

THE DREYFUS AFFAIR

Scandal still resonates after 100 years

TURNING POINT: False accusation of spying against Jewish officer added to anti-Semitic feeling — and gave birth to idea of a Jewish state.

By Geoffrey Wheatcroft The Guardian

LONDON

No one who witnessed it ever forgot the sight. Even by the standards of Paris, which in little more than 100 years had seen the beheadings of Louis XVI, Marie Antoinette, Danton and Robespierre, the June Days of 1848 and the Commune of 1871, it was an extravagant piece of public theatre.

One hundred years ago, on Jan. 5, 1895, Captain Alfred Dreyfus was taken from his cell in the Cherche-Midi prison and led to the Ecole Militaire on the place Fontenoy.

Two days earlier he had written to his wife. "My darling, I have learned that the supreme humiliation is for the day after tomorrow," and he was scarcely exaggerating.

At 8:45 he was led on to the barracks square where a sergeant major of the Garde Républicain tore the badges of office from his cap and sleeve, the red stripes from his trousers, the epaulettes from his tunic, and then broke his sabre across his knee.

As in any theatrical performance, a certain amount of rehearsal was needed. The seams of the stripes and epaulettes had been picked, the sword partly sawn through.

Dreyfus had been arrested the previous October, accused of selling military secrets to Germany, and convicted by court martial. After his degradation he was transported to Devil's Island in French Guyana to begin his life sentence.

Four years later, he was returned to France for a retrial, but again found guilty, though "with extenuating circumstances" and pardoned by the president.

It was not until 1906 that the French Republic finally acknowledged that he had been framed and falsely convicted through forgery. His complete innocence was then formally declared.

By then, France had been transformed. It might have been just another spy story or political scandal, the Watergate of its day.

It was far more than that. The Dreyfus case — L'Affaire, the Affair — was certainly a great story, launching a thousand books and keeping a million conspiracy theorists and bores occupied. The "bordereau," an annotated, purloined confidential memorandum, was their Grassy Knoll or Deep Throat.

But the Affair was much more important than Watergate. It was the central event of the Third Republic of 1871-1940, and the emotional drama of a lifetime for a generation in France and throughout Europe. It divided friend from friend, brother from brother, the duc de Guermantes from the prince de Guermantes. It rent a whole society.

For decades after the final acquittal, the Affair still cast its shadow. There were plenty of Frenchmen who remained convinced of Dreyfus's guilt. Even today their species is not extinct: only last year, the editor of an official French army magazine was sacked after he expressed reservations about Dreyfus's innocence.

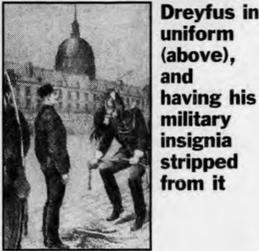
That editor apart, few people now doubt the truth. But it was not so obvious in January 1895. The case against Dreyfus looked remarkably convincing, and even among those who later became Dreyfusards, his supporters, some took their time to see the light.

The great socialist leader, Jean Jaures, was to become a Dreyfusard, but at the time of the original conviction, his only reaction was to complain about the class justice which sent a captain into exile when a common soldier would have been executed.

It was a while after that scene at the Ecole Militaire before the Affair came to the boil.

The turning point was three years later on Jan. 13, 1898, when the most famous open letter ever written was published: "J'Accuse: Letter to the President of the Republic from Emile Zola".

But although Zola and Georges Clemenceau, the political editor of the paper which published the



Dreyfus in uniform (above), and having his military insignia stripped from it

Nor did he "need to be told why Dreyfus had committed treason... Dreyfus is nothing but an uprooted plant who feels ill at ease in our French garden."

Looking at it from the other side of the fence from Barres, another observer came to a curiously similar conclusion.

Only diplomats and journalists had been admitted to the courtyard of the Ecole Militaire that morning. One of them was the correspondent of the Neue Freie Presse of Vienna, Theodor Herzl.

He had already been brooding about the condition of his people in Europe, wondering whether assimilation might not be a delusion and a fraud.

Did Europe really want the Jews, or, if so, did it want them on equal terms?

In the winter following Dreyfus's disgrace, Herzl wrote Der Judenstaat — The Jewish State.

"We are a people, one people. We have everywhere tried honestly to integrate with the national communities surrounding us... We are not permitted to do so... We are denounced as strangers."

The remedy was to return to Asia, to found a new Jewish state.

And so, the Affair had several wholly unforeseen consequences. It discredited the socialism of fools. Despite occasional flickers — in Britain it did rather more than flicker during the Boer War — left-wing anti-Semitism was quenched for good.

But the Affair stimulated a still sturdier growth on the radical right: it flared up again in Germany after the defeat of 1918.

Within 50 years of Dreyfus's disgrace, the Jews of Europe had been plunged into a darker night than Herzl, or, probably Barres, had ever imagined — though Barres's heirs in Vichy France played their part in a "Final Solution of the Jewish Question" in which some of Dreyfus's family died.

Almost more extraordinary, within a half-century of Dreyfus's second trial, the Jewish state of Herzl's dream had become reality.

Dreyfus would not have welcomed the state of Israel. He saw no need for it. His patriotism and his belief that he was a Frenchman in every way were unbreakable.

In fact, at the time Herzl wrote, emancipated Jews everywhere were very uneasy about his Zionist project.

In many cases, they were not so much uneasy as bitterly hostile. They were alarmed by the threat which a Jewish state might pose to their own position as Jewish Frenchmen, Britons, Americans, and by the charge of "dual loyalty" which it might raise.

Immediately after the Six-Day War of 1967, de Gaulle raised the question of dual loyalty again, but it was otherwise or elsewhere unheard, least of all among what had become the largest and most formidable Jewish community on earth, in the U.S. But it resurfaced 20 years later with the Pollard case.

Jonathan Pollard was a Jewish American employee of the U.S. Navy, who was suborned by Israeli intelligence into passing secrets, and sentenced to life imprisonment.

Some defenders of Pollard saw more resemblance to the Dreyfus case than just the sentence. One even published an essay called "J'Accuse: American Jews and L'Affaire Pollard."

This overlooked the rather important difference that Dreyfus had been innocent while Pollard was guilty.

Dreyfus would have been shocked by Pollard's conduct, but pleased by the condition of the Jewish diaspora 100 years on. In almost every Western country, Jews are now better integrated than ever before.

But then again, Dreyfus was an essentially complacent man, and a conventional one.

As the story goes, towards the end of his life, long after his release, his return to the army and his award of the Legion d'Honneur, he was discussing some scandal of the day with a brother officer, who scoffed at it. "But you know," Dreyfus said, "there's no smoke without fire."

Did you win?

Lotto 6/49: Saturday's winning numbers were 5, 7, 11, 30, 43 and 49. The bonus number was 15. Encore: 576807. Lottario: Saturday's winning numbers were 5, 10, 12, 18, 21, 26. The bonus was 3. Earlybird: 15, 18, 34, 37. Pick 3: 482. Super-7: The winning numbers Friday were 22, 23, 25, 26, 37, 41 and 45. The bonus number was 42. Complete results in Monday's Citizen.

What the "Jewish Question" asked was whether the Jews belonged; belonged, that is, in the countries where they lived. The mob that screamed "death to the Jews" outside the Ecole Militaire that morning a hundred years ago thought not. Neither did more sophisticated Jew-baiters. Novelist and politician Maurice Barres thought that Dreyfus's degradation was "more exciting than the guillotine."

CONTINUED FROM PAGE A1/IMMIGRATION

Police forces do not currently keep crime statistics by race or nationality.

In the fall of 1994, Canada negotiated with Jamaica to make it easier to deport immigrants. Colin Nelson of the Jamaican consulate in Toronto suspects this may account for the high number of deportees his country receives.

But while Jamaica has co-operated fully in accepting its nationals, diplomats are critical of the way Immigration does business. Often, Canada departs a serious criminal without informing Jamaican authorities that a dangerous offender is about to land in their laps.

Crutchley cited the example of a Jamaican immigrant who had mental disabilities and a history of sexual assault. He was removed from Montreal to Jamaica without notice to anyone. "We found out just by chance when (the man's) sister called wanting to know where he was," she says.

"The (Jamaican government) was astonished this could happen."

Crutchley says that in most cases Canada only informs Jamaica of a deportation when it needs travel documents for the person.

Jamaica is also concerned that potential deportees are treated poorly, denied the right to a fair hearing and face lengthy jail terms even though some have no current criminal charges or recent convictions, says Crutchley.

Immigration Canada has 1,233 people in detention in Ontario — a 20-per-cent increase from 1993-94. People are also spending 50-per-cent more time locked up than last year.

Some local lawyers say young Jamaican males are bearing the

brunt of this crackdown as police take advantage of the chance to banish people they see as trouble-makers.

Ottawa lawyer Riad Tallim says frequently in immigration hearings police testify not just about the person facing deportation but "generally about 'Jamaican crime,' and what they say is given significant weight."

At one hearing, for instance, an RCMP officer said a task force had investigated "Jamaican-based organized crime in the Ottawa area including Montreal and Toronto." The officer testified that Jamaican nationals between the ages of 17 and 30 made up 95 per cent of criminal gangs known as "crews." The crews, he said, were involved here in organized prostitution rings, drug trafficking and crack-cocaine houses.

The RCMP officer said he had no proof that the people before the hearing were involved in such crimes, but that police informants said they were.

The RCMP argues that this type of testimony is valid because it not only reviews a person's criminal record, but allows Immigration officials to know how police investigators view the person.

The practice of police testifying about Jamaicans at immigration hearings began in Montreal, says RCMP Det. Sylvain Lebel. There, police were dealing with violent "crews" of Jamaican nationals who had come to Canada about 10 years ago.

"Montreal (police) told us it would be a good tool to use Immigration to deal with this," says Lebel. He says since the increase in deportations of Jamaicans, Montreal's crime rate has dropped.

The number of deportees to Jamaica has left the island coun-

try dealing with higher crime rates, more sophisticated types of crime and in many cases people who have learned their criminal trade in Canada, where they grew up, say Nelson and Crutchley.

Clinton Gayle, 25, accused of shooting Toronto police officer Todd Baylis, came to Canada when he was eight years old. O'Neil Grant, in his early 20s, charged in the slaying of Georgina Leimonis at the Just Desserts Café, came to Canada at age 11.

"Canada is not dealing with this situation very well. Criminals who have been here since they were very young and have never had much to do with Jamaica are being sent back," says Crutchley.

"(Canadian officials) are just trying to take the easy way, just get them out instead of dealing with the crime situation here."

Some people Ottawa police describe as the region's most notorious criminals are being removed to Jamaica. Locksley Francis, 29, whose record includes assaults and prostitution-related offences, came to Canada when he was seven. Christopher, Richard and Simeon Dillon, all in their 20s and with similar records, have been in Canada for more than a decade.

Ottawa-Carleton Police Chief Brian Ford says such as police will be pleased to see these men gone, the federal government is not doing the right thing "by deporting people who were socialized in Canada but don't have citizenship."

"When these kids were running into trouble, that's when our system should have done something instead of waiting until now."

"Crime is a learned behavior," says Ford. "My God, we've got to accept some responsibility for these people."

CONTINUED FROM PAGE A1/BOMBS

The woman with the darkened eyes began to weep her face distorted in a mask of agony, mouth open in a hoarse scream.

"My sister died here today," she said. "A shell hit this building. Fragments smashed everywhere. She tried to take cover but it was too late."

Then she vanished into a basement.

On the top floor of the half-ruined apartment block, Nina and Yevgeny Shigeelev were celebrating his 79th birthday.

There was little festivity in their neat, attractive two-room flat. On the floor was a carpet of shredded glass, and a bitter wind blew through the cardboard-covered window frames.

"We aren't having a real party," said Nina, a calm, good-humored woman of 75. "We have some potatoes left and a little bread. Still, it's enough for today."

There is no electricity to light the polished crystal chandelier, and the small, tidy kitchen has no running water or gas. Hot food is a thing of

the past, and they save water as though it was liquid gold.

"We have to go to a spring and get it," said Nina. "It's too dangerous to go every day. Sometimes we can't go anywhere for several days."

Like most of the people who remain in Grozny, the Shigeelevs are Russian. But their children and grandchildren now living in the far northern region of Yakutia are like strangers to them. The only community they know is their neighbors.

But the invasion has changed that, and brought their lives to a dead end.

"There is no place for us to go," said Yevgeny, displaying his old army coat full of Second World War Soviet medals. "I've fought for my country. Now it has turned on me."

He put his arm around his wife, who smiled shyly.

"At night it's very frightening," she said. "I try to force him to go down into the basement to avoid the bombs, but he refuses to leave me. We've been together a long time."

Handicapped by arthritis, Nina cannot climb the six flights of

ruined stairs to and from the basement. As shells and rockets bombard the building the couple huddle together in the bedroom they have shared for five decades, alone in an apocalypse that is sweeping away their past and future.

"We had a good life," said Yevgeny. "We thought we were becoming like the Americans. Now we're like people living in prehistoric caves."

The Toronto Star

Correction

A photo caption in Friday's Citylife section should have said that Aimé Charron, Maurice Mattar, Louis-Alfred Beauchesne, Claude Parent, Joffre Bélanger and Jean-Paul Charron were six of the last seven members of the Saint-Jean-Baptiste Society, not the Institut Canadien-Français.

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