

Within the context of
the period 1895-
1995?



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

Within the context of the period 1895-1995 to what extent were the anti-Semitic policies implemented by the right wing elites during the Vichy Regime from 1940-1944 a reflection of their popularity within France? To this day the period of French Occupation and the Vichy Regime remains one of the most contentious and sensitive in modern French history.

After suffering a crushing military defeat to Germany in the summer of 1940 an armistice was signed and the country was divided: the northern half of France including the capital was occupied by the German forces and became the zone occupée and in the southern unoccupied zone, the zone libre, the 'autonomous' yet collaborationist government was set up in the town of Vichy headed by Marshal Philippe Pétain. Pétain's government collaborated with the German forces in deportation of some 75,000 Jews who perished in Auschwitz. JJ) These 4 years in French history which have become known as the 'Dark Years' still to this day weigh heavily on the French national conscience. Consequently in post-war France there was a widely shared desire to erase these years from French history. The French post-war leaders that had, for the most part, emerged from the Resistance attempted to erase Vichy from French history through not acknowledging the government as legitimate. De Gaulle refused to announce 'the restoration of the French Republic... on the grounds that it had never ceased to exist.' De Gaulle had no need to encourage examination of this shameful period of French History and instead went about reinterpreting the Vichy years as the years of the Resistance. However this myth of the Resistance ignored many of the harsh and unfavourable realities of French life during the occupation. Robert Paxton's Vichy France: Old Guard and New Order marked the first phase of

study of Vichy and was written at a time when the Gaullist myth was being questioned and challenged.

His historical study somewhat dispelled the generally accepted and favourable view that Vichy's collaboration was on the whole involuntary. In addition to this he set about instating Vichy into France's wider historical context rather than allowing it to be viewed as an anomaly in France's history. Another work contemporary to Paxton's study was Marcel Ophuls' *The Sorrow and the Pity* an unprecedentedly scathing depiction of the French people under Occupation. Both of these works challenged de Gaulle's revised version of the French occupation and sought about to shed light on he true nature of the Vichy Regime and France under occupation. Paxton dispelled the view that Vichy collaboration was entirely involuntary and that the line between voluntary and involuntary collaboration ran between Laval and Petain. What this revealed is that the anti-Semitic views that the Vichy government pursued could not said to be fully enforced by the German occupiers. This gives rise to the debate to what extent were the policies followed by the Vichy regime actually their own or were they rather pursued out of necessity to maintain France's sovereignty as Vichy sympathisers argued.

Perhaps what was most abhorrent about the Paxton's study to the French public was that he made the bold assertion that the nature of the Vichy regime and its policies could be assimilated into the wider French politicalculturewhich essentially is the suggestion that the anti-Semitism that proliferated under Vichy was not exclusively present in Vichy. Similarly

Ophuls' documentary suggests that the attitudes adopted by the French public presents a social culture where anti-Semitism was acceptable.

However it must be acknowledged that whilst the abovementioned present a scathing unfavourable depiction of French social and political culture this by no means can be said to , as Julian Jackson writes: ' The history of the Occupation should be written not in black and white, but in shades of grey. '

(JJ) Jackson here comments the complexity of the period of Occupation and the Vichy regime itself whilst Vichy followed policies of anti-Semitism it set about protecting French Jews from the extremities of the German occupation.

Whilst the public opinion can be described as attentiste indifference to the Jew's fate didn't mean the French public actively encouraged the persecution of the Jewish population. In considering the extent to which Vichy's policies are a reflection of their popularity in France requires an appreciation of the inherently nuanced nature of the period. The debate between whether Vichy's collaboration with Germany was voluntary or involuntary is important in forming a judgement on the motives behind the policies the regime implemented.

It is noteworthy that both Laval and Petain believed that Germany had won the war and the British would soon surrender. This gave rise three distinct motives behind voluntary collaboration; politico-administrative, politico-diplomatic and the alleviation of the impact caused by the Armistice on daily life. Despite the fact that in theory the Vichy administration was in control of the Occupied Zone this control was very much subjected to German regulation.

By actively collaborating with the Germans Vichy leaders hoped to maintain this balance of German intervention in the administration of the country fearing that not being forthcoming with collaboration would encourage further loss of Vichy autonomy. The politico- diplomatic motive was based on the assumption that the Germans had won the war and set about creating an environment for favourable peace treaty negotiations with the victorious axis powers.

There had already been portentous signs of the division of France in the Occupied Zone; for example, ' The two departments of the Nord and Pas-de-Calais were attached to the German military command in Brussels. ' (JJ) This was to prepare for the British invasion however once this was called off the refugees that had been removed from the area were not returned and instead their properties were being prepared to be handed over to German settlers.

If this was to be the case then it was essential for there to be goodwill between Vichy and the Germans in order to ensure favourable terms in the, believed to be, imminent treaty. Much of these considerations harkened back to the German annexation of Alsace-Lorraine after French defeat in the Franco-Prussian war of 1870. The third consideration behind collaboration was to limit the effects of the armistice on the daily lives of French people by being cooperative in other terms of the armistice the French had hoped to limit some of the other strands of the agreement that had become increasingly burdensome.

For example, the financial strains being placed on France by the German war effort had been increasingly problematic. These motives exonerate Vichy

from the stigma associated with a policy of collaborationism as they present a concerted desire to preserve French interests. However, whilst these were overarching intentions behind collaboration by becoming actively involved in appeasing the Germans Vichy began down the slippery slope of complicity that would eventually lead to the extremes of collaboration.

For example, Theodor Dannecker's radicalisation of anti-Semitic policy in the Occupied Zone meant in order for Vichy to 'preserve nominal sovereignty' (JJ) Vichy had to follow suit and this essentially involved carrying out the anti-Semitic policy of the Germans. One can argue that Vichy's complicity in the most extreme anti-Semitic policy was not motivated by its anti-Semitism but more the logic of their collaboration policy. Whilst Vichy made anti-Semitic policy one of its initial concerns what is clear is that, to some extent, it was necessitated by the German occupation.

Viewing the Occupation from a contemporary perspective can be problematic especially when it comes to assessing Vichy in terms of its anti-Semitic policy as the treatment of the Jews becomes the dominating factor of the Occupation. However, in order to gain a true appreciation of the Occupation one must contend with the fact that the anti-Semitic policy pursued by the Vichy elites was but a facet of the regime's policy and its concerns. Nevertheless, this is not to say that Vichy did not have its own autonomous and indigenous anti-Semitic policies.

The degree of enthusiasm in which Vichy administrators pursued anti-Semitic policy varies however within the Vichy government many anti-Semites were active who acted out of a very much French interpretation of the 'Jewish Problem'. Xavier Vallat, a Catholic and former member of the extremist right

wing group Action Française and head Commissariat-General for Jewish Questions from 1941-1942 (CGQJ), remained during his trial before the High Court of Justice in December 1947 unrepentantly anti-Semitic.

In fact he used his anti-Semitism as a defence claiming that he cannot be accused of collaborating with the French ' since his anti-Semitism was authentically French... ' (JJ) However contradictory this may seem as a defence it sheds light on an important reality: the crime anti-Semitism was seen as less of a crime than voluntary collaboration. This reality vindicates Vallat's claim of his indigenous anti-Semitism; his willingness to concede his own anti-Semitism is an attempt to normalise it and thus is revealed an attitude that propagated in right-wing political culture.

When one considers Vallat himself was a former member of right wing group Action Française that was borne out of the Dreyfus Affair (1894-1906), in which an innocent Jewish officer was accused of treason having been framed by the military that coalesced with other institutions of the right. We see that this attitude is one that has existed within the political culture of the right within France, one that predates Vichy and perhaps more significantly postdates Vichy. What's more is that Vallat himself was removed by Laval in April 1942 for his all too evident dislike of the German occupiers.

Vallat was both a passionate anti-Semite and an ardent nationalist what can be garnered from this is that whilst Vichy followed a policy of anti-Semitism this was not done in order to maintain the terms of collaboration with the occupiers rather we see that Vichy's autonomous Jewish policy irrefutably has roots in French anti-Semitism. John Sweets argues that: ' Vichy attention

had been turned to the Jews from the first months of the regime's existence'. Several examples of Vichy anti-Semitic legislation corroborate this view.

The Jewish Statute issued in 1940 imposed by the Vichy administration were the beginning of a web of legislation that would deprive Jewish citizens of the right to hold public office, make them a lower class and eventually denaturalise them. It is noteworthy that this statute was not imposed by the Germans. What's more is that an ordinance passed by the Germans in September 1940 defining the criterion of being Jewish was extended by Vichy to make more Jewish people susceptible to the anti-Semitic policies in work by both the German and the French.

This led to Dannecker ordering 'the wider definition of Jewishness to be used in preference to the slightly more restrictive German one.' There are several examples of the Vichy administrators going beyond the demands of the occupiers in Jewish policy what this reveals is a truly independent desire to address the aforementioned French interpretation of the 'Jewish problem'. During the years of the occupation the Jews in France became caught between two, not entirely separate but distinct nonetheless, projects of anti-Semitism.

The defining dichotomy of the occupation is 'collaboration' and 'resistance' this seemingly clear contrast however neglects the complexity of the period. One may assume that being a part of the Resistance entails being opposed to the existence and policy of the Vichy regime; however, this was not always the case. Among those in the Resistance were those who supported Petain and the anti-Semitic policies as well as the contrary.

In debating whether Vichy attitudes reflected wider French attitudes the stance of the Resistance form a counterpoint; what we see in particular regarding anti-Semitism the lines between Vichy and the Resistance are quite obscure. There was ambivalence towards the plight of the Jews present in Resistance. One respondent to a questionnaire, drafted in October 1943, to evaluate the political attitudes of the Resistance desired all Jews to be ' kept out of all governmental and public functions'; another ' the relegation of all Jews, Freemasons... nd former politicians. ' However, one must not overstate the similarities between the Resistance and Vichy, they differed on fundamental lines; The Resistance did in fact come to actively oppose Vichy anti-Semitism. However, what is important is that even among the Resistance there was conceived to be a ' Jewish problem' whilst they opposed Vichy's methods the roots of anti-Semitism are visible even amongst those who opposed it in Occupied France.

This common ground between those considered collaborationists and members of the Resistance created a state in France where one could move into the Resistance without making any ' fundamental ideological adjustments. ' This is characterised by Francois Mitterand, who was to later become president of the 5TH republic, who joined the Resistance after being a prominent Petainist. What we witness is that the principals of the Vichy regime were present in that of its opposition. This reality presents the fact that the Vichy regime cannot be viewed as an anomalous French government.

Whilst Vichy and the Resistance oppose each other fundamentally the similarities between these two distinct bodies reveal that in fact Vichy can be

assimilated in terms of its ideals into a wider French political culture. However in order to make this assumption the nature of the Vichy regime itself must be assessed. The nature of Petain's regime was authoritarian Julian Jackson comments that ' Vichy functioned like a court... At the centre of the court was Petain. ' Petain was Head of state and had the power to appoint and sack ministers at will.

Indeed the Vichy regime was as turbulent as the Third Republic with there being ministerial reshuffles frequently. Vichy did not view itself as a stop-gap French government the occupation of France and the armistice offered France a historic opportunity for political change. Paxton makes the assertion that: ' the excitement aroused' at the introduction of this National Revolution serves as evidence that Vichy was no mere caretaker regime but rather that there was general dissatisfaction at the state of the Republic pre second World War and as aforementioned politicians.

The National Revolution ' defined itself... in opposition to liberal individualism which uprooted people from the ' natural' communities of family, workplace and religion. ' Vichy also embarked on a programme of moral regeneration for France hoping to rid France of its undesirables (mainly Jews, Freemasons and Communists). Vichy also established a personality cult around Petain this involved portraits of the Marshal were commissioned to be placed in municipal buildings in the unoccupied zone. One can trace lineage from the style and nature of the Vichy regime from Daladier's Republic that precedes Vichy.

The authoritarian style of Daladier is reflected in Petain's position as Vichy Premier not only that but Daladier's rhetoric of family values, the role of

religion and moral regeneration are remarkably similar to the stance taken by Petain, this continuity of the mantras of these two governments goes some way to disprove the post-war myth that Vichy was a reactionary clique. Elements of the Vichy style of government would even postdate the regime in the Fifth Republic under de Gaulle. He too believed, like Petain and the Vichy elites, that the former structure of the French Republic was ineffective. de Gaulle's revision to the constitution empowered him and created a more stable but undoubtedly more authoritarian state. Paxton and Marrus make the assertion that: 'The government of Petain did not invent the anti-Jewish programme... Every element of this program was present in the years preceding the fall of the Third Republic.' The wave of anti-Semitism that surged with the arrival of the Vichy regime cannot simply be attributed to the anti-Jewish sentiments that erupted in the 30's due to the social and economic issues of the Great Depression and in the late 30's the fears of a 2nd world war.

Anti-Jewish sentiments were an undercurrent in French political and social culture, a volatile force that at sometimes would be restrained by some 'external pressure' but other times could burst out after having amalgamated with economic or social hardship. For example, the dormancy of anti-Semitism can be attributed to the fact that many French Jews fought and died in the 2nd world war and the third tenet of the French national motto is fraternité. As Maurras described this sense of brotherhood led to a 'semi-tolerance' of the Jews at the time.

However in the 30's during a time of economic contraction, high unemployment and hardship who more vulnerable a target for blame than

the foreigners and Jews? What became central to anti-Jewish sentiment during the 30s a growing obsession with the shortcomings of France. With the sense of insecurity of the 30's Jews became a symbol and cause of this 'terrible French inadequacy' a phrase coined by a contemporary French novelist. This is what allowed anti-Semitic feeling to permeate the sensibilities of the 'average' Frenchman.

Similarly the rhetoric of anti-Semitism had become so imbued in the French lexis that one even if speaking against anti-Semitism would speak in a way that would jar modern sensibilities. Anti-Semitism was imbued in France in a way permeated all facets of existence. It is noteworthy that Paxton's seemingly harsh depiction of this historical track of French anti-Semitism is influenced by the time in which he produced his history. Writing in the 70's he set about to dispel the Gaullist myth that had been largely accepted by the French public that allowed Vichy to detached from French social and political history/ culture.

Paxton's assertion however does not ignore some shocking realities take for example that some 30 years after the Dreyfus affair a production of the play in Paris was broken up by right-wing toughs. Despite the fact that Vichy collaborators contributed to the genocide of European Jewish population whilst anti-Jewish sentiments were assuaged as Paxton argues they are an undercurrent ever -present in French society. Even among who formed the government in the wake of Vichy still possessed this anti-Semitism.

Radical Pierre Mendes France PM of the 5th Republic between 1954-55 was forced to resign as his Jewish background made him unpopular with his contemporaries. Not only this but right-wing movements formed in the post-

war period the right wing Poujadist movement that was opposed to industrialisation undermining France's rural wholesome values- remarkably similar to Vichy ethics. However this attitude was not simply preserved among the cliques of right-wing it is noteworthy that Jean Marie Le Pen of the right-wing National Front Party forced a second round of voting in the Presidential election of 2002 having obtained 16.6% of voting in the first round. Not only do we see a revival of anti-Semitic right wing cliques but as late as 2002 we see genuine support for these movements in France. The simple assertion can be made that if France had not been somewhat accustomed to a political and social culture of anti-Semitism the policies enacted by the Vichy regime surely would have been abhorrent to the French public and caused general outrage. However in assessing the response of the French public the different stances of the French is an important consideration as well as the main concerns facing the population at the time.

The prevailing attitudes towards the Jewish people at the start of the period were that of attentisme, indifference and hostility. The French public, on a personal level, had more serious concerns to contend with life in Occupied France was made much more difficult by the fact and many French people sought to look after their own interests therefore the plight of the Jewish people became an occurrence that was largely ignored between 1940-1942. However Julian Jackson makes the distinction that: 'Indifference to the fate of the Jews was not the same as non- involvement in it. This was the case as 'The application of the both Statutes drew people into complicity with anti-Semitism'. Whilst the politicians drafted the measures that would put Jewish

quotas in their professions and exclude Jewish teachers the people who ran these professional organisations were made complicit in the anti-Semitism by exacting these measures. Indeed the smoothness in the way in which the Statutes were implemented gives evidence to the disregard of the French people to the unethical nature of the policy.

However it is difficult to determine whether the indifference to the plight of the Jews was indeed ' enough to characterise the attitude of the French population as one of active anti-Semitism' or whether the attitudes of the French public towards the Jewish population were a result of the need to protect one's own interests during the Occupation or perhaps is it too scathing to the French public to describe them as ' active' in the anti-Semitism? In some cases, the French public acted to reinforce the opinion that they were active in anti-Semitism.

In the South of France the exodus of Jews escaping the seemingly more threatening German Occupied Zone encouraged feelings of resentment and, for example, in Nice anti-Semitic incidents frequented. In there was a contrast between Jewish perception of attitudes towards them between the two zones; A Jewish observer commented at this time about the free zone: ' here we can still move around freely and don't fear arrest at any moment. But as for the attitude of the French one feels more at home in the Occupied Zone. This serves as evidence that in the unoccupied zone of France there were sentiments of active anti-Semitism present in that the Jewish population were subject of resentment and hostility. However, the reaction towards the Jewish population somewhat changed when the policy transitioned into deportation of the Jews. Sweets charts public reaction to the

plight of the Jews as: ' At first indifferent, insensitive... and then hostile to government policy as life became increasingly precarious for the Jews with each new action against them. Whilst there was an eventual turning point in public opinion regarding the fate of the Jews it seems that the French public were willing to witness the destabilisation of the Jews within France that saw them humiliated and sectioned aside from the rest of French society but drew the line where manifestations of this destabilisation became physical i. e. having to witness babies being torn apart from mothers who are being arrested for deportation to an internment camp.

Whilst a formal and somewhat discreet destabilisation of Jewish presence in France had been tolerable the visible sight of this seemed to be unpalatable to the French public. What becomes evident in the enacting of Vichy's anti-Semitic policy is that it was extremely reliant on public approval. The ease of which Vichy was able to establish anti-Jewish legislation was reliant on the complicity of the French people who did not have the interests of the Jewish people at the forefront during the German occupation.

However, we see that once this consensus had been broken in 1942 come to the implementation of the Final Solution Vichy policy loses effectiveness as it is undermined by civil society. We witness that the French population despite being complicit largely did in fact have a great deal of influence over the policy of Vichy. Vichy France and the German occupation has and will continue to be a contentious issue in French history.

Whilst it is irrefutable that German influence in the occupation had an influence in bringing about the anti-Semitic policy that proliferated under Vichy it is clear that Vichy had its own indigenous roots of anti-Semitism that

almost provided this government with a historical inclination to act in the way it did. The complexity of the period disallows any sweeping judgement of the period however, an acknowledgement of the influence of German factors and an understanding of France's own historical potential for the anti-Semitic policies allow for a nuanced appreciation of the period.

Bibliography Jackson, Julian. ' France the Dark Years 1940-1944'. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003. Paxton, Robert. ' Vichy France Old Guard ad New Order'. New York: Columbia University Press, 2001. Sweets, John. ' Choices in Vichy France'. New York: Oxford University Press, 1994. Marrus, Michael and Paxton, Robert. ' Vichy France and the Jews'. Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1981. Vinen, Richard. ' The Unfree French: Life under the Occupation' London: Penguin Books, 2007.
<http://www.wikipedia.com>