

Growing Impact of the Leuchter Report in Germany

Munich's Institute of Contemporary History Seeks to Discredit Leuchter's Findings

Editor's introduction

Nowhere has the impact of the 1988 Leuchter Report been greater than in Germany, and understandably so. As one young German recently noted, if olocaust Revisionism wins widespread acceptance there, the impact will be felt not merely in the intellectual world; many people who currently hold positions of influence and power in German politics will be out of work, and those replacing them will have dramatically different views about the most fundamental social-political issues.

With stakes this high, the game is bound to get rough. When the first German-language edition of the Leuchter Report was published in late 1988 by Udo Walendy (as No. 36 in his series of magazine-format "Historical Facts" booklets), German authorities lost no time in suppressing it. Interestingly, though, the reason was not the Report itself, but rather the somewhat provocative commentary that accompanied Leuchter's text. Under German law, "scientific" writings are exempt from the ban that applies generally to otherwise politically incorrect works.

In fact, Germany's Ministry of Justice has in effect declared that the Leuchter Report cannot be prohibited because it is constitutionally protected as a "scholarly" work. In a letter dated March 13, 1990, a Ministry official wrote:

I share your view that the Leuchter Report itself is a scholarly examination [eine wissenschaftliche Untersuchung] . . . With regard to the Leuchter Report, the Federal Minister of Justice is not aware of any reason . . . to forbid circulation of this document in the Federal Republic.

In recent years the Leuchter Report has been circulating widely through every strata of German society. Nearly every German scholar interested in the history of the Third Reich and the Second World War has read it, and recent discussions of it by thoughtful writers reflect the seriousness with which it is regarded. For example, a detailed and open-minded treatment of the Report appears in *Der Nasenring* ("The Nose ring"), a provocative and engagingly written critique of postwar German historiography by Swiss-born author Armin Mohler, who is probably Germany's leading conservative thinker and writer. Dr. Ernst Nolte, a leading specialist of the Third Reich era who recently retired as a professor of history at the Free University in Berlin, has also commented respectfully but somewhat critically on the Leuchter Report in an essay that appeared in several German periodicals.

Reflecting the Establishment's growing concern over its impact, a lengthy article attempting to discredit the Report appeared September 25, 1992, in the influential liberal German weekly *Die Zeit*. (A detailed and closely argued Revisionist response by four German specialists to this critique is available from Verlag Remer Heipke, 8730 Bad Kissingen, Postfach 1310, Germany.)

This *Die Zeit* article approvingly cited a 25-page critique of the Report by octogenarian amateur

historian Werner Wegner that appeared in 1990 as a chapter in a scholarly collection of essays, *Die Schatten der Vergangenheit* ("The Shadows of the Past"). The 650-page book, issued by the respected publishing firm of Propylaen, was edited by three brilliant historians of the postwar generation, Uwe Backes, Eckhard Jesse, and Rainer Zitelmann.

Perhaps the most authoritative German effort to refute has been a statement issued in 1989 by the prestigious Institute of Contemporary History (Institut fuer Zeitgeschichte). This Munich archive and research center, which is funded by German taxpayers, publishes monographs, books and a highly-regarded scholarly journal, *Vierteljahrshefte fuer Zeitgeschichte* ("Contemporary History Quarterly"). A major responsibility of the Institute has been to validate authoritatively the version of twentieth-century history established by the victorious Allied powers in 1945, confirmed at the uremberg Tribunal of 1945-1946, and affirmed by the German Federal Republic (which was established by the victorious western Allies, particularly the United States). Indeed, the pejorative Allied portrayal of Hitler and the Third Reich has been an essential element of legitimacy for the German Federal Republic.

Herewith we present the complete text of the Munich Institute's November 1989 statement about the Leuchter Report, which was written by Institute official Hellmuth Auerbach. Following the text is a commentary on its contents.

-- The Editor

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Subject: The So-Called Leuchter Report

In 1988, the German graphic artist and publisher Ernst Zuendel, who lives in Canada, was indicted for distributing an anti-Semitic and Revisionist writing (by Richard Harwood, "Did Six Million Really Die?").

In connection with his second trial in Toronto in early 1988, the French Revisionist Robert Faurisson (former literature specialist at the University of Lyon, but not an expert in contemporary history) arranged for Fred A. Leuchter, the American engineer and specialist in the development and construction of execution equipment by means of gas in American prisons, to visit Poland and to carry out an investigation there of the gas chambers in the former National Socialist extermination camps of Auschwitz and Majdanek.

This journey, which Leuchter undertook with several other persons, his investigation, as well as all his other activities in this regard, were financed by Zuendel. Along with Zuendel, Faurisson was interested in obtaining an expert opinion showing that, on technical grounds alone, the mass gassing of Jews in the extermination camps could not have been possible. Leuchter sought to prove precisely this with his Report. In doing so, he received the applause of the so-called Revisionists and apologists for National Socialism.

The Canadian court was less impressed with Leuchter's findings, and sentenced Zuendel to nine months imprisonment (without suspension). Regardless of this, the so-called Leuchter Report has been distributed ever since by all Revisionists and apologists for National Socialism as supposedly conclusive proof that the mass gassings of Jews in the extermination camps could not have taken place, and that this claim is, instead, a lie meant to blackmail Germany.

However, if one carefully studies this Leuchter Report, one must conclude that this is actually a rather superficial investigation based on false data, from which false conclusions have been drawn.

For one thing, Leuchter begins by making comparisons with the conditions in an American prison, where executions by gas are carried out in technologically advanced and highly sophisticated gas chambers under very strict safety guidelines. (During every execution, court personnel, physicians and even journalists are present.) By failing to take into account that conditions in the extermination camps were completely different, he reaches false conclusions.

In Leuchter's view, the gas chambers in Auschwitz could not have been used to kill people with yklon B because they could not be heated and lacked adequate ventilation facilities. In order to insure the quick death of the condemned person in an American gas chamber, more than ten times the amount of gas that is necessary to kill a person is used. Consequently, the ventilation of the [American execution] gas chamber after an execution is complicated and takes some time.

Zyklon B (Prussic acid) becomes gas only at a temperature of about 26 degrees Celsius. Consequently, a gas chamber in the USA must be heated. Leuchter fails to take into account that even a much larger room, if it is completely packed with people, would reach this temperature very quickly, and therefore does not require any heating.

The many people in the gas chambers of the extermination camps would very quickly take the poison gas into their bodies by breathing it in. As a result, the ventilation and the removal of the corpses could be carried out more quickly.

The [homicidal] gas chambers and the [non-homicidal] disinfestation chambers in Auschwitz were both built according to the same plan. For the most part, blue coloring caused by the presence of hydrogen cyanide can be found only on the walls of the [non-homicidal] disinfestation chambers [Desinfektionskammern]. For this reason, Leuchter, along with Faurisson, concludes that Zyklon B was used only in the [non-homicidal] disinfestation rooms.

However, larger quantities of the poison are needed for delousing. (A human being dies with a dose of just 0.3 g/m³ of hydrogen cyanide gas, whereas a louse must be subjected to a dose of 5 g/m³ of hydrogen cyanide gas for at least two hours.) For this reason, more hydrogen cyanide was deposited there [in the non-homicidal disinfestation chambers] than in the gas chambers meant for human beings.

Without permission of the [Auschwitz] Museum authorities, Leuchter removed wall samples from all of the buildings in which there were crematories or gas chambers, even in cases where these now exist only as ruins or reconstructed remains of walls. He then arranged for these samples to be analyzed in America. Because the analysis results showed that most of the samples contained no traces of cyanide, Leuchter and Faurisson maintain that the buildings from which these samples came could not have been used as gas chambers.

These buildings, some of which were blown up by the SS before their retreat, have, however, been exposed to the wind and weather for more than forty years. Because of the marshy ground of Auschwitz, some of them have stood for months in water. Because of the effects of moisture since 1945, the traces of cyanide that might still have been found have disappeared in the meantime.

This is also true of the [building of] Crematory I [in the Auschwitz I main camp], which has been preserved in its entirety. Because it has been visited by countless visitors as a museum site, the floor of this chamber is often cleaned with a lot of water by Museum personnel.

Forty years ago, however, in 1945, the Institute of Forensic Research of the University of Krakow carried out adequate investigations of the buildings as well as of collections of cut hair, hair clasps and other metal objects that the gassing victims had been wearing. Very clear traces of Zyklon B were found, something that Leuchter has not taken into account, or has intentionally ignored.

The crematory buildings housed gas chambers and crematory ovens under the same roof. According to Leuchter, this could not have been possible, because of the danger of explosion. However, he fails to take into account that the amounts of Prussic acid [hydrogen cyanide] used there were not enough to cause an explosion. (These amounts are also much less than used in the USA.)

In his report, Leuchter maintains that he obtained a copy of a diagram of Crematory V [in Birkenau]. In reality, a plan of this crematory does not exist at all. According to information provided by the Auschwitz Museum authorities, Leuchter did not receive any special diagrams of the buildings in Auschwitz whatsoever. He made no effort to obtain any such information, but instead merely purchased brochures and documents that are meant for visitors to the Museum.

Leuchter's superficiality and historical incompetence is also shown clearly in what he writes about Majdanek.

French pharmacist and toxicologist Jean-Claude Pressac recently produced a detailed and very comprehensive investigation of the Auschwitz gas chambers, showing that he is a real specialist of the gassing procedure. (J.-C. Pressac, *Auschwitz: Technique and Operation of the Gas Chambers*, New York, 1989, 564 pages.)

In an essay entitled "The deficiencies and discrepancies of the Leuchter Report" ("Les carences et incoherences du Rapport Leuchter"), published in *Jour J*, Dec. 12, 1988, Pressac subjected the Leuchter Report to a detailed critical analysis, in which Leuchter comes off very poorly. Among other things, Pressac writes:

Based on false knowledge and using false arguments, which lead to false interpretations, the Leuchter Report is unacceptable because it was produced under impermissible circumstances, because it overlooks the most basic historical data, and because it contains gross errors of calculation and measurement.

We can only agree with this assessment. The Leuchter Report is no proof whatsoever that the systematic mass gassings in the National Socialist extermination camps did not take place. It is, rather, a pseudo-scientific and rather clumsy propaganda writing that apologizes for National Socialism.

H. Auerbach
Munich, November 1989

Commentary

As a serious refutation of Leuchter's findings and his Report, this statement by Germany's Institute of Contemporary History falls miserably short, crumbling under even cursory scrutiny.

For one thing, statement author Auerbach reads things into the Leuchter Report that are not there. Auerbach claims, for example, that Leuchter "sought to prove" that "on technical grounds alone, the mass gassing of Jews in the extermination camps could not have been possible."

This assertion is doubly flawed. Contrary to what the Munich Institute asserts, Leuchter did not set out to discredit the Auschwitz gas chamber allegations. He agreed to carry out his forensic investigation only after warning Zuendel that he would speak the truth as he determined it, regardless of Zuendel's expectations.

More important, and contrary to what Auerbach asserts, the Leuchter Report does not claim that Jews could not have been gassed. What the Report does say is:

After a study of . . . the existing facilities at Auschwitz, Birkenau, and Majdanek . . . the author finds no evidence that any of the facilities normally alleged to be execution gas chambers were ever used as such, and finds, further, that because of the design and fabrication of these facilities, they could not have been utilized for execution gas chambers.

Leuchter simply maintains that the rooms that have been presented for nearly half a century as homicidal gas chambers are nothing of the kind. This does not, of course, mean that Jews could not have been gassed elsewhere.

Auerbach also seems unfamiliar with the technical issues involved here. He castigates Leuchter for comparing US execution gas chambers, with their rigorous safety provisions, and the alleged Auschwitz extermination gas chambers. Auerbach suggests that, if it weren't for bothersome safety regulations, US gas chambers could be run much like the alleged wartime mass-extermination gas chambers. In this, Auerbach completely fails to understand that the American safety provisions are not the result of idle bureaucratic nit-picking, but a reflection of the very real dangers of using hydrogen cyanide gas to kill people.

The strict US gassing regulations ensure the safety of prison personnel, as well as of the "court personnel, physicians, and even journalists" who witness American execution gassings. In much the same way, similar measures would have been necessary to ensure that SS camp personnel and other camp workers would not also be killed during each "gassing" operation at Auschwitz.

Auerbach tries to explain away the absence of any ventilation facilities in the alleged Auschwitz "gas chambers" by asserting that much less hydrogen cyanide was used there than in US execution gas chambers. Not unexpectedly, he fails to explain how the SS personnel could thus have killed hundreds of people in a large room in about the same amount of time required in the United States to kill one convicted prisoner in a small room with a much higher dose of hydrogen cyanide. He likewise does not attempt to explain how allegedly small amounts of hydrogen cyanide gas could immediately dissipate throughout a large room, with no fans or other assistance, and kill hundreds of people, just as readily as the massive overdoses administered in US prison executions. Auerbach similarly provides no explanation of how the poisonous gas was then removed within moments so that the "gas chamber" doors could be promptly opened to admit the work crews that dragged out the bodies.

Auerbach asserts that the temperature of a partially below-ground room can quickly be raised above 26 degrees C (about 78 degrees F) by filling it with people. He provides no proof of this, but apparently believes that it would be true even during the brutally cold Polish winters.

Auerbach most strikingly displays his ignorance when he tries to explain the absence of stains or traces of hydrogen cyanide (or, rather, of ferro-ferric-cyanide compounds) on the ceiling, walls and floors of the remains of the supposed extermination gas chambers at Birkenau. By arguing that the traces of hundreds of gassings would simply have weathered away during the last 40 years, he shows his ignorance about the difference between the chemical properties of hydrogen cyanide (which is rather transitory) and those of the ferro-ferric-cyanide compounds that are formed when hydrogen cyanide comes into contact with iron ions (such as those found in the concrete and brick at Auschwitz and Birkenau), which are very stable. Although traces of hydrogen cyanide might indeed have weathered away, the ferro-ferric-cyanide compounds that would have been produced are impervious to "weathering" and would have been measurable.

To further explain the absence of ferro-ferric-cyanide stains, Auerbach makes the astonishing assertion that the victims immediately breathed in and absorbed all of the poisonous gas into their mouths and lungs. This fanciful scenario contrasts sharply with the reality of the procedure of US gas chamber executions in which -- as Leuchter and Faurisson have pointed out -- both the corpse and the inside of the gas chamber must be thoroughly washed down (a process that can take a great deal of time) before the body can be removed.

Auerbach asserts that the low concentrations of hydrogen cyanide gas supposedly used in the Auschwitz "gas chambers" would not have been sufficient to create an explosive mixture. In point of fact, the concentration of hydrogen cyanide gas is nearly 100 percent close to the yklon pellets (or discoids), and falls off depending on the distance. As a result, it is not only possible but quite likely that at some point the concentration would have reached the six percent level at which the mixture is explosive.

Auerbach refers to a report prepared in 1945 by the Krakow Institute of Forensic Research, citing it as proof of extermination gassings at Auschwitz and Birkenau. In fact, the results of the Krakow Institute's 1945 analysis neither refute Leuchter's findings nor do they prove extermination gassings.

It is true that the Krakow Institute found significant traces of hydrogen cyanide in collections of cut hair (including hair clasps) of Auschwitz prisoners. However, as even prominent olocaust historians acknowledge, when prisoners arrived at the camp, their hair was normally cut very short as part of a routine procedure against the spread of disease. The cut hair was then treated with Zyklon to kill typhus-bearing lice, which is why hydrogen cyanide was found in the samples analyzed in 1945.

For a more detailed and authoritative review of the specific technical criticisms made by Auerbach, the reader should see the essays by Walter Lueftl and Paul Grubach published elsewhere in this issue of the Journal.

To its credit, Auerbach (and the Munich Institute) at least seem to accept Leuchter's qualifications and technical competence. But so desperate is Auerbach for anything that might plausibly discredit Leuchter that he concludes his statement with a polemical comment by a markedly less qualified French pharmacist, a man who lacks any real competence to make any pronouncements about Leuchter's supposed deficiencies.

For anyone familiar with the Leuchter Report, perhaps the most glaring defect of Auerbach statement is its failure to address in any way the many other important arguments and telling points made by Leuchter.

-- The Editor

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