

The Responsibility of the UK Parliament¹

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Conference on the Armenian Genocide, Truth and Politics

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On 7 November 1923, Adolf Hitler went from his Munich apartment to the nearby home of his chief political advisor, Max Erwin von Scheubner-Richter, where he was a frequent and welcome visitor. Scheubner-Richter's wife Mathilde saw Adolf as the son she could not have, and Hitler honoured Mathilde like his mother. The relationship between Hitler and her husband was equally close. Scheubner-Richter saw Hitler as a God-given leader to save Germany from its foreign tormentors, the Jews and

Bolsheviks. And Hitler was much influenced by Scheubner-Richter's ideas, and his political experience. He would later lament his death as an 'irreplaceable' loss.

On this Wednesday, 7 November 1923, Hitler was joining leading Nazis at the Scheubner-Richters' apartment to launch their coup. In the age of the one-party state, Mussolini seized power in his March on Rome, and the previous week, Kemal Atatürk proclaimed the Turkish Republic in a new capital – Ankara. It was time for the Nazi march on Berlin. The meeting decided to act immediately.³

Two days later, Hitler was hiding from the Bavarian Police, and Scheubner-Richter was dead, shot in the Bierkeller Putsch. The march on Berlin had stalled at the Bavarian War Memorial.



It is an irony of history that Max Erwin von Scheubner-Richter, a racist Nazi conspirator, is today remembered because of the Armenian Genocide. Hitler and Scheubner-Richter planned to redraw the political and ethnic map of Europe, but only one conspirator had experienced genocide, and that was not Hitler. So when in 1922 Hitler briefed Munich journalists on his plans, it was very much under the influence of his Chief Political Advisor:

‘There must be a solution to the Jewish Question’ he declared. ...
*‘Entweder das deutsche Volk wird ein Volk wie die Armenier, oder es erfolgt eine blutige Auseinandersetzung’.*⁴ Either the German race will be a race like the Armenians, or there will be a bloody

showdown.

After every genocide, bad people find every way to deny it happened, while good people intone the heartfelt slogan, *Never again*. If there is comfort to be gained from genocide, it is in those two words: *Never again*. This makes Hitler's first and most important statement on the Armenian Genocide disturbing. He too says, *Never again*. He too points to one genocide to warn of another. But the genocide he predicts is an illusion, a pretext to justify his *blutige Auseinandersetzung*, the Holocaust. Hitler twisted Armenia's fate, common knowledge in Weimar Germany, into a dire warning to the Germans. He described Germany's peril by invoking the Armenian's pathetic fate. And that is why a genocidal racist like Hitler was so interested in the fate of genocide's victims.

Hitler was not the first to rely on Scheubner-Richter's testimony on genocide. In 1921, while both men were visiting Berlin to cement relations with General Ludendorff, Scheubner-Richter was expecting a subpoena from the defence in the Berlin trial of Soghomon Tehlirian. This young Armenian saw his family slaughtered; his brother's skull cracked with an axe; his sister raped; his mother shot. He survived, sheltered by Kurds. He joined a vengeance squad, hired an apartment on Hardenbergstrasse, opposite the Berlin hideout of Talaat Pasha, the former Ottoman Interior Minister. Walked up to him in full

public view, shot him dead.

The Chief Public Prosecutor feared the embarrassment of a public jury trial. Germany knew of Talaat's responsibility for the organised slaughter. Tehlirian claimed his motive was revenge for his family's death. The Prosecutor saw that if the defence argued this 'was an act of heroism ... then the whole question of the Armenian atrocities ... will surely be up for discussion. Perhaps the defense will even try to investigate the stance of the German government on the Armenian atrocities.'⁵

That German stance, always passive and ineffective, sometimes complicit with the atrocities of their war ally the Ottoman Turks, was precisely what Scheubner-Richter had challenged as German Consul in Armenia. 'It appears to me' he wrote to the German Chancellor in December 1916, 'to be in our political and economical interest to turn our attention to this process of annihilation and to counteract it wherever possible.'⁶

Scheubner-Richter never got his day in court. Pastor Johannes Lepsius, the leading German campaigner for the Armenian cause, was heard, but before Scheubner-Richter and other embarrassing defence witnesses could be called, the trial was rushed to a conclusion and the jury sent out to consider their verdict. In an hour and a half they acquitted the assassin.

Since Tehlirian walked free, three lawyers have responded in remarkable ways.

Raphael Lemkin asked 'it is a crime for Tehlirian to kill a man, but it is not a crime for his oppressor to kill more than a million men? This is most inconsistent.'⁷ Lemkin became haunted with finding a name for this ultimate unnamed crime. In 1943 he discovered it: forty of his family died in the Holocaust, and he created a word: genocide.

Robert Kempner, present in the Berlin courtroom, wrote: 'for the first time in legal history, it was recognised that other countries could legitimately combat gross human rights violations caused by a government, especially genocide'.⁸ In 1945 Kempner was a Prosecutor at Nuremberg.

Paul Leverkuehn, the third lawyer, was in Berlin in 1921 meeting his old friend and comrade-in-arms Scheubner-Richter, for the last time, as it proved.⁹ Their paths had diverged since encountering genocide together, Scheubner-Richter with Leverkuehn his Adjutant leading an expedition across Armenia from Erzerum to Mosul. Scheubner-Richter was now a far right conspirator, but Leverkuehn was a constitutional lawyer with a promising international finance career.

So when Hitler gained power ten years after his failed coup,

Leverkuehn had to protect his back, his career, perhaps even his life. His solution was masterly.

Hitler sanctified Scheubner-Richter as chief of the Nazi martyrs of 1923. Every 9th November he marched to the Bavarian War Memorial where Scheubner-Richter died. An eternal flame burnt over Scheubner-Richter's sarcophagus, ein Posten auf ewiger Wache, a sentry on eternal watch.

Leverkuehn's solution was to write this biography – *Posten auf ewiger Wache. On the adventurous life of Max von Scheubner-Richter*.¹⁰



What an astonishing book: an eyewitness account and condemnation of genocide, published with approval from

Himmler's office. Mathilde, Scheubner-Richter's widow, worked with Himmler, Supreme Commander of Extermination in the Third Reich. She declared '*Ich bin vollständig einverstanden damit u. finde es sehr gut. Heil Hitler!*' '*I am in complete agreement with it and find it very good.*'¹¹

'Der Vorhang fiel über der Tragödie.' 'Of 1.8 million Armenians, at best there survived only four hundred thousand ... German consuls like Scheubner-Richter ... distributed money and other charity. But what could these few men do against a Turkish regime bent on annihilation, deaf even to the most direct warnings from Berlin, against the monstrous speed of execution of Armageddon?'¹²

This book, by an anti-Hitler Nazi, is a graphic witness account of the Armenian Genocide, published as the Holocaust was launched – about which Leverkuehn was informed as German Military Intelligence Chief in Turkey. Did he intend this book as a warning to his own people, the Nazi regime, perpetrators of a new genocide? Though it was totally ineffective, it may have saved one life – Leverkuehn's. When Hitler arrested the 1944 plotters, many of them confidential colleagues of Leverkuehn, one escaped execution: Paul Leverkuehn.

And there is yet more to say about this book. Leverkuehn's account of the Armenian Genocide was published again, in our

time, only ten years ago. In Turkey.¹³ Will it save lives this time?

It comes to something when testimony against genocide arises from the lives of genocidal racists and their circle. Yet despite this unbearable historical baggage – or maybe because of it - three years ago the German Bundestag finally heeded Scheubner-Richter's call to the Chancellor 90 years earlier: 'to turn our attention to this process of annihilation and to counteract it wherever possible.' All parties in the Bundestag resolved to commemorate 'the massacre of the Armenians in 1915', to deplore the Young Turk regime for deeds 'resulting in the almost total annihilation of Armenians in Anatolia', and 'to deplore the inglorious role of the German Reich which in spite of a wealth of information on the organised expulsion and annihilation of Armenians, made no attempt to intervene and stop the atrocities'.¹⁴ Amongst those voting their assent was Angela Merkel, German Chancellor since 2005.

Armenians in Germany are pleased rather than delighted. The resolution describes genocide in terms of the UN Convention, while cleverly avoiding naming it, except in the Explanation for the Resolution (which uses *Völkermord*, the exact translation of genocide). Left wing and Green parties in the Bundestag resisted the word in the Resolution for raising the spectre of Turkish legal jeopardy at a sensitive time of EU accession talks. But while German parliamentarians draw back from accusing another

country of genocide, they honourably declare that Germany shared responsibility for the genocide, implicitly inviting Turkey to join them on that road.

Whether this hope proves justified; and whether the Resolution pre-empts proper investigation of German responsibility by offering the Bundestag's apology before any public debate, as one German genocide scholar fears, remain to be seen.

As yet the Resolution has caused neither upheaval in German-Turkish relations, nor economic retaliation. Scheubner-Richter, who argued it was in Germany's 'political and economical interest to turn our attention to this process of annihilation', would have spotted that German exports to Turkey have grown 19% since the Resolution.¹⁵

And what of the UK? We have none of Germany's baggage. No complicity in genocide to be deplored. No large Turkish minority to be considered. Last week the Foreign & Commonwealth Office stated the government's position:

'We acknowledge the strength of feeling about this terrible episode of history and recognise the massacres of 1915-16 as a tragedy. However, neither this Government nor previous British Governments have judged that the evidence is sufficiently unequivocal to persuade us that these events should be

categorised as genocide as defined by the 1948 UN Convention on Genocide.’¹⁶

Raphael Lemkin would be bitter at his word *genocide* being twisted to exclude the Armenian ‘events’; Kofi Annan is blunt: ‘If we are serious about preventing or stopping genocide in future, we must not be held back by legalistic arguments about whether a particular atrocity meets the definition of genocide or not.’¹⁷

But why did the Foreign Office add ‘nor previous British Governments’ ... ?

What memory are they trying to repress?

On 5 October 1915 Pastor Johannes Lepsius presented his research in Turkey to the Reichstag. For their war ally to be accused of *Völkermord* was an embarrassment to the Reich, whose military censors promptly banned and confiscated Lepsius' work. The Bundestag Resolution's Explanation acknowledges this repression.

One week later in this parliament, Aneurin Williams, a backbench Liberal MP asked the Foreign Secretary if he had ‘official information showing that some hundreds of thousands of Armenians, mostly women, children and elderly men, have recently been done to death in pursuance of a plan of the Turkish

Government?'¹⁸

Williams, the Member for North West Durham, won a Commons debate a month later. Read the detailed testimony¹⁹ that he presented to parliament on 16 November 1915 in Hansard - Column 1760. Thanks to Aneurin Williams, this parliament was as well informed about the genocide in the year of its perpetration as it is today.

Foreign Office Minister Lord Robert Cecil replied to the debate. Did he 'acknowledge the strength of feeling about this terrible episode of history and recognise the massacres ... as a tragedy'? Not at all. The Minister said:

'The Committee of Union and Progress ... initiated the terrible scheme of which we see the results ... no more horrible crime has been committed in the history of the world ... the slaughter and destruction of this people ... under the cruellest possible circumstances.' Of the Germans, the Minister declared 'They and they only are the people who can stop these massacres and can save the Armenians if they choose.' On the crucial question of intent to destroy (the essence of the UN Genocide Convention²⁰) the Minister stated: 'It was a long-considered, deliberate policy to destroy and wipe out of existence the Armenians in Turkey. It was systematically carried out. ... There was no provocation whatever. ... The crime was a deliberate one, not to punish insurrection but

to destroy the Armenian race.'²¹



Last week I asked the Foreign Office, 'If this is not a clear and unequivocal allegation and description of the crime of genocide by a Government Minister, what is it?'²²

They replied - 'There is nothing to add'.²³

They dare not deny the Minister's statement. It stands beyond dispute, in expectation that this parliament, 93 years on, will finally acknowledge its own history.

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- ¹ This is the unedited text of the speech to the House of Commons Conference. The session was sponsored by Dr. Bob Spink MP, organised by the British Armenian All Party Parliamentary Group and supported by the Embassy of the Republic of Armenia.
 - ² Mike Joseph is a broadcaster, journalist, writer and historian specialising in genocide. He is a former Honorary Research Fellow at Cardiff University School of Journalism, and is a member of the International Network of Genocide Scholars.

With a career spanning television, radio and publishing, upon the fall of the Berlin Wall, Mike became personally involved with recovering his family's Holocaust history. After a series of encounters with the actual Nazi perpetrators and their families, he discovered a remarkable Nazi conspirator: Max Erwin von Scheubner-Richter was an intelligence officer who witnessed the Armenian Genocide and who five years later briefed Hitler on the practical implementation of genocide.

Since 2001, in lectures, talks and publications, Mike has recounted the extraordinary twists in the career of this early Nazi. He has documented his influence on Hitler, and shown how that influence survived his death in the 1923 Munich Putsch to become both Hitler's favourite Nazi Martyr, and a key witness in today's discourse about the Armenian Genocide. His recent work appears in the *Handbuch der völkischen Wissenschaften* (K G Saur, Munich), *The Armenian Genocide, Turkey and Europe* (Chronos, Zürich) and *Planet Magazine, issue 188* (Aberystwyth).

Mike continues to explore the way genocides have been recorded and received, in order to address the twin challenges of evasion and denial.

- ³ For sources on this and any other unattributed evidence, refer to the author.
- ⁴ In Eberhard Jäckel & Axel Kuhn (eds.) *Hitler: Sämtliche Aufzeichnungen 1905-1924*. Stuttgart: Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt, 1980, p 775. The quotation in its context:
'Eine Lösung der Judenfrage muß kommen. Wenn sie mit Vernunft gelöst wird, so wird dies das Beste für beide Teile sein. Wenn dies nicht erreicht wird, so gibt es nur zwei Möglichkeiten, entweder das deutsche Volk wird ein Volk wie die Armenier oder die Levantiner, oder es erfolgt eine blutige Auseinandersetzung. Man kann den Juden nicht verdenken, daß sie so sind, wie es in ihrer Rasse liegt; man kann aber vom deutschen Volk nicht verlangen, daß es sich vom Judentum beherrschen läßt, das keine Befähigung und keine Berechtigung hat, über arische Völker zu herrschen.

'Kampf gegen das Judentum ist eines der Hauptmomente in der Orientierung der Massen der nationalsozialistischen Partei. Dieses Schlagwort kann nicht aufgegeben werden, denn dadurch wird erreicht, daß die Massen in jedem Gegner, der aufgezeigt wird, ihren Todfeind sehen und sich danach einstellen.'

'There must be a solution to the Jewish question. If it is solved in a rational manner, it will be best for all concerned. If no solution is achieved, there will be two possibilities, either the German race will be a race like the Armenians or the Levantines, or there will be a bloody showdown. One cannot hold it against the Jews that they exist in accordance with their race; but one cannot demand of the German people that they allow themselves to be dominated by Jewry, that has neither the ability nor the right to rule over Aryan peoples.

'The fight against Jewry is one of the main elements in the National Socialist Party's orientation of the masses. This slogan cannot be abandoned, because as a result of it the masses consider anyone identified as an opponent to be a mortal enemy and behave accordingly.'

- ⁵ Tessa Hofmann, *New Aspects of the Talât Pasha Court Case in Armenian Review*, Winter 1989, Vol. 42, Number 4/168
- ⁶ From the Administrator in Erzerum (Scheubner-Richter) to the Reichskanzler (Bethmann Hollweg), Report, DE/PA-AA/R14094, A-33457, Munich, 4 December 1916, in Wolfgang & Sigrid Gust (Eds.): *A Documentation of the Armenian Genocide in World War I* www.armenocide.net 1995-2006 [Accessed 28 August 2006]. This collection of papers is published on the Internet in two language versions, German and English. The author refers to the English edition. The collection is also published in German in hardcovers as *Der Völkermord an den Armeniern 1915/16: Dokumente aus dem Politischen Archiv des deutschen Auswärtigen Amts*. Editor Wolfgang Gust (Springer: zu Klampen! Verlag 2005)
- ⁷ Quoted in Samantha Power, *A Problem from Hell; America and the Age of Genocide*. Harper Collins 2002
- ⁸ Tessa Hofmann, personal interview 2003; and in Tessa Hofmann, *New Aspects of the Talât Pasha Court Case in Armenian Review*, Winter 1989, Vol. 42, Number 4/168, p. 51.
- ⁹ 'Ich habe Scheubner zuletzt im Sommer 1921 gesehen'. Paul Leverkuehn, *Posten auf ewiger Wache*, Essen: Essener Verlagsanstalt, 1938 p. 194
- ¹⁰ Paul Leverkuehn, *Posten auf ewiger Wache*, Essen: Essener Verlagsanstalt, 1938
- ¹¹ Postcard, dated 5 December 1937, from Mathilde von Scheubner-Richter to Paul Leverkuehn, found by the author in Paul Leverkuehn's papers. It reads in full:

München den 5.12.37

Lieber Paul!

Herzlichen Dank für Ihren Brief u. das Manuskript. Ich bin vollständig einverstanden damit u. finde es sehr gut. Wenn es durch Mitteilungen von Schickedanz noch etwas erweitert werden könnte, wäre das dem Ganzen wohl von Vorteil. Ich habe ihm auch heute geschrieben u. ihn gebeten, Sie anzurufen, damit Sie sich mit ihm darüber verständigen können, hoffentlich tut er es bald! Über die Nachricht aus Straubing habe ich mich *sehr* gefreut, u. hoffe, das es auch ausgeführt wird. Ich sende Ihnen heute noch Bildmaterial, das ich unter Max Briefen fand. Vielleicht lässt sich das Eine oder Andere verwerten – dann 1 Gedicht von Max als Handschriftprobe vielleicht zu verwerten – u. schliesslich 2 interessante Documente aus Dr. Kappi## u. 2 Flugblätter die nach dem 9. Nov. 23 erschienen sind. Sie senden mir die Sachen wohl gelegentlich zurück! Ich werde mich sehr freuen, Sie bald wiederzusehen u. danke Ihnen noch für den schönen Theaterabend. Heil Hitler!

Mit besten Grüßen

Ihre getreue Hilde v. Scheubner-Richter

Munich, 5 December 1937

Dear Paul

Many thanks for your letter and the manuscript. I am completely in agreement with it and find it very good. If it could be expanded a little more with information from Schickedanz it would on the whole be advantageous. I have today written to him as well and have asked him to give you a ring so that you can come to an agreement about that. I hope he will do it soon! About the news from Straubing I was *very* pleased, and I hope that it will be carried out. I am sending you today some pictures that I found amongst Max's letters. Perhaps you can use one or other of them – then one poem by Max as a sample of his handwriting, perhaps to be used – and finally two interesting documents from Dr. Kappi## and two

leaflets which appeared after the 9th November 1923. You will no doubt return these things to me in due course! I will be pleased to see you again soon, and I thank you for the lovely visit to the theatre. Heil Hitler!

With best regards

Your Loyal Hilde v Scheubner-Richter

Scheubner-Richter's widow continued to be a fanatical adherent of Hitler's party after her husband's death, working for several years in the same office as Himmler, leader of the SS. In August 1926, Hitler honoured Scheubner-Richter's memory by charging Mathilde [now aged 71] with creating the NSDAP Archives in collaboration with Himmler. (Michael Kellogg, *The Russian Roots of Nazism Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2005*, p. 247).

¹² *Posten auf ewiger Wache*, p 46

¹³ *Sonsuz Nöbette Görev, Paul Leverkuehn'ün Anıları*, trans. Zekiye Hasançebi, ARBA Publishers, Istanbul 1998

¹⁴ Deutscher Bundestag 15.06.2005 Antrag der Fraktionen SPD, CDU/CSU, BUNDNIS 90/DIE GRÜNEN und FDP. 'Erinnerung und Gedenken an die Vertreibungen und Massaker an den Armeniern 1915 – Deutschland muss zur Versöhnung zwischen Türken und Armeniern beitragen.' An English translation is available at www.armenian-genocide.org/Affirmation.339/current_category.7/affirmation_detail.html

¹⁵ Statistics from www.destatis.de

¹⁶ Email communication from Press Office of Foreign and Commonwealth Office to the author, 22 April 2008 17:23

¹⁷ UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan's Action Plan to Prevent Genocide, in a speech April 7 2004 in Geneva commemorating the 10th anniversary of the 1994 Genocide in Rwanda. Press Release SG/SM/9197 AFR/893 HR/CN/1077

¹⁸ Parliamentary Debates (Official Report) in the Fifth Session of the Thirtieth Parliament of the UK of Great Britain and Ireland, Fifth Year of the Reign of HM King George V. Fifth Series – Volume LXXI. Fourth Volume of Session 1914-15. Column 1165 12 October 1915 Oral Answers

¹⁹ Parliamentary Debates etc. Volume LXXV. Eighth Volume of Session 1914-15. Column 1760 16 November 1915 Armenian Atrocities: 'The Turkish authorities within the little time of five months proceeded systematically to exterminate a whole race out of their dominions ... details have come in from many sources, from German and Swiss missionaries, from escaped refugees, from Europeans in Asiatic Turkey ... and all supporting one another in the most astonishing way ... describing what happened at particular places at particular times, with the names of the people who suffered and ... the people who inflicted those horrors.'

'Armenians ... were collected together at short notice, sometimes within a few hours ... Armenians of military age were already serving Turkey as soldiers in the ranks ... men from 15 to 70 who had not been taken as soldiers ... for the most part shot. The older men, women and children, were ordered to prepare to go away to a great distance. This did not take place simply in one town, but in practically every town where there was an Armenian population ... It did not occur owing to the fanaticism of one particular magistrate or one particular population. It is what took place in obedience to the orders sent round from the central authorities.

'These people were marched away under the control of gendarmes [and] criminals who had been taken out of the gaols for the express purpose ... allowed to take very little money ... very little food ... so they went on, driving them along, the people dropping by the way from hunger, women ... having been robbed of their clothes; babes were born by the roadside, and the mothers were told to get up and go on, until they died .. finally when they reached the River Euphrates, the women in many cases threw themselves into the river in order that they might escape by death from man's inhumanity.'

²⁰ Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide, adopted by Resolution 260 (III) A of the U.N. General Assembly on 9 December 1948. Article I: 'The Contracting Parties confirm that genocide, whether committed in time of peace or in time of war, is a crime under international law which

they undertake to prevent and to punish. Genocide means any of the following acts committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group, as such.'

²¹ Parliamentary Debates etc. Volume LXXV. Eighth Volume of Session 1914-15. Columns 1773-1776 16 November 1915

²² Email communication from the author to the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, 22 April 2008 17:58

²³ Email communication from Press Office of Foreign and Commonwealth Office to the author, 29 April 2008 10:34