

An End to Hitler

by Michael Curtis

Some people get their kicks from champagne. Others get them from selling and buying relics of Nazi Germany, or from remembrance and celebration of things from that evil regime. The ongoing present puzzle is the mentality and the motivation of those getting kicks from buying the socks worn by Adolf Hitler, the personification of evil and the mastermind of genocide, that were available for sale.

On June 20, 2016 an unnamed man who said he was Argentinian bought the socks for 18,000 euros at an auction in Munich, Germany held by the Hermann Historica International Auction House, a leading auction house. It was not immediately clear if the socks were washed before the auction.

That auction house is well known for its sale of historical objects, and liquidation of important collections. It claims it procures objects of contemporary German history under strict conditions for museums, archives, and serious collectors. The catalogue of this special auction titled, "Hitler and the Nazi Grandees, a Look into the Abyss of Evil," was limited and generally unavailable, and the auction was closed to the press.

At this auction, more ghoulish than of genuine historical interest, the unnamed Argentinian bought 50 items of Nazi memorabilia. Included in his treasure trove were the splendid underwear of Field Marshall Herman Goering, bought for 3.000 euros, and Hitler's uniform jacket, made from finely woven field grey cloth, for which he paid 275,000 euros. This buyer for identification at the auction revealingly used No. 888, a reference to "88," the Nazi code masking "H," the eighth letter of the alphabet and thus indicating the real meaning was "Heil Hitler." The motivation seems unmistakable.

In all, the 169 items at the auction that were sold for 900,000 euros included: the beautiful leather boots owned by Goering; Hitler's trousers, the pockets of which were lined with leather to hold a gun he carried with him; the personal crockery of Hitler; the dresses of Eva Braun, Hitler's mistress; the manuscripts of Heinrich Himmler, head of the SS who oversaw the "Final Solution"; the brass container in which Goering had put the hydrogen cyanide phial he used to commit suicide; and sections of the ropes used to hang the major war criminals, including Julius Streicher, the extreme anti-Semite who published *Der Sturmer*, and Ernst Kaltenbrunner, the Austrian born senior leader of the SS.

The Nazi items had been owned by Dr. John K. Lattimer who was a U.S. medical officer during the War Crimes Trials in Nuremberg where he cared for the prisoners as well as the allied forces staff. He kept his collection of Nazi memorabilia as well as items of naval and aviation interest, Native American culture and objects associated with important historical figures, in his residence in New Jersey where he died in 2007.

But Lattimer was not alone in his interest. Ghoulishness knows no end. This Munich auction was not the only sign of infatuation with the objects of Nazi Germany. At an auction in Chesapeake City, Maryland on March 18, 2016, Hitler's personal copy of his *Mein Kampf*, found in his apartment in May 1945, was sold for \$20,000 to a U.S. buyer who won over 10 active bidders. In 2010 the unrelenting Holocaust denier David Irving sold Hitler's walking stick for £7,000, and offered strands of Hitler's hair for £1,000.

By coincidence in the same week as the auction a somewhat indecisive, part confessional, part faux innocent, comment on the Nazi regime came in a German TV documentary called "A German Life," from a 105 year old Munich lady named Brunhilde Pomsel, perhaps the last living person knowledgeable about and close to the Nazi center of power. She had been a well-paid

personal secretary to the vehemently anti-Semitic Josef Goebbels, Nazi Minister for Propaganda, and advocate of the Holocaust. Pomsel had recorded all the voluminous words of Goebbels from 1942 to the day on May 1, 1945 when he shot his wife and poisoned his six children with cyanide before committing suicide.

On her 100th birthday Pomsel, who once explained it was an obligation, a mandatory duty to work for Goebbels, spoke of him in unflattering terms as narcissist, aloof, cold, a ranting dwarf (he was five foot five) but a big pig, well known for his seducing of many women, film stars and theater actresses, at his home, that he had stolen from a Jewish owner, on an island in suburban Berlin.

Though she had been at the center of power for three years Pomsel claimed she was a "stupid and disinterested (sic) nobody from a simple background. I never knew about the Holocaust." Pomsel expressed sadness about the murder by Goebbels of his six children, but she expressed no similar emotion about the concentration camps or the Holocaust that she claimed was unknown to her until years after the end of World War II.

In spite of the recent repugnant expressions of antisemitism and hostility to Israel by a number of members of the British Labour party, and some absurd allegations that Hitler in the 1930s was supporting Zionism, the news of a more sensible attitude towards Hitler is promising and suggests some degree of understanding about political reality.

After years of discussion of various alternatives the Austrian minister of the interior Wolfgang Sobotka has suggested, but not yet decided, that the house where Adolf Hitler was born on April 20, 1889 in the small town of Baunau am Inn, Austria, might be demolished. It has been empty for some years and the owner gets a sum, about \$5,000 a month from the government to keep it unused. Before that, the Austrian interior ministry

had been the main tenant of the building. By agreement it may not be used as a museum or in any historical context. The house was almost blown up after World War II, but it was left intact and given back to foreign owners.

The history of the house is familiar from all evidence of Nazi Germany. The family owners were Nazi sympathizers but managed to persuade the court investigating them that they had been victims of the Nazis and that the building should never have been taken away from them. Now, the Austrian government, though still undecided, is determining the legality of the demolition. A committee of historians will make a recommendation.

Desirable though this is, it is more important for other committees throughout the democratic world to examine the appropriateness of Nazi sites on the internet and ads for the sale of Nazi memorabilia, flags, swastikas, and uniforms. Hitler was no joke and should not be enrolled in any public activity. The evil he did lives on after him. It is time to bury him, not to praise him.