

**Nearly 70 Years Later, a New Round of Auschwitz Prosecutions**  
**By Chris Cottrell, The New York Times**  
**10 April 2013**

BERLIN — They worked as guards at the Holocaust's most notorious death camp, and nearly seven decades later they may finally be brought to account before a court of law.

[Germany's](#) Central Office for the Investigation of Nazi Crimes has prepared a list of 50 former guards who worked at the Auschwitz concentration camp in Nazi-occupied Poland and are still alive, said Kurt Schrimm, the head of the office.

Staff members searched old court records and Holocaust-related documents looking for names, and even traveled to Poland last year to try to augment their lists. One checked the names of the Auschwitz guards against databases to determine which were still alive.

The next step is ruling out those who were already tried, either by the occupation authorities or the German legal system. "We have to determine now whether or not these 50 people that we found on this list can be legally prosecuted," Mr. Schrimm said Wednesday in a telephone interview.

The list includes names that have been known to his office since the Auschwitz trials in the '60s as well as recent additions made last year, Mr. Schrimm said.

The Holocaust and the events of [World War II](#) continue to exert a significant pull on the German psyche. The television mini-series "Our Mothers, Our Fathers," which portrayed five young friends in Germany and how World War II affected them, attracted about 7.6 million viewers for its final episode last month. Der Spiegel, the country's leading newsweekly, often has articles related to Hitler, and regularly puts an image of him on its cover.

The significant new effort to broaden the pool of Holocaust prosecutions nearly seven decades after the end of the war came about as a result of the [conviction two years ago of John Demjanjuk](#), a former guard at the Sobibor death camp. The case lowered the legal threshold necessary to win a conviction so long after World War II.

Mr. Demjanjuk was found guilty even though he was not directly linked to any specific crime. Instead the court, in Munich, ruled that his work as a guard at the camp automatically made him an accessory to any murders carried out there. It convicted him of being an accessory to the murder of all 28,060 people who died at the camp during his tenure as a guard there. He died before a higher court could rule on his appeal.

Efraim Zuroff, the chief [Nazi hunter](#) for the Simon Wiesenthal Center, welcomed the new push to bring Holocaust perpetrators to justice before they die. "We're very happy that this thing is happening," Mr. Zuroff said. "It's definitely the right thing to do. But the real test of the initiative will come when these cases are turned over to the prosecutors."

The current revelations have exposed a rift in how best to reconcile German society to the atrocities of the Third Reich. Since the Allies began trying top members of the regime in Nuremberg shortly after the war, court cases have been used to educate the public in Germany about the atrocities of the Nazi era.

As perpetrators and survivors grow older, some have called for a shift. Thomas Weber, a German historian at the University of Aberdeen in Scotland, proposed something like the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in South Africa as a way to persuade the accused to talk about their motivations for working with the Nazis. Internet forums already encourage witnesses, even collaborators, to Nazi tyranny to share long-kept secrets.

Court proceedings, while cathartic, can quickly distract from the real issues at hand. “As perpetrators are so old and frail,” Mr. Weber said, “the discussion then turns into a question over whether it’s morally acceptable to try people who have to be carried in on stretchers into a courtroom.”

Mr. Zuroff of the Wiesenthal Center dismissed the idea of truth commissions. “It’s good for countries where there’s apartheid,” Mr. Zuroff said. “Not where there’s genocide.”

Nicholas Kulish contributed reporting.

© The New York Times.