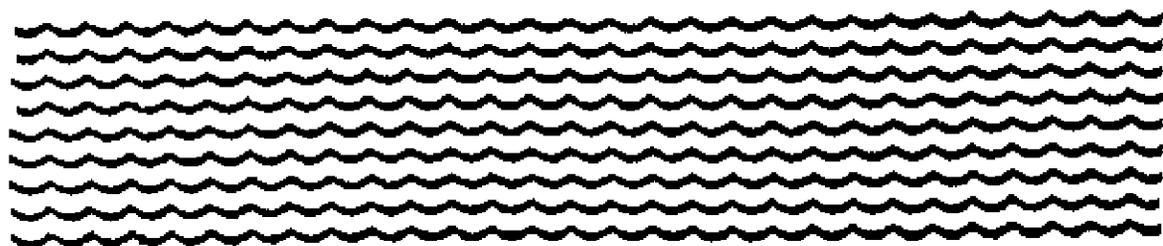


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Our Marshall Plan Hucksters*

By Gordon Gaskill

Strangely enough, while we are giving away billions to help Europe under the Marshall Plan, we must conduct a tremendous sales campaign to tell Europeans what we are doing for them. It's a peculiar situation, particularly with many Americans protesting that we are giving away too much anyway.

Here our European correspondent brings you an on-the-spot report of how ERP high-pressure publicity men are using modern sales methods in an effort to convince our European cousins that they ought to be grateful for Uncle Sam's gifts.

—THE EDITOR

The moment Pietro sets foot in the tiny Sicilian mountain village, a cry goes up, "The *cantastorie* is here!" By the time he has unlimbered his guitar the whole village is clustered around him, waiting.

Like numberless other remote villages in Sicily, this one is poor, illiterate; its people can afford neither radio nor newspaper—if they could read. For centuries they have

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got their news from wandering *cantastorie*—"singers of stories"—who are part town criers, part troubadours.

Today Pietro hangs up an especially handsome poster. (It ought to be; the Italian government printed it.) The poster shows, in a dozen four-colored panels, the tale of Mariella. Strumming his guitar, Pietro begins singing.

Ah, poor Mariella! She loves Giovanni, who loves another. Mariella leaps into the river to end it all. She is saved, and Giovanni realizes at last how much he loves her.

Then (the guitar goes somber) . . . tragedy! The icy water has given Mariella double pneumonia. The doctors shake their heads; she is about to die.

But wait! (The guitar goes faster). Up comes a burly hero marked "ERP"—the European Recovery Program, the Marshall Plan. From a gigantic hypodermic needle labeled "ERP Penicillin from U.S.A.," he treats the dying Mariella. She recovers! She marries Giovanni!

The villagers applaud. Then, hesitantly, one asks Pietro, "Please, what is this ERP?" And Pietro, primed, explains the Marshall Plan; most of them have never heard of it.

Corn? As one American official observed: "There's enough corn in it to feed Italy for a month. But it's what the Italians themselves think is the best way to get ERP across in Sicily. And it works."

Pietro's guitar is part of Italy's effort to carry out a promise she made to us when she accepted Marshall Plan aid:



WIDE WORLD PHOTOS

JAMES R. ZELLERBACH, chief of ERP in Italy, sells the Marshall Plan in public appearances. Here he inspects an Italian plow at Milan Fair.

that she would publicize it fully. All 19 Marshall Plan nations made the same promise. Some are living up to it cheerfully; some grudgingly; some try to forget the whole thing.

Behind them—helping, suggesting, prodding, and perspiring—is a corps of American publicity experts hired by ERP to try to make Europe realize the enormous extent of our help.

As one of them told me: “At first, it looked like a cinch. But when we got into it, we went crazy. This is the toughest assignment I’ve ever had, and I’ve had some tough ones.”

They are caught in a bewildering crossfire. On one side is the perfectly understandable feeling of Congress and the American people. Having shelled out their billions to bolster Europe, they quite naturally want Europe to know about it and appreciate it. This summer an indignant American tourist in Europe exploded: “Back in Washington they tell me my tax dollars are saving Europe. Over here, these people don’t seem to know it. When I ask them about it, they shrug their shoulders. What is all this, anyway?”

On the other side is European sensitivity. Or perhaps, as one Frenchman insists, there’s nothing especially “European” about it. “It is normal human feeling,” he says, “not to like to admit that you are so dependent on somebody else. Suppose you had to borrow money from a man. He gives it to you, but insists that every day you must say ‘Merci’ and tell everybody what a fine fellow he is. How would you feel?”

In the very beginning, there was one school of American thought which wanted to “sell” the Marshall Plan just the way you sell Super-Goo Soap back home. Fly a captive balloon from the Eiffel Tower with a sign: “Remember!

It All Comes from America!" Have smoke-planes write "Honest Uncle Sam, the European's Friend" in the skies of Rome. Put "Made in U.S.A." on every grain of rice or lump of coal.

It just wouldn't work. For one thing, Marshall Plan aid is mostly raw materials or machinery—things the public rarely sees. It would look silly to stamp a Danish light bulb: "The filament in this bulb was provided by ERP." Or to put on a typewriter: "Ten of the 200 machines which made this typewriter came from America."

But, far more important, such a program would make a thousand resentful enemies for every "grateful" client. And the basic aim of the Marshall Plan is to create a Western Europe which is not only prosperous but friendly.

"Our job," sighed one ERP public-relations man, "is to make an omelet without breaking eggs. We had to make Europeans conscious of ERP aid without making them resentful. Try it some time."

Out of this clash between old-time press-agentry and new-found diplomacy has emerged a wierd publicity campaign which one man has termed "ballyhoo in striped pants." Aside from Pietro's guitar, it uses talking lumps of coal, toy balloons, free doughnuts, printed prayers, fortunetellers, children's games, obliging kings, smiling presidents, and ambassadors with dirty hands.

And in each country the approach must be different. A show that wows Icelanders would draw only blank stares in

Turkey. You can't do in highly educated Denmark what you can in illiterate Sicily. A great London newspaper reaches all in England; in Greece you must use airplanes to drop news sheets into villages isolated by the civil war. The result is a 19-ring circus.

France, for instance, is the prima donna of the Marshall Plan. Ultrasensitive over their past grandeur, their recent occupations, their poor war record, and their chronic chaos, the French would like to forget how much outsiders are helping them. Yet, like a Frenchwoman, they are, for all their contrariness, well worth the wooing; France is not only our traditional friend, but our principal military bastion in Europe.

So in France our publicity is under the baton of John Brown, an understanding American ex-editor whose French is perfect, who took his doctorate in Paris, and served in France with the wartime OSS.

Brown immediately turned thumbs down on the more blatant kinds of American publicity, ordering: "No sound trucks playing *The Star-Spangled Banner*." Remembering an old French proverb that "Seduction is better than rape," he began allaying Gallic suspicions that we wanted to turn La Belle France into an American colony.

Instead of staging purely American exhibits, he began putting on joint Franco-American ones, which boosted the French manufacturing genius as well as the American-sent materials. This made everybody happy.

Realizing that French barbershops, like American ones,

are gossip centers and often short of reading matter, he sent ERP literature to every barbershop in France, where it was avidly read and discussed.

When new ERP tractors began arriving, Brown followed one of them through the American factory which made it until it reached the hands of Louis Perdrigeon, a young truck farmer near Paris. Louis had never had a tractor before, and all France was allowed to read of his delight, to share it, and, subtly, to understand the meaning of ERP.

Perhaps Brown's crowning stroke was a traveling exhibit which, by its timing and routing, captured the sentimental French imagination. It started from the Normandy beaches last June 6—the fifth anniversary of D-Day—and rolled slowly across France, following the exact route of Patton's liberating Army. To appreciative Frenchmen, the lesson was clear: Five years ago America brought freedom; today it brings peace and recovery.

Brown's delicacy has worked. Each month French newspapers now print some 3,000 stories about ERP. His "Aide Americaine," a regular report on ERP help, started out as a mimeographed affair with 400 copies. Today, it is handsomely printed, free, and goes to 100,000 subscribers, with new ones coming in at nearly 600 a day . . .

Germany is quite another kettle of fish. Embittered by defeat, the ex-master race had a hard time believing their conquerors would really spend vast sums of money to rebuild their country.

About a year ago I happened to attend the first press

conference given in Germany by our ERP chief there, Norman H. Collisson. It was an unpleasant affair. German reporters heckled him with suspicious questions that were near insults. They were obviously ignorant of the Marshall Plan, and one of Collisson's first triumphs was that he managed to keep his temper that day. At least, in public.

Recently I attended one of his conferences. The change was enormous; this time the German questions were well-informed and reasonable. The difference can be largely credited to an intelligent campaign by Collisson and his public-relations adviser, Walter T. Ridder, a German-speaking ex-war correspondent from Minnesota.

One example of the way he worked was an ERP exhibit in the small manufacturing city of Aschaffenburg. It was well advertised; the day before it opened, a children's band paraded through town. When Communists tore down the ERP posters, they got double attention.

The exhibit itself didn't try to explain on a grand scale how ERP was helping all Bizonal Germany. Instead, it concentrated on home truths. How, for instance, the famous Aschaffenburg wine presses couldn't be made without ERP copper. Or how the local surgical-instrument industry depended on imports from America.

The show lasted two weeks and, although Aschaffenburg has only 42,000 souls, more than 33,000 visited the exhibit. "Everybody came but the Commies," Ridder says.



JAMES C. DUNN (right), U. S. Ambassador to Italy, watches an Italian worker sample the latest shipment of American wheat to arrive in Taranto. A career diplomat, Ambassador Dunn helps promote the Marshall Plan among the people of Italy.

The same kinds of exhibits were held all over Bizonia, stressing local industry. The one in Munich was advertised by something German kids hadn't seen in years: toy rubber balloons. Ridder got them made only after convinc-

ing a German manufacturer that the Allied ban on airplanes, dirigibles, and military *balloons* didn't include the kind you blow up with your mouth. He got the German post office to set up a branch at his fair, and the special ERP cancellation stamp made letters mailed from it a collector's item.

For one fair, Ridder borrowed a doughnut-making machine from the Army and passed out free doughnuts. A placard stated that a doughnut contains some of the main things we are shipping into Germany—fats, sugar, flour, even oil for the motor.

"Everything but the hole," the placard said.

"And the hole," cracked a German, "probably comes from Russia."

Each week ERP selects a "Factory of the Week" in Germany which is notable for its increased production. Workers get certificates and handsome pins bearing the ERP shield.

And German schools, desperately short of textbooks, jumped at Ridder's offer to supply 1,000,000 copies of *We Rebuild*, a well-printed 64-page text on the workings of the Marshall Plan. Thus the ERP story is being intensively studied by a most important audience, the school children.

Completely different, and gaudiest of all, is Italy. Here almost anything goes. The Italians have no great national sensitivity; they are simply grateful for the enormous help we have sent them and don't mind saying *Grazie*.

The publicity campaign got off to a flying start in Italy before the April 18, 1948, election, in which the Commu-

nists put up a bitter battle. The government's main talking point was that it alone could get American help, and the election was battled out on that simple, understandable issue.

Both sides hit above and below the belt. Because the Italians are a poor and illiterate people (only one in 12 sees a newspaper; only one in 23 has a radio), the propaganda methods on both sides were elementary, colorful, even crude.

Even the very beggars in the streets became unsuspecting boosters of American aid. In Italy, beggars often hand you a flimsy paper "fortune" if you give them alms—much as do some American weighing machines. Usually the beggars must buy these, and so they were glad to get free ones, furnished by pro-American groups. These were heavily loaded. The one for a young girl reminded her that if American coal and food stop, "your lips will no longer have the rosy smile that makes men love you." That for a soldier said: "If supplies from America cease, there will be chaos and hunger, and you will stay in the Army forever." The one for a worker warned he would probably lose his job if American raw materials were cut off.

Italian children suddenly found themselves handed a game called *Cioco dell'Oca*. Vaguely like Monopoly, it had American planes and ships as pieces. There was nothing subtle about it. In one space, under the Statue of Liberty, it says: "All those who don't like this symbol are doomed to hunger and persecution." Beneath the American flag,

it says: "Under this shadow you will always be free and comfortable."

Enormously successful was a cunning poster entitled "Togliatti's Day." It portrayed Togliatti, the Communist leader, eating American bread in the morning, donning a shirt of American cotton, boarding a train run by American coal, etc. On the appreciative Italians, the irony was not lost.

Such tactics—it bears repeating—were carried out by various pro-American groups, not the U. S. Government itself, but we knew of them and quietly forwarded them. "In those days," recalls an American veteran of the great election, "we were fighting fire with fire. You can't be too delicate with the Communists."

At any rate, the strategy worked. Ever since then, the Italian phase of the ERP public-relations program has been free-wheeling and spectacular. Nobody minds but the Communists, it seems.

Italy's ERP public-relations director is Andrew B. Berding, an ex-lieutenant colonel who was for five pre-war years chief of the Associated Press's Rome bureau. His motto is: "Make it accurate, colorful, and simple."

Thus half a million impressed Italians saw Berding's "Wheat Organ" at the Bari Fair. It had 90 great neon tubes, one for each Italian province, arranged like a pipe organ. Each tube was divided into three colorful parts: one showing how much wheat that province grew itself;

the second how much it got from other Italian provinces; the third how much it received from America.

Shimmering with color, broken down into local terms, the "organ" dramatized unforgettably the statistical fact that Uncle Sam supplies over one-third of Italy's staple food.

Berding made another hit at the Milan Fair. On a gigantic map of the Atlantic Ocean he had tiny lighted ships, each representing an actual ship at sea at that very moment with ERP goods. From clacking teleprinter reports, operators kept moving the tiny ships to correspond with the real ones. At one time, there were over 300 ERP ships at sea at once. Italians jammed to watch this dramatic demonstration of ERP volume and power.

Instead of tiresome statistics about the wonders of American hybrid corn (which ERP introduced to Italy), Berding simply put up a primitive pair of scales. On one side were two ears of ordinary Italian corn. On the other, weighing it down, was a single ear of ERP hybrid corn. The lesson needed no words.

On radio time provided by the Italian government, ERP puts on playlets which are simple to the point of childishness. Yet they hold large audiences and spell out in A-B-C language the story of Marshall Plan aid. One, for instance, was a dramatized conversation among Othello, Nero, and Blackie, three lumps of coal that left home in America to help Italy. They told of their adventures: how one had helped make a new steel rail, how another had helped run a train, etc.

A second skit told the story of Jumping Jupiter, an American Sherman tank smashed by the Germans, but now living on in a new form in Italian bridges, railroads, etc. A third relates the adventures of Snowflake and Dolly, two American cows sent to replenish war-depleted Italian herds.

Well-made documentary films repeat the same theme. I watched one which told, beautifully and subtly, how ERP coal and steel had breathed life into the little town of Maniago, famous for its cutlery. Such films, about 12 minutes long, are shown in most of Italy's 2,000 movie houses. What's more, they pay for themselves.

To reach the millions of Italians who can't go to the movies, ERP has dreamed up 25 truck-mounted units which come into small towns with music blaring, run up a screen, and treat the villagers to a mixed music and film program which doesn't neglect to mention the merits of ERP.

Berding is an old enough Italian hand to know the truth of the saying: "The Italians never throw anything useful away." Thus the free post cards he hands out at ERP exhibits do double duty. The original taker usually mails it to somebody else, instead of buying an ordinary one himself.

Probably Berding's neatest coup was the time he got hold of—never mind how—the mailing list for a Communist weekly paper. To each name on the list—50,000—he sent out a handsomely printed "Calendar for 1949." Each page had fine pictures promoting ERP.



JOHN BROWN (right), ERP publicity chief in France, has used his wide knowledge and understanding of the French people to sell them America's European Recovery Program. Here he watches a milkmaid do her stuff at a country fair which he promoted in Normandy.

It was a week or so before the Communist paper learned about this skulduggery. Then it waxed indignant and printed a story asking its subscribers to show what they

thought of the American warmongers by mailing every calendar back.

The results of this dramatic appeal were wonderful—for Berding. Out of the whole 50,000, only 4 were returned.

Britain stands at the head of the class, as far as ERP publicity goes. She manages to be grateful without groveling, and makes no effort to conceal from her own people what an enormous part of her national life now depends on America.

“If all countries were like Britain,” one ERP public-relations man told me, “we’d be out of a job.”

One hundred and fifty mobile film units tour England endlessly, showing short films with economic lessons, and explaining ERP. A typical one is an animated cartoon showing the life of “Robinson Charley”—a symbol for Britain itself. It shows how Robinson Charley built up the family business and then took things easy for a while. How he fought two wars and then found, to his surprise, that he was having trouble getting the business going again. The film ends as a ship marked “ERP” sails across the Atlantic to help put Robinson Charley on his feet again.

Probably in no other country but Britain could a government-published book on ERP help become a minor best-seller. Called simply *Getting on Together*, it tells in well-written, common-sense terms the meaning and workings of ERP.

Cabinet ministers frequently make important speeches along the same line. The tone of these was set by one

statesman who called ERP "the most generous act in history," and then declared: "But we must work hard to get off the American taxpayer's back."

The Treasury and Foreign Office maintain an ERP information office with a panel of 100 eminent speakers. These average 1,000 talks a month, mostly on Britain's economic challenge and the workings of ERP.

An American official in London some time ago made a survey to find out how much English papers were printing about the Marshall Plan. The results surprised him. Despite a newsprint shortage which makes most papers look like leaflets, he found that London papers alone had published enough ERP stories to fill 35 complete issues of the *London Times*—in the first year. Provincial papers published about three times that.

"And," he said, "this is the very best kind of publicity, for it is done by the British themselves, voluntarily."

This, of course, is the aim of ERP everywhere: to get local countries to do their own publicizing of the Marshall Plan. It is obviously distasteful, and far less effective, if we, ourselves, must publicize our own good deeds. ERP would like to remain in the background, cooperating, perhaps suggesting, but not taking the lead.

Thus, in Holland, on the day bread-rationing ended; the bakers' association voluntarily put up in all Dutch bakery shops posters which said: "Half your daily bread comes from Marshall Plan Grain." And, on its own hook, a Dutch labor group got up its own pamphlet, *Does Santa*

Claus Live in Moscow? showing dramatically that America, not Russia, is the true friend of Dutch labor.

In each country, the American chief of the ERP mission is a figure of great importance, whose actions and statements are front-page news. Our publicity experts make sure these are well covered. They often supply advance translations of his speeches, and have, on some occasions, even flown local reporters to the scene.

These chiefs of mission are instructed to travel their countries a lot, to see and be seen, to talk to all kinds of people. Thus James R. Zellerbach, ERP chief in Italy, is almost constantly in his car, and averages 12 major talks a month, to management and labor alike. This is a carefully calculated part of ERP public relations, and it succeeds. Zellerbach has become almost a household figure in Italy. In one remote district, an old peasant who had barely heard of Mussolini recognized the name of Zellerbach right away.

Likewise, our chief in Germany, Norman H. Collisson, also circulates tirelessly, making speeches and, especially, appearing on the public forums which the Germans have learned from their American occupiers.

At one such forum in the Communist stronghold of Mannheim, Communists tried to take it over, with impassioned speeches from the floor according to a pre-arranged plan. Indignant anti-Communist Germans wanted to "throw the bums out," but Collisson deterred them.

"We believe in free speech," he said. "Let's hear what they have to say."

The ensuing debate lasted until midnight, but Collisson singlehandedly routed the Reds decisively. They knew next to nothing about the Marshall Plan, and he knew everything. The incident, by the way, made a deep impression on the Germans.

ERP neglects few opportunities to make occasions out of every possible event, and local dignitaries are usually glad to cooperate. Thus, when the port of Peiraeus was re-dedicated after being rebuilt by ERP funds, King Paul of Greece attended. Norway's King Haakon or the Crown Prince Olaf can be counted on to grace important ERP events, as can the premiers, presidents, and cabinet ministers of most countries. Because of the rank of the personages involved, these occasions become real front-page news and help further to focus public attention on ERP.

Ship arrivals are naturals. The first ship to bring ERP help was, of course, a gala occasion in each nation, but we also keep a careful check of future arrivals, and make a significant fuss over the fiftieth, the one-hundredth, the two-hundredth, and so on.

Such careful staging for publicity purposes has called forth new qualities in American diplomats. Only a few years ago an American ambassador was a rather remote figure who had little contact with the public. Today he must go down into the arena and perform acts which his predecessor might have thought undignified and unambassadorial.

By and large, our diplomats have taken the change-over in their stride. One of the best examples is our Ambassador

to Italy, James Clement Dunn. A career diplomat of the formal type, he was even for some time chief of our chilliest State Department branch, that of protocol. Yet he has become one of our ablest, most flexible and dramatic diplomats. When some special ERP ship arrives, Dunn is waiting on the dock, ready to hand to Italian Foreign Minister Carlo Sforzá a token lump of coal—and to dust off his hands nonchalantly later. Or he will present a symbolic handful of wheat to Prime Minister de Gasperi, to the delight of news photographers, and the appreciation of his real audience, the Italian public.

And it was Dunn who greeted the very first ERP ship to Italy. It came to Genoa, a Communist center with a Communist mayor, and the Italian police had taken precautions against trouble. Dunn carried it off superbly. There was absolutely no trouble at all. Even the Communist mayor came, dressed to the hilt, behaving quite correctly. Most surprising was the reaction of the watching thousands of workers, most of them nominal Communists.

They beamed at Dunn, applauded him, shook his hand reverently, and insisted he sit among them to have his picture made. The Ambassador obliged them easily. Most of all he remembers the remark of one of the workmen. Watching the American grain being unloaded, he exclaimed:

“Ei! Our leaders try to tell us that America is not really helping Italy. Today we have seen God’s truth!”

To spread God’s truth, and Marshall’s, as one of Dunn’s aides remarked later, it would be worth standing on your head in the Coliseum at high noon.

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