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James Damon and the Bishop Williamson Trial

In a small triumph for free speech and human rights in Germany, we are fortunate to have two excellent "alternative" accounts of last week's witch trial of Bishop Richard Williamson in Regensburg. It is clear that ever more readers are becoming suspicious of the "Establishment" media and turning to alternative sources of information. Bishop Williamson apparently dared to question "Holocaust" dogma, which he considers incompatible with Catholic dogma. The present report by independent writer and reporter Günter Deckert is posted on numerous websites, including www.globalfire.tv/nj/10de/verfolgungen/bischof_williamson.html Herr Deckert provided us with Revisionist accounts of the trials of Ernst Zündel, Germar Rudolf, Sylvia Stolz and Horst Mahler among others, most of which yours truly was privileged to translate into English. Marcus Haverkamp's excellent account of the Regensburg trial, written in English, is also posted on numerous Internet sites including www.revisionistreview.blogspot.com/2010/04/trial-of-bishop-who-wasnt-there.html

The Trial of the Bishop who Wasn't There



A Tragicomedy in a Few Acts and Many, Many Scenes

by Markus Haverkamp - mihaverkamp@yahoo.co.uk Tuesday, April 20, 2010

On Friday, 16 April 2010, Pope Benedict XVI's 83rd birthday, the trial against **Bishop Richard Williamson** of the Society of Saint Pius X (SSPX) took place at the Local Court Regensburg, Germany. All in all roughly forty journalists arrived as well as twenty-odd supporters of Williamson, who had to make do being seated in the back row of the absolutely packed court room. Among the supporters were **Lady Michèle Renouf**, **Günter Deckert** and **Ursula Haverbeck**, as well as many other well known faces. Sadly, there were no members, followers or supporters of the SSPX present that could be identified as such.

After the usual security checks, which for a change were handled in a rather civilized manner, the trial started at 9.00 a.m. sharp. The *dramatis personæ* were: **Judge Karin Frahm**, a fairly pretty blonde, twenty-nine years of age (!); **Senior State Prosecutor Edgar Zach**, a grey-haired gentleman probably in his late fifties; and **Matthias Loßmann**, the defense attorney for **Bishop Williamson**, a

fellow possibly in his mid-forties whose air and appearance were eerily reminiscent of a gravedigger. The minor parts were played by an all-female cast: a stenographer, an interpreter for English, and another for Swedish. Her Honor was seated in front of a strange yellowish backdrop, the kind familiar from modern Wagner productions. Seating and legroom were satisfactory, the acoustics excellent.

The proceedings began with an explanation by Herr Loßmann that Williamson would not be appearing since the SSPX had forbidden him from doing so. Next it was recorded that not one of the three Swedish witnesses had turned up, and that they had neither excused themselves nor given any reason for their absence. Herr Zach then began reading out the indictment. The contents were comprised of the usual stuff familiar to all: Williamson has denied and belittled the Holocaust, has done so aware of the fact that such heresy is a grievous violation of modern dogma, has furthermore committed this heinous act intentionally in a manner suited to disturb the public

peace, and must therefore be dealt with accordingly. To his credit it must be said that the Prosecutor, Herr Zach, was calm, collected, read the indictment without any aggressive or hateful undertone, and made a generally polite impression.

In the scene that followed, Defense Attorney Herr Loßmann gave a fairly detailed account of what had transpired and how the various events had come about. The judge asked many a probing question, of which a few were simply superfluous. Some questions Herr Loßmann was unable to answer. But a great deal of these gaps were filled in later during an exciting scene in which Loßmann's witness, **Maximilian Krah, the lawyer for the SSPX...**took the stand.

All in all Herr Loßmann left a rather dubious impression: his account was repetitive, unstructured, and his idiom sloppy and unbecoming of his role.

Here now a summary of a few lesser scenes, in no particular order: The court ordered a viewing of the infamous final five minutes of an originally hour long interview, the very five minutes that got Bishop Williamson into this mess. Then the matter of the absent witnesses was taken up again: two documents were read out, one by the legal department of **the Swedish television station SVT1** which stated that they would not help the court due to lack of trust in the German legal system, and the other by the Swedish Ministry of Justice, who wrote that they would not be rendering the court mutual judicial assistance since freedom of speech is guaranteed in Sweden but not so in Germany.

Furthermore, an article from a Swedish magazine, which had no real bearing on the case, was translated off the cuff fluently into high quality German... Plus, a segment of a German television program showing the interviewer of Williamson (Name: **Ali Fagan**; status: absent witness) made the comment that he would gladly stand as a witness in a German court of law, etc.

Another delightful scene starred the interpreter for English. Asked by Judge Frahm whether she could translate a letter extemporaneously or whether she needed time to prepare, this lady requested and was granted "five minutes," whereupon she ambled over to her Swedish speaking colleague, chatted with her for fifteen minutes, went back to her seat and translated the text in one go. It was surreal.

All these and the following scenes were interrupted by "five minute recesses" that were fifteen minutes long each. The trial lacked any real coherence, haphazardly jumping from one matter to the next, not even the many "five minute recesses" being synchronised to the action on stage. The only thing that kept everything together, were the endless, totally superfluous repetitions.

A real highlight was the act in which **Herr Krah**, whom we first encountered above, was called

as a witness for the defense. **As lawyer for the SSPX, Herr Krah** had a great deal of knowledge as to what had transpired having himself witnessed the events unfurl. Of this he gave an informative account. In answer to the judge's questions, he drew a detailed picture of Williamson's standard of living, describing not only his home but also which tube (subway train) to take in order to get there.

He then told of Williamson's position within the fraternity, that the bishop wields little or no power in the SSPX, and that Richard Williamson is considered and considers himself "an eccentric Englishman". Herr Krah went on to speak of the Bishop's personality, characterising him as refined, polite, erudite, well-spoken, and an excellent teacher. He then informed the court that if the bishop questions the "Holocaust" he does so only because he is utterly convinced that his opinion represents the truth. The bishop, so he said, is absolutely bound to truthfulness and would never lie. As such Williamson is certainly convinced of what he had stated in that interview. The problem, according to Herr Krah, is that Williamson's ability to perceive the truth is seriously impaired ("ein nachhaltig gestörtes Erkenntnisvermögen").

As an example of this condition Herr Krah told the court that Bishop Williamson does not believe in the 9/11 story, and on having been asked by the judge continued by explaining to the court all about how some, if not many people doubt the veracity of the official 9/11 account. To summarise, Herr Krah...gave a heap of information...including details likely to harm the bishop....

Let us now turn to the final act of this tragicomedy. In the first scene Herr Zach gave his closing arguments. He stated that Bishop Williamson had known exactly what he was saying, knew full well that this is against the law in Germany, was counting on the fact that this interview would be made public, and that the bishop had by these means hoped to spread his twisted views on the "Holocaust." Considering the fact that Williamson had done this intentionally, a fair sentence would be a fine of 12.000 Euros (i.e. US\$16,000).

Now it was time for the summation of the defense. Herr Loßmann proceeded to recapitulate the entire story as it had slowly unravelled before our eyes through a profusion of irrelevant repetitions, tedious tangents, and futile five-minute recesses. In short: On occasion of the ordination of a Swedish deacon who had converted from Protestantism not merely to Catholicism, but to one of its most traditional branches (which caused a stir in Sweden), a Swedish camera crew went to Zaitzkofen, near Regensburg, and asked the ordaining bishop, Richard Williamson, for an interview which he granted them. They spoke about religious matters for over fifty minutes, and then, once they had gained the bishop's trust,

suddenly asked him about a comment he had made about the "Holocaust" twenty years ago in Canada. The interviewer, Ali Fagan, described this question as "a shot from the hip", and the evidence clearly showed that the interviewer had deliberately set a trap for the bishop. After Williamson had answered the question in depth, he pointed out to the interviewer that such comments are illegal in Germany and asked him not to publicize them.

The Swedish television station STV1 then approached the leading German magazine *Der Spiegel* with this story, which the *Spiegel* proceeded to publish three days before the interview was to be aired on Swedish television. As soon as the SSPX had gotten wind of this they had their lawyer, Herr Krah, get in touch with Williamson, the latter asking that the interview not be broadcast, something that was realistically not going to happen, and insisting that this interview not be made available over the internet.

When Matthias Krah contacted Bishop Williamson, he was immediately aware of the gravity of the situation saying something along the lines of "typical journalists, you can't trust them." STV1 nonetheless made the final five minutes of the interview available on their website, from where it was downloaded onto YouTube and went viral. By itself this was all fairly inconsequential, for who had ever heard of the SSPX, or Bishop Richard Williamson for that matter? Unfortunately, however, this was exactly the moment the Vatican welcomed the SSPX back into the fold of the Church, and to the viciously anti-ecclesiastical, i.e. Zionist, press, the idea of a "Holocaust" heretic having his excommunication revoked must have been... (highly offensive). As such the matter was blown out of all proportion, causing desired damage to the Church. All this, Loßmann argued, was not the

bishop's fault. In fact Williamson is simply a victim of foul play, and must therefore be acquitted.

The court took a thirty minute recess, during which Her Honor decided on the verdict, the grounds for which were eight pages long. The court reconvened at 3.00 p.m. for the final scene, and Judge Frahm read out the verdict: guilty, fine: 10.000 Euros, i.e. \$13,500. She gave the following reasons for the verdict: Williamson had denied the "Holocaust," and though he may be convinced that it had not taken place, this is irrelevant since history has shown the "Holocaust" to have taken place, and furthermore even the highest courts have knowledge of this subject. Richard Williamson was also aware of the fact that his opinion would reach the public, but had nonetheless continued to express it. His crime was therefore a deliberate action. The fact that the interview had gone viral on YouTube was ignored since this was certainly not the bishop's fault and went against his express wish.

However, §130 Penal Code stipulates that "incitement of the People" (*Volksverhetzung*) is only established if the crime is perpetrated publicly and is intended to disturb the public peace. However, nowhere does the law stipulate that the public in question must be German! By having the interview broadcast in Sweden, millions of Swedes could see it. Ergo, these masses of people could then, feasibly, contact their friends and relatives in Germany and thus supposedly endanger the German public peace. Therefore, the bishop was found guilty and fined 10,000 Euros - and that's the end of that.

...The defense counsel defended neither his client nor truth but merely the SSPX....

The Heresy Trial of Bishop Richard Williamson

By Günter Deckert - Translated by J M Damon

Following is a quotation from an indignant article posted at www.regensburg-digital.de for 17 April 2010:

"It was actually said that we Germans are living under a Jewish dictatorship and they (the Media) wouldn't be allowed to write the truth anyway;" that National Socialism is "the alternative, a splendid economic system;" and that there was "no Holocaust!"

These are some of the things that were heard in the visitors' section of Regensburg Courthouse on Thursday during the frequent intermissions.

Sometimes they were said quietly and furtively, sometimes directly into the camera!"

Tr.: www.regensburg-digital.de is a city blog sponsored by a group calling itself the VEREIN ZUR FÖRDERUNG DER MEINUNGS- UND INFORMATIONSVIELFALT (Organization for the

Promotion of Diversity of Opinion). "Organization for the Promotion of Hypocrisy" might be a more fitting name, since the group strongly disapproves of "diversity of opinion" where "Holocaust" is concerned.}

The County Court is in the same courthouse as the District Court, connected to the jail for suspects who are under investigatory arrest.

At the entrance to the courthouse, security is the same as that of the Mannheim Heresy Trials {the trials of Ernst Zündel, Gernar Rudolf, Sylvia Stolz and others} with magnetic archways and searches of pockets, purses, briefcases, etc., like at the airports.

Only two officials are on duty, a man and woman, and the searches are somewhat lackadaisical.

There is another security check as we enter the main courtroom, again a male-female team.

The representatives of the Establishment media are not searched, however. There is room in the courtroom for only 19 visitors, in the very back. The rest of the space is reserved for the Establishment media.

As the trial gets under way there are several empty seats in the media section and visitors are allowed to take them.

Around 90 persons are present in the courtroom including 35 visitors, interns and trainees. Present are Lady Michelle Renouf from London, Frau Ursula Haverbeck, Markus Haverkamp, Andreas K. from Berlin and Gerd W. from Zossen / Brandenburg, another a victim of Section 130 {the section of the German Penal Code dealing with "Incitement of the Masses."}

There are no other prominent persons to be seen; if anyone is here from the Munich branch of the NPD (National Party) or NATIONAL-ZEITUNG (its newspaper) I do not see them.

There is only one bailiff and he is unarmed.

There is a partition between the section for visitors and media and the Prosecutor's staff, who are sitting on the right, and the Defense, sitting on the left.

The table for the witnesses is between the other two. Two court translators, one English and one for Swedish, are sitting near the partition.

There is only one judge, an attractive blond woman in her thirties who speaks with a Bavarian accent. She is sitting on an elevated podium.

Proceedings begin a little after 9 O'clock.

Even though it is known that Bishop Williamson is not coming, media interest is high - even the Südwestrundfunk (Southwestern Broadcasting Corporation) has come from Mainz, both radio and TV.

After a few minutes of filming and photographing the media leave, except for a few newspaper reporters.

Judge Karin Frahm (this is not a Bavarian name!) opens the proceedings and invites a bearded, grey haired senior prosecutor to read the rather short indictment.

The attorney, who appears to be in his late 50s, informs the Court that three Swedish journalists who were involved in Bishop Williamson's interview and broadcast were summoned as witnesses but have not responded.

Bishop Williamson's attorney, Matthias Lossmann of Coburg in Upper Franconia, states that his client would have gladly come but his ecclesiastical order, the Pius Brethren, did not give him leave.

Judge Frahm declares that the trial can proceed without the accused, and Attorney Lossmann reads a statement of the bishop to the effect that the bishop feels he has been betrayed by Swedish television.

Lossmann says his client clearly gave the Swedish reporters to understand that part of their discussion (the part concerning "Holocaust") should not be

broadcast, on account of the proscription expressing such opinions under German law.

The interview, which lasted a little over an hour, had concerned questions of religion, dogma and the Church (1).

FOOTNOTE 1: Bishop Williamson had come to Zaitzhofen, where there is seminar for priests of the Pius Brethren, for the consecration of a Swedish convert from the state church. The leadership of the seminar had allowed Swedish TV to cover the event. At the very end of the discussion, "out of a clear blue sky," the interviewer, Ali Fagan, a BEUTE-SCHWEDE (? "predatory Swede"?) suddenly brought up remarks that Bishop Williamson had made to a Canadian newspaper more than 20 years ago.

The reporter had obviously investigated Williamson very closely.

Fagan's questions about Williamson's past remarks developed into questions and answers, in English, on the subject of "Holocaust," "Gas Chambers," "Third Reich," "Adolf Hitler," etc.

Attorney Lossmann states that in addition to presenting Williamson's statement, he intends to call Attorney M. Krah of Dresden as a witness.

Krah is the confidential attorney of the Pius Brotherhood in Germany, who recently took over the Williamson case.

The judge then asks several questions for the record. After this, the Court views the broadcasts of Williamson's statements on Swedish state television as well as re-broadcasts on German television. The complaint against the bishop had been filed by an official in the Criminal Police Department acting on behalf of the Regensburg District Attorney. The visitors are unable to follow all of this because of technical problems - there is no TV screen on the wall.

The interpreter translates the English text of the interview word for word.

(As the Jewish media master Michel Friedman cynically remarked in Issue 16 of ZEIT Magazine: "You can say anything you want in Germany, but you must be prepared to pay consequences.")

"Defense Attorney" Lossmann then states his own opinion.

He is careful to make perfectly clear that he believes in "the historical actuality of Holocaust" and that he wholeheartedly approves of Section 130 of the Penal Code and believes that it must be retained.

His tactic is obviously to cover his derriere while raising doubt as to whether Williamson's remarks are punishable, due to the unique circumstances surrounding this particular case.

The Swedish reporters have submitted written statements to the effect that they had no agreement with Williamson regarding parts of the interview that should not be broadcast. Thus it is their word against his.

The fact is significant, and mentioned even in the "Establishment" media's coverage, that the Swedish government and Swedish TV are refusing to assist the Regensburg prosecutor because this trial violates Swedish concepts of freedom of speech and opinion. Then there is a prolonged procedural back-and-forth argument between the Defense, the Court and the Prosecution as to whether these written explanations should be included as evidence.

The judge rules that the material is includable. There have been numerous short breaks; now the judge calls a longer intermission at 11:10.

Afterwards Attorney Maximilian Krah, a witness for the Defense, is called to the stand.

He is a civil rather than criminal attorney from Dresden but not a Saxon. He describes in detail how he became involved on the evening of 19 Jan. 2009, after reading about the incident in SPIEGEL.

He was authorized by Father Franz Schmidtberger, the leader of the German Pious Brethren, as well as the central office in Switzerland.

He says he immediately attempted to contact Williamson, who was still in Argentina.

Finally, after considerable difficulty, he was able to get in touch.

Williamson immediately understood what was happening and remarked, "Well, that's just the way journalists are."

Attorney Krah says that it was immediately clear to him that the TV broadcast could not be intercepted and so he concentrated on reaching an understanding with the Swedes to avoid a posting on the Internet site of the Swedish TV station.

His attempt was unsuccessful, however.

Then he requested an injunction with the District Court at Nuremberg/Fürth, which was successful. Basically the key sentence of the ruling stated: If there is no intent (in this case, no agreement!), then criminal prosecution is not called for, and there is no need for prompt action. That is why he did not seek legal recourse (lodge an appeal.)

Because of his heavy workload he recommended Attorney Lossmann.

Judge Frahm has a great many questions for the witness, such as:

How did Bishop Williamson react? Was he surprised?

What did he want to have done?

Krah says it is very clear that the Bishop did everything he could to avoid the broadcast, which happened in spite of his request at the end of the interview.

The judge's questions become quite specific when she asks about the inner life of the Brethren.

She asks how many priests there are worldwide. Krah answers around 600, or 700 including those on the periphery.

How many are there in Germany?

- About 25.

And how many active followers are there? Krah says there are around 600,000, mostly in France, Switzerland (the French part) and the USA.

And what was Williamson's position at the time of the "offense?"

Krah answers that he was the head of a seminary in Argentina.

Surprisingly, and in my opinion pointlessly, Krah blurts out that Williamson is considered marginal within the Brethren. He is a genteel and cultivated but eccentric outsider who radiates great personal charm. Krah says the leaders of the order have ambiguous feelings about him.

FOOTNOTE 2: My impression is that it was Krah's mission to "talk up" the Brethren and "talk down" Bishop Williamson.

This became even more clear during the intermission when he repeatedly exclaimed to Lady Renouf: "This is not their case!" meaning that the Brethren are not involved here, or do not want to be involved.

Both the judge and head prosecutor conducted themselves in compliance with the System.

The question of whether the existing law is legitimate is never asked.

The question of whether the judge believes in her own verdicts is another matter.

If one wants to enjoy a career and live in peace in Germany, one cannot behave any other way.

The judge and prosecutor have "done their jobs" and kept up appearances in "saving our democracy."

We have to consider that very few individuals have the courage to resist "the throne" (established authority)!

There are very few heroes in our time. I personally doubt that Bishop Williamson's defending attorney has done him any favors, however.

I shall try to find out what his political orientation is. It would be pointless to attempt an appeal and change of verdict in Williamson's favor under the present "BRDDR" regime.

If the attorneys favor an appeal, it will be for the sake of their fees.

If Bishop Williamson should appeal, it would be for the sake of publicizing Jewish "Holocaust" dogma and "grabbing it by the throat."

It would be helpful to demonstrate how undemocratic our little present day Germany is, "the freest state that ever existed on German soil" according to the present propaganda.

The fine is of course purely symbolic since it cannot be collected in England.

Nothing can happen to Williamson as long as he stays in England, even if the "BRDDR" issues an international warrant for his arrest.

Krah goes on to say that there are four bishops among the Brethren whose position is not comparable to that of a bishop in the Catholic

Church, and furthermore Williamson is not a member of the General Assembly.

He is more like a "traveling representative for the consecration of priests," a kind of independent agent. The judge then wants to know about Bishop Williamson's financial situation.

Krah replies that when he is traveling, he receives a travel allowance as well as re-imbusement for expenses and spending money of 250 Euros per month. In addition he receives room and board.

He says that Williamson is not a wealthy man but neither does he have to beg in the streets.

Then Judge Frahm asks whether Williamson has access to the assets of the Pius Brethren and Krah answers with an emphatic "No!"

After that, the judge has no more questions.

Additional Observation

Despite the persecution and pervasive judicial terror directed against Revisionist researchers and experts, the Enlightenment insistence on empirical evidence cannot be reversed.

Even Zionist Inquisitor Friedman has to admit:

"The older I get, the more I doubt that legalistic measures really help combat Revisionism.

At any rate, the number of Holocaust Deniers has not grown smaller, and we must consider that."

Michel Friedman of the Jewish Central Committee as quoted in ZEIT, Issue No. 16, 2010.

Attorney Lossmann then continues questioning his witnesses. He asks whether Williamson is inclined to believe in conspiracy theories as "Wikipedia" suggests.

Krah replies that yes, Williamson has peculiar views concerning the "Holocaust" story, and he always says what he believes to be true.

He is confident in his opinion, as is shown in his conversation. He is very concerned about the truth.

Krah says that Williamson's problem is with acknowledging official truth; the bishop's problem is a defective ability to perceive it.

There is a brief intermission, then the proceedings continue.

The subject is now a report on Ali Fagan in a leading Swedish newspaper.

Lossmann says the report was initiated by Italian newspapers who perceive that the Williamson trial is a plot against the German pope.

Lossmann insists on a translation of this report on Fagan, saying the whole affair is comparable to Washington's "Watergate."

He observes that the proceedings against Bishop Williamson have not only gained Fagan a great deal of publicity, they have made him rich.

After another brief intermission, the head prosecutor begins speaking.

Predictably, he has no doubts about the validity of the trial.

He has no doubts that the conditions of Section 130 ("Incitement of the Masses") have been met, and a crime has been committed against the public.

He says Germany's peace has been disturbed and the bishop has acted with BEDINGTEM VORSATZ or intent, since he realized and accepted that the interview would be broadcast.

He says it was Williamson's goal to publicize his proscribed views among the people.

He says that people like Williamson have a "pathological compulsion" to spread false and unlawful opinions, therefore he is guilty on all points.

On the basis of the bishop's income of 3000 Euros per month (!?) he calls for a sentence of four months' incarceration at 120 Euros per day.

He says this is appropriate in view of Williamson's position within the Brethren, even though it is his first offense.

In his summarization, in which he pleads for acquittal, Attorney Lossmann disputes the state attorney's demand.

As for Williamson's income, he points out that it should be set at a maximum of 1000 Euros and in case of a guilty verdict would call for 30 to 60 days in jail, certainly less than 90.

He says that in view of the circumstances, which have become clear in the taking of evidence, acquittal is the proper verdict.

He says that Bishop Williamson's conduct was unbecoming to be sure, but he simply acted in a naive manner.

He says that Williamson had been misled and waylaid, but he had made every attempt to limit the damage he caused.

He says there can be no question of the bishop's "accepting the consequences."

He points out that, had it not been for the overall situation concerning the Pius Brethrens' readmittance into the Catholic Church, the media would not have played up the incident.

Lossmann concludes with the opinion of a professor of law who was quoted in SPIEGEL as saying that if Bishop Williamson did not intend for his views on "Holocaust" to be broadcast, he could not be punished.

He emphasizes that Williamson obviously lacked this intent; he was not aware the Swedish journalists would broadcast his remarks until they had done so. Therefore he should be acquitted.

Shortly after 1 O'clock the judge calls a 30-minute intermission and retires to consider her verdict.

She returns after 45 minutes and everyone stands to hear the verdict "in the name of the People."

Which people, one wonders.

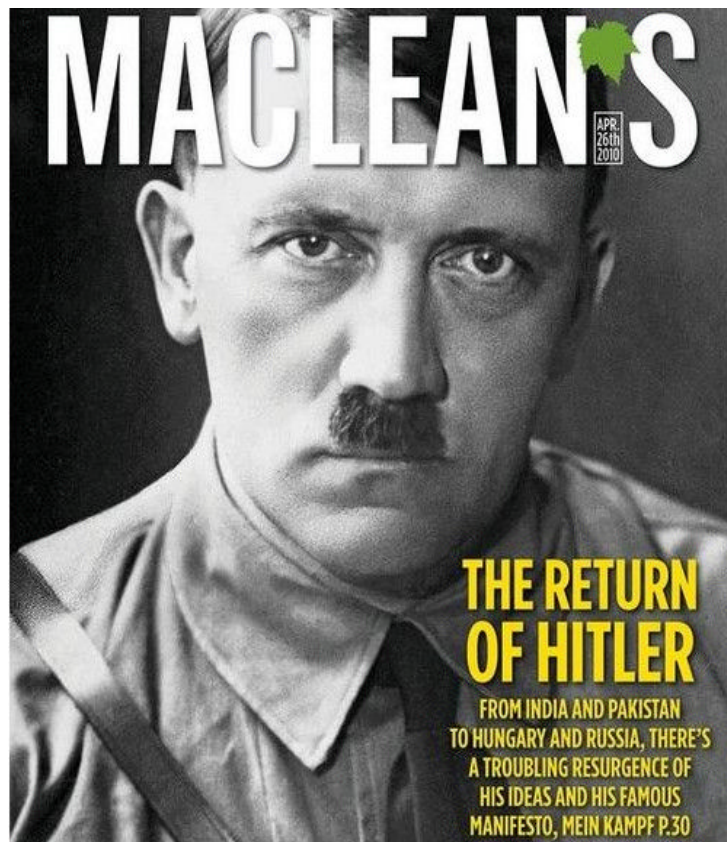
She finds Williamson guilty and sentences him to 100 days in jail at 100 Euros per day, 20 days less than what was demanded by the state attorney.

She takes a half hour to explain her verdict and agrees with every point of the state's attorney, emphasizing that "Holocaust is an acknowledged fact" and the number of Jewish victims "established by the highest court."
Needless to say, she does not bother to give her sources for this "acknowledged fact."

Perhaps she will give them in her written verdict. The courtroom gradually empties. Attorney Lohmann is the only one who is surrounded by the reporters. They ask if there will be an appeal. He replies that Bishop Williamson must make that decision. Presumably the State might appeal the verdict, since it considers the sentence too lenient.



Observers in court, centre back row: Ursula Haverkamp, Lady Michele Renouf, Markus Haverkamp...



The return of Hitler

The troubling resurgence of his ideas and manifesto, 'Mein Kampf'
by Katie Engelhart on Wednesday, April 21, 2010 7:10am

On April 30, 1945, Adolf Hitler took his own life with a simultaneous bite into a cyanide pill and gunshot to the temple. The day before, he dictated his will from the dank confines of the *Führerbunker*, a concrete shelter buried some eight metres below the old Reich Chancellery, as Soviet forces encircled Berlin. What exactly happened next is still fiercely contested, but by most accounts, the bodies of Hitler and his wife, Eva Braun, were carried upstairs to the garden by SS devotees, doused in gasoline, and burned to pieces—then buried, then later unearthened, and then buried again in an unknown location, or perhaps just scattered to the wind.

Almost 65 years later to the day, the man and the totalitarian regime he established continue to fascinate us. In just the last few years, *Mein Kampf* (My Struggle), Hitler's poorly written, 700-page magnum opus, "turgid, verbose, shapeless," to borrow from Winston Churchill, has earned bestseller status in some unlikely markets: India, Turkey and the Palestinian territories. His paintings are fetching record-setting prices, and trade in anything the Third Reich leader touched, or might have touched, is thriving. In some cases, the fascination is trivial, even absurd, such as the "Nazi chic" clothing that has been popular in Asia: T-shirts with Hitler portraits and swastikas. In others, though, it is more pernicious: the 65 years that have passed since Hitler's death have not dulled the allure of the Führer, or his ideology, for the now-burgeoning extreme right.

Take the lead-up to last Sunday's national elections in Hungary, which saw the far-right Jobbik Magyarországért Mozgalom (Movement for a Better Hungary) rake in 16.7 per cent of the national vote. In just a few years, Jobbik has grown from almost nothing, winning over a disenchanted electorate with its stark anti-Semitic and anti-Roma rhetoric. Party officials have been careful to dismiss any direct links to Nazism; anti-Semitism is masked in attacks on Israeli investors and hatred of the Roma is justified with talk of "gypsy crime." But members of Jobbik's paramilitary wing, the *Magyar Gárda* (Hungarian Guard), have not been so cautious. Neither have its supporters, who gathered by the Danube River last week to lash out at "Jewish pigs" and to unite in a common cry against foreigners on Hungarian soil: "They should leave!" Jobbik's leaders, now at the helm of the opposition, are ready to take their country forward—away from all that "commotion over the Holocaust."



Imagno/Getty Images

Hasnain Kazim, a journalist of Pakistani and Indian origin who is based in Islamabad, shies away from revealing where he was born: Germany. But it's hard to avoid; Kazim says people in Pakistan jump at any opportunity to talk with someone from Germany. "They say: 'Wow! Cool! So you're in favour of Hitler!'" It's even worse, he says, when family comes to visit him in Pakistan's bustling capital. The embarrassment might begin on the busy drive home from

the airport. "You'll find cars with the *Deutsches Kreuz*, the German Cross. You'll find people with stickers on their car saying 'I LIKE NAZI' or 'I LIKE HITLER.'" And then there's the banter. "People start talking about Hitler [in a] friendly way," Kazim explains. Even though "the people aren't Nazis," he says that Nazi imagery is ubiquitous in Pakistan's large cities. It took some time away, and then a move back to Islamabad eight months ago, for it to really resonate: "I only realized now how many people like Hitler."

Jonathan Solomon, a lawyer in Mumbai, says the same revelation struck him when he was browsing for books. "I was shocked to see that *Mein Kampf* is available in Indian bookstores, even in the prestigious bookstores. It was not 10 years ago." Moreover, pirated copies of the book, in a country where a 22-year ban on Salman Rushdie's *Satanic Verses* has still to be lifted, are available at street stalls. "It sells very well," says P.M. Shenvi, manager of the Strand Book Stall in Mumbai. Today, publishers continue to churn out multiple reprints of *Mein Kampf* a year to meet what R.H. Sharma, an editor at Mumbai's Jaico Publishing House, insists is a surging demand. In 2009, "we sold 10,000 copies over a six-month period in our Delhi shops," Sharma has boasted.

Perhaps Solomon should not have been taken aback. In 2002, the English-language Times of India published a report showing that Indian college students found much to admire in the Führer: namely, his efficiency, military strength and nationalism. The newspaper asked 400 elite college students, "Who's your favourite leader from history?" Hitler came in third, just behind Mahatma Gandhi. "Because he made Germany a superpower," was one student's response.

Of course, it's not just India where *Mein Kampf* is topping the charts. In 2001, it became a hot item after being introduced in Bulgaria. Soon afterwards, an Arabic translation became the sixth best seller in the Palestinian territories, according to Agence France-Presse. ("National Socialism did not die with the death of its herald," read its introduction.) Then, in 2005, the book took a top-seller spot in Turkey, selling over 100,000 copies in January and February alone—mostly, said publishers, to males between 18 and 30. And, it's been flying off Croatian shelves for years.

Not bad, for a badly written book. ("A boring tome that I have never been able to read," Benito Mussolini, the Italian Fascist dictator, once jeered.) Hitler wrote *Mein Kampf*—part autobiography, part raving philosophical treatise—in 1923, while in jail for a failed plot to seize control of Munich. It eventually became the holy book of the German National Socialist Party.

Global sales figures are hard to estimate; the official rights to *Mein Kampf* are held by the German state of Bavaria, which bans it from being printed. In the U.S. and U.K., the rights were seized when Hitler was still alive, and are privately held today. Houghton Mifflin, the U.S. publisher, told Maclean's that it sold 26,000 paperback copies in 2009. The U.K.'s Random House would not release its sales figures upon request. In many other countries, however, the situation is less controlled, and small publishers are apt to print *Mein Kampf* at will. Increasingly, they are feeding eager markets.

Ilhas Niaz, history professor at Islamabad's Quaid-e-Azam University, says Hitler fares well in Pakistan in part because of a particularly Pakistani admiration for strong leaders. "The cult of personality is strong," says Niaz. When "the current crisis cannot be met by any ordinary leader, people are looking into history for a charismatic figure." Aurangzeb Nazir, a 24-year-old student in Islamabad, told Maclean's, "Hitler united his nation and brought it from the brink of collapse to global prominence. That's why we look up to him." It's certainly not a new phenomenon. One of Pakistan's most beloved leaders, Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, also saw the 20th century's most famous mass murderer as someone to emulate. "Bhutto had silver-bound copies

of *Mein Kampf* in his library," says Niaz. "He incorporated lines from Hitler's speeches directly into his own oratory." But much of the popularity, Niaz admits, has more to do with the present than the past: "It's an emotional response to what is happening in Palestine." Besides the struggle with India over Kashmir, it is Israeli-Palestinian relations that dominate Pakistan's foreign policy consciousness, and sympathy for the Palestinians and a deep distrust of Israel help fuel the cult of Hitler worship. Maqudas Ghuman, a 21-year-old international relations student at Quaid-e-Azam, told Maclean's: "We admire Hitler partly because we want to remind Jews about what happened to them and express our anger over what their leaders, the leaders they admire, are now doing to the Palestinians."

Not surprisingly, the Israeli issue also plays strongly into Palestinian sales of *Mein Kampf*. Issa Ahwach owns Bissan, a Lebanese publishing house that prints an Arabic translation for the Palestinian region. Through an interpreter, he told Maclean's that sales have held strong "because we are suffering a similar kind of oppression under the Israelis. We can relate to what the Jews suffered."

In India, however, the situation is very different. "This admiration for Hitler that we do see in some circles is very much divorced from his anti-Semitic policies," says Yulia Egorova, a social anthropologist and author of *Jews and India: Perceptions and Image*. Historically, Egorova says, Hitler's popularity dates back to the 1920s and '30s, when the nationalist Subhas Chandra Bose saw the German leader as his country's ticket to independence from colonial British rule and formed an Indian Legion to fight at Hitler's side. "But at the same time he denounced anti-Semitism," Egorova says. Bose eventually became disenchanted with Hitler, but in some places, his dubious image as a defender of Indian sovereignty still stands.

How seriously should Indian interest in Hitler be taken? Rafique Baghdadi, who runs the Business India Book Club, calls *Mein Kampf* a cult book, "rather like Ayn Rand's *The Fountainhead*. It isn't a book that you see a lot of on local commuter trains." More ominously, though, activist Teesta Setalvad, co-editor of *Communalism Combat*, a monthly journal aimed at promoting secularism, ascribes the revival of interest in Hitler's ideology to the rise of right-wing Hindu fundamentalist politicians like the Bharatiya Janata Party's Narendra Modi, and the "horrendous tendency of India's upper middle class that has always liked authoritarianism." Adds Egorova: "They [draw] parallels between the Jewish question in Germany and the Muslim question in India."

Mumbai lawyer Solomon, who also heads the Indian Jewish Federation, agrees. "There is no anti-Semitism in India," he says. But Muslims, Solomon adds, are not safe: "It is a peculiar situation where we Jews have to raise our worries about these Nazi tactics being used against our Muslim brethren." Tensions have grown because of recent terrorist attacks by Muslim foreigners, but they have deep roots. One famous Hindutva ideologue, Vinayak Damodar Savarkar, said in 1949: "If you take *Mein Kampf* and if you remove the word Jew and put in the word Muslim, that is what I believe in."

In Turkey, the flourishing Islamic movement has spurred interest in Hitler and *Mein Kampf*. "It is the Islamists rather than the fascists who have fuelled the sales," says professor Dogu Ergil of Ankara University. "It was a reaction against the war in Iraq and Israel's actions in Palestine." Ergil says Islamist factions consciously boosted *Mein Kampf* sales in 2005 by printing the book in large numbers and driving its market price down to \$3: "This was done against Israel and Jews." Arnold Reisman, author of *Turkey's Modernization: Refugees from Nazism and Atatürk's Vision*, also suspects state involvement in the sales, but he thinks the target of the plot was broader. "They are essentially saying: 'Up yours, Europe!' " says Reisman. Turkey was "lying on the floor begging" to gain EU membership for years, but "they'll never get it—and they're beginning to see that. And as a result, they're turning away from Europe."

In some instances of Hitler glorification there is a "wilful blindness" at work, says Syed Jamaluddin, a history teacher at the Khaldunia high school in Islamabad. In 2005, the Indian state of Gujarat came under fire for issuing a textbook to high school students that included a chapter on the "internal achievements of Nazism"; it instructed that "Hitler lent dignity and prestige to the German government within a short time by establishing a strong administrative set-up." (Teesta Setalvad has been leading the battle to amend the texts—"Thankfully, young people in India today are realizing that economic growth is no justification for human rights violations," she says.) But in Pakistan, says Jamaluddin, "The information is out there but our young people are ignoring it. They're only seeing what they want to see. I try to nail Hitler in my class. I try to destroy him." Some are not listening. Sales of *Mein Kampf* were reportedly boosted by business students who saw the book as a how-to guide to becoming a self-made man.

Elsewhere, Hitler's continuing legacy is far less innocuous. In Hungary, the far right's foremost self-made man seems to have engaged in a closer reading of the Führer's message. In just four years, Gabor Vona, 31, a history teacher with closely cropped hair and a penchant for T-shirts, has catapulted his Jobbik party from the fanatical fringes to the mainstream, moving from only 2.2 per cent of the national vote in 2006 to almost 17 per cent in last Sunday's elections.

Vona keeps his speech tempered, distancing himself from overtly National Socialist rhetoric. But for many, his party's heated platform, which rests on an intense preoccupation with Hungary's 80,000 Roma, a consistent slew of attacks on "Israeli colonizers," and a solemn vow to ban immigrants from diluting Hungarian purity, draws comparisons that are tough to overlook. There are also the party's more direct connections to neo-Nazi elements in Hungary. For starters, Jobbik's platform is carried on the shoulders of the Magyar Gárda, the paramilitary corps founded by Vona in 2007. The uniformed wing is "redolent of the Hungarian Nazis, the Arrow Cross Party, who during the war were really important in carrying out the Holocaust," says professor Jeffrey Kopstein, director of the University of Toronto's Centre for European, Russian and Eurasian Studies. The guard, illegal but still active, wears black and marches in military formation, carrying a red and white flag similar to that of the Arrow Cross. Ervin Nagy, a disillusioned former vice-president of Jobbik and a philosophy lecturer at Karoly Gaspar University, has admitted that the guard was established to attract the extremist vote for a party reluctant to openly display Hitlerian imagery.

There are also extremist elements inside Jobbik that, despite the party's efforts, make their violent tendencies known. Some party members have been linked to the extreme right-wing, anti-Semitic news portal www.kuruc.info. All this could still be dismissed as the stirrings of a Budapest fringe—if Jobbik had not just won a place in parliament. "This is not acceptable in a democracy," insists Andras Gero, history professor at Budapest's Central European University (CEU).

Jobbik's presidential campaign chief Zsolt Várkonyi is quick to defend his party from comparisons to Hitler and the Nazis—"nonsense," he told Maclean's. Indeed, Jobbik supporters are not the swastika-emblazoned skinheads of the '90s; they are, largely, disenchanted voters under 40. And Vona has built his career not on a loyal adherence to *Mein Kampf* but on a blending of Hitlerian rhetoric that evokes Hungary's past glory and more modern concerns about globalization. It clearly strikes a chord with today's hard-luck Hungarians—one out of 10 are unemployed in the wake of the global recession. Says Geros: "Apart from the Nazi undertones, party propaganda plays heavily on Bolshevik ideals of anti-capitalism—Hitler and Stalin meet at the extreme ends of the political spectrum."

In Austria, the Nazi-inspired Freedom Party (FPÖ), which became the third-largest national party in 2008, is also preoccupied by the immigrant question. Leader Heinz-

Christian Strache has a solution: set up a ministry for the deportation of immigrants. Strache vehemently denies a Nazi link: "I was never a neo-Nazi and never will be." But even Austrian courts are not convinced. When Strache sued a Vienna newsweekly for defamation after it branded him a neo-Nazi, the court ruled that he indeed showed "an affinity to National Socialist thinking." It's not hard to see why. Photos of Strache, allegedly taken at a neo-Nazi training camp, have been leaked. (Strache says he was out for a day of paintball.) He was also photographed giving the three-finger radical-right salute. (Strache insists he was ordering three beers, earning him the nickname "Three Beers Strache.") He attacks Jewish bankers and veiled Muslim women ("female ninjas"); he loathes globalization and the EU; and he was once engaged to a girl whose father founded the Austrian branch of the German neo-Nazi National Democratic Party. Most recently, he campaigned to overturn the Verbotsgesetz, the 1947 law banning Hitlerian ideology.

Unlike Jobbik, a relatively new Hungarian product, the FPÖ has a history with real Nazis: the party's founding fathers were two wartime SS officers. And many high-ranking FPÖ officials come from the Burschenschaften, a secretive network of right-wing duelling societies that was banned after the Second World War but made a resurgence in the 1950s. Nazi frontmen Heinrich Himmler and Adolf Eichman were Burschenschaften; so is Strache.

Because of Austrian law, of course, "the leadership of the party is careful not to play the Nazi card too directly [since] the Nazi party is not legal," explains Anton Pelinka, professor of nationalism studies at CEU. "The Nazi manifesto is used indirectly. For example, with anti-Semitism, the party does not criticize Jews, it criticizes the 'East Coast.' The East Coast is a code word for the New York Jewish conspiracy." And behind it all, Pelinka says, Hitler is there, "in the closet."

In the U.S., "I don't think there's any doubt at all that the radical right as a whole in the U.S. has been Nazified over the last 30 years," says Mark Potok, spokesperson at the Southern Poverty Law Center (SPLC), a legal advisory group that tracks American hate groups. But it's become a curious mix: in a 2009 SPLC report on the rapid-fire growth of American right-wing militias, Potok and his colleagues wrote: "Militiamen, white supremacists, anti-Semites, nativists, tax protesters and a range of other activists of the radical right are cross-pollinating and may even be coalescing."

There's also been a shift, says Potok, away from the archetypal enemy: African-Americans. "It's not that the groups like black people," he explains. But they "now believe that behind black people, brown people, gay people, stands the Jew. More of them have come to a National Socialist view of the world: Jews manipulate everyone else." Of course, the old racism remains: in 2008, two white supremacist skinheads were arrested for plotting to kill Barack Obama and 88 more at a predominantly black school before beheading 14. In neo-Nazi circles, "88" is code for "Heil Hitler," while "14" is a reference to "Fourteen Words" from *Mein Kampf*: "We must secure the existence of our people and a future for white children."

Changing racial demographics have undoubtedly fanned the U.S. flame. In 2008, the U.S. Census Bureau issued a report predicting that whites would fall below 50 per cent of the American population by 2050. "I can tell you that the year 2050 is imprinted on the brain of every white nationalist in this country," says Potok. "That's Armageddon for them." As a result, the SPLC reports, hate groups, many of them with neo-Nazi elements, are thriving—the SPLC located almost 1,000. But Leonard Ziskind, author of *Blood and Politics: The History of the White Nationalist Movement from the Margins to the Mainstream*, points out that today's American National Socialists might be harder to spot than their 1990s forefathers. "You have radical neo-Nazis actually covering up their swastikas, trying to become more

mainstream." In a crowd, you couldn't pick them out: "These are people who fly the American flag."

Around the world, efforts to ban Hitler's words, along with other evocations of his Third Reich, continue—an implicit acknowledgment of the Führer's continuing political potency. Just last month, Russian prosecutors officially banned *Mein Kampf* as "extremist," making the sale and distribution of the book punishable by fine. In a public statement, the prosecutor-general's office judged that Hitler's vitriolic rant deserves blacklisting because it "justifies discrimination and destruction of non-Aryan races."

The action follows a spate of far-right violence, in this country that lost 26.6 million people in the war against Nazi Germany. Most were attacks on foreigners and migrant workers; SOVA, a Russian research centre that tracks xenophobia, estimates that last year 71 people were killed and 333 injured in hate attacks. Shortly before the ban was introduced, *Mein Kampf* was reportedly being distributed in Ufa, a region where ultra-right groups are active. Matthew Light, a criminology professor at the University of Toronto and an expert on Russia, is not surprised to see officials panicking. "The Russian government has become more afraid of skinheads and other extreme-right organizations," Light explains. "Whereas in the past they saw them as an outlet for people to vent their frustration, they now think this kind of movement is potentially threatening to the government itself."

It is easy to dismiss *Mein Kampf*; Galina Kozhevnikova, deputy head of SOVA, says "it's been a long time since this book by Hitler was of ideological importance. Hitler's text is archaic and out of date." And yet it remains a charged symbol. In China, *Mein Kampf* is forbidden except for research purposes and exists only in special libraries—as is also the case in Brazil. In the Netherlands, selling the book is illegal, although owning or lending it is not. In Canada, the book can be sold legally, but a de facto ban has been in place since Indigo CEO Heather Reisman banished it from her shelves in 2001. In France, it's legal to sell the book, but only if it is historically annotated. In Austria and Germany, *Mein Kampf* is banned.

Recent efforts to challenge that injunction in Germany have been blasted by the state of Bavaria, which explained in a statement to Maclean's that it maintains the ban out of respect for Holocaust victims. But in 2015, the state's rights to *Mein Kampf* will expire, the book will enter the public domain, and officials are counting down the time with growing unease. "Once Bavaria's copyright expires," warned state science minister Wolfgang Heubisch in February, "there is the danger of charlatans and neo-Nazis appropriating this infamous book for themselves."

As a result, Bavaria is maintaining its grip on *Mein Kampf* until the clock runs out, continuing to go after publishers that try to reprint it. When a small Czech publisher began printing *Mein Kampf* in 2000, the Bavarian prime minister wrote a letter to then-Czech president Vaclav Havel, begging him to put a stop to it. In 2005, when a Polish man's plan to print a version was revealed by the Associated Press, state officials were urged to get involved directly with Warsaw. And when a Spanish translation appeared on iTunes in 2009, Bavarian officials forced Apple to take it down.

The fear of Hitler and Nazism as a political rallying cry remains. Germany, says Richard J. Evans, a Cambridge professor and one of the most prolific scholars of the Second World War, has been relatively successful in reining in its extreme-right wing. The grounds for that were laid in the postwar period, when the Allies directed an aggressive "de-nazification" campaign in the former Third Reich—one followed by a period of obsessive German self-scrutiny in the 1960s. But in other countries, like Austria, the process was never completed. "Austria," says Evans, "never came to terms with the past." (Note, he says, the dearth of Holocaust memorials there.) Evans explains that "most Austrians were happy to be incorporated into Germany with

the Anschluss," even though after the war they would "treat themselves as the first victims of Nazism, and that's how the Allies treated them." That incomplete postwar denazification might in part explain why, today, the political opposition is run by a party founded out of the SS. But the state of the current world economy is also fuelling the trend. When the Berlin Wall fell in 1989, says Annette Timm, professor of European history at the University of Calgary, those Germans who joined up with neo-Nazis "were the ones who fell through the cracks after reunification and needed something to identify with." Today, Timm says, it is again the down and out "looking for something to feel passionate about." It's not surprising that support for Austria's Freedom Party is high among those without high school degrees, or that in Hungary, one of Europe's most suffering markets, a Nazi-inspired party is faring so well. Evans stresses that this can happen because Nazism "adapts and changes to present-day circumstances." Rather

than featuring thuggish skinheads, the far right now runs "young, good-looking white men" like Hungary's Vona and Austria's Strache. In most cases, it's not exactly time to panic—Evans says that in spite of some gains, neo-Nazism still remains to a great extent "on the fringe of society." But he still finds it all "worrying," given today's mass unemployment and recession. The cautious scholar grants that, as of now, the appropriation of Hitlerian ideology is mostly part of "a protest movement," a way of sending a clear message of frustration to the government. But "that's what Nazism started out as," says Evans. "In the 1930s when people voted for the Nazis, they were voting out of protest: not necessarily because they supported the whole ideological package." And, he adds bleakly, "We all know the results of that voting." *With Andras Badics, Utku Basar, Tom Henheffer, Naazneen Karmali and Adnan R. Khan*
<http://www2.macleans.ca/2010/04/21/the-return-of-hitler/>

Russia Opens File of Stalin's Order to Massacre Poles By Lucian Kim

April 28 (Bloomberg) -- Russia declassified files on a Soviet massacre of Polish officers in a gesture of goodwill following the death of Polish President [Lech Kaczynski](#). Special File No. 1 shows that Soviet leader [Josef Stalin](#) personally signed off on the shooting of more than 4,000 Polish prisoners of war in the Katyn forest in 1940, as well as thousands more held in other camps, state broadcaster [Rossiya-24](#) reported.



President Dmitry Medvedev

President [Dmitry Medvedev](#) ordered the publication of the file today, according to his [Web site](#). The decision follows the April 10 plane crash in western Russia that killed Kaczynski and a delegation of senior Polish officials traveling to mark the 70th anniversary of the massacre. Three days earlier, Prime Minister [Vladimir Putin](#) became the first Russian leader to pay tribute to the victims after decades of denial by the Kremlin. "We have to draw lessons from history," Medvedev said during a visit to Copenhagen today. "We will continue doing this. I believe it's our duty."

Dispel Claims

The publication of Stalin's orders should dispel claims by those in Russia who still deny the Soviets' responsibility, Andrei Artizov, head of the [Federal Archives Agency](#), told Rossiya-24.

The KGB destroyed its Katyn files after Stalin's death to cover up the massacre and support the official version that Nazi Germany was responsible for the shootings, Rossiya-24 said. The files documenting the Soviet leadership's orders survived only because they were stored in the Communist Party's archives, the broadcaster reported.

Russian human rights activists and Polish historians have wanted the Kremlin to declassify documents to help bring closure to the shootings. The Russian government's reluctance to discuss them strained ties between the former Communist allies.

Additional materials will be handed over to Polish researchers in the future, Medvedev said today.

Katyn has its roots in Poland's partition in World War II. After Nazi Germany invaded Poland in 1939, the Soviets marched into eastern Poland in accordance with a secret treaty between [Adolf Hitler](#) and Stalin. The officers killed in Katyn were among more than 20,000 Polish prisoners who vanished in the Soviet Union. Hitler abandoned the pact when he invaded the Soviet Union in 1941.

[Mikhail Gorbachev](#) broke with his Soviet predecessors in 1990 when he acknowledged the responsibility of Stalin's secret police. While the memorial site in western Russia was founded in 2000, no high-ranking Russian leader went there before Putin's visit this month.

To contact the reporter on this story: [Lucian Kim](#) in Moscow at kim3@bloomberg.net
<http://www.bloomberg.com/apps/news?pid=20601100&sid=aNsusqccGjVI>

William Shakespeare: A king of infinite space

On the anniversary of Shakespeare's birth and death, Anthony Seldon asks why we are allowing the world's foremost playwright and England's cultural figurehead to disappear from the classroom.

By Anthony Seldon Published: 6:39AM BST 23 Apr 2010

Forget the election, the Clegg bounces and the Brown gyrations. Blank out Icelandic volcanoes and flight

disruptions. For today is the happy conjunction of St George's Day and Shakespeare's possible birthday, his

446th no less, as well as the day he died. It is as good a day as any to be celebrating all that is English, and the world's greatest playwright.

Whichever party wins on May 6 must champion a renaissance of Shakespeare in our schools and restore him to his rightful place across the nation. Shakespeare should make us proud to be British.



A painting of William Shakespeare which is believed to be the only authentic image of the playwright made during his life Photo: Getty

Familiarity with Shakespeare must begin early, because it is there that the roots are laid for the rest of life. Yet the Bard has been on the retreat in schools. The dropping in October 2008 of tests for all pupils at 14 may have had much to recommend it in our exam-drunk country, but it has damaged the study of Shakespeare, as his plays were a compulsory element. The numbers of pupils in this 11-to-14 age group who have seen one of his plays in the theatre has halved since then.

The new English Language and Literature GCSEs, beginning this autumn, downgrade the importance of studying Shakespeare through live performance in favour of Shakespeare on film. Schools increasingly are turning to "International" GCSEs, which are more rigorous than traditional GCSEs, but do not require pupils to focus on Shakespeare.

He remains central to English Literature at A-level, but a declining percentage of students are now opting for the subject, while media and film studies are growing apace. Increasingly, there are teachers joining the profession who hardly studied Shakespeare at school, and lack the same passion of older colleagues who were reared on him.

Why does this matter? If our aim is to turn out, not civilised and sensitive young men and women, but unthinking automatons, then the dwindling of Shakespeare does not matter. But few *Telegraph* readers will agree with the new philistinism.

On St George's Day, thanks to Shakespeare, we can feel proud of our English heritage. No writer has contributed more to our national identity. In times of crisis, we turn to him. Churchill's government did so during the Second World War, funding Laurence Olivier's *Henry V* as morale-boosting propaganda. How many of today's young can quote Hal's Saint Crispin's Day speech: "We few, we happy few, we band of brothers. For he today that sheds his blood with me shall be my brother"? Most who revelled in the television miniseries *Band of Brothers* would never have known the origin of the phrase.

Shakespeare has given us so many of them – "more in sorrow than in anger"; "in my mind's eye"; "old men forget"; "a sea change"; "all that glisters is not gold"; "all the world's a stage"; "as dead as a doornail"; "vanished into thin air"; "fight fire with fire"; "wild goose chase"; "foul play"; "good riddance"; "in a pickle"; "more fool you", "mum's the word", "my journey's end", "sent him packing", "the game is up"; "the truth will out". Studying Shakespeare opens the young to a world of language that will enrich their lives for ever.

His plays give unparalleled insights into human nature. He is the greatest psychologist of all time. I have just returned from directing my sixth formers in *Othello* in the Far East. In Beijing and Ho Chi Minh City, many in the young audience

did not understand a word uttered; but they were engrossed. No spinmaster in this, or any other, election has ever approached the manipulative subtlety of Iago.

As with the Greek playwrights, Sophocles, Euripides and Aristophanes, the dramas move deeply into the human psyche. They portray all the seven archetypal plots described by Christopher Booker: *Henry V* thus typifies "the quest"; *The Tempest* "voyage and return"; *Richard III* "killing the monster"; *Twelfth Night* "rags to riches"; *As You Like It* "comedy"; *The Winter's Tale* "rebirth and redemption", while *Hamlet* gives us true "tragedy", with the perceptive young recognising the same story as *The Lion King*.

Shakespeare is the best representative of the English renaissance, the age of our greatest artistic and intellectual flowering. Our young need to know about it so that they can gain a better understanding of how English culture – their culture – has developed, with Shakespeare its finest example.

The British obsession with exams is a principal factor in the decline. The imperative of drilling students to learn the dross that examiners expect risks killing our best literature. Instead of being a delight to the imagination and spirit, classes can become a dull drudge of learning "correct" quotations and answers.

Teachers increasingly find that they lack the time to bring Shakespeare to life by allowing the students to read the whole play and act out scenes. Instead they do extracts. "I'd like to be more creative, but playing with the text will not attain the school's academic targets," said one teacher, responding to a survey commissioned by the Royal Shakespeare Company (RSC). Unsurprisingly, less than one fifth of the students agreed with the proposition that "Shakespeare is fun".

Seeing Shakespeare in the theatre is much profounder for students even than watching wonderful films such as Franco Zeffirelli's (1968) or Baz Luhrmann's (1996) *Romeo and Juliet*, or Kenneth Branagh's (1993) *Much Ado*. But many professional productions are too long and worthy, even for adults. It is little fun for the students, their teachers or parents, when the coach arrives back at the school gates at 1am.

The RSC, with its special abridged school versions, has it right, and its productions for schools are proving justly popular. You do not need much more than two hours to appreciate a Shakespeare production. The excellent 2007 production of *Othello* at the Globe Theatre on London's South Bank was marred by its length; the first Act lasted nearly 40 minutes. It could have been cut to 20.

None of the political parties has produced a manifesto on Shakespeare. Let me propose one. All children at primary level should know the stories and see simplified forms of all the major Shakespeare plays. They should learn passages from Shakespeare. At eight, I had to learn "Once more unto the breach, dear friends, once more" from *Henry V*, and have always been grateful for that (memorising poetry is the entitlement of every child).

Those in their first two years of secondary school should be offered opportunities to act in a Shakespeare, and should study "easier" plays such as *Julius Caesar* and *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. Thirteen to 16-year-olds should all study a tragedy – *Hamlet* or *Macbeth* would be ideal, a comedy such as *Twelfth Night*, and a history, perhaps *Richard III*. Lessons should involve acting key scenes, because that helps to create a deeper understanding, and brings character and plot to life. The RSC and other bodies should hold annual conferences and festivals to encourage a love for Shakespeare, and implant passion lost.

On St George's Day, let us remind ourselves that England is a "precious jewel set in a silver sea". Readers will recognise this line from *Richard II*. How many of our young will continue to do so unless we act now?

<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/theatre/7622436/William-Shakespeare-A-king-of-infinitespace.html>