

THE GERMAN SOCIETY OF PENNSYLVANIA
Friday Film Fest Series



Munich– The Edge of War (2021)
English/German with English Subtitles

February 20 | 6.30pm
Film, Food & Discussion

The German Society of Pennsylvania
611 Spring Garden St.
Philadelphia, PA 19123

Munich—The Edge of War

Director: Christian Schwochow

Screenplay: Ben Power

Based on: "Munich" by Robert Harris

Production: Andrew Eaton

Camera: Frank Lamm

Editor: Jens Klüber

Music: Isobel Waller-Bridge

Time: 131 Minutes

Cast: George MacKay as Hugh Legat
Jannis Niewöhner as Paul von Hartmann
Jeremy Irons as Neville Chamberlain
Sandra Hüller as Helen Winter
Liv Lisa Fries as Lena
Alex Jennings as Sir Horace Wilson
Ulrich Matthes as Adolf Hitler



Join us for our next Friday Film Night:

Friday, March 20 at 6.30pm

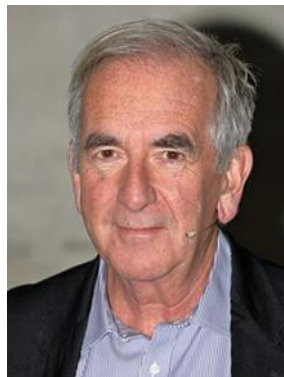
"Zwei zu eins" (2024)

German with German Subtitles

Commentary by: Karl Moehlmann

Robert Harris

Robert Harris, a British writer, is best known for his historical fiction thrillers. In 2016, he published the novel "*Conclave*" which was turned into an Oscar nominated film by Edward Berger in 2024. This film experienced a rise in popularity after the death of Pope Francis in April 2025 and the subsequent



When the bomb explodes in the Bürgerbräukeller in Munich on the evening of November 8, 1939, where Elser had placed it the column behind the speaker's podium, Hitler is unharmed because he had left the premises 13 minutes earlier due to the inclement weather. Hitler survives this and other assassination attempts.

In crafting the scene with Hitler and Hartmann, Harris implies his awareness of the entire history of failed assassinations attempts. "*Aber meine Hand wollte sich nicht bewegen*" is the utterance of an individual, but suggests the unwillingness and/or inability of Germans to liberate themselves from this "*verbrecherischen Diktator*". The generation born after the war would have benefitted from a more decisive action.

conclave that elected Pope Leo XIV.

Focusing on events around World War II and Ancient Rome his first best-seller was "*Fatherland*" in 1992, followed by "*Enigma*" in 1995, "*Pompeii*" in 2003, "*The Ghost*" in 2007 and "*An Officer and a Spy*" in 2013. Many of these books were turned into highly popular films, including the novel "*Munich*" which he wrote in 2017.

Wahrheit und Dichtung

The historic event at the center of this movie is the Munich Conference on September 30, 1938. At this summit, the United Kingdom, the French Republic and Italy agreed to allow Hitler's annexation of a part of Czechoslovakia called the Sudetenland where 3 million ethnic Germans lived. Hitler had previously questioned the legitimacy of the First Czechoslovak Republic which was created in 1918 at the end of World War I after the collapse of the Austrian-Hungarian Empire. He alleged that the government of Edvard Benes was persecuting Germans and other minorities and was seeking to gradually displace and exterminate them. Hitler ratcheted up the threat of a military intervention by sending 750 000 soldiers along the border of Czechoslovakia, supposedly as part of an army maneuver. Although Benes agreed to grant more minority rights, the Sudeten-Germans were under instruction from Hitler to refuse to compromise, thus setting the stage for the conference in Munich.

Granting Hitler the right to annex the Sudetenland is known as the infamous appeasement policy of British Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain. Many claim this agreement encouraged Hitler to plan for a much wider war a year later with the invasion of Poland. Harris portrays Chamberlain in an essentially sym



From left to right: Chamberlain, Daladier, Hitler and Mussolini

pathetic light. His pursuit of peace via the Munich agreement is seen as a stalling tactic to give Britain more time to prepare for an inevitable war with Nazi-Germany. While Chamberlain's approach is open to debate, there are other elements in this movie that are highly questionable or outright fictional.

Hugh Legat and Paul von Hartmann, are fictionalized characters inserted into the story to propel the plot and enhance the drama surrounding the conference. Hugh Legat from the British Foreign Office works as Chamberlain's private secretary. Paul von Hartmann is a translator in the German Ministry of Foreign Affairs. They met at Oxford University six years earlier in 1932 together with Paul's girlfriend Lena. Back in Germany Paul has been secretly in touch with a group that plans to overthrow Hitler.

Paul is given a copy of the so-called *Hossbach-Memorandum* that summarized a meeting on November 5, 1937 between Hitler, the military and various foreign policy officials. This memorandum was written by Hitler's army adjutant, Colonel Friedrich

Hossbach and outlines Hitler's expansionist intentions of gaining "*Lebensraum*" in the East and acting with increased speed in the arms race with the "*two hate-inspired antagonists*", Britain and France. Seen as proof that Hitler is not really interested in a peaceful settlement of the "*Sudeten-Krise*", Paul is trying to convince his friend Hugh to present the Hossbach Memorandum to Chamberlain before the latter signs the agreement with Hitler.

There are thrilling scenes of the two protagonists trying to gain access to the Prime Minister prior to the signing ceremony. But it is highly unlikely that Chamberlain was directly aware of the Memorandum. It was kept within the inner circle of German officials and not publicly known until after the war.

The dramatic license culminates when Paul finds himself alone in a room with Hitler with his hand on a gun that was given to him by the resistance. He reflects later:

*"Ich hätte ihn erschießen können. Ich war ihm so nah, ich konnte seinen Atem riechen. Ich habe die Pistole in meiner Hand gespürt, aber meine Hand wollte sich nicht bewegen.
(Weißt du warum?)
Wer gibt mir das Recht?"*

Exactly at this time, following the Munich Conference, Georg Elser, without any outside support, decided to build a bomb and kill Hitler. He reasons:

"Ich war bereits voriges Jahr (1938) um diese Zeit der Überzeugung, dass es bei dem Münchener Abkommen nicht bleibt, dass Deutschland anderen Ländern gegenüber noch weitere Forderungen stellen und sich andere Länder einverleiben wird und dass deshalb ein Krieg unvermeidlich ist."