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The CGQJ: The French Equivalent of the German SS

After France's failure to protect themselves from the Germans, a governmental institution known as the Vichy Regime came into power. The Nazis used this Regime in collaboration with the French to implement the Final Solution. Under the Regime, many organizations were founded to ensure that the Final Solution was carried out effectively. One of these institutions was the Commissariat Général aux Questions Juives, General Commissioner for Jewish Affairs in English, and abbreviated CGQJ. The CGQJ's mission was to implement anti-Semitic legislation and facilitate collaboration amongst the other legislative departments. It quickly became one of the most influential organizations established under the Vichy Regime due to a law passed in 1941 that excluded the Jewish people from many professions. In "Verdict of Vichy: Power and Prejudice in the Vichy France Regime," Michael Curtis stated the law allowed them to "intervene in the activity of every ministry, including the police, when it was pertinent" (Curtis 115). Curtis described the CGQJ as a "fundamental governmental implementer and deviser of political anti-Semitism" (Curtis 129). The attitude of indifference and collaboration throughout the war allowed the Vichyite efforts to run successfully until the end of the war. The CGQJ had an abundance of anti-Semitic collaborators at their disposal to expand their power and ensure the Final Solution was implemented throughout France.

The efforts of the Vichy Regime have been analyzed as a continuation of the Third Republic. This is because the policies under the Regime were already in law but were only being

enforced by the Vichyites. Michael Marrus and Robert Paxton analyzed these similarities in their book "Vichy France and the Jews." They argued that "The change of regime in July 1940 did not mark a radical departure, then, as far as refuge policy was concerned" (Marrus 67). They also argued that policies towards refugees were not different from those of the Third Republic. They were simply a "continuation and reinforcement" of policies (Marrus 68). Due to the enforcement of these policies, the French army was reduced to 125,000 soldiers. The Jews who served in the army were discharged, including the volunteers. By removing the Jewish volunteers from the army, the protection the refugees had while serving in the military was taken as well. Had this protection not been removed, it is possible that the tide of war could have been turned in favor of France.

The CGQJ was founded in 1941, and Xavier Vallat was selected to run the organization by the Vichy Regime. He was a lawyer and devout Catholic. His justification for his anti-Semitic policy was Catholic doctrines and felt his anti-Semitism should be considered "state anti-Semitism" (Moorehead, 22). Vallat did not seem to show any shame in being an anti-Semite. A journal titled "What it Meant to be "a Jew" in Vichy France: Xavier Vallat, State Anti-Semitism, and the Question of Assimilation" highlights Vallat's anti-Semitism. Vallat said to SS Officer Theodor Dannecker, the head of the Paris Judenferat, "I have been an anti-Semite for much longer than you. Besides I could have been your father" (Carroll 1998). In 1941, Vallat passed a law that excluded Jews from the military. He also removed Jews from the census thus not considering them citizens. The organization gained power due to a sweeping amount of anti-Semitic laws passed in the Fall of 1940. Many of the French laws that protected the Jewish population were being repealed. In Robert Paxton's book "Vichy France: Old Guard and New Order," Paxton described how these laws were repealed without any pressure from the Germans.

On October 4, 1940, a law was passed that allowed foreign Jews to be interned in “special camps or assign them to forced residence” (Paxton 174). On October 7 1940, a law that permitted French citizenship to Algerian Jews was repealed. Passing these policies showed that the French government was defining being French as natural born French citizens. In August of 1940, a law was repealed that “penalized anti-Semitic excesses in the press” (Paxton 174). By allowing the press to release Anti-Semitic articles, they could openly criticize and demonize the Jewish people as the Nazis did in Germany. Despite Vallat’s clear anti-Semitist nature, at his trial at Nuremburg for collaborating with the Nazis, he argued that the Jews were better off living under the Vichy government. He justified this statement by citing that 95% of Jews of French nationality were still alive in 1948. Vallat did not discuss the fate of foreign Jews, and this highlights his lack of concern towards the fate of the Jews.

In May of 1942, Vallat was replaced as head of the CGQJ. He was accused of being “too soft” on the Jews (Moorehead, 23). Vallat was replaced by Darquier de Pellepoix. Pellepoix’s anti-Semitism was more extreme than Vallat’s. Pellepoix believed “No Jew should be shaken by the hand” (Moorehead, 23). Pellepoix also did not allow the Jewish people to use their first names. Pellepoix’s efforts to effectively carry out the Final Solution led to the CGQJ to have over one thousand employees working for them. Pellepoix viewed the Jews as enemies that endangered France. On July 16, 1942, Opération Vent Printanier, or Spring Wind in English, was put into action. Nine Thousand French police were ordered to search for twenty-eight thousand Jews that were thought to be hiding. No German officials were present during this raid. The French police were only able to find 12,884 people during this raid, and those who resisted arrest were shot.

The power of the CGQJ was split into branches to attack Jews on legislative and administrative matters. The CGQJ had an administrative cabinet as well. Two of the most vital members of this cabinet were Pierre Chomel de Jarnieu and Lionel Cabany. Jarnieu directed Vichy affairs, and Cabany headed the Paris Cabinet. According to “The Holocaust and the Jews of Marseilles,” Vallat “oversaw the actions of executive, legislative, and financial offices directly” (Ryan, 33). Vallat worked diligently to exclude Jews from every aspect of French culture yet that was not enough for him. Vallat wanted to “establish quotas for all sectors of the economy” (Ryan 34). Vallat claimed that the Jews infiltrated the economy, especially in liberal professions. This ambitious goal led him to establish a second Statut de Juifs, or Status of the Jews, in English. The Office of Economic Aryanization was described as the most powerful branch of the CGQJ. The primary purpose of this branch was to liquidate Jewish property to distribute it amongst the Germans, Vichy officials, and other French citizens that were selected by the officials of CGQJ.

The Aryanization process in Vichy France played a vital role in the Regime, especially within the policies of the CGQJ. The process began in 1940 when the Nazis ordered every Jewish business to register as Jews (Curtis 127). The CGQJ also appointed temporary administrators to the businesses that were stolen from the Jews. Under this law, any contract made after May 23, 1940 would be considered void. Aryanisation sought to exclude Jewish people from everything so that the Aryan race could reign superior. The Vichy government felt depriving Jews of “normal status” was “crucial” (Curtis 123). Michael Curtis’s “Verdict on Vichy” describes the Aryanisation process as having an “extensive range in both the nature of assets and numbers of people affected; the considerable participation for the most part of both governmental and non-governmental French individuals” (Curtis 123). Part of the Aryanisation

process was to take Jewish possessions and redistribute it amongst the Aryans. Curtis explained that no one is sure how far the Aryanisation process went because it was so extensive in its efforts. The efforts were made to strip the Jewish people of everything. This process allowed 67,962 Jewish people's bank accounts to be frozen.

In October of 1941, the CGQI was at the core of liquidating Jewish assets and freezing their accounts. The number of employees of the CGQI expanded rapidly from 1941-1944. In 1941, there were only two-hundred and fifty employees. In 1944, over one thousand employees worked for the CGQI. The expansion of the CGQI showed that the support for them expanded. The CGQI was often helped by citizens who acted as spies for them. Due to the lack of resistance to the CGQI's activities so they could work freely in liquidating Jewish property and aid the Germans in the Final Solution. The main purpose of this organization was to liquidate the Jewish people of their belongings and "nominating provisional administrators of Jewish enterprises" (Curtis 115).

By excluding Jewish people from every aspect of French culture, this exclusion began what is called the Aryanisation Process. The process began in 1940 when the Nazis ordered every Jewish business to register (Curtis 127). The Aryanisation process also allowed the looting of Jewish apartments in occupied France. Over forty apartments were looted, and twenty thousand trainloads of Jewish belongings were sent to German cities for redistribution. After the war, only around forty-five thousand possessions were returned to their owners. There are still fights to return Jewish property to this day. Curtis claims that the Aryanisation process occurred more in the Northern Zone than the Southern Zone (Curtis 125). The idea of Aryanisation was to liquidate the Jewish people of their possessions and reduce them to nothing. Due to the sweeping results of Aryanisation and the press openly criticizing the Jewish people, the French people

were manipulated into thinking that the Jews were not truly French. Under the Militärbefehlshaber in Frankreich, abbreviated as MBF, which was implemented in 1940, the Jews had the option of freely selling their property to non-Jewish people. If they refused to sell, the business was either liquidated or a German would be appointed in place of the Jewish person who ran the business. The second wave of Aryanisation came in 1941, and landlords had the right to evict Jewish residents because they could not pay rent due to their income being frozen. These laws banned Jews from many professions, and they were not allowed to participate in any economic activities. The MBF also forbade “commercial transactions for Jewish businesses for which MCs had not yet been appointed” (Curtis, 129).

The anti-Semitic intentions of the CGQJ are clear in every action and policy implemented. By the end of the war, sixty to sixty-five thousand Jews were deported from France (Paxton, 183). Even though the CGQJ did not deport the Jews themselves, the policies made the implementation of the Final Solution easier. Anti-Semitic collaboration amongst the citizens of France was vital to the CGQJ’s success. This collaboration, along with the xenophobic roots within the Vichy Regime, allowed them to implement the Aryanization process in two waves. At first, the French government negotiated with the Germans that they would round up and deport foreign Jews. Many of the foreign Jews that were deported fled to France from countries that were already occupied by the Germans, such as Germany and Poland. The French Jews, for a time, believed that they were protected under the notion that they were French citizens. However, once the foreign Jews were deported, the Regime began going after French Jews. By going after French Jews, this redefined what the people considered to be a French citizen. The French people initially decided that someone was considered French if they were a naturalized citizen, therefore the foreign Jews meant almost nothing to them. By deporting

French Jews and the non-Jewish citizens' collaborators seemed to show that a citizen could either be French or Jewish, they could not be both under the Vichy Regime.

Even though there was not a lot of resistance to the CGQJ, there were still people who helped the Jews. Some of the officials under the CGQJ falsified papers, misplaced or lost files so they could not be used, or leaked information to the resistance. Some of the police in the Occupied Zone gave warning to the Jews that were going to be arrested soon. This small act of resistance saved around three hundred Jews from deportation. Unfortunately, acts of resistance against Nazi rule was uncommon, and any open attempt to resist the Nazi forces would lead to deportation as well. The Nazi occupation was a fascist system that sought to remove any and all opposition and wanted complete compliance from the people of France.

In "Village of Secrets: Defying the Nazis in Vichy France," by Carol Moorehead, Moorehead recounted some of the resistant movements made against the Vichy Government and the success and failures of the movements. One of these resistance movements was destroyed in January 1943. The CGQI discovered a resistance movement in Clermont-Ferrand. The CGQJ discovered that an "escape network for Jews" was taking place in the mountain villages (Moorehead, 190). They also discovered pro-Jewish propaganda. The CGQJ sent Inspector Léopold Parly to help compile a list of pro-Jewish resisters. During this thorough investigation the CGQJ discovered a "Judeo-Gaullist circle" (Moorehead, 190). This circle was helping hide Jews and forging fake IDs to aid their escape. Parly was a key figure in compiling the list of Jewish sympathizers and snuffing out these secret resistance movements. In his investigation, he found a schoolteacher meeting with other men on the list to compile plots on how to hide the Jews and prevent them from being deported. They also listened to BBC radio at these secret meetings. The men listening to the BBC is significant because it showed that they supported the

Allied Powers efforts against the Axis Powers. Being pro-Allied Powers in an Axis-Power occupied territory was considered taboo and treason. One of the members of the resistance movement was found inside one of the churches when CGQJ officers stormed in search of the pastor. The pastor of the church was arrested and so were the Jewish refugees that the church was hiding.

In 1943, the CGQJ sent out a public opinion survey because they were worried about the reaction to some of the anti-Semitic measures they were taking. The survey contained both general and specific questions regarding the policies implemented. The first question asked if the person likes the Jews. More than half answered no, or they were indifferent to the Jewish people. Only 364 people indicated that they liked the Jews, 1,553 people said they did not like the Jews, and 1,065 claimed to be indifferent (Poliakov, 137). With these numbers, the CGQJ created percentages and titles for each group. The people who answered that they liked the Jews were given the title Philosemites. Only 12.05% of people who participated were considered Philosemites. Those who answered that they did not like the Jews were classified as anti-Semites. 51.41% of participants were classified as anti-Semites based on their answers. Participants who felt they were indifferent were allowed to indicate that they were indifferent. They were classified as Indifferent in the analysis. Only 36.51% of participants were categorized as indifferent.

After the responses were recorded, and the survey takers were lumped into categories of Philosemites, Indifferent, and anti-Semite. The survey did a socioeconomic analysis on the survey responses. Based on the analysis, wealth did not seem to play a significant role in the way people responded because more than half, or close to half, of the responses indicated that anti-Semitic tendencies were in every category. The survey analyzed income and split up annual income into categories of “100,000-200,000” francs, “50,000-100,000” francs, “30,000-50,000”

francs, and “15,000-30,000” francs (Poliakov, 147-48). The only category where the percentage of people indicating they did not like the Jews was under 50% were those who made 15,000-30,000 francs per year and that percentage was 49.93%, which was still close to 50% (Poliakov, 148). The most interesting part of the analysis is when the answers were analyzed by occupation. The most surprising find in this analysis was 81.48% of students answered that they did not like the Jews (Poliakov, 148). Examining occupations is important to understanding public opinion of the Jews because the survey broke down specific reasons why someone indicated they did not like the Jews. Some of the more popular reasons have to do with economics. As a result of economic reasons as a factor of anti-Semitism, this survey showed that people of every type of economic class thought the Jews impacted them.

The survey also gave percentages of regions throughout France. The highest percentage of anti-Semites were found in Montpellier, which is in South France, with 90.40%. The second highest percentage was found in Limoges, Southwest-Central France, with 85.66% (Poliakov, 148). The regions polled in France were all over France, but the anti-Semitic answers still remained the highest in responses in every region polled. In the Clermont-Ferrand region, only 2.33% of responders were considered Philosemites (Poliakov, 148). The low percentage of Philosemites makes the resistance movements made in this region significant, but it also made it more dangerous as well. The members of the resistance had to be careful because they had to make sure collaborators did not reveal their plans to the CGQJ. Even though the resistance movement in Clermont-Ferrand failed, it is important to acknowledge it, because the individuals who participated in the resistance risked their lives to stand up for what they felt was right even when they were outnumbered. Marseilles was another key city in the Vichy Regime because of the collaborative efforts the citizens of Marseilles made. According to the survey, 47.62% of

citizens in Marseilles were categorized as anti-Semites, and 37.17% were categorized as indifferent. These numbers are important to note because Marseille is a port city and it would have been the perfect place for acts of resistance because Jews would have been able to escape on boats. Even though Marseille had a majority of anti-Semites in the population, resistance movements were still made despite the difficulties they knew they would endure.

The second question on the survey was to give the reason for their attitude towards the Jewish people. The number one answer among the anti-Semitic response was economic reasons. The second most popular answer was that the Jews were “The cause of France’s troubles” (Poliakov, 139). Other reasons people gave were that the Jews were foreigners and would never be considered French, the Jews are dishonest and corrupt, and the Jews are a threat to the French race. The top reason Jewish supporters gave, however small their supporters were, answer was that they felt the Jewish people needed to be protected against fascism and the Germans. Other reasons given were the good qualities the Jews possess, such as intelligence, honesty, and courtesy. Other responders felt the Jews were human like everyone else. They argued that they had Jewish friends and felt their friends did nothing wrong. Another reason given was that the Jews had done nothing wrong to them, and their participation in the military should be a consideration in why the Jews are not bad people. Some people also cited French hospitality and being a good Christian as reasons for liking the Jewish people. The main reason those who were indifferent gave was that they did not know any Jewish people, therefore, they are not familiar with them. Another reason the indifferent group gave is that there were both good and bad Jews, therefore “The good Jews ought not be punished for the bad ones” (Poliakov, 142). The third most common answer parallels one of the answers given by those who were in favor of the Jews, the Jews are “people like everyone else,” and “I do not make any distinction between a Jew and a

Frenchmen,” (Poliakov, 142). This is interesting because their response could have also been interpreted as a Jewish supporter response, but it was put in the indifferent responses as well. The response that the Jews were human like everyone else is the third most popular answer on the indifferent and supporter list of responses. Another interesting response by the indifferent people were that there was not a reason to persecute them. They felt that the Jews should not be attacked when bad Frenchmen are still walking free. Other indifferent people felt that persecutions were not the way the French operate and persecuting the Jews would only turn them into martyrs. The third question in the survey was “Are you in favor of the measures taken against the Jews in the Free Zone?” (Poliakov, 143). The percentage of people who voted in favor of the measures taken was 51.17%, which closely resembles the number of anti-Semitic answers in the first question, 51.41% (Poliakov, 144). The number of people against the measures is significantly higher than those who were considered Jewish supporters in the first question. The percentage of people against the measures was 30.83%, and the number of people who were considered full supporters of the Jews was 12.05% (Poliakov, 144). This could mean that some of the people who were categorized as indifferent in the first question voted completely against the measures in this question. For this question, only 17% of the answers were categorized as indifferent in this question (Poliakov, 144). In the first question, 36.51% of the answers were categorized as indifferent (Poliakov, 144).

Questions four and five asked about the sufficiency of the anti-Semitic measures against the Jews and were only asked to those categorized as anti-Semites by the survey. Question four asked “If you are in favor of the measures taken against the Jews by the Government in the Free Zone, do you consider them to be insufficient” (Poliakov, 144). Question five asked “If you do not consider these measures to be sufficient, what do you advocate: (a) From the commercial

point of view? (b) From the national point of view?” (Poliakov, 144). Out of all of the categorized anti-Semites, 66.32% felt the measures taken against the Jews were insufficient. The anti-Semites who felt the measures should be taken further gave specifics of what they would like to see implemented. The importance of public opinion and percentages for the CGQJ is shown. Despite the Vichy government being a fascist system, public opinion was valued by the CGQJ. In “Vichy France and the Jews” by Michael Marrus and Robert Paxton, they point out that even though this survey was conducted it “violated nearly every cannon of scientific poll taking” (Marrus 181). The employees who carried out the survey were not professionals, rather they were CGQJ employees. Marrus and Paxton also reveal that it is possible that the true nature of those who took part in the poll concealed their true nature, thus skewing the anti-Semitic numbers to a much higher rate. It is possible that the Vichy Regime used the numbers to carry out anti-Semitic policies, even though any poll carried out under the Vichy government was not considered valid. The survey allowed the CGQJ, to freely carry out the policies they wanted to because the amount of support for the anti-Semitic outweighed the opposition.

The CGQJ was an important part of the Vichy Regime’s history because the organization had so much influence on the course of events in France during World War II. The rapid expansion of the organization, as well as an abundance of willing collaborators, allowed the CGQJ to set policies and rule France with ease. Even though this power was strong, there were still resistance movements that deserve to be acknowledged. The CGQJ played a significant role in the Final Solution and had over one thousand employees by the end of the war. The infamy of this organization will never be forgotten, and the blood of innocent Jews will always be on their hands.

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