



Written by [Alex Newman](#) on November 7, 2013

Officials Refuse to Let Persecuted Homeschool Family Leave Germany

After sparking an international uproar recently by sending an [armed squad of police and social workers to abduct four children](#) from their loving parents over homeschooling, German authorities are again under fire in the case — this time for [refusing to allow the Wunderlich family to escape](#) the persecution and find refuge in a more tolerant country that respects parental rights. While the kids were eventually returned to their parents following the terrifying three-week ordeal, officials only reunited the family after securing guarantees that the children would be surrendered for government-approved education.



Now, the judge who signed the order to seize the four children at gunpoint — even [approving the use of force “against the children”](#) if they resisted abduction — is refusing to let the Wunderlichs leave Germany pending a hearing. In essence, the family, which legal experts say has already suffered multiple human-rights violations in the case, is being kept as prisoners against their will. While hundreds of German homeschoolers have [managed to flee the ruthless persecution](#) — fanning out all across Europe and the world — the Wunderlichs are stuck in legal limbo until at least December.

“Of course, today’s German Government isn’t teaching kids to be Nazis or carting homeschoolers off to labor camps,” said Michael Donnelly, director of international affairs for the Home School Legal Defense Association. “But many parents object to some things being taught and how they are taught on both religious and philosophical grounds. If parents can’t homeschool, what are they to do? Especially when you consider that private school curriculum must be state approved. It’s totalitarian — German judges and policymakers have their reasons, bad ones in my view, but this is a human right we are talking about. Which side of human rights does Germany want to be on?”

As *The New American* and numerous other media outlets around the world [reported](#) in late August, some 20 German police, special agents, and social workers showed up at the Wunderlichs’ home with a battering ram to grab the children, ages seven through 14. Relying on a National Socialist (Nazi)-era ban on home education, authorities claimed the parents were prohibited from educating their own kids. According to the judge, using force against the youngsters was allowed because they had “adopted the parents’ opinions” and “no cooperation could be expected.”

Apparently, only state-approved opinions are permitted in Germany. And everyone — including children — must cooperate toward that end, or face the violent wrath of the state, it seems. After being ripped from their parents’ arms, the Wunderlich kids were placed in a “group home,” where they were forced to submit to social and academic tests. According to German [media reports](#), the results showed that the children were doing well and performing above average. Still, the press reported that the family was



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sent a bill for almost \$20,000 for the coercive stay at the youth home.

As word got out about the abduction, a global scandal quickly erupted, shocking the world and deeply tarnishing the German government's international image. Following the massive outcry, German authorities finally returned the children to their parents — but only after they promised to surrender the kids to authorities for state-approved schooling with state-approved ideas at a government school. “What other choice did we have?” Dirk Wunderlich asked, referring to the under-duress agreement. “They had our children. We feel ravaged by the government.”

Obviously, neither the parents nor the children are happy about the situation, but they have few options. When father Dirk Wunderlich tried to find out if they could leave Germany, the judge [reportedly](#) told the family's lawyers that any attempt to emigrate before a December hearing would result in criminal sanctions. Even if they succeed in crossing the border, the judge vowed to have them hunted down and brought back before the court to face the charges.

The only allegation against the parents is that they exercised their internationally recognized right to educate their own children in accordance with their beliefs. “We don't want our children in school but we have no choice — we can't leave and if we don't comply they will take our children away,” Dirk Wunderlich [told](#) the U.S.-based HSLDA, which has led a global effort to support the Wunderlich family and other homeschooling victims of lawless persecution. “We will make the best of it because we know if we tried to leave, the authorities would separate us and we might never see our children again or for a very long time.”

The Wunderlich children are now forced to sit in government school for the first half of the day, followed by plenty of homework, the distraught father explained. He also noted that the kids find the situation and the school environment strange, confusing, and slow. Homeschooling is much more effective, Wunderlich continued, echoing the findings of countless academic studies showing that [homeschooled children do far better](#) on average than their government-schooled peers. “We hope with all our heart to get back to homeschooling somehow,” the father said.

Amid the fiendish and ham-handed effort to force the parents to submit the kids to government-mandated re-education, the Wunderlich parents actually lost formal custody to authorities last year. The kids were allowed to stay at home, but Dirk Wunderlich [told *The New American* magazine at the Global Home Education Conference \(GHEC\) in Berlin late last year](#) that German authorities seemed determined to smash his family over homeschooling.

Even though the unalienable right of parents to choose the education of their children is enshrined in European treaties and even the United Nations Universal “Human Rights” Declaration — drafted, ironically, in response to Nazi atrocities, including the use of “education” as a weapon to indoctrinate the population — the family knew tragedy could strike at any time. On August 29, with the terrifying raid, it did. And while the worst part — having the family torn apart at gunpoint — may be over, the pain and persecution are certainly not.

At this point, Dirk Wunderlich says his family is just trying to make the best of the situation until everything can, hopefully, be resolved. The parents hope to have full custody restored in December, possibly even sooner if officials respond to their emergency petitions, which have been ignored so far. Eventually, they want to be allowed to move to a place where the right to home education is respected. “We don't think we could do this for years, but for a few or more weeks we can,” the father explained. “Anyway, we don't really have any choice.”



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The HSLDA, which has been at the forefront helping embattled German homeschoolers, said in a [statement](#) that it will continue to support the Wunderlich family. It also continues to hope for changes in German laws to decriminalize homeschooling and respect the fundamental human rights of parents. For now, HSLDA is working with the Wunderlichs' attorney while focusing international pressure and attention on the ordeal, as well as on the broader plight of German homeschoolers.

In the United States, the organization is also working to protect persecuted German homeschoolers. Perhaps the most well-known case surrounds the [Romeike family](#), which was awarded asylum in 2010. "We can't expect every country to follow our Constitution. The world might be a better place if it did," noted Judge Lawrence Burman in his widely celebrated ruling, calling the German persecution "repellent" to everything Americans believe. "However, the rights being violated here are basic human rights that no country has a right to violate."

The Obama administration successfully appealed the ruling, claiming human rights were not violated, and is now [seeking to deport the Romeikes](#) to face more ruthless persecution in their homeland. Among other horrors, German homeschoolers can face jail time, forced psychiatric care, massive fines, and even obliteration of their families through the removal of children from their parents. Most of those who have escaped the terror fled to other European nations — virtually all of which respect the right to homeschool — but some families, including the Romeikes, have gone further in search of educational freedom.

The best solution, advocates say, would be for German authorities to start respecting fundamental human rights. "As a Federal Republic the hope for homeschooling is in the state legislatures. We need some German statesman to step up and do the right thing here," HSLDA's international attorney Mike Donnelly explained. "As a nation the culture has been hostile to homeschooling for some time. Our strategy has been to try to change that."

Noting that it is a tough job to change the mindset of an entire country — especially with a population of 80 million and a long history of conformity — HSLDA and other organizations are still hopeful that it can be done. "Americans have helped rescue the German people from totalitarianism once before, maybe we can do it again," Donnelly concluded. Still, how many more innocent families must suffer vicious persecution in the meantime remains to be seen.

Photo of the Wunderlich family with Michael Farris, chairman of HSLDA, in Berlin at the Global Home Education Conference last year

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