

What is 'Holocaust Denial'?

By Barbara Kulaszka

In recent years, considerable attention has been devoted to the supposed danger of "Holocaust denial." Politicians, newspapers and television warn about the growing influence of those who reject the Holocaust story that some six million European Jews were systematically exterminated during the Second World War, most of them in gas chambers.

In several countries, including Israel, France, Germany and Austria, "Holocaust denial" is against the law, and "deniers" have been punished with stiff fines and prison sentences. Some Jewish community leaders have called for similar measures in North America. In Canada, David Matas, Senior Counsel for the "League for Human Rights" of the Zionist B'nai B'rith organization, says: [1]

“The Holocaust was the murder of six million Jews, including two million children. Holocaust denial is a second murder of those same six million. First their lives were extinguished; then their deaths. A person who denies the Holocaust becomes part of the crime of the Holocaust itself.”

Often overlooked in this controversy is the crucial question: Just what constitutes "Holocaust denial"?

Six Million?

Should someone be considered a "Holocaust denier" because he does not believe – as Matas and many others insist – that six million Jews were killed during World War II? This figure was cited by the International Military Tribunal at Nuremberg in 1945-1946. It found that "the policy pursued [by the German government] resulted in the killing of six million Jews, of which four million were killed in the extermination institutions." [2]

Yet if that is so, then several of the most prominent Holocaust historians could be regarded as "deniers." Professor Raul Hilberg, author of the standard reference work, *The Destruction of the European Jews*, does not accept that six million Jews died. He puts the total of deaths (from all causes) at 5.1 million. Gerald Reitlinger, author of *The Final Solution*, likewise did not accept the six million figure. He estimated the figure of Jewish wartime dead might be as high as 4.6 million, but admitted that this was conjectural due to a lack of reliable information.

Human Soap?

Is someone a "Holocaust denier" if he says that the Nazis did not make soap from the corpses of murdered Jews? After considering the evidence – including an actual bar of soap supplied by the Soviets – the Nuremberg Tribunal declared in its Judgment that "in some instances attempts were made to utilize the fat from the bodies of the victims in the commercial manufacture of soap." [3]

In 1990, though, Israel's official Yad Vashem Holocaust center "rewrote history" by admitting that the soap story was not true. "Historians have concluded that soap was not made from human fat. When so many people deny the Holocaust ever happened, why give them something to use against the truth?," said Yad Vashem official Shmuel Krakowski. [4]

Wannsee Conference?

Is someone a "Holocaust denier" if he does not accept that the January 1942 "Wannsee conference" of German bureaucrats was held to set or coordinate a program of systematic mass murder of Europe's Jews? If so, Israeli Holocaust historian Yehuda Bauer must be wrong – and a "Holocaust denier" – because he declared: "The public still repeats, time after time, the silly story that at Wannsee the extermination of the Jews was arrived at." In Bauer's opinion, Wannsee was a meeting but "hardly a conference" and "little of what was said there was executed in detail." [5]

Extermination Policy?

Is someone a "Holocaust denier" if he says that there was no order by Hitler to exterminate Europe's Jews? There was a time when the answer would have been yes. Holocaust historian Raul Hilberg, for example, wrote in the 1961 edition of his study, *The Destruction of the European Jews*, that there were two Hitler orders for the destruction of Europe's Jews: the first given in the spring of 1941, and the second shortly thereafter. But Hilberg removed mention of any such order from the revised, three-volume edition of his book published in 1985. [6] As Holocaust historian Christopher Browning has noted: [7]

“In the new edition, all references in the text to a Hitler decision or Hitler order for the ‘Final Solution’ have been systematically excised. Buried at the bottom of a single footnote stands the solitary reference: ‘Chronology and circumstances point to a Hitler decision before the summer ended.’ In the new edition, decisions were not made and orders were not given.”

A lack of hard evidence for an extermination order by Hitler has contributed to a controversy that divides Holocaust historians into "intentionalists" and "functionalists." The former contend that there was a premeditated extermination policy ordered by Hitler, while the latter hold that Germany's wartime "final solution" Jewish policy evolved at lower levels in response to circumstances. But the crucial point here is this: notwithstanding the capture of literally tons of German documents after the war, no one can point to documentary evidence of a wartime extermination order, plan or program. This was admitted by Professor Hilberg during his testimony in the 1985 trial in Toronto of German-Canadian publisher Ernst Zündel. [8]

Auschwitz

So just what constitutes "Holocaust denial"? Surely a claim that most Auschwitz inmates died from disease and not systematic extermination in gas chambers would be "denial." But perhaps not. Jewish historian Arno J. Mayer, a Princeton University professor, wrote in his 1988 study *Why Did the Heavens Not Darken?: The 'Final Solution' in History*: "...From 1942 to 1945, certainly at Auschwitz, but probably overall, more Jews were killed by so-called 'natural' causes than by 'unnatural' ones." [9]

Even estimates of the number of people who died at Auschwitz – allegedly the main extermination center – are no longer clear cut. At the postwar Nuremberg Tribunal, the Allies charged that the Germans exterminated four million people at Auschwitz. [10] Until 1990, a memorial plaque at Auschwitz read: "Four Million People Suffered and Died Here at the Hands of the Nazi Murderers Between the Years 1940 and 1945." [11]

Is it "Holocaust denial" to dispute these four million deaths? Not today. In July 1990, the Polish government's Auschwitz State Museum, along with Israel's Yad Vashem Holocaust center, conceded that the four million figure was a gross exaggeration, and references to it were accordingly removed from the Auschwitz monument. Israeli and Polish officials announced a tentative revised toll of 1.1 million Auschwitz dead. [12] In 1993, French Holocaust researcher Jean-Claude Pressac, in a much-discussed book about Auschwitz, estimated that altogether about 775,000 died there during the war years. [13]

Professor Mayer acknowledges that the question of how many really died in Auschwitz remains open. In *Why Did the Heavens Not Darken?* he wrote: [14]

“... Many questions remain open ... All in all, how many bodies were cremated in Auschwitz? How many died there all told? What was the national, religious, and ethnic breakdown in this commonwealth of victims? How many of them were condemned to die a 'natural' death and how many were deliberately slaughtered? And what was the proportion of Jews among those murdered in cold blood among these gassed? We have simply no answers to these questions at this time.”

Gas Chambers

What about denying the existence of extermination "gas chambers"? Here too, Mayer makes a startling statement: "Sources for the study of the gas chambers are at once rare and unreliable." While Mayer believes that such chambers did exist at Auschwitz, he points out that "most of what is known is based on the depositions of Nazi officials and executioners at postwar trials and on the memory of survivors and bystanders. This testimony must be screened carefully, since it can be influenced by subjective factors of great complexity." [15]

Höss Testimony

One example of this might be the testimony of Rudolf Höss, an SS officer who served as commandant of Auschwitz. In its Judgment, the Nuremberg International Military Tribunal quoted at length from his testimony to support its findings of extermination. [16]

It is now well established that Höss' crucial testimony, as well as his so-called "confession" – which was also cited by the Nuremberg Tribunal – are not only false, but were obtained by beating the former commandant nearly to death. [17] Höss' wife and children were also threatened with death and deportation to Siberia. In his statement – which would not be admissible today in any United States court of law – Höss claimed the existence of an extermination camp called "Wolzek." In fact, no such camp ever existed. He further claimed that during the

time that he was commandant of Auschwitz, two and a half million people were exterminated there, and that a further half million died of disease. [18] Today no reputable historian upholds these figures. Höss was obviously willing to say anything, sign anything and do anything to stop the torture, and to try to save himself and his family.

Forensic Investigations

In his 1988 book, Professor Mayer calls for "excavations at the killing sites and in their immediate environs" to determine more about the gas chambers. In fact, such forensic studies have been made. The first was conducted in 1988 by American execution equipment consultant, Fred A. Leuchter, Jr. He carried out an on-site forensic examination of the alleged gas chambers at Auschwitz, Birkenau and Majdanek to determine if they could have been used to kill people as claimed. After a careful study of the alleged killing facilities, Leuchter concluded that the sites were not used, and could not have been used, as homicidal gas chambers.

Furthermore, an analysis of samples taken by Leuchter from the walls and floors of the alleged gas chambers showed either no or minuscule traces of cyanide compound, from the active ingredient of Zyklon B, the pesticide allegedly used to murder Jews at Auschwitz. [19]

A confidential forensic examination (and subsequent report) commissioned by the Auschwitz State Museum and conducted by Institute of Forensic Research in Krakow has confirmed Leuchter's finding that minimal or no traces of cyanide compound can be found in the sites alleged to have been gas chambers. [20]

The significance of this is evident when the results of the forensic examination of the alleged homicidal gas chambers are compared with the results of the examination of the Auschwitz disinfestation facilities, where Zyklon B was used to delouse mattresses and clothing. Whereas no or only trace amounts of cyanide were found in the alleged homicidal gas chambers, massive traces of cyanide were found in the walls and floor in the camp's disinfestation delousing chambers.

Another forensic study was carried out by German chemist Germar Rudolf. On the basis of his on-site examination and analysis of samples, the certified chemist and doctoral candidate concluded: "For chemical-technical reasons, the claimed mass gassings with hydrocyanic acid in the alleged 'gas chambers' in Auschwitz did not take place ... The supposed facilities for mass killing in Auschwitz and Birkenau were not suitable for this purpose..." [21]

There is also the study of Austrian engineer Walter Lüftl, a respected expert witness in numerous court cases, and former president of Austria's professional association of engineers. In a 1992 report he called the alleged mass extermination of Jews in gas chambers "technically impossible." [22]

Discredited Perspective

So just what constitutes "Holocaust denial"? Those who support criminal persecution of "Holocaust deniers" seem to be still living in the world of 1946 where the Allied officials of the Nuremberg Tribunal have just pronounced their verdict. But the Tribunal's findings can no longer be assumed to be valid. Because it relied so heavily on such untrustworthy evidence as the Höss testimony, some of its most critical findings are now discredited.

For purposes of their own, powerful special interest groups desperately seek to keep substantive discussion of the Holocaust story taboo. One of the ways they do this is by purposely mischaracterizing revisionist scholars as "deniers." But the truth can't be suppressed forever: There is a very real and growing controversy about what actually happened to Europe's Jews during World War II.

Let this issue be settled as all great historical controversies are resolved: through free inquiry and open debate in our journals, newspapers and classrooms.

Notes

1. *The Globe and Mail* (Toronto), Jan. 22, 1992.
2. *Trial of the Major War Criminals Before the International Military Tribunal* (IMT "blue series"), Vol. 22, p. 496.
3. IMT "blue series," Vol. 22, p. 496.
4. *The Globe and Mail* (Toronto), April 25, 1990; See also: M. Weber, "Jewish Soap," *The Journal of Historical Review*, Summer 1991.
5. *The Canadian Jewish News* (Toronto), Jan. 30, 1992, p. 8.
6. See: Barbara Kulaszka, ed., *Did Six Million Really Die: Report of the Evidence in the Canadian 'False News'*

Trial of Ernst Zündel (Toronto: Samisdat, 1992), pp. 192, 300, 349.

7. C. Browning, "The Revised Hilberg," *Simon Wiesenthal Annual*, Vol. 3, 1986, p. 294; B. Kulaszka, ed., *Did Six Million Really Die* (1992), p. 117.

8. B. Kulaszka, ed., *Did Six Million Really Die* (1992), pp. 24-25.

9. A. Mayer, *Why Did the Heavens Not Darken?: The 'Final Solution' in History* (Pantheon, 1988), p. 365.

10. Nuremberg document 008-USSR, in IMT "blue series," Vol. 39, pp. 241, 261.

11. B. Kulaszka, ed., *Did Six Million Really Die* (1992), p. 441.

12. Y. Bauer, "Fighting the Distortions," *The Jerusalem Post* (Israel), Sept. 22, 1989; "Auschwitz Deaths Reduced to a Million," *The Daily Telegraph* (London), July 17, 1990; "Poland Reduces Auschwitz Death Toll Estimate to 1 Million," *The Washington Times*, July 17, 1990.

13. J.-C. Pressac, *Les Crématoires d'Auschwitz: La machinerie du meurtre de masse* (Paris: CNRS, 1993), p.

148. See also: R. Faurisson, "Jean-Claude Pressac's New Auschwitz Book," *The Journal of Historical Review*, Jan.-Feb. 1994, p. 24.

14. A. Mayer, *Why Did the Heavens Not Darken?* (1988), p. 366.

15. A. Mayer, *Why Did the Heavens Not Darken?* (1988), pp. 362-363.

16. IMT "blue series," Vol. 1, pp. 251-252; Nuremberg document 3868-PS, in IMT "blue series," Vol. 33, pp. 275-279.

17. Rupert Butler, *Legions of Death* (England: 1983), pp. 235-237.

18. See: R. Faurisson, "How the British Obtained the Confession of Rudolf Höss," *The Journal of Historical Review*, Winter 1986-87, pp. 389-403.

19. See, for example: B. Kulaszka, ed., *Did Six Million Really Die* (1992), pp. 469-502. See also: M. Weber, "Fred Leuchter: Courageous Defender of Historical Truth," *The Journal of Historical Review*, Winter 1992-93, pp. 421-428
(http://www.ihr.org/jhr/v12/v12p421_Weber.html)

20. "An Official Polish Report on the Auschwitz 'Gas Chambers'," *The Journal of Historical Review*, Summer 1991, pp. 207-216.

21. G. Rudolf, *Gutachten ueber die Bildung und Nachweisbarkeit von Cyanidverbindungen in den 'Gaskammern' von Auschwitz* (London: 1993) (<http://www.vho.org/D/rgal/>); *The Rudolf Report* (in English)
(<http://www.vho.org/GB/Books/trr/>)

22. "The 'Lüftl Report'," *The Journal of Historical Review*, Winter 1992-93.

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