

The Prize Lies of a Nazi Tycoon

MICHAEL PINTO-DUSCHINSKY

April 2010

Alfred Toepfer was one of postwar Germany's leading businessmen and philanthropists. His fortune stemmed from his Hamburg-based grain and shipping company, which was a powerful engine of his country's economic boom in the 1950s and '60s. Through a series of foundations (the principal one now bears his name), he ploughed his money back into a host of prizes, scholarships and grants, many of them celebrating the idea of a united Europe. "Alfred Toepfer was one of the most successful German entrepreneurs of all time," noted the historian Professor Hans Mommsen at the Alfred Toepfer Foundation's 75th birthday celebration.



Alfred Toepfer, aged 93, looks out over Luneberg Heath, site of the Nazi surrender in 1945 and a place of nationalistic pilgrimage

Toepfer showered the great and good from Europe's political and cultural life with a huge array of medals and awards. For the UK, he instituted the Shakespeare Prize, first bestowed in 1937 on the composer Ralph Vaughan Williams, and relaunched in 1967 with an award to the theatre director Peter Hall. From then until it was discontinued in 2006, the prize was awarded to the most distinguished names in British cultural life, including Graham Greene, Harold Pinter, Graham Sutherland, Philip Larkin, Margot Fonteyn, Doris Lessing, Alec Guinness, Julian Barnes, Ian McEwan and Sam Mendes. The last two laureates were the Oxford scientist Richard Dawkins and the Welsh baritone Bryn Terfel. When it was wound up, the prize was worth ₤20,000 (£18,000).

Similar awards, equally well endowed, were lavished on other regions of Europe. In 1972, the then British Prime Minister, Edward Heath, received the first European Prize for Statesmanship, accompanied by a cheque for 300,000 Deutschmarks (more than £300,000 in today's money). Toepfer, in turn, was made an honorary Commander of the Order of the British Empire. When Toepfer died in 1993 aged 99, Heath and the former German

Chancellor Helmut Schmidt — another Toepfer prizewinner — delivered two of the funeral orations. According to Schmidt, Toepfer was "a man of freedom".

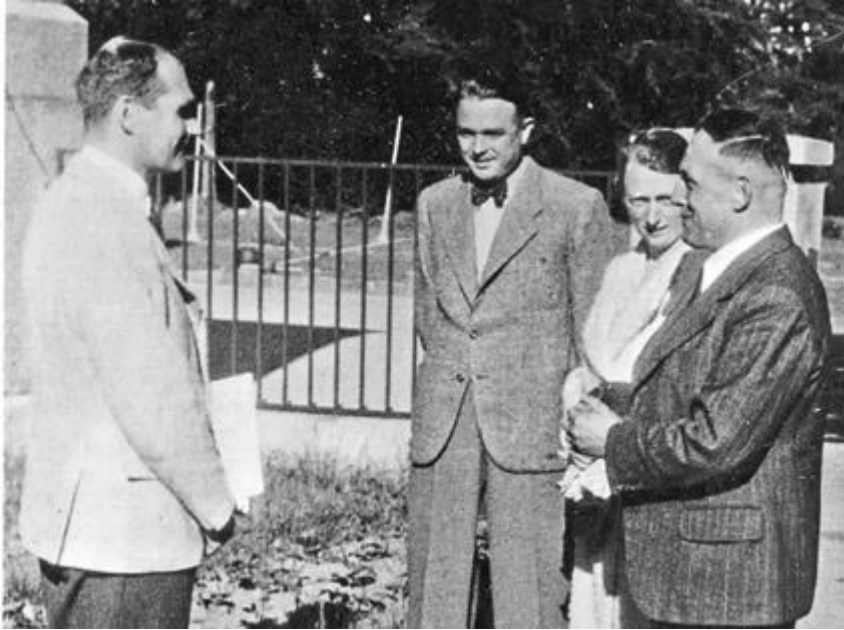
My investigations over a number of years show that he was nothing of the sort. In the fateful years leading to the Second World War, Alfred Toepfer was a "sponsoring member" of the SS who was enormously helpful to Hitler. He channelled money via his foundations to influence public opinion in Britain and elsewhere in Europe in favour of the Third Reich and played an important role in Nazi subversion in Austria, the Czech Sudetenland, Alsace-Lorraine and elsewhere. During the war, his company supplied slaked lime to the German ghetto administration in the Polish city of Lodz.

He was interned by the British for two years after the war but released. His business skills were needed by the new West Germany and he skilfully remodelled himself as an anti-Nazi interested only in building a new Europe. In reality, his closest henchmen were unrepentant Nazis who had been key figures in murdering hundreds of thousands of Jews and in starving to death countless numbers of Russian prisoners of war.

Some of the most regular recipients of his largesse have been students of Oxford, which is only now coming to terms with the fact that the source of scholarships from which it has benefited for many decades is severely tainted.

In 1936, Toepfer set up the Hanseatic Scholarships, which enabled students from Oxford, Cambridge and other British universities to further their studies at the Hanseatic University of Hamburg. They were re-established after the war. Currently, two scholarships restricted to graduates of Oxford and Cambridge are awarded each year. Each scholarship lasts for up to two years and is worth an annual £13,400 plus travel costs. But for the past 16 months, they have been the subject of unfinished discussions held, much to their credit, by the authorities at Oxford and Cambridge.

Issues now confronting Oxford's Committee to Review Donations and a special Oxford-Cambridge sub-committee set up to decide whether to end the association with the Alfred Toepfer Foundation include how far Toepfer was involved in Nazi activities and whether the foundation bearing his name today misrepresents his record. If so, do either the source of the money or the legend that accompanies it matter? Is the way in which the Holocaust is taught — or, more accurately, is relatively little taught — at Oxford affected by the university's sources of funding?



Alfred Toepfer (right) and his wife with Hitler's deputy Rudolf Hess (left) in June 1939

But the most important underlying issue is the trivialisation of the Holocaust implicit in the foundation's accounts of its founder's career. This is what has most angered a number of German and French historians.

While I was researching in the Alfred Toepfer Archive in Hamburg, Birte Toepfer, Toepfer's daughter-in-law — and the chair of the foundation, which received much of his wealth and according to its last accounts had an endowment of nearly 86 million euro (about £75m) — came to speak to me. "What do you want?" she asked. There was no such thing as guilt by descent, I replied, but one did inherit responsibilities. Toepfer's family and his foundations needed to apologise unreservedly for Toepfer's actions. As with the South African "Truth and Reconciliation" process, acknowledgement of the truth is the prerequisite for reconciliation. As long as the past is explained away, the moral basis for a new Europe cannot yet exist and British universities should not accept money tainted by denial. The apology has been refused. Citing various reasons, the foundation has blocked further access to its archives and papers for the time being. It has set out its latest position in a long letter copied to the Oxford authorities in January and in a statement posted on its website in February. It makes a series of admissions but also gives a qualified defence of its founder.

On 31 May 1934, Hans Grimm, a novelist and one of the Nazi regime's top propagandists, approached the director of Oxford's Taylorian Institution, the university's modern languages centre. His objective: to persuade Oxford to accept a series of German-funded prizes for distinguished artistic personalities and scholarships to bring British students to the Hanseatic University of Hamburg. Grimm's novel, *People Without Space*, sold 500,000 copies in Germany by 1939. Arguing that Germany suffered from a lack of "living room" (*lebensraum*), the 1,300-page book influenced and popularised Hitler's strategy of territorial expansion. Grimm continued to defend Hitler into the 1950s. When he made contact with Oxford, Grimm was working with the president of the Reich Writers' Chamber, part of Joseph Goebbels's propaganda machine.

Grimm's Oxford counterpart, Professor Hermann Fiedler, was the mainstay of the Taylorian and his bust still presides over its entrance. Fiedler was valuable to the Hitler regime. As former Oxford tutor of the Prince of Wales, later King Edward VIII, Fiedler had good connections. The fact that he was an Aryan with close family in Germany provided a useful

lever. It was Fiedler who wrote to the editor of *The Times* in May 1937 that he was "appalled" that Oxford had refused to send an official representative to celebrate the 150th anniversary of Göttingen University, by then purged of Jews. Fiedler added that he had accepted Göttingen's invitation to him to be present.



Death camp supremo Odilo Globocnik, whom Toepfer entertained at his country mansion; SS Lieutenant-General and Sudeten German leader Konrad Henlein, a board member of Toepfer's foundations before the war

Oxford was a priority target of Nazi cultural diplomacy. The presence of so many Jewish refugee academics provided daily reminders to the dons of Nazi racism. However, active appeasers, such as the Marquis of Lothian, were also associated with the university and with the Rhodes Scholarships. So it was not surprising that Joachim von Ribbentrop, Hitler's ambassador-at-large who headed the Nazi radicals within the German Foreign Office, took a personal interest in the project of scholarships to Germany for British graduates. Ribbentrop corresponded with Toepfer, addressed the Anglo-German Fellowship about the proposed Hanseatic Scholarships and became their patron. The British Prime Minister, Neville Chamberlain, was persuaded to issue a statement welcoming the first awards, an event publicised worldwide.

Toepfer, who insisted on remaining anonymous as the donor, was a self-made man whose Hamburg grain business was flourishing. Fearing the power of Jews to harm his commercial interests in New York and Buenos Aires, he hesitated to declare his Nazi sympathies. He was so secretive that he sent letters to close colleagues within Germany under the pseudonym "Mr Hoffmann". He combined a nose for tax evasion and currency manipulation with strong nationalist feelings. By using charitable foundations already set up by 1931 and by moving money between banks in New York, Amsterdam, London and Liechtenstein, he could aid the Nazi regime while escaping the restrictions of its currency-exchange regulations. In fact, he was arrested in 1937 for suspected infringements of these controls. He finally escaped punishment largely because of his high Nazi — and especially SS — patronage. On 10 December 1937, *The Times* reported that Hermann Goering had made representations on his behalf.

A few weeks before Grimm's approach to Oxford, Toepfer published a financial report showing he was in lockstep with Nazi foreign policy: "For Britons, the world; for the

Germans, the leadership of the Continent." By courting and lulling British opinion-formers, Germany would be freer to carry out its aggressive aims against Austria, Czechoslovakia and France. In 1936, Goebbels praised Toepfer in his diary as a clever, generous and enthusiastic patron.

Outwardly, Toepfer's cryptically named FVS and JWG Foundations existed to award lucrative prizes to leading European intellectuals. In Britain, a newly-created "Shakespeare Prize" was awarded in 1937 to Ralph Vaughan Williams. On the Continent, most members of the prize juries and most of the prize-winners were Nazis. They included prominent intellectual godparents of the Holocaust as well as pro-Nazi activists in countries across and beyond Germany's existing borders. Prize-giving ceremonies were swastika-clad gatherings of Hitler's elite supporters.



Joachim von Ribbentrop, Hitler's Foreign Minister and patron of Toepfer's Hanseatic Scholarships for Britons; SS Brigadier Edmund Veesenmayer, whom Toepfer employed after the war

The FVS and JWG Foundations had vital covert functions as well. American, Swiss and French diplomatic and intelligence archives, war crimes trials and documents in the — albeit expurgated — Alfred Toepfer Archive provide ample proof.

From the late 1920s, Toepfer purchased country estates in Germany and surrounding countries. In the 1930s, they accommodated residential courses for German Nazi cadres and potential recruits from surrounding lands. They served too as secluded gathering points for Nazi dignitaries (such as Deputy Führer Rudolf Hess and his staff), for party leaders from Austria (where the Nazi Party was banned from 1934-38) and from the Sudetenland.

The leader of Austria's clandestine Hitler Youth, SS Colonel Paul Minke, was active on Toepfer's board of directors. Minke ran the Hitler Youth's leadership school in Potsdam, made regular secret visits to Austria after 1934 and arranged for top Austrian Nazis to gather at the Toepfer mansion, Gut Siggen in East Holstein. They included Odilo Globocnik, who went on to head the notorious Operation Reinhard death camps in Poland, and Friedrich Rainer (later gauleiter, SS Lieutenant-General and Holocaust perpetrator). Rainer and SA Major-General Franz Hueber, Hermann Goering's Austrian brother-in-law, became Toepfer board members. In 1935 Toepfer made the Kalkhorst castle available to groups from Austria and other target

states. Run initially by the Folk League for Germanhood Abroad (VDA) and then by the SS, the project enabled Toepfer to cultivate some of Himmler's most senior SS officers, including Werner Best, head of the Gestapo's administration and legal department, and Werner Lorenz, head of VOMI, the Ethnic German Liaison Office. An Austrian SS colonel, Franz Wehofsich, supervised the courses.

The Sudeten German leader Konrad Henlein (later a gauleiter and an SS Lieutenant-General) stayed secretly at one of Toepfer's mansions for several weeks in 1935. Reich Writers' Chamber president and Toepfer board member Hans Friedrich Blunck recorded that "Mr Hoffmann" and "the great unknown" (Henlein) hatched a "very big programme" for Nazi Germany and Czechoslovakia. Henlein became a leading board member of both main Toepfer foundations. During the Munich crisis of 1938, when Henlein's agitators and thugs needed a place of refuge on the German side of the Czech-German border, Toepfer offered them the free run of his properties.

With the takeover of Austria and the Sudetenland successfully completed before the end of 1938, Toepfer busied himself with subversion in Alsace-Lorraine and elsewhere. He ran this operation using money parked in Liechtenstein, with a board headquartered in Basle, Switzerland, and a foundation based at Freiburg-im-Breisgau, in close reach of Alsace-Lorraine.

By this time, Toepfer's younger brother Ernst was living in Switzerland, having previously gained US citizenship after spending several years running a New York branch of the business. This made it easier to transfer money across international borders. Ernst Toepfer (who was to die of natural causes in 1941) had been secretary of the pro-Nazi "Wehrwolf" organisation in New York City in the late 1920s. In the 1930s, he had acted (he later claimed) as chauffeur and bodyguard for Sepp Schuster, leader of the New York City Nazis. The Toepfer brothers' main agent in Switzerland was Eugen Wildi, a lawyer and member of the Swiss fascist "National Front" who had transmitted Nazi funds to Alsace-Lorraine since the 1920s.

Hitler's triumph at Munich heightened alarm among Swiss politicians about German subversion in their own country. Within weeks, the Swiss police arrested Wildi. Their worst suspicions were confirmed when they found papers showing that he was on the board of the Toepfers' JWG Foundation alongside Henlein and senior Austrian Nazis. Ernst Toepfer's US passport was confiscated and his bank account blocked. The Swiss Federal Attorney General approached the US legation in Berne, which sent a series of communications to Washington in November 1938 outlining Swiss suspicions about the subversive character of the Toepfer foundations. Charges were then brought against the two Toepfer brothers and several suspected Nazi agents operating from German territory. The Swiss authorities alleged too that an Austrian associate of the Wildi-Toepfer circle, the former head of the VDA Dr Hans Steinacher, had previously been involved in smuggling bombs into Austria before the Anschluss.

Meanwhile, on the French side of the border, the security services were observing the Toepfers' grantees. On 28 April 1939, a senior official in the Bas-Rhin department identified two Toepfer board members, Danish pastor Johannes Schmidt-Wodder and Wildi, as "very active agents of the German special services".

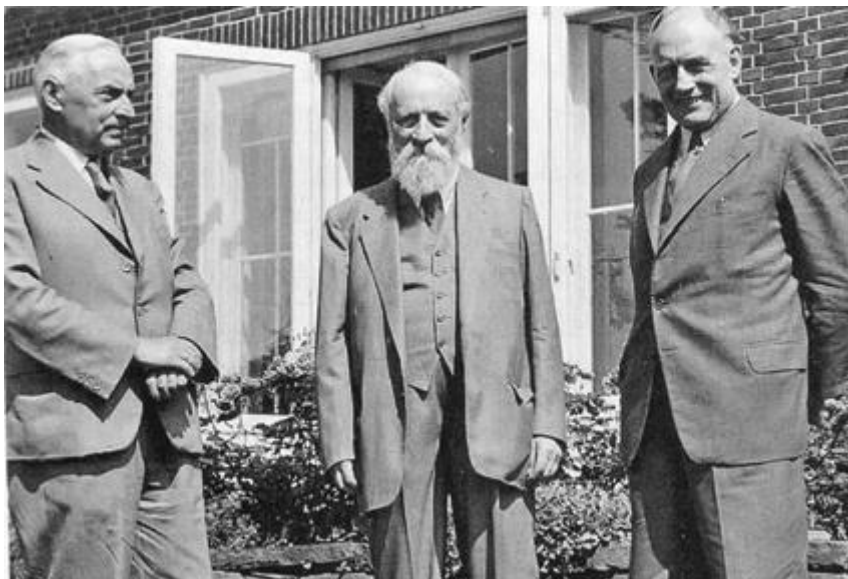
The French had good reason for concern. Toepfer board member Hermann Bickler headed an autonomist political party in Alsace. After the Nazis overran France, he became an SS

colonel, Nazi Kreisleiter (district leader) in Strasbourg and then one of the heads of the Sicherheitsdienst (the SS intelligence service) in Paris. He headed the division responsible for protecting and promoting Nazi double agents within the French resistance.

With the outbreak of war, Alfred Toepfer's obsession with deception made him a good candidate for the Abwehr (military intelligence). He was stationed mainly in Paris in a section responsible for subversion and sabotage.

The war proved good for his business interests both within the Reich and in occupied Eastern Europe. His company opened branches in Poznan (Posen), Cracow (Krakow) and Lviv (Lemberg). It explored the commercial possibilities of the Caucasus until the military defeat at Stalingrad cut off this potential opportunity. Relatively little is known about the company's operations in occupied Poland. But it has been established that the Poznan office traded with the German administration of the Lodz ghetto, the country's second largest in the number of Jews cooped up within it.

Although the victorious Allies punished few people after 1945 for Nazi war crimes, several members of Toepfer's boards and prize panels were sentenced to death: one committed suicide after his capture; another died of illness while awaiting trial; others were jailed. Toepfer fared better. After a two-year internment, he was freed in 1947. By this time, food shortages meant that the British occupation authorities needed his firm's expertise in agricultural trading. During internment, Toepfer's lawyers had obtained the usual testimonies (from, among others, Ernst Jünger) claiming that he had been associated at great personal risk in the 20 July 1944 plot to assassinate Hitler, had stood up for Jewish grain merchants in Hamburg, had refused to join the Nazi party, and so forth. The fact that the Nazis had arrested and detained him in 1937-38 became an asset.



The Jewish philosopher Martin Buber with Toepfer in 1953 at the Toepfer Foundation's guesthouse

His arrest in 1937 was a central plank of Toepfer's story during his internment in 1945-47 and has remained a feature of the Toepfer defence ever since. Crucial to this version is the thesis that the arrest was for political rather than economic reasons. The weight of evidence does not support this. His arrest was one of several separate cases involving alleged currency offences by import-export merchants. It followed an anonymous poison-pen letter sent to the German

authorities by a member of Toepfer's staff. The main charge was that his and his brother's complex structure of foundations was an artificial tax-avoidance device.

A subsidiary allegation concerned his connection with the writer Ernst Niekisch. An anti-democratic, anti-Semitic nationalist and socialist, Niekisch had (with financial backing from Toepfer) edited a journal titled *Resistance*. At the time, the "resistance" in question had been against the Weimar Republic, not as Toepfer later implied, against the Nazis. When Hitler came to power in 1933, Toepfer welcomed this development. Niekisch did not and was eventually sentenced to life imprisonment for "literary treason". Investigations by the Hamburg Gestapo in 1937 produced scant evidence of a continuing link between the two men.

Toepfer retained his wartime profits and rapidly expanded his grain business, building a considerable fleet of ships for the purpose. From the late 1940s, he used his wealth to run a double life. On the surface, he was politically correct, announcing his conversion to the idea of a united Europe. He restarted his highly funded prizes, now taking care to include a smattering of Jews in the winners' roster. In 1951, the Jewish philosopher Martin Buber won the "Hanseatic Goethe Prize". Toepfer started to make awards to West German, Austrian, French and British politicians. French acting President Alain Poher and Georges Pompidou's Interior Minister, André Bord, were among them.

Toepfer's CBE was one of an extraordinary variety of degrees, medals and awards showered upon the Hamburg multi-millionaire. Toepfer's purchase of honours was on a scale worthy of Maundy Gregory. (The chairman of Oxford's selection committee for the Hanseatic Scholarships later felt that the award of the CBE was sufficient proof that Toepfer was a man of honour. This may help to explain the university's failure to investigate further.)

For a man who claimed to have been a non-Nazi and indeed an active anti-Nazi, Toepfer was extraordinarily generous and close to some of the most senior and most rabidly anti-Semitic members of the old political order. By giving prizes mainly to famous writers, architects and artists, Toepfer made it respectable to bestow other awards on Nazi associates and a series of anti-Semitic, *völkisch* (racist) writers and scholars.

The two faces of the Hamburg businessman are illustrated by his daughter Gerda's visit to Oxford in 1951. Gerda stayed for months at the home near the Dragon School of Herma Fiedler, the daughter of the professor who had lobbied for the original Hanseatic Scholarships. In December 1951, Gerda Toepfer and Herma Fiedler visited the elderly poet laureate John Masefield to give him the Shakespeare Prize originally granted in 1938. Coinciding with the prize-giving at the poet's home, there was a public ceremony in Hamburg.

This was not Gerda's only family duty in Oxford. She was in contact with Carlyle Macartney of All Souls College. An expert on Central Europe and "openly antisemite" [sic], according to a Foreign Office official, Macartney worked for the Foreign Office during the war under Arnold Toynbee, gathering political intelligence on Hungary. In 1951, Macartney was writing a history of the 15 October 1944 coup d'état by the Arrow Cross, the party of Hungary's Nazis. The project provided a reason for Macartney to contact senior Nazis in the name of historical research. He especially wished to hear from SS Brigadier Edmund Veessenmayer, the German plenipotentiary in Budapest during the Holocaust, who was still serving time in Landsberg Castle for war crimes.

Gerda acted as a go-between because, as she wrote to the All Souls historian, her father now employed Veesenmayer's two closest Holocaust associates. Veesenmayer's political deputy, Kurt Haller, had been one of the main players in the Nazi intrigues that brought the Arrow Cross to power. Once in control, Arrow Cross hooligans inflicted unspeakable cruelties on Budapest's Jews. Many thousands of the last surviving Jews perished in the weeks before the Russians liberated the capital. After the war, Haller bamboozled his British interrogators, trading information about his earlier Abwehr operations with the Irish Republican Army for silence on his Holocaust activities. Released in 1946, Haller became Toepfer's in-house legal counsel from 1947 until his death in 1961.

Barbara Hacke, Veesenmayer's personal secretary from 1940-45, worked for several years after the war as Alfred Toepfer's private secretary. After his release, Veesenmayer too joined the Toepfer payroll. Hacke probably typed the successive communications to Ribbentrop in May, June and July 1944 in which Veesenmayer reported the latest total of hundreds of thousands of Jews deported from Hungary. Hacke accompanied her boss to the Balkans, where his mission was equally sinister. After the war, she gave evidence to protect him by claiming that Adolf Eichmann had not come under his command despite Veesenmayer's plenipotentiary role. This enabled Veesenmayer to pretend he had not known the destination or intended fate of 437,000 Jewish deportees.

The surviving letters imply that a motive of Gerda Toepfer's approach to the semi-official All Souls historian was to bargain for Veesenmayer's early release from US custody in exchange for his co-operation as a historical witness. Gerda was obviously acting on her father's behalf. Documents show that Veesenmayer and Hacke were equally extreme and unrepentant. Through Gerda Toepfer, Hacke entered into correspondence with Macartney using imagery strikingly similar to that used currently by the Alfred Toepfer Foundation. In 1951, she criticised "the Nuremberg methods of seeing everything either black or white". Her letter of 2 May 1952, effectively justified the Holocaust:

If I understand Dr Veesenmayer right, he saw and still sees the events and his task of that time under a European aspect. You will admit that the idea of a United Europe is not an entirely new one. And there were quite a number of personalities also in the Germany and Hungary of before 1945 who saw their tasks and actions in accordance with this idea and not under narrow nationalistic viewpoints, which fact history will perhaps realise after a certain lapse of time.

The fact that Toepfer employed someone with these beliefs as his secretary raises troubling questions about his own opinions. So does Toepfer's repeated use of the term "concentration camp" to refer to Britain's (admittedly grim) postwar detention centres rather than to Bergen-Belsen, Buchenwald or Dachau.

In 1951, Toepfer recruited SS Major-General Hans-Joachim Riecke. He held senior positions in Toepfer's company and his main foundation until 1976. A Nazi state secretary in the Food Ministry, Reichstag deputy and a senior member of the staff in occupied Eastern Europe of Alfred Rosenberg (Reich Minister for the Occupied Eastern Territories), he had been one of those mainly responsible for plans to starve the local population. The deaths of hundreds of thousands of Russian POWs were on his hands. The truth is that all three of Toepfer's closest staffers-his senior executive, his legal counsel and his personal secretary-were parties to mass murder.

On September 1950, Toepfer received a coded request for a private meeting with the brother of Hartmann Lauterbacher, a former SS Major-General, former deputy head of the Hitler Youth and gauleiter. Toepfer had known him since the mid-1930s. In 1950, Lauterbacher was in hiding, having escaped from Italian custody. His brother evidently requested that Toepfer contact an associate in Buenos Aires requesting him to help Lauterbacher and his "large circle of friends" to set up a new life in Argentina. A copy of Toepfer's letter of recommendation, dated 2 October 1950, survives in the Alfred Toepfer Archive.



Toepfer with British Prime Minister Edward Heath in 1972 when Heath was awarded the Toepfer-funded European Prize for Statesmanship

Lauterbacher boarded a ship to Buenos Aires a few weeks later, following the same route taken by Adolf Eichmann during the same year. Subsequent reports identify Lauterbacher as one of the main organisers, together with Otto Skorzeny, of *Die Spinne* (The Spider), the escape organisation for members of Odessa (*Organisation der ehemaligen SS-Angehörigen*, that is Organisation of Former Members of the SS). Evidently, Lauterbacher was more concerned to develop the Argentina ratline for other wanted Nazi officers than for himself. He was soon in Egypt where he was reportedly part of a group of Nazis sent, with the connivance of the CIA and West German intelligence, to train anti-Israel guerrillas.

Toepfer gave financial help and support to many other Nazis, whom he considered as victims of Allied — especially British — brutality. He complained repeatedly about his own prewar internment by the British and about the fact that he had been questioned by a "Jewish officer", though there is no evidence that he was in any way ill treated. He helped to fund SS Lieutenant-General Werner Lorenz's defence before the US military tribunal in Nuremberg. He entertained and assisted SS Lieutenant-General Werner Best. Apart from his senior role in the Gestapo, Best had participated in thousands of murders in Poland and had been Germany's plenipotentiary in occupied Denmark. Soon after his release, Best was implicated, along with Veessenmayer, in a neo-Nazi plot uncovered in 1953 by the British occupying authorities. Toepfer offered employment to SS Colonel Hermann Bickler while he was on the run from the French, who had sentenced him to death. He awarded prizes to the former Nazi rectors of Hamburg and Freiburg Universities (both prewar board members). The list of favours to Nazis and acts of support to far-Right causes is almost endless.

Even Toepfer's seemingly innocent farming and environmental activities had a *völkisch* dimension. As head of the Nature Park Society from December 1953, he orchestrated protests

against the British forces using Lüneburg Heath as a military training ground. The heath, scene of the German surrender in 1945, was a place of nationalistic pilgrimage.

Toepfer's attachment to the "Blood and Soil" philosophy of working the national land provides the background to a controversy about his reported relationship with the Holocaust denier Thies Christophersen. This former concentration camp guard, far-Right farming mystic and author of *The Auschwitz Lie*, who died in 1997, claimed that he had received funding from Toepfer but that this had ceased when he wrote his book. The Alfred Toepfer Foundation points out there is no evidence for this apart from Christophersen's own testimony.

It took many years for doubts about Toepfer's self-proclaimed anti-Nazism to emerge. Critical material appeared in a German dissertation published in 1973. In 1978, American doctoral research cast light (based partly on French war crimes trials) on Toepfer's subversive pre-war role in Alsace-Lorraine.

In 1979, the award of the European Prize for Statesmanship to French Prime Minister Raymond Barre attracted ridicule in the satirical magazine *Le Canard enchaîné*, which portrayed the money attached to the prize as comparable to the gift of diamonds to President Valéry Giscard d'Estaing by Emperor Bokassa of the Central African Republic.

In 1993, 1996 and 1999 a series of protests led to the abandonment of annual prizes administered through the Universities of Vienna and Strasbourg, the cancellation of an award ceremony at the French Senate, questions in the Swiss cantonal parliament in Basle and, in 2000, the abandonment of the Robert Schuman Prize.

During his life, Toepfer reacted to the occasional protests against him by consulting lawyers and by issuing brazenly inaccurate accounts of his personal history.

In 1996, three years after his death and after the debacles in Strasbourg as well as a powerful series of articles by French writers and academics led by Lionel Boissou, the Alfred Toepfer Foundation decided that simple denial would no longer suffice. It employed the public relations firm Goerres and Partner and then created an "Independent Academic Commission" to produce a credible history. Its lead historian, Professor Hans Mommsen, wrote to the Toepfer Foundation that its researches would take the "wind out of the sails" of the critics.

The three years during which the commission conducted its work coincided with attacks by young German historians on their predecessors. They produced evidence to show that some leading post-war German historians had been active under Hitler in advocating and planning "dejudaisation" in Eastern Europe. The conflict came to a head at the annual conference of German historians in 1998. Some of the historians now exposed, such as Theodor Schieder, had been part of Toepfer's network of boards and committees during the Hitler period. The controversy over Toepfer's past thus became a symbol of the wider debate about the cover-ups which, according to such younger historians as Ingo Haar and Michael Fahlbusch, had pervaded the German historical profession after 1945.

When the 488-page report of the Toepfer Foundation's historians appeared in 2000, it fulfilled many of the critics' fears. Purporting to present a balanced judgment and including qualified admissions, it could be viewed, as one of the junior authors (himself not a member of the commission) recently testified, as a PR exercise. As with similar histories financed by companies with controversial records of activity under the Nazis, some of the most damaging

facts about Toepfer were buried in obscure parts of a turgid tome or given cursory treatment. The introductory summary (the only part of the book translated into English and carried on the foundation's website) mentioned that Alfred Toepfer employed Veessenmayer and Haller after the war, but only in a footnote. The sympathetic headline conclusions in this introduction did not follow from the evidence.

The lead authors claimed that Toepfer was neither anti-Semitic nor racist, failing to explain why so many of his colleagues were both of these things and why he promoted the Nazi agenda. The history stressed that Toepfer was not a member of the Nazi party, assuming that this single piece of evidence proved that he was not a Nazi. Key documents and areas of research were ignored. A paean for Nazism which Toepfer published in 1940 was not set before the reader. It included the following passage:

"National Socialism has not only permitted social justice in Germany, it has achieved it. National Socialism has not only promised an end to unemployment and the economic misery of the masses, it has achieved both these things. National Socialism has not only promised to youth and to the *Volk*, irrespective of birth or wealth, a life-embracing education, both for body and mind, it has achieved this. Thanks to National Socialism we now have *Völkisch* [racial] unity, political leadership and the formation of a general political will; we have a concentration of power without equal in German history."

After the war, British investigators found and translated a series of letters written by Toepfer in 1937. He claimed at that time that he was "close to the SS," that he was a "sponsering [sic] member of the SS" and that, in response to the desire of fellow citizens "to name me to the party, I have gladly agreed". (Despite this reported agreement, his name does not appear in known party records.) Little of the evidence given above about the subversive activities of the Toepfer foundations in the 1930s was included in the official history.



German Chancellor Helmut Kohl receives the Toepfer-funded European Prize for Statesmanship in 1991. Toepfer is on the far right

In its own defence, the foundation points out that the history does reveal the shocking fact that a branch of Toepfer's company in Poznan (Posen) supplied various goods for the German ghetto administration in Lodz. However, the fact that these supplies included slaked lime, a

product used among other things to cover cadavers, was not mentioned in the introductory chapter. Moreover, the commission's files in the Alfred Toepfer Archive, some of which I read before they were closed to me during the course of my research, reveal the severe pressure piled on the author of the relevant chapter. Professor Christian Gerlach, author of the chapter in the official Toepfer history on the firm's wartime activities in German-occupied Eastern Europe, has written recently to the Toepfer Foundation to confirm that there were "massive efforts to influence me" and "to render my text harmless (in particular by cutting it)". Further, "a thoroughly defensive attitude reigned" in the commission relating "above all to basic interpretations of the role of Toepfer".

Even the reservations about Toepfer included in the official history are characteristically ignored during the high-profile ceremonial occasions which Toepfer loved and which his children and his foundations have continued. The founder is still glorified. Greywash becomes whitewash. In 2007, Hans Mommsen praised Toepfer as a great European of "exemplary inner consistency" who showed "no trace of anti-Semitism". According to Mommsen, the objectives of the youth hostels he set up before the war were rambling and care for the environment. An illustrated celebratory volume published for the foundation's 75th anniversary in 2007 continued the glorification with the barest mentions of the Nazi past. In a collection of 75 photographs, hardly any showed the foundation's Nazi activities.

Apart from viewing its history through rose-tinted glasses, the foundation makes strange arguments. In February, its chief executive, Ansgar Wimmer, wrote to Oxford to set out its latest position. He acknowledged that Toepfer's firm supplied slaked lime to the Lodz ghetto, but he claimed that Toepfer was neither directly nor indirectly involved in the Holocaust. Moreover, Toepfer made no "overall" profit from the war. This is not only unlikely, unproven and contrary to the findings of members of the "Independent Academic Commission", it is morally irrelevant. Whether or not Toepfer's firm sold slaked lime at a profit, or whether its profit on the slaked lime was balanced by losses on other activities, does not affect his guilt. Nor is it possible for the purposes of scholarship money for Oxford and Cambridge to segregate the clean from the tainted money in the Toepfer endowment.

A further flawed pleading is that Toepfer did nothing illegal or criminal. This may well be true in terms of the Nazi legal order (though, even here, there are doubts in view of the tax-evasion charges). Since Nazi laws were so cruel and perverted, doing nothing to contravene those laws is hardly a recommendation.

Another line of argument was that the good uses to which the Toepfer endowment is now put counterbalance any past blots. Wimmer asked: "Is there a balance sheet which allows us to weigh good deeds and bad deeds against each other?" Moreover, people have the right to be judged on "the full picture". Toepfer was "one of the most remarkable and outstanding European philanthropic figures of the 20th century". In lieu of the apology which members of Toepfer's family and the foundation resolutely refuse to give, the foundation is taking actions seemingly designed to avoid rejection of its tainted scholarships by Oxford and Cambridge.

A new posting in February on the foundation's website could be viewed either as a set of overdue admissions or as a damage limitation exercise. Coinciding with the rehousing and professional recataloguing of the Alfred Toepfer Archives, the foundation issued a public statement. This recognised its responsibility to be transparent about its founder's record, and admitted many of the facts about his Nazi associations established over the past two decades. Nevertheless, it restated the conclusion of the "Independent Academic Commission" that even after 1933 Toepfer was not an enthusiastic supporter of National Socialism. It distinguished

between Toepfer's support for "individual objectives, people and organisations within the National Socialist regime", and for "cultural programmes and priorities of the Nazi regime", which it admitted, and any overall support for National Socialism itself. Moreover, it restated that Toepfer had "numerous and extensive merits".

Neither rationally not emotionally can I come to terms with the implied argument of this statement. How is it possible to reconcile the acknowledged fact that in the 1950s Toepfer employed not one but several of history's vilest criminals with the view that he was not an enthusiastic Nazi? He employed them in the full knowledge of what they had done. The foundation's position suggests a desensitisation which is all the more shocking for being unintended.

There is a very real danger that universities will undermine their basic mission if they accept funds and scholarships from institutions that continue to explain away disgraceful records. Academics characteristically feel confident that they are able to express scholarly and moral judgments without being influenced by their funders. I am considerably less sanguine about this. As Dr Robert Kaplan's study of the funding of Holocaust studies in Israeli universities has demonstrated, the source of the funding affects the opinions and the results of the research. The process of influence through money is frequently subtle and thoroughly corrosive.

In the modern world, universities rely on generous private individuals, foundations and corporations to supplement money they receive in fees and from the state. In general, the need to appeal for cash to former students and to the outside world has had very positive effects. It has made universities more innovative, more international, more accountable and better able to provide facilities and opportunities for the disadvantaged. But there also are dangers. These are particularly pronounced in certain fields of study. Notorious among them is funding for research relating to the conflict in the Middle East and into modern German history and politics.

When it comes to the study of the Holocaust, "greywashing" is more pervasive and, in my view, considerably more pernicious than crude whitewashing and denial. The official line of the Alfred Toepfer Foundation is that he was an "ambiguous" person. In its Hamburg headquarters, Ansgar Wimmer showed me a work of art which, he said, expresses its vision of its history and that of its founder. It is a chess set with both black and white pieces painted in grey.

Like one of the Holocaust perpetrators whom Toepfer employed after the war, the current leadership of the foundation uses this unfortunate colour metaphor to avoid the reality that, if ever there were crimes that were irredeemably and completely evil, they were those of Nazi Germany.

[View Full Article](#)

Michael Pinto-Duschinsky is Britain's leading academic expert on the funding of political parties and elections. As president of the International Political Science Association's Research Committee on Political Finance and Political Corruption, he has advised governments all over the world. A former Research Fellow of Merton College and Pembroke College, Oxford, he has also taught at Brunel University. He was honorary academic adviser to the Claims for Jewish Slave Labour Compensation, 1996-1999.