

The Necessary Fight Against Terrorism

by Michael Curtis

The opening in London of a new British film *Anthropoid* dealing with the assassination of Reinhard Heydrich on May 27, 1942 is a reminder of one of the world's most evil individuals. At the same time it provides an opportunity to reflect on the consequences and the cost of highly desirable and heroic action to counter evil forces.

The title of the film refers to the code name given by British Special Operations Executive (SOE) that planned the assassination that was carried out. The plan was executed not by Czech resistance but by two men, one a Czech, the other a Slovak, who had been trained in Britain, and who were parachuted from an RAF bomber into Czechoslovakia. They critically wounded Heydrich, who lingered from injuries for a few days, by throwing a grenade into his open top Mercedes in a street in Prague. The open car was itself an indication of Heydrich's arrogant belief he was in full dictatorial control of affairs.

This British film is not the first to be made about the end of Heydrich's life. An earlier film in 1943 directed by Fritz Lang and written by Bertolt Brecht was loosely based on the assassination, but was fictional and inaccurate, and in essence wartime propaganda. *Anthropoid* provides an accurate and realistic picture of the killing of the monster known as the Hangman, the Blond Beast, the Butcher of Prague.

Like a number of other prominent officials of the Nazi party, Heydrich came from the home of a cultured and sophisticated family, living in Halle. His mother was wealthy and taught piano. His father Bruno was a composer and opera singer.

Indeed, Heydrich had heard a performance by a string quartet of pieces from his father's opera *Amen* in the Wallenstein Palace in Prague a few minutes before his fatal car ride. Heydrich himself was an accomplished musician on the violin and piano. As in the case of some many other highly educated and sophisticated young men, he became a monster of evil.

Heydrich was an ambitious young man who at first wanted to be a chemist, but joined a military "defense force" though he didn't fight, and an anti-Semitic organization, and then joined the navy. It was in 1931 that he met Heinrich Himmler who brought him into the intelligence unit of the Nazi party. The efficient and hard working Heydrich quickly founded and built up the SD intelligence service, that arrested, deported and murdered, all "enemies of the Reich," and also the Gestapo. He became an SS General, head of the Reich Security Main Office, and in control of Nazi security forces including the Gestapo.

In September 1941, Heydrich became first the deputy and then the real Reich-Protector of Bohemia and Moravia, now the Czech Republic, living in a luxury villa that had been confiscated from the Jewish Ferdinand Bloch-Bauer whose wife had been painted by Gustav Klimt. There he ruled as a brutal military dictator, suppressing Czech culture and executing members of the Czech resistance.

Ambitious for power and status, with the zeal of a convert, and encouraged by a strong Nazi wife, he was ruthless. He declared that brutality was necessary against the enemies of the Reich. He was responsible for the Einsatzgruppen, the task force that travelled in the wake of German armies and murdered at least two million people by mass shootings and gas.

Heydrich was central to the elimination of Jews. He helped organize Kristallnacht in November 1938. He organized and presided over the Wansee Conference held January 20, 1942 to implement the "final solution" of the Jewish question, the

deportation and murder of all Jews in Europe. His motto was that one must be as hard as granite, and this meant the end of Jews that he argued would be a benefit to humanity.

Almost all non-Nazis believed a greater benefit to humanity would be Heydrich's own elimination. But that elimination had dire consequences. The difficult moral dilemma to be faced is whether the cost of Heydrich's assassination was too high, though obviously no one could know in advance of the full cost.

Learning of Heydrich's death, Adolf Hitler ordered the raiding and killing of civilians around the area of Prague. The most vicious acts were the execution of all men 173, over the age of 15, and 52 women, and the deportation to extermination camps, from which they did not return, of all citizens in the towns of Lidice and Lezaky, villages that were physically eliminated. In addition, the extermination program sending Jews to their death was intensified.

The case of Heydrich raises the moral problem of whether desirable acts to eliminate repellent individuals and to seek general liberation from discrimination and suffering should be committed if the consequences are disproportionate or overwhelming. It is a difficult problem. The actors carrying out the righteous deeds are obviously courageous and dedicated to their cause, and would know almost certainly they would die in committing the act. At the same time, they and their colleagues cannot envisage the savage consequences of their action, as in the case of Heydrich.

The dilemma is not new to history. Two thousand years ago a similar dilemma existed for the Jewish people with the revolt led by Shimon Bar Kokhba in 132-136 against the Roman control of Judea. It was bitter and brutal conflict as a result of which 580,000 Jews are estimated to have died in battle and many others died of hunger and disease. Many Jews were sold into slavery. Before the Holocaust it is probably the greatest

disaster in Jewish history, and Jewish independence was lost for a long time.

Many Romans also died in the conflict and the consequence was that the Romans transformed Judea into Syria Palaestina, and Jerusalem into Aelia Capitolina from which Jews were barred. Jews suffered politically as well as in cost of lives. They were virtually condemned to political inaction until the dawn of the Zionist movement and the return to the land of Israel.

The difficult problem is whether to consider Bar Kokhba a false messiah or a military hero. Even more difficulty is the decision, in spite of obvious difficulties, to fight against suffering, inhumanity and evil. Political leaders and the citizen body must consider if any price is too high to pay or if the consequences of action are so forbidding that any action would be precluded.

Of course all individuals have to ponder and decide for themselves on individual cases but the nation needs an answer on general issues. In the U.S. and the Western world today this dilemma is clear because of the need to counter Islamist terrorism. In the U.S. the next President has to consider the degree to which the necessary fight against and the elimination of Islamist terrorism is worth the inevitable casualties. For some this is perhaps not easy but the answer should be clear. Monsters, individual and general, cannot be tolerated. The secret of life is courage and the fight against evil must continue.