

Beyond Barbie

The exposure of French officials who willingly collaborated with the Nazis is at least as important as the trial and conviction of the German Klaus Barbie, says Serge Klarsfeld. That is the message that Serge Klarsfeld delivered when he met Post European correspondent MEIR MERHAV.

HALF A CENTURY has gone by since the German nation perverted itself into a criminal conspiracy against humanity. After the creation of Hitler's SS-state, many people in the nations that were brought under its heel were corrupted and turned into collaborators. Half a century — and what that state did and what it stood for remain parts of an unsettled account. The latest entry in the ledger is named Klaus Barbie, and the auditors who opened that black page of Germany's and France's past are Beate and Serge Klarsfeld.

The story of this courageous couple is well known. Single-mindedly, and practically single-handedly, they have devoted — and, more than once, risked — their lives to turn page after page of the sinister record, exposure of the criminals, not mere revenge, was their purpose, the idea being to shatter indifference and that abrogation of moral responsibility that licensed the deeds of those felons in the past and tolerated their subsequent reacceptance into human society.

The first blow in the cause to which the Klarsfelds have dedicated themselves was struck in 1968, when Beate publicly slapped Chancellor Kurt Georg Kiesinger in the face. By standing trial for that act of protest, she put her prosecutors in the dock and forced the Germans to realize that they had raised a former radio propagandist of Hitler to be their head of government. Again and again, for 15 years, she and her husband Serge have kept up their fight against the resurgence of Nazism and the rehabilitation of its criminals.

Their struggle goes on, for the account remains unsettled — unsettled for the Jewish people, who will never be able to close the book — and forget that they were singled out for systematic extermination and mutilated forever, unsettled for Germany, which cannot avoid the burden of its past, and unsettled also for France, which still hasn't completed its reckoning with itself.

Barbie's real crimes against humanity, Serge Klarsfeld says, were not his repression of the French *resistants*, whose lives were often spared if they talked. His crimes were what he did to the Jews. "What would have happened," Klarsfeld asks, "if among

the group arrested with Jean Moulin there had been a Levy or a Cohen? Would he be alive and well like Dr. Dugoujon, whose clinic at Caluire served as a meeting place, or like Raymond Aubrac or Andre Lassaragne? Would he be alive like

Christian Pineau, who was one of the last to see Jean Moulin alive in the prison of Montluc?"

It is not the collaboration of traitors to the Resistance that France must face, but the willing, organized and voluntary collaboration that the Barbies got from French officials in the execution of the "Final Solution."

Serge Klarsfeld hopes that before the trial of Barbie, that dark chapter in France's past will be illuminated by the trials of Jean Leguay, Rene Bousquet and Maurice Papon. The trial and condemnation of Barbie the German would leave France untouched. Not so the trial of the three Frenchmen.

The first, Leguay, was the delegate of the Vichy police to the occupied zone of France in 1942-44. He delivered thousands of Jews into the hands of the Nazis for deportation. Until his indictment on the basis of evidence submitted by Serge Klarsfeld, he was a prominent businessman in the U.S.

Bousquet was Leguay's superior, the chief of police of Vichy. His exposure by Klarsfeld forced him to resign his directorship of the powerful Banque d'Indochine et de Suez.

Maurice Papon, secretary-general of the Bordeaux Prefecture from 1942 to 1944, assisted in the deportation of some 1,500 Jews. Under the presidency of Giscard d'Hstaing, he rose to become minister of the budget. After the war, he was twice exonerated from the charge of collaboration, for services rendered to the Resistance. He is the most prominent example of those who veered with the wind and served whoever held power, who always did their "duty," however vile.

THE BATTLE of the Klarsfelds is against indifference. Collective amnesia, moral torpor and people who place political considerations above historical and ethical responsibility. It is concentrated against Nazism and the rehabilitation of its criminals, against anti-Semitism and the neo-Nazi resurgence; it supports

Israel as the ultimate guarantor of the Jewish people's survival.

For Beate Klarsfeld, born in 1939, that struggle is an act of atonement for deeds of which she and her generation are not guilty. For her, it is a moral duty to hammer home the awareness of what the older generation knew but buried in silence. Her father-in-law, Arno Klarsfeld, was a volunteer in the French Army, and escaped from German captivity to join the French Resistance. He was caught and deported to Auschwitz and murdered in 1943. For Serge, it is a moral imperative to ensure that the triple menace of Nazism, genocide and anti-Semitism will never again threaten to destroy the Jewish people.

The Klarsfelds realized that at the beginning of the relentless struggle that, in a cynical and indifferent world, they could only succeed by adopting shock tactics. They deliberately broke the law so as to make the law prevail, got themselves arrested and tried so as to make their trials an indictment of the real criminals, and organized the disturbance of decorous court proceedings so as to compel hidebound prosecutors and judges to dispense justice rather than dry paragraphs of law.

Yet these tactics were always only the high point of a previous, painstaking assembly of documents and incontrovertible legal evidence — the work of months and years of patient detective work, of physical exertion, ceaseless travel, and risk.

Over the years, the work of the Klarsfelds has made lesser people. Jews and non-Jews, bow their heads in homage and admiration.

WITH OR without support, the Klarsfelds' hunt is approaching its end. Nature decrees it. But is it really the end? The Klarsfelds have directed their fight against the murderers of the Jews, against the planners and ideologues, the administrators and executioners who personified the "Final Solution."

But their struggle has — as it must have — a wider human dimension, which gives it lasting meaning. It goes beyond the ethnocentricity of fighting against anti-Semitism, and beyond the battle against Nazism regarded as historically *sui generis* and thus not comparable to previous or later atrocities of war and tyranny.