the British-United States area, which takes in the city and port of Trieste, plus a narrow rural belt, into Zone B, the large, southern part of the Free Territory, inhabited by seventy thousand people and administered by the Yugoslav Military Government, as it is to get into Yugoslavia itself, which closes in on the Territory from three sides. One day, I drove ten miles out of town to the nearest road block between the two zones, in the village of Albaro Vescova, south of Trieste. After I left the city and began heading through the dreary open countryside, I noticed that almost every house and wall displayed a Communist slogan. As I approached the demarcation line, the number of the slogans increased. There were stencilled pictures of Tito and Stalin, nicely painted Yugoslav flags, hammers-and-sickles, and all kinds of inscriptions, such as "VV Tito" and "Zivela Federaciona in Demokratsicna Jugoslavia." I saw one sign that said, in eight-foot letters, "We Want Freedom—Help Us Join Yugoslavia." I gathered that it had been painted in 1945, just before the arrival of a United Nations commission, and had been left untouched by the British and Americans, possibly as proof of the existence of freedom of expression on their side of the line. Trieste police and Military Government officers claimed that most of these exhortations were painted at night by Communist "bucket brigades." However, there appeared to be little doubt that this rural border region of the British-United States Zone was fairly well disposed toward Tito. The area, though only a few miles from the hotels and shops of Trieste, is representative of the Darkest Balkans, for the people live in utter poverty. Women carry pails of water on their heads. Stray dogs wander through the streets of villages still pockmarked from heavy shelling. The only indications of liveliness I

came across amid the general air of depression were signs, nailed by the British forces to trees or house walls, reading, "To Nomads' Rugby Football Club!"

The British-American road block in Albaro Vescova was merely a red-and-white wooden barrier, guarded at the time of my visit by a few Trieste policemen under the surveillance of two Tommies. About thirty yards farther along the road was another wooden barrier, tended by two Yugoslav soldiers. I was told of a nearby quarry of high-quality white marble, which, like all building materials, is urgently needed in Trieste, that could not be exploited, since the main vein happened to be smack in the middle of the no man's land between the two barriers. There was no after-duty camaraderie between the two sets of guards. Back in 1945—"it seems like centuries ago now," a Trieste policeman said to me—they would occasionally meet for a glass of wine, but the high-level political divergences had worked their way down to even the corporals and sergeants at the road block. The British major in charge of the police detachment that controlled the Albaro Vescova road block, a ruddy, cheerful man from Aberdeen, told me that he hadn't seen his Yugoslav opposite number for over a year. "There is a profound and reciprocal lack of interest," he said with a shrug. He informed me



that no more than a few hundred people a day cross the line, most of them residents of villages in the vicinity who have business on both sides. A good number of people from the southern side cross over to buy food, which is scarce in Zone B, where the Yugoslavs have carried out an agrarian reform, expropriating the estates of big landowners and dividing them among the agricultural laborers, and plentiful in Trieste, where the bread is as white as it is in America, since it is made of

American flour. (Ninety per cent of the food in Trieste comes from the United States.) Practically the only traffic that moves freely across the border is a steady flow of mutual accusations between the governing powers.

MILITARY GOVERNMENT officials in Trieste assured me that in an honest, secret plebiscite, about eighty per cent of the urban population—including members of the Communist-controlled

labor unions, most of whom are Italian by birth and in sympathies and held under Tito's thumb only by Party discipline—would vote to return to Italy if there were any guarantee that they would be protected from Tito's expansionist aspirations. Presumably, such a guarantee is implicit in the current tripartite proposal to effect this reunion. As far as I could make out, the only people who were still for a Free Territory of Trieste were a few thousand elderly *Triestini*, too few to have any political importance. (The paper that presents their views, the *Trieste Sera*, appears twice weekly, in an edition of about seven thousand copies.) They remember nostalgically the city's golden era, before the first World War, when Trieste was the major Adriatic seaport of the Hapsburg empire and when everybody was making a lot of money. Those affluent days are responsible for the appearance of prosperity that the port still affects—the solid, ornate, unimaginative buildings, the broad streets, and the casual air with which all business transactions are conducted. Trieste was the home office of big banks, steamship lines (Lloyd-Triestino and Cosulich), and insurance companies (Assicurazioni Generali and Riunione Adriatica di Sicurtà). Even though the city has been under Italian influence for hundreds of years—the fortress of Trieste was founded in pre-Roman days, and the seaport has been populated by Italians ever since—it still looks very Austrian. The marble-adorned palaces built during the Fascist heyday have not exactly contributed to Trieste's architectural beauty, but they have not changed the city's character much, either. Some *Triestini* feel like kicking themselves whenever they think back on the Austrian era. "We were all Irredentists in our young days," a gray-haired businessman told me. "Everybody was busily plotting against the Emperor Francesco Giuseppe, but down in the port the cranes, lifts, warehouses, and piers were rattling with activity. The port was the source of our prosperity, since we have never produced any consumer goods and have to import nearly all food, fuel, and clothing. Look at the port today. It's a cemetery. Last week, four vessels arrived—all United States ships carrying food for Trieste and relief shipments of wheat and coal for Austria."

NOT long ago, the *Triestini* who most fear the appearance of Tito's forces in the streets became considerably alarmed when they learned that the

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British and Americans were pulling their outpost platoons back from the road blocks along the Yugoslav border, leaving the job of guarding the barriers to the Trieste police and to one or two G.I.s or British soldiers with field telephones to unit headquarters in the rear. The Trieste police force is an ambitious if somewhat amateurish outfit of five thousand men, dressed in blue uniforms and high helmets not unlike London bobbies'. They are drilled by Allied officers, and commanded by Colonel Gerald Richardson, O.B.E., who in civil life is a Scotland Yard divisional detective inspector. Two years ago, the Allies had trouble finding men for the police, because the jobs were thought to be too dangerous, but today the male population of Trieste seems to be divided into two groups—those already working for the police force and those who want to start. A policeman gets fifteen thousand lire, or twenty-six dollars, a month, an additional amount if he has a wife and children, free quarters, and, best of all, the generous rations that the Italian troops who served in Italy with the Allied Forces got during the war. I was told by a police officer that except for keeping an eye on the road blocks and running down smugglers in the harbor area—neither of which is too arduous—the police's most frequent duty is breaking up political demonstrations, which occur with uncompromising regularity. The *Triestini* are old hands at throwing bombs and grenades, and they shoot at one another with abandon. The police have devised a system of crowd control based on three-ton water trucks equipped with pumps and fire hoses. Advance notice of political meetings must be given to the Allied authorities, who try to avert bloodshed by assigning the demonstrators to a certain street or a certain square, by forbidding the importation of speakers from outside the Territory, and by forcing the organizations to hold their meetings at inconvenient hours, such as two o'clock Sunday afternoon, when everybody would rather take a nap than throw bombs. As an added precaution, the police always ransack every house in the vicinity of a proposed meeting, and always come up with a collection of murderous weapons.

All the dozen parties and factions in Trieste like to stage demonstrations, and the Communists, most powerful and best organized of the parties, hold the noisiest ones. The number of actual Party members in the city is thought to be about eight thousand, but the number of votes controlled by the Commu-

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nists is estimated at from fifteen to twenty per cent of Trieste's population. The Communist membership is drawn from the shipyards of Muggia and San Andrea, the harbor district, the steel plants and oil refineries, the suburbs of Trieste—especially San Giacomo, which is called Little Stalingrad—and from among the city's thirty thousand unemployed. The Party is run by Vittorio Vidali, a forty-seven-year-old veteran of the Spanish Civil War, in which he commanded the 5th Loyalist Regiment. Before that, between 1923 and 1927, Vidali lived in New York. In 1927, when the American government instituted deportation proceedings against him on the charge that he had entered the country as a stowaway, he was represented by Clarence Darrow. Later, he went to Russia, and then to Mexico, from which he returned to his native Trieste last February. He is said to take orders from Tito rather than from Togliatti, since Trieste's Communist cell is more closely tied politically to Belgrade than to Rome. Vidali's headquarters are in a big, modern building across the street from the American enlisted men's Red Cross club, near the harbor.

OCCUPATION troops seemed to me to be less in evidence in Trieste than garrisons of similar size are in towns in Germany. Officers and enlisted men had been ordered to keep pretty much to themselves, since they were under constant surveillance by the local press, which commented on their behavior in cartoons and caustic anecdotes. "We have to watch our step closely," a high-ranking American officer told me. "This is the hottest spot on earth, and we must build up a well-trained force that can strike fast if it should ever become necessary. We pulled the platoons back from the border posts so we could train them all the time instead of letting them get soft and lazy up there." A great many members of TRUST, which stands for Trieste United States Troops, and of BETFOR, which stands for British Element Trieste Forces, take some satisfaction in being stationed in "the hottest spot on earth."

The British and American commanders have taken over the two best castles in the Territory. The British reside in Duino Castle, and Major General Bryant E. Moore, the commander of TRUST, and his staff live and work in Miramare Castle, which was built in 1857 for Emperor Francis Joseph's brother, the Archduke Maximilian of Austria, who was executed in 1867 in



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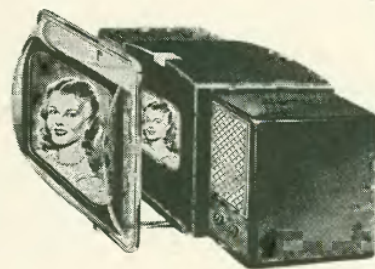
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Mexico. Thereafter, Miramare Castle was occupied, in succession, by Crown Prince Rudolf of Hapsburg, who died at Mayerling; Archduke Ferdinand, who was assassinated in Sarajevo; the Duke of Aosta, who was killed in North Africa; and Brigadier R. W. M. de Winton, of the British Army, who was shot a year ago in Pola. The superstitious *Triestini* say that the castle is like a jealous woman, for it kills off every inhabitant after he leaves it. The prestige of the United States Army in Trieste has been considerably enhanced by General Moore's decision to live there in spite of the curse.

On the other hand, American prestige has not been at all enhanced by some of the civilians whom the Americans employ. There are parasites from Leghorn, who came here after the Army moved out of Italy; hangers-on from Udine and Gorizia, who carry letters of recommendation signed by anybody, from Field Marshal Montgomery down to unknown mess sergeants; divorce lawyers from Naples; and confidence men and gamblers from all over Italy, who hope that Trieste is going to become a sort of Balkan Reno. For all of them, the American garrison in Trieste is the last water hole in Europe where American rations and cigarettes are to be had in abundance. "Trieste's one hell of a place," a Fifth Army veteran told me. "A lot of crooks on one side and a lot of Jugs on the other." "Jugs" has replaced "Krauts," "Huns," and "Nips" in the American soldiers' vocabulary. The bitter tone with which they use the word is indicative of their attitude toward their fellow-shareholders in the Free Territory. Up to now, the most critical moment in the relations between the American and Yugoslav troops was last September, when the British and American forces, in accordance with the terms of the Italian peace treaty, gave up a strip of territory approximately five miles deep and sixty miles wide. American newspapers subsequently printed inflammatory stories about the imminence of a dustup and carried photographs showing American and Yugoslav soldiers glaring at each other across barbed-wire barricades, but actually the withdrawal took place without serious incident. It was followed, however, by extended haggling between the local Western Allied and Yugoslav commanders over the exact location of the new border. "I'd always thought I was a pretty good man at arguing a case," I was told by an American officer who had been a lawyer in New York and who had taken part in the negotia-



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tions. "But this Jug kept wrangling with me two days and one night without giving me an hour of rest. First, he wanted two hundred metres more, then a hundred and fifty metres, then a hundred, then fifty, forty, thirty—all the way down the line. Well, I was a sucker and I was tired. I finally let him have half a metre of Trieste."

BEFORE the British, American, and French authorities proposed that Trieste be reunited to Italy, a number of prominent Europeans—among them the Swiss General Henri Guisan and the Belgian Senator Auguste Buisseret—had been suggested for the job of permanent governor, but nobody in the city expected that such an official would ever take office. One day, when a woman in the suburbs gave birth to a thirteen-pound girl, word spread through the *osterias* (bars) of the harbor that the grandmother of the future governor had just been born. "Suppose the Security Council of the United Nations nominated a man," one Allied Military Government officer said to me, "and suppose he were courageous enough to come here in spite of various threats of assassination. What is he going to do about the Free Territory's two economic systems, two standards of living, two social structures? He'll have to be damn smart to deal with that mess. In fact, if he's really smart, he won't come here at all." Now, if the Western powers' plan is successful, no courageous man will have to go through the anguish of making the decision.

—JOSEPH WECHSBERG

LINES FOR THE SUNDAY AFTER EASTER

The calla lilies in their bright vases
are gone, and in their places
are the familiar ferns
in the old green urns.
The sadness returns
to the minister's eyes.
The congregation, he observes,
counting the curves
and curlicues
of unpeopled pews,
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—RICHARD ARMOUR

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