

THE TRUTH ABOUT AID OF ALGERIA'S WAR ORPHANS. (By a Paris Correspondent.)

Paris, March 4 - Few people care - really care - it seems, about the fate of Algeria's war orphans. Rich America and prosperous France have slipped inspired stories into the capitalist press that they are about to give all kinds of help to Algeria, which will include help, it goes without saying, to those most desperately in need. Not in any rush, however. In the modern world of nuclear strike capacity, atomic counterforce and the balance of terror, what is so pressing about sending food and clothing to North Africa?

Some radicals - even some socialists - who pride themselves on their capacity to sympathize with human suffering, display an attitude that is not much different. They seem to find it inconvenient to organize even a small campaign of aid. Perhaps they count on the imperialists doing the job after all.

Thus it would appear that Algeria's war orphans, the tens of thousands of the most pitiful victims of history's most savage colonial war have been abandoned by the outside world and are even being disregarded by certain officials in Algeria itself.

These are the facts that came out in a press conference held by Mlle. Djamila Bouhired, Mme. Zohra Bitat and Abderrahmane Naceur March 1st. in Algiers as reported in the March 2nd. edition of Al Chaab. These three young people head Algeria's national organization for war orphans "El Djil El Djadid." "We are at our wit's end - We don't have financial or material means - We suffer at times from failure of the public powers to understand." These three statements, said Al Chaab, constituted the theme of the press conference. "We called this meeting with the press," Mlle. Bouhired declared, "in order to make clear the numerous problems and the very limited means faced by our organization, which is very isolated. There is one thing on which everything focuses - it's the publicity in the press. In brief, they talk about collections among the brother Arab countries amounting to seven billion francs (4.7 millions). This is false. Nothing has come to us up to now except promises. We were promised aid about as follows: 200 million francs (£170,000) from Egypt, 300 million (£200,000) from Iraq, 65 million (£43,333) from Syria, and 600 million (£400,000) from Kuwait. But this never went further.

As for richer and more powerful countries, these were not even mentioned in the conference. If help from Arab countries ends only in promises, what can be expected from imperialist powers? Or from "socialist" countries whose concern for "peaceful coexistence" with a country like France scarcely permits them to extend a helping hand toward a country like Algeria?

"We have at present in El Djil El Djadid, "the three officers of the organization reported," 2,059 children, divided among 15 centres. The cost of each one of them is around 800 francs (12/-) a day. During the days of colonial rule, social centres had 1,700 francs (25/-) to expend for each child, a difference of 50%, and to this must be added our lack of material means. On this subject we would like to indicate that there are things which we could turn to use in our homes for young people that are mildewing on the docks in Algiers and other places. We find it difficult to explain why we aren't permitted to take what we need there." The most anguishing problems are not in the capital or other big centres but among the youth in the interior. "It is there that the families hit hardest by the war exist and it is there that the greatest number of orphans or maladjusted children are found and it is in getting at the source of the ills that the means for curing them can be found. But without means nothing can be done. It is a question of life or death."

In reply to what the press might do about the situation, one of them said: "Our aim in meeting with you today was to raise a cry of alarm. We don't know how we will be able to get along if the public powers don't come to our aid. We propose to organize a national and international campaign. We count on the entire press to defend our cause and to let people know that our organization is an organization for children and that children have rights we must respond to. We invite you to visit our centres and better to judge the truth

The Minister of Youth and of Sports refused to grant us certain means without any valid reason. We repeat then, we count on the press to take an active part in the defense of these children who form part of the framework of the reconstruction of the country and the building of socialism."

For those who feel something should be done to help Algeria's war orphans, the address is : Association El Djil El Djadid, Haut Mont D'Hydra, Chemin de la Madeleine, Algiers, Algeria.

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A new assessment of the extent of surplus manufacturing capacity throughout industry, with an estimate of how far production could be expanded without causing labour shortages and high imports, will be published next week by the Institute of Directors. It is based on enquiries made of the Institute's 20,000 members, and will show how an increase in output could reduce unit costs and help boost exports.

The survey is intended not only to impress the Government with the scope for further expansion, but to restore business confidence, on which capital investment decisions depend. Another aim is to prove to industry that this time—unlike previous expansion drives—a boom could be maintained without running into bottlenecks, and that Britain could have a "go" without a subsequent "stop". Although there have been some signs in the last few weeks of a quickening pace in orders for new capital equipment from private industry there has so far been no evidence of the major upsurge in this sector of the economy which Mr. Maudling's measures of November 5 were designed to produce.

Industry as a whole is still adopting a "wait and see" attitude to new investment. The main reasons advanced are:—

1. The existence of substantial surplus capacity; 2. Uncertainty about the outcome of the next general election, and fear of the policies which would be followed by a Labour Government; 3. Uncertainty about the economic prospects of the U.K. after the Brussels debacle, and the need to give priority in planning new capacity to building up production inside the six. This atmosphere of caution and uncertainty is in danger of creating a vicious circle. One of the main objects of the National Economic Development Council's work is to create a growth psychology in industry, by pointing out the increase in demand which may be expected to develop over the next few years. In view of the length of time which major investment projects take to mature, it is future demand rather than present demand which is relevant to the need of new investments. An industry which is working well below capacity to-day may easily find itself unable to meet demand in a few years' time if it does not initiate new investments. The vital factor in the trend of the growth curve. On the other hand, if industry itself is not persuaded of this— and so far N.E.D.C.'s projections have made little impact on industrial boardrooms in general—then the growth plan itself becomes endangered, because the 4 per cent. per annum growth which the N.E.D.C. envisages itself depends heavily on major increases in demand for the capital equipment industries.

There is now a good deal of concern in "Neddy" about the feasibility of its 4% growth plan unless investment begins to turn up fairly soon. Failing a change of mood, it is argued, industry may by its own caution prove its present fears to be justified, whereas, if it is adventurous, it will disprove them. Obviously much more needs to be done by the Government and by industry itself, to popularise

"Neddy's" calculations. The Institute of Directors' survey is a step in this direction. It will show that there is a substantially greater reserve of capacity in the economy than at any time since the war, and therefore less danger than in the past that expansion will run into bottlenecks and therefore have to be restrained. The argument of surplus capacity, of course, cuts both ways. But the demonstration that this time there is much less likelihood that "go" will have to be followed quickly by "stop" could have important consequences, for industry and for Government. So far as industry is concerned, the post-war experience of "stop-go" policies by the Government has created a general mood of cynicism about expansion. As one industrialist put it the other day; "Experience teaches us that when the sun shines and we put our heads out, sooner or later we get hit. But if we keep quiet and immobile in our dug-outs, we're all right." It is this psychology which the N.E.D.C. and Mr. Maudling have somehow to alter in the next few months.

The Budget is obviously crucial in this respect. Probably a large number of major investment decisions will hang fire until after the Budget. But the Government faces a possible problem of timing here. The Budget will certainly contain a number of stimuli to consumer spending. If these produce a consumer goods boom in the late summer and early autumn, and this in turn produces a boom in private investment which coincides with the maturing of a substantial part of the public investment projects already going through the pipeline, this could lead to a strain on the external payments even if it did not strain internal resources (as it probably would not). This is a secondary problem of which the Government is well aware. In this respect the trend of exports is crucial. Although the survey will probably show that material stocks in industry are at a high level, it is clear that extra production at home will lead to bigger imports at some stage. As labour costs are rising less fast than those of most main competitors overseas, it is somewhat surprising that exports have not been doing better in recent months. But one reason for the tailing-off is almost certainly that current prices in the main export markets do not make exports sufficiently profitable. Most firms claim that they earn much lower margins on exports than on home sales, and the pressure on prices grows steadily keener. Some firms have been selling abroad at a loss and there has been a growing tendency to question the wisdom of going on doing so. The agreements being negotiated in steel are a response to increasing competition in world markets.