

## Liberty, Equality, Fraternity, But Not for All: France and the “Alien” Jews, 1933-1942

Reviewed by  
Raya Cohen

Vicki Caron, *Uneasy Asylum: France and the Jewish Refugee Crisis, 1933-1942*  
(Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999) xvi, 605 pp.

For many people it is depressing even to move house. A lost fragment of life always remains. To move to another town, settle in a foreign country, is for everyone a major decision. But to be suddenly driven forth, within twenty-four hours, from one's home, one's work, the reward of years of steady industry! To become the helpless prey of hate!

- Franz Werfel, *The Forty Days of Musa Dagh*, translated from the German by Geoffrey Dunlop (Cardinal Books, 1961), p. 78

An acute “refugee problem” was created as a result of World War I and in its aftermath. There were refugees from the genocide of the Armenians in Turkey, Jewish refugees who fled for their lives from the Ukraine, “White Russian” emigrés from Russia, and others. During the 1920s, many of these homeless people were afforded the protection of the League of Nations by means of “Nansen passports,” which guaranteed some of their rights and forbade their expulsion from the countries in which they found refuge. Many refugees also found work as part of the effort to rebuild Europe after the devastation wrought by the “Great War.”

Many refugees viewed France, which proclaimed its belief in granting the persecuted a haven and freedom, as a natural destination. More compelling, though, was the fact that, following the war and the economic crises it spawned, France needed manpower to offset the “lost generation” in both the economy and the armed forces. As a result, the immigrants and refugees of the 1920s were well-received in France as cheap labor, and the Foreign

Legion provided a straightforward track for their integration within a military framework. Thus, for example, many bearers of “Nansen passports” were drafted into the French army.

These circumstances facilitated life somewhat for the refugees and concealed what would become flagrantly apparent only in the mid-1930s: the refugees were the dark underside of Europe’s nation-states, in which those without citizenship were defenseless and were deprived of even the basic human rights. Under these conditions, the fate of refugees who were Jews, Communists, or anti-Nazi activists was liable to be especially severe.

Some 30,000 Jews found shelter in France between 1933 and 1939, with the number of illegal refugees estimated at between 15,000 and 20,000. With many more refugees from Fascist Italy, and, in particular, half a million refugees from the Spanish Civil War, France, on the eve of World War II, seemed to justify its reputation as a haven for the persecuted. In the long term, one consequence of this policy is that today (according to the 1985 census) one of every four French citizens is an “alien” or a descendant (second or third generation) of immigrants. Hence also the considerable importance that was attributed in France to the ideology of the “melting pot.” It was in fact the dominance of that perception that delayed a critical review of French history precisely from an “ethnic” perspective; that is, from the viewpoint of the groups of diverse extraction that espoused a different culture, such as the Algerian immigrants, or the groups of new arrivals from Eastern Europe. These general features stand out in particular with respect to the period of World War II.

In the French evocation of the past, the Vichy government was described as having been fashioned by an extremist, fringe minority – “a handful of traitors” was the usual expression – that had wronged France. The “true France” was represented, in this view, by the Third Republic; this was the France that refused to collaborate with the Nazis, the France embodied by General de Gaulle and the Resistance. That portrayal suited the image of France as the cradle of human rights and civil rights, the country that had emblazoned on its banner the slogan of “liberty, fraternity, equality.”

It made a good story. It was disseminated and nourished by rival political forces, such as the Gaullists and the Communists, and French historiography made no serious effort to question this version of events.<sup>1</sup> However, this narrative of memory, which overlaid French society with a patriotic cohesiveness and a halo of anti-Nazi resistance, exacted a heavy price in terms of the Jewish narrative of memory. The 76,000 Jews who were deported from France to the extermination camps during World War II were perceived as part of the victims of the French nation, even though the majority were not French, and most of them had been retroactively stripped of their citizenship. It is only in the past two decades, as the consciousness of the Holocaust has intensified throughout the world, and in France in particular, that there has been a cry to acknowledge the distinctive fate of those who perished in the Holocaust.<sup>2</sup>

Beginning in the 1970s and 1980s, the exposure of the “Vichy syndrome,”<sup>3</sup> together with the collapse of Communism and the growing awareness of the Holocaust, brought about a dramatic shift in the perception of the past. The French Resistance movement (the Maquis) and the “Free France” movement were found to be a national alibi that covered up an internal French conflict, which, under the conditions of the German occupation, had assumed acute dimensions. One of its manifestations had been the readiness of the Vichy government to collaborate with the Nazis in deporting Jews. This created the abyss into which France – the entire country – plunged, as every French citizen may freely admit today after President Jacques Chirac himself did so publicly.<sup>4</sup>

Vicki Caron’s book is one of a host of new studies that are grounded in France’s emergent consciousness of its past in respect to the Vichy

---

<sup>1</sup> Robert Paxton, *La France de Vichy, 1940-1944* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1973).

<sup>2</sup> Anette Wieviorka, *Déportation et Génocide, Entre la mémoire et l’oubli* (Paris: Plon, 1992).

<sup>3</sup> Henry Rousso, *Le Syndrome de Vichy (1944- 198...)* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1990).

<sup>4</sup> On July 16, 1995, President Chirac, speaking in the name of France, admitted responsibility for the actions of the Vichy government, including the deportation of the Jews to the death camps. As such, Vichy became officially, even if not by universal agreement, an integral part of France, enabling the integration of the Vichy period into the continuity of the French state and society.

government and the Holocaust in particular. Caron addresses the trenchant question of the role played by the Third Republic, in turning France, ultimately, into a death trap for many of the Jewish refugees. More specifically, she examines “French policy toward Jewish refugees from 1933 through the Vichy era” (p. 354). From this point of view, the book must be read as an integral part of the current historical discourse focusing on the question of the continuity and discontinuity between the period of the Third Republic and the Vichy regime, and, consequently, with regard to the Fourth and Fifth Republics. The existence of a “*classe politique*,” which produces the elite that forms the state’s leadership and heads its government bureaucracy creates a continuity of officialdom that demonstrates even more sharply the continuity between the regimes--as was clearly seen recently in the trial of Maurice Papon.<sup>5</sup>

Caron’s contribution to this discourse resides in her conclusion that, even if it cannot be argued viably that the waning period of the Third Republic paved the road for the deportation of the Jews to their death during the Vichy period, one can nevertheless speak of the existence of a “twisting road” of this kind. However, she argues, that, although the Vichy government, like its predecessors, pursued a policy that encouraged the Jewish refugees in France to emigrate, it also escalated the xenophobia it had inherited. This reached the level of an overt, sweeping anti-Jewish policy, not only against Jewish immigrants and refugees (who, whether they were naturalized or not, were perceived as “aliens” who had not been raised in French culture) but against full-fledged French Jews as well (p. 345).

Caron arrives at this conclusion by means of a comprehensive, well-documented study that probes the subject searchingly from three interlocking points of view: policy toward the refugees; public opinion, particularly as this was expressed in the activity of pressure groups for and against the refugees; and the (native) Jewish community of France. The systematic discussion of both the policy that was followed regarding the Jewish refugees and the

---

<sup>5</sup> A summary in English of some aspects of this affair can be found in Nancy Wood, “Memory on Trial in Contemporary France: The Case of Maurice Papon,” *History and Memory* 11:1 (1999), pp. 41-76.

various contradictory pressures that were exerted on the policy-makers enables the author to refine the findings of earlier researchers and provide a more complex picture of the attitude toward the refugees and the Jewish immigrants in France. What emerges is that the generally accepted disparities, not to say contradictions, between Vichy and the Third Republic, between France on the eve of the war and during the war, between Vichy and public opinion on the subject of the Jews, and between French Jews and immigrant Jews, were not as clear-cut as might be thought. Indeed, the two sides of each of these equations have much more in common than was previously thought.

French policy toward the Jews, Caron finds, derived fundamentally from pressures wielded by interest groups that influenced the government beginning in the 1930s. Those interests were manifested in more liberal or more exclusivist and anti-Jewish conceptions adopted by the government at different stages. In other words, it was not France's objective needs that brought about the fate of the Jewish refugees in the 1930s. On the contrary, the army needed manpower to make up for the losses it had sustained in World War I, and, afterward, in order to prepare for the next war; and the economy needed investments and initiatives that the refugees (or at least some of them) were in a position to supply. Whereas the left-wing camp and the liberals had sought to utilize the refugees as an economic-entrepreneurial force and had tried to find employment for them and even to settle them as farmers in abandoned parts of the country, the extreme right demanded their expulsion. However, even under a right-wing government, an expulsion policy proved unfeasible, as no place could be found to which to deport them (p. 83). The result was that the policy toward the refugees remained objectively limited and independent of changes of government – the refugees could neither be swallowed nor spewed out, so to speak. According to Caron, the bias of policy toward a more liberal or a more stringent approach originated not with the ruling coalition but with the state administration. There was no fundamental shift until the establishment of the Vichy government.

In the period between the arrival of the first wave of Jewish refugees in 1933, and the defeat of France and the rise of the Vichy government in June

1940, the government bureaucracy was influenced by the middle-class spirit of “economic protectionism.” To the craftsmen and small merchants were now added the doctors’ and lawyers’ organizations, which spearheaded the lobby against the absorption of refugees and immigrants, especially in the areas to which many of the refugees from Germany flocked (Paris and Alsace-Lorraine). These organizations exploited the refugee problem in order to compensate themselves for the damages they had ostensibly sustained in the wake of the economic depression of 1933. Their calls to the government to introduce economic protectionism, restrict the entry of refugees, and encourage the emigration of those already in the country had the effect of bolstering the already emergent anti-refugee policy. Thus, for example, in August 1935, a decree-law was promulgated (without the approval of the parliament) permitting the merchants’ and craftsmen’s organizations to set quotas for “foreign workers,” mainly in the textile industry, in which many of the East European immigrants worked, while in October the right of foreign immigrants to work as peddlers was restricted.

Worse, already in July 1934, a precedent had been set for legalized anti-Jewish discrimination, representing a first regression from the Emancipation. Henceforth, graduating law students would not be able to be accepted to a public position for ten years if they were not native-born Frenchmen (meaning that even those who had acquired citizenship and were ostensibly entitled to full rights could not work). A second group of citizens who faced legal discrimination was created in the summer of 1935: naturalized physicians would have to wait four years before they could open private clinics and five years before being permitted to work in the public service. Such measures had no objective justification, as France lagged behind its Western neighbors in the ratio of physicians to the population. However, the doctors, like the lawyers, took advantage of the circumstances that had arisen and abused the weakness of the refugees (pp. 28-32).

Economic protectionism was not, of course, espoused solely by the middle class. Xenophobia spread within the working class, too, as the workers maintained that they were being displaced by the new immigrants (p. 86). However, such allegations did not affect the administration, in light of the fact



that the leftist leadership, i.e., the heads of the trade unions, the Socialist Party, and the Communist Party, adopted a liberal position toward the refugees; they called for the immigrants' geographic dispersal in abandoned agricultural areas in order to relieve the burden (p. 22).

Beginning in 1934, against the backdrop of intensifying economic protectionism, the government decided to permit the entry only of refugees who had been physically attacked or whose lives were in danger (a step that had the effect of increasing the number of illegal refugees entering the country). At the same time, the government launched initiatives in the international arena in order to encourage the emigration of Jews, such as advocating immigration to Palestine and trying to shift the burden to the League of Nations. The point of departure of French policy with regard to the refugees, as it took shape in 1935, was that France could not serve as a "dumping ground" for the Nazi refugees in general and the Jews in particular. This policy formed the foundation for the two basic orientations noted above: the xenophobic approach of the extreme right, which called for France to be sealed hermetically in the face of any and all immigration; and the more moderate attitude, espousing selective immigration and upholding the right of shelter for refugees and their right to work.

The moderate approach, which was advocated by left-wing circles, liberals, Catholic groups, and most of the Jewish leadership in France, was based on the assumption that the refugees could be economically useful, whereas the extremist conception left the refugees no choice but to "disappear." However, events took a different course. The Nuremberg Laws (September 1935) generated concern in France that there would now be a mass influx of refugees. To forestall this, the government announced, at the end of 1935, that it was shutting down the cabins in which it housed thousands of illegal refugees from Germany. The intention was to induce the refugees to leave French soil, but, because this was not feasible for most of them, overnight the refugees found themselves at the mercy of the police, subject to arrest at any time. The political and human absurdity that punished the refugees for being unable to emigrate also engendered contrary pressures, some of which would bear fruit in a later period.

French policy toward the refugees – who, in any event, continued to stream into the country between 1935 and 1942 – thus oscillated between trying to find a temporary, humane solution to the problem, or detaining them as criminals simply because they were present on French soil without authorization.

According to Caron, what did change with the various ruling coalitions was rather public opinion. The rise to power of the Popular Front government (1936) sent the pendulum swinging back: the new government permitted the illegal refugees to become legal again, and humanitarian organizations intensified their pressure for the refugees to be integrated and given the right to work and make a living. The right wing, however, radicalized its position and invoked antisemitic feeling and the refugee question in order to excoriate the leftist government. The majority of the public remained in the middle, sharing the concerns mooted by the right but unwilling to seal the country's borders against the entry of refugees. However, even the left-leaning Popular Front government did not revoke the existing policy on the refugees; it merely moderated it by relaxing the criteria for issuing residence and work permits to new refugees and by legalizing the residence in France of refugees already in the country for some time (by presidential decree, September 1936). Nevertheless, it was clear to the government that lower-level bureaucrats were effectively thwarting its efforts in this respect.

The most important achievement of the Popular Front government perhaps lay in the sphere of foreign policy. France signed an international convention prohibiting the deportation of refugees whose citizenship had been revoked. This was relevant to the Jewish refugees from Germany but not to those from Eastern Europe (pp. 122-124).

The pendulum of the administration, which had oscillated between a policy of limiting the entry of refugees and trying to provide them with a temporary shelter in France, now swung in the other direction once more, as the influx of refugees mounted in 1938. Germany's annexation of Austria, the events of "*Kristallnacht*," and the onset of the Nazi government's policy of mass deportation, together with the policy of appeasement vis-à-vis Germany, all worked to the refugees' detriment.



In May and November of 1938, the new government (under Edouard Daladier) issued two decree-laws, preventing foreigners from entering France and enabling the deportation of illegal refugees (pp. 182-186). Until their expulsion, hundreds and perhaps thousands of refugees who lacked an entry permit or a passport were incarcerated in detention camps (p. 311). Jewish and humanitarian organizations were forced to turn their efforts to ransoming these detainees instead of trying to find acceptable employment to absorb the refugees. In the international arena, the Foreign Ministry took the line that France was willing to act as a country of transit for refugees who held an entry permit to other countries; however, the tradition of providing a haven for refugees had temporarily disappeared. At the Evian Conference, France claimed that since World War I it had taken in 200,000 refugees and had reached the limit of its capability in this regard (pp. 184-185).

The situation deteriorated to an utterly intolerable point, leading even the conservative Jewish leadership to criticize the government (p. 313). However, government circles grasped the absurdity of the new refugee policy, and, concurrent with efforts to exert diplomatic pressure on the United States and Great Britain to issue entry permits for refugees, Paris began to examine the possibility of settling new immigrants in Madagascar or other French colonies. At the same time, old plans formulated by the Popular Front to settle refugees in farming areas (on condition of financing by the Joint Distribution Committee) were examined, along with other ideas. In 1939, as the drums of war grew louder, the situation became even more acutely absurd: thousands of anti-Nazi refugees were incarcerated in detention camps while the army was desperate for combat troops.

The outbreak of the war made the vicious circle even more pronounced: on the one hand, there was no viable policy that could cope with the flow of Jewish refugees who fled from the Low Countries, or were expelled by the Nazis from Germany, Austria, and the other territories that were annexed to the Reich; while, on the other hand, there was no point in punishing the refugees for not being able to continue their journey outside France. French policy vis-à-vis the Jewish refugees reached an impasse.

With the surrender of France and the establishment of the Vichy government (June 1940), the right-wing, antisemitic line that called for extreme measures to be taken against the Jews was ensconced in government policy. The Vichy government agreed to Article 19 of the ceasefire agreement concerning the possibility of repatriation – the forced return of German refugees – as part of the Nazi government’s demands. In the meantime (October 1940), it did not hesitate to round up and place in detention camps all the refugees of the “Jewish race”--legal and illegal immigrants, and citizens (those who had been naturalized beginning in 1937) whose citizenship was retroactively revoked. By January 1941, more than 50,000 men, women, and children were in detention camps as a result of this anti-Jewish policy. At least 3,000 of them died there under French guard (p. 342). True, there were precedents for policy directed against Jewish refugees and even against Jews who were naturalized in 1934-1935, but the Vichy government legitimated an official anti-Jewish policy (which had earlier been concealed under the guise of economic difficulties generated by “refugees” and “aliens”).

In Caron’s view, the sweeping policy against the Jews, which brutally trampled the equal rights of refugees and the tradition of granting them protection, attests to a total break with the tradition of the Third Republic, even if that tradition had become somewhat shaky in the last years of the Republic. Continuity, as she sees it, was apparent precisely in the realm of public opinion, among the circles that had supported a comprehensive anti-Jewish policy, such as the middle-class circles that were active since the 1930s in an effort to reduce economic competition, including doctors, lawyers, merchants, and so forth (p. 324). They relentlessly pressured the government to act against the refugees and the Jews in order to reap economic profits, and they encouraged the Vichy government to step up its efforts to force the Jews to emigrate. That policy, of course, encountered the same difficulty that previous governments had experienced in that the gates of other countries were closed (p. 336). It is against this background that one should view the decision by the Vichy government to collaborate with the Nazis in the mass deportation of Jews “to the East” in July 1942. Thus, the impasse reached by France’s refugee policy was breached not only by force of the Vichy government’s

antisemitism “from above,” but also at the encouragement of economic circles “from below.”

This is also the context within which Caron places the activity of the Jewish leadership in France with regard to the Jewish “aliens.” The Jewish leadership as a whole was one of the pressure groups that protected the refugees, promising, already in 1933, through the “Alliance” network, to look after them and thus ensure that they would not become a burden on the French economy (p. 97). However, against the backdrop of the atmosphere of economic protectionism that seemed rampant throughout French society, part of the Jewish leadership also shunned the refugees. It was convenient for the Jews of France to believe that the Jewish immigrants did, in fact, constitute an economic burden on the country or were taking away jobs from workers. By this means they were able to ensure that antisemitism was deflected from them onto others. Similarly, it was convenient for the Jewish bourgeoisie to view the socialist Leon Blum, the prime minister of the Popular Front government, as a magnet for antisemitism and dissociate itself from him.

Jacques Helbronner, a leader of the Jewish community and also the French representative to the League of Nations’ High Commissioner for Refugees, was in favor of making France a transit point only and opposed its becoming a “dumping ground” (p. 60). He and his allies among the Jewish leadership in France, such as Robert de Rothschild, not only objected to the idea of settling refugees in farming communities but also supported the deportation of Jews back to Germany. They took pride in the fact that they organized the repatriation of 616 Jews in 1934, most of them to Germany (pp. 102-103). The Jewish leaders, whom Caron describes as “hard-liners,” did not shape French policy but certainly “played an influential and very direct role in the formulation of official policy itself, pressing the government at every step of the way to pursue the most restrictionist policy possible” (p. 114). Thus, the Jewish leadership, which dominated the Jewish community until 1936, was one of the forces “in the field” that caused the pendulum to swing to the right, against the refugees, in 1934-1935.

The head of the more moderate wing was Raymond-Raoul Lambert, editor of the journal *Univers Israelite* and the representative of the young

generation of the Jewish leadership. His liberal worldview made him the leader of the Jewish community's activities on behalf of the refugees and against the government's policy.<sup>6</sup>

Until 1938, that wing in the community played a secondary role. However, in light of the appeasement policy toward Nazi Germany, the leadership was divided between the supporters of the government's "hard line" toward the refugees and its critics. This time the more moderate and humanitarian approach gained the upper hand among the Jewish leadership, which, alongside the immigrants' organizations, provided support and relief to the refugees and the immigrants (p. 306). Nevertheless, in order to obtain the release of the refugees who were incarcerated in the camps, the Jewish leadership had to abandon its demand for the border to be opened to additional refugees, apart from exceptional cases in which public opinion was able to effect a softening of the hard line that prevented the entry of refugees (such as the refugees aboard the *St. Louis*) (p. 315). However, as noted, in the Vichy period, the voice of the lobby that had basically supported the refugees fell silent. Under these circumstances, Lambert and the other few humanitarian activists became "social workers in the service of our faith and our country," working to assist the tens of thousands who were incarcerated in the detention camps (p. 350).

The Jewish leadership in France was thus not a symbol of Jewish solidarity, but neither did it leave the "alien" Jews to their own devices in return for promises of its own safety. Like the majority of French society, the Jewish leadership oscillated between fears of antisemitism and sympathy for the refugees, within the larger swings back and forth between "economic" fears and a French tradition of fighting for refugees and humanitarian values. Yet this is the crucial point: Caron shows the weight carried by public opinion in the 1930s in France regarding government policy toward the refugees. It was more or less unchanging, locked within objective limits: the refugees forced

---

<sup>6</sup> During the war Raymond-Raoul Lambert headed the UGIF (Union Generale des Israelites de France), which was founded on November 29, 1941; he was afterward accused of collaborating with the Vichy authorities. See Raymond-Raoul Lambert, *Carnet d'un Témoin (1940-1943)*, introduced and annotated by Richard I. Cohen (Paris: Fayard, 1985).

themselves on France and were caught in a trap. However, the amendment of a subsection of an administrative decree, or even a change in the public atmosphere brought about by one lobby or another could decide the fate of thousands of people, deprive them of their rights as free individuals who were innocent of any wrongdoing, or, on the contrary, grant them freedom, albeit in a state of destitution.

It is here that Caron helps refine the historiography of the period: antisemitism was not a historical phenomenon that explained every development to the Jews' detriment; rather, it evolved within public opinion in the wake of ostensibly objective interpretations (generally of an economic character) spread by various interest groups. These groups made conscious use of xenophobic and antisemitic frames of mind that were engendered before the war, without reference to the refugees, were heightened during the war years (and continue to be fanned in our own day).

Vicki Caron's book on French policy toward the Jewish refugees in the 1930s, against the backdrop of Hitler's ascension to power, is an important study not only for those who are interested in the history of France itself, but also – and perhaps mainly – for those who are concerned with the study of the attempt to annihilate European Jewry. For if there were any possibility of saving the Jews from the fate decreed for them by the Nazi government, it was by giving them shelter, if only temporarily, outside the Nazis' reach. From this point of view, France served as a central link for Jewish refugees who fled for their lives. The drama generated by the tension between the fact that France was a death trap for many refugees and the policy pursued by French governments – involving the multiplicity of laws and decrees, and the attendant political conceptions– is the context in which the book should be read. Caron, though, is careful not to overlay the later drama retroactively on the earlier period; on the contrary, she is meticulous in analyzing the conceptions and the policy on this subject in a contemporaneous historical context, when the actors involved could not foresee the critical consequences of the policy of closing the gates of France in 1938. And it is precisely in this context that a simple yet hard truth surfaces: even a minor clause in a dryly worded regulation, the arbitrariness of a clerk, or the inclination of a policeman

– phenomena produced by a particular public atmosphere – could determine people's fate.

The roots of the various approaches taken in France to the question of the Jews in general and the immigrants in particular are to be sought in the 1920s and 1930s. This was the formative period for those who later had to cope with the victory of the Nazis and the burden of the war, and not least with the question of the Jews during the period of the “final solution.” Caron underscores this point when she notes the continuity between the Third Republic and the Vichy government in objective circumstances. These ostensibly did not change with respect to refugee policy not only from 1933 to 1940, but actually until 1942, until the possibility arose of transporting them “to the East.” Her major contribution lies in the examination of the period before 1940, when she exposes the anti-Jewish “precedents” and their implications for the later operative mechanism. In this connection we should perhaps once again recall the underlying implications that the policy of closing the gates pursued by France, Switzerland, and other countries had on making Germany's Jews hesitate to emigrate. However, that is a subject for a different study.

With respect to the continuity into the Vichy period, Caron seems to me to be less convincing (it bears noting that the scope of the study of this period is not as extensive, although the same groups and the same bureaucratic machinery were involved). “France according to German time,” as Philippe Burrin put it, would appear to be a more complicated chapter even with regards to France's attitude toward the refugees. There is no doubt that in an atmosphere of victorious Nazism the previous conceptions evolved in a very particular direction. Thus, for example, it can be said that the trampling of the Naturalization Act and of the French Constitution that was perpetrated by Petain and Laval when they revoked the citizenship of 15,000 Jews rested only “glancingly” on precedents from the period of the Republic. Essentially, it can be seen as being an innovation and a departure from the past. By the same token, one can conjecture that, if Germany had emerged victorious, the boundary of Frenchness would have been pushed further and further back,



until, finally, only a few privileged Jewish families would have remained “kosher” from a French point of view.<sup>7</sup>

*Uneasy Asylum* is an excellent analysis of French policy toward the refugees in the political maelstrom that engulfed France in the 1930s. The book’s title effectively encapsulates France’s approach to the refugee issue, though we must always remember that this is a balanced view from a historical distance. It does not evoke the human experience of the refugees, many of whom met “the devil in France,” in the words of Lion Feuchtwanger, even if they were ultimately spared death.<sup>8</sup>

Translated from the Hebrew by Ralph Mandel

**Source: *Yad Vashem Studies*, Vol. 29, 2001, pp. 377- 393**

---

<sup>7</sup> Philippe Burrin, *La France à l'Heure Allemande 1940-1944* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1995), p. 162.

<sup>8</sup> Lion Feuchtwanger, *Le Diable en France* (Paris: Belfond, 1996).