

The War Has Taken Place

Events kept making it less and less probable that peace could be maintained. How could we have waited so long to decide to go to war? It is no longer comprehensible that certain of us accepted Munich as a chance to test German good will. The reason was that we were not guided by the facts. We had secretly resolved to know nothing of violence and unhappiness as elements of history because we were living in a country too happy and too weak to envisage them. Distrusting the facts had even become a duty for us. We had been taught that wars grow out of misunderstandings which can be cleared up and accidents which can be averted through patience and courage. We were attending an old school in which generations of socialist professors had been trained. They had experienced World War I, and their names were inscribed by entire classes on the memorials to the dead. But we had learned that memorials to the dead are impious because they make heroes out of victims. We were encouraged to suspend the history which had already been made, to recapture the moment when the Trojan War might still not have taken place and a free act might still, in a single stroke, have exploded all the exterior fatalities. This optimistic philosophy, which reduced human society to a sum of consciousnesses always ready for peace and happiness, was in fact the philosophy of a barely victorious nation, an imagined compensation for the memories of 1914. We knew that concentration camps existed, that the Jews were being persecuted, but these certainties belonged to the world of thought. We were not as yet living face-to-face with cruelty and death: we had not as yet been given the choice of submitting to them or confronting them. Outside the peaceful garden of our school where the fountain immemorially and everlastingly murmured, there awaited us for our vacation of '39 that other garden which was France, the France of walking trips and youth hostels, which was as self-evident as the earth itself—or so we thought. We lived in a certain area of peace, experience, and freedom, formed by a combination of exceptional circumstances. We did not know that this was a soil to be defended but thought it the natural lot of men. Even those of us who, better informed by their travels or made sensitive to Nazism by their birth or already equipped with a more accurate philosophy, no longer separated their personal fate from European history, even they did not know how right they were. Debating with them as we came back together,

we justified the objections: the die has not yet been cast; history has not yet been written. And they answered us in conversational tones. From our birth we had been used to handling freedom and to living an individual life. How then could we have known that these were hard to come by? How could we have learned to commit our freedom in order to preserve it? We were consciousnesses naked before the world. How could we have known that this individualism and this universalism had their place on the map? What makes our landscape of 1939 inconceivable to us and puts it once and for all beyond our grasp is precisely the fact that we were not conscious of it as a landscape. In the world in which we lived, Plato was as close to us as Heidegger, the Chinese as close as the French—and in reality one was as far away as the other. We did not know that this was what it was to live in peace, in France, and in a certain world situation.

Whether by chance or by design, the representatives whom Germany sent among us were ambiguous. Bremer, a lecturer at the University of Paris, revered the values of war, consorted with Montherlant, and was to make some of the ties he had formed before the war useful to his government when he came back here in 1940 as cultural attaché. But in 1938 he was fond of saying he was an “old radical.” By talking loud enough, one could get him to back down on the principal articles of Nazism. He showed surprise and injured feelings one day when, as he was speaking of the Spanish government officials and insistently calling them “Reds,” we asked him to take his propaganda elsewhere. I witnessed his dismay when, in 1938, he had to leave France to put in a period of military service in Germany. He believed—as much as a man of his sort can believe in anything—Germany’s “European” propaganda; or at least he wanted to believe in it, since it allowed him to reconcile his pleasure at living in France with his loyalty to the government of his country. One morning in March 1939, I entered the room of another Parisian German to tell him of the occupation of Prague. He leaped up, ran to the map of Europe (which he did have on the wall), and said, with every intonation of sincerity, “But that is mad! That is impossible!” Naivete? Hypocrisy? Probably neither. These fellows said what they thought, but they didn’t think anything very clearly, and they kept themselves in the dark to avoid a choice between their humanism and their government, a choice by which they would have lost their respect either for themselves or for their country. There was only one solution to their inner debate: a German victory. When they came back to Paris in 1940, squared away with their country now that they had followed it into war, they were of course prepared to “collaborate” with France (within the limits imposed upon them by the German high command and Nazi policies) and to forget the military interlude. Before 1939 their slackness led them to choose to represent Germany in Paris; this

played a part in the propaganda, and their irresolution sustained our unawareness. After 1940 their good feelings were supposed to serve the same ends, and they lent themselves half-consciously to this game until the day total mobilization caught them up, hurling Bremer to the Russian front where he met his death and the other to the African front where, it is said, he was severely burned. So it is that history attracts and seduces individuals. Thus when we look closely at things, we find culprits nowhere but accomplices everywhere; so it is that we all played a part in the events of 1939. The only difference between our Germans and ourselves was that they had had Nazism right under their noses, and as yet we had not. They could not have been unaware of how they were being used; we had not yet learned that game.

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Our being in uniform did not essentially change our way of thinking during the winter of 1939–40. We still had the leisure to think of others as separate lives, of the war as a personal adventure; and that strange army considered itself a sum of individuals. Even when we worked with a will at the job of war, we did not feel involved, and all our standards were still those of peacetime. Our colonel had a 155 fired to disperse a German patrol near our position, and a captain was detailed to recover the shoulder straps and papers of two dead Germans: we were as bemused over those stretchers as we would have been over a deathbed. We lingered over that German lieutenant who had lain dying in the barbed wire, a bullet in his stomach, and had cried out, “French soldiers, come get a dying man” (it was night, our position was isolated, and we had been ordered not to go out before daybreak). We looked long and compassionately at the narrow chest which the uniform barely covered in that near-zero cold, at the ash-blond hair, the delicate hands, as his mother or wife might have done.

After June of 1940, however, we really entered the war, for from then on we were no longer permitted to treat the Germans we met in the street, subway, or movies as human beings. If we had done so, if we had wanted to distinguish Nazis from Germans, to look for the student beneath the lieutenant, the peasant or working man beneath the soldier, they would have had only contempt for us and would have considered it a recognition of their government and their victory, and then they would have felt like victors. Magnanimity is a rich man’s virtue: it is not hard to be generous with the prisoners one has at one’s mercy. But we were the prisoners. We had to relearn all the childish behavior which our education had rid us of; we had to judge men by the clothes they wore, reply rudely to their well-mannered commands, live side by side with them for four years with-

out living with them for one minute, feel ourselves become not men but “Frenchmen” beneath their glance. From then on our universe of individuals contained that compact gray or green mass. Had we looked more sharply, we could already have found masters and slaves in peacetime society, and we could have learned how each consciousness, no matter how free, sovereign, and irreplaceable it may feel, will become immobile and generalized, a “worker” or a “Frenchman,” beneath the gaze of a stranger. But no enslavement is more apparent than that of an occupied country. Even those of us who were not disturbed and continued to paint, write, or compose poetry, sensed—when they went back to work—that their former freedom had been sustained by the freedom of others and that one is not free alone. If they had once felt cheerfully in control of their lives, that, too, had been a mode of coexistence, possible only in a certain atmosphere; and they became aware of that general milieu—unmentioned in their past philosophy—where each consciousness communicates with every other.

German anti-Semitism not only horrified but mystified us. With our background we had to ask ourselves every day for four years: how is anti-Semitism possible? There was of course a way to avoid the question, by denying that anyone really lived anti-Semitism. Even the Nazis pardoned certain Jews whom they found serviceable, and a chance connection allowed a Jewish actor to appear on the Paris stage for four years. Maybe there was not a single anti-Semite after all? Maybe anti-Semitism was wholly a propaganda device? Maybe the soldiers, the SS, the newspapermen were only obeying orders in which they did not believe, and maybe the very authors of this propaganda did not believe in it any more than they did? Launched by calculating agitators and borne along by confused elemental forces, anti-Semitism would have been a sinister mystification. So we thought up to 1939: now that we have seen those busloads of children on the Place de la Contrescarpe, we can no longer think so. Anti-Semitism is not a war machine set up by a few Machiavellis and serviced by the obedience of others. It is not the creation of a few people any more than language is, or music. It was conceived in the depths of history. In the last analysis, that cops and con men conception of history which emphasizes agitators and elemental forces, cynicism and stupidity, is naive: it attributes too much awareness to the leaders and too little to the masses. It does not see any middle ground between the voluntary action of the former and the passive obedience of the latter, between history's subject and object. The Germans made us understand, on the contrary, that leaders are mystified by their own myths and that the troops are their half-knowing accomplices, that no one commands or obeys absolutely. An anti-Semite could not stand to see Jews tortured if he really saw them, if he perceived

that suffering and agony in an individual life—but this is just the point: he does not see Jews suffering; he is blinded by the myth of *the Jew*. He tortures and murders the Jew through these concrete beings; he struggles with dream figures, and his blows strike living faces. Anti-Semitic passion is not triggered by, nor does it aim at, individuals.

Thus we encountered the Marxist formula, which at any rate has the merit of placing us in a social context: “Anti-Semitism is the socialism of imbeciles.” A convulsed society with a foreboding and dread of revolution will transfer the anguish it feels about itself to the Jews and in this way appease it. This might explain the hypocritical anti-Semitism of the Maurrasians, which is always accompanied by reservations or exceptions and which retreats before particular cases. But what about the racism of the SS, what about Drancy, what about the children taken from their mothers? Like all explanations based on a transferred emotion, this too collapses before passion. Transference of passion is not a final explanation, since the question is, precisely, what motivates it and why the anguish and sadism of a decadent society focus on the Jews. Here, as with all passion, we run into an element of chance and pure irrationality without which passion would be grounded in something and would no longer be passion. A certain man loves a certain woman today because his past history has prepared him to love that particular personality and face, but also because he *met* her, and this meeting awakens possibilities in his life which would have remained dormant without her. This love seems like fate once it has become established, but on the day of the first meeting it is absolutely contingent. An obsession may indeed be motivated by an individual’s past, but it yields more than it promises: it has, when actualized, its own weight, which is the brute force of the present and of what exists. It is likewise impossible to explain all the whys and wherefores of anti-Semitism. One may point out its motivations, such as the social problem and the role the Jews once played in the development of a certain form of capitalism, but such motivations only sketch the outline of a possible history. The most that rational explanation can do is to say that the anguish in Germany around 1930 went back into the past and chose to find relief in anti-Semitism. Since anguish always turns away from the future, such explanation can go no further. Passion creates itself apart from its motivations and cannot be understood in a universe of consciousnesses. German anti-Semitism makes us face a truth we did not know in 1939. We did not think there were Jews or Germans but only men, or even consciousnesses. It seemed to us that at every moment each of us chose to be and to do what he wished with an ever-new freedom. We had not understood that, just as an actor slips into a role which envelops him and which alters the meaning of all his gestures, just as he carries this great phantom with him, animating it and yet con-

trolled by it, so, in coexistence, each of us is presented to others against a historical background which we did not choose; and our behavior toward others is dictated by our role as “Aryan,” Jewish, French, or German. We had not understood that consciousnesses have the strange power to alienate each other and to withdraw from themselves; that they are outwardly threatened and inwardly tempted by absurd hatreds, inconceivable with respect to individuals; and that if men are one day to be human to one another and the relations between consciousnesses are to become transparent, if universality is to become a fact, this will be in a society in which past traumas have been wiped out and the conditions of an effective liberty have from the first been realized. Until that time, the life of society will remain a dialogue and a battle between phantoms—in which real tears and real blood suddenly start to flow.

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We were no longer permitted to be neutral in this combat. For the first time we were led not only to awareness but to acceptance of the life of society. Before '39 we were not interested in the police: they existed, but we would never have dreamed of joining them. Who among us would have helped arrest a thief, who would have been willing to be a judge, to pass sentence? For our part we did not want to be criminals or thieves, because this is what we had decided. But what right did our freedom have to annul that of another person, even if the murderer had himself decided the outcome of another man's life? We found it intolerable that sanction should wish to parade a moral character, and we reduced it to one of the necessities of police order, which we carefully distinguished from moral rules. It was base work to which we did not want to consent even if we were involved in it. I remember my bewilderment when I learned that, as a second lieutenant in the reserves, I could be required by the police to aid in an arrest and that I was even supposed to offer my services. We certainly had to revise our thinking on this subject, and we saw that it was indeed up to us to judge. If the arrest and conviction of an informer had depended on us, we could not have left this task to others. Before the war, politics seemed unthinkable to us because it treats men as statistics, and we saw no sense in treating these unique beings, each of whom is a world unto himself, according to a set of general rules and as a collection of interchangeable objects. Politics is impossible from the perspective of consciousness. But the moment came when our innermost being felt the impact of these external absurdities.

We have been led to take upon ourselves and consider as our own not only our intentions—what our actions mean for us—but also the ex-

ternal consequences of these actions, what they mean in a historical context. Twenty years ago a historian denounced the Allies' share of responsibility for World War I. During the Occupation we were stupefied that this same historian should publish—with the permission of the censors—a pamphlet denouncing England's role in starting World War II. He did not understand that to implicate England with the Germans occupying Paris was to accept responsibility for propaganda no pacifist had the right to further, since it was the instrument of a martial regime. In the spring of 1944 all professors were asked to sign a petition entreating Marshal Pétain to intervene and stop the war. It would be overly simple to assume that the men who composed and signed this petition were agents of the Germans trying to end the war before the German defeat. Treason is rarely committed with such clarity, at least among professors, and they are the type of men who are never swayed by self-interest alone, but also by ideas. Let us then try to imagine one of the authors of this petition. For him, the passions of war *do not exist*: they gain their apparent strength from the consent of men who are *equally free at every moment*. Therefore there is no world at war, with democracies on one side and Fascist states on the other, or with the established empires lined up against the latecomer nations eager to found empires for themselves (the former accidentally allied to a "proletarian" state). There are no empires, no nations, no classes. On every side there are only men who are always ready for freedom and happiness, always able to attain them under any regime, provided they take hold of themselves and recover the only freedom that exists: their free judgment. There is only one evil, war itself, and one duty, refusing to believe in victories of right and civilization and putting an end to war. So this solitary Cartesian thinks—but he does not see his shadow behind him projected onto history as onto a wall, this sense, this figure that his actions assume on the outside, this Objective Spirit that is himself.

The Cartesian would doubtless reply that if we hold ourselves responsible for the most distant consequences of our thoughts and actions, the only thing left for us to do is refuse all compromise as does the hero. And, he would add, how many heroes are there among the men who today take pride in their having resisted? Some were civil servants and continued to draw their salary, swearing in writing—since they had to—that they were neither Jews nor Masons. Others of them agreed to seek authorization of what they wrote or staged from a censorship which let nothing pass which did not serve its purpose. Each in his own way marked out the frontier of the permissible. "Don't publish anything," said one. "Don't publish anything in the newspapers or magazines," said another. "Just publish your books." And a third said, "I will let this theater have my play if the director is a good man, but if he is a servant of the government, I will withdraw it."

The truth is that each of them settled with outward necessity, all except a few who gave their lives. One could either stop living, refusing that corrupted air, that poisoned bread, or one could continue, which meant contriving a little hideout of private freedom in the midst of the common misery; and this is what most of them did, putting their consciences to rest by means of some carefully weighed sacrifices. Our compromise does not acquit the traitors who called this regime down upon us, aided it more than what was absolutely necessary, and were the self-appointed keepers of the new law. It does, however, prohibit us from judging them in the name of a morality which no one followed to the letter and from basing a new philosophy on the experience of those four years, since we lived according to the old one. Only the heroes really were outwardly what they inwardly wished to be; only they became one with history at the moment when it claimed their lives. Those who survived, even at the greatest risk, did not consummate this cruel marriage, and no one can speak of this silence or recommend it to others. Heroism is a thing not of words but of deeds, and any preaching would be presumptuous here, since the man who is still able to speak does not know what he is speaking of.

This line of reasoning is hard, but it leads in the direction we want to go. It is true that we are not innocent and that the situation in which we found ourselves admitted of no irreproachable conduct. By staying here we all became accomplices to some extent, and we must say of the Resistance what the combatants said about the war: no one comes back except the man who at some moment or another reduced the risks he was running, who, in that sense, elected to save his life. Nor can those who left France to pursue the war elsewhere with arms or propaganda lay any more claim to purity, for they escaped a direct compromise only by yielding the ground for a while, and in this sense they too had a part in the ravages of the Occupation. Several of our comrades asked themselves the question and made the best choice, but nothing can turn their decision into a true solution. One compromised oneself whether one stayed or left; no one's hands are clean (which is perhaps why the Germans found the corpses of Martel and several others at Paris). We have unlearned "pure morality" and learned a kind of vulgar immoralism, which is healthy. The moral man does not want to dirty his hands. It is because he usually has enough time, talent, or money to stand back from enterprises of which he disapproves and to prepare a good conscience for himself. The common people do not have that freedom: the garage mechanic had to repair German cars if he wanted to live. One of our comrades used to go to the Rive Gauche Bookstore for the German philosophy books he needed. When the day came, he took part in the uprising and was shot by the Germans. We are in the world, mingled with it, compromised with it. This is

no reason to surrender all that is exterior and to confine ourselves to our thoughts, which are always free, even in the mind of a slave. This division of interior and exterior is abstract. We give the world both too little and too much credit. Too much because we bring weight to it when the time comes, and the state, as was evident with the Vichy State, is nothing without our consent. Too little because it arouses our *interest*, because we exist in it, and the wish to be free on the fringe of the world will end in our not being free at all. A judgment without words is incomplete; a word to which there can be no reply is nonsense; my freedom is interwoven with that of others by way of the world. Of course, those of us who were neither Jews nor declared Communists could manage to meditate during those four years: we were not denied Plato or Descartes or rehearsals at the Conservatory on Saturday mornings. We could begin our adolescence all over again, return to our gods and our great writers as if they were vices. This did not bring us any nearer to ourselves or to the spirit of the times. Yet for all that, we did not get out of history. Our finest thoughts, seen from London, New York, or Moscow, had a place in the world, and they had a name—the reveries of captives—and even their value as thoughts was altered as a result. One cannot get beyond history and time; all one can do is manufacture a private eternity in their midst, as artificial as the eternity of the madman who believes he is God. There is no vital spirit in gloomy isolated dreams; spirit only appears in the full light of dialogue. We were no more free, as we meditated on our great men, and no more pure consciousnesses, than the Jew or the deportee who became pure suffering, unable to see and unable to choose. No effective freedom exists without some power. Freedom exists in contact with the world, not outside it.

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In this we rediscovered one of the truths of Marxism. But even Marxism had to be taken up anew, for it threatened to confirm our prewar prejudices. Under the pretext that history is the history of class struggle and that ideological conflicts are only its superstructure, a certain kind of Marxism detaches us from all situations in which the fate of the classes is not immediately at stake. Marxists of this type classed the Second World War as imperialistic, at least until the intervention of the U.S.S.R., and were not interested in it. True history would recommence for them on the day when the social struggle could again manifest itself. Since Fascism was, after all, nothing but a poor relative of capitalism, the Marxist didn't have to take sides in this family quarrel, and whichever faction won made little difference to him. Certain of us thought that capitalism could not allow itself to be liberal in a crisis, that it would become rigid in all things, and that the

same necessities which gave birth to Fascism would stifle freedom in the pretended democracies. The worldwide war was just an appearance; what remained real beneath that appearance was the common fate of the proletariats of all nations and the profound solidarity of all forms of capitalism through the internal contradictions of the regime. Thus there could be no question of the national proletarians in any way assuming responsibility for the events in which they found themselves involved: no proletarian in uniform can feel *anything but* proletarian. Thus certain among us frowned on their own delight at the news of some German defeat and pretended not to share the general satisfaction. When we presented the situation of an occupied country to them as the prototype of an inhuman situation, they did their best to dissolve this phenomenon in the more general one of capitalistic exploitation and oppression. Entrusted from the start with the secret of history, they understood patriotic rebellion better than it understood itself and absolved it in the name of the class struggle. And yet when the liberation came they called it by name, just like everyone else.

They didn't have to give up Marxism in order to do so. The experience of those four years had, in fact, brought a better understanding of the concrete relationship of the class struggle to Marxist ideology. The class struggle is not *more real* than ideological conflicts; they cannot be reduced to it, as appearances to reality. Marx himself pointed out that, once they become established, ideologies have a weight of their own and set history in motion in the same way that the flywheel drives the motor. There must be more, consequently, to a Marxist analysis of Hitlerism than summarily classifying it as "a capitalistic episode." Such an analysis undoubtedly lays bare the combination of economic events without which it would not have existed, but this situation is unique, and to define it fully, to bring it back into contact with actual history, we must take local particularities into account and consider Nazism's human function as well as its economic one. The Marxist must not simply keep applying the capital-work formula in some mechanical way, but must think each new event through afresh to determine in each case the serpentine route of the proletarian future. He is not obliged to consider oppression in an occupied country as a surface phenomenon, beneath which the truth of history is to be sought. There are not two histories, one true and the other empirical; there is only one, in which everything that happens plays a part, if one only knows how to interpret it. For a Marxist in a French environment, the German Occupation was not a historical accident but an event of the first magnitude. The German and Anglo-Saxon victories are not equivalent from the point of view of the class struggle. No matter how reactionary the Anglo-Saxon govern-

ments are and wish to be, they are curbed in their own countries by their liberal ideology, and the social struggle's imminent reemergence into the spotlight gains in interest for men who do not have a hundred years to live and who would have had to spend perhaps fifty years under Fascist oppression. Marxism does not suppress history's subjective factors in favor of objective ones; it binds the two together. The ideology of nationalism cannot be classed once and for all as bourgeois: its function in shaping the historical conjunction must be newly appreciated at every moment, and this function may at times be progressive and at other times reactionary. Nationalistic feeling (which is not to say chauvinism) is revolutionary in the France of today and was so in 1940. This does not merely mean that national feeling is in fact opposed to the immediate interest of French capitalism and that, by a pious trick, the Marxists can make it serve their own struggle. It means that the historical conjuncture frees the national reality from the reactionary mortgages which encumbered it and authorizes the proletarian consciousness to integrate it. One might try to argue that in Marxist political thinking the nation can only be a means, never an end, that Marxist patriotism can only be tactical, and that for the Marxist a purgation of morals, for example, serves the ends of revolution, whereas the primary concern of the patriot is, on the contrary, the integration of the movement of the masses into the nation. But even this kind of language is not Marxist. It is the particular attribute of Marxism not to distinguish the means from the end, and, in principle, no system of political thought is less hypocritical and less Machiavellian. It is not a question of abusing the patriots' good faith and leading them where they do not wish to go. Not the Marxist but history transforms nationalist feeling into the will to revolution. It is a question of making the patriots see (and events as well as Marxists undertake to do this) that in a weakened country like France, which the movement of history has reduced to a second-rate power, a certain political and economic independence is possible only through a dangerous oscillation or within the framework of a Socialist Confederation of States which has no chance of becoming a reality except through revolution. To be a Marxist is not to renounce all differences, to give up one's identity as a Frenchman, a native of Tours or Paris, or to forego individuality in order to blend into the world proletariat. It is indeed to become part of the universal, but without ceasing to be what we are. Even in a Marxist perspective the world proletariat is not a revolutionary factor so long as it only exists objectively, in economic analysis. It will become such a factor when it realizes that it is a world proletariat, and this will only happen through the concerted pressure or a meeting at the crossroads of actual proletarians, such as they exist in the different countries, and not

through an ascetic internationalism wherein each of them loses his most compelling reasons for being a Marxist.

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To sum it all up, we have learned history, and we claim that it must not be forgotten. But are we not here the dupes of our emotions? If, ten years hence, we reread these pages and so many others, what will we think of them? We do not want this year of 1945 to become just another year among many. A man who has lost a son or a woman he loved does not want to live beyond that loss. He leaves the house in the state it was in. The familiar objects upon the table, the clothes in the closet mark an empty place in the world. He converses with the absent person, he changes nothing in his life, and every day his actions, like an incantation, bring this ever more evanescent shadow back to life. The day will come, however, when the meaning of these books and these clothes will change: once the books were new, and now they are yellow with age; once the clothes were wearable, and now they are out of style and shabby. To keep them any longer would not be to make the dead person live on; quite the opposite, they date his death all the *more* cruelly. In the same way there will come a moment when what we wish to preserve of the friends who were tortured and shot is not our last image of them, what they were in those four years and in that feverish summer, but a timeless memory in which the things they did mingle with what they might have done, given the direction of their lives. We have not of course gotten to this point, but since what concerns us here is writing, not recounting our griefs, should we not go beyond our feelings to find what they may contain of durable truth?

The war was not over before everything had already begun to change—not only because of man's inconstancy but also because of an inner necessity. Unity had been easy during the Resistance, because relationships were almost always man-to-man. Over against the German army or the Vichy government, where social generality ruled, as it does in all machines of state, the Resistance offered the rare phenomenon of historical action which remained personal. The psychological and moral elements of political action were almost the only ones to appear here, which is why intellectuals least inclined to politics were to be seen in the Resistance. The Resistance was a unique experience for them, and they wanted to preserve its spirit in the new French politics because this experience broke away from the famous dilemma of being and doing, which confronts all intellectuals in the face of action. This was the source of that *happiness* through danger which we observed in some of our comrades, usually so tormented. It is only too obvious that this balance between action

and personal life was intimately bound up with the conditions of clandestine actions and could not survive it. And in this sense it must be said that the Resistance experience, by making us believe that politics is a relationship between man and man or between consciousnesses, fostered our illusions of 1939 and masked the truth of the incredible power of history which the Occupation taught us in another connection. We have returned to the time of *institutions*. The distance between the laws and those to whom they apply is once more apparent; once again one legislates for X; and once again the good will of some resumes its class features which make it unrecognizable to others. We must again worry about the consequences of what we say, weighing the objective meaning of every word, with no hope of convincing by the sheer force of truth. This is what we did during the Occupation when we had to avoid any public gesture which might have “played into the hands of the occupying forces.” But among friends at that time we had a freedom to criticize, which we have already lost. Are we now going to subject our words and gestures to that completely exterior rule—which so aroused Péguy’s indignation—which enjoins us not to “play into the hands” of the reactionaries, the Communists, or the government? For four years we witnessed the abrogation of personal life. There is nothing more to *learn* from that, and if politics is definitely hell, we have no choice but to give it up. Indeed, this is why, on the eve of another war, the founders of the N.R.F invited authors and public to abandon the values and the attitudes of the war. They wanted to demobilize consciousness, to return to purely aesthetic problems, to disengage themselves from history. . . .

Assuredly—and this is the point we want to make—those five years have not taught us to think ill of what we once judged to be good, and in the eyes of conscience it is still absurd to hide a truth because it harms one’s country, to kill a man because he lives on the other side of the river, to treat another person as a means rather than an end. We were not wrong, in 1939, to want liberty, truth, happiness, and transparent relations among men, and we are not now abandoning humanism. The war and the Occupation only taught us that values remain nominal and indeed have no value without an economic and political infrastructure to make them participate in existence. What is more, in actual history values are only another way of designating human relationships, as these become established according to a man’s mode of work, the nature of his loves, and the shape of his hopes; in brief, according to the way he lives with others. It is a question not of giving up our values of 1939 but of realizing them. Imitating the tyrants is not the question, and, insofar as such imitation was necessary, it is precisely for having forced us to it that we cannot forgive them. It is doubtful whether tyranny can ever be eliminated from political

life, whether the State could wither away and men's political or social relations could ever be reintegrated into their human relationships. But even if we have no guarantee that these goals will ever be realized, we can at least see very clearly the absurdity of an anachronistic tyranny like anti-Semitism and of a reactionary expedient like Fascism. And this is enough to make us want to destroy them roots and branch and to push things forward in the direction of effective liberty. This political task is not incompatible with any cultural value or literary task, if literature and culture are defined as the progressive awareness of our multiple relationships with other people and the world, rather than as extramundane techniques. *If all truths are told, none will have to be hidden.* In man's coexistence with man, of which these years have made us aware, morals, doctrines, thoughts and customs, laws, works, and words all express each other; everything signifies everything. And outside this unique fulguration of existence there is nothing.

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