

PROTEST STIRS ADL TO RESTORE PRIZE TO AUTHOR

This past winter, the Catholic League joined with several Polish-American organizations to protest a decision by the Anti-Defamation League (ADL) to renege on granting a prestigious literary award to Richard Lukas for his book, *Did the Children Cry? Hitler's War Against Jewish and Polish Children*. The protest paid off because in the end, ADL was pressured into restoring Lukas with the Janusz Korczak Literary Award.

It all started on December 1, 1995. It was then that Carol Perkins of the ADL wrote to Lukas' publisher, Hippocrene Books, announcing the judges' decision to give Lukas the award. Lukas was to receive the literary award, plus a prize of \$1,000 on January 23 at the ADL's headquarters in New York. In her statement to Lukas' publisher, Perkins wrote that "Because many excellent entries were submitted for the competition, arriving at the final decision proved an interesting challenge for our judges." But all that was soon to change.

On January 10, the ADL's director of Marketing and Communications, Mark Edelman, wrote to the publisher stating that a "mistake" had been made in announcing that Lukas was to receive the award. Edelman explained that the ADL has "several levels of review" and that subsequent review led to a decision to reverse the initial judgment.

When the Catholic League learned of what happened, it was incensed. The league had given Lukas' book a favorable review in the December 1994 *Catalyst*, noting that *Did the Children Cry?* was "a heady tonic to the prevailing mythology that Catholics did nothing while Jews suffered." The letter is reprinted here in full:

Dear Mr. Edelman:

I have learned that author Richard Lukas was notified in early December by the ADL that he was the winner of the ADL's Janusz Korczak Literary Award. I have now learned that the award is being rescinded, just two weeks prior to its presentation. As an author myself, I find this incomprehensible. As the president of the Catholic League for Religious and Civil Rights, I am troubled by the statement that notifying Lukas of the award was a "mistake."

The Catholic League monthly journal, Catalyst, only occasionally reviews books. The December 1994 edition of Catalyst gave a very positive review of Did the Children Cry? Hitler's War Against Jewish and Polish Children, 1939-45. One of the reasons we chose to give it a favorable review was the author's interest in detailing how the Catholic Church, as well as individual Catholics, went to great lengths to help Jews during the Holocaust. We found the book to be a heady tonic to the prevailing mythology that Catholics did nothing while Jews suffered. Such misrepresentation of history only feeds anti-Catholicism and that is why we took interest in Lukas' work.

Mistakes of any kind can easily be made. But it is not an everyday occurrence when authors are notified by prestigious organizations that they are the recipient of a coveted award, only to have the award withdrawn because of a "mistake."

For the record, I would like to know exactly why the book was selected for an award in the first place. Surely there are records of this evaluation. And I would also like to know why those reasons were found unpersuasive—and by whom—at a later date.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

William A. Donohue
President

The Catholic League, as well as several Polish-American organizations, did not receive a response from the ADL until the matter was favorably resolved on March 18. But the good news did not come until considerable pressure had been brought to bear.

Before the ADL reversed its decision not to give the award, the attorney for author Lukas had already warned the ADL that it would be sued. Also, a delegation from a New York division of the Polish American Congress, led by Frank Milewski, had met with officials of the ADL expressing their concerns. Servite Father John T. Pawlikowski, a professor at the Catholic Theological Union in Chicago, also wrote to the ADL, stating that the cancellation of the award had caused "embarrassment and dismay within several Polish-American organizations that have been historically committed to improving Polish-Jewish relations."

When the ADL made its announcement to reinstate the award to Lukas, it noted that it still had several problems with the book. The ADL said that "we believe the book underestimates the extent of Polish anti-Semitism before and after World War II. We believe also that, while there were heroic efforts of some Poles during this time, the book appears to vastly overestimate the number of Poles who were engaged in such courageous actions. Finally, the ADL believes the book presents a sanitized picture of Polish involvement with Jews during the War and overlooks authoritative points of view of many historians, including Polish historians."

The ADL's new spin on the issue suggests that the Lukas volume fell short of passing the ADL's politically correct interpretation of history. That the judges saw fit to give the book the literary award in the first place put the ADL in the awkward position of having to justify its decision to renege.

Though justice prevailed in the end, this marks a sad chapter in the ADL's history. Had it not been for public pressure (and the Catholic League is proud to have been among the first to protest), Lukas would have been discredited and the important message he detailed in his book would have been ignored. We hope that the ADL has learned an important lesson and that such "mistakes" will be avoided in the future.