

WHY HITLER PROMOTED LAVAL



turned over the power to Petain. Laval acted merely as a go-between.

Were it not for Laval, Petain would have remained just another retired marshal, remembered by officials as "the victor of Verdun" and by the World War veterans as the man who butchered the mutiny back in 1917. Whether he accepted his new role as an accomplice or as a tool, is a problem for psychologists. The result was the same.

At the time of the armistice the future Vichy personnel comprised men who wanted Hitler to win and those who were convinced he had won already. Only to that extent can one speak of any differences of opinion among the Petains, the Darlans, and the Laval. The politician was simply smarter than the marshal and the admiral. The latter might have nurtured illusions about a fascist France in a democratic world, but Laval knew that their common rule could endure only in a Hitler-dominated world.

That was in 1940. In the two ensuing years—during which foreign observers have emphasized a conflict between Vichy and Berlin, an actual struggle was going on between Petain and Hitler on one hand, and the French people on the other.

Pétain did score a few "victories." He outlawed the people's political parties and the trade unions, persecuted the Jews, filled the concentration camps, and made innumerable speeches. But all this was of no avail; he failed to win the French people. They would not collaborate with Hitler. They would not collaborate with Vichy. They would not even believe—as did many persons abroad—that the Nazis actually were displeased with Vichy. If at first the Frenchman had been stunned by the defeat, if many of them did really trust Petain, if problems of food were at one moment more pressing than politics, today that is no longer so.

England was not defeated. The Soviet Union inflicted the first great defeat on Hitler. Petain no longer could plead the inescapability of a Nazi victory. America joined the fight and Petain became less useful as a link between Hitler and the neutrals. Above all, he did not succeed in presenting Hitler with a benevolent France: the Nazis face today a country more hostile and much more united than in 1940. The old marshal outlived his importance, if ever he had any. Fascism has lost the second battle of France, in which its troops were led by "the victor of Verdun." Fascism has lost it at a time when it cannot afford to lose battles.

What was Hitler to do? To occupy south-

*A Frenchman tells why the Petain-Darlan combination failed.
The new Premier's task: "To make France safe for fascism."
Antoine Hebert forecasts Der Fuehrer's next step.*

WHILE Pierre Laval stood before the microphone to deliver his first broadcast as the head of the Vichy government, still warm bodies of Frenchmen, riddled with Nazi bullets, were piling up in barracks, yards and vacant lots of the occupied zone. Thus began what has been termed "a new era in the history of French-German relations," and what will be known later as the beginning of open warfare in France.

I must say that the reaction of many American commentators to the latest French events was as naive as it was sudden. They pitied the poor old Marshal Petain, and incidentally the French people. They foresaw a complete change of rule in Vichy. They lamented the second and decisive "fall of France," now reduced to the status of a Nazi vassal.

But in my opinion, it is time to quit worrying about that senile butcher of his own people. The new shift in the Vichy personnel can become a defeat for the fascist rulers of France, hence a Nazi defeat. As for the French people, they do not need pity, but arms. They do not care about obituaries but would welcome a second front.

Laval did not pop up unexpectedly out of Otto Abetz' pocket. In the past fifteen years French reaction has tried time and again to impose him upon the French people who invariably ejected him from office. The struggle culminated in 1935 when the then Prime Minister Laval, on the eve of senatorial elections, relinquished his seat in a Parisian suburb and fled to his native village rather than face a Communist opponent. As an individual he was unimportant, and still is. He and scores of other reactionary politicians, carried away by the landslide of the People's Front, were but the obedient servants of the Schneiders, the de Wendels, the Michelins.

As long as the latter succeeded in keeping the people divided and their own stooges elected, they had been all out for democracy. Confronted with a united front of common people, they changed their mind. If a constituency no longer could be blackmailed or cheated into electing Laval, if the Parliament insisted on governing the country, de-

mocracy had outlived its purpose. Bullets were to prove more efficient than vote bulletins.

When the day of reckoning came—in June 1940, in Bordeaux—two problems were involved. First, how to make the armistice contribute toward a Nazi victory? That was Hitler's chief concern, in which the French fascists were vitally interested. Second, how to make the people of France swallow the deal without provoking a civil war? That was the chief concern of the French fascists, in which Hitler was vitally interested. On the solution of these problems depended the future of fascism—in France and in Germany.

It is often assumed that Hitler aimed at enslaving France and reducing her to a colonial status. That may be true, but only after he has won a world-wide victory. As long as the war lasts, what Hitler needs is a strong and friendly France. Not strong enough to remain a danger to himself, but powerful enough to be able at least to defend herself—on his side, and against his enemies.

After all, France is not Slovakia; it is the second largest empire in the world. As an Axis partner, she would prove much more valuable than Italy. If close collaboration were impossible, however, France had to be kept neutral. Already planning to attack the Soviet Union, Hitler could not afford to get involved in an upheaval in the West; nor did he have men to spare to conquer hostile French colonies, or man the French Navy. Moreover, a neutral France would protect his rear, just as Italy did until June 1940. Accordingly, instead of appointing a Gauleiter, Hitler let the French fascists take the matter in their own hands. If he needed them, they needed him even more.

They knew they could not beat the French people into submission, they had to double-cross them. The French army, though defeated, still existed; there were loyal officers; and the privates were armed. The use of a decoy was imperative: a man whose soldier's honor was unquestioned as yet even by his adversaries at home and abroad. Even Parliament had to be respected. So the Chamber of Deputies voted itself out of existence and

ern France, appoint a Gauleiter, transform the latent civil war in France into an active one, and himself open up a second front in the West? Or to keep Petain and Darlan in order further to placate gullible foreign diplomats, at the same time making one last try to double-cross the French people? The choice was obvious. The combination Laval-Petain-Darlan, the answer.

It is even doubtful whether much pressure was needed to make Petain accept Laval. New bonds today tie together the men responsible for the betrayal. Too much blood has been shed in France, not only by the Nazi firing squads, but also by the Vichy executioners. The partnership between Petain and Laval, whether they like or hate each other personally, is sealed with Frenchmen's blood. Even if the Marshal merely believed in June 1940 that Nazi victory was inevitable, today he must do his utmost to contribute to it—for his own sake. It is too late for him to switch over. Should some Allied circles expect that and forgive him, his own people never will.

THUS, as I see it, Pierre Laval has the task of making France safe for fascism. Evidently he intended to form a "left" Cabinet. He conferred with Marquet, Bergery, and others who had been "leftists"—as they probably had had chickenpox—many years ago. But even they felt that a portfolio in the new government would be too hot to hold. There was nothing left for Laval but to keep some of the old ministers and to blend them with a few of his personal stooges. In his Cabinet Laval found himself the only "leftist," under "the high authority of the Chief of State."

His broadcast would have been much stronger could he have spoken in first person, plural. In fact, the only "we" in his speech referred to Petain and himself. All he could do under the circumstances was to deliver a kind of demagogic appeal which fascist leaders usually make before they seize power. Coming after two years of hunger and terror, it was bound to fall flat.

Laval did not come to Vichy in order to deliver the French fleet or the empire to the Axis: had Hitler really needed it, Petain would have done it himself, as he did in the case of Indo-China. Laval came in a last desperate attempt to deliver the French people as a whole to the Nazis. He can be counted upon to resort to every trick in his repertoire of a shyster lawyer and a parliamentary wire-puller in order to achieve his purpose. When he fails—as every French patriot knows he will—there will be nothing left for the Nazis but reluctantly to take over themselves. The French ruling class would have proved that it is unable to get its people to accept fascism even with the help of foreign armies.

Whether the terrorist in Laval will soon become uppermost to the demagogue, is immaterial. Whether it will happen in a week or in a year depends upon the war developments and the militancy of the French people.

The outside world hears little from the French people, except the explosions of bombs

Gabriel Peri's family—Hostages

Lisbon by (mail).

THE well known Nazi practice of barbarous reprisals against the families of anti-fascists is being emulated by the Vichy government which still tries to keep up the pretense of "independence" and "neutrality." Gabriel Peri, French Communist leader and former vice-chairman of the foreign affairs commission of the Chamber of Deputies, was shot in Paris some weeks ago by a German firing squad—a crime for which Vichy professes to bear no responsibility. But it cannot so easily wash its hands of the crimes it has committed against Peri's family.

Soon after the negotiation of the surrender to Hitler in June 1940, the Vichy government arrested Peri's wife, Mathilde, her old mother, Madame Torinyac, the wife's sister, Pauline, and the latter's two-year-old daughter, Ninette, and held them as hostages for Gabriel Peri, who was then in hiding in occupied France. They were taken to the Rieucros concentration camp in the district of Lozere, confined to a small room, and forbidden to speak to the other women internees. The Rieucros camp is notorious for the brutal behavior of its officials, and unhygienic conditions. Situated in the mountains, the summer days are long and hot, water is scarce, and rats plentiful, while in winter the temperature falls as low as fifteen degrees below zero, Centigrade. The 500 interned women include, in addition to French opponents of "collaboration," German, Italian, and Polish anti-fascists. Naturally under such conditions the women are ill much of the time, and epidemics of dysentery have occurred. Latest reports tell of a trachoma epidemic among the German women.

This was the place to which the government of Petain and Darlan sent the family of one of the noblest Frenchmen of our time, not sparing a seventy-two-year-old woman and a two-year-old baby. Madame Torinyac, ill of cancer, soon had to lie down and could not be moved. Her daughter, Pauline, was married to a high official of the loyalist government of Spain. After Franco's victory he remained in Spain and continued the fight against fascism underground. It was in the Rieucros concentration camp, while beset with the problem of trying to survive and helping others to survive in that foul and desolate place, that Pauline learned that her husband had been seized by Franco and shot on Sept. 22, 1940, in Montjuich, near Barcelona.

Mathilde Peri, a woman of delicate health, developed tuberculosis. Her husband, hunted by the Nazi overlords, thought constantly of his family, but few of his letters arrived. In the last letter that Mathilde received, he wrote: "I have a bed to sleep on in the place where I live, but what about you? I send this letter from somewhere and you cannot answer me, but I hope I shall be able to write you again." Mathilde Peri finally had to be sent to a sanitarium—with a policewoman as company, since Mathilde was only "on leave." What will happen to her and the tens of thousands of other anti-fascists of various nationalities in Vichy's concentration camps? Will the democratic world remain silent?

CONRAD VANVES.

and the shots of the Nazi firing squads. In this tragic silence, 40,000,000 people stand united as never before. A common hope and a common hate make them live. Among them, the Communists are the only ones really organized with a consistent policy and able to carry it out all over the country—and the most courageous. They are not the majority, far from that. The majority is composed of patriots gathered from all over the political horizon, betrayed or abandoned by their former leaders, to whom the Soviet victories appear like so many lifebelts. They are the willing soldiers. But they are not used to working illegally. Too often they sacrifice themselves in vain. The Communists do have the experience, and under their influence the word "patriot" once more gains the revolutionary connotation it had in 1793.

Those Frenchmen who trusted Petain no longer do so; by giving his blessings to Laval, he irrevocably alienated whatever confidence he might have enjoyed.

The French patriots think daily of their

sons, brothers, and fathers kept in German captivity. But they also know that these prisoners are at war, and they know that the only way to have the prisoners released is to win the war.

The French patriots cannot understand how the great American republic—their ally—can send them air-borne leaflets with words of encouragement, and keep its diplomatic representatives in Vichy. What they want is arms and help against the Nazis. They will be strong enough to take care of their own fascists if helped to dispose of the invaders.

The French patriots withstood the Petain fallacy. They are resisting the demagoguery of Laval, and should open terror succeed his futile efforts, they will resist the killers to the best of their ability and their strength.

It is up to the United Nations to shorten the misery of the French people. There are rivers and mountains in France, beaches and city streets, good to fight on, and worth fighting for. There are, above all, men and women willing to fight.

ANTOINE HEBERT.