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TELEVISION EUNY HONG-KORAL

Brilliant documentary of a dealer in death

The world's most notorious Holocaust deniers swear by Fred Leuchter, a US designer of execution equipment. This unholy alliance began in 1988, when German-born Ernst Zündel faced criminal charges in Canada for publishing his pamphlet "Did Six Million Really Die?", in which he claimed there were no gas chambers at Auschwitz.

Testifying on his behalf was Leuchter, who claimed he had personally inspected the "alleged gas chambers" at Auschwitz and found "conclusive evidence that contradicts the alleged volume of corpses cremated in the generally alleged time frame".

David Irving, the controversial historian, would later claim it was "the Leuchter Report" that first converted him from a mere sceptic to "a hard-core disbeliever" in what Irving elsewhere refers to as "the gas chamber theory".

Leuchter is the subject of the brilliant documentary *Mr Death: the Rise and Fall of Fred A. Leuchter, Jr.*, directed by Errol Morris. (Cinemax. January 30, at 8.30pm ET. The film has also been released for video rental.)

The documentary begins with an interview with Leuchter. This is shot in a testimonial style, with Leuchter facing the camera. He explains how he came to custom-build electric chairs for US prisons, which was his primary occupation prior to the Zündel trial.

His aim was for prisoners to "have a painless, dignified, more humane execution". The basic problem, he says, is that it is nearly impossible to kill someone without causing suffering to that individual or danger to others.

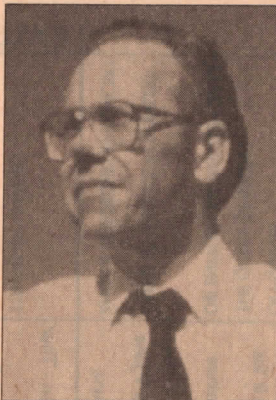
The faint of heart ought skip to the next paragraph. He laconically goes into gruesome detail about the

re-start itself. "Then they'd have to call all the witnesses back, strap the vegetable back in the chair, and re-electrocute him."

Word got around that Leuchter had a knack for designing the chairs; he was in high demand from prisons nationwide. He expanded his repertoire to include gallows and lethal injection machines. He is not sure how this happened. "What lethal injection has to do with electrocution is beyond me."

It is inexplicable how someone so cognisant of his professional limitations would come to consider himself an expert on Auschwitz.

Zündel, also interviewed for the documentary, explains why he chose



Fred Leuchter in 'Mr Death'

Leuchter to testify: "It was necessary that the expert be American, because America is the only country that [still] dispenses with people using gas."

This programme makes one horrified to realise that, regardless of one's position, capital punishment makes for unsavoury bedfellows.

Leuchter, whom Zündel refers to as "a simpleton", was offered a chance he could not resist. Leuchter was to fly to Auschwitz, all expenses paid: his first-ever trip abroad. He was to

chisel at the Auschwitz site, Leuchter had to employ lookouts to avoid arrest.

Where does one begin with the problems in this information-gathering method?

It is not even clear that the brick fragments were in fact from the walls of the crematorium; as Leuchter's own videocamera betrays, the camp has been almost entirely dismantled. The footage shows Leuchter fishing some of his samples from rain puddles.

Dutch historian Robert Jan Van Pelt asks in this documentary why Leuchter examined the rubble, instead of the meticulous records the Nazis themselves kept, which included floor plans and diagrams of pipes to carry cyanide gas into the room.

The defence hired a chemist to test the fragments for traces of cyanide; he explains that he was misled into believing that the samples were part of a case involving "an industrial accident". He shakes his head in disbelief: "Cyanide gas doesn't penetrate solids. Which was the exposed surface? I didn't have any idea."

When Leuchter himself was called to the stand in the Zündel trial, he provided his baffling, contradictory "expert" testimony (not included in the documentary). At one point on the stand, he conceded that cyanide gas might have been used in the camps, but only for "de-lousing", not for extermination. Zündel lost the case.

When Leuchter returned to the US, he became one of the most sought-after speakers on the "Holocaust revisionist" talk circuit.

Leuchter's wife left him. Prisons began to cancel their contracts for execution devices. It was then discovered that he had been practicing engineering

in Christianity? Did Hitler have a diploma in National Socialism? No, they did not, but they knew a hell of a lot about their fields."

I feel somewhat ill at ease in encouraging my readers to watch *Mr Death*, because that is probably Zündel's desire as well. Under the impression that he is now a matinee idol, he advertises the film (which was on limited release in US theatres) on his own official website.

"[Watch] the Leuchter Documentary - starring Revisionists Fred Leuchter, David Irving and Ernst Zündel. Please attend and give us your feedback about this important Revisionist breakthrough!"

What many Holocaust deniers seem to have in common is a certain deafness to irony. The only upside of this is that they cannot tell when they are being mocked, and unwittingly assist in their own exposé, such as this documentary.

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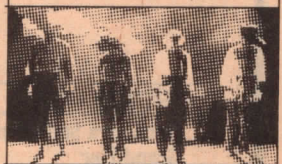
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