

Slaughter of the Innocents

By Serge Klarsfeld

Fifty years ago tomorrow, the Soviet Army liberated Auschwitz, where the Nazis killed perhaps 1.3 million Jews. "Liberated," though, is a misleading term. On Jan. 26, 1945, the S.S., fleeing from the Red Army, slaughtered thousands it had driven out of the Polish concentration camp.

Of the 69,000 French Jews sent to Auschwitz and other camps, 10,800 were under the age of 18. The children were deported by the Vichy Government from March 27, 1942, to Aug. 18, 1944 — more than two months after D-Day. Of 2,500 camp survivors, a handful were children.

I published "The Memorial of the Jewish Children Deported From France" in October (only in French). My aim in putting together this 1,552-page book of text and photographs was to rescue these children from oblivion — to permit them to leave a permanent mark in history as individuals and as a group.

I also wished to heighten the nation's awareness of the Vichy Government's crime in associating itself with the Nazis. For it took a reluctant France half a century to even begin facing up to its collaboration with the Nazi occupiers.

The French long tried to delude themselves and others that the deportations had been entirely a Gestapo operation. But it was Vichy's head of state, Marshal Henri Philippe Petain, and his Prime Minister, Pierre Laval, who authorized the collaborationist administration and its police to persecute and arrest the Jews who

Serge Klarsfeld, a Nazi hunter, has published a dozen books on the fate of French Jews during World War II.

filled German trains that carried them to the Final Solution.

It was not until April 1994 that the first Frenchman was convicted of crimes against humanity — Paul Touvier, who at 79 years of age was condemned to life imprisonment for ordering the execution of seven Jews near Lyons in 1944.

Regrettably, a historic trial of Vichy's anti-Jewish policy will never take place. That possibility ended when Rene Bousquet, who headed the Vichy police in 1942 and 1943, was assassinated in Paris in 1993 by a deranged gunman (who was not Jewish, by the way). Mr. Bousquet had been charged with crimes against humanity by ordering the arrests of 4,000 Jewish children. He had also been accused of masterminding the first big roundup of Jews, on July 16, 1942, when 13,000 were arrested in Paris; of these, 8,000 were taken to the Velodrome d'Hiver, a cycling stadium, and held in inhuman conditions before being deported.

In this book, all the faces of the children, from infants to teenagers, accuse President Francois Mitterrand of betraying the innocent, for he remained a friend of Mr. Bousquet until the assassination.

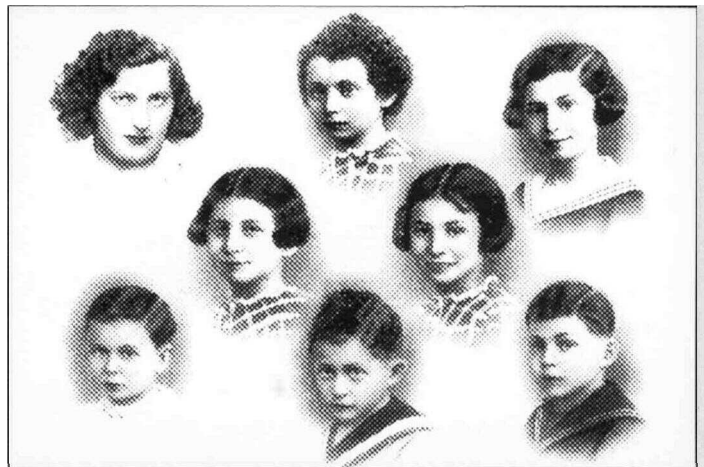
By advertising in Jewish publications in Europe, Israel and the United States, I managed to gather some 1,000 photographs of deported French children murdered for the sole crime of having been born Jewish. A few of them accompany this article.

The memorial book contains the name, place and date of birth, address at the time of arrest and the date and number of the deportation convoy of each victim.

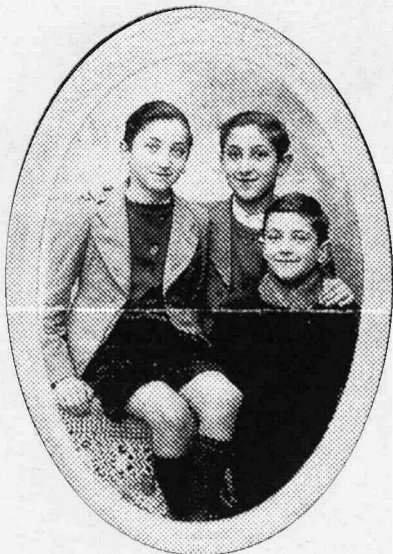
It was very hard to pry out of the French authorities the identity cards of deported children and the photos of them taken in French concentration camps. Today, this archival resistance is not only absurd, it even supports the Nazis' effort to wipe out evidence of the Holocaust. D



Infants at the concentration camp at Gurs, France.



Ida Epelbaum and her seven children.



From left, Isaac, Maurice and Willy Bajroch.



From left, Regine Davidovitz, Bina-Berthe and Fajga-Fanny Apelojg.



Yolande Bing.