LETTER FROM TRIESTE

October 3

THE city of Trieste, situated at the head of the Adriatic Sea, between Italy and Yugoslavia, is today the only place where both Cominform Communists and Tito Communists carry on freely and equally under the blessings of democratic institutions. The freedoms of speech, assembly, association, and propaganda are guaranteed by treaty and the presence of ten thousand American and British troops. In the inevitable mudslinging that has been indulged in here between the hostile brothers of the Marx family, the Tito Communists have definitely come off second best. Last year, in the first democratic election to be held in Trieste in a quarter of a century, the Cominform Communists got a fraction over twenty per cent of the total vote, as against the Titoists' slightly more than two per cent. The division between the two Communist groups is not, as might be expected, an ethnic one of Italians vs. Slovenes. While it is true that there are scarcely any Italian-speaking Triestenes among the Titoists, who are led by one Branko Babić, a former peasant and former colonel in the Yugoslav Partisan forces, many Slovenes are members of the Cominform group, which is ably managed by Vittorio Vidali, a first-rate organizer of the Thorez type.

Back in 1946, Marshal Tito and Palmiro Togliatti, Italy's Communist leader, agreed that ultimately the Free Territory of Trieste, of which the city of Trieste is a part, should be divided between Italy and Yugoslavia and that in the meantime Communist activities in the area should be coördinated under Tito's direction. Vidali was a faithful follower of Tito until the latter split with the Cominform, in June, 1948, after which he became a faithful follower of Togliatti. Naturally, the split created quite a stir among the Trieste Communists. Many Slovenes who were influential in the Party deserted the Cominform, among them the Party treasurer, who thoughtfully took the Party funds along with him. The Cominform Communist newspaper *Unità*, published in Milan, instituted a Trieste page (the paper's circulation here is now five thousand) and started a spirited battle against Trieste's pro-Tito Slovene daily, *Primorski Dnevnik* (circulation, twenty-five hundred). Although the editors of *Dnevnik* were pro-Tito, the paper was printed in a pro-Cominform shop, and when the printers didn't like something that the editors gave them to print, they would withhold the item and leave a blank space, causing considerable amusement and sarcastic comment among the non-Communist Triestenes. The capitalist titters stung the Cominform adherents no less than the pro-Titoists, and after a few weeks higher Marxist discipline prevailed and the printers resumed normal operations. Then the editorial staff of *Dnevnik* and the local correspondents of *Unità* began to beat one another up. The situation has quieted down as much as any situation ever does in Trieste, Europe's best training ground for terrorists, where anonymous letters, knives, and bombs are among the amenities of daily life, but every five or six weeks the editors of the pro-Tito paper get knocked about a bit, and last Christmas a bomb exploded in their offices.

Between rounds of fierce intramural fighting, the two Communist factions just as fiercely attack the Marshall Plan. It is one of the dialectical paradoxes of Communist propaganda that the Tito Communists here are energetically assailing the Marshall Plan at a time when Tito, in Belgrade, is trying just as energetically to get more American help through it. Marshall Plan aid and the unmistakable signs of recovery it has brought about have not, as has been the case in France and Italy, adversely affected Communist strength in Trieste.

Party members here—Cominform and otherwise—account for at least a quarter of the population of the city, and possibly more, despite the fact that during the first twelve months of the operation of the Plan, Trieste received more E.R.P. dollars per capita than any other beneficiary—$60 for every man, woman, and child, as against an average of $18.36 for all other beneficiaries. Up to last June 30th, E.C.A. had spent $27,300,000 in Trieste.

THE Free Territory of Trieste is the half-baked working out of a concept that evolved at a time when, in the words of one American here, "people were going around with the light of San Francisco in their eyes." It is because of the persistent opposition of the Soviet Union that the concept has never been fully realized. According to the Italian peace treaty of February 10, 1947, the Free Territory was to be administered jointly by the Americans, the

British, and the Yugoslavs until an impartial governor could be appointed by the United Nations Security Council, after consultation with Yugoslavia and Italy. Both countries wanted to take over the Free Territory; Yugoslavia was backed by the Soviet Union, Italy by the Western powers. A governor has never been appointed, and the Free Territory is still being run, as it has been since its inception, by three military commanders whose authority is based on one skimpy sentence in the peace treaty: "Pending the assumption of office by the governor, the Free Territory of Trieste shall continue to be administered by the Allied military commanders within their respective zones." It has worked out that there are two zones. One, Zone A, consists of ninety-six square miles, with a population of 309,500, and takes in the city and harbor of Trieste; it is administered by the Americans and the British and has arrived at monetary and customs agreements with Italy. The other, Zone B, consists of a hundred and ninety-seven square miles of rocks and fishing villages, with a population of 73,000, and is administered by Yugoslavia, which has posted five thousand troops there, established a state monopoly of trade, broken up big land holdings, installed its own customs and monetary systems, banned the non-Communist press, introduced food rationing, and made the zone in all but name a part of itself.

The history of the Free Territory of Trieste provides an instance of political expediency that didn't pay off. On March 20, 1948, with the idea of strengthening the hand of Premier de Gasperi in the then impending Italian elections, the United States, Great Britain, and France issued a declaration proposing the return of the entire Free Territory to Italy. At that time, of course, no one could foresee that three months later Marshal Tito would become the black sheep of the Cominform and a potential Western ally. The declaration, which was denounced by Russia, has since boomeranged, for today the Western Allies find themselves in the delicate position of having to try to please both Italy and Yugoslavia. A few months ago, Secretary of State Acheson expressed the hope that the two countries would settle the Trieste problem amicably between themselves. The possibility that they will do so grows increasingly remote. Trieste is perhaps the only issue on which all political parties in Italy, from the Communists to the extreme Right, are wholly united, and everybody in Italy suspects that the

United States is bartering Trieste for favors from Tito. But the Yugoslavs aren't pleased, either; they are afraid that the Russians may consent to the return of Trieste to Italy in order to embarrass both the Yugoslavs and the West.

Two years ago, when I was last here, roadblocks between the two zones constituted the southern extremity of the Iron Curtain in these parts. Since the Tito-Stalin split, this section of the Iron Curtain has moved—politically, though not ideologically—a hundred and sixty miles northeast, to the Yugoslav-Hungarian border, but Trieste is still the last outpost of both the Western Latin and the Eastern Slav worlds, and the roadblocks on the Zone B side have been made much stronger than they were; the simple barriers constructed of wood and heaps of stone that I encountered there in 1948 have been replaced by elaborate anti-tank blocks in the middle of the highway. Only vehicles accredited by the Yugoslav military authorities may enter or leave the zone, and they must zigzag slowly through these defenses under the scrutiny of Yugoslav guards. On the Zone A side, at one point on the boundary, a handful of blue-uniformed Trieste police and a couple of smartly turned-out G.I.s occupy a cheerful little house that is adorned inside with flowers, pictures of pinup girls, and Coca-Cola posters. On the opposite side, a glum Yugoslav soldier stands in front of a dilapidated shack that seems to reflect the drabness and austerity of the police state. It is now easier for an American to get a visa for Yugoslavia proper than permission to enter Zone B, and even when permission has been granted, visitors are likely to have their troubles. Last April, during a local election, two Western reporters, carrying valid passes, were maltreated and the tires of their cars were punctured while Zone B police stood by.

An anti-Tito Slovene Communist organization is reported to exist in Zone B, and life is further complicated for Tito's henchmen there by the fact that a considerable part of the zone's population is made up of Italian-speaking residents of the fishing villages along the coast. At the headquarters of the Cominform Communist Party in Trieste, snugly adjoining the American Enlisted Men's Hangar Service Club, I talked with a highly placed official who brushed off the Titoists in Zone A as a minor nuisance but spoke bitterly about conditions in the Yugoslav zone, where, he told me, the Cominform Communists are being persecuted. "Our people are

being sent to jail while even Christian Democrats are getting jobs," he said angrily. Recalling that in the election in Zone B last April, Marshal Tito's People's Front chalked up eighty-nine per cent of the vote and the Christian Democrats two per cent and that the remaining nine per cent of the ballots were declared "not valid," I asked the official whether the Cominform was operating there. "We have a strong underground in the Yugoslav zone," he replied. "I used to go there myself every week until the attempt was made on Togliatti's life. We'll lick them yet." But he did not repeat Vidali's threat of last year that "Tito's head will fall very soon." He seemed to have a healthy respect for the Yugoslavs.

POSSIBLY nowhere else in the world are matters in as great a muddle politically as in Trieste, a city the size of Columbus, Ohio. A dozen political parties are active here. Each has its own objectives and slogans, but all, to a greater or lesser degree, want either independence for the Free Territory or its return to Italy. The pro-Italy Christian Democrats are the most important of these parties. Next in line is the Cominform branch of the Trieste Communist Party, which wants the two zones unified under a governor, to be named by the United Nations, and the withdrawal of British, American, *and* Yugoslav troops. The Tito branch of the same party takes the negative position of opposing the return of the Free Territory to Italy but doesn't quite come out for annexing it to Yugoslavia. As for the others, the Socialist Party favors return to Italy; the Independence Front has the slogan "Trieste for the Triestenes;" the Italian Social Movement, which corresponds to the Neo-Fascist party of the same name in Italy, asks for restitution of all Italy's lost territories, presumably including Ethiopia and Corsica; the Italian Republican Party, which subscribes to the social principles of Mazzini, favors return of the Free Territory to Italy; the Common Man Democratic Front wants Italy to have not only the Free Territory but the whole former district of Venezia Giulia, of which part is now the Free Territory, part belongs to Yugoslavia, and the rest still belongs to Italy; the Trieste Democratic Front wants independence; the Italian Liberal Party, which was once the leading party in Trieste but got only 1.84 per cent of the vote last year, is for return to Italy; the Slovene Democratic Union, with its roots in the old Slovene liberal move-

ment, is anti-Cominform and anti-Tito and favors the independence of the Territory (among its members are many chauvinistic refugees from Yugoslavia, who grumble about the Allied administration in Zone A, although it has opened fifty new Slovene schools here); and, finally, the Republican Independence Movement calls for "the widest autonomy in association with Italy," whatever that means. There you have it—as nice a mess as any Communist could hope for. Columbus, Ohio, was never like this.

The Trieste City Council is supposed to take an active part in the local administration, but it spends most of its time bickering about world politics and sending resolutions to Washington. Its theoretical responsibilities have been for the most part assumed by the Allied Military Government (British and American, that is), which manages things competently and has succeeded in turning back various departments—among them those of labor, health, and education—to the Triestenes. A.M.G.'s worst problem is the chronic one of unemployment among a people who were long accustomed to share in the city's once booming importing and exporting, transshipping, and insurance businesses. The situation isn't quite as bad as it was two years ago, however; only eighteen thousand are at present unemployed, as compared to twenty-four thousand in 1948. The improvement can be attributed to low-rental building projects, shipbuilding (a transatlantic liner for the Italia Company and three liners for Lloyd Triestino have been built here), and the construction of oil refineries, blast furnaces, a milk-pasteurization plant, and a cement plant, all stimulated by E.C.A.

Some thirty-five thousand people—one out of every three working Triestenes—are employed in some capacity by A.M.G., and what would happen to them should the Allies leave is anybody's guess. Featherbedding is prevalent. The Trieste police force, a well-trained outfit established to deal with trouble along the border, has almost five thousand men, the equivalent of a police force of a hundred and thirty thousand for New York City. There are a thousand customs officers, and three thousand railroad workers to operate the fifty-eight miles of railroad tracks in and around the city. To make matters worse, almost every A.M.G. official has his opposite number in the local government, giving Trieste a bureaucracy in the advanced stages of elephantiasis.

Another problem, and one that grows

more acute every day, is posed by the constant influx of refugees. Over twenty thousand Italian-speaking residents of the coastal villages in Zone B have already moved into the city, and thousands of Yugoslavs, Rumanians, and Hungarians, as well as White Russians who fled to Yugoslavia after the First World War, are being fed and sheltered in camps the A.M.G. has opened around the city. Some of the refugees arrive in style on the Simplon-Orient Express, some are pushed, more or less gently, across the border by Yugoslav frontier guards, and some swim rivers to get here and arrive in shorts and nothing else. More refugees come in steadily, and no one knows what to do with them next.

THE number of American, British, and Yugoslav troops in the Free Territory is limited, by the peace treaty, to five thousand from each country. This gives Major General William M. Hoge, the Commanding General of TRUST (Trieste United States Troops), a little less than a standard regimental combat team to rely on for military purposes, because a third of his men are needed for administrative, supply, and clerical duties. For a while after the Cominform-Tito split, when the roadblocks had lost much of their political importance for the Americans, Trieste was one of those garrison towns where "you never had it so good," what with its fine beaches, modern movie houses, open-air cafés, excellent restaurants, and pretty girls. But the war in Korea has changed this state of mind. The Trieste garrison sees in it too many uncomfortable analogies. Trieste is a ward of the United Nations, like South Korea, and the American troops here have mainly "policing" duties. Should anything happen in this part of the globe, it might be Korea all over again. The smallness of the world has been brought home to the G.I.s here. As a corporal put it, "Gosh, I can't help thinking that if somebody had shuffled my papers different in the Pentagon, I might be lying in a mud field in Korea right this minute instead of having an *espresso* here on the Corso. One of the fellows who was with me in basic training was wounded badly near Taegu." The fate that befell the garrison troops in Japan has made a vast impression on the men, giving them an evident willingness to drill and silencing the complaints of headquarters clerks at being ordered out for drill every morning at seven. The G.I.s are alert to the danger, but they are also G.I.s. The most important topic of con-

versation all one week recently was the TRUST Baseball Championship of 1950, which, I'm glad to report, the Provisional Battalion Satans won from the 1st Battalion Tigers, 7–4, at Heroes Field.

Among the Triestenes themselves there is lamentation about American unpreparedness, and considerable Communist-instigated defeatism. (While the United Nations forces were still confined to the Pusan beachhead, one frequently heard people say, "The Americans should never have set foot in Korea in the first place.") Prices have gone up, owing to hoarding, and at the same time the banks have tightened the credit screws so much that quite a few firms are worried about whether they will be able to meet their payrolls from one Saturday noon to the next. The average Triestene makes thirty thousand lire (fifty dollars) a month and spends it all, mostly on food and drink, plus perhaps an installment payment on a motor scooter. The Triestenes don't work too hard, and they allow themselves plenty of time for griping. The advocates of an autonomous Free Territory gripe about Rome, which, they say, benefits from Trieste's port trade. (They don't bother to mention that Rome contributes a lot to Trieste's support.) Everybody gripes about the British and Americans, because "they occupy the best hotels." (Nobody bothers to mention that within a single fiscal year British and American soldiers have spent £534,200 and $3,668,475, respectively, in the shops and cafés of Trieste.)

Everybody worries about the future ("Have you heard that Vidali has sent his wife and child to Mexico?"), especially about what Tito is going to do. Ever since the spring of 1945, when the Yugoslav Partisans held Trieste in a brief reign of terror, until a division of New Zealand troops arrived and restored law and order, Triestenes have been fearful of a repeat performance. They point out that Yugoslav troops are still only a few miles from the city—and who can be sure Tito and Stalin won't make up? And there are always incidents. A few months ago, the Italian-Triestene steamer Vettor Pisani was boarded by the Yugoslavs in Capodistria, a port in Zone B, and machine guns and anti-Yugoslav leaflets were found aboard her. (The Italians claim that the Yugoslavs planted the weapons themselves.) The captain was sentenced to six months in prison. Some Allied authorities here believe, however, that this indicates great

progress toward better relations; two years ago, they say, the captain would have got life. Responsible Triestenes are worried about not being able to do anything to strengthen their position. "In Italy, they at least have an Army and can build up their defenses," a local businessman said to me. "Here we will have to sit back and wait for the city to be half destroyed by invading Russians and then completely destroyed by liberating Allies." It is generally thought that at the moment Tito is quite satisfied with the status quo in Trieste, which keeps ten thousand Allied soldiers—and an open supply line to America—at his western frontier, thereby relieving at least that many Yugoslav troops for duty at more critical frontiers to the north and east.

EVEN so, everybody would be just as happy if Tito had not recently repeated his demand that Gorizia, an attractive Italian border town some twenty miles north of Trieste, be ceded to Yugoslavia. Gorizia, which controls the main entrance into Yugoslavia from the west, was once Austrian but was taken over by Italy after the First World War. In appearance, it is still typically Austrian, with its relatively high, solid buildings and pleasant coffeehouses filled with people who talk interminably about politics. Until the early twenties, the population of Gorizia included a substantial number of Slovenes, but after Mussolini rose to power, the Fascists made life so miserable for them that many crossed the border and settled in Yugoslavia, which at that time was enjoying some measure of freedom under the Karageorgevitch regime. Then the situation reversed itself; Gorizia got rid of the Fascist dictatorship and a Communist dictatorship prevailed in Yugoslavia. Under these circumstances, some of the emigrants began looking wistfully back at Gorizia, where people could talk freely and the shops were filled with goods. But when they tried to return there, they found that they were forbidden to leave Yugoslavia.

Up to a few weeks ago, the emigrants were not even allowed to meet relatives and friends from Gorizia on the twenty-five-yard-wide strip of land that, near the town, constitutes a no-man's-land border between Italy and Yugoslavia. Then, one Saturday, word spread that border meetings of groups—no one to exceed thirty people, and the total not to exceed a thousand—would be permitted the next day, from nine to twelve in the morning and from two-

thirty to six in the afternoon. All that night, people from the interior of Yugoslavia arrived and camped on the east side of the border. Opposite them, on the Italian side, Yugoslav refugees living in Trieste lined up, hoping to find out about families they had left behind in Yugoslavia. By eight-forty-five Sunday morning, the crowd on the Yugoslav side had grown to such proportions that, in the words of a local Italian paper, "pressure against the Yugoslav barrier became irresistible." The crowd swept past the Yugoslav border guards, across the narrow no man's land, past the Italian guards, and into Italy. A number of people were hurt; five had to be hospitalized. Even a few Yugoslav soldiers found themselves in Italy—"very much against their will," they explained later. Men, women, and children rushed joyfully into Gorizia's bakeries and food shops, which had opened for the occasion.

"It was pathetic," a Gorizia shopkeeper told me when I visited the town not long ago. "They stared at our wares with their eyes popping. I'm sure the children had never seen so many wonderful things before. Within an hour, all our bakeries were sold out, and they also bought great amounts of lemons, spaghetti, medicines, sugar, coffee, wine, and beer." Gorizia's housewives, unaware that there is a shortage of consumer goods in Yugoslavia, were surprised to see almost every Yugoslav woman buy a broom. In Vittorio Square, two Yugoslav soldiers were observed enjoying a glass of good Italian beer, possibly very much against their will. The people of Gorizia have their own estimates of how many people from Yugoslavia probably "forgot" to go back. Since then, only small border get-togethers have been permitted.

JUST outside Gorizia, as I was driving back to Trieste, I came to a point where a road branches off from the highway and leads into Yugoslavia. Beside the branch road at the border were two shacks for guards, Italian and Yugoslav, and beyond the shacks was a little church. A woman dressed in black was crying bitterly and pleading with the Italian guards to let her pass into Yugoslavia, but her entreaties were being met with cheerful indifference. I stopped and asked her what the trouble was, and she replied that she wanted to go to the nearby Yugoslav village of Miren, where she had been born and where most of her family were still living. She lived in Milan, she said, and she had come all the way from there to visit

the grave of her mother. "She's buried in the cemetery behind that church there," she said. "The border runs right among the tombstones. Last year, when I was here, it ran right across my mother's grave. Thank God, her head was lying in Italy! It made me feel better that way. But now they've changed the border—just a bit, but enough so all of her grave is on the other side. And they won't let me cross over to pray there."

The woman led me to the edge of the cemetery behind the church. One of the Italian guards, an amiable fellow with a jaunty feather in his cap and what turned out to be a ceaseless craving for my Pall Mall cigarettes, followed a few steps behind. The headstones in the cemetery were simply hewn and the wrought-iron crosses that stood over some of the graves were rusty. A weathered piece of clothesline was strung from one side of the cemetery to the other, marking the border. We stopped well before we reached it, but a Yugoslav guard nevertheless came out of his shack, unslung his Sten gun, and stood glaring at us. The woman pointed out her mother's grave, about a yard the other side of the clothesline. Emotion got the better of her, and she began to cry again. "My brother is a farmer in Miren," she told me when she had regained control of herself. "He was here a little while this morning and started to talk to me, across the border, but that guard with the gun over there took him aside and said something to him, and then my brother looked toward me and shrugged and put his hand over his mouth, and I could hear the soldier tell him to go home. My God, *Signore*, what has become of this world of ours when people are not even permitted a moment's peace to pray at the grave of their mothers?" She turned slowly and walked away from the border. The Yugoslav soldier stood staring after her, the gun still in his hands.

—JOSEPH WECHSBERG

•

FULLER EXPLANATION DEPT.
(DROLL COMPOSITOR DIVISION)

[*From the Westlake (Ohio) West Shore Calendar*]

The new film, "The Vicious Circle," owned by the Cuyahoga County W.C.T.U. will be shown at the Wesley House, 19432 Detroit Rd., Sept. 20 at 2 P.M. Persons interested in temperance work are welcome, according to an announcement by Mrs. Mildred Sperry.

Every one is more or less mad on one point.—Kipling.