

For the Faith: An Anti-Stalin Lawsuit in Paris

Honours Thesis

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Chapter 1 Introduction

David Rousset (1912-1997) was a former French Trotskyist, member of the Resistance, and survivor of Nazi concentration camps. He published an article in the French newspaper *Le Figaro littéraire* in 1949, appealing to all survivors of Nazi concentration camps to support him in setting up an international commission of inquiry into the existence of concentration camps in the Soviet Union.¹

In his appeal, Rousset asserted that the Soviet labour camps were essentially no different from Nazi concentration camps, as both were detention facilities that illegally deprived victims of their freedom and treated prisoners in inhumane ways.² As a survivor of the Nazi concentration camps, Rousset felt it was his duty to stand up and save the prisoners of the Soviet Gulag system. In Rousset's words, this was to "prevent the nightmare of yesterday from recurring."³ In the increasingly tense atmosphere of the Cold War in 1949, Rousset insisted that his appeal had no political agenda but was a moral obligation for those who had witnessed the suffering of the camps.⁴ He believed that only the survivors of concentration camps could understand and prevent similar tragedies occurring in the Soviet Union.⁵

Rousset's exposé of Soviet concentration camps was not an isolated case in post-war Europe. To take one example of post-war France was Victor Kravchenko (1905-1966), a Soviet officer who

¹ David Rousset, "Au secours des déportés dans les camps soviétiques. Un appel de David Rousset aux anciens déportés des camps nazis," *Le Figaro littéraire*, 12 Nov. 1949.

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

⁴ David Rousset, "Nous sommes les témoins de l'avertissement que furent les camps nazis," *Le Figaro littéraire*, 12 Nov. 1949. This is different article with different topic in same paper, same date as in note 1.

⁵ Ibid.

defected to the United States in 1944 and published his memoirs, *I Chose Freedom* (1947), in which he exposed the Soviet purges and the existence of concentration camps. In *Freedom*, Kravchenko claimed that Soviet prisons were unjustly holding thousands of intellectuals, engineers, and Communist Party members labeled as enemies of the people.⁶ Kravchenko also claimed that the Soviet Union continued to expand its detention facilities after the war.⁷

Because of his anti-Soviet rhetoric, Kravchenko was blamed in France, notably when the pro-communist newspaper *Les Lettres françaises* published an article in 1947 by a self-proclaimed former U.S. intelligence agent named Sim Thomas. In the article, Thomas claimed that Kravchenko defected while serving in the United States and fabricated *I Choose Freedom* with non-existent stories in collaboration with American intelligence personnel.⁸

Kravchenko sued *Les Lettres françaises* for libel and won, with the court ordering a compensation payment. However, this result was ambiguous since the court's decision only endorsed the fact that Kravchenko had been defamed and did not give a written opinion on the existence of the Soviet concentration camps.

Most of France's non-communist intellectuals questioned Kravchenko's background because of his status as a defector. For example, Albert Camus (1913-1960), who railed against the Soviet Union as a totalitarian state, was dismissive of Kravchenko. Camus asserted that Kravchenko was merely a beneficiary of Stalinism and lacked the authority to criticize Stalinism's crimes.⁹ In

⁶ Victor Kravchenko, *I Chose Freedom: The Personal Political Life of a Soviet Official* (London: Lowe and Brydone Printers, 1947), 108.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 475.

⁸ Sim Thomas, "Kravchenko, Un document sensationnel recueilli par Sim Thomas," *Les Lettres françaises*, 13 Nov. 1947.

⁹ Albert Camus, *Actuelles II. Chroniques 1948-1953* (Paris: Gallimard, 1953), 90.

other words, Camus argued that even if the USSR should be blamed, Kravchenko did not deserve to appear as a critic.

It was also because of Kravchenko's bad reputation that he could not invite enough witnesses within the court willing to support him, making his defense less robust. Instead, the other side of the court capitalized on the unquestionable wartime resistance of the French Communist Party and the Soviet Union's struggle against fascism.¹⁰ As Tony Judt wrote: “Resistance intellectuals testified to the impeccable credentials of the French Communist party, which in turn stood for the Communist Party of USSR. As a result, it was presumed that the Soviet Party could not act in the manner Kravchenko claimed.”¹¹ In the end, the trial morally boosted the pro-communists.

From 1944 to 1956, there was a notable surge in enthusiasm for the revolution in France. The active role of the French Communist Party in the Resistance after Germany's invasion of the USSR and the enormous sacrifices made by the Red Army in the war against Germany won the sympathy of the non-communist left in France after the war. Many French intellectuals of the left supported the idea of ending capitalism after the war. They wanted to bring about a radical renewal of post-war France, erase the unfavourable memories of the Occupation, and end the bickering politics of the 1930s. Moreover, the Soviet Union deliberately portrayed the October 1917 Bolshevik Revolution as a new French Revolution, with its radical agenda naturally attracting the French left.¹² This led many to hold a favourable view of the Soviet Union.

¹⁰ Tony Judt, *Postwar: A History of Europe Since 1945* (New York: The Penguin Press, 2005), 214.

¹¹ Tony Judt, *Past Imperfect: French Intellectuals, 1944-1956* (New York: New York University Press, 2011), 113.

¹² George Lichtheim, *Marxism in Modern France* (New York: University of Columbia Press, 1966), 10-12.

Rousset's appeal to camp survivors was, therefore, bound to meet with a backlash from defenders of the Soviet Union. Within five days of Rousset's appeal, Pierre Daix (1922-2014), a member of the French Communist Party, published an article in *Les Lettres françaises*. Claiming that Rousset was attempting to wage an ideological war against the USSR.¹³

Rousset then sued *Les Lettres françaises* for libel, a case that ended in 1951 when a French court ruled in Rousset's favor that concentration camps did exist in the Soviet Union. The lawsuit became a famous public relations case in post-war France. It led to responses from some of the most influential French intellectuals of the time, including Raymond Aron (1905-1983), Jean-Paul Sartre (1905-1980), Simone de Beauvoir (1908-1986), Robert Antelme (1917-1990), and Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1908-1961).

This thesis will examine the origins and potential impact of the Rousset libel case. The questions of whether Soviet concentration camps existed and whether they were, as Rousset claimed, similar in nature to Nazi camps sparked disputes in the courtroom and discussions outside the courtroom. Additionally, this paper will explain how Rousset transformed from a Nazi concentration camp survivor to a staunch critic of the Soviet Union, a shift closely linked to his personal experiences and the post-war political climate in France.

In the politically charged atmosphere of postwar France, David Rousset's moral condemnation of the Soviet Union serves as a powerful case study of how ethical argumentation was strategically employed by intellectuals. Rousset, a former Trotskyist and concentration camp survivor, employed his moral authority not merely as a means to mask anti-communist

¹³ Pierre Daix, "Pierre Daix, matricule 59.807 à Mauthausen, répond à David Rousset," *Les Lettres françaises*, 17 Nov. 1949.

sentiments but as an integral part of the intellectual debate that sought to navigate and challenge the polarizing forces of Cold War politics. This thesis argues that Rousset's public denunciation of the Soviet Union in 1949 was a calculated and self-consciously ethical stance reflecting the complexities of postwar French political and intellectual life, where the lines between moral imperatives and political allegiances were blurred and contested.

Historiographical Review

Hannah Arendt (1906-1975) quoted Rousset's description of the Nazi concentration camps several times in *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (1951). In her analysis of the camp experience, Arendt agreed with Rousset's assertion about the absolute inhumanity of the camps: that this inhumanity cannot be comprehended by ordinary human beings who have not been inside and that survivors who come back to the real world refuse to convey the pain out of a sense of doubt about its reality: "Normal people refuse to believe that everything is possible."¹⁴

In keeping with the theory that dehumanization was one of the horrors of the camps, Rousset asserted in his appeal that Nazi camps were not fundamentally different from Soviet camps and that the experience of being a prisoner in the concentration camps inspired the survivors to offer their help to those still in Soviet camps.¹⁵ Arendt did not comment directly on Rousset's statement in her work. Still, she intriguingly commented that "attempts to cultivate the European elite through intra-European understanding based on the everyday experience of the European

¹⁴ Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*. (San Diego, NY, London: Harcourt Brace, 1985), 440-441.

¹⁵ Rousset, "Au secours des déportés."

concentration camps failed in much the same way as attempts to draw political conclusions from the international experience of the previous generation after the First World War.”¹⁶ In general, Arendt preferred not to draw a complete equivalence between the Soviet camps and the Nazi camps, believing that the experience of shared suffering disabled the survivors of the European camps to build an influential political community.

British historian David Caute assessed the Communist Party's attack on Rousset's appeal as legally and politically unhelpful in denying the existence of Soviet concentration camps. In Caute's view, the three events that took place in 1949-1950 – Rousset's condemnation of the Soviet concentration camps, the Soviet purges of ex-communists in the Eastern European countries, and Tito's break with the Soviet Union – made it clear that the public political discourse in France was no longer receptive to neutral positions, and that intellectuals had to make a definite choice of their public position regarding the political climate.¹⁷

Historian Tony Judt later selected the Rousset case within his analysis of why progressive intellectuals on the French left sympathized with the Soviet Union during the postwar decade. Like Caute, Judt regarded Rousset's appeal as a reaction of the French intelligentsia to the persecution of intellectuals that emerged in Eastern Europe at the same time because Rousset's case finally increased the stakes for both sides and made it more difficult for non-communist defenders of the USSR to ignore the trials, which were smaller in scale at the time.¹⁸ This is the polarised thinking that came with the Cold War when one had to take a stand for or against the state of affairs or be denounced as an opportunist.

¹⁶ Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, 441-442.

¹⁷ David Caute, *Communism, and the French Intellectuals, 1914-1960* (London: Andre Deutsch, 1964), 183-185.

¹⁸ Judt, *Past Imperfect*, 112-113.

As for the legacy of the Rousset trial, Judt concluded that Rousset's efforts to expose Soviet crimes had no cognitive impact on the French intelligentsia since the official Soviet documents¹⁹ produced in the courtroom had been in the public domain since 1936.²⁰ In Judt's view, the significance of Rousset's appeal was that it began to relieve some intellectuals of the self-burden of frank analysis of the situation, an intellectual self-censorship that, in most cases in the past, had evolved into a dilemma. This dilemma is manifested in the fear among some intellectuals that criticizing the Soviet Union might inadvertently strengthen the capitalist forces or provide ammunition for anti-Soviet sentiments. Moreover, they were unwilling to witness the United States gaining an advantage in its competition with the Soviet Union, which would have signified a victory for the capitalist class. This mindset reflects the complex situation intellectuals faced under the political pressures of the Cold War era.

Ian H. Birchall, author of *Sartre against Stalinism* (2004), in evaluating the deafness of progressive French intellectuals in the post-war period to the moral problems generated by the Soviet Union, complained about the post-war “soft on Stalinism” labeling of the intellectuals involved.²¹ Birchall claimed that the discrediting of Sartre, who was generally regarded as sympathetic to the Soviet Union during this period, was a myth circulated in the academy without a factual basis.²² Referring specifically to Judt's study of Sartre and questioning Judt's references to Sartre's words and inappropriate analogies, Birchall asserted that Sartre was a

¹⁹ For example, in his appeal on 12 November 1949, Rousset cited Article 129 of the Soviet Union's Labour Correction Code of 1934, which stipulated that the control of labour correction institutions should be transferred to the Ministry of Internal Affairs. Rousset, “Au secours des déportés.”

²⁰ Judt, *Past Imperfect*, 114-116.

²¹ Ian H. Birchall, *Sartre against Stalinism* (Providence: Berghahn Books, 2004), 1-3.

²² *Ibid.*

staunch anti-Stalinist, though sometimes was too naive about the Soviet Union.²³ Sartre chose to stand on the side of the left mainly because he believed in the power of the working class.²⁴ Sartre's detractors, in contrast, equated Marxism with any form of revolutionary socialism.²⁵ In his analysis of Sartre's statements during the Rousset trial, Birchall argued that this was not a new issue for Sartre, that Sartre's failure to take a personal position on the problem stemmed from his firm determination to remain non-aligned during the 1947-1950 period, and that the historians [he mentioned Judt by name] should have taken note of this in the analyses that Sartre published in the leftist journal *Les Temps Modernes* [founded in December 1945].²⁶

In her recent study, Emma Kuby focuses on the content and language of Rousset's description of camps in the USSR. Kuby figures that Rousset's comparison of Nazi and Soviet camps and his attempt to create a political community through the witnessing of suffering was a reason for attacks on Rousset by the progressive left forces: the consensus in France after the war was that the experience of the resistance should determine how the French reunified the country, which for the French Communist Party represented the party's glorious experience against the Germans during the Occupation.²⁷ In the eyes of opponents, Rousset's comparison between Nazi and Soviet Union camps betrayed the memory of Communist resistors and victims who suffered and sacrificed in France during the war.²⁸ As more documents were declassified after the Cold War, it became clear that Rousset had received covert assistance from British and American intelligence

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Ibid., 4-5.

²⁶ Ibid., 115-117.

²⁷ Emma Kuby, *Political Survivors: The Resistance, the Cold War, and the Fight against Concentration Camps after 1945* (New York: Cornell University Press, 2019), 64-65.

²⁸ Ibid.

agencies before and after his supposedly apolitical appeals.²⁹ Kuby deduced from this: “self-consciously ethical argumentation functioned in postwar Western European intellectual debate neither as a purely cynical device with which to mask anti-communist commitments nor as a transcendent alternative or ‘outside’ to Cold War politics.”³⁰ As far as this debate is concerned, the lofty moral positions relied upon by both sides have become inseparable from the politics of the Cold War.³¹

²⁹ Ibid., 72-73.

³⁰ Emma Kuby, “In the Shadow of the Concentration Camp: David Rousset and the Limits of Apoliticism in Postwar French Thought,” *Modern Intellectual History* 11, no. 1 (2014): 173.

³¹ Ibid.

Chapter 2 Survivors' Memories: Legacy from Nazi Concentration Camps

Chapter two explores how Rousset developed his theory of the universality of concentration camps and survivors. He defined concentration camps as facilities that illegally deprive individuals of their liberty and subject them to inhumane treatment, insisting that any facility meeting these criteria is a concentration camp and those detained are its victims. By examining Rousset's experiences before 1946 and his memoir *L'Univers concentrationnaire* (1946), this chapter explains how Rousset formed this theory and emphasizes the significance of survivors as witnesses. It concludes that Rousset viewed concentration camps as a universal institution in human society, which finally led him to unite all survivors in condemning the Soviet labour camps in 1949.

“Good people do not forget; good people tell the story; good people write!”³² These are said to be the last words of historian Simon Dubnov when he was murdered in Riga in December 1941. After the Nazi concentration camp system spread across Europe as the German army conquered, it left behind innumerable survivors who had witnessed its horrors first-hand. After the war, people who had been through the camps came forward to tell their stories; for some, telling their stories was a duty to remember.³³

Like other European countries occupied by Germany during the war, France had many people forcibly deported to German concentration camps. Most of the victims of forced deportation to German concentration camps in France consisted of two types of people. In France, the term

³² Annette Wieviorka, *From Survivor to Witness, Voices from the Shoah*, in *War and Remembrance in the Twentieth Century*, ed. Jay Winter and Emmanuel Sivan (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 125.

³³ *Ibid.*

'deportees' referred to Jews and members of the French Resistance who had been arrested by the German occupation forces or the Vichy government. While these identities often overlapped, statistically, French deportees were primarily categorized as either ethnic or political deportees.³⁴

After 1945, French ethnic deportees who had been living in Nazi concentration camps began to return to France. Unfortunately, very few of them made it back alive compared to the number of deportees who had left. According to statistics, on the eve of the German Occupation, there were 340,000 Jews in France.³⁵ Of these, some 80,000 Jews were forcibly transferred to concentration camps in the Nazi East, and with some forcibly transported to Auschwitz after August 1944, even though by this time, the Allies had begun the liberation of France.³⁶ After the war ended, only 2,500 of all the Jews who had been deported from France returned alive.³⁷

Regarding political deportees, 88,597 prisoners were arrested in France because of repressive measures by the German Occupation authorities and Vichy. Those arrested were classified in a database as resistance fighters, politicians, hostages, and common law criminals.³⁸ Sixty percent of those deportees returned to France alive.³⁹

David Rousset was one of these 90,000 expelled French political prisoners. Before the war, as a Trotskyist, Rousset was dismissed from the Socialist Party in 1935 for following Trotsky's

³⁴ François Delpech, "La persécution nazie et l'attitude de Vichy," *Historiens et Géographes* (2001), accessed 20 January 2024, <http://aphgcaen.free.fr/cercle/delpech2.htm>.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ "The Deportation of the Jews from France," Yad Vashem. The World Holocaust Remembrance Center accessed 20 January 2024, [The Deportation of the Jews from France \(yadvashem.org\)](http://www.yadvashem.org/en/the-deportation-of-the-jews-from-france).

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ "Livre Mémorial," La Fondation pour la Mémoire de la Déportation, accessed 13 January 2024, [FMD \(bddm.org\)](http://www.fmd.org).

³⁹ Ibid.

orders to carry out an internal struggle in the French Socialist Party.⁴⁰ At the time, the French Communist Party and the French Socialist Party endeavored to agree on a coalition to counter the growing fascist threat. This left-wing political alliance would later become known as the Popular Front.

This left-wing coalition of the French Communist Party, the French Socialist Party, and the Radical Socialist Party⁴¹ was heavily criticized by Trotsky. Trotsky argued that the communist parties of Europe could effectively prevent the rise of fascism only by taking firm revolutionary steps to overthrow capitalism.⁴² Whether the Communists, and indeed the Socialists, should join or create a government under a system they were committed to destroying is a question that has haunted the French left, and participation in bourgeois electoral politics can quickly be condemned by dogmatists as a betrayal of socialism.⁴³ So, it is unsurprising that Trotsky described the Popular Front in France as the “rotten refuse of reformism.”⁴⁴ Rousset shared Trotsky's political views, and after his expulsion from the Socialist Party, he remained committed to building the Trotskyist parties in France. Rousset participated in creating the Internationalist Workers Party in 1936, and later, he joined the Trotskyist Fourth International, founded in 1938.⁴⁵

⁴⁰ Kuby, “In the Shadow of the Concentration Camp,”: 149-150.

⁴¹ Composition of the Popular Front, see Julian Jackson, *The Popular Front in France Defending Democracy, 1934-38* (New York: Cambridge University, 1990), 3-5.

⁴² Robert S. Wistrich, “Leon Trotsky’s Theory of Fascism,” *Journal of Contemporary History* 11, no. 4 (October 1976): 159.

⁴³ Jackson, *The Popular Front in France*, 52-53.

⁴⁴ Wistrich, “Leon Trotsky’s Theory of Fascism,”: 178.

⁴⁵ Kuby, “In the Shadow of the Concentration Camp,”: 150.

In October 1943, Rousset was arrested in Paris for belonging to the Resistance, and before his liberation in 1945, he went to four concentration camps, including the infamous Buchenwald camp.⁴⁶ When Rousset returned, he lost half the over 200 pounds he weighed when arrested in 1943.⁴⁷ He left the camp with typhus and a lung infection; upon his return to Paris friends described him as a “dying man.”⁴⁸

His freedom from the concentration camps surely overjoyed Rousset. In 1946, Rousset enthusiastically told an interviewer that the experience of walking freely on the pavement in a crowd felt like a rebirth, like a rediscovering of childhood.⁴⁹ He likened the return of a deportee to a process of relearning life, where every aspect of daily existence held value and significance.⁵⁰ However, physical healing did not mean forgetting the horrors of the past concentration camp experience, which tended to perpetuate the memories of the past in the minds of the victims.

The repatriation in France of the sixty percent of political deportees who ultimately survived camp internment began before the end of the war.⁵¹ Between January and March 1945, with the help of the Red Cross, the rescue team led by Henri Frenay (1905-1988), the French Minister of Prisoners, Refugees, and Deportees negotiated with the German authorities for the use of the Red

⁴⁶ Stephan Pabst, *Buchenwald: Zur Europäischen Textgeschichte Eines Konzentrationslagers* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2023), 222.

⁴⁷ Kuby, *Political Survivors*.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 24.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

⁵¹ "Livre Mémorial."

Cross convoys to enter the German camps to provide supplies and carry out rescue operations.⁵² Once the war was over, France transported deportees trapped in Germany around the clock, reaching a peak of 15,000 per day.⁵³ However, the trauma assessment of prisoners was not adequately implemented, and rescued prisoners received only a psychological 10-minute evaluation when they returned to France by train or plane.⁵⁴ Even though it is well documented that the planners of repatriation seem to have been aware of the very high probability of emotional problems among returning deportees and of the difficulties that future repatriates might encounter on their return, French repatriation efforts continued to lack psychological care measures.⁵⁵ For many of those who survived, the horrors of the camps left them, even years later, with a sense of disillusionment with the reality of life and that returning to everyday life was not as easy as they had thought it would be.

The traumatic experience of the concentration camps and the relative indifference of the natural world to the suffering of the survivors constituted secondary trauma for the survivors. David Rousset, like many survivors, was often confronted with the painful reality that the horrors of the camps, which some of them were eager to express, were met with a degree of indifference. For those who did not experience the horrors of the camps, the thin bodies of the survivors were enough to convey what had happened to them. This replacement of the survivors' language with

⁵² Michael Dorland, *Cadaverland: Inventing a Pathology of Catastrophe for Holocaust Survival: The Limits of Medical Knowledge and Memory in France* (Waltham, MA: Brandeis University Press, 2009), 40.

⁵³ This number includes deportees, prisoners of war, and forced laborers. *Ibid.*

⁵⁴ Dorland, *Cadaver land*, 38.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 29-31.

the visual impact of their physical condition often left the survivors feeling alienated from the real world, as they felt trapped inside the camps and unable to escape.⁵⁶

Determined to show the world the horrors of the Nazi concentration camp, Rousset spent only three weeks in a state of recovery preparing a manuscript recounting his experiences in Buchenwald. The memoir that made him famous, *L'Univers concentrationnaire* (1946), was a book in which he endeavored to understand how the camp system caused prisoners to experience a profound breakdown of values. His focus on the hierarchical classification of Nazi concentration camp prisoners and how life in the camps sapped the prisoners' morale shows the particular importance he attached to analyzing the spiritual, rather than the functional, nature of the torture in the camps.

. In the literary sense, *L'Univers concentrationnaire* was an autobiographical novel, but emotionally and conceptually, it was a testimony of Rousset as a returned survivor. The inhumanity of the camps documented in *L'Univers concentrationnaire* allows us to understand Rousset's almost paranoid quest for survivors' privilege to explain and intervene in the Soviet camp system, as he exposed it later in 1949.⁵⁷ Avoiding personal narratives, *L'Univers* provides a structured analysis and portrayal of a new human institution: the concentration camp.

⁵⁶ Ibid., 78-79.

⁵⁷ In his 1949 appeal, Rousset repeatedly emphasized that only those who had experienced concentration camps could truly understand the urgency of exposing the Soviet labour camps. As survivors of the camps, they were the only ones who had firsthand experience of the horrors and thus had both the ability and the privilege to make such a call. Rousset referred to himself and other concentration camp survivors as “expert witnesses.” See Rousset, “Au secours des déportés.”

In *L'Univers concentrationnaire*, Rousset focused on the psychological state of the inmates to show the inhumanity of the camp. According to Rousset, people of all nationalities and all faiths walked around the main square of Buchenwald as if they were the walking dead, unquestioningly illuminated by the searchlights, yellow and without dignity.⁵⁸ Rousset's reference to the diversity of the inmates in the camps was an attempt to minimize the origin of the inmates' identity and to highlight the psychological erosion of the camps on all the inmates. There was no point in emphasizing the inmates' various political beliefs and nationalities once stripped of their convictions, dignity, and traces of civilization. It can be seen from this that as early as 1946, in his writings on camp analysis, Rousset identified with the universality of the camp inmate, that a person, regardless of their status, who had been in a camp would be labeled only as a prisoner.⁵⁹ This similar universalization of camp inmates would be repeated in Rousset's 1949 call for an investigation into the Soviet camps, when he called on all former internees, regardless of their political beliefs, to join in exposing the Soviet camps, demonstrating his conviction that the similarity of the camp ordeal was enough to overcome the differing political beliefs of the camp survivors and unite them in denouncing the camps that still existed in the Soviet Union.⁶⁰

According to Rousset's description, prisoners arriving at the camp were herded from their vehicles under the glare of dogs and lights, bumping into and struggling with each other. The

⁵⁸ David Rousset, *L'Univers concentrationnaire* (Paris: les éditions de minuit, 1965), 12-13.

⁵⁹ Another example of Rousset's perspective on the universality of concentration camps and the identity of survivors is reflected in his disregard for the distinct identity of Jewish concentration camp survivors. Throughout his life, he opposed the intentional differentiation of survivors, especially Jewish ones. In the 1960s, Rousset publicly clashed with historian Jean-François Steiner, author of *Treblinka: The Revolt of an Extermination Camp* (1966), over Steiner's assertion that Nazi extermination camps for Jews were fundamentally different from other types of Nazi concentration camps. Rousset believed that Steiner's approach of singling out Jewish survivors would severely undermine the solidarity among all concentration camp survivors. See Samuel Moyn, *A Holocaust Controversy: The Treblinka Affair in Postwar France* (Waltham: Brandeis University Press, 2005), 2-3, 57-63.

⁶⁰ Rousset, "Au secours des déportés."

camp's sophisticated system of numbering, shaving, and showering inmates made all the procedures orderly. Rousset described the camp as a full-fledged department store, except that behind the counters were the tools of the killing.⁶¹ Rousset compared the prisoners entering the camps to sheep, a view he simultaneously relayed through the mouth of an unnamed prisoner: "The shaved heads have been trembling, conscious only of the fact that they have lost an otherwise unique world, a world undoubtedly hidden beyond the grid, far beyond the space with no horizon, traversed by torn railway tracks."⁶²

In Rousset's view, the isolation of concentration camp inmates from the rest of the world was an essential criterion in defining a concentration camp. According to Rousset, restriction of personal liberty and isolation from the outside world were sufficient to constitute a concentration camp. In analyzing Rousset's remarks on the isolation of people in the concentration camp world from the everyday world, Hannah Arendt suggested that this stemmed from the functional requirements of the camps:⁶³

The camps are meant not only to exterminate people and degrade human beings but also serve the ghastly experiment of eliminating, under scientifically controlled conditions, spontaneity itself as an expression of human behavior and of transforming the human personality into a mere thing, into something that even animals are not.⁶⁴

⁶¹ Rousset, *L'Univers concentrationnaire*, 13-15.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 16.

⁶³ Rousset's *L'Univers* greatly influenced Arendt's understanding of the despair within concentration camps. This is evident in her frequent direct citations of Rousset's descriptions of the camps in her work *The Origins of Totalitarianism*.

⁶⁴ Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, 438.

Thus, a concentration camp's ability to eliminate human spontaneity has to do with its ability to isolate the inmates from the outside world completely. This exclusive isolation was something that only a concentration camp could achieve, not only in terms of life and freedom but also in terms of the camp system's design to create a Kafkaesque dystopia and deny the inmates the meaning of their lives.⁶⁵

One of the arguments in Rousset's 1949 article denouncing the Soviet concentration camps was that they were naturally the same as the Nazi concentration camps in that they were both systematic persecutions that deprived people of their liberty and segregated them from the everyday world.⁶⁶ Rousset's similar remarks in *L'univers concentrationnaire* suggest that his idea of universalizing the definition of concentration camps, which he had held since the early post-war period, was based on his experiences in the camps. This was not a spur-of-the-moment response to appeal to public opinion when he denounced the Soviet concentration camps in 1949.

According to *L'univers concentrationnaire*, Rousset mentioned and categorized many famous concentration camps. He described the camps of Buchenwald, Neuengamme, Dachau, and others as "la cité des robots" ("the city of robots")⁶⁷, which formed the basic framework of the Nazi concentration camp industry, carrying out a precise and slow killing program. Rousset subsequently distinguished between a system of concentration camps for Jews and Aryans, represented by Auschwitz and Neu-Bremm.⁶⁸

⁶⁵ Ibid., 438-439.

⁶⁶ See Rousset, "Au secours des déportés."

⁶⁷ Rousset, *L'Univers concentrationnaire*, 48.

⁶⁸ Ibid., 48-50.

However, after distinguishing between the different Nazi concentration camps, Rousset argues that there is no difference in the nature of the camps, but only in their degree.⁶⁹

As he wrote:

Buchenwald had its hell: Dora, the underground V2 rocket factory; prisoners spent weeks without going to the surface; eleven people squeezing onto two straw mattresses, eating and sleeping in the underground next to the latrines. Hangings occurred every evening, with prisoners obligated to watch the slow and meticulous executions. Very often, on Sundays, there was a roll call, and the "Muslims," the weakened prisoners, were singled out and sent to the extermination camps in the East. In Neuengamme, people were hanged in the courtyard, and for a period, the assembled detainees were required to sing throughout the ceremony. In Helmstedt, hangings took place in our dormitory.⁷⁰

Once again, Rousset's definition of the camp system was universal. In his view, fine distinctions between types of camps did not help to understand the dangers of the camp system. This approach was consistent with his condemnation of the Soviet camps four years later when he linked the Soviet camps to the Nazi camps.⁷¹ In his view, gas chambers, forced labour, and prison factories were a subset of the camp system. Once illegal detention became the norm, infrastructure could be defined as a concentration camp. Here, the existence of concentration camps as a phenomenon, rather than as a pronoun for the evils of the Nazi regime alone, implied that equally evil concentration camps might exist in other parts of the world.

It is worth noting that the prisoners in the camps, in Rousset's analysis, did not necessarily retain a solidarity of mutual assistance towards each other, as the SS consciously selected

⁶⁹ Ibid., 50.

⁷⁰ Ibid., 51-52.

⁷¹ In 1949, Rousset argued that even the Soviet concentration camps could not escape condemnation as labour camps that were created for economic production. He cited the example of Buchenwald, where there were no gas chambers for the massacre of Jews, but no one denied that Buchenwald was a concentration camp. See Rousset, "Au secours des déportés."

privileged prisoners to participate in the camp's administration. According to Rousset, in Buchenwald, the management of the camp was essentially transferred to the designated prisoners, and the function of the SS was effectively limited to controlling access to the camp and a guiding role.⁷² The SS assigned tasks to privileged prisoners whom Rousset called “Prisoners of Bureaucracy” [bureaucrates détenus].⁷³ This system not only allowed the SS to conduct its business more freely, but more importantly, the presence of these prisoner aristocrats made it difficult for the prisoners to stick together. This was another aspect of the horrors of the camps that Rousset saw as reinforcing the despair of the camp world, as the SS deliberately introduced the system as a form of punishment for the prisoner. The infighting amongst the prisoners was designed to polarise and weaken their will to resist.⁷⁴

The intensification of inter-prisoner conflict through the screening of privileged inmates was, in Arendt's view, a critical step in the creation of the living dead, and the extreme conditions of the camps tended to force inmates to face dilemmas. The camp system tended to extend organized complicity to the inmates.⁷⁵ The presence of complicit inmates effectively gave them the lion's share of administrative responsibility, and when a bureaucratic prisoner was forced to decide between letting his friend die or someone who happened to be a stranger, his moral system completely collapsed. The distinction between the murderer and the victim was blurred.⁷⁶

⁷² Rousset, *L'Univers concentrationnaire*, 101-102.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 105.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 105-106.

⁷⁵ Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, 451-452.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 452-453.

Similarly, Rousset insisted that the truth is that "victim and executioner are alike ignoble; the lesson of the camps is the brotherhood of abjection."⁷⁷

Physically tortured and filled with moral self-contempt, the prisoners in the world of the concentration camps were purposefully tortured to death in a world of isolation, and even if they survived, it was tough for them to get out of that hell. The horrors of the camps forced the prisoners to forget about the everyday world and the ordinary world to forget about them.⁷⁸

Rousset argued that an abnormal fear was prevalent among prisoners in the camps.

He described the image and inner fears of a typical concentration camp prisoner:

A man, with his hands tied, kneels on an iron bar that gradually and unavoidably pierces his skin. Sweat cascades down his face, his eyes wide and fixed on a harsh, unmoving light that seems to gaze back at him for an eternity. It scorches his eyelids, drains his mind, and fills him with insane fears and desires as if suffering from insatiable thirsts: this is the lot of a concentration camp prisoner. Everywhere and at every moment, the SS have erected edifices of violence.⁷⁹

Even so, Rousset exclaimed that he: "knew nothing that could visually recreate life in a concentration camp with the same intensity."⁸⁰

Concentration camp survivors' recollections were considered educational by Rousset because of their experience of the horrors of the Nazi concentration camps. Their firsthand recollections of the camps contributed to a greater understanding of how the camps functioned under the totalitarian state system. Survivors' testimonies were essential in providing this understanding and conferred

⁷⁷ Ibid., 453.

⁷⁸ Ibid., 443.

⁷⁹ Rousset, *L'Univers concentrationnaire*, 63-64.

⁸⁰ Ibid.

on them the status of witnesses.⁸¹ However, the extent to which they could recapture for the public the horrors of the concentration camps was debatable.

One limitation faced by concentration camp survivor writers like Rousset was that they could not fully recount their experiences in their entirety because they existed as traumatic memories that could not be accurately conveyed. After all, it is not possible to experience a horrible event and reproduce it while simultaneously developing an avoidant refusal.⁸² In this view, it was paradoxical to talk about traumatic memories and, at the same time, recall them; it was only possible to speak of the repression of traumatic memories and not about their reproduction.⁸³ As analyzed by psychologist Cathy Caruth, once a traumatic memory has been transformed into a narrative memory, the accuracy of the memory will likely be compromised because the facts of the narrative are pretty different from the facts of the memory.⁸⁴ Zoe Waxman relays the troubles of a survivor-writer who had difficulty conveying the pain experienced by survivors in a way that readers could understand. For example, hunger, which at one time denoted the feeling of not having enough to eat in everyday life, was a tangible fear that caused actual pain in the concentration camps.⁸⁵ In this way, the surreal style Rousset employed in *L'Univers* was a deliberate strategy, aiming to make readers feel the extreme and inhuman horrors of the concentration camps as intensely as possible.

⁸¹ Zoe Vania Waxman, *Writing the Holocaust: Identity, Testimony, Representation* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 154.

⁸² *Ibid.*, 155.

⁸³ *Ibid.*

⁸⁴ Cathy Caruth, *Trauma: Explorations in Memory* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995), 153.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*

In *L'Univers concentrationnaire*, Rousset conveyed a sense of responsibility for the survivors and the fact that it is difficult for ordinary people to comprehend the horrors of the camps fully. It is this that highlights the value of the survivors, who, in Rousset's view, without an understanding of the horrors of the Nazi camps, there is no way of guaranteeing that similar tragedies will not occur in the future. So, how do people be helped to understand the horrors of the concentration camps? In Rousset's view, the survivors of the camps had the first right to explain the horrors of the camps. As Rousset expressed it: "ordinary people did not know everything was possible, and even if testimony compelled their intellect to admit it, their muscles would not believe it."⁸⁶

Rousset then expressed the uniqueness of the survivor's identity and a kind of authority. According to Rousset, camp prisoners did know everything about camps; they were familiar with death, which they encountered every hour.⁸⁷ They knew the humiliation of beatings; they judged the devastation of hunger. For years, they lingered in this degrading environment, separated from others by an experience that could not be transmitted.⁸⁸

Since ordinary people could not understand the horrors of the concentration camps fully, Rousset attempted to create a possible illustration of life in the camps from the impossible. On the one hand, Rousset was aware of the horrors of the camps, and on the other hand, he recognized the difficulty of making the public aware of the camps. As the historian Waxman argues, the camp tragedy could not be reproduced, but it had to be reproduced, which was one of the contradictions of the Holocaust/Nazi camps analysis.⁸⁹ And the fact that language was not enough to

⁸⁶ Rousset, *L'Univers concentrationnaire*, 181.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 182.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*

⁸⁹ Zoe Waxman, *Writing the Holocaust*, 173.

communicate the full horror did not mean that nothing could be said or understood.⁹⁰ Rousset saw himself as a witness who felt competent to judge the seriousness of the camp's crimes. In his view, as a survivor who knew the camps, he possessed an ontological and epistemological authority to interpret them.

Therefore, from the perspective expressed in Rousset's works in 1946, his decision to expose Soviet concentration camps in 1949 was understandable on a personal and emotional level. His appeal in 1949, claiming that there was no difference between Soviet and Nazi concentration camps, stemmed from his universal definition of the camp system as an act that mercilessly isolated inmates from the outside world, viewing it as a violation of the most basic human rights; in this, he saw no difference between Soviet and German camps. He called for all survivors of Nazi concentration camps to condemn the Soviet camps alongside him because Rousset firmly believed that it was precisely their responsibility. After all, as former camp survivors had experienced the extreme terror of the camps, they should sympathize with other camp prisoners worldwide. Finally, Rousset's reason for calling survivors "expert witnesses" in 1949 was that he viewed the experience of the camps as a moral and cognitive privilege. Only survivors were qualified to recognize the horror and harm of the camps. Standing up to testify was also their duty; if they remained silent, it would be a betrayal of the past, admitting the success of the Nazi attempt to destroy completely the prisoners' will to resist, only this time, four years later, Rousset transplanted this analysis onto the Soviet concentration camps.

This pursuit of the expert identity partly evolved into a motivation for some survivors to take on

⁹⁰ Ibid.

the role of experts themselves in analyzing the Holocaust and concentration camp studies. Survivors often can more promptly identify the extent to which the concentration camp system has posed a danger to humanity and has potential threats in the foreseeable future. Just as Rousset concluded at the end of *L'Univers concentrationnaire*, he believed that the existence of Nazi concentration camps served as a warning because the social and economic foundations that gave rise to such camps could be found in other parts of the world society.⁹¹ He explained the existence of Nazi concentration camps in the tone of a former Trotskyist, attributing it to the social aberrations caused by the economic crises of capitalism and imperialism.⁹² However, he ultimately warned that this did not mean that similar systems of concentration camps could not exist in human society.⁹³ The English translator of *L'Univers concentrationnaire*, Ramon Guthrie, summarized this, suggesting that Rousset's interest in the camps as sites of atrocity was far less than his interest in them as a social phenomenon produced by social, economic, and political trends because these societal trends, as a form of atrocity, were still operating in societies everywhere.⁹⁴ Concentration camps were a social phenomenon, which meant they had the potential to reemerge. In this case, the memories of survivors who had experienced concentration camps would help others deepen their understanding of the horrors of concentration camps, thereby serving a preventive function.

If the concentration camps were seen as a universal phenomenon rather than being used to

⁹¹ Rousset, *L'Univers concentrationnaire*, 186-187.

⁹² Ibid.

⁹³ Ibid

⁹⁴ David Rousset, *The Other Kingdom* (New York: Reynal & Hitchcock, 1947), 11.

define the Nazis, then Rousset's criticism of the Soviet Union becomes traceable. The question now becomes when Rousset began the decision to condemn the Soviet Union and why.

Chapter 3 From Resistance to RDR: Rousset's Political Engagement in Postwar France

This chapter explains David Rousset's shift in political orientation by analyzing his experiences from 1945 to 1949, which led the former Trotskyist to publicly denounce the Soviet Union in 1949 after a brief period of pro-Soviet attitudes in the early post-war period. Chapter 3 attempts to rationalize Rousset's good reputation in France against the background of popular admiration for the Resistance in post-war France. This admiration also explains Rousset's pro-Soviet statements in 1945. The chapter then describes the Rassemblement Démocratique Révolutionnaire (RDR), a short-lived political movement founded by Rousset in 1947. It explains how the failure of the RDR, within the context of the Cold War, led Rousset to turn to the capitalist United States for support and ultimately become an opponent of the Soviet Union.

In the early post-war period, French leader Charles de Gaulle went to great lengths to obscure the existence of the Vichy regime. The humiliation of the last four years of German Occupation and the bitter memories of the Vichy regime's subservience to the Germans hardly allowed him to celebrate his victory in peace. He chose to cling to the Republic, the sacred matter that resonated most with the French, to rebuild French unity. In 1944, de Gaulle responded to a crowd's demand to proclaim the restoration of the Republic by saying:

The Republic has never ceased to exist. Free France, fighting France, and the French Committee of National Liberation have by turns embodied it. Vichy was and is null and void. I am the president of the government of the Republic. Why should I proclaim it?⁹⁵

⁹⁵ Quoted in Henry Rousso, *Vichy Syndrome: History and Memory in France since 1944*, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1994), 16-17.

In post-war France, a phenomenon named by historian Henry Rousso as the “Vichy Syndrome” emerged.⁹⁶ It described the nation's struggle with the memory and consequences of the Vichy regime's collaboration with Nazi Germany. Led by de Gaulle, French leadership tirelessly propagated the notion that collaboration had been the deed of a mere handful of traitors while exaggerating the scale and scope of the Resistance.⁹⁷ In this way, French leaders tried to blame the German invaders for all the miseries of the Occupation.⁹⁸ This effort aimed to foster a communal identity that could embrace most French citizens, justifying post-war reconstruction and unity by portraying most French as heroic participants in the Resistance.⁹⁹

France swiftly established a political representation transcending specific political ideologies after the war by sharply dividing wartime activities into collaboration and resistance. This representation was agreeable to various political factions across the political spectrum, from communists to Gaullists, positioning it as the cornerstone of the new republic. Considering that in the first elections of the Fourth Republic, two-thirds of the legislators had Resistance backgrounds, this consensus was understandable.¹⁰⁰

This universal discourse also sought to downplay the post-war divisions. The four years under Vichy were primarily regarded as a civil war.¹⁰¹ The partitioned Occupation by German forces and the collaborationist regimes not only geographically split France but also polarized its

⁹⁶ Ibid.

⁹⁷ Ibid., 18-20.

⁹⁸ Tony Judt, "The Past Is Another Country: Myth and Memory in Postwar Europe," in *The Politics of Retribution in Europe: World War II and Its Aftermath*, ed. Jan T. Gross, István Deák, and Tony Judt (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), 295-296.

⁹⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰⁰ Rousso, *Vichy Syndrome*, 18.

¹⁰¹ Ibid., 5-10; Judt, *Past Imperfect*, 32-35.

political forces, pitting conservatives, fascists, leftists, and pro-Communists against each other. As analyzed by Rousso, the internal conflicts sparked by the Vichy regime over four years originated from the 1930s' left and right-wing calls for internal enemies.¹⁰² By the time of the Occupation, these tensions had evolved into a confrontation between Nazism, Communism, and representative democracy. On this basis, bloody confrontation was inevitable, and the Vichy regime detained and arrested more than 200,000 people during the Occupation, a considerable number of whom were arrested as a result of what the Vichy regime regarded as an internal problem rather than as a result of co-operation with the German occupiers.¹⁰³ Accordingly, Free France and the Communist Resistance killed more than 10,000 prisoners without trial.¹⁰⁴ Therefore, simply blaming foreign invasion and collaborators for the internal struggles caused by the Vichy regime was far-fetched because it ignored the factional struggles that were already rife in France before the war.

It can be said that the four years of Vichy not only narrated the story of the Resistance of most patriots against the invaders but also perpetuated the chaos and strife of French politics. French leaders chose to overlook the civil war of the Vichy period, focusing instead on the saga of the Resistance in the aftermath. However, it is important to note that the Vichy regime was not an isolated episode. The excesses of the French transition from the later years of the Front Populaire to Vichy marked a shift from one civil war to another. The post-war French leaders were resolute in preventing the new republic from falling back into these unresolved conflicts. They saw Vichy

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, 6-8.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, 6.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 7.

as a convenient scapegoat and sought to expand the scope of the Resistance as much as possible to unite as many different political forces as possible.

The dark image of the Vichy regime would persist in the following decades, despite De Gaulle's attempts to replace the wartime divisions with a unified narrative of Resistance. The digression was that de Gaulle's relentless denial of the legitimacy of the Vichy regime was at least legally untenable. The French parliament had voted to transfer power to Pétain in 1940, and the Vichy regime was widely recognized by the international community, establishing diplomatic relations with 40 countries between 1940 and 1941, including the United States, Japan, and China. It also means that de Gaulle was technically a rebel.¹⁰⁵ If this is logical, it means France legitimately collaborated with the enemy during the war, which was an unacceptable scenario afterward. The thesis that the Vichy regime was illegitimate, or even non-existent, sought to place the blame for the war's collaboration and the civil war on a few elements that attempted to lead post-war France to escape the strife of the past to enter a new era as quickly as possible. In any case, among all the resisters, there was no doubt that the Vichy regime was illegal, and this basic concept constituted a source of unity and solidarity among the resisters of different political beliefs.

Reasonably, the Resistance members were sincerely supported in the first days after the war. The Fourth Republic was founded on a high level of respect for the Resistance, both emotionally

¹⁰⁵ On the legal relations of the Vichy regime with the post-war provisional government and the pre-war Third Republic, see Peter Novick, *The Resistance versus Vichy: The Purge of Collaborators in Liberated France* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1968), 191-197.

and legally, and the intellectuals and politicians who had experience with the Resistance had a great deal of prestige and reputation in the early years after the war.

The same applies to French deportees detained in Germany. Most of the political deportees who returned to their homeland had been arrested and deported to German concentration camps for their participation in the Resistance. They returned to France towards the end of the war. The French Provisional Government set up a Department for Deportees and Refugees at the borders, and those who were screened by the Department and identified as political deportees or prisoners of war were given a bonus of 1,000 francs, double rations, and other benefits such as paid holidays together with their wives.¹⁰⁶ When the government passed a law in 1948 precisely to compensate war victims, members of the Resistance movement received much more compensation than other groups, such as prisoners of war and forced labour workers.¹⁰⁷

There was also a great deal of support for the return of the deportees throughout France. For example, the prefect of Savoie reported at the end of December 1944 that there had been local protests against the elections scheduled for February 1945 because 2 million French citizens were still interned in Germany.¹⁰⁸ In other regions, the electoral commissions even chose deportees as candidates without knowing whether they were still alive.¹⁰⁹ Resistance members undoubtedly had sufficient prestige and moral nobility in early post-war France to help them become involved in public affairs and exert their influence. Albert Camus praised these deportees after the war:

¹⁰⁶ Megan Koreman, "A Hero's Homecoming: The Return of the Deportees to France, 1945," *Journal of Contemporary History* 32, no. 1 (January 1997): 11-12.

¹⁰⁷ On France's post-war categorization of reparations to wartime victims, see Regula Ludi, *Reparations for Nazi victims in postwar Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 54-58.

¹⁰⁸ Koreman, "A Hero's Homecoming," 13.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 14.

“It must be known that a single hair on the heads of these resistance fighters is more important than all those smiling politicians in photographs.”¹¹⁰

David Rousset was brought back to France by car, train, and airplane. As a well-known intellectual, he was received by Major General James Gavin of the U.S. Airborne during his return.¹¹¹ Rousset's prominent position as a left-wing intellectual before the war gave him good connections with many celebrities, and his wartime experience of Resistance furthered his popularity. In Rousset's case, his first work on writing about the camps, the original version of the previously discussed *L'Univers concentrationnaire*, appeared in the newspaper *Revue Internationale*, which was founded by Rousset's friend Maurice Nadeau (1911-2013) after the Second World War.¹¹² Nadeau had joined the French Trotskyist organization with Rousset in the 1930s, and both were later involved in the Resistance together.¹¹³ Nadeau was close to Rousset, both politically and emotionally. Another work by Rousset, *Les Jours de notre mort*, was published by Jean-Paul Sartre's *Les Temps Modernes*.¹¹⁴ These two works established Rousset as a leading authority on interpreting the concentration camp experience in France.

Of all those who participated in the Resistance, politicians, intellectuals, and others who had prestige and privileges before the war enjoyed more societal support afterward. It can be said that if a celebrity who was prestigious before the war joined a Resistance organization during the

¹¹⁰ Albert Camus, Alexandre De Gramont, and Elisabeth Young-Bruehl, *Between Hell and Reason: Essays from the Resistance Newspaper Combat, 1944-1947* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1991), 109.

¹¹¹ Kuby, *Political Survivors*, 22.

¹¹² *Ibid.*, 28.

¹¹³ Marion Van Renterghem, “Maurice Nadeau, éditeur génial et désargenté, mort à la tâche à 102 ans,” *Le Monde*, 17 June 2013, [Maurice Nadeau, éditeur génial et désargenté, mort à la tâche à 102 ans \(lemonde.fr\)](http://www.lemonde.fr).

¹¹⁴ Kuby, *Political Survivors*, 28.

Occupation, they would receive double honors after the war. On the one hand, they could rely on their status to return to the French upper class and re-engage in public affairs; on the other hand, their wartime Resistance demonstrated unparalleled courage and patriotic fervor; combining these aspects gained such noble resisters many loyal supporters after the war. Rousset was such an example. Another primary reason for his high reputation after the war was that he was not just any resister; he was a bona fide concentration camp survivor, having been imprisoned in German concentration camps as a deportee. This highlighted his lofty moral authority, and the image of a political deportee who was also a concentration camp survivor resonated particularly well with the French post-war narrative of Resistance. Survivors of concentration camps who were political prisoners during this period were widely regarded in France as heroes who suffered on behalf of France.¹¹⁵ A description of Rousset appeared in a recent article in which the author described Rousset's reputation as having been established when he returned alive from Auschwitz. [sic]¹¹⁶ *Esprit* described a lecture Rousset attended in October 1945: "Rousset, as a survivor, speaks with such authority! What an authority!"¹¹⁷ Even pro-communist magazines heaped praise on Rousset, a former Trotskyist, and the editor of a pro-communist magazine reminded readers in 1946 never to forget Rousset's portrayal of the "kingdom of the concentration camps," which was likely to return sometime in the future.¹¹⁸

Rousset's status as a resister and Nazi concentration camp survivor appealed to the political aesthetics of the French public in post-war France; or, put another way, it was politically correct

¹¹⁵ Koreman, "A Hero's Homecoming " : 14.

¹¹⁶ See Renterghem, "Maurice Nadeau," There seems to be an error in the original article; Rousset was a survivor of Buchenwald.

¹¹⁷ Bertrand D'Astorg, "Réflexions d'un survivant," *Esprit*, 1 November 1947:691.

¹¹⁸ Quoted in Kuby, *Political Survivors*, 44.

for him to engage in political discourse as a resister in post-war France. In 1945, Rousset became active in commenting on public affairs, initially focusing on the concentration camps but gradually diversifying. This shows the long tradition of French intellectual involvement in public affairs since the Dreyfus Affair, where intellectuals, as a highly respected and independent social group, spoke out publicly to guide the country on the right path of change.¹¹⁹

In late 1945, Rousset presented a report entitled "Propositions for a New Appreciation of the International Situation" at the congress of the Parti Communiste Internationaliste, a French Trotskyist party, which eventually led to Rousset's expulsion from the PCI. In his assertion that Trotskyists should revise their position on hostile relations with the Soviet Union, Rousset argued that the history of the Second World War amply demonstrated the need to "silence some of our disagreements with Stalinism and to do so deliberately and fundamentally."¹²⁰ Rousset further suggested that "the Stalinist bureaucracy, for all its flaws and its conservative and reactionary ideology, is one of the decisive bulwarks of socialist revolution in the world today."¹²¹ Rousset's remarks were taken as a serious offense by French Trotskyists, and he was expelled from PCI in 1946.

Rousset's pandering to the Soviet Union was far from the anti-Soviet image he would establish in 1949. Still, support for the USSR was common in French public discourse during the early postwar period. As Tony Judt has argued, analyzing the political positions of prominent postwar French figures in terms of their individual behavior is challenging.¹²² In the 1930s, Rousset, as a

¹¹⁹ Sunil Khilnani, *Arguing Revolution: The Intellectual Left in Postwar France* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993), 11-12.

¹²⁰ Kuby, *Political Survivors*, 49.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*

¹²² Judt, *Past Imperfect*, 28.

Trotskyist, was undoubtedly opposed to the Soviet Union. Still, in the post-war context of France celebrating the Resistance, Rousset chose to downplay the struggle with the Soviet Union. Rousset's reason for doing so was significantly related to the French Communist Party's unwavering participation in the Resistance movement during the Occupation.¹²³ During the Resistance period, the PCF was one of the few resistance forces with a complete underground structure, publications, militia organizations, and a framework of authority.¹²⁴ By 1945, the positive image of the PCF was closely linked to its wartime resistance. Although the story was somewhat exaggerated, the fact that sixty thousand members of the PCF died during the Occupation gave the party a justifiable moral prestige in the post-war era.¹²⁵

Wartime resistance gave the PCF an excellent opportunity for postwar propaganda. Further, the Soviet Union alone liberated Eastern and Central Europe in the name of anti-fascism and defeated Nazi Germany after four years of hard fighting. As the historian Francois Furet argued, the Second World War became "an involuntary accomplice of Communism"¹²⁶ for the Soviet Union, which legitimately liberated half of Europe in the name of freedom and gained unprecedented prestige, enough to erase the regime's past crimes.¹²⁷ By the end of the war, the

¹²³ Even before the invasion of the Soviet Union, a considerable number of French Communists were involved in the resistance. For details, see David Caute, *Communism and the French intellectuals, 1914-1960* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1964), 147-151.

¹²⁴ Judt, *Past Imperfect*, 159.

¹²⁵ Caute, *Communism and the French intellectuals*, 161.

¹²⁶ François Furet, *The Passing of an Illusion: The Idea of Communism in the Twentieth Century* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999), 330.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*, 350.

combatant countries were divided into a bipolar world of fascism and anti-fascism, with the Soviet Union unquestionably on the side of justice.¹²⁸

Simone de Beauvoir gave the Soviet Union a high status after the war, as she wrote in 1945: “We have no hesitation in our friendship with the Soviet Union, and the sacrifices of the Russian people have proved that their leaders are the embodiment of themselves.”¹²⁹ Beauvoir's subsequent explanation of why the USSR gained a good impression after the war may be in line with the views of a significant part of the French population at the time, including, of course, Rousset: “The war had brought about a decisive change, our beautiful dreams had come from resistance, and only the factions that had participated in the resistance movement had joined public life.”¹³⁰ The deep-seated reason for the Soviet Union's considerable prestige in post-war France was that the French intelligentsia took Soviet communism as the origin of the heroic resistance to French communism during the war.¹³¹ Tony Judt insightfully analyzed how wartime memories had a decisive impact on the public statements of prominent post-war French figures. He believed that the public figures of that time tended to place the Occupation as a singular experience within the context of understanding post-war affairs, especially for intellectuals with resistance backgrounds.¹³² Resistance members' personal stories positioned them on the "path of history."¹³³ Consequently, they were liberated from the concerns of political participation.¹³⁴

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*, 352.

¹²⁹ Simone de Beauvoir, *La Force des choses* (Paris : Gallimard, 1963), 18.

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*, 19-20.

¹³¹ Judt, *past Imperfect*, 161.

¹³² *Ibid.*, 28.

¹³³ *Ibid.*

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*

Through their resistance, intellectuals engaged with history and gained entry tickets to intervene in public politics after the war.

From the perspective of 1946, Rousset's softened stance towards the Soviet Union was understandable because the revolutionary ideas represented by the USSR, or rather the modified revolutionary thoughts, appeared beautiful to postwar leftist intellectuals. In 1946, many saw Marxism as a third option beyond capitalism and defeated fascism. Even Trotskyists like Rousset began to improve their view of the Soviet Union. According to Trotskyists, the Soviet Union undoubtedly became a nation of "revolution betrayed."¹³⁵ Trotsky himself fatalistically compared the USSR under Stalin to a Bonapartist state, likening Stalin to Napoleon, who had also betrayed the revolution.¹³⁶ If Trotsky argued that the roots of fascism and Stalinism lay in the proletariat's failure to carry out a second revolution,¹³⁷ then in 1945, many France saw an opportunity for socialism to revive in the country and carry the potential new revolution. On the one hand, France was widely considered to have lost its pre-war influence, necessitating a systemic rebuild while seeking a powerful concept of national revival.¹³⁸ The communist promise of building a solid sovereign state echoed De Gaulle's own advocacy. Still, the advantage of French communism was that it did not, at first glance, seem to be based on the glorification of a military hero [the existence of the Vichy government was always a lesson, so de Gaulle was certainly in potential danger on this point].¹³⁹ On the other hand, the French emphasized the

¹³⁵ Leon Trotsky, *The Revolution Betrayed: What is the Soviet Union and Where is it Going?* (New York: Pathfinder Press, 1972)

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*, 272-279.

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*, 278-279.

¹³⁸ Khilnani, *Arguing Revolution*, 44.

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*, 18-19.

history of their own Great Revolution, which led them to see the hope of successfully reviving France after the war through harmonized communism or Marxism. After all, Bonaparte seized power, but if viewed dialectically, the aura of the republic ultimately remained in France.

Hence, Sartre's attitude merits close examination. In summarizing Sartre's ideal, Beauvoir believed that Sartre hoped communists could enable humanism to exist and that he would attempt to seize humanism from the bourgeoisie.¹⁴⁰ If Sartre could use tools borrowed from capitalism to understand Marxism from the perspective of bourgeois culture, he would then invert bourgeois culture to be viewed from a Marxist standpoint.¹⁴¹ Precisely because France in 1945 was still undecided about its future direction, there were still many possibilities as to where its political system should go, and the fact that the Right had temporarily lost its voice because of Vichy's collaboration with the enemy did not mean that the people were willing to return to the chaotic Third Republic. France's long republican tradition and the growing influence of Marxism led many competent intellectuals to envisage the country's future as a delicate balance, hoping that France, after its revolution, would maintain its republican institutions while retaining the stability of its communist planners. Raymond Aron depicted the Soviet principle as possessing both the radicalism of the Jacobins and the planners' impatience to maintain order.¹⁴² This observation was equally applicable to describing post-war French leftist political thought.

What were the reasons for the enduring appeal of communism in France, even to Trotskyists such as Rousset, who, for a time in post-war France, expressed a favorable view of the Soviet Union? Francois Furet summed it up well when he argued that communism generated more

¹⁴⁰ Beauvoir, *La Force des choses*, 19.

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁴² Raymond Aron. *The Opium of the Intellectuals* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, reprint in 1962), 16.

spontaneous adherence in the open and liberal societies of Western Europe precisely because it never came to power there.¹⁴³ This fact allowed communist ideology to break away from the authoritarian character of the Soviet Union in Western Europe while retaining the most primitive appeal of Marxism.¹⁴⁴ As a demonstration of the enormous appeal of communism, the communist-controlled National Union of Intellectuals (Union Nationale des Intellectuels) attracted more than 100,000 members before and after the liberation.¹⁴⁵

Rousset did not abandon his revolutionary socialist ideals after he left the Parti Communiste Internationaliste. As for the future of post-war capitalism in France, Rousset's attitude was that it "is decomposing and rotting."¹⁴⁶ As a member of the radical left, he still expected a fundamental change that would transform the chaos of France in the thirties, wash away the shame of the German Occupation of the forties, and reunite the divided political forces. Rousset believed that the bourgeoisie had failed to fulfill its historical mission in the past and that it would not fare well in France in 1946.

Thus, in 1948, Rousset and Jean-Paul Sartre founded a political organization, called the Rassemblement Démocratique Révolutionnaire (RDR). The organization aimed to create a third-way party on the left. This socialist alliance neither conformed to communist radical ideas nor identified with capitalism's path. In February 1948, the founders of the RDR, led by Rousset and Sartre, together published a manifesto in the leftist newspaper *Franc-Tireur*, which stated that:

Amid the decay of capitalist democracy, the weaknesses of a certain form of social

¹⁴³ Furet, *The passing of an illusion*, xi.

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁵ Caute, *The Fellow-Travellers*, 209.

¹⁴⁶ Kuby, *Political Survivors*, 49.

democracy, and the constraints of communism in its Stalinist form, we believe that free people gathering for revolutionary democracy can breathe new life into freedom and human principles.¹⁴⁷

The statement went on to denounce the Cold War struggle that was intensifying at the time, which in the French context showed RDR's double rejection of the pro-Soviet PCF as well as the pro-Washington Socialist Party SPIO:

For us, the means are as important as the ends, and the aim of socialism is not to permit the use of any means. We do not recognize the existence of a double game in the struggle between executioners and victims. We cannot adopt improper means to ensure the achievement of lofty goals because their realization comes from morality, civil law, and the struggle of peoples from various nations against tyranny over the centuries.¹⁴⁸

The statement called for collective politics not being the only option for the French, thus: “The RDR will not divide any democratic forces with the proletariat, whether they remain in their respective parties or leave, we do not need to criticize them; rather, we believe that the time has come for everyone to come together in revolutionary democracy.”¹⁴⁹ As a participant in the political turmoil of the 1930s and the subsequent debates on France's post-war reconstruction, Rousset was hopeful that the RDR would halt factional disputes while truly remaining uninfluenced by the US and USSR. The new organization reflected the attempts of French leftist intellectuals to resolve a longstanding dilemma: they were staunch socialists yet keenly aware that the PCF was no longer a haven for them, having become a mouthpiece for Moscow. On the

¹⁴⁷ “L’Appel du Comité pour le Rassemblement Démocratique Révolutionnaire,” *Franc-Tireur*, 27 February 1948. [Le Franc-tireur : organe des Mouvements unis de résistance : mensuel malgré la Gestapo et la police de Vichy : édition de Paris | 1948-02-27 | Gallica \(bnf.fr\)](#).

¹⁴⁸ Ibid.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid.

other hand, the Socialist Party was too weak, with the memories of the failure of the Popular Front in the 1930s still vivid. This led to a regrettable situation: often, influential writers like Rousset joining a political faction did not necessarily reflect a correct interpretation of France's current state but was merely to avoid bolstering another faction's strength. The program of the RDR reflected the dream of Rousset and Sartre: they wanted to participate independently and with a clear conscience in a social revolution that Bolshevik interpretations would not guide.

The year of the RDR's founding (1948) was when the Cold War opened. The war's beginning brought George Kennan's famous telegrams, the Truman administration's increasingly hard-line policy toward the Soviet Union, the Marshall Plan's aid to Europe, and Stalin's creation of the Communist Information Bureau. Europe was forced to choose one side of the Cold War to alleviate tensions. The expulsion of the PCF from the government in May 1947 could not have been based on anything other than a concern for the communist takeover of power in the coalition governments of Eastern Europe during the same period. Immediately after being expelled from the government, the PCF called for a strike, which led to questions about whether the call was motivated by the interests of the workers or by Moscow's directives.¹⁵⁰ As an example of the suspicion towards the Soviet Union triggered by a series of events in 1947, *Franc-Tireur*, the newspaper that published the RDR's founding manifesto, changed its pro-communist stance when it criticized the execution of partisan Nikola Petkov (1893-1947) in Bulgaria in September 1947.¹⁵¹ *Franc-Tireur* had an annual circulation of over 370,000 at the

¹⁵⁰ Ian H. Birchall, "Neither Washington nor Moscow? The Rise and Fall of the Rassemblement Démocratique Révolutionnaire," *Journal of European Studies* 29, no. 116 (December 1999): 367.

¹⁵¹ *Ibid.*

time and a sizable working-class readership.¹⁵² The establishment of the RDR appealed to many socialists and workers who were unhappy with the PCF and Soviet intervention in Eastern Europe but were unwilling to align with the United States.

According to its funding statement, the RDR was not a political party. Still, it was closer to an assembly as it did not force members who had joined the Communist Party or the Socialist Party to withdraw from political parties everywhere before they could participate in RDR matters. This view was also expressed by Sartre in his speech on 19 March 1948, when he argued that political parties were unable to tap into the hidden demands of the masses and that party organizations, like state bureaucrats, could only issue slogans and often ignored the daily needs of the masses.¹⁵³ In short, the RDR welcomed the working class and the middle class, and it wanted to unite all the forces it could to expand its influence in France through rallies. As an example, on 1 June 1948, the RDR's organizing newspaper, *La Gauche*, invited Albert Camus to run a commentary on democracy, editorializing in the middle of Camus's column this passage:

La Gauche is honored to publish in this issue an article written for us by Albert Camus, whose outstanding talent and moral qualities are well known to everyone. Whether Camus joins RDR or not is irrelevant. What matters is that free men like him agree with us on the need to open up new avenues of left-wing thought. So, for those who accept neither corruption nor stereotypes, we want to use this magazine to exchange ideas with all such people through their work and their political, moral, and philosophical positions. Camus stands among us, and what he says here will provoke discussion, which is precisely what we want. RDR and its columns welcome all free people and activists, for whom RDR and its institutions will become a new home.¹⁵⁴

¹⁵² Ibid.

¹⁵³ Birchall, *Sartre against Stalinism*, 95.

¹⁵⁴ Albert Camus, "Démocratie sans Catéchisme," *La Gauche*, June 1, 1948. [La Gauche 1 juillet 1948 - \(01-jul-1948\)](#) | [RetroNews - Le site de presse de la BnF](#).

Another celebrity attracted by RDR's solidarity policy was Merleau-Ponty (1908-1961), who had never attended a follow-up meeting of the RDR Executive Committee.¹⁵⁵ Still, he was one of the founding members of the RDR Executive Committee.¹⁵⁶

On 19 March 1948, the RDR held a public meeting in which it denounced de Gaulle as a war-monger and accused the French Communist Party of deliberately creating a political conflict in France.¹⁵⁷ As an organization that defended France's political independence, the RDR argued at the meeting that accepting the Marshall Plan's aid risked U.S. political interference but was necessary for France.¹⁵⁸ At another conference a week later, which brought together internationalists, Trotskyists, orthodox socialists, communists, and many others who organized their activities around the left, Sartre received applause from the participants but not nearly as much as Rousset.¹⁵⁹ The success of the RDR, which received a massive welcome from the left in its early days, could not have been achieved without the demonstration effect of the prestige of Rousset and Sartre. More importantly, the RDR's idea of downplaying the factions made possible the reunification of the left, from the Tours Conference in the 1920s,¹⁶⁰ which divided the left, to the Popular Front in the 1930s, to the coalition governments established after the war, a unity that avoided sectarianism was always sought. That was why at the RDR inner meeting on 11 March 1948, Rousset openly declared: "What we want is a massive mass movement; we need to get rid

¹⁵⁵ Michel-Antoine Burnier and Bernard Murchland, *Choice of Action: The French Existentialists on the Political Front Line* (New York: Random House, 1968), 55.

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁷ "Le RDR tient son premier meeting," *Combat*, 20 March 1948. [Combat : organe du Mouvement de libération française | 1948-03-20 | Gallica \(bnf.fr\)](#).

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁹ Birchall, "Neither Washington nor Moscow," 371.

¹⁶⁰ See page9-10.

of monolithic sectarianism; we will never think of communist workers as separatists as we did yesterday, and our role is sometimes fundamentally sided with the Communist Party.”¹⁶¹

Considering the RDR's explicit repudiation of Stalinism, the organization still hoped to attract a sizeable working-class membership of the French Communist Party.

Much of the RDR's popularity can be attributed to a generalized policy of solidarity. Still, it has also met with hostility from the PCF and large parties like the SFIO for this ambitious strategy. The PCF regarded the RDR as a competitor from the moment it became active because it could not tolerate attempts by other political parties to represent the working class.¹⁶² From the outset, the PCF was much more hostile to its fellow left-wing rivals than the right-wing parties, an inherent tactic since the Popular Front.¹⁶³ Moreover, the deterioration of the situation in Europe further deepened the PCF's sectarianism, and it was in 1948, the year of the RDR's appearance, that the Soviet Union's break with Yugoslavia made it clear that Stalin would not accept any alternative to communism as a path to socialism.¹⁶⁴ From the very day the RDR was founded, the PCF widely denigrated figures like Sartre and Rousset, and RDR gatherings were attacked as "anti-Soviet meetings."¹⁶⁵

The situation with the SFIO was somewhat different, as it contained multiple political factions, unlike the strictly disciplined PCF. However, this led to a similar attitude of resistance towards the RDR as that of the PCF. The leaders of the SFIO hoped to shift the internal balance of power

¹⁶¹ “Voici ce que nous sommes et ce que nous voulons,” *Franc-Tireur*, 11 March 1948.

¹⁶² Birchall, “Neither Washington nor Moscow,”: 373.

¹⁶³ *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

and strengthen the party by opposing the RDR.¹⁶⁶ Consequently, in early July 1948, the SFIO congress passed a resolution by a majority vote prohibiting SFIO members from participating in the RDR.¹⁶⁷ Thus, France's two major leftist parties, which were also the most crucial political forces that the RDR hoped to unite with, had both clearly rejected the RDR. Joining the RDR was one thing, as it did not entail any responsibilities. However, when the PCF and SFIO forced their members to choose between the party and the RDR, few were willing to leave their respective parties to continue participating in RDR activities.

On the other hand, the RDR was established as a call for unity, yet had been slow to outline a straightforward political program. This might have been a deliberate strategy to attract as many members as possible, intending to develop the platform collaboratively within the left. However, with the PCF and SFIO officially prohibiting their members from joining the RDR, the organization faced criticism for its lack of a definitive action plan. This problem and its recruitment challenges caused significant issues within the RDR. As Gilles Martinet (1916-2016), who left the SFIO in 1948 in favor of joining the RDR, worried: “Can we oppose a particular kind of social democracy without expressing a complete opinion about it? Further, how can we demonstrate that we can denounce a Stalinist form of communism without claiming to be another form of communism?”¹⁶⁸ The French Trotskyist leader Pierre Frank (1905-1984), on the other hand, eloquently deciphered the problem with the RDR in March 1948: “The RDR was unable to put forward a program for the working class community, and it attempted to attract the

¹⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 374-376.

¹⁶⁷ As early as the end of April 1948, the SFIO had a proposal to ban members from the RDR, but factionalism in the party made it so that the resolution was not formally introduced until July. *Ibid.*, 376.

¹⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 378.

masses by presenting literary stars, a ploy that the Stalinist party had long ago used.”¹⁶⁹ If the RDR had just mechanically condemned de Gaulle or disparaged the PCF without developing new theories, then members would have been perfectly capable of joining more established parties on the left or right; it would have been no different from what the other parties were doing. The RDR's internal reports showed that fewer than 1,000 RDR members remained in 1949.¹⁷⁰ If Rousset had high hopes for the RDR and wished for it to be a vehicle for his revolutionary political ideals, then his political career as the founder of the RDR was essentially dead at the end of 1948. After that, Rousset gradually began to issue explicit conclusions condemning the Soviet Union. By analyzing Rousset's statements before and after the demise of the RDR, we will see that he was no longer the same man who refused to play the double game and that political realities forced him to make a choice.

Just one year later, after his visiting America, he firmly condemned the Soviet labour camps in the name of a Nazi concentration camp survivor, fully aware of what he was doing.

In a private conversation in October 1948 with Gérard Rosenthal¹⁷¹ (1903-1992), a close friend and French lawyer who was also one of the founders of the RDR, Rousset assessed the Soviet Union: “It was neither capitalist nor communist. The Stalinist Party was the party of a new historical and social formation. In this society, the country, which owned the economy, exploited the people.”¹⁷² During the same period, Rousset, in a conversation with Sartre, criticized the

¹⁶⁹ Ibid., 379.

¹⁷⁰ Ibid., 381.

¹⁷¹ Gérard Rosenthal acted as defense counsel for the libel case initiated by Rousset in 1950-1951 and participated in all the trials.

¹⁷² Jean-Paul Sartre, David Rousset, and Gérard Rosenthal, *Entretiens sur la politique* (Paris: Gallimard, 1949), 66-67.

following: “The proletariat in the Soviet Union was disintegrating, and in its place, a kind of industrial serfdom was emerging.”¹⁷³ On 14 December 1948, while attending a public gathering of the RDR, Rousset referred to the concentration camps in the Soviet Union, which would be the main object of his activity for the rest of his life: “In the name of what political interpretation do we recognize the existence of concentration camps in the Soviet Union? It is not enough to change the relations of production; this must be done in the practice of manual and mental laborers.”¹⁷⁴ Interestingly, Rousset mentioned the existence of Soviet concentration camps in a matter-of-fact tone that suggested it was common knowledge in France in the late 1940s. By April 1949, with the establishment of NATO, some leaders of the RDR began to reconsider their strategy of independence from the two blocs, questioning whether a non-aligned stance still held practical significance.¹⁷⁵ Rousset was among those who held this view. These signs indicated that Rousset no longer admired the Soviet Union.

In late April 1948, Rousset traveled to New York to raise funds for RDR activities.¹⁷⁶ Historian Ian Birchall argues that Rousset's trip to the United States ultimately changed his political stance, and he no longer felt the same hostility toward Washington as he did toward Moscow.¹⁷⁷ After returning from his trip to New York, Rousset argued that the United States could be criticized through democratic channels despite its shortcomings, but this was impossible in the Soviet Union.¹⁷⁸ The disarray in the RDR organization and disagreements about whether it still adhered

¹⁷³ Ibid., 206.

¹⁷⁴ “4000 Parisiens à la Salle Pleyel, ” *Franc-Tireur*, 14 December 1948.

¹⁷⁵ Birchall, “Neither Washington nor Moscow,”: 388.

¹⁷⁶ Ibid., 389.

¹⁷⁷ Ibid.

¹⁷⁸ Ibid.

to a non-alignment policy led Sartre to become estranged from RDR as he insisted on denouncing the creation of NATO and the Soviet Union's intervention in Eastern Europe.¹⁷⁹ Sartre chose to break with Rousset after he traveled to the United States in search of funds. In his later years, when Sartre recalled his disagreement with Rousset, he contemptuously called Rousset: “a former Trotskyist who had absolutely nothing of the revolutionary about him apart from his big mouth.”¹⁸⁰ Sartre despised Rousset's move to the United States in his recollections: “Rousset wanted to get funds for the RDR by begging from the American workers' unions. This seemed to me mad, for it meant making a great French group financially dependent on the American organizations, which are so different from ours and from the left-wing policy that we put forward.”¹⁸¹ The harsh realities of RDR's struggle for survival shattered Rousset's utopian dream of uniting all forces. In an era when Cold War tensions were escalating, it had become increasingly unrealistic not to make a clear choice. Similarly, Rousset's public exposure of the Soviet concentration camps in late 1949 was not a spur-of-the-moment move, as he was fully aware of the enormous political divisions it could cause, but it was precisely what he wanted. Newly declassified files show that intelligence officers at the U.S. Embassy in France assisted Rousset in obtaining a visa in December 1949 and helped him make friends with anti-Stalinist intellectuals in New York.¹⁸² The agent belonged to the CIA's Office of Policy Coordination (OPC), an office designed to influence the activities of individuals who supported U.S. foreign

¹⁷⁹ Ibid., 390.

¹⁸⁰ Jean Sartre Paul and Simone de Beauvoir, *Adieux: A Farewell to Sartre* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1984), 447-448.

¹⁸¹ Ibid., 448.

¹⁸² Irwin M. Wall, *The United States and the Making of Postwar France, 1945-1954* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 153.

policy.¹⁸³ To avoid being caught in the act, British and American intelligence agencies generally acted in secrecy when funding leftist anti-communist activists in Europe, and Rousset himself was unaware that the intelligence agencies were assisting him.¹⁸⁴ Another source indicated that Rousset sought the help of the British Consulate to gather witnesses, documents, and possible public assistance regarding the Soviet concentration camps before launching his condemnation of the camps in November 1949.¹⁸⁵ It follows that Rousset's claim that he had no political motivation to expose the Soviet concentration camps was untrue.¹⁸⁶ It was a trade-off forced on him by the politics of the Cold War. As Cuby argued: “Rousset's appeal against the Soviet concentration camps was not a nonpolitical protest of human suffering but rather a step into the battlefield of the Cold War in the manner of a concentration camp witness.”¹⁸⁷

The debate surrounding the Soviet labour camps, rather than focusing primarily on their existence, seemed more about settling scores for the future. Was being anti-communist equivalent to being pro-American? Did morality take precedence over political beliefs? For Rousset's lawsuit, the French left would be divided during Rousset's lawsuit.

¹⁸³ Frances Stonor Saunders, *The Cultural Cold War: The CIA and the World of Arts and Letters* (New York: The New Press, 2013), 24.

¹⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 24,36,41.

¹⁸⁵ John Jenks, *British Propaganda and News Media in the Cold War* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2006), 140-141.

¹⁸⁶ See pages 2-4 above.

¹⁸⁷ Kuby, *political survivals*, 55.

Chapter 4 Justice on Trial: The Legal Pursuits of David Rousset

This chapter will analyze how the Rousset case sparked controversy both inside and outside the courtroom by examining newspaper commentaries on the case and the court records of Rousset's trial. It will focus on the arguments of both sides to explain why the existence of labour camps in the Soviet Union caused a rift among the French left in 1949-1950.

On 12 November 1949, Rousset published an appeal on the front page of the right-wing newspaper *Le Figaro littéraire* relating to the Soviet forced-labour camps, arguing that they, like the Nazi camps, were concentration camps in which human freedom was denied. He invited survivors of the Nazi camps to help him to denounce the terror that the Soviet concentration camps had caused.¹⁸⁸ Rousset claimed to have hundreds of reports on the inner workings of Soviet labour camps. These reports we know today resulted from assistance from British and American intelligence agencies.¹⁸⁹ At the head of the appeal, Rousset presented a map marked with the locations of Soviet labour camps, ranging from Leningrad to the Kolyma Basin. Rousset referred to the Soviet labour camp system as the Gulag, marking the first time the term "the Gulag" appeared in Western Europe specifically to denote the Soviet labour camps.¹⁹⁰

To demonstrate that inmates of Soviet labour camps could be and were held without judicial process, Rousset cited Article 129 of the Soviet Union's Labour Correction Code of 1934, which stated that as of 27 October 1934, jurisdiction over all correctional institutions should be

¹⁸⁸ Rousset, "Au secours des déportés."

¹⁸⁹ See previous pages 67-69.

¹⁹⁰ Rousset, "Au secours."

transferred from the judiciary to the Soviet Union's Ministry of Internal Affairs (NKVD).¹⁹¹

Rousset also cited Article 8 of the preamble to the USSR Labour Correction Code, which stipulated that the arrest of a corrective labour camp inmate was to be determined by a decision of a court or administrative body.¹⁹² These two laws indicated that the Soviet judiciary no longer had full judicial power to adjudicate correctional labour practices. The NKVD shared the decision-making power and could decide the fate of correctional labour inmates on its own.

Rousset asked, “Do you think it is a shame when a regime's top police agency is responsible for re-educating its citizens?”¹⁹³ At the end of his appeal, Rousset called on former Nazi concentration camp survivors to help him set up a committee to apply for permission to enter the Soviet Union to inspect conditions in Soviet labour camps.¹⁹⁴ Rousset believed that these were the only people who knew what the camps looked like and who had the expertise to explore the world of concentration because they had lived through the Nazi camps and survived.¹⁹⁵

If we look back at the assertions in Rousset's famous work *L'Univers concentrationnaire*, we can see that Rousset's focus on the camps and the definition of survivor privilege were always consistent. This privilege was based on the unique experiences of concentration camp survivors, granting them the authority to interpret events related to the concentration camps. In Rousset's view, the existence of both Soviet labour camps and Nazi concentration camps were essentially

¹⁹¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁹² *Ibid.*

¹⁹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁹⁵ *Ibid.*

inhuman systems characterized by the deprivation of liberty and unnatural death.¹⁹⁶ Thus, there was no difference between the two. This meant that the Nazi camp survivors joining Rousset's denunciations of Soviet camps was logical. Rousset's conviction that all camp survivors shared a single experience had convinced him in 1946 that there was no need to differentiate between political deportees and racial deportees, and by 1949, the definition of a community of survivors had begun to link with different countries' prison facilities.

Even though Rousset was aware that the blatant comparison between Soviet labour camps and Nazi concentration camps would almost certainly be attacked by the French Communist Party and the pro-Soviet left, he tried to appease the PCF at a conference held a few days after his appeal. Referring to the Soviet Union, Rousset commented: "I fully agree with the position of those who want similar investigations in other countries, but if we ask for an investigation to be carried out in Russia first, it is precisely because this country is a defender and a champion of socialism."¹⁹⁷

To minimize opponents' questions about his political motives, Rousset also promised that his proposed commission "will not stop investigations in the Soviet Union with partisan tendencies,

¹⁹⁶ The main argument in Rousset's appeal came directly from the *L'Univers concentrationnaire*, where he asserts that "ordinary people did not know everything was possible." Rousset also made a similar statement in *L'Univers concentrationnaire* about the nature of the Soviet labour camps being no different from the Nazi camps. Rousset did not even consider genocide to be a distinguishing feature of the Nazi camps. As he described it in *L'Univers concentrationnaire*: "Buchenwald did not have the gas chambers of Auschwitz, but did it not have its hell?" Rousset *L'Univers Concentrationnaire*, 51. See also Rousset, "Au secours des déportés."

By 1949, this analogy had been directly appropriated by Rousset into a comparison between the Soviet Union and the Nazi concentration camps, a universal definition of the camps that continued throughout his career as a political activist independent of changes in his political philosophy. According to Rousset's criteria, a camp was indisputably a concentration camp if there was an arbitrary deprivation of liberty, forced labour, and inhumane conditions of confinement.

¹⁹⁷ "Après l'appel de M. David Rousset," *Le Monde*, 17 Nov. 1949.

but it must extend its studies to all the countries where the people have definitively lost their liberty under political, racial, or social repressions, such as the fascist countries of Greece and Spain.”¹⁹⁸ However, no matter how much Rousset tried to appease the sentiments of the French Communist Party, he could not have been unaware that the majority of the French concentration camp survivors he was appealing to were political deportees who had participated in the resistance during the war, and the French Communist Party undoubtedly played an essential role in the wartime resistance. Rousset likely hoped that the intense reaction of the French Communist Party would provoke widespread discussion. The development of events also aligned with his expectations, as the French Communist Party quickly responded to his appeal.

On 17 November 1949, Pierre Daix attacked Rousset in an article in the pro-Communist newspaper *Les Lettres Françaises*. Dramatically, Daix had also been arrested and deported to a Nazi concentration camp for his wartime participation in the Resistance. Thus, Daix was one of the survivors Rousset called on for concentration camps, and his rebuttal of Rousset's appeal was intended to compete with Rousset's call for concentration camp deportees. For this reason, the English translation of the title is "Pierre Daix, a former inmate of the Mauthausen concentration camp, number 59.807, in response to David Rousset."¹⁹⁹ Daix argued that Rousset's comparison of the Nazi concentration camps to the Soviet Union's "educational centers" was an attempt to divert attention from the injustices of capitalism. Daix wrote: "In fact, the Nazi concentration camps were the most accomplished expression of Hitler's regime, and it was the Communists

¹⁹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹⁹ Pierre Daix, "Pierre Daix, matricule 59.807 à Mauthausen, répond à David Rousset," *Les Lettres Françaises*, 17 Nov. 1949.

who won the victory over them, and Rousset himself declared in 1947 that the Nazi concentration camps were the horrible result of the degeneration of capitalist society so that nothing could be more pernicious than the attempt to assimilate the Communists to the Nazis."²⁰⁰

Daix subsequently claimed that Rousset misinterpreted Soviet law and questioned the authenticity of the testimonies Rousset possessed, arguing that they were fabricated. He defended the Soviet labour camps by stating:

"In a society like the Soviet Union, work has become a force for human liberation, and justice sanctions those who, through negligence or laziness, hinder the nation from achieving its well-being. Therefore, these sanctions take the form of corrective work, resulting in wage deductions and work supervision rather than deprivation of freedom. So, since this is not a crime, isn't it natural that administrative bodies rather than courts decide the corrective measures?"²⁰¹

In response to Rousset's tactic of continually using the memories of former deportees in Nazi camps to appeal for an investigation of Soviet labour camps, Daix similarly appealed as a survivor of Nazi camps: "As a former deportee, I saw the most reliable evidence of the atrocities in the Nazi camps, and it is precisely because I lived through them that I vow we will never experience the horrors of the Nazi concentration camps again. I want to thank the Soviet Union, which eliminated the Nazis."²⁰² In Daix's view, the existence of labour camps in the Soviet Union that arbitrarily deprived people of their freedom was simply unimaginable, let alone the notion that the Soviet labour camps were the same as Nazi camps. For Daix, the immense sacrifices made by the Soviet Union and the French Communist Party during the war were seen as an absolute anti-fascist liberation war. Naturally, when Daix learned that Rousset was equating Nazi

²⁰⁰ Ibid.

²⁰¹ Ibid.

²⁰² Ibid.

Germany with the Soviet Union, he felt insulted, especially given Rousset's dubious background as a former Trotskyist, which could more easily be attacked as a betrayal of revolutionary ideals.

Daix questioned Rousset's intention, suggesting it was to disseminate anti-Soviet propaganda. Therefore, he wrote: "I condemn this investigation as an effort to incite my former deported comrades to engage in an anti-Soviet war, effectively demanding that they view the Soviet Union as the primary threat. This investigation aims to allow agents of warmongers like David Rousset to penetrate the USSR territory as much as possible. Rousset's past anti-Soviet stance and recent trip to the United States indicate this."²⁰³ By 1949, the Cold War mentality resulting from the intense rivalry between the USSR and the USA was so prevalent that Daix concluded if Rousset was anti-Soviet, he must have been a US agent, and vice versa. Interestingly, the so-called "consistently anti-Soviet Rousset" had in fact been praised by the French Communist Party in 1946. It was also in *Les Lettres Françaises* that a member of the French Communist Party wrote an article commending Rousset for his warning about the possible return of the world of concentration camps: "Let us never forget that this camp universe was nearly ours, and its possibilities still circle insidiously near to us."²⁰⁴ By 1949, Daix had denounced Rousset as a man who "exploited the sacrifice of martyrs to create division among Resistant fighters in the presence of the SS."²⁰⁵

Rousset's appeal received a polarized response. Daix's accusations against him signaled the hostility of the French Communist Party, but Rousset was not without supporters. On 19

²⁰³ Ibid.

²⁰⁴ Quoted in Kuby, *Political Survivals*, 44.

²⁰⁵ Daix, "Répond à David Rousset."

November 1949, *Le Figaro littéraire* published a letter of solidarity with Rousset from members of the French National Federation of Deportees and Internees of the Resistance (F.N.D.I.R.). These former deportees agreed with Rousset that Nazi camp survivors had the right to investigate Soviet labour camps to avoid a repetition of the tragedies of the past. As if to counter Daix's attack on Rousset, Buchenwald survivor Henry Teitgen, imitating Daix's approach, commented under the signature "Prisoner 39.506 Buchenwald": "As a deportee, I have no hesitation in siding with Rousset; no concentration camp survivor can tolerate that other people in the world are subjected to the same kind of treatment as we were, and it would be an insult to us if Buchenwald still existed anywhere in the world."²⁰⁶ Roger Heim (1900-1979), biologist and vice-president of the F.N.D.I.R, wrote: "Without prejudging the decision of the F.N.D.I.R. in this respect, I will join the investigation in response to Mr. Rousset's appeal to wake up for the sake of freedom and the future of humanity."²⁰⁷

For other cases, it was no coincidence that Rousset's companion in the RDR, the deportee journalist Rémy Roure (1885-1966), wrote in *Le Monde* that there was little point in retaining memories of the past if one knew that "the nightmare has not disappeared and that we should focus on the present[referring to the Soviet labour camps]."²⁰⁸ For his part, the Catholic priest Michel Riquet (1898-1993) appealed emotionally: "We respond to David's call because it is a problem all too similar to the system of concentration camps that we have experienced, and what

²⁰⁶ "Les anciens déportés répondent à l'appel de David Rousset," *Le Figaro littéraire*, 17 Nov, 1949.

²⁰⁷ Ibid.

²⁰⁸ Rémy Roure, "Les morts vivants," *Le Monde*, 11 November, 1949.

is the attitude of a deportee in such a situation? Never again Buchenwald! No more Auschwitz! No more Mauthausen!”²⁰⁹

Former deportees who supported Rousset believed that the investigation of the Soviet labour camps would avoid a repetition of the tragedy of the Nazi concentration camps and that it was not about political preferences. This view was also expressed by the famous socialist leader Léon Blum (1872-1950), who published an article in solidarity with Rousset in the socialist newspaper *Le Populaire* on 7 March 1950, less than three weeks before Blum's death. Blum repeatedly emphasized that Rousset's actions had nothing to do with the Soviet Union and that he could not understand why the French Communist Party would block the investigation.²¹⁰ Blum wrote that:

Rousset's actions were, by their very nature, independent of any party position, and the commission he set up sought to investigate the possible existence of concentration camps in Europe and around the world. Given the breadth of its scope, why did the communist party of France react as if it were outraged when the international community investigated concentration camps around the world?” The explanation is simple: it's a matter of early strikes. No doubt, the Stalinists in France, Belgium, and Germany knew better than we did what the so-called labour camps in the USSR were.²¹¹

Rousset's insistence that his appeal was not based on political affiliation provoked questions and disgust from the Communist Party, which believed that he had launched the appeal for anti-Soviet purposes and had falsely claimed no political affiliation to bring in the center of the left. On 31 December 1949, a member of the Communist Party wrote an article in the resistance magazine *Le Patriote*, arguing Rousset's appeal to the deportees was a way of gaining sympathy

²⁰⁹ Le R. P. Riquet, “Quelque part en Europe ou en Asie Mauthausen continue” *Le Figaro littéraire*, 3 December 1949.

²¹⁰ Léon Blum, “Quand les staliniens plaident coupable,” *Le Populaire*, 7 March 1950.

²¹¹ *Ibid.*

and “smoothing the way for a nuclear onslaught against Stalin.”²¹²

On 19 November 1949, French Communist Party member Robert Antelme (1917-1990) published a rebuttal in *Le Figaro littéraire* in response to Rousset's appeal. Antelme implied that Rousset was aware he was inciting political action and that he was coercing the deportees to help him achieve his personal goals under the guise of morality. Antelme wrote:

Rousset, I accept the proposal to establish an investigative committee, but you must be aware that *Le Figaro littéraire* is a biased newspaper, having long published one-sided opinions about the Soviet Union. In this context, your decision to publish this declaration here constitutes an expression of anti-communism, and you know that this declaration further provides moral support for such anti-communism.²¹³

Antelme did not deny that Rousset's appeal was morally grounded. However, he questioned whether Rousset had the right to urge all deportees to join his appeal in the name of morality.

More importantly, as a Frenchman, Antelme believed that all French people should focus on their domestic issues rather than be distracted by political struggles related to foreign countries. As

Antelme commented:

I hope you understand that my failure to respond to the call is not out of indifference but considering everything that has happened in Indochina in the last four years and the massacres ordered by the authorities against the people of Madagascar, which are so relevant to us in France, isn't this something to be concerned about? Of course, this magazine is always silent about the capitalist regimes, the metropolis, and especially the colonial forms of oppression. I refuse to be a hostage to the political struggle when you are shouting at the deportees, and yet you are silent in the press about the realities that concern us, forcing deportees to take a stand in the form of blackmail.²¹⁴

²¹² Quoted in Kuby, *Political Survivals*, 63.

²¹³ “Les anciens déportés répondent.”

²¹⁴ Ibid.

Antelme's rapid ascent to prominence among post-war intellectuals was like Rousset's. As a survivor of Nazi concentration camps, Antelme's 1947 memoir *L'Espèce humaine* garnered widespread acclaim for its straightforward yet vivid depiction of the unspeakable horrors of the camps. The sociologist Edgar Morin (1921-) praised *L'Espèce humaine* as "the only book that, on the level of naked human experience, expressed the horror of the concentration camps in the simplest and most appropriate language."²¹⁵ In contrast, Morin believed that Rousset's *Les Jours de notre mort* was too "rhetorical."²¹⁶

Antelme and Rousset were long-time friends. Rousset had introduced Antelme to Marxism shortly before their respective deportations.²¹⁷ Sadly, Antelme's rejection of Rousset's was not enough in the eyes of the PCF, as Antelme added: "I accept the proposal to establish an investigative committee."²¹⁸ In March 1950, Antelme faced expulsion from the PCF.²¹⁹ Although he did not officially leave the PCF until 1956, his friendship with Rousset ended due to Rousset's activism against Soviet labour camps.²²⁰ Hence, Antelme did not deny the existence of Soviet labour camps, but he was particularly suspicious of Rousset's political motives.

If the Communist Party largely denied the so-called concentration camps operated in the Soviet Union, many on the non-Communist left acknowledged the existence of similar labour camps there. However, they strongly objected to Rousset's comparison of Nazi concentration camps

²¹⁵ "Autour de Robert Antelme. Témoignages – Entretiens," *Lignes* n° 21, no. 1 (1 January 1994): 189.

²¹⁶ *Ibid.*

²¹⁷ Martin Crowley, *Robert Antelme: Humanity, Community, Testimony* (Oxford: European Humanities Research Centre, University of Oxford, 2003), 45.

²¹⁸ Rousset, "Les anciens déportés répondent à l'appel de David Rousset."

²¹⁹ Crowley, *Robert Antelme*, 46.

²²⁰ *Ibid.*, 47.

with Soviet labour camps, arguing that Rousset was merely providing ammunition for anti-Soviet propaganda by capitalist countries.

In a 14 November 1949 *Combat* posting, left-wing intellectual Claude Bourdet (1909-1996) disagreed with Rousset's definitions and categorization of the concentration camps: "How can we logically separate the camps from the political and social repressions, the prisons and the system of executions from the rest of the system of political and social repression, prisons, and executions?"²²¹ Bourdet keenly perceived that, according to Rousset's stand regarding concentration camps, the acts of detention that occurred in the French colonies would also be regarded as concentration camps: "Rousset said he was not discussing general injustices, but a specific injustice known as concentration camps."²²² Bourdet then wrote: "Political prisons, police camps, arbitrary arrests—from Madagascar to Indochina, do we not also have such concentration camps? Just as world wars cannot excuse Hitler, colonial wars cannot excuse such certain actions."²²³ Bourdet concluded: "I suggest that Rousset should not confine his gaze to the Soviet Union but establish a commission calling for an inquiry into the prison systems of all the world's countries. At this point, we will see who accepts and rejects."²²⁴

In the face of overwhelming skepticism, Rousset insisted that Soviet labour camps should be the first to be investigated, not only because of their size but also because the Soviet Union was a self-proclaimed socialist state. As Rousset put it: "Truman readily admitted to the world that he was a capitalist, Franco told the world he was a Francoist, and these regimes saw social

²²¹ Claude Bourdet, "Balayer devant notre porte," *Combat*, 14 November 1949.

²²² *Ibid.*

²²³ *Ibid.*

²²⁴ *Ibid.*

inequality as inevitable.”²²⁵ Rousset then questioned the nature of the Soviet state: “The Soviet Union calls itself a socialist state, yet it ‘liberates’ its workers through the exploitation of man by man!”²²⁶ Rousset still maintained that while Nazi concentration camps and Soviet labour camps were exactly identical, their commonalities were enough for him to claim the moral high ground: “Opponents claim that one should be cautious when differentiating between the functions of Nazi concentration camps and Russian labor camps. However, what difference does it make to those who died?”²²⁷

Rousset consistently adhered to his theory of the universality of concentration camps, that there was no fundamental difference between political labour camps and prison camps. The differences in the identities of the victims could not conceal the inhumane oppression inflicted on all prisoners by the camps. The fundamental human right, freedom, was suppressed, leading to what Rousset had described as the “concentration universe.” Hence, Rousset thought the call was a basic human moral issue, advocating for an investigation into the Soviet Union's brutal trampling of people's freedom. Morality need not justify politics, so Rousset called on the memory of Dreyfus in his response to his opponents: “Have we forgotten the lessons of the Dreyfus affair? Must we not notice that the left has become anti-Dreyfus?”²²⁸

Rousset's defense, along with his previous appeals, had continued to generate uninterrupted controversy. In January 1950, Sartre attacked Rousset's appeal, arguing that not only were there

²²⁵ David Rousset, “Oui ou non, les camps de concentration existent-ils en URSS?,” *Franc-Tireur*, 14 November 1949.

²²⁶ *Ibid.*

²²⁷ *Ibid.*

²²⁸ *Ibid.*

French prisons in Indochina but the entirety of the European colonies contained what were essentially concentration camps for democracies. He claimed that Rousset's view of the USSR as the main threat to humanity in this context was an attempt to justify the evils of capitalism.²²⁹ Furthermore, Sartre questioned whether personal memory of the Nazi concentration camps qualified Rousset to define the Soviet labour camps and claim justice in the name of humanity, arguing that even the experience of an absolute like the concentration horror cannot determine a political position.²³⁰ In Sartre's view, even deportees who had dehumanizing experiences could not live forever in the past, and political choices based on moral memories were not relevant. Hannah Arendt similarly expressed a pessimistic view that past suffering could create political solidarity in the present. As she wrote: "attempts to cultivate the European elite through intra-European understanding based on the everyday experience of the European concentration camps must fail in much the same way as attempts to draw political conclusions from the international experience of the previous generation after the First World War."²³¹

In June 1950, Rousset filed a formal lawsuit against Daix and *Les Lettres Françaises* for libel, as Rousset could not tolerate the accusations of fabricated evidence made against him by Daix and *Les Lettres Françaises*. The trial began in Paris in November 1950. The media and social controversy had already started with Rousset's appeal in November 1949, and the trial was a source of great interest in France when it began.

²²⁹ Emma Kuby, "From Auschwitz to Algeria: The Mediterranean Limits of the French Anti-Concentration Camp Movement, 1952–1959," *French Mediterraneans: Transnational and Imperial Histories*, vol. 2(2016): 352.

²³⁰ Kuby, *Political Survivals*, 69.

²³¹ Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, 441-442.

At the first hearing on 25 November 1950, the defendant Daix, through his lawyer, applied to the judge not to hear the case. Counsel claimed that many untrue reports of the Soviet labour camps, which had arisen in the preceding year, constituted extreme violence against the Soviet Union and that, therefore, the trial involved the evaluation of a foreign system and that the court was not competent to hear a case involving a foreign jurisdiction.²³² The defendant's request that the Court should not take up the case was reiterated at the second hearing on 1 December 1950. Daix reminded the judge that "the proceedings should be postponed until the Court had ruled on the nature of Rousset's appeal."²³³

Daix also tried to evoke memories of collaborators during the Occupation in court at the second hearing: "I recalled the arrest of Professor Langevin ten years ago. In 1940, a group of judges wearing robes like yours prosecuted demonstrators who opposed the Nazis."²³⁴ The incident referred to by Daix was the anti-fascist protests initiated by the French physicist Paul Langevin (1872-1946) in October 1940 at the beginning of the German Occupation of France, which led to his indictment and imprisonment by the courts in Vichy. Daix implied that, like Langevin ten years earlier, he was being prosecuted for fascist purposes. The Communist Party had consistently opposed the post-war amnesties for collaborators and proposed strict reckoning, but it could not prevent most collaborators from returning to their positions. Data showed that in 1945, the number of French collaborators imprisoned was 40,000.²³⁵ After the first amnesty in December 1948, this number dropped to 13,000, and by April 1950, shortly before Rousset's

²³² David Rousset, Théo. Bernard, and Gérard Rosenthal, *Pour la vérité sur les camps concentrationnaires: Un procès antistalinien à Paris* (Paris: Ramsay, 1990), 16.

²³³ *Ibid.*, 25.

²³⁴ *Ibid.*, 33.

²³⁵ Rousso, *Vichy Syndrome*, 53-54.

lawsuit took place, only 5,587 collaborators remained imprisoned. Most of the Vichy government's public officials during the Occupation returned to their posts within five years. So Daix claimed that he “did not want the French courts to become once again a stage for anti-Bolshevik exhibitions, as they had been during the German Occupation.”²³⁶

In response, Rousset and his defense lawyer, Gérard Rosenthal, presented an organizational law clause signed by Mikhail Kalinin (1875-1946) on November 5, 1934. This clause granted the Ministry of Internal Affairs the authority to deport prisoners to labour camps through administrative orders independent of the Ministry of Justice.²³⁷ Rosenthal then presented to the court an internal document²³⁸ signed by the foreign minister of the USSR, Andrey Vyshinsky(1883-1954), in 1949, indicating that prisoners in corrective labour camps could be detained both through judicial measures (courts) and actions taken by specific agencies (the Ministry of Internal Affairs).²³⁹

At the end of the second hearing, Rousset concluded that he had no intention of evaluating the nature of the USSR and that the trial was by no means a question of deciding the nature of the Soviet labour camps, stating that this was a civil action: “the moral importance of the matter lies in the fact that when a suspicion, a belief that concentration-camp-style crimes against humanity have taken place, we should not be silent, and our opponents have insulted us, and I reiterate that the court has received a worded summons for defamation, and I would welcome it if my

²³⁶ Rousset, Bernard, and Rosenthal, *Un procès antistalinien À Paris*, 18.

²³⁷ *Ibid.*, 46.

²³⁸ The court records did not indicate the source of this document, which I presumed was secretly provided by British and American intelligence agencies when Rousset sought their help.

²³⁹ Rousset, Bernard, and Rosenthal, *Un procès antistalinien À Paris*, 43.

opponent could provide evidence to prove himself."²⁴⁰ After hearing both sides, the court ruled that the defendant had not proven the truth of his statements that Rousset deemed defamatory, but the court also might not have fully understood the potential damage to Rousset's reputation, so it decided to summon witnesses.²⁴¹ In contrast to the previous attacks between Rousset and his opponents, the witnesses who appeared before the trial were no longer deportees but prisoners returning from Soviet labour camps. Daix insisted that witnesses should not be in court because he maintained that those witnesses were motivated by "resentment and political hatred."²⁴²

On 8 December 1950, Elinor Lipper (1912-2008) appeared as a witness at the fourth hearing. Born in Brussels to German Jewish parents, she had joined a red student organization in Berlin in 1931 and fled to Switzerland after the Nazis came to power. As a committed communist, Lipper went to the Soviet Union in 1937 out of conviction that it was a true democracy. However, with the onset of the Great Purge, she was arrested two and a half months after she arrived in the Soviet Union and was then imprisoned for 11 years. Lipper recalled her naive views when she was first imprisoned: "For the first few years, I still believed that everyone in Soviet prisons deserved what they got and that they were the natural enemies of the regime."²⁴³

The judge asked Lipper: "Do you think Rousset launched the appeal in good faith?"²⁴⁴ This was the judge's way of bringing the trial back to the issue of whether Daix was being sued for defamation. Lipper replied that she believed this because she could testify from personal

²⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 44.

²⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 48-49.

²⁴² Kuby, *Political Survivals*, 76.

²⁴³ Rousset, Bernard, and Rosenthal, *Un Procès Antistalinien À Paris*, 79.

²⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 83.

experience that tens of thousands of innocent people were currently imprisoned: “There are five labour camps in Moscow holding 30,000 prisoners.”²⁴⁵ Rousset also did not press Lipper on her experience but asked her for confirmation: “Am I being honest or dishonest when I claim that the labour camps are inhumane?”²⁴⁶ Lipper replied: “The facts bear this out; in Kolyma, people work 14 hours at -50 degrees Celsius, there is winter for eight months of the year, and the mortality rate is as high as 30 percent.”²⁴⁷ Lipper's testimony resonated with Rousset's definition of inhumane treatment as a crucial, defining characteristic of the concentration world. She confirmed the existence of inhumane detention facilities across the vast expanse from Moscow to Kolyma. If they were not concentration camps, they at least underscored the "moral importance" of Rousset's consistent claim that one could not ignore the inhumanity that exists. This was one of the reasons Rousset chose to sue. In Rousset's words: "It is the very importance of this movement that Daix has vilified, leading to divisions among the deportees when he could have done so much more."²⁴⁸

At the fifth hearing on 9 December 1950, Rousset's side continued to produce Soviet documents in response to Daix's accusations that Rousset had falsified evidence.²⁴⁹ All of the cited

²⁴⁵ Ibid.

²⁴⁶ Ibid., 84.

²⁴⁷ Ibid.

²⁴⁸ Ibid., 87.

²⁴⁹ In his fifth trial, Rousset cited several Soviet documents: 1. Soviet Labour Correction Code, Chapter 1: Those obligated to engage in corrective labour do so based on specific orders from administrative agencies. 2. Soviet Labour Correction Code, Chapter 2, Article 45: Corrective labour should be undertaken in places where freedom is deprived. 3. The 1934 establishment clause of the NKVD includes: The NKVD has the authority to send prisoners to labour camps for up to five years. 4. A political article on corrective labour in Volume 29 of the first edition of the Great Soviet Encyclopedia: It is incorrect to disregard the distinction between criminal institutions and administrative agencies in punishment. Similarly, it is wrong to view corrective labour institutions purely as educational establishments. The purpose of corrective labour activities is to prevent prisoners from further

documents were in the public domain, which meant the Daix side's allegations of forgery against Rousset risked real misrepresentation and defamation.

The next witness was Julius Margolin (1900-1971), born in Pinsk in the Russian Empire. A Zionist had moved to Palestine in 1936. He returned to Poland in 1939 to visit his family and was arrested during the Soviet invasion of Poland and spent six years in a labour camp. Margolin testified that prisoners in Soviet labour camps could be charged even in the complete absence of a legal decree. Margolin claimed that he had never been sentenced by a court and had only been notified in absentia by the NKVD on 13 September 1940 of a charge of being a socially dangerous element.²⁵⁰ The dramatic thing that happened to Margolin was that on 3 September 1940, the Soviet Union granted an amnesty. This was remarkable, as Polish citizens like Margolin, who had been arrested in connection with the Soviet invasion, were not even considered for amnesty because they had never been sentenced.²⁵¹ Margolin also mentioned in real life that no one called the camps “re-education camps,” not even the guards: The inmates are simply told: “If you're here, it's because you lied.”²⁵²

Daix's response to nearly all the witnesses was to accuse them of being biased anti-Soviet propagandists. Margolin's testimony was challenged by the Daix side, with defense counsel loudly questioning: “As a Jew, are you aware that Hitler murdered six million Jews? Are you aware that the Nazis, who annihilated millions of people, were mobilized again and that anti-

descending into class negation and dissuade them from undermining and dividing class solidarity. Rousset, Bernard, and Rosenthal, *Procès Antistalinien*, 90, 91, 92, 98.

²⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 113.

²⁵¹ *Ibid.*

²⁵² *Ibid.*

Soviet propaganda was drummed up again in the courtroom? “²⁵³ Daix repeatedly reminded the court of the Soviet Union's significant contributions to the anti-fascist war, a tactic that did little to clear the charges against him.

The diverse backgrounds of the subsequent witnesses gradually tipped the scales in Rousset's favor. These witnesses included M. Weisberg, a member of the German Communist Party who had emigrated to the Soviet Union; Valentín González (1904-1983), a hero of the Spanish Civil War who had fled to the Soviet Union; and Tikhon Charikov, a Russian peasant who had been unjustly arrested. Whether communists or liberals, Soviets or foreigners, their testimonies demonstrated the existence of labour camps in the Soviet Union.

Rousset invited these witnesses not to criticize Soviet concentration camps but to validate for the judge the existence of Soviet labour camps and that he had not forged evidentiary documents.

At the sixth hearing, on 15 December 1950, the last of Rousset's witnesses and the one whose identity attracted the most attention took the stand: Margaret Neumann (1901-1989).

Neumann had been held in both Soviet labour camps and a Nazi concentration camp. A former member of the Communist Party of Germany, Neumann came to the Soviet Union in 1935 and was sent without judicial process to Kazakhstan in 1938 to perform forced labour. In February 1940, Neumann, along with 28 other German and Austrian prisoners, was handed over by the NKVD to the Gestapo on the bridge at Brest-Litovsk. She was imprisoned in Ravensbrück until the end of the war.²⁵⁴ Neumann described her experience in the Soviet labour camps as follows:

²⁵³ *Ibid.*, 115.

²⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 180.

“Men and women were housed together in the camps, common criminals were locked with political prisoners, and many women had to prostitute themselves in the camps to survive.”²⁵⁵

The Daix side then tried to interrupt Neumann: “I would like to ask Neumann to comment on the moral importance of this case and the damage it has done to the reputation of the USSR.”²⁵⁶ She replied: “All I can do is compare my experience in Russia with my later experience in Germany. You have just said that the Red Army liberated me, but it is difficult for me to distinguish between a slow death in the tundra of Siberia or a quick suffocation in a gas chamber; which one is more immoral?”²⁵⁷

On the seventh hearing on 16 December 1950, Jean Laffitte, a communist and the secretary-general of the French Peace Fighters Organization, testified in opposition to Rousset's claims. He stated that there was no reason to believe that the Soviet Union had concentration camps.

Rousset's lawyer questioned Laffitte: "You say you have no reason to believe the Soviet Union has concentration camps, but if such camps existed, would you join in condemning them?"²⁵⁸

Laffitte replied: "As far as I know and based on what I have seen in the Soviet Union, I do not believe such things exist."²⁵⁹ Rousset's lawyer continued: "It's clear that you refuse to answer my question. Suppose that the Soviet Union did have concentration camps; would you condemn them?"²⁶⁰ Laffitte's response was quite remarkable: "Sir, let me ask you if your mother were a

²⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 182.

²⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 183.

²⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 187.

²⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

murderer, would you condemn her? I will tell you my answer: “My mother is my mother, not a murderer!”²⁶¹ (The court erupted in commotion).

The entire trial ended with the statement of the last witness, Vaillant Couturier (1912-1996), a former Auschwitz survivor, who, when confronted with Rousset's questioning, concluded: “I can't answer your question, but just to say what I think, the Soviet prison system was the most ideal in the world.”²⁶²

At this trial stage, the situation became clear: Daix could not present evidence to justify his defamatory attacks on Rousset. Naturally, one might have wondered why the Daix side was actively defending the case despite knowing they had little chance of winning. Was it because, as Daix claimed, they "did not want the Soviet Union to be maligned?" A key question was whether they genuinely believed the Soviet Union did not have labour camps. If such camps did exist, what had convinced them to ignore this fact? The testimonies of the witnesses Daix brought showed how everything that happened in the Soviet Union was rationalized. In short, it was a matter of faith.

It is difficult to explain in a few words why communism held such a strong appeal for the French left after the war. The disillusionment caused by the failure of the Popular Front, the reckoning with the Vichy regime and the right wing, the myth of the Resistance, and the victory in the Great Patriotic War all contributed to a devotion to Stalin. This devotion was so intense that it could outweigh certain temporary disgraces, such as the existence of labour camps.

²⁶¹ Ibid.

²⁶² Ibid., 195.

Perhaps the reason, as Rousset previously claimed, that he turned his investigations first on the Soviet Union was because “the Soviet Union claimed that it was a paradise where communism had been realized, while the United States at least admitted that it was a capitalist country where injustice existed.”²⁶³ Soviet defenders like Daix countered Rousset with a similar reasoning: capitalism had revealed its horror, and the communist Soviet Union was the only country with the idea of realizing the dream of humanity, if not in the present, then in the future, and that some sacrifice was necessary in the present. When political beliefs differ, it is hard to say whose moral standards prevail. What constitutes morality for one person might have a different meaning for another. The opposing sides in the Rousset case illustrated the harsh realities of the Cold War stage. The Soviet Union had labour camps, but the United States was also deeply embroiled in racial struggles. France itself also committed atrocities in Indochina and Algeria.

We cannot say that Daix and Sartre were oblivious to what was happening in the Soviet Union. They chose to confront Rousset to uphold their principles. Rousset must have felt compromised when seeking help from Britain and America. For a Marxist to seek the assistance of capitalist countries to oppose the first communist state was, in a way, a shame. However, he withstood the pressure and, despite exposing the Soviet labour camps in a less than honorable manner, it did not change the fact of the massive imprisonment of citizens in the USSR.

The court delivered its verdict on 12 January 1951. Daix and *Les Lettres Françaises* ultimately lost the case because they defamed and baselessly insulted Rousset. Daix was ordered to publish an apology in *Les Lettres Françaises*. Considering Daix's contributions to France as a former

²⁶³ Rousset, “Oui ou non.” And Birchall, “Neither Washington nor Moscow,”: 389.

resistance fighter, Daix's fine was reduced from the current equivalent of 150,000 CAD to 30,000 CAD.²⁶⁴

²⁶⁴ Ibid., 250.

Conclusion

On 13 January 1951, *Le Figaro* ran a front-page story focusing on Rousset's victory, with the headline “Justice for Rousset” .²⁶⁵ Undoubtedly, Rousset scored a public relations victory. So, where did the protagonists go after the case? What have historians learned from this case?

In the year he won the case, Rousset established a commission of inquiry composed mainly of deportees, the Commission Internationale contre le Régime Concentrationnaire (CICRC). The CICRC was designed to investigate unjust arrests around the world, and it investigated political prisons in the Soviet Union, Greece, Spain, and even China. However, when Rousset chose in 1957 to turn his investigations to French colonies in North Africa, the organization was embroiled in a protracted conflict that led to its collapse. The organization followed Rousset's universal definition of a concentration camp, which was highly modeled on the Nazi and Soviet camps and led to the classification of any illegal place of detention as a concentration camp.²⁶⁶ When Rousset insisted on investigating the detention camps in French North Africa, he faced accusations similar to those when he called for an investigation of the Soviet labour camps. Even Rémy Roure, the journalist who had assisted Rousset in launching the 1949 appeal against the Soviet Union, broke with him on this occasion: “The Algeria inquiry that had been initiated was an unjust accusation against France, and your reasoning on the rationale was too absolute.”²⁶⁷

When the Commission of Enquiry pointed the finger at France itself, the split in the Commission was immediate. A significant proportion of the French population did not support the independence of the North African colonies, let alone consider the prison camps in Algeria to

²⁶⁵ “Justice est rendue à David Rousset,” *Le Figaro*, 13 January 1951

²⁶⁶ Kuby, “From Auschwitz to Algeria,”: 348-350.

²⁶⁷ *Ibid*, 355.

be concentration camps. Though Rousset's theory of universality had given him enough support initially to launch an investigation into the Soviet labour camps, he lost much popularity when he insisted on launching an investigation into the mother country as a staunch anti-colonialist. The investigation eventually went ahead, but the CICRC lost financial support from the United States, which led directly to the organization's dissolution.²⁶⁸

Regarding the CICRC's fate, Sartre's fierce opposition to Rousset in his day may have been prophetic. As Judt analyses it, Sartre's objection was not to Rousset's exposé of the Soviet labour camps but to his over-emphasis on the Rousset-type universe of the camps, which, in Sartre's view, was in "bad taste."²⁶⁹ Although Judt himself wrote this passage to demonstrate the bad habit of progressive French intellectuals constantly questioning the West's failure to do the right thing in the face of accusations against the Soviet Union, it has to be said that Sartre foresaw as early as 1949, the dangers of Rousset's overly-absolute definition of the concentration camps as a definition that could later be applied to France itself.

Sartre also mentioned Rousset in his open letter, breaking with Camus and stating that he did not accept Rousset's political blackmail in the name of morality. He used Turkmenistan and Madagascar to refer to the Soviet and French camps:

I'm not saying that the Malagasy must come before Turkmenistan; I'm saying that we can't take advantage of the suffering of the Turkmen people, and I don't think that it will help them, but Rousset takes advantage of their suffering. Please tell me what feelings Rousset's revelations will provoke among anti-communists. Despair? Suffering? Calm down! It is difficult for a Frenchman to put himself in the place of the Turkmen and feel sympathy for their abstract existence. What is outrageous and desperate is that I see in the anti-communists the excitement and joy in their hearts

²⁶⁸ Ibid., 349.

²⁶⁹ Judt, *Past Imperfect*, 173.

because he finally has proof!²⁷⁰

Sartre's other accusation against Camus might have revealed the inadequacy of the moral dichotomy of good and evil in the context of the Cold War. Using predefined moral standards to judge everything could lead to awkward results: "Let me explain your logic: the Vietnamese are colonized. Therefore, they are enslaved. But they are communists; therefore, they are tyrants."²⁷¹ Similarly, when Rousset insisted that a detention facility was no different from a Nazi concentration camp insofar as it contained inhuman abuses and deaths, the French authorities drew parallels with Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union. There is no denying that Sartre became a Soviet-sympathetic fellow traveler after 1952. However, he was aware of and recognized the widespread system of forced labour in the Soviet Union. Sartre was always a seeker of the "Third Way"; from the short-lived RDR with Rousset to his later interest in Maoism, Sartre never gave up the pursuit of intellectual action independent of political parties.²⁷² While there is undoubtedly merit in those who decry Sartre's growing support for the Soviet Union into the 1950s, it is interesting to note Sartre's response to this type of accusation: "Camus, if I am a shameful sympathizer, why do they [USSR] hate me and not you?"²⁷³

Daix, a central figure in this analysis, shares a common thread with many disillusioned communists. His journey of gradual distancing from the Soviet Union, sparked by the Soviet

²⁷⁰ Jean-Paul Sartre, "Réponse à Albert Camus," *Situations IV* (Paris: Gallimard, 1964), 104-105.

²⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 107.

²⁷² Anna Boschetti and Richard C. McCleary, *The Intellectual Enterprise: Sartre and Les Temps Modernes* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1988), 113.

²⁷³ Jean-Paul Sartre, "Réponse à Albert Camus," 104.

crackdown in Prague in 1968, was a deeply personal struggle. In his later years, Daix candidly admitted:

It was a long journey for me to realize that I was not a Marxist but a Stalinist. The influence of Stalinism distorted the intricacy of the labour movement and its theories. It provided a rationale and validation for class struggle as a science and demonstrated itself as one of the most effective strategies for violence. History can use it to conceal itself and elude people's scrutiny. This logic ensnared my youth. However, blindness is always accompanied by complicity; you must be touched to be manipulated. I served the lies I was subjected to, even if I could only spread them because I must believe in them.²⁷⁴

This profound self-realization dawned on him as early as 1963, during the Thaw, when Daix had already written a preference version for Solzhenitsyn's *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich*.²⁷⁵

Judt posits that the three primary manifestations of France's division in the twentieth century are the internal strife between the left and the right, the contamination of the moral landscape of the coming decades by Vichy and the Occupation, and the protracted instability of the political system.²⁷⁶ Rousset's role as an intellectual in French society is intricately linked to these three factors. He embraced Trotskyism in the thirties after witnessing the defeat of the Popular Front, disheartened by the degree of the hostility between the left and the right and disillusioned by the lack of unity within the left. It was during the Occupation that Rousset's political views were further molded when collaborators apprehended him for his involvement in the Resistance and subsequently deported him to a German concentration camp. After the war, he seized the

²⁷⁴ Pierre Daix, *J'ai cru au matin* (Paris : R. Laffont, 1976), 9-10.

²⁷⁵ "Dietrich / Picasso Solzhenitsyn and The Gulag browse," accessed June 11, 2024, [seybold.ch | Dietrich / PicassoSolzhenitsynAndTheGulag browse](http://seybold.ch/Dietrich/PicassoSolzhenitsynAndTheGulag/browse).

²⁷⁶ Tony Judt, *The Burden of Responsibility: Blum, Camus, Aron, and the French Twentieth Century* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007), 6.

opportunity presented by the turmoil in the French political system to propose the creation of the RDR to disrupt the cycle of the ongoing struggle between left and right in France. He then launched an appeal to the Soviet Union, which still held significant prestige in France at the time in the context of the Cold War. The volatile political climate in France, characterized by constant strife between the left and the right, often led to heated disputes even within the French left. In the case of Marxism, which had taken the lead on the left, the practice and interpretation of Marxism in France were closely tied to political struggles and the protagonists' loyalty to a particular cause.²⁷⁷ The outcome was a fierce political debate. In essence, the loyalties of the opposing sides in the Rousset debate did not hinge on the existence of the Soviet labour camps. Instead, it was their pre-existing divergent loyalties that fueled this years-long dispute. This is why Judt has acknowledged that Rousset's case had little moral impact in France; a single case does not alter the more significant political choices made on both sides of the argument.²⁷⁸

However, the fact that the Rousset case failed to fundamentally change the left's special preference for the Soviet Union does not diminish the significance of the Rousset case. Rousset pioneered a political construct based on testimony, emphasizing the memories of witnesses' suffering and shifting the focus from abstract morality to victim-centred politics of testimony.²⁷⁹ The court's decision ruling in Rousset's favour was not based on the complex documents he presented but on the live testimonies of victims recounting their experiences. Before the Rousset

²⁷⁷ Tony Judt, *Marxism and the French Left: Studies in Labour and Politics in France, 1830-1981* (New York: New York University Press, 2011), 171.

²⁷⁸ Judt, *Past Imperfect*, 114.

²⁷⁹ Carolyn Dean, *The Moral Witness: Trials and Testimony after Genocide* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2019), 84-85.

case, witness testimony was used effectively in the Nuremberg Trials. Still, those primarily dealt with state-sanctioned violence and seldom focused on the personal experiences and memories of witnesses. After the Rousset case, historians would again witness the importance of the testimony model in the Eichmann trial, reflecting a similar effort to seek personal memories of suffering.²⁸⁰ The victim-centered approach was not uncommon in that era, as people had endured immense suffering during the World Wars. However, Rousset was determined to change the stereotype that equated victims with weakness. He consistently emphasized the testimonial privilege of concentration camp survivors, not because those who had not experienced the camps owed them anything, but because "ordinary people did not know everything was possible."²⁸¹

What, then, can Rousset's case teach? Although it was not known until the 2010s that Rousset actively received help from British and American intelligence agencies, that fact did not change the moral persuasiveness of Rousset's appeal; the Gulag was not one of Rousset's fictionalized stories after all. To the argument that Rousset's forced equation of Nazi concentration camps with Soviet labour camps was intended simply to spark a high-profile political debate, it is worth remembering that his universalization had been Rousset's consistent theory since the war ended. Whether it be Nazi concentration camps, Soviet labour camps, or what happened in Algeria afterward, Rousset consistently viewed inhumane and unfree detention facilities as concentration camps. If we need to analyze the complexities of intellectual struggles during the Cold War, we must abandon simplistic moral dichotomies. The reason is straightforward: Rousset's theories were inseparable from Cold War politics, just as his opponents were. We cannot dismiss an

²⁸⁰ Ibid.

²⁸¹ Rousset, *L'Univers concentrationnaire*, 181.

individual's entire narrative because of certain compromises or fully endorse them without reservation.

Literary scholar Neal Oxenhandler (1926-2011) has remarked that "the temptation to look for heroes in post-war France was powerful."²⁸² In the context of the disputes between Rousset, Daix, and the left-wing intelligentsia, this statement is still relevant in the opposite context: the temptation to look for scapegoats in post-war France was also powerful.

²⁸² Quoted in Kuby, "In the Shadow of the Concentration Camp", 173.

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