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Laurent Joly, *Vichy dans la "Solution Finale": Histoire du Commissariat Général aux Questions Juives, 1941-1944*, Paris: Bernard Grasset, 2006. 1015 pp. Appendix, chronology, bibliography and index. 35.00 € (pb). ISBN 2 246 63841 0 37 1833-5 2006-IV.

Review by Donna F. Ryan, Gallaudet University.

Evaluating French complicity in the Final Solution and the role of French government agencies in assisting the Nazis in their murderous goals has occupied many historians since 1945, perhaps even more intently since Michael Marrus and Robert Paxton pointed out the distinct, if complementary, roles played by Vichy and the Nazis.[1] Laurent Joly has written an exhaustive and definitive history of the *Commissariat Général aux Questions Juives* (CGQJ), the primary agency responsible for formulating and enforcing anti-Semitic policy in France, created by Admiral Darlan in March 1941 at the behest of German authorities. This volume follows Joly's acclaimed study of Xavier Vallat, [2] the commissariat's first director, and is a revision of his *thèse du doctorat* for the University of Paris I, written under the direction of Pascal Ory.

The archives of the *Commissariat Générale aux Questions Juives* remained fragmented and in disarray in the National Archives in Paris until the publication of an inventory in 1999, part of the government's commitment to make documents related to the Holocaust in France more accessible. Drawing on this rich collection, Joly has examined the role of some 2500 employees of the CGQJ--its leadership, petty bureaucrats, and thuggish anti-Jewish police, the *Police aux Questions Juives* (PQJ) and later, the *Section d'Enquête et Contrôle* (SEC)--in identifying, isolating, incarcerating and delivering to Nazi death camps some 75,000 Jews living in France. This is an encyclopedic work, full of nuance, detail, and fascinating stories about the personnel, goals, and actions of the CGQJ, which beautifully fits its story into the larger context of actions of both the German occupiers and the traditional French bureaucracy. Each of these three entities pursued anti-Semitic ends that would dovetail into policies that deflected attention from France's own much assimilated Jewish minority at the expense of its foreign and poorly acculturated Jews. While the CGQJ at first occupied center stage in the formulation of anti-Jewish regulations, the policies of Pierre Laval, and his police chief, René Bousquet, reduced its influence dramatically during the deportations of 1942. While much of this is established interpretation now, Joly's indisputable contribution is the rich detail about the CGQJ, based on documentation unavailable to earlier scholars such as Joseph Billig.[3] The work's strength lies in this attention to specifics, typical of the *thèse du doctorat*, making this an indispensable reference for the specialist in the French Holocaust, but perhaps too exhaustive to be very useful to the lay reader.

Joly examines the roots of the CGQJ, acknowledging the anti-Semitic sentiments in every major political crisis of Third Republic France, including the Panama Scandal, the Dreyfus Affair, activities of right-wing leagues between 1933 and 1935, and opposition to the Popular Front. He acknowledges that the influx of foreign Jews, often unwilling to assimilate, at the end of the nineteenth century added a racial element to French anti-Semitism, which had rejected mystical racism for a political definition of the role of Jews in the state, which was a by-product of ardent Catholicism and anti-Communism (pp. 33-34). In 1938, laws aimed at foreign Jews ushered in a new era of anti-Semitism that would isolate Jews without any German direction. The 1940 Alibert Laws introduced a racial component to the definition of Jewishness that had never been present in French law. Exemptions to the new definition were handed out parsimoniously, and required negotiating a complex bureaucracy (p.94). An economic

strain was present in this attack from the beginning, for the identification of Jewish businesses in September 1940 foreshadowed Aryanization.

When German authorities approached Darlan about the creation of a Jewish office, his compliance signaled his own desire to remove Jews from public positions, except those whose families were French for at least fifty years. He found Xavier Vallat to be the personification of those sentiments, a strong anti-Semite, but one who was "reasonable" (p. 123). Vallat represented "old line" anti-Semitism, grounded in Catholicism, corporatism and anti-Bolshevism, with a touch of popular anti-Semitism added in the 1930s. Surrounding himself with similar rightist, Christian and monarchist friends in the CGQJ, Vallat carried out his duties with a smooth, confident and sometimes duplicitous air (p.155). His ideas about a France in which Jews would be removed from public life, except those who had served France well (Vallat was himself a veteran who had lost part of a leg and an eye) would often clash with German notions. As commissioner, he achieved great success in meticulously excising many French Jews from public life, but far less in assuring French control over Aryanization of Jewish property. Increasing German demands, such as the creation of the *Union Générale des Israélites de France*, would lead Darlan and his Minister of the Interior Pierre Pucheu to determine that it would be better to cooperate by offering foreign Jews when hostages were demanded in order to "save" French Jews. This was a concept that would lead the French government into a more compromised position and that would marginalize the CGQJ after late 1941. By spring 1942, German actions had taken a radical turn towards deportation and the role the French had played in the management of internment camps would begin to weigh on the conscience of some Vichy officials, perhaps even Xavier Vallat (pp. 278-279).

In the shake-up that occurred in early 1942, Louis Darquier de Pellepoix replaced Vallat, whom the Germans had determined must go. Joly sees this change as a significant shift by French authorities in the direction of Jewish policy. He characterizes Darquier as a militant nationalist, in perpetual rebellion against his Dreyfusard father, and an admirer of Charles Maurras. Joly describes Darquier as an unseemly fellow, involved in sex, drugs, corruption and lies, who surrounded himself at the CGQJ with mentally deficient and shadowy figures like Pierre Galien and Pierre Gérard (pp.294-296 and 300-301). Henceforth the CGQJ worked in tandem with the *Militärbefehlshaber in Frankreich*, whose Paris offices Darquier would share. Once deportations began in the spring of 1942, young, smart, and ambitious SS officers, like Karl Oberg, Herbert Hagen and Helmut Knochen would enter into direct negotiations with Laval's equally bright, young, and determined police chief René Bousquet. The CGQJ became peripheral to French anti-Semitic policy as Laval and Bousquet tried to preserve French autonomy by actively participating in deportations, rather than surrendering the task to the Germans, and sending foreign-born Jews to the transports in order to spare assimilated French Jews. At this point Laval engaged in a deadly game, deciding to deport children with their foreign-born parents, because he believed that image would be less disturbing to public opinion than the sight of families being divided (p. 352). As the French government became more embroiled in this process, the CGQJ became more tangential to the power struggle between the French government and the Nazis. Nevertheless, by December 1943, the CGQJ had swelled to a bureaucracy of a thousand, with a budget of 50,000,000 francs, although most employees were poorly compensated and suffering from low morale. In this period, Darquier directed the CGQJ to actions more worthy of SA thugs or French *miliciens* than the legalistic hairsplitters of Vallat's era.

In chapter eight, Joly describes the makeup of CGQJ personnel from 1941-1944, based on meticulous analysis of recently opened files, providing some of the most interesting information in this study. Of the 2550 total employees, there were about 180 administrators, whom Joly divides into five types: legalistic anti-Semites, especially dangerous because they were competent and certain they were right; zealous civil servants, well-trained, hard working and of good morality; virulent anti-Semites, often déclassé militants of the radical right in search of victims to abuse; anti-Semites *de combat*, arrogant, boastful, profoundly racist, found almost exclusively in the SEC; and finally, the anti-Semites of the library, the writers and propagandists, often subsidized by the Germans. The fourth type often

committed the most heinous crimes. In one case, a CGQJ employee killed a seventy-year-old Jewish refugee in revenge for the assassination of six *miliciens*. He gave the man three minutes to pray, then shot him several times. When he realized he had one bullet left, he returned to the body, excused himself to the onlookers, and fired the last shot into the victim. He would later kill a Jewish couple in their eighties, because they were "just too old" (p.435).

Chapter nine focuses on the lower-level bureaucrats, some 2000 workers, mostly compensated less than comparable bureaucrats in the regular civil service, with fewer opportunities for advancement and lower retirement pensions. Most came with little prior knowledge of the CGQJ's charge, and were simply looking for government jobs. Only SEC employees were screened for ideological commitment. Work directed towards the Aryanization of Jewish property seemed to have no connection to events leading to deportation, which remained in the hands of the Germans and regular French officials. Many would look back upon their period of employment with the CGQJ as a parenthetical period of their work life that they rarely mentioned afterwards, not even attempting to include it for retirement benefits. This level of painstaking examination of the archives of the CGQJ helps us understand the complex role it played in the Holocaust and marks this as the definitive study of the organization.

In chapters ten through thirteen, Joly turns his attention to the successes of the CGQJ in enforcing anti-Jewish policy and finds mixed results. He considers the personnel at the prefectures as fundamental in the war against the Jews, leading to competition between prefectures and the CGQJ that resulted in even more stringent enforcement of the anti-Jewish laws. The struggle to define who was a Jew in legalistic terms, often dependent on the status of grandparents, led to many opportunities for fraud and false declarations. In total, some 11,000 exemption certificates were issued by the CGQJ. In terms of the economic destruction of Jews, the CGQJ played a central role, employing about 700 agents in this task. In 2000, the Mattéoli Mission, charged to determine the degree of economic spoliation of Jews in France, found about 42,000 Aryanization procedures were launched in the Occupied Zone, where the bulk of Jewish property in France was located, with another 8000 procedures undertaken in the Unoccupied Zone. Joly estimates that about 2000 Jews were driven from the liberal professions and an additional 2000 from other professional jobs. About 500 Jewish civil servants were fired and somewhere between 500 and a thousand Jewish students were forbidden to pursue advanced education. More disturbing still were the actions of the SEC after 1943, which ranged from the execution of legal, if questionable, actions to outright murder as described above. The SEC arrested Jews for minor infractions of the law--a Star of David improperly attached, buying a pastry outside the hours designated for Jews--actions which contributed enormously to the climate of fear that was an important, if sometimes undervalued, aspect of the Holocaust (p. 650).

The last year of occupation, from fall 1943 through summer 1944, was characterized by French efforts to maintain some control of a rapidly deteriorating situation. Charles Paty du Clam succeeded Darquier, only to be replaced by Joseph Antignac, when the Germans balked at Paty du Clam's intransigence. A paranoid and violent Paul Besson headed the SEC which turned its attention to wild hunts for Jews on the streets. Between August and December, many dossiers of the CGQJ were burned, although the dossiers dealing with economic issues were saved, perhaps to justify actions already taken (p. 764).

In the Liberation and post-war trials, most CGQJ personnel escaped any punishment for their actions, except those who had supported pro-German and anti-national goals (p. 787). In other words, those who had acted within the context of French law, as it was written at the time, were spared. Paty du Clam would argue that he had served France by trying to tone down the CGQJ and later joining the Resistance. Vallat hoped to convince the court that, rather than helping the Nazis, he acted to protect France from its "Jewish problem." During his trial, Vallat still refused to speak to a Jewish member of the high court, whom he cited as French for less than twenty years and unfit to judge a veteran like himself. He admitted being anti-Jewish, but not a collaborator. Although he was at risk of a death

sentence because he had succeeded Philippe Henriot as propagandist, he was spared by a single vote (14-13) and was sentenced to only ten years in prison and national disgrace for life. Darquier, condemned to death, managed to escape to Spain, where he would be quoted in an article in *L'Express* in the 1980s as saying that the Jews killed at Auschwitz were only lice. Several members of the SEC were indicted and some thirty-five were tried in person, although most successfully argued that they had no idea what happened to Jews they arrested. Joly suggests that suspended and commuted sentences allowed liberation France to condemn in principal the work of the CGQJ, although almost no one was actually punished for what they had done.

In his conclusion, Joly finds three kinds of anti-Semitic logic at work in France. First was the German, spearheaded by the SS and those responsible directly to the Third Reich, as well as the occasional zealot like Darquier, which brutally expelled and murdered over 75,000 Jews in France. French government anti-Semitism depended on Realpolitik to reduce Jewish political importance while steering a course independent of direct German pressure. Among its adherents were Darlan, Laval and Bousquet. The third was the anti-Semitism of the CGQJ that was forged in the right-wing leagues from old corporatist, Catholic anti-Bolshevism. While generally not racial anti-Semites of the German ilk, these servants of the CGQJ, especially the SEC, did much material and physical harm to Jews. Joly states that in some areas the Germans succeeded *because* of the CGQJ.

In a final balance sheet on the Holocaust in France, Joly focuses on the French decision to sacrifice foreign Jews to avoid the potentially more unpopular act of deporting French Jews. While only 5 percent of Jewish citizens perished, some 70 percent of foreign Jews died. Only Rumania would exceed this record for attacking foreign Jews within national borders. While this conclusion tries to fit his work into the larger context of Holocaust studies, it is the scrupulous attention to detail that will make this work an indispensable reference work for specialists in the Final Solution in France.

## NOTES

[1] Michael R. Marrus and Robert O. Paxton, *Vichy France and the Jews* (New York: Basic Books, 1981).

[2] Laurent Joly, *Xavier Vallat, 1891-19720: Du Nationalisme chrétien à l'antisémitisme. d'État* (Paris: Bernard Grasset, 2001).

[3] Joseph Billig, *Le Commissariat générale aux questions juives (1940-1944)* 3 vols. (Paris: Éditions du CDJC, 1955, 1957, 1960).

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