France's existentialist 'radicals': Vichy collaborators on the Left Bank

by D. Stephen Pepper

The Left Bank
by Herbert Lottman,
Houghton Miflin Co.,
New York, 1982, 319 pp., $15.95.

"We were never so free as we were under the Occupation," wrote Jean Paul Sartre shortly after the liberation of Paris. In the same spirit André Gide, another hero of the French existentialist left, wrote in his diary in August 1941: "Although it may seem strange to one who comes back to it after a long absence, Paris gives the impression of ease and even of freedom."

The existentialist philosophical outlook of these degenerates is perfectly compatible with fascism, as their collaboration with the Vichy regime attests. For them, "freedom" is the right to do as you please, no matter what the consequences for the human race.

Today's "peace movement" and the Green Party hold up Sartre and company as the brave Resistance fighters who used ideas, words, and art as others used guns and bullets. As *The Left Bank* usefully demonstrates, nothing could be further from the truth. Not only did the existentialists collaborate cheerfully with the fascists; once the Germans withdrew, they adroitly shifted their allegiance to the Communists.

Today, the fascist Greens in West Germany, the self-proclaimed spiritual heirs to the legacy of Sartre and Gide, are preparing the downfall of the Bonn republic, in an alliance with Soviet imperialism. For those who believe that today's "Red-Green" alliance is unique or unusual, there is a lesson to be learned from the history of the Left Bank crowd.

American free-lance journalist Herbert Lottman tells the story, and if you have not heard of his book, this is not surprising, since almost immediately after it appeared, it dropped out of sight, not to be found in any of the book shops which otherwise prominently display every bit of effluvia that puffs the mythology of left intellectuals' opposition to Hitler.

Existentialist philosopher Jean-Paul Sartre, one of the Left Bank crowd, the forebears of today's Green fascists.

The truth is quite different. Take the case of Sartre and his mistress, Simone de Beauvoir. Beauvoir worked for the Vichy regime during the entire Occupation, producing a cultural program for the Pétain government's Radio Nationale. As Lottman notes drily, "The Sartre-Beauvoir personal code of behavior allowed her to work for this propaganda organization: 'It all depended on what one did there.'"

Even more revealing is the fact that Sartre's literary reputation began during the Occupation. *Les Mouches, The Flies*, was first produced under the Nazis at the theater once called the Sarah Bernhardt, but whose name had been removed because the actress was Jewish. The *Pariser Zeitung*, the newspaper of the German occupation forces, called the play "a theatrical event of the first order." Camus's *The Stranger* and *The Myth of Sisyphus* and Sartre's *Being and Nothingness* were all published by Gallimard during the Occupation. When *No Exit* was staged at a Left Bank theater, it was such a

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critical success that one observer wrote, "It is the event that opened the golden age of Saint-Germain-des-Près . . . to the drawing rooms of Paris and of France."

No sooner was the war over than Sartre and Beauvoir became "political." They had taken no part in pre-war anti-fascist movements and had been passive, to say the least, during the Occupation. But now that they had friends in power, "politics became a family affair and we intended to be involved," Beauvoir explained. The guiding principle of their politics was anti-Americanism. At first, they went through various "positions" to maintain their "independence" from the Communists, but in 1951, Sartre abandoned any such subtleties and the former collaborationist became a full-fledged hero of the Stalinist order. In 1952, he published *The Communists and Peace*, and was the hero of the International Peace Congress organized by the Soviets in Vienna.

Pablo Picasso, another god enshrined in the Left Bank's Pantheon, had a similarly sordid political career. He lived in Paris throughout the Occupation. It was said of him that "he never turned away an art-lover in uniform." Indeed, Lottman notes that "his studio became an obligatory port of call for cultured German officers, as well as French admirers, and it got so crowded at times that he could not work." That he was an institution protected by the fascists is shown by the fact that his vast personal collection of paintings remained undisturbed in the vault of the Banque de France.

In return, Picasso never engaged in political activity, never uttered a political thought. The sole exception, and a bland one at that, is that he signed the petition to free the surrealist poet Max Jacob, who, although a converted Catholic, was born a Jew and was therefore carted off to a concentration camp. When asked to intervene directly with his German friends, Picasso replied sanguinely, "Max is an angel, he'll fly over the wall," and returned to his lunch.

Some weeks after the liberation of Paris, Picasso joined the Communist Party, whereupon the party newspaper *L'Humanité* produced the following headline, "The Greatest Living Painter of Today, Picasso Has Joined the Party of French Resistance." The closest brush with resistance Picasso ever had was when he was fined for eating in a black-market restaurant.

Picasso, like Sartre, became an icon of the "peace movement." In 1946, he designed the dove of peace that became the world-wide symbol of the communist-organized postwar disarmament movement. Picasso remarked cynically that the dove was known to be a most warlike bird.

Finally, what of André Malraux, that exemplary figure of a left intellectual, who, like Jacques Soustelle, wound up in the Gaullist camp? During the war, he abandoned his Jewish wife to live in luxury on the Riviera in the villa of Dorothy Bussy (the sister of the British appeaser Lytton Strachey, and herself the translator of Gide). There he lived with his anti-Semitic mistress, attended by a butler. When asked to join the Resistance he promised to do so—as soon as the Americans had landed.

Security emergency

by Susan Maitra in New Delhi

During his recent visit to Tripura, Indian Home Minister P. V. Narasimha Rao urged the CPI-M-ruled Tripura government to rise above petty partisan politics and deploy the army to counter the insurgent activities in the tiny state bordering on Bangladesh. New Delhi's subsequent decision to send a high-level team headed by an army major general to Tripura to evolve a plan to stamp out the tribal insurgency is a clear indication of its concern over the developing situation.

Tripura is the stronghold of the Communist Party of India-Marxist (CPI-M), which came to power with a sweeping mandate in 1978. The Left Front headed by the CPI-M won 56 of 60 seats, wiping out the nationally ruling Congress (I) Party in the process. In the next Assembly elections, held in January 1983, the strength of the Left Front was somewhat reduced; the Congress (I), which had no representation in 1978, secured 12 seats and the Tripura Upajati (TUJS), a party consisting of Chakma and Jamatia tribes, won six seats leaving the rest to be won by the Left Front.

But six years of significant electoral majorities have not helped the CPI-M government stabilize the state. Instead, insurgent raids have become endemic, and law and order within the state has continued to deteriorate.

Increasing insurgency

In recent months, many incidents have been reported by Indian papers, centered on the insurgent activities of the Tripuri National Volunteers (TNV), led by one Bijoy Hrangkhal. Ambushes, raids, and murders were perpetrated by the TNV even before the Panchayat (Village Council) elections held in June of this year, but since then, the frequency of the TNV raids has increased.

The TNV came into existence in 1978 when Bijoy Hrangkhal, a Baptist educated in Christian schools, broke away from the TUJS and formed the militant underground arm of the tribals. His purpose: to fight the "domination" of the Bengali settlers. A small princely state during the British Raj days, Tripura is now a victim of violent tribal reaction to the influx of new settlers from outside. Tripura is surrounded on three sides by Bangladesh, and is linked to India only by a tiny border with Assam and Mizoram. The trickle of immigrants from East Bengal in the pre-partition days swelled to a flood after 1947, when hundreds of thousands of Bengali Hindu refugees from then-East Pakistan (Bangladesh) fearing persecution crossed over into Tripura. Before the 1947