

# Elon Musk is a mad extremist spreading poison

## Head of the Buchenwald concentration camp memorial condemns the billionaire after his endorsement of the hard-right Alternative for Germany

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, Buchenwald

**T**he head of Germany's largest concentration camp memorial has called

Elon Musk a "mad extremist" who should read up on history after the billionaire endorsed the hard-right Alternative for Germany as the country's "last spark of hope" before next month's election.

"One can only say to him, 'Take a history book and withdraw for three days, read the history book and please be quiet with the poison he's spreading'," said the historian Jens-Christian Wagner, who runs Buchenwald near Weimar, the largest camp memorial on German soil.

"I think Musk is a mixture of mad and right-wing extremist and that is particularly dangerous," he said of President Trump's ally.

Musk made his [comment about the Alternative for Germany \(AfD\)](#) last month in an editorial in the Welt am Sonntag newspaper. This month he underlined his endorsement by hosting a live chat with the party's co-leader, Alice Weidel. This week he was embroiled in a row over [a one-arm gesture he gave at a party marking Trump's inauguration](#), which some experts said was a Nazi salute. Musk dismissed the story as a "salute hoax".

Germany's election takes place on February 23 with the Christian Democrats leading the polls and Friedrich Merz widely expected to become the next chancellor. A poll this week showed the party polling at 28 per cent. The AfD and Social Democrats share second place on 19 per cent.

Wagner, in an interview with The Times, claimed the AfD was fostering hostility towards places such as Buchenwald, Bergen-Belsen and Sachsenhausen by playing down the Holocaust and accusing them of waging a "cult of guilt". He added: "That's motivating violent neo-Nazis to take action."

He said Buchenwald — which was opened in 1937 and liberated by American troops in April 1945, and where 56,000 political prisoners, repeat offenders, Jehovah's Witnesses, Roma and Sinti, homosexuals, Jews and prisoners of war were killed — was [targeted about once a week](#).

Visitors make the Hitler salute, shout *Sieg Heil*, and disrupt tours by equating the crimes in Buchenwald to German suffering at the hands of the Allies. A swastika was found carved on a table in a seminar room this week. Fifty out of 250 memorial trees planted at the site have been chopped down in recent years.

"Recently we had a case where pupils were spotted lying down in the ovens of the crematorium and photographing each other. It turned out one of the two boys was the son of a local AfD politician who exerted pressure on the school not to punish them," Wagner said. "Up to now we've not had security cameras in the crematorium for ethical reasons because it's a place where some people come to grieve. But now we're going to install cameras there too."

Wagner, who has received death threats, said that the camp was now spending €1 million a year, about a tenth of its budget, on security with eight guards patrolling the site day and night.

As Holocaust survivors fade away and social media is awash with revisionist disinformation, the camp's historical importance was stronger than ever, he argued. "These are real places of history. Soon only these stones will remain to testify. These are crime scenes and we're securing them as proof that this crime happened," Wagner said.

Among the most chilling objects in Buchenwald's archive are lampshades made of the skin of dead inmates, especially tattooed ones, as part of a practice by SS guards to present each other with gifts made from human remains. To refute doubts voiced by revisionists who said the lampshades were a fabrication of the Allies, a new forensic examination of one lampshade was commissioned using modern methods. The results were presented last year. "It's authentic," Wagner said.

The lampshades are no longer on display for ethical reasons. "They're human remains," Wagner said. However, the Buchenwald website has a photo of one on the desk of the camp commandant Hermann Pister.

Wagner, among the most outspoken of German camp directors, was unsuccessfully sued by [the AfD](#) last year after his foundation sent out a letter to 350,000 households in Thuringia before the state election in September warning them not to vote for the party.

He said he had not imagined that his job would become as political as it has, but that neutrality was not an option when a party was belittling [the Holocaust](#) and insulting the dignity of the victims.

"Ten or 15 years ago I wouldn't have dreamt in my worst nightmares what attacks the work of memorial sites are being subjected to now. What seemed like social consensus in the Noughties has become extremely brittle."

The AfD, he said, was a symptom of a broader trend that now reached into the centre of German society due to the passage of time and the rise in disinformation.

Wagner added that the outlook for the camp memorials was “not very rosy” given the political trend and pressure on government budgets. The AfD has said it will sack him if it comes to power. He said the camps were not about instilling a sense of guilt in young Germans or immigrants who carried no blame.

“It’s about democracy and respect for human rights. Looking at National Socialist crimes, especially how they came about, shows us what kind of society we do not want to live in and how quickly the path from a supposedly democratic system can lead to a brutal dictatorship. It’s a historical lesson for the future.”

“And then there is another ethical reason: as descendants or as part of the German society from which these crimes were committed, we also have an ethical obligation to recognise these crimes towards the victims.”