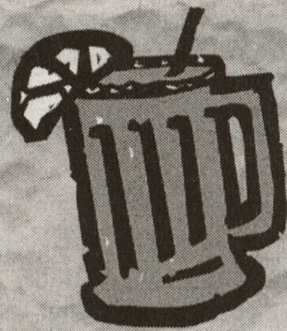


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Former French Cabinet minister Papon tried for past war crimes

BORDEAUX, France (AP) — France put its wartime past on trial today in the case of a former Cabinet minister accused of war crimes during World War II and then protected by late President Francois Mitterrand.

Maurice Papon, a police official under the collaborationist Vichy regime, allegedly ordered the arrests of hundreds of Jews later killed in the Holocaust.

"Papon, Maurice, 87 years old, retired," he responded to Judge Jean-Louis Castagnede, who formally opened the trial and called in the accused.

Papon entered a silent courtroom remodeled to accommodate the crush of Holocaust victims, their families, reporters and others.

He sat behind bulletproof glass as part of tight security surrounding the trial.

His lawyer, Jean-Marc Varaut, pleaded for him to be freed during the trial, a move civil parties opposed.

"Detention may prove fatal," Varaut argued. "It would be detrimental to the client's psychological and physical health to be held in prison, where he was greeted both inside and outside with shouts of 'Death!'"

The proceedings were suspended after two hours to deal with the request.

The judge appointed a panel of independent medical experts to examine Papon and to decide whether detention would be harmful. It wasn't

known when the proceedings would resume.

The trial should shed light on how French officials helped send thousands of Jews to Nazi death camps in World War II.

The proceedings at the Palais de Justice are expected to last three months and will include

"It would be detrimental to the client's (Papon) psychological and physical health to be held in prison, where he was greeted both inside and outside with shouts of 'Death!'"

JEAN-MARC VARAUT
MAURICE PAPON'S LAWYER

testimony from 140 witnesses.

Papon is a former police supervisor in the Bordeaux region and the highest-ranking Vichy official to stand trial in the persecution and deportation of Jews. He surrendered to police Tuesday evening.

A former budget minister under conservative President Valery Giscard d'Estaing, Papon is charged with complicity in crimes against humanity for allegedly signing arrest orders that led to the deportation of 1,690 Jews.

In all, France deported about 760,000 Jews, including 12,000 children, to death camps during World War II; about 2,500 survived.

Before the trial opened today, victims' families staged morning demonstrations, one at the site of a former camp for deportees and another at a deaux synagogue.

At the transit site in the suburb of Marais, Nazi hunter Serge Klarsfeld joined with groups in reading the names and ages of 100 Jewish infants and children allegedly deported on Papon's orders. They also read prayers for the dead.

At the gathering was Therese Stopnicki, as a 6-year-old escaped the police roundup that captured her two sisters, ages 2 and 5, died at Auschwitz.

"I've been having nightmares for weeks," she said. "Thinking I'll be going to court and breathing the same air as a man makes me nauseated."

A poll published today indicated a split in French feelings about the trial, with 57 percent interested but 42 percent expressing little interest, the daily Le Parisien said.

Still, 62 percent felt the trial was more important than that of Papon: it was a way of judging the French government in the deportation of Jews under the Vichy regime.

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Low turnout forces rerun in Serbian elections

BELGRADE, Yugoslavia (AP) — Serbia's recent presidential elections produced no clear winner, forcing election officials to call for another vote.

An extreme nationalist candidate edged Slobodan Milosevic, the neo-communist incumbent, in a weekend race, but turnout was low. A rerun must be held, final results confirmed Wednesday.

Vojislav Seselj, whose troops fought in support of Serbs in Croatia and Bosnia, won 47.9 percent of the votes Sunday. Zoran Djindjic, backed by Yugoslav president Milosevic, won 47.9 percent. The results were invalid votes.

New elections must be held within two months because 48.9 percent of the electorate turned out was short of the minimum of just over 50 percent needed to make the results count.

Unlike Sunday's election, which was a runoff between the two candidates who did best in the first round on Sept. 21, the rerun will be open to other candidates as well. If the winner does not get more than 50 percent of the vote, a runoff will be held.

It was the first major defeat for Milosevic's Socialist Party, which won the first multi-party voting in more than a decade in 1990 and all subsequent major elections.

Seselj espouses a nationalism even more extreme than that advocated by Milosevic when the Yugoslav war erupted in 1991. Seselj, who leads the ultranationalist Radical Party, still advocates a greater Serbia that would incorporate parts of Croatia and Bosnia.

In separate elections Sunday, Momir Bulatovic narrowly defeated pro-Western challenger Djukanovic, according to complete results.

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