

Similarly, Claudine Vegh's father, Mr. Rozengard, deliberately chose France as a place to live, giving up a promised chair in criminology at the University of Warsaw and ultimately bringing six siblings to Paris. He had suffered humiliations as a Jew in Poland, and throughout the 1930s he repeatedly asked his daughter, "How is it possible to live in Poland when one has lived in France?" Then he regularly reminded her, "You, who as a child can breathe in this country, never forget how lucky you are!"⁸⁹ Her father kept his faith, but in 1941 the government of the country he loved so much prohibited him from practicing as a lawyer because he was Jewish.

Maurice Rajsfus's father arrived in Paris in 1923 from Poland and found work selling clothing from stalls in public markets. France did not treat him well. Since the elder Rajsfus was not observant and was rarely known to be Jewish, Maurice later attributed his father's troubles more to antiforeign prejudice than to anti-Semitism. Mr. Rajsfus's two children, born in Paris in 1925 and 1928, were declared French citizens upon his formal request, under the terms of the 1927 naturalization law. His own requests for naturalization, however, were rejected twice, in 1935 and 1938, without explanation, despite the fact that he had two children who were citizens, honorable work, excellent health, and no criminal record.

Maurice Rajsfus remembers that his father sometimes considered moving to the United States. He, too, chose to remain in Paris, secure in the knowledge that his children were citizens and would receive education and opportunity in a free land. And life was far better than in Poland. As with Claudine Vegh's father, however, his faith was not rewarded. He and his wife were arrested as foreign Jews in Paris on July 16, 1942, by French police. They did not return from Auschwitz.⁹⁰

2

War Begins, 1939–1940

AT 4:45 A.M. ON FRIDAY, SEPTEMBER 1, 1939, GERMAN STUKAS ATTACKED Danzig in the Polish corridor. The French government declared war on Nazi Germany on September 3, and French men and women prepared reluctantly for war. About five million young men were immediately mobilized and sent to frontier posts or training camps. They would endure eight dreary months of "phony war" there until the German invasion of France in May 1940. Workers were similarly mobilized in the factories, where they were soon laboring sixty or sixty-five hours a week, in two or three shifts, in an attempt to compensate for the cut in French industrial manpower. The minority of French citizens who were Communists were thrown into profound confusion by the Russo-German nonaggression pact, just signed on August 23, 1939, and withheld active support of the French war effort until after the German invasion of the Soviet Union on June 22, 1941.

Predictably, the French Jewish response to war did not differ significantly from that of French non-Jews. The reaction of most foreign Jews in France to the declaration of war, however, with the exception of the Communist minority, was far more enthusiastic. Of about 100,000 foreigners who had volunteered or been drafted into the French army by May 1, 1940, about 30,000, or 30 percent—a

number enormously in excess of their proportion of the immigrant population—were non-French Jews.¹ As early as August 27, 1939, the Polish Jewish immigrant A. Honig arrived at a Foreign Legion recruiting station to find a huge line of young men trying to enlist. Observing that most were Jews, he recorded in his diary, "The fighting spirit which prevails among those who have come here contrasts with the slight enthusiasm which the French in general show for the war."² Foreign Jews, he explained, were eager to show their devotion to France, their adopted country that had given them opportunities undreamed of in Central and Eastern Europe. Their own private struggles against Hitler had often begun long before, with personal experience of Nazi militarism, totalitarianism, and anti-Semitism. In addition, the French government promised enlisting immigrants and their families protection from expulsion or internment—a measure that the Vichy regime revoked a year later.

Even as their men were volunteering for military service, however, the situation deteriorated drastically for enemy aliens, Jewish and non-Jewish alike. Ironically, many of the hardest hit were political refugees from the Third Reich—men and women in France because of their political opposition to the very regime against which the French were now fighting. Gustav Regler (1898–1963), for example, a non-Jewish German author and winner of the Iron Cross for bravery in combat against the French in the First World War, fled to France from Nazi Germany when residents of his native Saar Basin voted for reunification with the Third Reich in 1935. Wounded while fighting with the International Brigades during the Spanish Civil War, he was recuperating at the home of Ernest Hemingway in Key West, Florida, when war broke out in September 1939. He immediately returned to France and tried to enlist. He was thanked politely and told to return in a few days. Fourteen hours later, six French police arrested him as an enemy alien and sent him to Le Vernet (Ariège), an internment camp in the Pyrenees about thirty miles from the Spanish frontier.³

Arthur Koestler (1905–83), the well-known Jewish Austro-Hungarian author and anti-Fascist, was arrested in Paris on October 2, 1939, and held with other refugees from the Third Reich in the crowded coal cellar of the *préfecture de police* for two nights, and in the open air at the Roland Garros tennis stadium at Auteuil for another week. He too was ultimately sent to Le Vernet.⁴ By February 1940, there were slightly more than 2,000 prisoners at Le Vernet, including Spanish Republicans interned before the war, common crimi-

nals, German, Austrian, and Czechoslovakian refugees, and French political dissidents.⁵ Between 700 and 900 of the 2,000 were Jewish.⁶ Many of the 2,000 were well known, including the journalists Bruno Frei and François Bondy and the writers Friedrich Wolf and Rudolph Leonhard.⁷

Arrests of enemy aliens during the fall and winter of 1939 focused on political activists but were by no means limited to them. Peter Lipman-Wulf, then a thirty-four-year-old apolitical German sculptor, had immigrated to France in 1933 because, as a Jew, he had lost his teaching position at the State Academy of Fine Arts in Berlin. In the autumn of 1939, in the Provençal town of Saint Raphaël (Var), he dutifully responded to an order to report to the authorities. Lipman-Wulf's Jewishness was not an issue, for he had never declared it in France. He was interned at a camp called Les Milles (Bouches-du-Rhône), south of Aix-en-Provence and within easy sight of Mont Sainte-Victoire, so often painted by Paul Cézanne (1839–1906). With him at Les Milles were the authors Lion Feuchtwanger and Alfred Kantorowicz; the painters Max Ernst, Hans Bellmer, and Robert Liebknecht (son of the assassinated German Communist leader Karl Liebknecht); the Düsseldorf opera producer Friedrich Schramm; the music critic Heinrich Strobel; the journalists Heinz Bieber-Georgi, Hugo Bloch, and Otto Heller; two winners of the Nobel Prize in Medicine, Otto Meyerhof and Thadeus Reichstein; and roughly 1,000 other prominent and not-so-prominent immigrants.⁸ In France as a whole, an estimated 15,000 immigrants from the Third Reich, mostly non-Jewish and Jewish men under the age of fifty but including some women, were arrested in the first days of the war. By the end of the year, at least 8,000 were still being held throughout the country in hundreds of internment camps, euphemistically called *centres d'hébergement*, or "lodging centers."⁹

The arrest of enemy aliens upon the outbreak of war was not unique to France. The British arrested Germans, Austrians, and Italians in 1939 and 1940, and the Americans interned Japanese-Americans after December 7, 1941. French internment camps, however, were particularly primitive. Lipman-Wulf recalls that at Les Milles, a former brick factory and one of the more bearable camps, internees washed in water from one long outside pipe pierced with twenty holes. The water was not potable and froze solid in winter. In good weather, the men ate in the open air near the latrines. The mistral blew toilet paper through the dining area, but the food was adequate and there was little disease. Men slept on the floor inside the factory,

which was immensely dusty from its former service and filled with fleas and vermin. There was no forced labor, and the forty or so artists in the group could continue their work. French guards readily supplied them with paint, paper, and canvas but then stole their creations. A camp commander stole work from the already famous non-Jewish German painter Max Ernst (1891–1976) and sold it in Paris. The commander was furious when he learned that a piece which he had sold for 100,000 francs was worth twice that price!¹⁰

Unlike Les Milles, Le Vernet was officially a repressive camp for suspected criminals and political activists, and conditions there barely supported life. Inmates slept in flimsy huts with no heat, light, or blankets. Koestler calculated that each man in a crowded bunk had a width of twenty-one inches for sleeping. The food, woefully inadequate, consisted of a daily bread ration of eleven ounces, plus a cup of black coffee in the morning and a pint of thin soup at midday and evening. During the winter of 1939–40, prisoners worked six hours a day. Koestler's first job was to remove heavy stones with a pick and spade, under the eyes of French guards who beat prisoners when they faltered. He later spent his days collecting and emptying steaming latrine bins, some of which weighed sixty to seventy pounds. Four times a day, between working hours, the prisoners stood outside in lengthy roll calls. More than 25 percent of the men on any given day were sick. Guards were cruel, and offenders were beaten and placed in solitary confinement with bread and water only.

Regarding the direct physical treatment of prisoners, Koestler saw Le Vernet as a slight improvement over German camps:

In Vernet beating-up was a daily occurrence; in Dachau it was prolonged until death ensued. In Vernet people were killed for lack of medical attention; in Dachau they were killed on purpose. In Vernet half of the prisoners had to sleep without blankets in 20 degrees of frost; in Dachau they were put in irons and exposed to the frost.

In other respects, however, the comparison was actually unfavorable to the French:

As regards food, accommodation and hygiene, Vernet was even below the level of Nazi concentration camps. We had some thirty men in Section C who had previously been interned in various German camps, including the worst reputed, Dachau, Oranienburg, and Wolfssbittel, and they had an expert knowledge of these questions.¹¹

It was a severe indictment of the Third Republic in its death throes—before, it must be emphasized, the devastating defeat of June 1940. The victims were men who had fled from tyranny to the land of freedom, and who had been convicted of no crimes. Their treatment by harassed, indifferent, and suspicious bureaucrats set a dangerous precedent, easing the way for subsequent cruelties directed specifically against foreign Jews.

Except at Le Vernet, where only about 50 of the 2,000 prisoners were freed before the fall of France, a majority of the Germans and Austrians arrested after September 1939 were released by May 1940. The specially constituted Commission de criblage, composed of representatives of the Ministry of the Interior, the Ministry of War, and the Foreign Ministry, studied and decided each case. Outright Nazis, Communists, and “suspicious” individuals were usually not freed. Many with connections, however, were released after special intervention on their behalf. Koestler and Feuchtwanger, for example, benefited from specific protests from the British; Regler, from the soon-to-be minister of the interior, Georges Mandel (1885–1944); and Max Ernst and the German Jewish philosopher and literary critic Walter Benjamin, from famous French literary figures. Gradually, many others over the age of forty were freed, including prisoners with French spouses or children, those in poor health, former Legionnaires, and recipients of the Cross of the Legion of Honor or the *médaille militaire*.

Except at Le Vernet, most remaining male inmates under forty and holding valid immigration papers were given a choice during the spring of 1940 of enlisting in the Foreign Legion or joining special labor battalions called *compagnies de travailleurs étrangers* (CTEs), in the service of the French army. In April 1940, Lipman-Wulf chose labor and was sent, in the uniform of a so-called *prestataire*, to a construction site in Normandy. When the Germans invaded a month later, he escaped to the south of France from where, after a series of adventures, he crossed into Switzerland and survived the war. As will be seen, many *prestataires* remaining under the custody of the Vichy regime were not so lucky.

Nor were many of the released prisoners particularly lucky. Thousands, including Feuchtwanger, Ernst, and Benjamin, were rearrested in May 1940 as the “phony war” ended and the German army began to overrun France. This time French government orders were to intern *all* male immigrants from the Third Reich between the ages of seventeen and fifty-five, and all unmarried and childless married

women. Included were Jews and non-Jews, political and racial refugees, simple economic immigrants, and mere tourists visiting France at the wrong moment. Despite the specified minimum age, at least 5,000 foreign children were also interned. It was, again, an ominous precedent.

These enemy aliens, or *indésirables*, as they were called, were often arrested and temporarily interned in the north of France. As the invading German army rapidly approached Paris, however, they were shuttled southward, in part to protect the anti-Nazis among them from falling to the Germans, and in part to prevent supposed "enemy agents" from rejoining their countrymen. Families were divided when women and children were sent to one camp, usually Gurs (Basses-Pyrénées, now Pyrénées-Atlantiques), while men were interned elsewhere, often at Saint-Cyprien or Rivesaltes (both in Pyrénées-Orientales).¹² The most politically "suspect" women went to Rieucros (Lozère), and the men to Le Vernet. Les Milles, which had actually closed in April, reopened and by June held 3,400 men detained in southeastern France. Foreign women and children in the same area were often sent to the Bompard, Terminus, Atlantique, and Levant hotels in nearby Marseille. Rooms at the hotels were dilapidated and overcrowded, and food was insufficient. French *gendarmes* stood guard outside.¹³

While in transit to the camps, immigrants who had come to France seeking political asylum from the Nazis were often in danger from the French themselves. Lisa Fittko, an anti-Nazi activist in Berlin long before Hitler's rise to power, remembers that the bus that took her and other German women to the Gare d'Austerlitz in Paris in May 1940 had its windows blackened and carried a sign reading "Refugees from the War Zone," to protect passengers from being lynched as *Boches*. Her train was stoned in Tours. Then at the end of the journey, she and the other women were stoned and spat upon as they walked from the train station at Oloron-Sainte-Marie to the buses that would take them to Gurs.¹⁴ Once inside the camp, internees were relatively safe from the surrounding storm, but with the last government of the Third Republic struggling for its very existence, conditions at Gurs and other internment centers deteriorated further.

In the confusion of the fall of France and the weeks following the armistice of June 22, many internees escaped or were released from camps by guards who were either indifferent or wanted to help keep them out of Nazi hands. Gurs was virtually abandoned by its guards

for a brief period in June, and thousands of women simply walked out.¹⁵ Others, destitute and with no place to go, or afraid of losing contact with their men interned elsewhere, chose to remain. At Les Milles, the German writer Walter Hasenclever, believing that he was about to be delivered to the Nazis, committed suicide on the night of June 21. The next morning, guards placed about 2,000 equally terrified prisoners on a train and wandered throughout southwestern France with them for five days. After passing through Sete, Tarbes, Lourdes, and Bayonne, the train finally stopped at the Château de Saint Nicholas, near Nîmes, not far from its departure point. From there, some prisoners, including Lion Feuchtwanger, Max Ernst, and the historian Golo Mann, the son of Thomas Mann, managed to escape. The others returned to Les Milles on August 20.¹⁶

Escapees were soon replaced by other foreign *indésirables*, mostly war refugees fleeing the advancing German army in the Low Countries. By the end of 1940, some 40,000 to 50,000 people were interned in the unoccupied zone. Of these, about 70 percent were Jewish.¹⁷

The "phony war" had ended abruptly on May 10, 1940, with the German invasion of Belgium, Luxembourg, and the Netherlands. Within days, well over a million refugees were pouring into France, their most precious possessions crammed into wheelbarrows, baby carriages, or automobiles that often ran out of gas or broke down. The refugees, including an estimated 40,000 foreign Jews, mostly without papers, clogged the roads, filled the hotels, depleted local resources, and annoyed and frightened French civilians.¹⁸ Close on their heels and often overtaking them was the German army itself, which had pierced the Maginot Line and entered France by May 15.

By June 10, as the Italians belatedly declared war and invaded France in the south and the Germans crossed the Seine and approached Paris in the north, another exodus began. The French government fled first to Tours and then to Bourdeaux. About four million French men, women, and children, including hundreds of thousands of Parisians and from 100,000 to 200,000 Jews, now joined the foreigners on the road.¹⁹ Whole families slept in barns or fields and ate what little they could buy from local peasants.

Testimonies differ with regard to the reception refugees received. Nina Gourfinkel, a Russian Jewish immigrant in Paris since 1925 who fled to Moissac (Tarn-et-Garonne) in June 1940, remembered that the French in the south were unwelcoming to *les gens du nord* in

general, and to foreigners in particular. "A multitude of tiny individual ditches compartmentalizes the French, separating them from one another," she observed, "and a great ditch separates them from the exterior world, from everything that is not France or, in a manner still more narrow, from life à la française." Consequently, foreigners, and not only Jews, "walked, talked, and especially ate in an unacceptable manner" and were regarded with distaste.²⁰ On the other hand, many refugees, like Paul Reichmann, who today is a Canadian businessman but then was a ten-year-old whose family had escaped to Paris from Vienna after the Anschluss, remember kindness and generosity. "I still recall," Mr. Reichmann says, "that the French peasants received us with enormous hospitality, and shared food and shelter with us without hesitation."²¹

The treatment of legal immigrants by local French men and women was one thing, however, while the official reception of frantic recently arrived war refugees without documents was quite another. Those who had fled from the Low Countries to escape the German army, including 40,000 Jews, met with little but trouble. If they were citizens carrying valid Belgian, Luxembourg, or Dutch passports, they were sometimes allowed to proceed with special passes in lieu of French entry visas. If they were former citizens of the Third Reich, however, who had emigrated to the Low Countries a few years previously and now found themselves on the road again, they were regarded and treated as illegal enemy aliens or, if their passports had been revoked, as *apatrides*—stateless persons. Many, including about 10,000 of the 40,000 Jews, were soon apprehended by harassed French officials who did not know what else to do with them. They were sent to join other enemy aliens already in the camps.

Fourteen-year-old Arno Mayer and his family, Luxembourg Jews, were among the more fortunate refugees in France in May 1940. As he recalled:

We barely stayed ahead of the fast-moving Wehrmacht and managed to avoid roads that were being strafed by the Luftwaffe. Near Verdun we experienced our first bombing raid and came within a hairsbreadth of having our flight cut short at a military control point. Except for the totally fortuitous intervention of an under-standing general of the French army, we would have been interned as security risks because my seventy-four-year-old paternal grandfather was still carrying a German passport . . . despite his fifty years in Luxembourg.²²

Issued a special *laissez-passer*, the Mayers were able to make their way eventually to Morocco, Portugal, and the United States.

Gret Arnoldsén, age twenty, and his father were less fortunate. After harrowing experiences in Vienna, including a period of imprisonment during Kristallnacht, Gret and his parents had escaped illegally from Austria to Brussels. In May 1940, as the Germans were overrunning Belgium, they attempted to reach France. Separated involuntarily from Gret's mother, the men were jammed into a refugee train and sent to France, where they were immediately interned. After days of meandering through France in a locked and guarded train, they were deposited in flimsy huts surrounded by barbed wire on the sandy beaches of Saint-Cyprien. They spent the winter starving and freezing at Gurs, and a somewhat more comfortable period at Noé (Haute-Garonne), from where Gret was sent to a hospital in December 1941 with the pulmonary lesion that saved his life. The Vichy regime sent Gret's father to the occupied zone in 1942, and he was deported to Auschwitz soon after. A refugee from the Nazis in Vienna, he had spent more than two years in France without a day of freedom.²³

Claude Vigée, a Jewish student from a family that had been French for generations and was thus never perceived as foreign and only occasionally as Jewish, had very different experiences while traveling south during the exodus. At Mayenne, friendly people took in his family and let them sleep in their own beds, declining any payment. At Taussat outside Bordeaux, a kindly old Republican innkeeper accepted the Vigées at his hotel and wept with them during Marshal Pétain's radio announcement of a cessation of hostilities. At Bordeaux, however, a doctor who had rented Vigée's uncle an apartment a few weeks before now refused to rent to Jews and broke the contract. Then at Pau (Basses-Pyrénées, today Pyrénées-Atlantiques),

the good folk . . . did not lose such a rare chance to exploit this new type of tourist invading their city. The defeat was good for something. I saw with my own eyes these honest citizens . . . sell bottles of clear water for ten francs a liter to thirsty and exhausted refugees, old people, women or children, who asked them for something to drink at the entrance of the city.²⁴

Vigée's mixed experiences were shared by most French Jews who fled south. Some non-Jewish French men and women were tolerant and generous; others were highly anti-Semitic. Many were grasping and

mean toward all refugees at a time of political and economic uncertainty. The majority were simply indifferent, preoccupied with their own troubles. The divisions would continue, in ever more exaggerated form, throughout the war.

The German army occupied Paris early in the morning of Friday, June 14, marching in orderly fashion down the almost deserted Champs Élysées. Three days later, shortly after noon on June 17, the newly appointed French prime minister, eighty-four-year-old Marshal Henri Philippe Pétain (1856–1951), announced by radio that France must cease hostilities. The speech was greeted with widespread approval and relief. Frédéric Hammel, a French Jewish chemistry professor and researcher from the University of Strasbourg who was mobilized in 1939, stationed at a military laboratory in Paris, and evacuated to Montpellier in June 1940, heard the speech in a restaurant during lunch. He recalled:

Everyone is hoping for the end of this war. When Marshal Pétain says in his tired voice: "the time has come to stop fighting," the relief of everyone is visible. Not a word of anger. Not a word of regret. I feel an indescribable shame. It would seem that I am the only one to realize what that means, to foresee what is awaiting us.²⁵

Hammel was not quite the only one, of course. Claude Vigée, as seen, encountered a grieving old innkeeper. The French Jewish musician and composer Darius Milhaud (1892–1974), lunching at a bistro at the old port in Marseille, recalled that the message "came to rend our hearts," and that "all around us people wept in despair."²⁶ General Charles de Gaulle (1890–1970) broadcast his first defiant speech from London the following evening, inviting French officers and soldiers, engineers and skilled workers, to join him in a continuation of the struggle against Germany. A few thousand young patriots crossed the English Channel to volunteer for what were to become the political and military forces of "Free France," headed by de Gaulle and defined by him as the only true and legitimate heir of the Third Republic. Then on June 21, twenty-nine deputies and one senator sailed for North Africa on the *Massilia*, in the vain hope that the Pétain government would continue the war from the colonies. In France itself in the few days that remained until the armistice, some brave officers and their men continued to resist the invader. Fifty

scarcely trained cadets from the cavalry school at Saumur died defending four bridges over the Loire on June 20 and 21. Elsewhere, at least two officers were actually killed for their resistance by angry French civilians or by their own men.

Other individuals grieved silently for the fall of France. Among these last were the throngs of foreigners in the country. But as Nina Gourfinkel remarked, many French citizens, instead of seeing the foreigners' grief as a sign of goodwill, reacted indignantly, complaining that people without a country could not teach *them* patriotism.²⁷ *On nous a vendu*—"They have sold us out"—became the popular cry, and Frenchmen defined "they" according to their political convictions. For many, "they" were above all the foreigners, and the Jews in general, who had dragged France into a hopeless and unnecessary war for personal reasons.

Indeed, since the unpopular declaration of war in September, expressions of anti-Semitism had increased daily. In February 1940, several months before the invasion, A. Honig recorded in his diary that citizens were often heard muttering to themselves, "While the blood of our men is flowing, the *métèques* are earning money and living the good life," despite all evidence of high numbers of foreign enlistments for military service.²⁸ Most French Jews, however, managed to ignore anti-Semitism until the defeat, but then the impact was immediate and brutal. Claude Mauriac, son of the noted Catholic novelist François Mauriac (1885–1970) and himself also a novelist, recorded a typical incident in his journal on August 4. A Jewish café patron in Toulouse, a war veteran twice wounded and decorated for service to France, was insulted as a *sale youpin* (dirty foreign Jew) responsible for the nation's troubles. After being severely beaten up by four drinkers led by an air force captain, he was thrown out, to the cheers of all.²⁹ Meanwhile, the thoroughly French Philippe Erlanger, who had never previously experienced anti-Semitism, wrote with some astonishment of the reaction among his closest friends and colleagues at the Ministry of Education:

As the situation worsens I feel a clearly hostile atmosphere thickening around me. The word "Jew" is not pronounced, at least in a loud voice, but one feels it ready to explode like a bomb.

Of the approximately four hundred people who now constitute our strange group, only Huisman and I belong to this dangerous species. No doubt about it! The war and the defeat are our doing.³⁰

* * *

On June 22, 1940, in the forest of Compiègne, in the same railroad car where Marshal Ferdinand Foch had delivered terms to a defeated Germany in November 1918, French delegates signed the armistice with the Third Reich. The document was accepted in the expectation that Britain would be defeated within a few weeks. The war would end and the French would sign a definitive peace treaty, emerging as an equal partner with Germany in the new European order. To the surprise and humiliation of many, however, Britain did not fall, and the provisional armistice remained to govern Franco-German relations until the Liberation.

After the armistice, France was divided into several parts. The three departments in Alsace and Lorraine which had been German between 1871 and 1918 (Moselle, Bas-Rhin, and Haut-Rhin) were annexed to the Third Reich and administered by two Nazi *Gauleiters* (district leaders). The departments of the Nord and the Pas-de-Calais in northeastern France were placed under the administration of a German military governor based in Belgium. The vast area of France that remained was divided into an occupied and an unoccupied zone, separated by a demarcation line that quickly became a formidable barrier, difficult to cross legally and dangerous to cross illegally. About three-fifths of the country north of the Loire River and extending south in a narrow strip along the Atlantic coast to the Spanish frontier constituted the occupied zone, administered by a German military governor, or *Militärbefehlshaber in Frankreich* (MBF). About forty departments south of the line were unoccupied.³¹ This arrangement continued until November 11, 1942, when, after the Allied landings in North Africa, the German army forcibly occupied the entire southern zone except for eight southeastern departments or parts of departments east of the Rhône River that fell to the Italians. After the Italians signed an armistice with the Allies on September 8, 1943, and attempted to withdraw from the war, those departments also came under German control.

By the terms of the armistice, the French government was to have sovereignty over the entire country while acknowledging and respecting "the rights of the occupying power." A formula as difficult to interpret then as it is today, it became the source of continual discussion, friction, and maneuvering. In effect, policies of the Vichy regime were enacted in the unoccupied zone, while in the occupied zone they applied so long as they did not conflict with those of the Germans. The armistice also imposed several other limitations upon

French sovereignty. Among these, the army in metropolitan France was limited to 125,000 officers and men. According to article 18, the whole of France was required to pay occupation costs eventually set at an exorbitant 20 million marks, or 400 million francs, a day. And in article 19, the French agreed to hand over any refugees from the Third Reich requested by the German government, thus violating rights of asylum and sentencing hundreds to certain death.³² Again, the measure eased the way toward later deportations.

The French government that signed the armistice was a legally constituted organ of the Third Republic. Eight days after the German invasion of the Low Countries, Prime Minister Paul Reynaud summoned Marshal Pétain, the renowned "victor of Verdun," ambassador to Spain, and admiral of General Francisco Franco (1892-1975), into his cabinet as vice-prime minister (*vice-président du conseil*). Then on the evening of June 16, besieged on all sides by officers and politicians insisting on an armistice and with the German army in Paris, Reynaud resigned and recommended that President Albert Lebrun ask Pétain to form a government.

The Marshal's first acts as prime minister were to call for a cessation of hostilities and arrange an armistice. His next steps were equally momentous. On July 9 and 10, 1940, the senators and deputies elected to the Popular Front Parliament in 1936, or what was left of them (some seventy Communists had been expelled by Prime Minister Édouard Daladier in January 1940, and thirty were still in North Africa after sailing on the *Massilia*), agreed by an overwhelming majority to revoke the Third Republic Constitution of 1875 and award Pétain full powers to promulgate a new one. Within the next few hours, the Marshal issued three constitutional acts. The first gave him the title of chief of the French state, the second declared that the chief of state had a "totality of government power" and was responsible for making and executing all laws, and the third adjourned the Senate and the Chamber of Deputies indefinitely.

The Third Republic was not killed by the Germans; it committed suicide. It died because its elected officials did not believe it worth saving. Under the Third Republic, France had been fatally weakened, it was said, by laxity, indiscipline, and institutionalized dissent. France had also, under the Third Republic, suffered an economic depression, elected a Popular Front government, and, finally, lost a war in thirty-eight days. The hard-won victories and social cohesion of the 1914-18 war were forgotten, and it seemed time for a fresh start. But however well the military defeat of 1940, the popularity of the

armistice, and the personal prestige of Marshal Pétain may be explained, it remains difficult to grasp how responsible elected officials from the center and left could have assigned the task of constitutional making to a man known to be authoritarian and antiparliamentarian. In so doing, they utterly abandoned the Republic for which they had struggled for more than half a century, and they abandoned their constituents as well. The "National Revolution" that resulted, with its dedication to *travail, famille, patrie*—work, family, country—would be popular for a time, not for its form or content but because it brought peace. But form and content would prove crucial in the long run, and peace would prove elusive. Meanwhile, millions of men, women, and children in France would suffer under a repressive authoritarian regime.

Of the roughly four million French who had fled south at the time of the German invasion, most non-Jews and as many as 30,000 Jews returned to their homes and businesses in the occupied zone after the armistice and the establishment of the Vichy regime.³³ Many, of course, had never left. Most French Jews were particularly anxious to resume a semblance of normal life. Their personal stories bear witness to their love and faith in their country—in turn a reflection of their prewar acceptance in the society.

Philippe Erlanger stubbornly remained at his post in Paris despite numerous insults and incidents, remarking that "I am discovering abominable sentiments from some whom I believed to be my friends, and a miraculous devotion where I never would have suspected it."³⁴ He consulted his friend René Blum, the director of the Ballets de Monte-Carlo and brother of the former prime minister Léon Blum. René Blum, in the United States with the dance company when France fell, had believed it his duty as a Frenchman to return after the armistice.³⁵ Both men now considered escaping to London to join de Gaulle, but both decided against it. They agreed, as Erlanger put it, that "a Jew with any kind of public recognition, especially if he holds a position, must not under any pretext leave his country. He must *bear witness*."³⁶ Erlanger finally left Paris in April 1941 for the unoccupied zone, where he survived. René Blum remained in Paris. He was among the 743 French Jewish professional men arrested in their homes in Paris by the Germans on December 12, 1941, in an unusual early reprisal action against Jewish citizens. He was interned at Compiègne and later at Drancy. On September 23, 1942, he was

deported to Auschwitz, where he died in the gas chamber at the age of sixty-four.³⁷

Like his brother and Erlanger, Léon Blum (1872–1950) also considered joining de Gaulle but rejected that option for the same reasons. Still a deputy, Blum traveled to Vichy in July to vote against granting Pétain full powers to draft a new constitution. He then retired near Toulouse. Ignoring all warnings of danger, he lived openly until September, when Vichy officials arrested him, not as a Jew but as a political offender. He was imprisoned and tried with other leaders of the Third Republic at Riom in February 1942. Found guilty of criminal responsibility for France's material and moral unpreparedness for war in 1939, he spent two years as a hostage in special quarters at Buchenwald, where he survived.³⁸

Thousands echoed the determination of Erlanger and the Blums. Some paid for their decisions with their lives. The more fortunate eventually emigrated or went into hiding. Raymond-Raoul Lambert, French for generations, the winner of the Cross of the Legion of Honor and the *croix de guerre* from the First World War and a captain in the army in 1940, was among the former. On October 19, 1940, just two weeks after the racial laws were enacted,³⁹ he wrote in his diary, "I will never leave the country for which I was almost killed [in the war]."⁴⁰ He remained to serve his people as director in the southern zone of the Union générale des Israélites de France (UGIF), the German-imposed Jewish welfare organization. Arrested in Marseille on August 21, 1943, he was deported to Auschwitz on December 7 with his wife Simone and their four children, ages fourteen, eleven, four, and eighteen months. The entire family was gassed upon arrival on December 10.⁴¹

The pediatrician and professor Robert Debré also remained at his post at the Hôpital des Enfants-Malades in Paris. Despite the newly promulgated racial laws banning Jews from teaching, he even obtained a promotion in the autumn of 1940, by a unanimous vote without abstentions from members of his medical faculty. Although he later wrote of that period, "I had resolved, with more determination than ever, to pay no attention to those restrictive laws and to act towards the French and German police as if I had nothing to worry about," he was obliged to apply for a special exemption from the racial laws in order to continue working.⁴² He was one of only ten Jewish professors in the country to receive it. Then in September 1943, as both a Jew and a Resistant, he was forced into hiding.⁴³

The anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss and the historian Marc Bloch, both demobilized in June 1940 and both residents of the unoccupied zone during the summer, tried to return to their teaching positions in Paris in the fall. Both were directed into positions in the unoccupied zone by sympathetic bureaucrats in the Ministry of Education who understood the danger better than they. Of his official, Lévi-Strauss later recalled, "He told me that considering the name I bore, he would refuse to send me to Paris."⁴⁴ Lévi-Strauss promptly lost his new post in the south because of the racial laws there. He emigrated to New York, where he accepted a position at the New School for Social Research.

Bloch, instead, received an exemption from the racial laws and continued teaching. In November 1940, he accepted an offer from the New School, but when he could not obtain American visas for his two oldest children and his eighty-year-old mother, he changed his mind. Perhaps he was never committed to leaving. In June 1942, he wrote to his close friend and colleague Lucien Febvre, "In any case, and whatever happens, I am happy to be here, rather than there where I almost went. These months to come which I foresee as being so hard, it is in my country that I want to live them."⁴⁵ When the Germans occupied southern France, Marc Bloch, age fifty-six, joined the Resistance. Arrested on March 8, 1944, he was shot by the Gestapo on June 16, with twenty-seven others, in a lonely meadow on the outskirts of Lyon.⁴⁶ He was murdered not as a Jew but as a Resistant.

The French Jewish journalist and author Emmanuel Berl (1892–1976) fled south from Paris in May 1940, "to avoid," as he later explained, "being taken by the Germans."⁴⁷ Berl was actually summoned to help edit several of Pétain's speeches in June 1940. He then lived more or less normally in Vichy and Cannes until he went into hiding in July 1941—a much earlier date than usual for French Jews.

The French-naturalized journalist and author Joseph Kessel (1898–1979) escaped to Lisbon in June 1940, also to avoid the Germans. Soon homesick, he refused to admit to dangers in the unoccupied zone and longed for France. In a letter to his brother, in August 1940 he wrote, "I am sure that I will be less unhappy being hungry and cold and even afraid and persecuted in France than comfortably installed in a flat in New York or a house in Hollywood." He added, "Since I have done nothing in my life other than love and serve France without playing a political role, I cannot believe that [my re-

quest to return] will not be heard." He returned in September. On February 10, 1941, he wrote his brother that, "despite everything, France is not finished, not Nazified, not anti-Semitic." Kessel fled abroad only in December 1942, after the Germans occupied the south.⁴⁸

The Russian-born Jewish painter Marc Chagall (1887–1985) and his wife Bella, both naturalized in 1937 and living happily in Gordes (Vaucluse) in the unoccupied zone in May 1940, were also slow to sense danger. When the American vice-consul, Harry Bingham, and the director of the American Emergency Rescue Committee, Varian Fry, personally brought them an invitation from the Museum of Modern Art in New York City to emigrate to the United States, they politely declined.⁴⁹ But life began to appear more hazardous during the winter of 1940–41, when their daughter and son-in-law were denaturalized and they themselves were rounded up for interrogation by French police in Marseille. On May 7, 1941, they crossed the Pyrenees legally by train to Canfranc, Spain. They sailed from Portugal to New York in June, arriving as the Germans were invading the land of their birth. Their daughter and son-in-law followed a few weeks later.⁵⁰

If most prominent and not-so-prominent French and naturalized Jews elected to stay put in 1940, so too did most foreign Jews. The American Jewish author Gertrude Stein (1874–1946) and her companion, Alice B. Toklas (1877–1967), longtime residents in France, lived openly throughout the war in their rented country homes in Billignin and later in Culoz (Ain), near Belley and northwest of Chambéry. They felt deceptively safe near the Swiss border, despite the rough, mountainous terrain that separated them from the frontier. Their friend Bernard Fay, a historian and the director of the Bibliothèque nationale, promised to try to protect them. The mayor of Culoz, whose wife befriended the two American women, kept their names off the local books. Especially during the last year of the war, German officers and soldiers appeared daily in Culoz. The villagers all knew about Gertrude and Alice, and kept silent.⁵¹

Of course, not all Jews chose to remain in France in 1940. Approximately 5,000 Jews prudently fled the country between June 10 and 25, passing through Spain and Portugal on the way to Britain, the United States, or South America. With help from the Portuguese consul general of Bordeaux, Aristides de Sousa Mendes, and some Spanish border guards, the number had grown to 20,000 by early September.⁵² At a slower rate, thousands more would escape through

Spain, North Africa, and Switzerland in the months and years to come. Others, including 6,449 aided by the Jewish emigration association HICEM, would leave France legally before all such departures were prohibited toward the end of 1942.⁵³

Many emigrés were recent arrivals in France, with no personal ties or loyalties there and with fewer illusions about the fate of Jews under a Nazi regime. Some were outspoken anti-Nazis who feared political rather than racial persecution and possible deportation to the Third Reich under the terms of article 19 of the armistice. Many had been interned as enemy aliens, an experience hardly conducive to further residence in France. Prominent foreign emigrés obliged to leave illegally in 1940 because they could not obtain French exit visas included Lion and Marta Feuchtwanger, who escaped from Les Milles and Gurs, respectively; the non-Jewish German author Heinrich Mann (1871–1950), brother of Thomas Mann, with his nephew Golo Mann; and the Austrian Jewish author Franz Werfel (1890–1945) and his non-Jewish wife Alma Mahler-Werfel. All of them crossed the Pyrenees on foot, in two separate groups, and sailed from Lisbon to New York in October.⁵⁴ Despite physical weakness, Walter Benjamin also crossed the Pyrenees illegally in an agonizing ten-hour ordeal on foot in September 1940, only to be told by Spanish border guards that his transit visa was invalid and he would be sent back. Benjamin committed suicide with morphine at Port-Bou on the Spanish frontier, and the major work that he had painfully carried over the mountains disappeared with him.⁵⁵

Not all Jewish emigrés in 1940 were foreigners, however. Darius Milhaud, whose father traced his roots in the Comtat Venaissin back to the fifteenth century, crossed the Pyrenees legally and sailed for the United States with his wife and son in July 1940. He wrote later, "I realized clearly that the capitulation would prepare the soil for fascism and its abominable train of monstrous persecutions."⁵⁶ The philosopher Raymond Aron and future Nobel Peace Prize winner René Cassin (1887–1976), responding separately to de Gaulle's radio appeal of June 18, found themselves on the same Polish troop ship bound for London five days later. Like Milhaud, Aron later wrote that he realized that "conquered France, reconciled with the Third Reich or submitting to it, would no longer have a place for the Jews."⁵⁷

Two other prominent French Jews, Minister of the Interior Georges Mandel and the future prime minister, deputy Pierre Mendes France (1907–82), tried to continue the struggle against the Germans

from North Africa by joining other government officials sailing on the *Massilia* on June 21. Both men were immediately arrested—like Léon Blum, not as Jews but as political offenders. And like other leaders of the Third Republic, they were tried for treason by the new Vichy authorities. Mendes France ultimately escaped and succeeded in joining de Gaulle.⁵⁸ Mandel was less fortunate. Transferred to Buchenwald with Léon Blum and some others, he was returned to Paris in July 1944 and turned over to the French *Milice*, an elite paramilitary force of fanatic Fascist volunteers. On July 7, in the forests of Fontainebleau, he was murdered by machine-gun fire in the back.⁵⁹

Also among those trying to escape the Germans at the end of June 1940 was the future wife of Isaiah Berlin, Aline Strauss (née de Gunzbourg), then a young widow with a three-year-old child, a mother from a well established and highly integrated French Jewish family, and a Russian-born naturalized Jewish father. The task was daunting, and she did not initially succeed. She remained peacefully in unoccupied France until October, when the racial laws were decreed. The laws convinced her and her parents that they had to leave France.

Hoping to leave legally, Aline Strauss wrestled with government bureaucracies for weeks. Her top priority was to obtain entry visas to the United States for herself and her family—a supremely difficult challenge, for few such visas were being issued at the time. She also needed to secure French passports for herself and her family, transit visas through Spain and Portugal, French exit visas, and proof of ship passage. The entire process was complicated by endless bureaucratic obstruction and by the intricate time frame involved. Visas were often valid for only a limited period, and by the time they were all in place, a ship might well have sailed. Miraculously enough, Aline Strauss finally succeeded. She left France with her son in January 1941; her parents, to avoid giving the impression of a family exodus, followed three months later.⁶⁰

Legal emigration from France was immensely difficult and expensive in 1940 and 1941. Illegal emigration was dangerous and often physically impossible for the very young, the old, and the infirm. Still, it may seem surprising that more did not leave legally while it was still possible, or illegally while frontier patrols were less frequent and punishments less deadly. Foreign Jews, with fewer ties and illusions and in greater danger of immediate internment, tried more readily than French Jews but had more difficulties with documents

and money. Many, without money, connections, or even the ability to speak French, could not even hope to try.

French Jews more often had a choice but did not try. On the contrary, Aline Strauss recalls that her mother's French Jewish relatives were highly critical of her decision to leave, viewing it as an unpatriotic abandoning of France. They insisted on staying in France and in their own homes, and several were subsequently deported.⁶¹ Their decisions in 1940 and 1941, however, must be examined not with the knowledge of subsequent events but in the context in which they were made. Most French Jews, while disillusioned and greatly inconvenienced by the Vichy regime, at least trusted in its willingness to protect them. Most believed, with Marc Bloch and Joseph Kessel, that it was better to be uncomfortable in their own country than comfortable in a strange and alien land. Most surely agreed with Emmanuel Berl, who later recalled, "The anti-Semitic movement . . . did not surprise me. Of course, I did not think that it would go as far as it did. And besides, we didn't ask ourselves too many questions. One lived from day to day."⁶² Until it was too late.

3

Racial Laws, 1940–1941

THE FIRST GERMAN TROOPS TO OCCUPY NORTHERN FRANCE BEHAVED with courtesy and restraint. Denise Baumann, a nineteen-year-old university student who would ultimately lose her entire family at Auschwitz, wrote of the German soldiers in her diary that first summer: "What difference is there between them and other lads when they play on the beach, when they go swimming?"¹ The historian Léon Poliakov, then a thirty-year-old Russian Jewish immigrant in France, agreed, recalling later about those early days, "Although sad, made ugly by the uniforms and the white posters of the occupier, life in Paris appeared normal. We didn't even worry about the Jews. The Germans had been 'correct'; there had been no massacres nor pogroms."² Lisa Fittko's elderly German Jewish parents, who remained for a year in their home in Paris, also assured their daughter in the unoccupied zone that the Germans were invariably polite. Fittko commented wryly, "One clung to this image, because it helped make life under the occupation bearable."³

Henry Bulawko, a Jewish immigrant, Resistance activist, and survivor of Auschwitz, was equally confident in the beginning.

The fear and panic of the first days soon changed into an uneasy quiet. The Germans were "correct," as the posters and collabora-