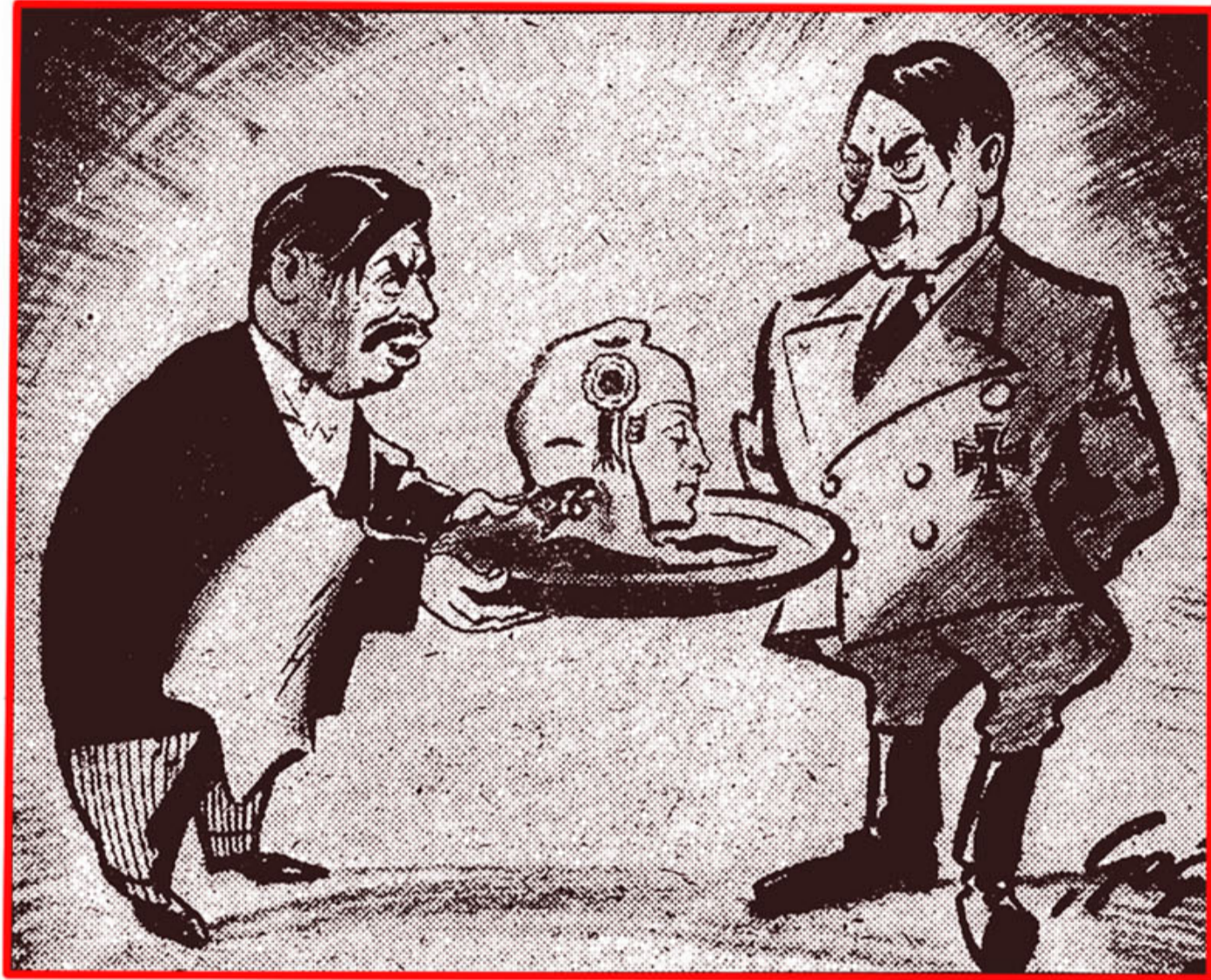


May 18, 1942: p. 34

Laval and Nazis

Plot to Drag French into Anti-British Camp

Göring Also Takes a Hand as Paris Propagandists Bleat Axis Line at Unwilling People



Gog in the London Daily Sketch

“Laval’s ‘Full Collaboration’ ”

“Madagascar Week” in Vichy found Pierre Laval knee-deep in Japanese. On one side was Ambassador Takanobu Mitani and his staff; on the other Admiral Naokuni Nomura, head of the Japanese Mixed Axis Commission in Berlin, and Rear Admiral Katsuo Abe, who holds a similar job in Rome. No soothsayer was required to see what was going on. Vichy, when confronted with a Japanese demand for French Indo-China, had yielded without a struggle. What the little yellow men wanted this time was Madagascar.

Then Vichy felt a jolt. Britain attacked the island and Washington peremptorily ordered the French not to interfere. Weaseling—one of Laval’s notable talents—seemed the best policy. Briskly he denounced the American message, proclaimed that he would not initiate a break with Washington, and then turned loose an anti-British blast in the press and over the radio.

But Laval’s self-imposed mission—to create a pro-Axis France—ran into obstructions. Gen. Benoît Léon de Fornel de la Laurencie, once Vichy’s envoy to the Germans in Paris, refused to swallow Lavalism and was arrested, charged with threatening the chief of government.

Frenchmen in the occupied zone preferred to go on hating the Germans. At Vire, south of the Channel port of Cherbourg, a Nazi munitions train was wrecked, killing 21 Frenchmen who had been forced aboard as hostages. Firing squads were active in Paris, Caen, and Romorantin, which was a United States aviation center during the last war. The toll reached between 150 and 200 by the end of the week. The Nazis threatened to send 500 men “eastward” to labor camps.

Only a fortnight earlier the redoubtable SS-man, Prince Josias Waldeck-Pyrmont had arrived in Paris to crush resistance. His failure brought a still more ominous visitation last week: Reinhard Heydrich, the slick, fair-haired Gestapo chieftain known to Germans as “Der Henker” (the Hangman). He had a long list of qualifications for the job. He joined a terrorist organization at the age of 16, went into naval intelligence under Admiral Canaris (NEWSWEEK, Jan. 19), collected evidence for the 1934 blood purges, perfected an apartment-house spy system, and reached the peak of his career last Sept. 27 at the

Laval's France

age of 37 when Hitler named him "Protector" of Bohemia and Moravia. More than 500 executions were carried out under his orders and the BBC put him first on a list of war criminals slated for eventual punishment.

To Paris Heydrich brought two henchmen whose past records, along with their first names, were locked in secret archives:

Major General Oberg, a brigade leader of Hitler's Elite Guard, and Dr. Knochen, a Gestapo inspector, were assigned to the bloody task of subduing the French.

Broader policies of collaboration awaited the arrival of Hermann Göring, who scheduled a meeting with Laval in Paris for this week. According to Vichy dispatches, the blubbery Reichsmarshal proposed to discuss two points: (1) German demands for the return of Gen. Henri Honoré Giraud, whose escape from Königstein Fortress constituted one of the mysteries of the war—*NEWSWEEK*, May 11; and (2) Laval's alleged concern over reports that the Spanish were massing troops in Morocco for a snatch at French territory. Such was the window dressing; the real goods were Laval's plans for future aid to the Axis.

Göring's activities coincided with reports from Stockholm that he was about to relinquish two of his posts—as President of the Reichstag and Supreme Head of War Production—"because of the enormous strain on him."

Significance ~~~

Laval's handicaps in reconciling the nation to the "new order" are his personal unpopularity—careful observers estimate that 90 to 95 per cent of the population spurn his policies—and the determination of the Nazis to stamp out resistance through terrorism. Nevertheless he has an outside chance to succeed with a weary, hungry people—particularly if the war lasts long enough to allow him to hammer home his hatred of Britain and his warning of a Communist tidal wave over Europe.

These propaganda lines were planted in France by the Nazis soon after their rise to power. The serpent-tongued Otto Abetz, now German ambassador to France, operated in Paris as early as 1930 as apostle of the apparently innocuous doctrine of Franco-German rapprochement. Annexed later by Joachim von Ribbentrop and allowed to draw on a secret fund that eventually reached 2,000,000 francs a month, he became one of the chief termites that undermined France's foundations.

By 1934 Abetz was getting results—notably the Comité France-Allemagne (France-Germany Committee) which was formed with Nazi blessings and succeeded in creating widespread distrust of British motives. By 1935 a rabid article appeared in the weekly *Gringoire*, in which the writer Henri Béraud proclaimed: "I hate England . . . England must be reduced to slavery!" The anti-British barrage gained in intensity until it became one of the Nazis' chief means of undermining public morale during the days of "phony war."

To continue this line and tax London with a plot to seize the French Empire piecemeal was Laval's best hope. The strategy to be worked out with Göring did not necessarily imply overt help to the Axis. The same effect could be obtained by launching a military action to regain French Equatorial Africa, now in the hands of the de Gaulle forces, and by "convoying" French ships against the blockade. In the inevitable conflict with Britain, Laval would then be ready to present himself as the empire's defender.