

France Will Remember Jews Sent to Nazi Camps by Vichy

By ALAN RIDING
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PARIS, Feb. 4 — Often criticized for refusing to apologize for the deportation of Jews from France during World War II, President Francois Mitterrand has created a national day of remembrance of the racist and anti-Semitic crimes carried out by the collaborationist Vichy regime.

The decision, which was warmly welcomed by Jewish leaders here, was seen as an important step in France's gradual acceptance of the role played by French citizens — as well as by Nazi occupation forces — in the deportation of some 76,000 Jews from France to German death camps.

"We now have an explicit and solemn condemnation of the crimes of Vichy," said Serge Klarsfeld, a French lawyer who heads the Association of Children of Jews Deported from France and has led the fight to bring surviving French war criminals to trial. "We cannot ask for much more."

A presidential decree signed Tuesday said that victims of racist and anti-Semitic persecution here between 1940 and 1944 would be remembered in ceremonies throughout the country every year on July 16, the anniversary of the first mass arrests of Jews by French police officers in Paris in 1942.

Monuments to Be Erected

The decree also said monuments would be erected at the Vel d'Hiv, a cycling stadium where the first detainees were taken in Paris, as well as at one of the camps where Jews were concentrated and at a house in the Rhone valley where Jewish children were held before deportation.

Further, commemorative plaques would be placed in every French department. A special committee headed by the Secretary of State for Veterans and including Jewish representatives will decide the text that will appear on each plaque in coordination with the local authorities.

The decree was widely viewed as an attempt to appease Jewish and other groups that have accused the French leader of ambivalence toward the Vichy regime and its chief, Marshal Henri Philippe Petain. Although he worked briefly for Vichy as a young man, Mr. Mitterrand later emerged as an important Resistance figure.

Urged by a committee of prominent intellectuals to apologize for the arrest and deportation of thousands of Jews, Mr. Mitterrand argued last year that neither the French nation nor the French Republic could accept blame for crimes carried out by a temporary and illegitimate government.

Protest Over Petain Wreath

As recently as Nov. 11, the President also provoked a storm of protests when he ordered that an Armistice Day

wreath in his name be placed on Marshal Petain's tomb, the argument being that he was honoring the French military hero of World War I and not the political traitor of World War II.

In contrast, when a French court last year decided that crimes against humanity could not be brought against a Vichy official, Paul Touvier, the Government successfully appealed the ruling. The case against Mr. Touvier, who is accused of ordering the execution of seven Jews, is scheduled to be heard in April.

Jean Kahn, president of the Council of Jewish Institutions in France, said today that he considered the decision to create a national day of remembrance to represent a full condemnation of the Vichy crimes, "something we have long been waiting for."

Mr. Kahn said he was particularly pleased by the decree because he understood it would also lead to the teaching in schools of both the "shameful" history of the period and of the need for tolerance, "all the more necessary given the recent outbursts of racism, anti-Semitism and xenophobia in Europe."

Mr. Klarsfeld said he hoped Mr. Mitterrand's action would put an end to "the misunderstanding" with the Jews in France. "It's an important stage in the fight to recover our memory, one in which the place of Vichy in our history is at stake."

Welcoming what it called a "symbolic act," the Union of Jewish Students said educational work still had to be done before the French people learned the full truth of its wartime history. Later this month, the union will lead 500 French youths on a tour of French internment camps and deportation centers used between 1940 and 1944.