

OPINION

On the EDGE

An opinion column about current issues in Norway

Join the conversation!

A call for understanding, not vengeance

By Sverre Melkstavik, Norwegian student at Columbia University

Kristopher Schau is a controversial Norwegian comedian, famous not only from conventional radio and TV, but provocative stunts such as investigating whether or not a dog can distinguish the difference between a frankfurter and a man's genitalia.

As a result, Mr. Schau may seem an inappropriate commentator on the trial against Anders Behring Breivik, the man who murdered 77 people in Norway last year. Due to Mr. Schau's career as a notorious joker, he has never been recognized as a legitimate reporter. The shock of the general public was imminent when *Morgenbladet*, a humanistic, nationwide newspaper, chose to use Mr. Schau as their weekly correspondent. However, Kristopher Schau has proved that he has a deeper quality of insight, a gentle pen and an attentive presence. He urges us to listen, and to listen closely. In the name of closure he calls for understanding, rather than for vengeance.

After the first two weeks, commentators in most Norwegian newspapers report Mr. Breivik to be a deranged monster deprived of empathy and human emotion. He has, with a steady voice and calculated language, explained in meticulous detail what happened before, and during, the attack. How it was a mistake to bring diesel fuel to the island rather than petrol; it does not burn. How he justified the execution of innocent children for the cause of the greater good – his cause. The cruelty and details provided by the murderer have been so overwhelming that respected journalists even admit that they, if only for a second, thought that the death penalty might be a



Photo: Dagbladet

Kristopher Schau, comedian-turned-commentator on the trial of July 22 killer Anders Behring Breivik.

good idea after all.

Norway is a small nation still in mourning. On that beautiful summer day last year 77 lives were lost; 77 people, most of whom children, were taken before their time. How can we justify number 78?

So what do we do? How should we respond when 'the devil' comes knocking? We must begin by shedding the tabloid language. The actions of which Mr. Breivik is guilty are monstrous, but they do not make him a monster. His precise responses in the court room are perceived as ice cold and emotionless, thus the fact that he tries to cooperate soberly with the prosecutors is overlooked.

If we are ever to make this world better, we must grab our demon by the horns, battle his ideas and learn from them. What knowledge has been lost over the centuries to the justice of vengeance? What wisdom might we have learned, had we been merciful? Sun Tzu famously said in *The Art of War*; "keep your friends close, but your enemies closer." I say: keep your friends close, and your enemies alive. Only by discourse can we understand. Only by dis-

course can we learn.

Kristopher Schau, as it turns out, is a man of many talents. He is doing an authentic, lucid job referencing one of the most difficult trials in Norwegian history. Many people feel that the trial should be held behind closed doors, and that Mr. Breivik should be locked away and never spoken of again. They are afraid that exposing the case to the public gives Mr. Breivik the platform he needs to spread his venom. Mr. Schau, however, puts it the other way around. He feels that the unique

chance to understand how a man like Mr. Breivik ticks is one of few bright aspects this case has to offer. Breivik provides insight into another man's ideology. Not acceptance, but understanding. Consequently, the next time a frustrated young man is persuaded by the brown forces of fascism – or the ignorance of fundamentalism – we must be able to recognize the signs immediately, and interfere resolutely.

Mr. Schau proclaims: "Never again!" All of us, who have lost a friend or a loved one to those that turn to violence, must unite. We must stand behind Mr. Schau and from the top of our lungs shout out loud: "Never again!"

Sverre Melkstavik, born 1981 in Trondheim, Norway, is an undergraduate student at Columbia University. He spent the first decade of his adult life in the restaurant business as a bartender, manager and owner. After becoming a family man, he decided to pursue an academic career, and is currently working on a bachelor of arts in financial economics.

The opinions expressed by opinion writers featured in "On the Edge" are not necessarily those of Norwegian American Weekly, and our publication of those views is not an endorsement of them. Comments, suggestions and complaints about the opinions expressed by the paper's editorials should be directed to the editor.

good supply, as it was a rainy afternoon. Af- tacks.

say, too. "Norway announced last year that