

Hitler, It Seems, Loved Money and Died Rich

By STEVEN ERLANGER

BERLIN, Aug. 7 — Hitler died wealthy.

According to a new German television documentary, Hitler liked money, both for the luxuries it bought him and the loyalties it ensured, and he amassed a lot of it.

In all the continuing fascination with Hitler since his suicide on April 30, 1945, in his Berlin bunker as the Soviet Army closed in, little attention has been paid, until now, to his personal finances.

Abstemious in his public image,

Hitler liked to live grandly. He paid much attention to his income from his own writing and from the copyright fees for his photographs, said Ingo Helm, a 47-year-old freelance journalist and filmmaker, who spent over a year making "Hitler's Money," which will be shown later this month on a state-owned station, ARD.

"Hitler saw himself as an unrecognized genius, and in order to change this situation he was very interested in power, money and social advancement," Mr. Helm said in an interview today, after word of his film

was made public in German media. "All this was balsam for the tortured soul of the unrecognized genius."

Hitler himself described at great length his poverty and hardship as a struggling artist in Vienna before World War I, although he had a small inheritance. His poverty embarrassed him deeply. In "Mein Kampf," from which he would make millions, he emphasized the hard struggle for existence of the "upstart" who had risen "by his own efforts from his previous position in life to a higher one," that "kills all

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Hitler, It Seems, Hungered for Money

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city" and destroys "feeling for the misery of those who have remained behind."

As the historian Ian Kershaw notes, such feelings put "into context his professed interest in 'the social question' while he was in Vienna," which turned into a search for scapegoats to explain his own destitution and social decline. It may also help explain Hitler's affection for wealth.

But Hitler also spent millions, in lavish gifts and payments, to buy the loyalty of politicians and businessmen and to keep them dependent on him, Mr. Helm said.

"Influenced by his propaganda, I thought of Hitler as someone who wasn't selfish," Mr. Helm said. "I knew he was a criminal but it surprised me to know that he was rich."

After the war, Hitler's property and assets, including a house in Munich he had built for Eva Braun, were given to the state of Bavaria by the Allied Control Commission. He had no children.

Hitler made few distinctions between his own money and that of the Nazi Party and even the state, Mr. Helm said, adding, "It was all mixed together."

In the development of his summer residence at Obersalzberg, above Berchtesgaden in Bavaria, or in the development of his own art collection, Hitler freely used state funds. Nor did he pay taxes on his income or his property, meaning that there was no overall accounting of his worth.

Much of his fortune came from royalties earned on "Mein Kampf," his best-selling autobiography and political tract, which is still banned in Germany.

But during his time as German leader, every couple who married were given a copy of "Mein Kampf" by their local community — which had to buy the book from the publisher.

According to Mr. Helm, Hitler earned some 7.8 million reichsmarks from the book alone. It is hard to give a precise value in today's currency, but the reichsmarks would be worth some \$5 to \$8 today, Mr. Helm said — a tidy sum.

In addition, Hitler's friend and photographer Heinrich Hoffmann — in whose shop Hitler first met Eva Braun, whom he married just before dying — had the sole copyright on official portraits of Hitler, which were used in government offices and on postage stamps.

Mr. Helm says he cannot prove that Hitler got a kickback on those royalties, but believes so. Original



A 1950 photograph showed the ruins of Hitler's mountain home above Berchtesgaden, where he used to receive visiting foreign dignitaries.

law limited the duration of copyright to 10 years, but Hitler personally authorized an extension of copyright to 25 years on what Hoffmann called his "photographic artwork" of the führer. "Hitler probably had a share in that income," Mr. Helm said.

Hitler also benefited hugely from contributions made by individual businessmen and the corporations themselves — much more after he came to power than before. "He wasn't simply created by big business," Mr. Helm said. "Once he was in power, big business was opportunistic," contributing large sums to what was known as "the Adolf Hitler Donation of German Industry."

From the time he became chancellor until his death in 1945, Hitler received some 700 million reichsmarks in corporate payments, Mr. Helm said — well over \$3 billion. In return, the businessmen made millions more on their investments and their war work.

There were also special funds from the state budget to which only Hitler and his close associates had access.

According to new research that comes to light in Mr. Helm's film, Hitler invested at least two million reichsmarks of his own money to accelerate the secret reconstruction of a palace in what is now Poznan, in Poland, for another führer residence. The palace had been originally built by Kaiser Wilhelm II, and by 1945 at least 20 million reichsmarks had been spent on the project.

Although Hitler died without immediate heirs, his late half-sister, Angela Raubal, had children, and there are other descendants of his mother, who live in the Waldviertel region of northern Austria.

The heirs had asked Werner Ma-

ser, a popular German historian of the Nazi period, to look into their rights. In particular, the heirs argued that copyright cannot be expropriated in the way physical property can. They wanted the royalty income.

However, the heirs disagreed among themselves, Mr. Helm said, and no lawsuit to obtain the royalties was filed.

The Hitler phenomenon remains a source of fascination, prompting a small industry in histories of the period, let alone thrillers and movies.

Most embarrassingly, in 1983, the magazine Stern fell for a set of fabricated diaries supposedly written by Hitler and paid about 10 million marks (some \$5 million), through a reporter named Gerd Heidemann, to a forger named Konrad Kujau. Stern also sold the rights to Newsweek and The Sunday Times of London.

Last year, there was another flurry of attention, this time to a more serious work of history trying to make the case that Hitler was gay. The book, "The Hidden Hitler," by Lothar Machtan, suggests that Hitler ordered the killing of several high-ranking Nazis to protect his secret, including Ernst Röhm, the head of the Sturmabteilung, or Brownshirts.

Röhm was gay, and Mr. Machtan writes that he tried to blackmail Hitler by threatening to reveal his sexuality, one reason that Hitler supposedly ordered "the night of the long knives" in 1934, when he purged more than 100 of his most embarrassing and threatening followers.

Even the Nazi persecution of gay men, many of whom were sent to concentration camps, was a function of Hitler's self-hatred and effort to disguise his own sexual preferences, Mr. Machtan argues.

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