

Jean-Paul Cointet, Les hommes de Vichy. L'illusion du pouvoir, Paris (Perrin) 2017, 375 p., ISBN 978-2-262-04929-4, EUR 23,90.

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One of the views about Vichy France now well-established in the literature is that it was not a bloc. It included traditionalists and modernisers, soldiers and trade-unionists, parliamentarians and authoritarians. Jean-Paul Cointet has made a number of important interventions in the history of Vichy, from »Pierre Laval«¹ and »La Légion française des combattants«² to »Sigmaringen: une France en Allemagne«³ and »Expier Vichy, L'épuration en France, 1943–1958«⁴. His new book adopts a prosopographical approach to shed new light on Vichy. He takes 26 case studies, and declares from the start, »Entre tous ces hommes, il serait vain de rechercher identité de vues et unité de pensée« (p. 10).

Having said that, Cointet arranges his characters into six categories. To begin with there are the »Fondateurs et piliers« – Philippe Pétain, Maxime Weygand, François Darlan and Pierre Laval. Then come »les conseillers du Prince«, who were very much needed because Pétain was not a politician – Henry du Moulin de Labarthète, Lucien Romier, Henri Moysset and René Gillouin. Third, »les doctrinaires« – Henri Massis, Jacques Chevalier, Xavier Vallat and tennis champion Jean Borotra. Fourth, »les épurateurs«, including law professors Raphaël Alibert and Joseph Barthélemy but also the technocrat Pierre Pucheu, administrator René Bousquet and soldier Joseph Darnand. Fifth, there are »les croisés de l'Europe nouvelle«, most of whom finished up at the château de Sigmaringen – Fernand de Brinon, Marcel Déat, Jacques Benoist-Méchin, Paul Marion, Abel Bonnard, and Jean Bichelonne. Philippe Henriot never left Paris. Sixth and finally, »les désillusionnés«, of which there are only two: François Valentin, leader of the Légion française des combattants, and François Mitterrand. One might have imagined there were more disillusioned Vichyists. Naturally, there is pressure on space but the absence among »les croisés de l'Europe nouvelle« of Jacques Doriot is striking.

The obvious question to ask is: how does this approach sharpen our understanding of Vichy. The 20 of 25 pages devoted to the »Fondateurs et piliers« are not going to tell us much that is new. On the other hand, the section on the *éminences grises*, the conseillers du Prince, has a good deal of material that is unfamiliar. The prosopographical approach allows us to trace the paths of these individuals to power: many were indeed the »battus aux élections« who were having their revenge, others were convinced pacifists after their experience in the First World War. We are introduced to the varied *imaginaires* of Vichy's personnel: the



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¹ Jean-Paul Cointet, Pierre Laval, Paris 1993.

² Id., La Légion française des combattants. La tentation du fascisme, Paris 1995.

³ Id., Sigmaringen. Une France en Allemagne, septembre 1944–avril 1945, Paris 2003.

⁴ Id., Expier Vichy. L'épuration en France, 1943–1958, Paris 2008.



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Romantic, aesthetic cult of Nazi Germany in the case of Benoist-Méchin, the Catholic-conservative views of a Francoist like Henri Massis. The fine-grained analysis allows us to see which individual was responsible for which speech of Pétain or which of his acts. Du Moulin was behind the speech of 10 October 1940 calling for Franco-German collaboration while Romier and Moysset drafted the »vent mauvais« speech of 12 August 1941. Moysset was very much behind the Charte du travail, Barthélemy and Pucheu invented the Sections spéciales at the courts of appeal which dispensed retro-active justice, while Vallat drafted the second »statut des juifs«.

The prosopographical approach also allows insights into some of the personal qualities or quirks of many of these individuals. Weygand was a tea-totaller while Laval smoked two or three packets of cigarettes a day and rarely offered them around. Admiral Darlan had no academic qualifications, not even the *certificat d'études*, while Bichelonne was a brilliant engineer who relaxed by solving mathematical problems. Pucheu was a fine footballer, while Déat, when he finally became a minister in March 1944, was presented with the complete works of Goethe in 36 volumes by the German embassy. We are not told whether he read them.

The same approach, on the other hand, makes it difficult to trace who was in which camp. Darlan's men included Benoist-Méchin, Pucheu, Marion, and Jacques Barnaud, who is not included in the collection. Laval's team included Romier and Barthélemy, who were close to Pétain, together with Bichelonne, Bonnard, and Bousquet, who are included, and Georges Hilaire and Hubert Lagardelle, who are not. Conflicts, as between Weygand and Laval, were fierce. But networks and rivalries are not at the centre of this study.

One dimension that might have been more developed is that of gender and sexuality. Bousquet and de Brinon had girlfriends, while Bonnard and Benoist-Méchin were gay. Bonnard was obsessed by questions of masculinity and one of Cointet's best lines is that »Pétain refuse à confier la jeunesse à un homme qui aime à la fréquenter un peu trop« (p. 327). Laval had no such qualms. Completely absent, except as mistresses, are women. The title refers to »Les hommes de Vichy«, but it is unclear whether »hommes« is used in a gender-neutral or gender-specific sense. Much has been written about the gendering of Vichy, women under Vichy, and women in the Résistance, but were any women »pillars« or »doctrinaires« or »counsellors« of Vichy? The question deserves at least discussion.



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