

Mein Kampf Infringer Aimed to Warn of Hitler Threat

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The German copyright to Adolf Hitler's *Mein Kampf* has been much in the news recently. Stories and blogs report that the copyright will expire on December 31, 2015. Unless a German court decides otherwise, anyone can legally publish Hitler's original version after that. *Mein Kampf*—"My Struggle" in English—is the 700-page work in which the World War II Nazi dictator laid out his plans for world domination and described his belief in a "master race."



Since the end of the war, Germany has relied on copyright to suppress *Mein Kampf*, deeming it too dangerous for reprinting. The copyright history of the work in the United States is no less complicated. One notable episode involves a lawsuit filed in 1939 against Alan Cranston, then a 25-year-old journalist who later served for decades as a U.S. senator from California and who ran for president in 1984. The publisher Houghton Mifflin sued Cranston in 1939 for infringing a translation of *Mein Kampf* it had published earlier that year.

Several years before, when Cranston was a student at Stanford University, he visited Munich and found himself in the same room as Adolf Hitler. "I saw this man with a glazed look of power in his face," Cranston told the *Los Angeles Times* in 1988. Fluent in German, he subsequently read *Mein Kampf*. Hitler wrote the work in 1923 and 1924 while in prison following a failed uprising, and he published it in Germany in 1925 and 1927.

In 1939, Cranston encountered Houghton Mifflin's English translation of *Mein Kampf* at a Macy's bookstore in New York City. "As I picked it up, I knew it wasn't the real book because it was



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"It created quite a stir," Alan Cranston said of his much-abbreviated "anti-Nazi" version of *Mein Kampf*. "Some Nazis went around knocking down newsstands that displayed it in Saint Louis and the German part of New York and elsewhere in the country."

CREED OF HATE

“The masses can only be captured by a ruthless and fanatic one-sided presentation of our nationalistic idea.

The dynamic force which has made the most important changes in history has always been—no scientific intellect—but rather a fanatic feeling of hysteria which has hurled the masses in one direction.

To win the soul of the people, it is not enough merely to fight for one’s own end—one must at the same time destroy the upholders of the opposite cause.

A savage attack upon some adversary is proof to

the people of the justice of their own cause.

The masses feel that if their leaders refrain from destroying an opponent, this must be a sign of uncertainty of their own cause—if not a sign that the cause is unjust.

The masses are only a fragment of nature, and their feelings cannot understand a handclasp between men who proclaim opposite views. *What they want is the victory of the stronger and the annihilation of the weaker, or else his unconditional enslavement.*”

MEIN KAMPF—Chapter XIII

Cranston wrote his own titles to excerpts from *Mein Kampf* to highlight troubling passages. A rare copy of Cranston’s translation is available in the Rare Book and Special Collections Reading Room of the Library of Congress.

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much less weighty, it was much thinner,” he recounted to the *Los Angeles Times*. When he read it, he realized that important parts had been left out, including Hitler’s plans for the world.

Alarmed, Cranston decided to prepare a translation that more accurately reflected Hitler’s intentions. He called it *Adolf Hitler’s Own Book Mein Kampf. A New Unexpurgated Translation Condensed with Critical Comments and Explanatory Notes*. With Benjamin Epstein of the Anti-Defamation League, Cranston founded Noram Publishing to print the tabloid-formatted translation proclaiming on its cover, “Not one cent of royalty to Hitler” and “Millions sold in book form at \$3; now for the first time in this popular edition at 10 cents.” Noram Publishing registered the copyright to the translation with the Copyright Office on April 19, 1939.

“It seems incredible,” Cranston wrote in the foreword, “that after having set down in writing such brutal, coldly-calculated plans, Hitler is being allowed by his fellow

Germans—and by the rest of the world—even to attempt to execute them.” Calling *Mein Kampf* the “most vital and significant political tract of our time,” Cranston stated that “every American should know—immediately—exactly what it was that Hitler said back in 1925.”

To that end, Cranston said he rescued “what is coherent thought from the midst of Hitler’s torrent of 270,000 words.” Cranston assured readers that the translation “contains every important point, every important idea Hitler presented” but “eliminated his long-winded digressions, and cut out much of the endless repetition.”

Cranston’s translation sold half a million copies in 10 days. In response, Houghton Mifflin sued, and the U.S. District Court for the Southern District of New York ruled in its favor. “No damages were assessed, but we had to stop selling the book,” Cranston said in an interview toward the end of his life. “But we did wake up a lot of Americans to the Nazi threat.”

Lorraine Tong of the Congressional Research Service served as Cranston’s legislative aide for foreign policy when he was a senator. She said Cranston’s approach to *Mein Kampf* foreshadowed his public service career. “He always had a world view,” she said, citing his efforts to stop nuclear proliferation, end the Vietnam War, reduce tensions in the Middle East, and normalize U.S.-China relations, among other initiatives. “He was also a leader in promoting human and civil rights and saving the environment for future generations. I admired his ability to focus like a laser beam to solve complex problems, often seeking practical solutions beyond party lines.”

As for the future of *Mein Kampf* in Germany, where the work has long been accessible in Nazi-era editions and online despite the prohibition on reprinting, the Institute of Contemporary History in Munich is reportedly preparing an annotated edition of it to be published there when the copyright ends. ©