

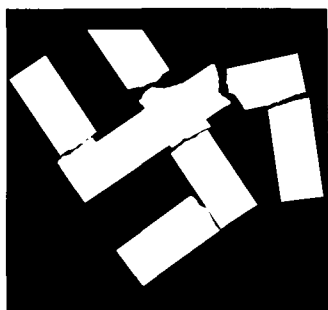
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## NOTES & TOPICS

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### Bitter Defeat, Total Occupation

*The German-French Difference—By A. G. KAGENECK*



THE SCENE is well known: the picture of German cities in what is called *das Jahr Null*, the catastrophe, the total defeat and the unconditional surrender—ruins, misery, a dazed and despairing population . . . and yet, for all that, a certain peculiar dignity in the rubble, with the broken stones pushed back to make

sidewalks again, with few beggars and no recalcitrant werewolves.

In another spring, some five years earlier, another great European power, France, had also suffered a total military capitulation. Is there a useful comparison?

Certainly not from a military point of view. France's forces were beaten on the mainland as often in its history; but there was still a considerable fleet, and bases in a world-wide colonial empire. France had an ally in Great Britain, resolutely fighting on, and a potential partner in President Roosevelt's America. There was a General in London who refused to accept the surrender of France: only a battle had been lost, not the war. And there was, last if also least (as it turned out), a legitimate government in place, headed by a World War I hero who had taken the reins before the capitulation and had formally petitioned, according to international law, for a cease-fire.

None of this was true for Germany. The *Reich* had also been totally conquered and all of its land-mass occupied; but it had "unconditionally surrendered", had neither allies nor a government, and had morally disintegrated together with its criminal Nazi régime, leaving its people completely at the disposition of the conquerors. Nobody was to flee across the frontiers to raise a hue-and-cry for resistance. There wasn't the slightest chance of reversing the fortunes of war which had brought the Allies a famous victory. There were no elements among the battered German armies or in the shattered civilian population that could conceivably be mustered to take up arms and fight on. There was no such alternative motive, spirit, or perspective.

"When one loses a world war", one German writer (Peter

Bamm) has sensitively observed, "one is not in quite such a desperate situation as the victors often tend to believe. One thinks back to the day when hostilities ceased (in May 1945). The defeated looked up with relief, and even rapture, at a sky now free from bombers—which had, in their way, prepared us rather well for everything and anything that might now happen to us, no matter what. We had learned to take and accept the hardest of blows, all with a certain equanimity. It was our own follies that we had to learn to deal with, for twice in the century the Germans were put in the position of taking on a challenge of catastrophe. On both occasions they had the advantage of starting up again from nothing or very little. To recall those wild 'jungle days' is to be overcome a little with a still sadness, if not nostalgia. Those were days when we would learn to be friends, to work together with each other. . . ."

IF THIS IS SO, what then was the comparable spirit among the French? They too had their "jungle", and it lasted almost as long—four-and-a-half years. But an analogy between Germany and France has to confine itself only to the elemental historic fact of total defeat and occupation. After that everything is different. There was no *Jahr Null*, no "Year Zero", when every major city lay in ruins. There were no extremes of hunger and an absolute struggle for naked physical survival. Maintaining dignity on an empty stomach was not exactly the challenge. The French were a people whose peasant population amounted, at the time, to some 55%, and they knew how to scrape together food for a square meal; and even by means of an effective "grey market" to keep supplying France's towns and cities. There were imports from the African colonies, and of course there was an administration, no longer in Paris but in Vichy, yet still capable of some measures of national organisation and coordination.

To be sure, the defeat of May 1940 had constituted a shock for the nation, as France crashed from the pedestal of century-old fame as "the greatest military power in Europe." Was it some secret internal affliction which had in six brief weeks stricken the French with "a sickness unto death"? Well, they didn't want to "die for Danzig", and they didn't. The *poilus* of 1940 cried out to the German soldiers, "*La guerre est finie!*", as if the whole affair had been a brief misunderstanding.

The aged Marshal in Vichy put the blame on "yesterday's men", the old régime of parties and politicians, and offered a new national slogan on behalf of "family . . . work . . . and fatherland." The people were to roll up their sleeves and get to work, make their deals with the occupiers, blame everything on

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the English, and be grateful that the Germans were keeping the Bolsheviks from their door. No one would listen to the General in London. Life would go on. Somehow it would all end well.

It was an idyllic vision, and it lasted until that moment on the 15th of August 1941 when, in the Paris Métro station Barbès-Rochechouart, a German serviceman named Franz Moser was shot by the Communist resistance fighter "Colonel Fabien." It was, as we now know, a well-planned assassination (or "execution", in the terrorist phrase of our day); and it did not fail to ignite the chain-reaction of violence, with repression following terror and sparking counter-terror in turn. It would (and did) end only on the day of liberation. But between 15 August 1941 and 25 August 1944 lay three years. These, according to French historians, must be reckoned as "the nation's worst days since the French Revolution", and many make comparisons with the years of terror under Marat and Robespierre et al.

The historian Henri Amouroux has recently completed the sixth volume of his epochal work on the years of Occupation during World War II, and he calls the year 1943 a time of "the most merciless civil war." Jacques Soustelle, once the special Gaullist representative in Occupied France, phrases it more euphemistically as "the year in which Frenchmen ceased to love one another. . . ." *Le Figaro* has referred to "the chaos of internecine warfare" which overcame the country. *Le Monde*, reviewing Amouroux' work, praises the courage of "finally" looking the truth in the face.

What are they getting at? What had been happening was the great turning-points of World War II—Stalingrad, the American landings on the south Mediterranean shore, the new German demands on France for badly-needed arms and manpower. All made for a new situation, as tens of thousands of young Frenchmen, who may well up until then have had only

the vaguest notion of the *maquis* and the Resistance, fled into the "underground." Their parents who had been patiently "getting along"—"collaborating", if you will—now came to see in the face of "Fritz" the hated mug of the *Boche*.

The expansion of the Resistance movement began to pose new problems of leadership and especially political dominance among the various strands cooperating in the underground struggle. The Communist Party, which had of course itself turned away from "collaboration" when the Soviet Union was attacked, was concerned about its controlling positions. More arms were needed; would they get the weapons? Neither General de Gaulle nor the British political command were exactly enthusiastic about giving Moscow a "military base" in the Western camp; and in any case the Allied heavy commitment was to bomb the Germans in French bases with their own might and main.

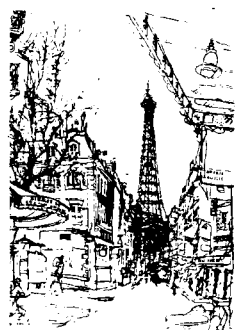
Needless to say, the collaborators (no small contingent) made much of these difficulties, as they continued to have faith in the ultimate German victory, and some were even enthusiastic enough for "National-Socialism" to volunteer for French units fighting alongside the *Wehrmacht*. (One such unit actually tried to defend Hitler's bunker in Berlin.) Later on the members of such units, including the militia which was recruited to root out the terrorists, were mercilessly brought to rough justice in the so-called *épuration*; the motto here was "two eyes for an eye", and "for a tooth the whole jaw."

SO FOR SOME 19 months something approaching a civil war raged among Frenchmen. Denunciation became a daily civic preoccupation; terror countered terror, and continued collaboration induced redoubled revenge. So much mounting hate on all sides could only produce that series of purges, wholesale "liquidation" of enemies of the nation, which followed the liberation of French territory by the Allied armies.

Most of it, now recognised as being the most naked kind of "lynch justice", came to an end during 1947. Nobody can know exactly how many Frenchmen were done away with during (in Amouroux's phrase) this "*impitoyable guerre civile*." Some estimates refer to 100,000, which would be about ten times the number of casualties which France suffered in the brief campaign of 1940.

All of this, of course, inflicted deep wounds and has left ugly scars on the French body politic. From time to time they are opened and bleed again. Some time ago two members of the opposition in the Chamber accused President Mitterrand of "a shady past." An unsavoury discussion raged around the former police commissioner of Paris, a Minister under de Gaulle, over his role in the "extraditing" of French Jews to the Germans in 1943. As for the leader of the Communist Party, how was it that instead of joining the ranks of the *maquis* in the Resistance underground, he found a job in Augsburg at the Messerschmitt plant making planes for the *Luftwaffe*? Nobody gets "lynched" nowadays, except in the sense of having one's reputation hanging like an effigy; but the ugliest of accusations are rife as if the line was still being drawn in the old simple-minded way between "resistance here, collaboration there."

## Things Past



MANY OLDER French people approach the D-Day commemoration with mixed emotions, remembering the bitterness of defeat in 1940, the humiliation of the Occupation and the embarrassing years of collaboration with the Nazis. The extent of physical and moral degradation suffered by the French during the Occupation has become a taboo subject. More books have been written about it in America than in France.

Last week, M. Chaban-Delmas, Prime Minister under President Pompidou, and another Resistance

hero, said on television: "It is time we discussed what really happened during the War."

Recognition of the British and American role in the liberation, though genuine in France, has always been accompanied by a feeling of discomfort that despite the important contribution of the Free French and the *Maquis*, freedom was a gift from the Allies. Magazines, newspapers and the media are this week reviving all these memories.

Michael Field  
reporting from Paris

in the DAILY TELEGRAPH (London)

The fatal falling-out among Frenchmen in defeat and occupation is far from being overcome.

IS THERE ANY parallel with what the Germans went through following their surrender and occupation by conquering armies? On the surface of things, if one confines oneself only to the Western military zones of Germany, there would appear to be very little similarity. In France a kind of "revolution" took place. In Germany there was a deadly quiet, as if a whole nation and people had been mortally wounded, waiting only for some miraculous form of resurrection. Fateful history had drawn a line and closed a book; what was to come would be written on new white pages.

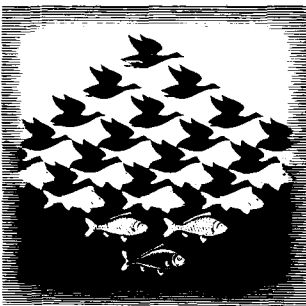
No such books were closed in France. A few pages were torn out here and there, and now they are being pasted back in. If one can risk the fanciful semantic by-play, the German concern for *Werden* and the French involvement with *existence* took on political flesh and blood. The Germans wanted to "become" something else, wanted to put the past behind them; they would now become a part of "the West", good Europeans, loyal allies. The French could not escape existential realities, and were driven to confront the shameful events of the recent

past with some new and decisive commitment to their own special national identity. If need be, they would have a big Bomb of their very own; if there was no other way, they would try and find themselves in splendid isolation. Both nations had skeletons in their closets, and both dealt with them in different ways. The burden for relations between the two ancient antagonists was heavy.

Still, there was "the European idea" as a bridge, and on both sides of the Rhine emerged bridging figures: Dr Adenauer and Robert Schuman. This would hardly have been enough if another historic factor had not emerged on the scene to divert the drama to another stage—the Eastern superpower with its totalitarian expansionism. For all the variations of attitudes in "the Cold War" and in the ideology of French and German anti-Communism, it is in this common context that the divisive national excesses of preoccupation with the past lost most of their point and poignancy. The German Chancellor may not have been invited to share in the glorious sentimentalities of the D-day celebrations last year in Normandy, but what both the French and the Germans share in all other respects is the deep present need for collective security, as if in a common vow: nations must never go through the tragic humiliations of defeat and occupation again.

## Left to Right?

### *Ideological Memoirs—By MAX BELOFF*



THERE IS SOMETHING especially interesting about reviewing an autobiography by one's exact contemporary. When Professor Ferns was born in Alberta in 1913, Sir Robert Borden was Prime Minister of Canada; when I was born in London in the same year, Herbert Henry Asquith was Prime Minister of

the United Kingdom, the Kaiser, the Emperor Franz Josef and Nicholas II were on their thrones, and Lenin was an obscure exile in Switzerland. What does one come to think about politics after all that has happened since then? I suppose that today both of us would be classified as "on the Right"—hence the title that Professor Ferns has chosen for his book<sup>1</sup>—yet the differences between us are perhaps almost as considerable as the differences in our respective experiences. Although we came together over the founding of what is now the University of Buckingham, we cannot be said to have influenced each other; but this absorbing book may help others, as it has helped me, to define my position.

Certainly Professor Ferns' experience both of life and of

the life of ideas has been very different from my own. The achievement of any degree of higher education in the Canada of the Depression years for someone of modest background was itself a formative experience. To come from that background to Cambridge was perhaps an even more decisive event, both because of what Professor Ferns came to admire in Cambridge and in England—and he is still an Anglophile, if not an optimistic one—and because of what he came to resent. Much has been written about the Communist connection in the Cambridge of the 1930s of which Professor Ferns was part, though not all those touched by its influence took Marxism as seriously as he did, or took so long to eradicate it or, perhaps one should say, transcend it. But one cannot help wondering what would have happened if Professor Ferns had found his way to Oxford rather than Cambridge—all this might then have touched him more lightly. Once again, one feels that what led Cambridge men across the barriers of patriotism to flirt with treason—or in some deadly cases to practise it—was a degree of intellectual arrogance combined with an insulation from the real world that has been so marked in Cambridge for so long.

The intellectual odyssey of Professor Ferns had, however, many other adventures to offer. It was the Nazi-Soviet Pact that, as for others, was the signal if not for a rapid reversal of course, at least for questioning the true motives of Soviet policy. Going back to find some outlet for the wish to serve the cause of freedom, Professor Ferns found his ties with the Communists slipping; he had no need of them, and they as it

<sup>1</sup> *Reading from Left to Right: One Man's Political History*. By H. S. FERNS. University of Toronto Press. \$24.95, £21.20.