

AMERICAN NEWSPAPER COMMENT(II)SELF-PORTRAIT OF A TRAITOR

Pierre Laval's latest bid for a peace treaty with Germany and his pleas for French participation in the war on the Axis side is more important as a self-portrait of a traitor than as a statement of policy, writes the Cleveland Plain Dealer.

France's new Dictator does not believe that Britain and the United States will restore the Empire to France should they win the war. Laval merely reveals by this nonsensical scepticism what he would do, had he the power, in the matter of conquered territories.

He possesses the mentality and outlook of the true fascist - an ingrained proclivity for conquest and plunder, he confesses his unbelief in the progress of man and the development of political relations.

The Dictator's mentality was so sunk in defeatist grooves that he now confesses it was useless for France to engage in war - and all was lost in advance.

Compare this point of view with that of the leaders of such countries as Yugoslavia, Greece, the Netherlands and Belgium, who well knew the odds were against them overwhelmingly but who still defied the enemy.

Seldom in the long history of political oratory has a traitor painted a self-portrait in more revealing colours. He has condemned himself before posterity.

M. Pierre Laval is, as the saying goes, out on a limb and no one knows it better than he. At this late date there is no other line for him to take than the one taken in the speech broadcast the other day from Vichy. Both his political life and his physical life now hang upon the slender hope of an Axis victory - a victory which two years ago seemed to him and to so many others so certain but which has now been placed in the category of highly improbable events.

M. Laval, the master of political intrigue has thus found himself enmeshed in his own devious policy.

It may well be that M. Laval, who, under the Parliamentary dispensation, was so often able to outfox his political opponents, believed himself capable in the long run of outfoxing his German masters, whose cerebral capacities he shares the contemptuous opinion of most of his countrymen.

But he has discovered too late that the German overlordship of Europe is not necessarily permanent. His policy and personality had become so deeply identified with the cause of the Nazis that retreat was impossible and so there is nothing left for this pantaloon who fancied himself an Odysseus or a Machiavelli but to play his farce to the bitter end - and bitter it will certainly be.