

One

The Negationists' Challenge to Auschwitz

When the surrounding world, which remembers the Armenian atrocities (against which it could have intervened), takes offense at tortures, which required more imagination to think them up than to invent them, it gets as an answer: "Believe us, the lack of understanding that our measures often meet with saddens us all." They don't mean it like this, but always otherwise. They feel it a violation when they are thought capable of the very acts they commit. Such acts they then describe as "alleged"—a brief but efficient formula based on the resolve not to engage such things and derived from the indisputability of a political morality based on allegations of what has not happened. In order to win the incompetent a position, the pickpocket accuses the civil servant of greed, and as one prefers to send this person to a concentration camp instead [of] to the courts, the suspicion hardens that he who was so capable in his position was capable of anything. In that way the alleged becomes real, and the real alleged, and exactly marks the breakthrough to a new civilizatory type, which writers describe: that the murderer, who also lies, has not murdered, and that the very cowardice of the murder gives him a hero's stature. It is the principal camouflage which the little word "alleged" generates—the little word that crops up again and again in the comments on current events.

—Karl Kraus, *Die Dritte Walpurgisnacht* (1933)

"I don't see any reason to be tasteful about Auschwitz. It's baloney. It's a legend." These provocative words, first spoken by David Irving in 1991, were echoed nine years later in the Royal Courts of Justice in London by barrister Richard Rampton QC. The occasion was Rampton's opening statement for the defense in the libel case of *David John Cawdell Irving versus Penguin Books Limited and Deborah Lipstadt*. Continuing to read from Irving's speech, which was given in Calgary, Alberta, Rampton noted that Irving's Canadian audience had been sympathetic. There had been laughter when Irving remarked that when he was called a "moderate fascist," he strongly objected to the adjective "moderate." Irving's pronouncements about Auschwitz made clear why. Rampton quoted from Irving's lecture:

Once we admit the fact that it was a brutal slave labour camp and large numbers of people did die, as large numbers of innocent people died elsewhere in the war, why believe the rest of the

baloney? I say quite tastelessly in fact that more people died on the back seat of Edward Kennedy's car in Chappaquiddick than ever died in a gas chamber in Auschwitz.

Turning to Mr. Justice Charles Gray, who heard the case alone without a jury, Rampton emphasized the important issue of the libel case:

My Lord, this is obviously an important case, but that is not however because it is primarily concerned whether or not the Holocaust took place or the degree of Hitler's responsibility for it. On the contrary, the essence of the case is Mr Irving's honesty and integrity as a chronicler—I shy away from the word "historian"—of these matters, for if it be right that Mr Irving, driven by his extremist views and sympathies, has devoted his energies to the deliberate falsification of this tragic episode in history, then by exposing that dangerous fraud in this court the Defendants may properly be applauded for having performed a significant public service not just in this country, but in all those places in the world where antisemitism is waiting to be fed.¹

With this statement the first day of the trial came to an end.

Rampton's decision to quote one of Irving's many tasteless remarks about Auschwitz and Auschwitz survivors at the end of his short opening statement reflected the central importance of Auschwitz in the case. Irving's libel action against the American academic Deborah Lipstadt, the author of *Denying the Holocaust*, and her publisher, Penguin Books Limited, touched on a number of issues: Irving accused Lipstadt of libeling him by labeling him a Holocaust denier, accusing him of falsifying history in order to put Hitler in a more favorable light, and charging that he had stolen documents from a Moscow archive. Irving agreed with none of these accusations. In his own opening statement he submitted that Lipstadt's charge that he was a Holocaust denier was intolerable. "For the chosen victim, it is like being called a wife beater or a paedophile," Irving said. "It is enough for the label to be attached for the attachee to find himself designated as a pariah, an outcast from normal society. It is a verbal yellow star."² Both sides agreed that Holocaust denial—revisionism, as Irving calls it, or negationism, as I prefer to call it—stood at the center of the case, and both parties accepted that at the center of Holocaust denial was Auschwitz, the largest of the extermination camps.

Irving dramatized the centrality of Auschwitz to the trial during his cross-examination of myself, the expert witness for the defense for matters concerning Auschwitz. He had constructed an argument that assumed that the evidence for the function of Auschwitz as an extermination camp ought to be the presence of an underground gas chamber in Crematorium 2, and that the evidence for that gas chamber ought to be the presence of some holes in the remains of the concrete roof of that space. According to eyewitnesses, the SS had introduced the gas into the gas chambers through those holes, which connected to hollow wire-mesh columns in the gas chambers that allowed for the gas to disperse. In my own expert report to the court, I had stated that "today, these four small holes that connected the wire-mesh columns and the chimneys cannot be observed in the ruined remains of the concrete slab." However, my report continued:

Yet does this mean they were never there? We know that after the cessation of the gassings in the fall of 1944 all the gassing equip-



Richard Rampton

ment was removed, which implies both the wire-mesh columns and the chimneys. What would have remained would have been the four narrow holes in the slab. While there is not certainty in this particular matter, it would have been logical to attach at the location where the columns had been some formwork at the bottom of the gas chamber ceiling, and pour some concrete in the holes, and thus restore the slab.³

Developing a line of argumentation easily summarized by negationist Robert Faurisson's pet expression "No holes, no Holocaust," on the eleventh day of the trial, Irving offered to abandon his libel suit against Penguin and Lipstadt if I could show archeological evidence of those holes. I responded that this was impossible, as the concrete roof of the gas chamber was too badly damaged. Yet Irving did not give up, trying to get me at least to accept the principle that a causal chain existed in which the holes would prove the gas chamber, the gas chamber would prove the use of Auschwitz as an extermination camp, and the use of Auschwitz as an extermination camp would prove the Holocaust.

[Irving]: "And do you accept, do you not, that if you were to go to Auschwitz the day after tomorrow with a trowel and clean away the gravel and find a reinforced concrete hole where we anticipate it from your drawings, this would make an open and shut case and I would happily abandon my action immediately?"

[Van Pelt]: "I think I cannot comment on this. I am an expert on Auschwitz and not on the way you want to run your case."

[Irving]: "There is my offer. I would say that that would drive such a hole through my case that I would have no possible chance of defending it any further."⁴

Irving's obsession with Auschwitz was a reflection of the general negationist creed that Auschwitz was indeed the linchpin of the so-called Holocaust Hoax. The reasons for the negationist preoccupation with attacking Auschwitz are many. Here it suffices to mention the most important and at the same time most paradoxical one: the presence of overwhelming eyewitness evidence and substantial documentary evidence for the history of Auschwitz as an extermination camp.

First of all, one of the very few full confessions given by any German official involved in a key role in the Holocaust is the comprehensive explanation made by Auschwitz Kommandant Rudolf Höss. Other key figures in the Holocaust either died before the end of the war (Reinhard Heydrich), committed suicide immediately after the German defeat (Heinrich Himmler), or made less than full confessions (Adolf Eichmann). Höss acknowledged the central role of Auschwitz in the Holocaust, and he described the organization, development, procedures, and problems of the extermination program in great detail on various occasions. For example, in his interrogation at Nuremberg, Höss gave a detailed account of the numbers of Jews who had arrived in Auschwitz: 250,000 from Poland, 65,000 from Greece, 100,000 from Germany, 90,000 from Holland, 110,000 from France, 90,000 from Slovakia, 20,000 from Belgium, and 400,000 from Hungary. When asked how he could accommodate all these people in a camp designed to hold 130,000, Höss answered: "They were not supposed to be employed in work there, but they were supposed to be exterminated."⁵



Rudolf Höss (facing the camera, middle), attending to a conversation between Reichsführer-SS Heinrich Himmler (left, with glasses) and IG Farben engineer Max Faust (right, in civilian attire). Auschwitz, July 17, 1942. Courtesy Archive Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum, Oswiecim.

In an affidavit which he corrected and ultimately signed, Höss admitted that he had overseen the extermination, “by gassing and burning,” of at least two and a half million human beings—mostly Jews:

6. The “final solution” of the Jewish question meant the complete extermination of all Jews in Europe. I was ordered to establish extermination facilities at Auschwitz in June 1941. At that time there were already in the general government three other extermination camps; BELZEK, TREBLINKA and WOLZEK.⁶ These camps were under the Einsatzkommando of the Security Police and SD. I visited Treblinka to find out how they carried out their exterminations. The Camp Commandant at Treblinka told me that he had liquidated 80,000 in the course of one-half year. He was principally concerned with liquidating all the Jews from the Warsaw Ghetto. He used monoxide gas and I did not think his method was very efficient. So when I set up the extermination building at Auschwitz I, I used Cyclon B, which was crystallized Prussic Acid we dropped into the death chamber from a small opening. It took from 3 to 15 minutes to kill the people in the death chamber depending upon climatic conditions. We knew when the people were dead because their screaming stopped. We usually waited about one-half hour before we opened the doors and removed the bodies. After the bodies were removed our special commandos took off the rings and extracted the gold from the teeth of the corpses.

7. Another improvement we made over Treblinka was that we built our gas chambers to accommodate 2,000 people at one time, whereas at Treblinka their 10 gas chambers only accommodated 200 people each. The way we selected our victims was as follows: we had two SS doctors on duty at Auschwitz to examine the incoming transport of prisoners. The prisoners would be marched by one of the doctors who would make spot decisions as they walked by. Those who were fit for work were sent into the Camp. Others were sent immediately to the extermination plants. Children of tender years were invariably exterminated since by reason of their youth they were unable to work. Still another improvement we made over Treblinka was that at Treblinka the victims almost always knew that they were to be exterminated and at Auschwitz we endeavoured to fool the victims into thinking that they were to go through a delousing process. Of course, frequently they realized our true intentions and we sometimes had riots and difficulties due to that fact. Very frequently women would hide their children under the clothes but of course when we found them we would send the children in to be exterminated. We were required to carry out these exterminations in secrecy but of course the foul and nauseating stench from the continuous burning of bodies permeated the entire area and all of the people living in the surrounding communities knew that exterminations were going on at Auschwitz.⁷

On Monday, April 15, 1946, the affidavit was read out in court. Under cross-examination by American prosecutor Colonel John Harlan Amen, Höss confirmed that he had signed it voluntarily.⁸ After he was extradited to Poland, Höss provided extensive explanations of the operation of Auschwitz during his trial, wrote a long essay on the Final Solution as it

affected Auschwitz, composed his memoirs, and produced a great number of smaller essays on individual SS men with whom he had worked.

Höss was an important witness, and therefore any attempt to refute the Holocaust must engage and refute Höss. Furthermore, our knowledge of Auschwitz is based not only on Höss's testimony but also on a powerful convergence between eyewitness accounts, physical remains of the camp, the extensive building archive of the Auschwitz Central Construction Office (which survived the war), and various other archival sources. The evidence for the role of Treblinka, Belzec, and Sobibor—sufficient as it may be to come to a moral certainty about the wartime history of those places—is much less abundant. There are very few eyewitnesses, no confession that can compare to that given by Höss, no significant remains, and few archival sources.

Given this situation, negationists decided that it made strategic sense to concentrate their energies on debunking the Höss account and showing that Auschwitz could not have accommodated an extermination program. In 1982, the well-known American negationist Arthur R. Butz explained that impartial scientific, forensic, and scholarly analysis of the evidence would reveal that Auschwitz had not been a center of extermination. “It follows,” Butz argued, “that the basic tactic of the defenders of the [extermination] legend, in controversies to come, will be to attempt to make claims that cannot be tested by the normal method of placing them as hypotheses in appropriate historical context and seeing if they cohere.” According to Butz, those who maintained that the Holocaust existed despite evidence to the contrary would prefer to discuss extermination camps such as Belzec, Sobibor, and Treblinka—places of which little remained in terms of physical or archival relics and knowledge of which is largely based on witness testimony of survivors such as Jankiel Wiernik and postwar confessions of Treblinka commandant Stangl and others. “The consequence,” Butz concluded, “is that it is much easier to disprove the legend as it applies to Auschwitz than as it applies to the others.” The remains of the Auschwitz crematoria and the surviving archival sources pointed to a non-genocidal intent and use, Butz claimed. Therefore Butz declared that, confronted with Auschwitz, “the defenders of the [extermination] legend are in an impossible position.” He predicted that it would be “very easy to bring down the legend as it applies to Auschwitz and Auschwitz in turn, on account of the nature of the evidence involved, brings down the rest of the legend with it.”⁹

Butz called for an attack on Auschwitz because the evidence provided enough technical data to refute the accepted historical record (he said). Irving aimed at Auschwitz because he recognized the great symbolic value of the camp for our knowledge and understanding of the Holocaust. In a speech given at the Tenth International Revisionist Conference, organized in 1990 by the negationist Institute for Historical Review, Irving raised the question of why he and everyone else had been fooled for so long into thinking that the Holocaust had happened. His answer was simple: “We have been subjected to the biggest propaganda offensive that the human race has ever known.” The main weapon in this campaign was “the great battleship Auschwitz!” Therefore Irving adopted as his battle cry: “Sink the Auschwitz!”¹⁰ This call to arms invoked Churchill's 1941 order “Sink the Bismarck!,” immortalized in the 1960 movie *Sink the Bismarck*, which described the Royal Navy's hunt for Hitler's proudest and deadliest battleship which, as some believed at the time, could have turned the course of

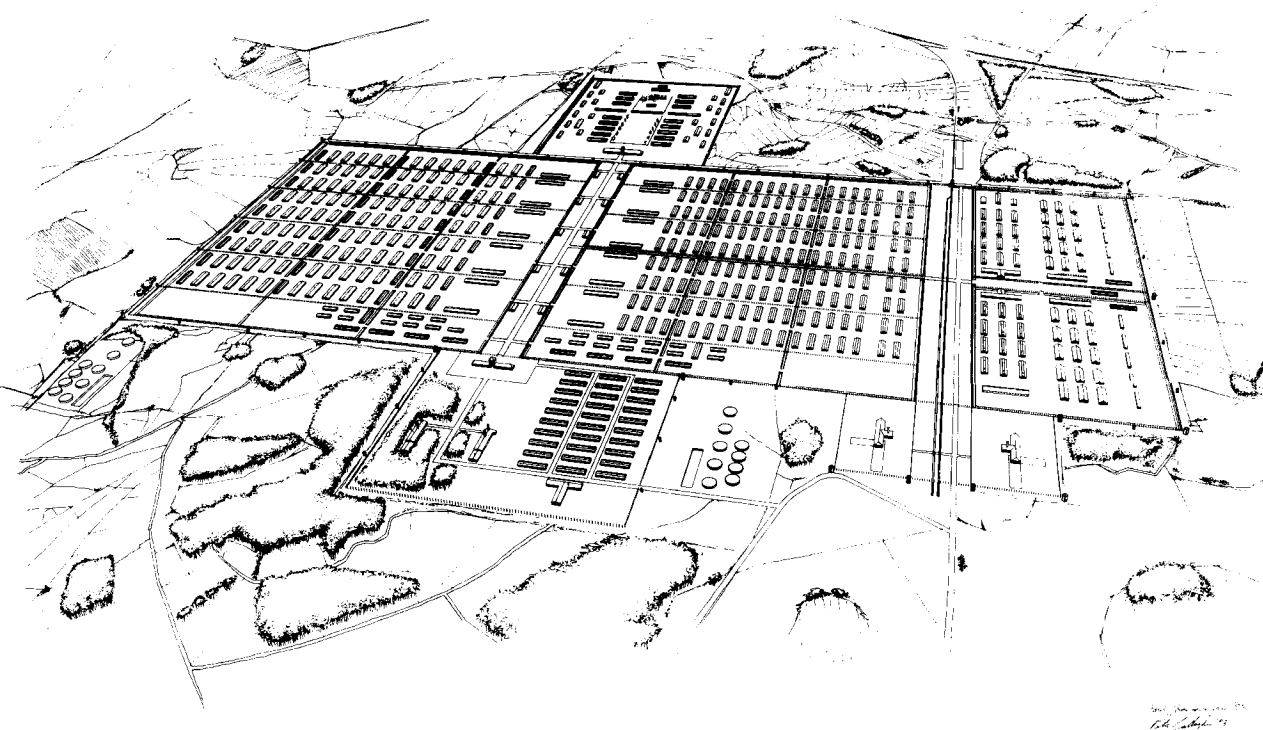
history with her eight 15-inch guns. Irving's substitution gives an inkling of the topsy-turvy geography of the negationist world, in which Jews displace Germans as perpetrators of the Holocaust and Germans displace Jews as victims.

Irving's designation of Auschwitz as the most powerful "battleship" of the opposing side reflected his appreciation for the central symbolic significance of Auschwitz. At least since 1951, when Theodor Adorno stated that "to write a poem after Auschwitz is barbaric," the word Auschwitz has become a synecdoche for the Holocaust in general.¹¹ As Hans Jonas explained, the single name of Auschwitz serves "as a blindingly concentrating lens" to gather the widely dispersed reality of the Holocaust. "Auschwitz," he said, "marks a divide between a 'before' and an 'after,' where the latter will be forever different from the former."¹² Originally formulated by Adorno, "after Auschwitz" has become a linguistic marker within philosophical and theological discourse to denote the great historical rupture wrought by the Holocaust.¹³ As Jürgen Habermas explained, "Auschwitz" changed the world because there the fundamental solidarity of all human beings was destroyed. Therefore "Auschwitz altered the conditions for the continuation of historical life contexts—and not only in Germany."¹⁴ Trying to comprehend his own experience, Elie Wiesel came to the conclusion that "Auschwitz signifies not only the failure of two thousand years of Christian civilization, but also the defeat of the intellect that winds to find a Meaning—with a capital *M*—in history. What Auschwitz embodied has none."¹⁵

Philosophers have identified Auschwitz as a historical watershed. Historians have more empirical reasons to identify Auschwitz as the symbolic center of the Holocaust. First of all, it was the site where the single largest group of Jews were murdered. According to Raul Hilberg's rather conservative figures, which I hold to be the most reliable estimate of total Jewish deaths, the Holocaust claimed 5.1 million Jewish lives. Of this number, over 800,000 Jews died as the result of ghettoization and general privation, over 1.3 million were murdered in open-air shootings, and up to 3 million died in the camps. Of these, Auschwitz had the highest mortality with 1 million Jews, followed by Treblinka and Belzec with 750,000 and 550,000 Jews respectively.¹⁶

Second, Auschwitz may be considered a symbolic center of the Holocaust because the camp became the destination of a greater variety of Jews than any other. Jews were deported from at least twelve European countries to Auschwitz; the history of Auschwitz testifies to the pan-European character of the Holocaust.¹⁷ But beyond that, Auschwitz was the place where the Germans killed many non-Jews: Romani, Poles, and Russians. These people died with Jews and died with the dead of the Jews; because of this, they give Auschwitz a particularly universal character which makes it different from Belzec, Sobibor, and Treblinka.

Auschwitz may be seen, then, as a particularly pointed attempt to destroy not only Jews but also the soul of Judaism. As the great Jewish philosopher Franz Rosenzweig reminded the generation that was to succumb in Auschwitz, the Jews were the first to understand that the son is born so that he may bear witness to his father's father: "The grandson renews the name of the forebear. The patriarchs of old call upon their last descendant by his name—which is theirs."¹⁸ Thus, God planted eternal life in the midst of the Jewish people. Rosenzweig observed how the Jewish concept of a linked sequence of everlasting life goes from grandparent to grandchild; the Jewish people know that its eternity is present in the child of its child. Because of this, Jews could forgo claiming its eternity by



Bird's-eye view of Auschwitz-Birkenau, as planned in February 1943. The view is from the west to the east. Closest to the viewer are, left to right, a sewage treatment plant, Crematorium 5 (surrounded by trees), Crematorium 4, the so-called Central Sauna with the thirty storage barracks known as Canada, another sewage treatment plant, Crematorium 3, and Crematorium 2. The railway spur connecting to the main railway corridor runs east to west to end between Crematorium 2 and Crematorium 3. On the eastern side of the camp, one can see the SS compound. The northern part of the camp, on the left of the picture, was only partly completed. Drawing by Robert Jan van Pelt, Peter Gallagher, and Paul Backewich.

means of the possession of land. In the grandchild, the Jewish nation knew itself to “begin again.” As Elie Wiesel wrote in a commentary on the new beginning Adam and Eve made after they had been thrown out of Paradise, “It is not given to man to begin.” This, so he argues, is God’s privilege. “But it is given to man to begin again—and he does so every time he chooses to defy death and side with the living.”¹⁹ This, in a nutshell, is the eternal foundation of a people which defines itself in the relationship between the old and the young. In Auschwitz, the Germans annulled this link and tried to destroy the very basis of Jewish existence: on arrival the old and the young, the grandparents and the grandchildren, were immediately sent to the gas chambers. The linked sequence of the everlasting life which, for the Jews, goes from grandparent to grandchild, was to be destroyed from the very beginning. The generation in between was allowed to live for somewhat longer in the barracks adjacent to the ramps where the selection took place, under the smoke of the crematoria. The whole camp system was designed to make fathers strangers to their sons and mothers strangers to their daughters, to set brother against brother and sister against sister. Primo Levi commented in his *The Drowned and the Saved* that in Auschwitz “almost everybody feels guilty of having omitted to offer help.”²⁰ Those whose ancestors had given the world knowledge of a God who had created a good world from nothing were confronted with the truth of Auschwitz—the revelation that “man, the human species—we, in short—had the potential to construct an infinite enormity of pain, and that pain is the only force created from nothing, without cost and without effort. *It is enough not to see, not to listen, not to act.*”²¹ Auschwitz has remained an enormous challenge to the survival of Judaism, a religion that centers on a

covenant of life between God and Abraham, a covenant that stipulates that the stronger will bear witness to the suffering of the weaker in a world that God acknowledged to be “good.”

Furthermore, and perhaps more important for those concerned with the general cultural-historical impact of Auschwitz, the camp may be considered the symbolic center of the Holocaust because it was thoroughly “modern” in its technology and organization. For Henry Feingold, Auschwitz marked the juncture where the European industrial system went awry. “Instead of enhancing life, which was the original hope of the Enlightenment, it began to consume itself.” Therefore Auschwitz was “a mundane extension of the modern factory system” in which people were the raw material “and the end product was death, so many units per day marked carefully on the manager’s production charts.”²²

As the nexus of technological prowess, bureaucratic discipline, and ideological determination, Auschwitz was not only thoroughly modern but also “civilized.” As Franklin H. Littell observed, the death camps were not planned, built, and operated by illiterate, unschooled savages. “The killing centres were, like their inventors, products of what had been for generations one of the best university systems in the world.”²³ The architect who designed Birkenau was a Bauhaus graduate. Dr. Josef Mengele had a degree in philosophy from the University of Munich and a degree in medicine from the University of Frankfurt am Main; he believed himself to be a herald of a new era. Inspired by Mengele, German dramatist Rolf Hochhuth had the camp doctor state in his controversial play *The Deputy* that Auschwitz marked the end of the old and the beginning of a new age, an age marked by the gospel that “life as an idea is dead.”²⁴

In Hochhuth’s analysis, the modernity of Auschwitz was partly embodied in the crematoria, which offered in their logical arrangement of undressing rooms, gas chambers, and crematoria ovens a carefully thought out production facility of death. Yet the modernity of this technology of mass destruction is embodied not merely in the statistics that state that the gas chambers could kill so many people in so many minutes and the ovens could reduce so many corpses to ashes in so many hours. It is also embodied in the anonymity of the killing procedure itself. Ancient German law, going back to the pre-Christian era, stipulated that sentences of death should be pronounced in the midst of the community in the open air and that the judges who had condemned a person to death should be present at the execution, which likewise had to take place in full view of the community and the gods. All of this embodied a profound sense that when humans decide to take the life of another human being on behalf of society, they inflict a wound in the created world and should accept public responsibility for this. In the modern world, issues of personal responsibility and accountability tend to become diffused. At no point has this become so clear as in the case of Auschwitz, where Jews were executed without having been subjected to a clearly established judicial procedure and where the killing itself took place hidden from the world, in (mostly) underground gas chambers.

For French historian Pierre Vidal-Naquet, the gas chambers represented more than the industrialization of death with its attendant anonymity. They also offered an epistemological shift by introducing the negation of the crime within the crime itself. Vidal-Naquet quoted the sophistry of one of the attorneys for the accused in the Frankfurt Auschwitz Trial (1963–1965), who argued that those involved in the selection of the arriving Jews were not separating those fit for work from those unfit for work; they were separating those who would be sent to replace the disap-

peared work force from those who would be killed right away. As the decision to kill all Jews had been made before, those involved in the selection ought to be considered not killers but saviors of Jews, and those throwing the Zyklon B into some innocent-looking vents were only following orders. To Vidal-Naquet, this lawyer expressed the reality of the near-disappearance of responsibility expressed in the question: “Who, then, was the killer at Auschwitz?”²⁵ The very modernity of Auschwitz—that is, the anonymity of the killing—is embodied in the uniquely modern phenomenon that has arisen from it: the fact of Holocaust denial. As Vidal Naquet noted, “The crime can be denied today because it was anonymous.”²⁶

American theologian Richard L. Rubenstein explored some other dimensions of the “modern humanitarianism” of Auschwitz. Rubenstein defined Auschwitz as the supreme example of absolute domination that, thanks to technology and bureaucracy, has become possible in the modern age. As a place which combined extermination with slave labor, Auschwitz constituted a new kind of society which allowed, so Rubenstein believes, a prophetic vision of a future increasingly confronted with the assumed problem of “surplus populations.”²⁷ Rubenstein believed that, as things are going, Western urban civilization is doomed to culminate in Necropolis, the new city of the dead. As the Holocaust was to him “an expression of some of the most significant political, religious and demographic tendencies of Western civilisation in the twentieth century,” so Auschwitz was the terminal expression of the icon of modernization: the city. “The camps were thus far more of a permanent threat to the human future than they

*Crematorium 3, Spring 1943.
Courtesy Archive Auschwitz-
Birkenau State Museum,
Oswiecim.*



Plan of Auschwitz-Birkenau, 1943. On the west side (top of drawing) are, from left to right, Crematorium 2, Crematorium 3, a sewage treatment plant (Kläranlage), the so-called Central Sauna with the thirty storage barracks known as Canada (Effektenlager), Crematorium 4, Crematorium 5, and a second sewage treatment plant (Kläranlage). Courtesy Archive Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum, Oswiecim.

(Opposite top) Arrival of Hungarian Jews in Auschwitz-Birkenau, spring 1944. Courtesy Yad Vashem.

(Opposite bottom) Auschwitz-Birkenau, 1943. Courtesy Archive Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum, Oswiecim.

could have been had they functioned solely as an exercise in mass killing. An extermination center can only manufacture corpses, a society of total domination creates a world of the living dead.”²⁸

Because not all deportees were killed on arrival, many more survived Auschwitz than any of the other death camps. Of the 1.1 million Jews who were deported to Auschwitz, some 100,000 Jews left the camp alive. Many of those survivors were to succumb during the death march to the West or during their stay during the spring of 1945 in concentration camps such as Buchenwald and Bergen-Belsen. But tens of thousands saw liberation and testified about their ordeal after the war. Some even did so during the war. The most important wartime report on the German genocide of the Jews, sponsored by the War Refugee Board, was written by two escapees from Auschwitz who described the extermination installation in some detail. Of the 100,000 gentile survivors of Auschwitz, of whom the Poles, with 75,000, were the largest group, all who could do so bore witness to the use of the camp as an extermination center for Jews.

The technology of mass destruction as it existed in Auschwitz also points to another important issue: the significance of the so-called Final Solution of the Jewish Problem as a state-initiated, state-sponsored, and state-controlled program of genocide. Like any major historical problem, there has been, is, and probably will remain legitimate disagreement among historians about various aspects of the history of the Holocaust. Yet there has been, is, and probably will remain a general consensus that the German destruction of at least five and possibly as many as six and a half million European Jews was *not* the result of countless individual initiatives taken, as Irving phrased it in 1984, by “Nazi criminals, acting probably without direct orders from above.”²⁹ The evidence of the operations of the Einsatzgruppen in the German-occupied parts of the Soviet Union, of the ghetto clearings in Poland and the subsequent mass killings in the death camps, and of the deportations of Jews from many countries over long distances to the killing centers in Poland reveals a high level of organization involving many state officials. Furthermore, Auschwitz was constructed in the middle of the war, at a time when there was a general building stop in Germany, with public funds. Many levels of the German bureaucracy were involved in the process, providing special construction permits and rationed building materials. The German state railways cooperated when it gave, after careful consideration, permission for the construction of a railway spur connecting the existing railway tracks at Auschwitz to the crematoria in Birkenau. The staged transformation of Auschwitz from a prison camp for Poles to a death camp for Jews occurred on the initiative of, and under control of, the state—primarily as it was embodied in Reichsführer-SS Heinrich Himmler in his capacity as chief of the German police.

Finally, Auschwitz is considered the center of the Holocaust because enough of the two most important parts, the Stammlager (main camp) at Auschwitz (also known as Auschwitz I) and its huge satellite camp Auschwitz-Birkenau (also known as Auschwitz II), still remain to give the visitor a sense of the nature and scale of the operation. Treblinka, Belzec, and Sobibor, which together hosted the murder of 1.5 million Jews, were small camps that were demolished by the Germans at the end of 1943. Very little to nothing of the original arrangement can be seen. Only recently in Belzec, with the uncovering of the enormous mass graves, has it become possible to acquire, at the location of the massacre, some visual sense of the atrocities that passed there.

In Auschwitz I and, more important, in Auschwitz II, the case is different. When the SS evacuated the camps, they were able to dismantle

the gas chambers and blow up the crematoria. But the Soviets found the rest of the Stammlager and Birkenau largely intact. In 1947, the Polish parliament adopted a law “Commemorating the Martyrdom of the Polish Nation and other Nations in Oswiecim,” and the minister of culture included both Auschwitz I and II in the new Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum.

Given the many remains of the death camps—the guard towers, the barbed-wire fences, the gatehouse, the tracks, the barracks, the ruins of the crematoria, and so on—it is not surprising that in a largely visual culture dominated by photography, film, and television, the landscape of Auschwitz has become an icon of the Holocaust. Alain Resnais and Jean Cayrol’s magnificent 1955 movie *Night and Fog* was largely shot in and around Birkenau. The opening scenes showed the banal, seemingly innocent fields around the camp. Their filming of the remains at Birkenau allowed the horror to slowly emerge from the midst of banality. As the camera pans the empty barracks in Birkenau, the narrator immediately warns us not to take the image of the present for the reality of the past. “No description, no picture can restore their true dimension: endless, uninterrupted fear. . . . We can only show you the shell, the shadow.”³⁰

Resnais tried to evoke an impression of the deportations by filming what remained of the deportees in the showcases of the museum at Auschwitz I. As he films their contents, the narration, which until then has so quietly recalled and probed, becomes halting, as the unimaginable and unspeakable is brought home. Finally it stops—as if there is nothing more to say about the world of the camp. Resnais constantly returns with his camera to the fields of Birkenau, and with every scene he confirms the factuality of the events that happened there and the centrality of Auschwitz for the modern understanding of the world. Revolutionary in its visual language and brilliant in its counterpoint of image and sound, past atrocity and present landscape, *Night and Fog* simultaneously established and confirmed the central role of the landscape of Auschwitz in the modern imagination of atrocity.

All of this combined in what Irving labeled “the battleship Auschwitz” that had to be sunk if the negationists were to convince the world that the Holocaust was, in the words of Butz, “The Hoax of the Twentieth Century.” Irving was right. Because of its symbolic significance, Auschwitz was, is, and will remain the crucial battleground.

Irving’s obsession with Auschwitz also carried a personal if not an existential dimension. In 1988, a quick perusal of an engineering study of the Auschwitz crematoria was the occasion for Irving’s turn to negationism, which in turn had made him into a protagonist in Lipstadt’s *Denying the Holocaust*. In his opening statement for the defense at Irving’s libel case, Rampton summarized the circumstances of that fateful conversion.

So, my Lord, I pass on to Mr Irving and Holocaust denial. Between the publication of the first edition of *Hitler’s War* in 1977 and its second edition in 1991, Mr Irving’s views about the Holocaust underwent a sea change. In the 1977 edition he accepted it as an historical truth in all its essentials, systematic mass murder of Jews in purpose-built extermination factories, but in the 1991 edition all trace of the Holocaust in this sense had disappeared. Auschwitz, for example, has been transformed from a monstrous killing machine into a mere slave labour camp.

What are the reasons for this astounding volte-face? The

principal reason can be expressed in one word: Leuchter. In 1988 a man of German origin, Ernst Zündel, was put on trial in Canada for publishing material which, amongst other things, denied the existence of homicidal gas chambers at Auschwitz. In defence of this charge, Mr Zündel's lawyers recruited a man called Fred Leuchter, who seems to have made his living as some kind of consultant in the design of execution facilities in the USA. Mr Leuchter was duly dispatched to Auschwitz to seek evidence of the use, or otherwise, of homicidal gas chambers. He took some samples from various parts of the remains of Auschwitz which he later had analysed in America and then wrote a report describing his findings and summarizing his conclusions. These were that there were never any homicidal gas chambers in Auschwitz.

Unfortunately for Mr Zündel, Mr Leuchter's report was declared inadmissible by the Canadian judge on the grounds that Mr Leuchter had no relevant expertise.

Now it happened that Mr Irving also gave evidence for Mr Zündel at that trial. In the course of that visit he had read the Leuchter Report. Shortly thereafter he declared himself convinced that Leuchter was right and that there were never any homicidal gas chambers at Auschwitz. So enthused was he by the Leuchter Report that he published it himself in this country, with an appreciative foreword written by him and introduced it to the public at a press conference in London, at which he declared that the validity of Leuchter's laboratory reports was unchallengeable.

So it was that the Leuchter Report became the main weapon in Mr Irving's campaign to "Sink the Battleship Auschwitz," as he calls it. The essence of this campaign is that the Holocaust symbolized by Auschwitz is a myth, legend or lie, deployed by Jews to blackmail the German people into paying vast sums in reparations to supposed victims of the Holocaust.

According to Mr Irving, the Leuchter report is "the biggest calibre shell that has yet hit the battleship Auschwitz" and has "totally exploded the legend." Unfortunately for Mr Irving, the Leuchter Report is bunk, and he knows it.³¹

The Zündel trial and its aftermath turned out to be a watershed in Irving's life. With his endorsement of Leuchter's conclusions he lost his standing in the community of historians. Before 1988, Irving was known mainly as the author of mostly well-written but controversial historical studies of the Third Reich. His books appeared under the imprint of respected houses such as Viking, Macmillan, Cassell & Company, Simon & Schuster, and Hodder & Stoughton and received accolades from other historians. After 1988, Irving came to be seen as the rabble-rousing speaker at gatherings of the extreme right who ended up accused and convicted in German and French courts, a man who rapidly turned into a pariah of the historical community. It is clear from a study of the evidence that Irving is largely to blame for his own fate. He did not embrace negationism in the rush of the moment but accepted it deliberately, after a long period of gestation. To understand Irving's journey to the Royal Courts of Justice, it is necessary to sketch the outline of his intellectual biography.

David John Cawdell Irving was born in Britain in March 1938, the month that Hitler annexed Austria. His father served as a naval officer on the Murmansk convoys. He survived the sinking of the ship in which he

*The ruined chimneys of
Auschwitz-Birkenau.
Photo by Rod Shone.*

served, but he never returned home. His mother, a commercial artist, raised David and his three siblings in strained circumstances. Already at grammar school, Irving showed his desire to achieve notoriety when, awarded a book as a school prize, he asked for Hitler's *Mein Kampf*. After a short stint at the University of London, he left for Germany to work in a Thyssen steel mill. There he rose to the position of third smelter and perfected his German and for the first time encountered in the stories of his fellow workers a German perspective on the Second World War—one that defined the Germans not as perpetrators but as victims. One of them came from Dresden and told Irving about the Allied fire-bombing of that city in February 1945. His story proved a catalyst, and Irving decided to write a history of what he had come to see as a major Allied war crime. Published in 1963, Irving's well-written *The Destruction of Dresden* not only became a best-seller but its allegation that the bombing of the city was "the biggest single massacre in European history"³² gained him access to Germans who, after 1945, had chosen to remain out of the public eye. These Germans were happy to share with Irving their memories and some old documents which they had kept under lock and key since 1945. As a result, Irving gained among professional historians the enviable reputation for finding hitherto unavailable historical material. Irving, in turn, developed a profound disdain for the work of other historians, whom he accused of intellectual incest because they copied each other's conclusions without bothering to dig up new evidence. In quick succession Irving published, among other books, the memoirs of Field Marshal Wilhelm Keitel (1965), a history of the Nazi atomic research program (1967), a biography of Air Force Field Marshal Erhard Milch (1973), and a biography of Field Marshal Erwin Rommel (1977). Irving's friendship with Hitler's SS adjutant Otto Günsche proved fateful. Günsche introduced him to many members of Hitler's staff: his adjutants such as Karl-Jesco von Puttkamer, Gerhard Engel, and Nicolaus von Below; secretaries such as Traudl Junge and Christa Schroeder; servants; and many others. These people who had lived very close to Hitler trusted Irving as a sympathetic Englishman who had no anti-Nazi axe to grind, and they entrusted him with their diaries and private papers.

After more than a decade of research, Irving published his massive *Hitler's War* (1977). Written in a gripping narrative style, *Hitler's War* was very different from the dry studies that preceded it. The first sentence effectively set the tone. "Late on the evening of September 3, 1939, Hitler exchanged the elegant marbled halls of the Chancellery for the special train, Amerika, parked in a dusty Pomeranian railroad station surrounded by parched and scented pine trees and wooden barrack huts baked dry by the central European sun."³³ Showing a keen eye for the texture of life, Irving wrote the book in the style of a historical novel. It read as if he had somehow crawled into the skins of the main protagonists—a quality that does not surprise because Irving relied heavily on the interviews, diaries, and memoirs he had obtained from the members of Hitler's inner circle. The general public loved it. Professional historians were not enthusiastic. True, many praised Irving's energy in turning up new sources, and some welcomed it because *Hitler's War* offered an absolutely original perspective on Hitler's career as a military leader. But most historians were deeply troubled by the fact that Irving had uncritically accepted as truth the views of those who had a vested interest in putting Hitler in the best possible light. The result resembled the account of his life during the war that Hitler never came to write.

Irving's sympathy for Hitler led to what most reviewers considered the offensive core of *Hitler's War*: Irving's theory that the Holocaust had been initiated behind Hitler's back by men such as Reichsführer-SS Heinrich Himmler, SS-Obergruppenführer Security Police Chief Reinhard Heydrich, and Gauleiter Artur Greiser. In the introduction to the book, Irving raised this theory in the context of his attempt to "expose the 'unseaworthiness' of many current legends about Hitler." The "most durable" legend concerned Hitler's involvement in the extermination of the Jews. Irving proposed that the killing had been ad hoc, "the way out of an awkward dilemma, chosen by the middle-level authorities in the eastern territories overrun by the Nazis—and partly a cynical extrapolation by the central SS authorities of Hitler's anti-Semitic decrees." Hitler had aimed only to deport the Jews to the East, but the Germans there were unable to deal with the arrival of many Jews in the already overcrowded ghettos. "Partly in collusion with each other, partly independently, the Nazi agencies then simply liquidated the deportees as their trains arrived, on a scale increasingly more methodical and more regimented as the months passed."³⁴

According to Irving, these massacres happened not only without Hitler's permission but even in violation of Hitler's express wish that the Jews be spared. To support this assertion, he provided rather flimsy arguments such as the notion that as a pragmatic politician, Hitler would not have approved of moving "millions of Jews" to the East with the single purpose of killing them there, "nor would he willingly destroy manpower, for which his industry was crying out."³⁵ Significantly, *Hitler's War* contained only two photos. One showed what Irving described in the introduction as the "incontrovertible evidence"³⁶ for Hitler's alleged protection of the Jews. It is a facsimile page from Himmler's phone log of November 30, 1941. That day Himmler was at Hitler's headquarters. In Himmler's Gothic handwriting the log recorded that at 1:30 P.M. Himmler had called Heydrich in Prague. The topic of discussion: "Jew transport from Berlin. No liquidation."³⁷ Irving did not transcribe Himmler's log entry but wrote as a caption "at 1:30 P.M. the SS chief telephones Heydrich in Prague from Hitler's bunker in the Wolf's Lair, ordering that there was to be 'no



David Irving, author of Hitler's War. Photo by Ted Bath. Courtesy The Times.

liquidation' of Jews."³⁸ It is important to note that the phone log referred to a "Jew transport" (singular), not to "Jew transports" (plural). In the main narrative Irving wrote that "on November 30, 1941, [Himmler] was summoned to the Wolf's Lair for a secret conference with Hitler, at which the fate of Berlin's Jews was clearly raised. At 1:20 pm Himmler was obliged to telephone from Hitler's bunker to Heydrich the explicit order that Jews were *not to be liquidated*."³⁹ By changing the wording of Himmler's phone log of November 30, Irving conveyed the impression that Hitler had intervened on behalf of the Jews and had "obliged" Himmler to call the operation off.

While Irving tried to lift the burden of guilt from Hitler's shoulders, misquoting evidence to make his point, he did not deny that the Holocaust had occurred. To the contrary: he made a number of references to the role of Auschwitz as an extermination camp. Writing about the spring of 1942, Irving stated that the Germans began to round up Jews in France, Holland, Belgium, and Slovakia to send them to Poland. "Upon arrival in Auschwitz and Treblinka, four in every ten were pronounced fit for work; the rest were exterminated with a maximum of concealment."⁴⁰ The major reason for that concealment, as Irving argued in the next few lines, was to dupe Hitler. "The concealment was almost perfect, and Himmler's own papers reveal how he pulled the wool over Hitler's eyes."⁴¹ Writing about the Hungarian Action in 1944, when more than 400,000 Jews were deported to Auschwitz, Irving noted that "in Auschwitz, the defunct paraphernalia of death—idle since late 1943—began to clank again as the first trainloads from Hungary arrived."⁴² Yet this time the policy of concealment was to fail. "Himmler's ghastly secret was coming out, for two Slovak Jews had escaped from Auschwitz extermination camp, and their horrifying revelations were published in two reputable Swiss newspapers in early July."⁴³ At this time Irving accepted that Auschwitz had been an extermination camp. He was to reverse himself eleven years later.

If Irving had hoped that *Hitler's War* would earn him the respect of the historical establishment, he must have been disappointed. Hugh Trevor-Roper, Regius Professor of Modern History at Oxford, praised Irving's "indefatigable scholarly industry" and then launched into an attack on Irving's method, concluding that Irving's judgment could not be trusted. Trevor-Roper observed that Irving's discussion of Hitler's attitude toward the Jews was highly implausible. The Himmler phone log of November 30 did not refer to the liquidation of Jews in general but to the liquidation of one transport. Trevor-Roper rightly observed that "one does not veto an action unless one thinks that it is otherwise likely to occur." Irving's argument showed his greatest fault as a historian: "He seizes on a small but dubious particle of 'evidence'; builds upon it, by private interpretation, a large general conclusion; and then overlooks or re-interprets the more substantial evidence and probability against it. Since this defective method is invariably used to excuse Hitler or the Nazis and to damage their opponents, we may reasonably speak of a consistent bias, unconsciously distorting the evidence."⁴⁴

In Germany, Martin Broszat, director of the Institute for Contemporary History in Munich, published a devastating 36-page critique in his institute's quarterly; and in the United States, Charles W. Sydnor, Jr., undertook considerable original research before demolishing *Hitler's War* in a 30-page review that not only claimed that "an inflexible bias is the shaky foundation of Mr. Irving's revisionist edifice" but also judged Irving's claim to have surpassed all earlier scholarship on Hitler as "pretentious twaddle." Concerning Irving's reliance on his conversations with Hitler's

staff, Sydnor concluded that “Mr. Irving’s mining efforts have yielded more lead than gold.” The collective testimony of those who had served Hitler on a day-to-day basis in no way provided the foundation for a “credible revisionist argument about what he did or did not know, order, do.”⁴⁵

If *Hitler’s War* generated the indignation of professional historians, it attracted the sympathetic attention of negationists. Until the publication of *Hitler’s War*, no historian of reputation had come even close to their views. They recognized in Irving a kindred spirit who could lend their case legitimacy, and they actively began to cultivate him as a fellow traveler. In 1980, Irving received his first invitation to speak at a negationist conference.⁴⁶ Irving was apprehensive. A condition of his participation would be not having to share the same platform with notorious negationists such as Arthur Butz. “This is pure Realpolitik on my part,” he admitted in a letter to the conference organizers. “I am already dangerously exposed, and I cannot take the chance of being caught in Flak meant for others!”⁴⁷ Irving was not (yet) prepared to be associated too publicly with well-known negationists, particularly because he aimed to establish his own right-wing political party. He was, however, quite willing to establish an ongoing commercial relationship with negationists by granting the Institute for Historical Review the right to distribute his books. While projecting toward the outside world an image of success, with a flat in Mayfair and a Rolls-Royce, Irving was having financial difficulties and was in need of help.

In 1983, Irving finally agreed to attend the annual conference of the Institute for Historical Review. His political ambitions had been thwarted, so he had greater freedom to associate with whomever he wished. But, perhaps most important of all, Irving’s confidence was buoyed by the reaction to his highly visible role in the debunking of the Hitler diaries as forgeries. Endorsed as authentic by eminent British historian Lord Dacre (Hugh Trevor-Roper), prominent American historian Gerhard Weinberg, and German scholar Eberhard Jäckel, the diaries were scheduled to be published by the German magazine *Der Stern*, the British *Sunday Times*, the American *Newsweek*, the French *Paris Match*, and several smaller journals. Resisting the tide, Irving maintained that the diaries were fake. His conviction derived from the fact that he knew the collection from which the diaries had come as one riddled with forgeries. In fact, he was in possession of copies of many of these fakes. Editors of magazines who had missed the scoop of the Hitler diaries and who had a vested interest in protecting their own circulations by showing that they were not genuine courted Irving as never before. It made him a lot of money. More important, in a remarkable *coup de théâtre*, the Hitler diaries affair had allowed him to appear as a prophet of truth. On Monday April 25, one of *Der Stern’s* competitors, the *Bild Zeitung*, smuggled Irving into the *Der Stern* press conference to announce the discovery. In his *Selling Hitler*, Robert Harris described what happened when David Irving leapt to the microphone in the center of the hall to announce that the diaries had come from a source that mostly yielded forgeries.

“Reporters stormed towards me,” recalled Irving, “lights blazing, and microphones were thrust at me.” A Japanese film crew was trampled in the rush and a fist fight broke out. Chairs and lights were scattered as chaos rippled across the crowded floor. From the platform, Koch shouted that Irving should ask questions, not make speeches. Irving’s microphone was switched off. But it was too late. Irving challenged *Stern* to say whether the

diaries' ink had been tested for its age. There was no answer. "Ink! Ink!" shouted some of the reporters. "Torpedo running," whispered Irving to one of the journalists sitting next to him as he sat down. The local NBC correspondent approached and asked if he would leave immediately to take part in a live link-up with the *Today* show, now on the air in America. Irving agreed. "All most exhilarating," he noted, "and I left a trail of chaos behind me."⁴⁸

Irving carried the day and earned tens of thousands of dollars from the media, which was clamoring for his story. His vindictive and very public triumph over Trevor-Roper, who had so fiercely criticized *Hitler's War* six years earlier, reinforced his neurotic sense of pride and his grandiose sense of self-importance. Recalling the event five years later, the man who took pride in being an outsider without a title admitted that it gave him an incredible pleasure to see important people—the doctors, professors, and lords of this world—with "egg on their face."⁴⁹

The *Der Stern* press conference marked a turning point in Irving's career, but he undercut some of the credit he had won when, several days later, he changed his mind and declared the diaries to be authentic. This disclosure brought him to the front page of *The Times*, but a few weeks later the forensic investigations of the ink and paper, which Irving had advocated, definitively proved that Irving had originally been right and that the diaries were a postwar forgery. As a result, he was to be remembered as the first person to declare the diaries to be fake and the last person to declare them authentic.⁵⁰ But while the outcome for his professional reputation was mixed, the Hitler diaries affair seems to have emboldened him, and the earlier caution he had shown in mixing with negationists began to disappear. Speaking later that year at the annual conference of the Institute for Historical Review, Irving was willing to share a platform with well-known negationists such as French academic Robert Faurisson and German judge Wilhem Stäglich.

David Irving at Stern press conference, 1983. Courtesy Stern.



If his hosts expected a repetition of the excitement Irving had generated on April 25, they must have been disappointed. Yet his rambling speech was revealing. At the beginning, Irving freely admitted that he conducted his activity as a historian with a keen eye to the publicity he could receive. "I have at home . . . a filing cabinet full of documents which I don't issue all at once," Irving told his audience. "I keep them; I issue them a bit at a time. When I think my name hasn't been in the newspapers for several weeks, well, then I ring them up and I phone them and I say: 'What about this one, then?'"⁵¹ He mentioned that his collection contained not only genuine documents but also forgeries, which allowed him to launch a curious description of his role in the Hitler diaries affair. After a preview of some of the controversial elements in his forthcoming Churchill biography, Irving turned to his *Hitler's War* and the violent response it had generated in Jewish circles. He repeated his opinion that Hitler had ordered the resettlement of the Jews in the East and that he suspected that the atrocities that befell the Jews there were the result of initiatives taken by "local criminals on the spot." He admitted that he could not prove his thesis. "I haven't gone into that, I haven't investigated that particular aspect of history but from the documents I have seen, I've got the kind of gut feeling which suggests to me that that is probably accurate."⁵² Such remarks must have been none too welcome to most of those present, but the comparison he subsequently developed must have been more acceptable. The fate of the Jews in the East was no different from that of the Palestinians in Sabra and Chatilla. "Isn't it right for Tel Aviv to claim now that David Irving is talking nonsense and *of course* Adolf Hitler must have known about what was going on in Auschwitz and Treblinka, and then in the same breath to claim that, *of course*, our beloved Mr. Begin didn't know what was going on in Sabra and Chatilla. You can't have one without the other; rather like a horse and carriage."⁵³ Irving's conclusion was that Hitler had been "so busy being a soldier that he didn't really pay too much attention to what crimes may or may not have been going in various far-flung parts of the Reich." To which he added: "I'm not going to go into the controversy here about the actual goings-on inside Auschwitz, or the other extermination camps or concentration camps." Immediately after declaring that he did not want to engage Auschwitz, he stated that he had been "deeply impressed by Mr. Friedrich Berg's lecture earlier this afternoon."⁵⁴ The thesis of Berg's lecture had been that accounts of the alleged diesel gas chambers at Belzec, Sobibor, and Treblinka were false, because it was hard to imagine "a more hideously clumsy, and inefficient, method of committing mass-murder." Hence "the Diesel gas chamber claim is rubbish."⁵⁵ Irving was cautious, he admitted, because he was being watched and risked a total boycott by the American publishing industry. "I am right out in the front line. The artillery fire is beginning and the shot and shell are falling all 'round me."⁵⁶

Irving did not explicitly embrace negationism at the 1983 conference, but the occasion was to have far-reaching consequences: it marked his first encounter with hard-core negationist Dr. Robert Faurisson. That meeting began a process that would lead to Irving's 1988 endorsement of the Leuchter Report and, twelve years later, culminate in the libel trial in the Royal Courts of Justice.

Faurisson was a one-time lecturer in French literature at the University of Lyons-2. He had emerged from a school of literary interpretation known as New Criticism. This school went back to the early 1940s, when two prominent American critics, Monroe C. Beardsley and William Kurtz



Robert Faurisson, 1988. Courtesy Canadian Jewish News.

Wimsatt, proposed that the contemporary approach of interpreting poems in their autobiographical, historical, political, or cultural contexts was bankrupt. Instead, a critic should read a poem as a verbal icon—an autonomous verbal structure—and foreclose any appeal to history, biography, or cultural context. Even the poet's intention did not matter when judging a poem.⁵⁷ French student of literature Robert Faurisson adopted Beardsley and Wimsatt's ontologically grounded aesthetic isolationism but abandoned its pragmatic aim to encase it in a particularly dogmatic set of rules. His "Ajax method" (because "it scours as it cleans as it shines"), centered on the proposition that while words may have more than one meaning if taken in isolation, they acquire one specific meaning only within a text. And while texts may generate different responses, this does not mean that they have different meanings. In short: "Texts have only one meaning, or no meaning at all."⁵⁸ Refusing to consider any external evidence, the only access to truth was now to be through Faurisson's own technique of textual exegesis.

Faurisson's work would have remained a footnote in the history of postmodern literary theory if not for his desire to apply the "Ajax method" to the study of history. It was, at first sight, a natural extension of his activities. "The historian works with documents" declared a nineteenth-century French handbook on historical methodology in its opening sentence. And it concluded its opening paragraph with the succinct formula: "No documents, no history"⁵⁹—an adage which, incidentally, would inspire Faurisson to coin his own maxim: "No holes, no Holocaust." Langlois and Seignobos's classic *Introduction to the Study of History* (1897) stressed the importance of a critical approach to documents because "criticism is antagonistic to the normal bent of the mind."⁶⁰ Writing in a time which clearly remembered how historians cultivated an "empty and pompous species of literature which was then known as 'history,'" ⁶¹ Langlois and Seignobos pressed their case that historians should not make easy assumptions about documents written a long time ago by people who may have used language differently.⁶² But they also wrote that contemporary documents could be taken at face value. Ignoring Langlois and Seignobos's observation that it was not necessary to apply the most rigorous internal criticism to contemporary documents because the author and the historian shared language and outlook, Faurisson condemned historians who habitually failed to "attack" the documents they were using and instead tried to fit those texts into their various contexts.⁶³ In other words, historians sinned against the ground rule of Faurisson's theory of criticism, seemingly justified by Langlois and Seignobos, that nothing should distract from the exegesis of the sacrosanct "word on the page."

Faurisson's attempt to apply his rule of textual exegesis to history was ill founded. First of all, it was a clear example of the kind of hypercriticism against which Langlois and Seignobos had warned. "There are persons who scent enigmas everywhere, even where there are none. They take perfectly clear texts and subtilise on them till they make them doubtful, under the pretext of freeing them from imaginary corruptions. They discover traces of forgery in authentic documents."⁶⁴ Applied without restraint, hypercriticism destroyed the possibility of history.

Furthermore, Faurisson's approach very clearly departed from Beardsley and Wimsatt's own method of exegesis, which applied only to poetry because in poems "all or most of what is said or implied is relevant." For the interpretation of "practical messages," the critic had to "correctly infer the intention."⁶⁵ However, Faurisson had no qualms about launching his theory of literary criticism into a colonizing drive beyond the boundary of

the poetic to treat historical texts as merely rhetorical, purely discursive operations that have no link to external evidence.

Faurisson was not the only one to dissolve the boundary between literature and history. In fact, a whole school arose which, under the banner of New Historicism, began to apply the lessons of adherents of New Criticism to the discourse of history. The new historicism claimed that the materials of historical investigation—chronicles, correspondence, bills, minutes, memoirs, court proceedings, eyewitness testimonies, and so on—were at an ontological level not different from, for example, poetry. Fair enough. Yet they also charged that the accounts historians wrought from those elements—their “histories”—were no different from poems or novels or epics. In effect, they erased the fundamental distinction between fact and fiction—a distinction that had in a rough-and-ready fashion defined the boundary between history and literature since the ancient Greeks.

Faurisson could be seen as just another exponent of post-structuralist historiography if not for the fact that he attempted to apply this theory to a unique ideological agenda. To be sure, many in the New Historicist camp had a mission of their own: to challenge the dominant understanding of history as just another hegemonic discourse. The New Historicists aimed to create a place in history for the hitherto repressed—that is, everyone who was not white, straight, or male. In other words, by dissolving “History” into “histories,” they tried to reveal new riches hitherto suppressed under the totalitarian discourse that centered on a Whig interpretation of history as progress. Faurisson, however, had a different axe to grind: he did not desire to make our reading of the past more inclusive. To the contrary: he aimed to narrow history by scouring the Holocaust from the record. If the champions of New Historicism intended to increase the truth content of history by allowing different and contradictory “truths” to float simultaneously, Faurisson desired to use the same technique to debunk a central truth of contemporary history as a lie.

In this mission, Faurisson was inspired by another French ideologue, Paul Rassinier.⁶⁶ Born in 1906, Rassinier had been a communist in his youth, but he was expelled from the party in 1932. A pacifist in the 1930s, Rassinier applauded the Munich agreement. He served in the French army in 1940, joined the French Resistance in 1942, and edited the clandestine magazine *La Quatrième République*. Arrested on November 29, 1943, by the Gestapo, he was deported to the concentration camp of Buchenwald in January 1944. After a period of quarantine there, he was brought to the concentration camp at Dora-Mittelbau, where he was imprisoned for fourteen months.

When Rassinier entered the camps he saw no basic difference between the democratic West, National Socialist Germany, and communist Russia, between the First World War and the Second. He was simply not prepared to acknowledge that the National Socialist regime was different or that its concentration camps were unique. “The problem of the concentration camps was a universal one, not just one that could be disposed of by placing it on the doorstep of the National Socialists.”⁶⁷ Rassinier believed that the horror of camp life was the result not of German policies but of the common practice, found in every country, of letting trusted inmates, who were referred to in the French penitentiary system as *Chaouchs*, run the prison on behalf of the jailers. “From morning to night, our *Chaouchs*, throwing out their chests, plumed themselves on the power that they said that they had to send us to the *Krématorium* for the least indiscretion and with a single word.”⁶⁸ According to Rassinier, the SS kept a distance and were even ignorant of what happened inside the camp. If they had involved

themselves with the day-to-day lives of the inmates, the situation would have been better.⁶⁹ After having formulated the thesis that the SS was really not in control and that all the horror of inmate life was due to the petty cruelty of the Kapos, Rassinier came to a logical conclusion: the atrocity stories about the use of the camps as factories of death could not be true, because these stories implied an organized system of terror that transcended the cruelty of the Kapos. To account for the fact that such stories circulated nevertheless, Rassinier postulated “the complex of Ulysses’ lie, which is everyone’s, and so it is with all of the internees.” Camp inmates had an inborn need to exaggerate their suffering “without realizing that the reality is quite enough in itself.”⁷⁰

After he was liberated in April 1945, Rassinier returned to France. He had no patience for or empathy with his fellow deportees who “came back with hatred and resentment on their tongues and in their pens.” They were caught in “a treadmill of lies. . . . So it was with Ulysses who, during the course of his voyage, each day added a new adventure to his Odyssey, as much to please the public taste of the times as to justify his long absence in the eyes of his family.”⁷¹ To Rassinier, the proof of the fact that the ex-inmates were lying was their constant return to the (to him) obviously absurd proposition that camps had been equipped with homicidal gas chambers. As time progressed, he became more and more obsessed with the issue of the gas chambers, which had ceased to be the result of mere “lies of Ulysses” and had become a massive fabrication created with a political aim in mind.

This shift in explanation from psychology to conspiracy was due to the notorious Kravchenko trial, which dominated the French media in the first half of 1949. In 1944, Victor Kravchenko, a top official of the Soviet delegation in Washington, D.C., defected to the West. In his best-selling book *I Chose Freedom* (1946), Kravchenko described the Soviet Union as a totalitarian nightmare in which the successes that had been trumpeted all around the world, especially the ruthless collectivization of agriculture, had been achieved through the application of terror backed by an extensive system of concentration camps. The Soviets and their communist allies in the West answered through a campaign of defamation against Kravchenko, which resulted, among other things, in an article published in the French magazine *Les Lettres Francaises*. It claimed that Kravchenko was too stupid to have written the book, and that his so-called revelations had been manufactured by American intelligence. In response, Kravchenko filed a libel suit against the magazine, and in early 1949 the trial began in Paris. It lasted for two months. In the end Kravchenko won, but many never surrendered the idea that the whole gulag had been an invention of the American intelligence service, designed to discredit the Soviet Union.⁷² Rassinier drew the conclusion that if the Russian concentration camps had been concocted in Washington, D.C., the stories about German extermination camps with large crematoria equipped with homicidal gas chambers must also have been the product of some propaganda apparatus.

Rassinier spent the rest of his life trying to debunk the myth of the camps. As a known Nazi sympathizer and anti-Semite, Faurisson was attracted to Rassinier’s thesis that the Holocaust was a hoax and the gas chambers the stuff of legend.⁷³ Exposed to an alleged deception of such dimensions, Faurisson lost his interest in sonnets, odes, and novels and began to subject accounts about Auschwitz to his “Ajax method.” As he surveyed the literature, the great debunker found many contradictions in, among other things, statements about the total number of victims who had died in Auschwitz. Shortly after the liberation the Russians had given the

number of 4 million victims. Commandant Rudolf Höss had mentioned at one time 3 million victims, of whom two and a half million had been gassed—the rest having died from “natural causes,” and at another time he had mentioned a number of some 1,130,000 victims. And historians such as Gerald Reitlinger had estimated that “only” 700,000 Jews had died in Auschwitz. Faurisson discovered other contradictions in the literature: for example, the plan of the crematoria published in the wartime War Refugee Board report, based on the testimony of two escaped prisoners and released in November 1944, showed little relation to the plans of the crematoria published after the war. And of course, many eyewitness testimonies contradicted each other, while some plagiarized other texts. Faurisson concluded that all these contradictions pointed at only one possible conclusion: the story that Auschwitz had been an extermination camp was a hoax.

Until 1978, Faurisson did not have access to the public at large. The prestigious daily *Le Monde* refused to publish his letters, and elsewhere the mainline press ignored him. Only the extreme-right *Défense de l'Occident* (Defense of the West) was interested, and in June 1978 it published an article entitled “Le ‘problème des chambres à gaz’” (“The ‘Problem of the Gas Chambers’”).⁷⁴ Because of its limited circulation, Faurisson sent an off-print to a number of important people, adding a convenient summary of his arguments.

Conclusions (after thirty years of research) of revisionist authors: (1) Hitler’s “gas chambers” never existed. (2) The “genocide” (or: the “attempted genocide”) of the Jews never took place; clearly, Hitler never ordered (nor permitted) that someone be killed for racial or religious reason. (3) The alleged “gas chambers” and the alleged “genocide” are one and the same lie. (4) This lie, which is essentially of Zionist origin, has allowed a gigantic politico-financial swindle of which the principal beneficiary is the State of Israel. (5) The principal victims of this lie and this swindle are the German and the Palestinian peoples. (6) The tremendous power of the official information channels has, until now, assured the success of the lie and censored the freedom of expression of those who denounce the lie. (7) The supporters of the lie know now that their lie is in its last years; they misrepresent the purpose and meaning of revisionist investigations; they label what is just a return to a concern for historical truth as “resurgence of Nazism” or “the falsification of history.”⁷⁵

Not many of the recipients gave the material a second thought. Yet the Nazi-hunters Beate and Serge Klarsfeld—the former a German by birth, the latter a Holocaust survivor—saw a gathering storm, and they invited Joseph Billig, who had assisted in the Nuremberg prosecution of the Nazi ideologist Alfred Rosenberg, and Georges Wellers, editor of *Le Monde*, to contribute to a volume entitled *The Holocaust and the Neo-Nazi Mythomania* (1978). Wellers, a survivor of Auschwitz, wrote two essays united under the heading “Reply to the Neo-Nazi Falsification of Historical Facts concerning the Holocaust.” One of the two essays dealt with Paul Rassinier’s demographic “proof” that the Holocaust was a hoax, and the other essay is entitled “The Existence of the Gas Chambers.” In his introductory remarks, Wellers summarized the allegations of the negationists and noted the paradox that a Frenchman and former resister, Rassinier, had laid down the foundations of negationism. “The paths marked out by Rassinier are faithfully followed by his imitators, who constantly refer to the master,

citing him as a 'classic' who has 'definitively' demonstrated this or that," Wellers observed. Yet the pupils had started to go beyond the master, denying even the few concessions Rassinier had made to historical truth. Wellers mentioned them briefly, ending with the remark that "finally, for a certain R. Faurisson, everything is crystal clear: 'The time is ripe,' it is the 'imposture of genocide.'" ⁷⁶

If Klarsfeld's aim was that the publication of *The Holocaust and the Neo-Nazi Mythomania* would finish the issue, he must have been disappointed. In the fall of 1978, shortly after the book appeared, the existence, technology, and operation of the gas chambers became an object of public contention in France. The catalyst was a notorious *L'Express* interview with Louis Darquier de Pellepoix. Living in comfortable exile in Spain since the end of the war, the former commissioner general for Jewish affairs of the Vichy government alleged that the Holocaust had not occurred, that there had been no gas chambers in Auschwitz. He claimed: "Only lice were gassed in Auschwitz." ⁷⁷

The Darquier interview provided Faurisson with the opportunity he needed. Within days, he published an article in the socialist newspaper *Le Matin*. Faurisson commented that the Darquier affair ought to convince the French that the Holocaust was fiction and the gas chambers fabrications and proclaimed "that the massacres in so-called 'gas chambers' are a historical lie." ⁷⁸ A few weeks later *Le Monde* was forced, under the threat of legal action, to publish a letter by Faurisson entitled "'Le problème des chambres à gaz' ou 'le rumeur d'Auschwitz'" ("The Problem of the Gas Chambers' or 'The Rumor of Auschwitz'"). The letter began with the declaration that "no-one contested the use of crematoria ovens in certain German camps." The high mortality due to epidemics had made those incineration facilities necessary, he claimed. "It is the existence of 'gas chambers,' true slaughterhouses for humans, which is contested." ⁷⁹ Faurisson argued that any visitor to Auschwitz or Majdanek could observe that the gas chambers could not have worked because it would have resulted in a "catastrophe" for the perpetrators, who would be killed themselves. Furthermore, it would have been impossible to cram 2,000 people in a room of 210 square meters, and it would have been ridiculous to then sprinkle them with pellets of an insecticide. Faurisson argued that the plans that did exist showed that the alleged gas chambers were typical morgues and that the gas would have taken too long to be extracted from the room. Finally, he noted that in all the trials no one had been able to produce German documentation for Bunkers I and II. Faurisson concluded with the statement that "Nazism is dead, quite dead, and also its Führer. Today only the truth remains. Let us dare to proclaim it: The non-existence of the 'gas chambers' is good news for poor humanity. Good news like this should no longer be suppressed." ⁸⁰

Publication of such language in the influential and prestigious *Le Monde* brought the negationist denial of the gas chambers into public prominence for the first time anywhere. Until then, such ideas had circulated only within the fringe. Now denial was to stay in the public arena. Worried by the effect of Faurisson's letter, the editors of *Le Monde* asked for a response from Wellers, who was well prepared to answer Faurisson. Wellers's letter, "Abondance de preuves" ("An Abundance of Evidence") appeared next to Faurisson's. While Wellers competently refuted the latter's arguments, the publication of his letter proved a mistake: the publication of the two letters on the same page created the appearance that Faurisson's and Wellers's arguments were in principle commensurate in intellectual respectability—that, in short, there were (as the negationists have tried to

establish all along) a “revisionist” and an “exterminationist” thesis concerning the Holocaust, the advocates of which ought to be given equal opportunity to plead their cases.

According to a nineteenth-century French law, Wellers’s direct attack on Faurisson gave the latter a right of response. Faurisson did not hesitate to make use of it, and *Le Monde* printed his reply to Wellers on January 16. He claimed that he believed in the gas chambers until he read the work of Rassinier and that he had reflected on the issue for fourteen years and researched it assiduously for another four. “I have analyzed thousands of documents. . . . I have searched in vain for a single deportee capable of proving to me that he has seen, with his own eyes, a ‘gas chamber.’ I certainly did not want an illusory abundance of proofs; I would have been satisfied with only one proof, only one proof. That proof I never found.”⁸¹

Many regarded the publication of Faurisson’s letters with confusion and mortification, and responsible historians who feared an unending cycle of negationist assertions and professional rebuttals joined together to end the farce. Well-known Holocaust historian Léon Poliakov and Pierre Vidal-Naquet, historian of ancient Greece, wrote a declaration that was endorsed by thirty-five other prominent French historians and published in *Le Monde* on February 21. Entitled “La politique hitlérienne d’extermination. Une déclaration d’historiens” (The Hitlerian Policy of Extermination: A Declaration by Historians), the manifesto pronounced that “the question of how technically such a mass murder was possible should not be raised. It was technically possible because it occurred. This is the necessary starting point for all historical investigation of the subject. It has fallen to us to recall that point with due simplicity: there is not nor can there be a debate over the existence of the gas chambers.”⁸²

Faurisson wrote a rebuttal of the statement, but it was refused for publication. In this letter, entitled “A proof . . . one single proof,” which Faurisson published a year later in his book *Mémoire en défense*, he offered (what seemed to be) a constructive proposal. “Instead of repeating ad nauseam that there is a superabundance of proofs that attest to the existence of ‘gas chambers’ . . . I propose that, to begin at the beginning, one supplies me with a proof, one single precise proof of the actual existence of one ‘gas chamber,’ one single ‘gas chamber.’ Let us examine this proof together, in public.”⁸³ If we compare the spirit of “A Declaration by Historians” and Faurisson’s “A proof . . . one single proof,” one can, on a first view, feel some sympathy for Faurisson’s attitude. After all, we are heirs to a rational, liberal, and individualistic culture that accepts as one of its formative myths the conflict between the Church and Galileo. It is all too easy to see in the statement of the historians a dogmatic pronouncement by a new intellectual inquisition aiming to repress evidence and logic for the sake of doctrine and to see in Faurisson a champion of free inquiry. And, indeed, negationists have tried to exploit this seemingly obvious parallelism between the heroes of the scientific revolution and themselves for all it is worth.

Faurisson had become well known in France. Fame came, however, at a high personal price. Students at the University of Lyons-2 staged demonstrations against him, and in response the university administrators suspended his lectures. The staff of the Center of Contemporary Jewish Documentation in Paris, which had been Faurisson’s main source of information, refused to serve him. Faurisson also became known abroad. In August 1979, the Italian magazine *Storia illustrata* printed a long interview in which Faurisson’s statements were left unchallenged. Hitler, so the French scholar declared, had not engaged in genocide any more than

Roosevelt had. Both had interned enemy aliens in internment camps: the latter the Japanese and the former the Jews. Yet because he had not been able to intern all Jews, Hitler had forced those who were left in the cities and villages to wear a sign. Faurisson compared them with paroled prisoners and argued that Hitler had ordered the Jews to be marked so that he could ensure the safety of the German soldier: "The German soldier would otherwise have been unable to distinguish the Jews from the non-Jews."⁸⁴ Thus, the segregation of Jews from the non-Jews occurred not for ideological but for military reasons. To Faurisson, the fact that the Jews built 700 bunkers in the Warsaw ghetto proved their threat. Even the children challenged the military situation. "There exist today enough accounts and memoirs in which Jews tell us about the way they engaged, even as children, in all kinds of illicit activities or resistance against the Germans."⁸⁵ Faurisson's logic was allowed to go unchallenged.

Shortly after giving his interview to the *Storia illustrata*, Faurisson crossed the ocean to begin his missionary activity in the United States. In fact, his name had already become known in progressive circles: a French academic had been hindered in his pursuit of knowledge, and in response to that violation of academic freedom, several hundred scholars signed in the fall of 1979 a text that protested the "vicious campaign of harassment, intimidation, slander and physical violence" designed to silence Faurisson and strongly supported "Professor Faurisson's just right of academic freedom."⁸⁶ The most prominent signatory was Noam Chomsky. To the famous linguist and public intellectual, who showed open disgust for the general subservience of the mainstream intelligentsia to the propaganda systems of their own governments, Faurisson must have appeared a fellow traveler worthy of support. The same year that he signed the petition in support of Faurisson, Chomsky derided the proven willingness of many intellectuals to "disseminate propaganda concerning the evil practices, real or fabricated, of current enemies of the state. It is remarkable to see how susceptible intellectuals have been, over the years, to the machinations of the atrocity fabrication industry."⁸⁷ Faurisson did not belong to the herd, and therefore he deserved support.

Faurisson's first stop was California, where he attended the first congress sponsored by the Institute for Historical Review. There he was to present a paper entitled "The Mechanics of Gassing," but because he felt that his English was rather bad, Faurisson asked a Canadian participant, Ernst Zündel, to read his paper on his behalf. Zündel was an appropriate choice: he was the publisher of, among other negationist books, Thies Christophersen's *The Auschwitz Lie*. Zündel's presentation of Faurisson's paper marked the beginning of an interesting relationship.

Faurisson's paper began with a discussion of the difficulty of gassing people because it imposed severe risks for the executioner. Therefore Höss's recollection that the crews began clearing the gas chambers *sofort* ("immediately") after the gassings did not make any sense, because too much hydrogen cyanide would have remained in the bodies and in the air pockets between them. "What kind of superpowerful fan is able to instantly disperse so much gas drifting through the air and hidden in air pockets?" the paper asked, and it continued with the observation that "it is abundantly clear from Höss's description that the fan in question must have been endowed with magical powers in order to be able to disperse all the gas with such flawless performance . . . that there was no cause for concern or need for verification of the absence of the gas!"⁸⁸ Then the paper reviewed the instructions for handling Zyklon B from its manufacturer, Degesch, which stipulated that rooms fumigated with the agent should be

aired at least for twenty-one hours and discussed the danger of explosion at some length. The paper once more considered the issue that, according to Höss, the Sonderkommandos had entered the gas chambers “immediately” after the deaths of the victims. “I contend that this point alone constitutes the cornerstone of the false evidence, because this is a physical impossibility,” Faurisson wrote (and Zündel said). “If you encounter a person who believes in the existence of the ‘gas chambers,’ ask him how, in his opinion, the thousands of cadavers were removed to make room for the next batch?”⁸⁹ As far as we know, no one at the meeting rose to point out that, after gassing 2,000 people in the basement of Crematorium 2 in one operation, even the Germans had to allow some time before “the next batch.” After all, it would take the crematoria ovens of that same crematorium more than a day and a half to incinerate the bodies.

Turning to the remains in Auschwitz, the paper mentioned that the gas chamber of Crematorium 2 had been merely a morgue and that it would have been too small to accommodate the between 2,000 and 3,000 victims mentioned by Höss. Then it mentioned the idea that the Germans attempted to blow up the crematoria to erase the traces of their alleged crimes. “If one wishes to obliterate all trace of an installation which would be intrinsically quite sophisticated, it must be scrupulously dismantled from top to bottom so that there remains not one shred of incriminating evidence.”⁹⁰ The paper did not mention that eyewitnesses mentioned that, indeed, the gas chambers had been “scrupulously dismantled” and that only after the perforated columns and ventilators had been removed were the rooms dynamited.

Then the paper turned to what was to become a focus of Faurisson’s studies in the next years: the design, technique, and operation procedures of American gas chambers. “The real gas chambers, such as those created in 1924 and developed by the Americans around 1936–1938 offer some idea of the inherent complexity of such a method of execution,” the paper proclaimed. There followed a lengthy description of the gassing procedure in American prisons and the extensive safety precautions taken to prevent any accidents.

After discussing American gas chambers, the paper returned to the German gas chambers. “If the Germans had decided to gas millions of people, a complete overhaul of some very formidable machinery would have been absolutely essential.” The construction of gas chambers would have involved many experts, commanded huge financial resources, and consequently generated a lot of paperwork. “Had this occurred in a state such as the Third Reich, a wealth of evidence would surely have survived.”⁹¹

Faurisson’s paper generated a discussion; Zündel especially liked its approach. Comparison of the structures in Auschwitz and American gas chambers was to be the key to the future of negationism and was to provide the basis for Leuchter’s involvement in the second Zündel trial in 1988—an involvement that directly led to Irving’s adoption of the negationist position.⁹² On his return trip to France, Faurisson made a stop in Washington, D.C., to give a lecture at the headquarters of the National Alliance, the American neo-Nazi party. Faurisson made use of his stopover to visit and photograph the gas chamber in the state prison in Baltimore, Maryland. He sent those photos to Zündel who, as Faurisson testified in the second Zündel trial, became obsessed with the American gas chambers and urged Faurisson to continue his investigations in that direction. But, as Faurisson testified in Zündel’s 1988 trial, “I had some trouble after that that I could not really work on this question.”⁹³

Indeed, on his return home to France Faurisson became, once again, the center of public debate. In April 1980 the so-called Faurisson Affair was given new life with the publication of Serge Thion's 350-page-long book *Vérité historique ou vérité politique? La dossier de l'affaire Faurisson. La question des chambres à gaz (Historical Truth or Political Truth? The File of the Faurisson Affair—The Question of the Gas Chambers)*. With the strong declaration of the thirty-five French historians published in *Le Monde* on February 21, 1979, Faurisson had become the underdog opposed by the defenders of the status quo. For the champions of the radical left, Faurisson became a hero of the search for a new cause that would unmask the hypocrisy of the bourgeoisie, and they began to fashion, in imitation of the Dreyfus Affair, a so-called Faurisson Affair. Those who rallied to Faurisson's side were the same radicals who believed that the reporting on the Cambodian genocide had actually served the interests of the establishment. "The West's best propaganda resource is Pol Pot's regime," Régis Debray observed in discussion with Noam Chomsky. "We needed that scarecrow."⁹⁴ And Chomsky provided, together with Edward Herman, a lengthy analysis of the way the liberal press averted its eyes from the "terrorizing elites" at home and used the news of atrocities abroad to help maintain the political, social, and economic status quo.⁹⁵ Thus, the atrocities ascribed to Pol Pot (or Stalin) allowed the elites in the United States to discredit every form of socialism as a highway to the Gulag and to resist the creation of national health insurance, the improvement of welfare programs, and the growth of the labor movement.

Contemporary atrocities were not the only ones to be exploited by the reactionary establishment. Hitler also proved a convenient "scarecrow." For the French ultra-Left of the 1970s, National Socialism had been the ultimate political emanation of capitalist society, created to stop the historically necessary advance of the working classes. As such, it was a tool of the bourgeoisie, the same bourgeoisie that shaped and dominated postwar liberal-democratic society. Yet the bourgeoisie denied the fundamental identity between liberal democracy and Hitler's regime, and their main argument was, as some ultra-Left ideologists had discovered, the Holocaust. The strategists of the proletariat formulated the thesis that the fundamental identity between the two political systems would become clear only if the Holocaust, the principal foil of capitalism, were to be removed from the historical record.⁹⁶

Finally intellectual fashion played into Faurisson's hands. The generation that began to dominate the intellectual world in the late 1970s had been the same that, ten years earlier, had seen its hopes of progress through radical change defeated. As the promise of change had not materialized, the students of 1968 felt that "history" had betrayed them and became skeptical of any "grand narrative" of historical development that led to some social, political, and economic resolution at the end. This, in turn, led to the conception of a different kind of understanding of the past, or, for that matter, of the present. Instead of one privileged narrative that told of the progress of God's people from fall to redemption or of the progress of (Western) civilization from cave to lunar colony or of the progress from slavery to freedom, the generation of 1968 formulated the idea that one should allow, paraphrasing Chairman Mao, a thousand parallel "histories" to bloom. And they carried on their banners Nietzsche's observation that objective reality is not accessible, that what we call truth is a "mobile army of metaphors, metonyms, and anthropomorphisms" in the service of political, social, and economic power.⁹⁷ Armed with Nietzsche's slogan that

one's obligation to truth was just one's pledge to lie herd-like according to a fixed convention, these revolutionaries stormed the bastille of the "grand narrative" which, so they believed, disenfranchised all but the (generally) white male carriers of "the idea." These radicals preached that one should stop searching for "the truth" and become engaged in recovering many alternative "truths," such as the histories of the underprivileged class (the common folk, slaves), gender (women), race ("colonials"), and so on. In short, in an effort to defeat the cultural imperialism of the West and the cultural arrogance of its intellectual tradition, historians began to practice a principled relativism that demanded an absolute suspension of judgment when faced with "otherness" or concepts expressed in such neologisms as "alterity," "illeity," and "*différance*." In seeking the stranger and the foreigner, they hoped to find themselves.⁹⁸ As a result, many of the generation of 1968, who reveled in the rhetoric of "difference," "textuality," "incommensurable phrase-regimes," and the like, were fascinated by Faurisson—the ultimate stranger, the champion of an alternative history that was incommensurable with the hegemonic narrative of the Holocaust.

For example, philosopher Jean-François Lyotard became interested in the Faurisson Affair because it illustrated a number of difficult issues that arise when one accepts, as Lyotard does, that questions of historical truth and falsehood are wholly defined within the context of language games and the incommensurability of discourses. Lyotard argued that any attempt to dismiss Faurisson by pointing to the massive amount of evidence concerning Auschwitz or to Faurisson's mistakes in logic would deny the narrative "differend" between his and our version of events. Therefore one ought to encounter Faurisson by suspending judgment and see in him a champion of the war on totality. In arguing his case, Lyotard provided what remains the classic summary of Faurisson's logic. "His argument is: in order for a place to be identified as a gas chamber, the only eyewitnesses I will accept would be a victim of this gas chamber; now, according to my opponent, there is no victim that is not dead; otherwise, this gas chamber would not be what he or she claims it to be. There is, therefore, no gas chamber."⁹⁹

To Lyotard, Faurisson's submission that we can have no knowledge, no *evidence* of what actually occurred in the gas chambers at Auschwitz since there exist no survivors who can vouch for the facts as a matter of firsthand empirical witness had a philosophical significance. He did not, however, become one of Faurisson's champions. Others found sufficient reason to take a more active role. The prominent left-wing radical Serge Thion rallied to Faurisson's case, presenting his support as the logical consequence of his commitment to the principles of freedom of thought and his political activism on behalf of the unassimilable "Other." Faurisson was "by all standards, a man alone."¹⁰⁰ Remarkably enough, Thion moved beyond accepting Faurisson as the stranger that must be embraced and actually assimilated Faurisson's point of view, categorically dismissing the great abundance of evidence that attests to the historical reality of the Holocaust. The confessions of Höss and other SS men were without value. "Once one is prepared to imagine the situation of those defeated men, gambling with their own lives between the hands of their jailers, a paltry game in which truths and lies are the basic tokens in a tactic of survival, one will not be prepared to accept all their declarations as valid currency."¹⁰¹ A true defender of the underdog, be it the Algerians in their battle with the French Republic, the Vietnamese in their battle with the United States, or Faurisson in his battle with the establishment, Thion had no difficulty feeling sympathy for even men such as Höss or Frank when they were in the

dock. To Thion, the Nuremberg War Crimes Tribunals had been not much different from the Stalinist show trials, and therefore they had no evidentiary value.

Within months after bringing Thion's book on the market, Faurisson published his *Mémoire en Défense—contre ceux qui m'accusent de falsifier l'histoire. La question des chambres à gaz (Testimony in Defense—Against Those Who Accuse Me of Falsifying History: The Question of the Gas Chambers)*. The true significance of the book was to be found in Noam Chomsky's ill-advised preface. As we have seen, in 1979 Chomsky had signed a petition in support of Faurisson's academic freedom to challenge the inherited account of the Holocaust, and one thing had led to another. Entitled "Some Elementary Commentaries on the Right to the Freedom of Speech," Chomsky reviewed the reasons why he had signed the 1979 petition and dismissed the outcry that had resulted from it. He stated that he had often signed petitions on behalf of people whose ideas he found detestable—Russian dissidents who supported American policies in Indochina, for example—and observed that in those cases no one had raised an objection. "If someone had, I would have regarded him with the same contempt that those who denounce the petition in favor of Faurisson's right deserve, and for the same reasons."¹⁰² Then Chomsky went on to contrast the freedom-loving practice in the United States with the stifling intellectual climate in France. Back home, he proudly stated, Arthur Butz ("whom one may consider the American equivalent of Faurisson") was not subjected to harassment, negationists had not been hindered in running an international conference, and the American Civil Liberties Union had defended the right of neo-Nazis to march through the largely Jewish town of Skokie, Illinois. The French, in other words, had much to learn. In his final paragraph, he addressed the tricky question of Faurisson's anti-Semitism. This did not remove the obligation to defend Faurisson. On the contrary: Chomsky declared that it made the defense of Faurisson more necessary. "It is exactly the right to express the most dreadful ideas freely that must be defended most rigorously."¹⁰³

The Chomsky preface initiated a second wave of publicity for Faurisson, which led, among other things, to a radio interview on December 17, 1980. Faurisson said that the alleged Holocaust was a historical lie that served a huge political and financial swindle that benefited the State of Israel at the expense of the German and Palestinian peoples. This statement led to Faurisson's indictment under France's Race Relations Law. At the same time Faurisson was also indicted under Article 382 of the civil code for willfully distorting history. Finally, Faurisson faced a libel suit initiated by French historian Léon Poliakov, whom Faurisson had accused of fabricating his sources with reference to an important historical document on the Belzec extermination camp. The first two trials certainly put Faurisson in the position of the Dreyfusian underdog persecuted by the system and brought him much publicity, even sympathy, especially when he was convicted in each case.

By the time Irving met Faurisson, the latter had set his sights on the English historian, sensing that Irving could be a potential convert to his cause. Scheduled to speak after Irving, Faurisson began his talk with a challenge: if Irving believed that a Holocaust had happened, but behind Hitler's back, he had better prove it.¹⁰⁴ Faurisson followed up in an article entitled "A Challenge to David Irving," published in the negationist *Journal for Historical Review* in 1984. Faurisson first summarized his general thesis that the extermination camps had not existed. So much was known

about the concentration camps, he claimed, “but about the gigantic homicidal gas chambers, we have nothing. That is magic.”¹⁰⁵ Then he turned to Irving. Faurisson observed that Irving “sometimes gives in to the temptation to maintain opinions that, from his own point of view, he ought not to maintain since he has not studied the question.”¹⁰⁶ Faurisson proceeded to attack the various statements Irving had made about the Holocaust in which he had admitted to various liquidations done at various locations by various criminal elements of various ethnic backgrounds without direct orders from above. As to Irving’s account of the extermination procedures, Faurisson observed that it contained “too much metaphysics, not enough materialism.”¹⁰⁷ Faurisson counseled that it was time for Irving to begin at the beginning. “Let me tell you that the moment has come for a historian of your importance to get into the subject and to study it for yourself in your own fashion.”¹⁰⁸

But Faurisson was soon to forget about Irving. More pressing issues had come up. A few months after the end of the conference, Faurisson was approached by Ernst Zündel, the man who had read his presentation at the 1979 conference. Zündel was a kindred spirit, if only for having published Richard Verrall’s (alias Richard Harwood) *Did Six Million Really Die?* This book began with the claim that it offered “irrefutable evidence that the allegation that 6 million Jews died during the Second World War, as a direct result of official German policy of extermination, is utterly unfounded.” The Holocaust, in short, was a “most colossal piece of fiction and the most successful of deceptions.”¹⁰⁹ Harwood’s conclusions were not shared by many, and in 1983 Holocaust survivor Sabina Citron issued a private complaint against Zündel. The Crown assumed the carriage of the charge and in 1984 indicted Zündel under Section 177 of the Criminal Code of Canada for willfully publishing statements that he knew to be false and for causing injury to a public interest. Zündel decided that he would defend himself by arguing that Harwood’s book did not contain false statements because no gassings had taken place in Auschwitz. Zündel asked Faurisson to direct the defense team and act as an expert witness. Faurisson accepted. Zündel also asked Irving to testify as an expert witness. Irving responded that he had been a successful expert witness in two German trials and that he could be persuaded to go. He cautioned Zündel, however, that “in *some* respects my evidence may be disadvantageous, but on balance it would help.”¹¹⁰ It is likely that Irving’s warning gave Faurisson second thoughts, and in the end Irving’s services were not required.

In early 1985, the case was heard by District Court Judge Hugh Locke in the District Court of Ontario. Attorney Peter Griffiths represented the Crown, and attorney Douglas Christie acted on behalf of Zündel. Because it was a public trial, Canadians got for the first time a taste of the tenor of negationism. In his cross-examination of one of Zündel’s expert witnesses, Swedish negationist Ditlieb Felderer, Griffiths exposed the vituperative language of negationism. Griffiths presented Felderer with some of the negationist flyers he had published.

[Griffiths]: “Could you read us that pamphlet?”

[Felderer]: “This one here?”

Q.: “Yes please.”

A.: “Yes. It says, ‘*Please accept this hair of a gassed victim.*’”

Q.: “Why would it say that if there was no hair in it?”

A.: “Why would it say this?”



Ernst Zündel, 1988. Courtesy Canadian Jewish News.

Q.: “Yes.”

A.: “Well, because sometimes the people don’t mail, I suppose, any hair. I don’t know. You have to ask those people who mail it.”

Q.: “Are they supposed to put hair on it?”

A.: “Yes. If they wish. There are other things that are mentioned in the back.”

Q.: “Read it from the start, Mr. Felderer.”

A.: “*‘Hair of a gassed victim. Next time you cut your hair do not discard it! No, mail it instead to Mr. Smolen . . . (Now, Mr. Smolen is the director of Auschwitz, I will just bring that in.) . . . at the Auschwitz Museum or to any of the addresses found on the next page—to be exhibited in the display of hair of gassed victims. Your hair has a much better claim to be exhibited there than the phony samples of commercial wigs and hair hitherto exhibited. Also collect together the hair of all your friends, dogs, and other animals. Send it all in a plastic bag to Mr. Smolen. He will remember you for it. It can be mailed as “Printed Matter” by placing the term “Sample” on the special delivery.’* Typical Voltaire satire, I would say. And then it continues on. It says: ‘*To Mr. K. Smolen and Staff, Auschwitz Museum, Oswiecim,—Auschwitz—Poland. Dear Mr. Smolen: In appreciation of your deep concern for gas victims, I am hereby forwarding my personal trophy for your permanent Museum exhibits. I understand that you are intensely involved with the subject of gassing. Personally I feel rather miserable. Not even Zyklon-B would cure me! This is much on account of the fact that I am getting gassed to death by a slow poison procedure. Our air is full of filth, poison, gasses, harmful chemicals and other disgusting elements. Matters are no better in your city. Your city is virtually saturated with deadly gasses emanating from your Monowitz chemical factory. In fact the place is not fit even for crows. I urge you to pay it a visit. Surely the Nazis never had a factory in such deplorable condition. But it is not necessary for you to go there as the factory’s poison gasses reaches your very own office at Auschwitz which is situated close to the former Nazi brothel.’* And I must say here that this is in fact Block 24.”

Q.: “I am not asking you to say. Please read that.”

A.: “Which the inmates used.”

Q.: “Just read that, Mr. Felderer.”

A.: “*‘In case of urgency I suggest you to put on a gas mask immediately. You may collect one at the private Museum displays in Block 24. Please be sure it has the special “J” filter. The poison at Auschwitz is deadly. You need to take the utmost precautions. My package of hair to you is a very personal proof of the fact that I am being gassed to death. Should you doubt it, I beg your experts to analyze it. I am therefore donating this private gift to you with the hope of that countless of your Museum’s avid onlookers may gaze at it in wonder and give a solemn prayer in memory of a victim doomed to extinction due to environmental poison gassing.’*”

Q.: “All right. . . .”¹¹¹

As an expert witness, Faurisson was not as offensive as Felderer, but if Zündel had hoped that Faurisson’s Gallic wit would shine in the court, he must have been disappointed. The strategy of the defense was to prove that the Auschwitz gas chambers had been a hoax, and in order to do so, they had to destroy the credibility of a wartime report on Auschwitz written by Rudi Vrba and Alfred Wetzlar after their escape from Auschwitz in April 1944. A summary of the Vrba-Wetzlar report had been cabled from Switzerland to the United States in early July 1944 that described the procedure and machinery of destruction in some detail.

At the end of February 1943 four newly constructed crematoria and gassing units were put into operation in B two larger and two smaller the larger type consisted of vast central hall flanked on one side by furnace room and on other by long narrow gas chamber. About 2000 persons at once were crowded into central hall which was camouflaged to resemble a bathing establishment made to undress given a piece of soap and towel and then herded down a short stairway into ad[j]oining lower gas chamber this is hermetically closed and SS men wearing gasmasks mount [the roof] and shake down into room from three openings in ceiling a powdered cyanide preparation labelled cyklon manufactured in Hamburg. Within a few minutes everyone in gas chamber is dead, latter is aired and Sonderkommando proceeds with gruesome work of transporting bodies on small flat cars running along track passing under central hall to furnace room here there are nine ovens each with four openings with high smokestack rising in middle each opening can incinerate three normal bodies within one-half hours. Daily capacity of larger crematoria is 2000 of two smaller about 1000 each, total of all four units is some 6000 daily.¹¹²

The full report was published only in November 1944 by the War Refugee Board, and it was consequently known as the “War Refugee Board Report.”

Faurisson believed that the War Refugee Board Report was one of “the three pillars of the story of the gas chamber,”¹¹³ and therefore he had to demolish its credibility. During his examination-in-chief, Faurisson tried to convince the court that the discrepancy between a sketch plan of a crematorium drawn by Vrba after his escape and the remains of that crematorium in Auschwitz proved the report to be without any value at all.

[Christie]: “Any other reason why you say we should not believe the W.R.B. Report of Dr. Vrba and others?”

[Faurisson]: “The plan of Auschwitz, the plan of the crematorium.”

Q.: “What about them?”

A.: “They do not—they are nothing.”

Q.: “What do you mean, they’re nothing?”

A.: “When you see the reality of the place . . .”

Q.: “Yes.”

A.: “. . . It does not stand, that’s all. When you see on the same

level a gas chamber, then a track to put the people, the bodies in the furnaces, and when you see that in fact this place which was a mortuary was underground, that you had a little lift, and on the—at the other level you had the furnaces . . .”

Q.: “Yes.”

A.: “. . . And the furnaces are not at all like they have been drawn by Dr. Vrba, and he said . . .”

Q.: “What do you conclude from that, doctor?”

A.: “I conclude that it is not exact.”

Q.: “What do you conclude about the author of that, if he says it is exact?”

A.: “I say, ‘You say something which is not exact.’”

Q.: “All right. . . .”¹¹⁴

It was not a great performance, given the fact that, two days earlier, Vrba had explained why the plan of the crematorium was “not exact.” It had been a conflation of the plans of two different types of crematoria, drawn up in haste with the objective of warning the Hungarian Jews of their fate in Auschwitz.¹¹⁵

The testimony of defense witness Dr. William Lindsey proved a particular disappointment. A chemist who had worked for DuPont, Lindsey had traveled to Auschwitz, where he had made a cursory examination of the gas chamber of Crematorium 1. Furthermore, he had studied the German documentation of Zyklon B. He had earned respect in negationist circles after his publication of an article in *The Journal of Historical Review* entitled “Zyklon B, Auschwitz, and the Trial of Dr. Bruno Tesch.” In this article, Lindsey argued that the allies had originally “invented” the Holocaust during the war as part and parcel of the usual atrocity propaganda and that after the war, they had decided to continue to push that story, against all evidence to the contrary, to cover up their own misdeeds and create a foundation for postwar Allied solidarity.

With no “Holocaust” to take their place in the columns of the world’s newspapers, the many surreptitious, undercover activities, plans and responsibilities of Franklin D. Roosevelt and his proto-United Nations conspirators prior to, during and after the war—today still too-little publicized—would have come under immediate, murderous, and lasting scrutiny. This would have resulted in the United Nations wartime charges and the (still-vulnerable) “integrity” of this organization being ripped asunder in a manner which would have made the revelations about the Allied lies found in the World War I Bryce Committee Report on propaganda charges look by comparison like reports on a love feast. If the many plans already formulated diplomatically and formally or informally in war conferences were to be fully, irreversibly implemented as the planners wished, the “New” United Nations organization would have to meet the full support of those who might otherwise strongly oppose it. The wartime “atrocity propaganda” charges made by the victors to inflame their soldiers and citizenry, and to justify and condone their own use of progressively more violent, ruthless measures against Germany and Japan, *simply had to be sustained after the war.*¹¹⁶

On paper, Lindsey showed the kind of eloquence and argumentation which attracted Zündel and Faurisson, and he also seemed to know a fair amount about hydrogen cyanide in general and Zyklon B in particular. But as an expert witness, Lindsey's performance was not very satisfactory. When Christie asked if he believed that either 2.5 million or even 1 million people had been gassed in the crematoria, Lindsey answered that "I find it, from my point of view, I find it is absolutely impossible to believe that. The method as described, the rate at which they can burn these bodies and carry out the gassing procedure, I find it's impossible."¹¹⁷ In the witness stand, Lindsey showed very little eloquence, and, contrary to the impression he had given in the many notes that accompanied his article, Lindsey proved unable to back up his opinions with demonstrable scientific facts. His testimony failed to provide the negationist breakthrough Faurisson had hoped for.

The case ended with Zündel's conviction for publishing *Did Six Million Die?*, and Thomas sentenced him to a prison term of fifteen months. Not deterred by the facts, negationists celebrated "The Great Holocaust Trial" as a watershed: it had given them the first public platform in North America. Thus, negationists celebrated Zündel's legal defeat as a resounding victory for the negationist cause. "For the first time in modern history, the consensus reality most accurately described as Exterminationism, was tested and challenged in a court of law," one of Zündel's supporters claimed. Zionists, Holocaust historians, and the public at large had been shown to have no answer to "the revisionist revelations within the Great Holocaust Trial." Instead of addressing the "radical questions [the trial] has raised and the bedrock of previously censored facts it has unearthed," those who pushed the Holocaust Hoax had only turned up "the volume on their hysterics."¹¹⁸

The Zündel trial encouraged many negationists to believe that their cause was on the rise. Sensing a change, Irving began to move closer to the position occupied by hard-core negationists, and he began to engage the issue that was at the core of the negationist challenge to the historical



William Lindsey on his way to the Ontario District Court, accompanied by Zündel's bodyguards, 1985. Courtesy Canadian Jewish News.

record: the camps. In 1986, he told an audience in Australia that the photos of the concentration camps taken by the English and American soldiers in the spring of 1945 did not provide evidence of German atrocities. "The starvation, the epidemics, the typhoid had only broken out in the last two or three weeks of the war." The Allies, not the Germans, probably carried the blame because of the deliberate bombing of the German transportation and industrial infrastructure.

We had deliberately created the conditions of chaos inside Germany. We had deliberately created the epidemics, and the outbreaks of typhus and other diseases, which led to those appalling scenes that were found at their most dramatic in the enclosed areas, the concentration camps, where of course epidemics can ravage and run wild. And so it is symbolic of the hypocrisy that existed at the end of the Second World War that we picked on those awful photographs, which were of course good television one would say nowadays, they were good newsprint, they were good photos, they were very photogenic those scenes, those piles of corpses. We picked on them as being evidence that the war was a just war and that our journey had not been in vain.¹¹⁹

Irving was not (yet) prepared to explicitly deny the Holocaust as such or the fact that many Jews had died. But he did become silent about Himmler's role: obviously Himmler was too close to Hitler, and it was not very probable that Himmler could have exterminated a good part of European Jewry without Hitler's knowledge. Instead, Irving began to shift the responsibility to the actions of "nameless criminals" of various nationalities. In a radio interview given during the same Australian trip, he stated that between hundreds of thousands and millions of Jews had been liquidated "by the Germans, or the Latvians, or the Ukrainians, or all the rest who carried out liquidations."

They were the victims of a large number of nameless criminals into whose hands they fell on the eastern front. Mostly around Eastern Europe the liquidations occurred. And these men acted on their own impulse, their own initiative, within the general atmosphere of brutality created by the Second World War, in which of course the Allied bombings played a part.¹²⁰

When his interviewer Terry Lane asked him if his remark about the "hundreds of thousands or millions" of Jews implied that he rejected the figure of 6 million Jewish victims, Irving evasively replied that "when you are a statistician as I am, and you've studied statistics, you know that figures don't compact [*sic*], they don't come rounded up to six figures like that, with zeroes at the end. There is one school of thought that says 4 million. Another school of thought may say 6,500,000. Another school of thought, right out at the fringe, says it was only 100,000."¹²¹ Irving was not willing to come down on one side or the other.

Irving was not the only historian who seemed open to negationist propositions. In Germany, Ernst Nolte, professor of history at the Free University in Berlin, had come to the conclusion that Hitler's persecution of the Jews was not unique and that the German concentration camp system had been in everything except the construction of gas chambers just a copy of the Soviet Gulag. The Nazi attempt to kill all Jews, "a universal nation," was a reply to Stalin's destruction of the bourgeoisie, "a universal class." Nolte believed that the Nazi policy against the Jews was created in defensive response to the real, or at least honestly perceived, threat of Judeo-

Bolshevism and was therefore not much different in kind from the American internment of Japanese citizens after Pearl Harbor. But he acknowledged that, as an act of self-defense, Auschwitz was “excessive.”¹²² This judgment appeared in his monumental *Der europäische Bürgerkrieg 1917–1945 (The European Civil War, 1917–1945)*, completed in 1986 and published in 1987. In this book, Nolte did more than try to explain why the Germans had been forced to kill Jews or share his judgment of why Auschwitz had been a somewhat excessive response to the threat of the Jews. Even worse, he also threw doubt on the historical record of the Holocaust. The historiography of the Holocaust, Nolte argued, had been a largely Jewish affair, and as a result it had crystallized in simplistic schemes that defined the Holocaust in terms of German murderers and Jewish victims. Nolte noted that, as far as he was concerned, the verdict was out about what had happened in the extermination camps. He noted that various authors who had no neo-Fascist leanings and who were not German, and who therefore had no axe to grind, sincerely doubted the existence of the gas chambers and he mentioned that “not rarely is [it] stated that mass gassings of that scale were technically impossible with the means available.”¹²³ In a footnote, Nolte made it clear that he was quite sympathetic to the negationist argument that the Wannsee Conference, held to discuss the Final Solution of the Jewish Problem, had never happened. And he called on established historians to engage these arguments constructively instead of condemning out of hand.¹²⁴ In declaring the negationists as partners in a historical debate, Nolte had de facto legitimized them. It seemed that as far as the Holocaust was concerned, the climate of opinion was about to change.

In 1986, David Irving visited Toronto on a world-encompassing lecture tour. He had arranged for a driver to pick him up at the airport, but instead Zündel showed up to greet him. According to Zündel, Irving was visibly shocked. “He wanted nothing to do with me, even then, because of the bad reputation that I had in conservative circles in England and Europe. He thought I was some ‘Revisionist-Neo-Nazi-Rambo-Kook!’”¹²⁵ In order not to give the wrong impression to his audience, Irving asked Zündel not to show up at his lecture. Zündel complied, and so did his supporters. As a result, attendance at Irving’s lecture was very poor. Worst of all, journalists stayed away. After Irving left, Zündel sent him a long letter in which he reviewed the disappointing results of the trip and told him bluntly: “Please make sure that you have someone competent handle your next appearance. You deserve the best!” In the remainder of the letter, Zündel persuasively laid out various schemes that would enrich Irving. Both “handsome” and “witty,” Irving was a promoter’s dream. “You speak beautifully, with a well-modulated voice. You can be combative and abrasive when necessary and also humble and charming.”¹²⁶ All of these talents were, of course, wasted if no one marketed them properly. Zündel, who identified himself as “an advertising man,” made it clear that he saw all the possibilities.

Flattered, enticed by the potential for profit, and encouraged by the ever-more-public willingness of Nolte and others to consider the necessity of a historical revision of the Holocaust, Irving allowed himself to be drawn into Zündel’s orbit and closer to Zündel’s continuing legal battle. On appeal, the 1985 ruling against Zündel had been overturned on procedural grounds, and a new trial had been ordered. This time District Court Judge Ron Thomas was to preside, and John Pearson and Catherine White were to conduct the prosecution. Christie was to represent Zündel again, and, as it soon became clear, Faurisson was once more to head the research team. It had become obvious to Zündel that witnesses of the caliber of

Felderer had done him no good and that he needed the endorsement of a public personality like Irving. In late 1987, Zündel asked Irving to act as an expert witness in what Zündel modestly defined as “The Second Great Holocaust Trial.” Irving would have to testify on Churchill’s responsibility for the outbreak of the Second World War. “Undoubtedly, the prosecution will ask you about ‘mass-gassings’ and ‘Hitler’s orders for the extermination of Jews,’” Zündel warned Irving. “I assume that you will give him the same statements you have made in this regard during your various lectures and talks. I think the Defence can live with that!”¹²⁷ Zündel proved a master of persuasion: he suggested that Irving could use his stay in Canada to give lectures and promote his books from coast to coast. Zündel noted that Irving would profit from the publicity derived from his courtroom appearance and that he would provide “frontmen” to organize the book-promotion campaign.

Zündel repeated his presentation of the trial as a catalyst for a successful book tour in another letter sent in early January 1988. After expressing his dismay over the fact that Irving had had to personally deliver his books to London booksellers and once more offering to organize help with such pedestrian chores so that Irving could concentrate on the important task of revising history, Zündel came to the point: his “thoughtcrime trial” was to begin on January 18, 1988. He notified Irving that he expected him to testify in late March or early April. Zündel predicted that in his testimony Irving could create a proverbial “bang” to begin a promotional tour. “Your timely appearance at the ‘Hitler Diary’ debate was excellent in this regard, and the forthcoming trial here in Toronto promises to be a well-covered media event.”¹²⁸

Irving remained cautious. In his reply to Zündel, he established clear conditions to make the whole thing worth it to him: the whole operation was to be essentially risk free as far as his ability to travel in the future to Canada and the United States. He also warned Zündel that he could not endorse all of his claims. “I accept that a great tragedy did happen but do not accept the present versions as to how.” Irving added that he expected “adequate compensation for my time and travel.”¹²⁹

While Zündel and Irving were courting each other, Faurisson worked out the details of what was to serve as the defense’s trump card: a scientific report on the Auschwitz gas chambers. In his 1980 paper “The Mechanics of Gassing,” he had called for an analysis of the Auschwitz gas chambers in terms of the gas chambers used by some American states, and now the opportunity had arisen to realize that ambition. Faurisson identified Bill Armontraut, warden of the Missouri State Penitentiary in Jefferson City, Missouri, as a potential expert witness. Armontraut’s prison included a gas chamber operated by cyanide gas. Constructed in 1939, it had been used thirty-nine times. Zündel’s legal aide Barbara Kulaszka wrote to Armontraut, who responded in a January 13, 1988, letter, suggesting that she contact a certain Fred Leuchter. “Mr. Leuchter is an engineer specializing in gas chambers and executions. He is well versed in all areas and is the only consultant in the United States that I know of.”¹³⁰

Faurisson had found the man he had been looking for. He called Leuchter and gave him, as Leuchter recalled a year later, “a very shocking history lesson” which left the engineer questioning “that fifty-year-old Holocaust lie and the application of that lie to generations of children.”¹³¹ After a few initial telephone conversations, two trips to Boston by Faurisson, and one trip to Toronto by Leuchter, Leuchter agreed to investigate the ruins of the crematoria. He left for Poland on February 25, accompanied by his wife, a draftsman, a videocameraman, an interpreter, and, “in spirit,”

Zündel and Faurisson, “who for obvious reasons could not accompany us in person, but who nevertheless were with us every step of the way.”¹³² The party returned on March 3, having spent three days at Auschwitz and half a day at Maidanek. In those camps, Leuchter studied the layout of the crematoria—or, better, of what remained of them—and illegally took various samples of the brickwork and plaster, which he brought back to the United States to be analyzed by Alpha Analytical Laboratories in Ashland, Massachusetts, for residual cyanide content.

A week after Leuchter’s return from Poland, Zündel suddenly became nervous about Irving’s appearance when two of the expert witness he had called—Dr. Russell Barton and Dr. Kuang Fann—agreed during cross-examination with the Crown’s argument that the Nazis had murdered 6 million Jews and that *Did Six Million Really Die?* was a repugnant book. He contacted Irving again, writing that he could not afford anymore to have one of his witnesses “in the final analysis agreeing with the Crown prosecutor that ‘It really did happen.’” If cross-examined on the Holocaust, Irving ought either say that he could give no expert opinion on that matter because he had done no research in that area or that he had done research and that it showed “major problems” with current knowledge about the Holocaust. “To affirm that mass gassings took place, or that there was an official policy of ‘Judenausrottung’ coming from your lips would be a disaster for me. Please let me know exactly how you feel.”¹³³

Then Zündel received Leuchter’s report, and it appeared that Faurisson’s strategy had been successful: unlike Lindsey in 1985, Leuchter had delivered the goods. “The author finds no evidence that any of the facilities normally alleged to be execution gas chambers were ever used as such, and finds, further, that because of the design and fabrication of these facilities, they could not have been utilized for execution gas chambers.” Furthermore, Leuchter stated that “an evaluation of the crematory facilities produced conclusive evidence that contradicts the alleged volume of corpses cremated in the generally alleged time frame.”¹³⁴ Leuchter’s conclusion gave Zündel the opportunity to force the issue with Irving. The question became now very easy: Would Irving be prepared to endorse, in court, Leuchter’s findings? In an interview given in 1998, Zündel told American filmmaker Errol Morris that he had phoned Irving in Florida, telling him about Leuchter’s investigation in Auschwitz and the analysis of the samples he had taken there. According to Zündel, Irving responded: “Why did I not think of that myself?” Irving agreed to travel to Toronto, meet Leuchter, and then decide if he would testify.

And so David Irving was in Toronto. He saw the Leuchter Report. He met Fred Leuchter, he looked at all the stuff that he had brought, the video footage, and the drawings that Fred had brought with him. And he said, “This is a shattering document. The Leuchter Report is a shattering document. It is a stroke of genius by the defense. As a historian,” he said, “anybody that will write history, the history of the Second World War that does not take into consideration what Fred Leuchter has found and unearthed, will henceforth do so at their peril because they will write propaganda. Not history.”¹³⁵

For Zündel, the chase had ended. Irving was to testify on his behalf, unequivocally endorsing Leuchter’s findings.

Irving testified on Friday, April 22, and Monday and Tuesday, April 25 and 26, 1988. As an expert witness for the defense, Irving endorsed the main object of legal contention in general terms, Harwood’s *Did Six*



Fred Leuchter holding an electrocution helmet for an electric chair. Courtesy Fourth Floor Productions.

Million Really Die?—a book that claimed that the Holocaust was a piece of Allied atrocity propaganda not that different from the stories that had circulated in the First World War that had credited the Germans with transfixing Belgian babies on bayonets and operating “corpse factories” in which they extracted fat and other useful commodities from the corpses of their own dead. Irving judged “over ninety percent of the brochure *Did Six Million Really Die?* to be factually accurate.”¹³⁶ Through his general endorsement of *Did Six Million Really Die?*, Irving implicitly endorsed the theory that the stories about gassings were Allied atrocity propaganda. Later in his examination-in-chief, Irving became more explicit when he noted a contradiction between the alleged Nazi policy “for the deliberate, ruthless, systematic extermination of the Jews in Auschwitz and in other places of murder” and the existence of many survivors. “So either the Nazis had no such program or they were an exceedingly sloppy race, which isn’t the image that we have of them today.”¹³⁷

During his examination-in-chief, Irving even called Hitler as his witness to support his contention that nothing in Auschwitz had been out of the ordinary.

[Christie]: “And have you in your examination of the records of Adolf Hitler’s headquarters’ activities, discovered what was said on the occasion when Auschwitz was captured? Do you know what was going on?”

[Irving]: “On January the 26th or January the 27th, 1945, the Russian troops overran Auschwitz and on this day, the stenographers, who took down in Hitler’s headquarters every word he spoke, recorded a passage which has survived. We have the fragment of what he said. General Guderian reported to the Führer, ‘Yesterday the Russians overran Auschwitz,’ and Hitler just replied ‘Oh, yes.’”¹³⁸

“Oh yes,” and not, as Irving added, “Well, let’s hope they manage to get rid of it or they’re not going to find anything.”¹³⁹

Irving did not retract his remarks when, during cross-examination, Crown Attorney Pearson confronted him with a passage from his *Hitler’s War* in which he had written about the Holocaust as a historical fact. Pearson confronted Irving with a sentence in which he declared that “the secret extermination camps did not begin operating until December 1941.”

[Pearson]: “Sir, aren’t you suggesting there, stating to the reader that the secret extermination camps did not begin operating until December 1941?”

[Irving]: “I think I have to say here that this sentence falls into the category of sentences that I would not repeat in 1988. At the time I wrote that in the 1960’s, 1974 thereabouts when I wrote—wrote that introduction, I believed. I believed everything I had heard about the extermination camps. I wasn’t investigating the extermination camps. I was investigating Hitler.”

Q.: “But you told us that you did ten years of extensive research on the National Socialist regime?”

A.: “Yes.”

Q.: “And you had no problem making that statement, did you?”

A.: “Because I believed.”



David Irving in Toronto, April 1988. Courtesy Canadian Jewish News.

Q.: "Right."

A.: "I believed what I had read up at that point. I hadn't gone to the sites of Auschwitz and Treblinka and Maidanek and brought back samples and carried out analysis. I hadn't done any research into what is called the Holocaust. I researched Hitler and his staff."

Q.: "You haven't done that, have you, since?"

A.: "I haven't."

Q.: "You haven't done those things?"

A.: "I have carried out no investigation in-depth in equivalent depth of the Holocaust."

Q.: "But your mind changed?"

A.: "My mind has now changed."

Q.: "You no longer believe it?"

A.: "I have now begun to challenge that. I understand it is now a subject open to debate."

Q.: "But your belief changed even though you didn't do any research; is that what you're saying?"

A.: "My belief has now changed because I understand that the whole of the Holocaust mythology is, after all, open to doubt and certainly in the course of what I have read in the last few days, in fact, in this trial, I am now becoming more and more hardened in this view."

Q.: "As a result of what you've read here in the last few days?"

A.: "Indeed."¹⁴⁰

As he explained, the reading matter that had changed his mind was Leuchter's conclusion that "none of the facilities examined were ever utilized for the execution of human beings and that the crematories could never have supported the alleged work load attributed to them."¹⁴¹ In court, Irving publicly embraced Leuchter's conclusions: "I'm very impressed, in fact, by the presentation, by the scientific manner of presentation, by the expertise that's been shown by it and by the very novel conclusion that he's arrived at." Irving admitted that "as a historian I'm rather ashamed it never occurred to me to make this kind of investigation on the particular controversy." In conclusion, Irving endorsed the report wholeheartedly. "I think it is shattering in the significance of its discovery."¹⁴²

After the trial, Irving could have chosen to pack up, return to London, forget about it, and continue his studies of the Nazi pantheon. Probably his reputation would not have suffered much, and he would still have enjoyed the pleasures of a scholar's life without many controversies and court actions. Yet he chose a different route: he decided that Leuchter's Auschwitz was to be his Rubicon and a turning point in the history of history. As he was to state two years later in his notorious "Battleship Auschwitz Speech," his stance in the Toronto courtroom had been foreshadowed by his dramatic and effective intervention in the *Der Stern* press conference five years

earlier. He introduced his account of his Toronto testimony by saying “Just picture me seven years ago, in 1983.”

I’m at the press conference of the West German Magazine *Der Stern*, in Hamburg. . . . I was the first one to have a chance to ask the people at *Der Stern* certain questions. I said right out: “The Diaries are fake—the Adolf Hitler diaries are fake!” They’d spent nine million deutschmarks on them! And all the German historians had said they were genuine. Eberhard Jäckel had said they were genuine, so they must be genuine—but they weren’t.

I got the same kind of feeling about the Holocaust. . . .

This is how it was when I was in Toronto a couple of years ago.¹⁴³

Having tied his 1988 Toronto appearance to his 1983 Hamburg intervention, Irving denied himself the opportunity to reflect on what he had done and, with that, the possibility of retreat. His destiny as a historian came to be tied up with the historical record concerning Auschwitz.

From the moment he left the courtroom, Irving began to aggressively trumpet his own conversion as a world-historical event. Undoubtedly flattery played a role: one negationist magazine, *Instauration*, celebrated his testimony as “traumatic for world Jewry.”¹⁴⁴ Willis A. Carto of the Institute for Historical Review wrote Irving that with his support, negationism was to triumph. “It’s not everyone who has a chance to be instrumental in a historic turnaround. The practical consequences of destroying the holocaust myth are almost indescribably potent.”¹⁴⁵

Such attention triggered a whole range of behavior patterns that had little to do with the professional conduct of historians in search for the truth and much to do with the narcissism of a man caught in a no-man’s-land between an inflated sense of his own superiority as a historian and a sense of inferiority vis-à-vis the historical establishment. In a lecture given in 1988 in Canada, Irving admitted that since he had been a small boy he had enjoyed seeing important people, or people with reputation and prestige, with “egg on their face.” With Holocaust denial, he had found a way to act out his boyhood dream: “Just imagine the omelet on their faces if we manage to expose that other six million lie [as opposed the six million marks *Stern* paid for the Hitler diaries]. This is the prospect that is now opening up in front of me.”¹⁴⁶ The reference to the Hitler diaries was revealing, because his intervention in the Hitler diaries affair had been an occasion when he had indeed played a useful public role. Again and again he was to compare his role in the Hitler diaries affair with his endorsement of Leuchter’s results. Irving predicted that soon he would bring the whole exterminationist edifice down with a new book on Auschwitz. “This is why I hope that people will recognize that I managed to pull off a coup even more spectacular than exposing the Hitler diaries as a fake. From one six million lie to another. That I will see then that some of the world’s most famous historians and politicians have the biggest omelet of all times all over their face.”¹⁴⁷

In a hurry to see the omelet on their faces, Irving bought from Zündel the right to publish the British edition of the Leuchter Report through his own publishing venture, Focal Point Publications. In the spring of 1989, when everything was ready for the book launch, an event occurred that removed whatever restraint Irving may have had. A storm broke loose in the United States about a book published half a year earlier by respected Princeton historian Arno Mayer. Entitled *Why Did the Heavens Not Darken? The Final Solution in History*, it proposed that the Holocaust,

which he termed “Judeocide,” was not the result of anti-Semitism but of anti-Bolshevism. It was the result not of the National Socialist fantasy concerning the so-called “Jewish Question” but of German frustration after the Wehrmacht failed to defeat the Soviet Union in the summer and fall of 1941.¹⁴⁸

While this thesis could perhaps be accepted for the operations of the Einsatzgruppen, Mayer went farther: Hitler’s invasion of the Soviet Union also provided the cause and context for the death camps, including Auschwitz. Mayer’s book included a whole chapter on Auschwitz which provided enough clauses, sentences, and paragraphs to raise the enthusiasm of negationists everywhere. While Mayer did not deny the presence and importance of the gas chambers, he attached particular importance to typhus as a cause of death in Birkenau, which he described as the place where the ailing and dying from the other camps in the Auschwitz complex were sent. “The result was an unspeakable death rate.”¹⁴⁹ Mayer offered a well-meant but ill-considered reflection on the causes of death in Auschwitz that concluded with the sentence that “from 1942 to 1945, certainly at Auschwitz, but probably overall, more Jews were killed by so-called ‘natural’ causes than by ‘unnatural’ ones.”¹⁵⁰ Mayer did not provide a scholarly apparatus to support his statements.

Mayer’s thesis that typhus had been one of the main causes of death in Birkenau could only bring happiness to negationists such as Robert Faurisson, who had advised Zündel about his defense and who had set Leuchter’s research agenda. Faurisson had always maintained that all the Zyklon B shipped to Auschwitz could be easily explained because of the (in his opinion) endemic prevalence of typhus-bearing lice in the camp. Yet none of those connected with the Institute of Historical Review noticed Mayer’s book. That changed in April 1989, when *The New Republic* published an angry and devastating 6-page review entitled “False Witness,” written by Daniel Goldhagen. He summarized Mayer’s book as “an artful construction of half-truths” that was “riddled with extraordinary factual errors, which amount to a pattern of falsification and distortion.”¹⁵¹ Goldhagen observed that Mayer’s “outrageous” account of Auschwitz showed “the spirit of revisionist apologia.”¹⁵² He had no difficulty in demolishing Mayer’s account of Auschwitz. His review, however, had unintended consequences: it alerted the negationists to the fact that a major historian had produced a work that, with admittedly considerable distortion, could be presented as an endorsement of their own position. Consequently, the May issue of the newsletter published by the Institute of Historical Review carried a review entitled “The Holocaust: A Sinking Ship?” It described Mayer as “one of the leading lights of his profession” and his book as a justification of “the approach and methodology of Revisionist scholars of the Holocaust like Paul Rassinier, Arthur Butz, Robert Faurisson, Wilhelm Stäglich, Walter Sanning, David Irving, Mark Weber, Fritz Berg, Carlo Mattogno, Henri Roques and a growing cohort of other researchers.”¹⁵³ It defined Mayer’s text as a “minefield of hoax-boasting concessions”—a place “where Exterminationist angels fear to tread” but an “intrepid Harvard graduate student” had rushed in. And it ended with the question “What to make of it all?”

Is the crew of the good ship *Holocaust* preparing a rush for the lifeboats (and women and children be damned!), or are damage control teams working feverishly below decks in an effort to keep the stricken hull afloat? Will the (largely Gentile) suckers for what passed not so long ago, even among academics, as “the best

documented event in history” stick to their berths in steerage, as the hoax capsizes and begins its last lonely hurdle to the watery graveyard of historical frauds?¹⁵⁴

In his review of *Why Did the Heavens Not Darken?*, published later that year in *The Journal of Historical Review*, Robert Faurisson did not hide his pleasure either. One sentence had given him particular joy: “Sources for the study of the gas chambers are at once rare and unreliable.”¹⁵⁵ Faurisson observed how far revisionism had come. He reminded his readers that in 1979, leading French scholars had publicly stated that there could be no debate about the gas chambers.

We had to wait until 1988 for an established historian like Arno Mayer to say, in his chapter on Auschwitz, that sources for the study of the gas chambers, far from being *abundant* and *reliable*, as people asserted, are only *rare* and *unreliable*. This is just a single example of the significant progress that Historical Revisionism has made in the scholarly community.¹⁵⁶

With the apparently partial “conversion” of a prominent member of the historical establishment to a negationist position vis-à-vis the Auschwitz gas chambers, the prospects of the Leuchter Report to attract establishment support looked good indeed. In a letter to negationist Robert Countess, Irving judged Mayer’s book to be “remarkable, though not quite as ‘revisionist’ as the reviews of it (Newsweek etc) suggest. Still, it is a breakthrough.”¹⁵⁷ With the “breakthrough” of *Why Did the Heavens Not Darken?*, Irving gained the confidence to put his whole reputation on the line: the provocative press statement issued by Focal Point—that is, Irving—was not only grandiose in its claims for the historic significance of the Leuchter Report, but also unequivocal in the (self-)aggrandizement of Irving as a debunker of falsehood. There was no doubt where Irving stood: the pamphlet announced that on June 23, 1989, Irving was to make the “epochal announcement” that the gas chambers of Auschwitz had not existed. Claiming that “scientists, using the same ultra-modern equipment and methods that detected the centuries-old fraud of the Turin Shroud,” had established the Auschwitz gas chambers to be a fraud, the pamphlet stated that Irving “has placed himself at the head of a growing band of historians, worldwide, who are now sceptical of the claim that at Auschwitz and the other camps there were ‘factories of death’ in which millions of innocent people were systematically gassed to death.” Reminding the reader that Irving had been the first to unmask the Adolf Hitler diaries as fraudulent, it stated that “now he is saying the same thing about the infamous ‘gas chambers’ of Auschwitz, Treblinka and Majdanek. They did not exist—ever—except, perhaps, as the brainchild of Britain’s brilliant wartime Psychological Warfare Executive (PWE).” It added that “the survivors of Auschwitz are themselves testimony to the absence of an extermination programme.”¹⁵⁸

The press release more or less followed Irving’s introduction to the Leuchter Report. In it, Irving clearly established his contempt for the historical establishment and his aim to use the report as a weapon in his battle with mainline historians.

Unlike the writing of history, chemistry is an exact science. Old fashioned historians have always conducted endless learned debates about meanings and interpretations, and the more indolent among them have developed a subsidiary Black Art of “reading

between the lines,” as a substitute for wading into the archives of World War II documents which are now available in embarrassing abundance.¹⁵⁹

Saying that “more daring” historians had begun to use modern technologies to dispel “some of the more tenaciously held myths of the twentieth century,” Irving presented his own record as a debunker of the faked Hitler diaries through laboratory analysis of the ink used. The results of “laboratory analysis” of Auschwitz, he claimed, were unequivocal: “While significant quantities of cyanide compounds were found in the small delousing facilities of the camp where the proprietary (and lethal) Zyklon B compound was used, as all are agreed, to disinfect the plague-ridden clothing of all persons entering these brutal slave-labour camps, no signifi-

cant trace whatsoever was found in the buildings which international opinion—for it is not more than that—has always labelled as the camp’s infamous gas chambers.” He added that he did not expect “incorrigible historians, statesmen and publicists” to change their view that the Nazis used gas chambers at Auschwitz to kill human beings. “But it is now up to them to explain to me as an intelligent and critical student of modern history why there is no significant trace of any cyanide compound in the building which they have always identified as the former gas chambers,” Irving wrote. “The ball is in their court.”¹⁶⁰

Confident of his contribution to world history, and seeking maximum publicity, Irving sent copies of the preface to members of Parliament. It was met with an immediate response. On June 20—three days before the official launch of the Leuchter Report—Hugh Dykes, M.P. introduced an “early-day motion” with the title “David Irving and Holocaust Denial.”

DESCRIPTION: That this House, on the occasion of the reunion of 1,000 refugees from the Holocaust, most of whose families were killed in gas chambers or otherwise by Nazi murderers is appalled by the allegation by the Nazi apologist David Irving that the infamous gas chambers of Auschwitz, Treblinka and Majdanek did not exist ever, except perhaps, as the brainchild of Britain’s brilliant wartime Psychological Warfare Executive: draws attention to a new fascist publication, the Leuchter Report, in which this evil calumny appears: and condemns without qualification such pernicious work of Hitler’s heirs.¹⁶¹

Eighty-eight of the members present signed the motion.

The only effect of this public opposition to Irving’s claims was to strengthen his sense that he was the instrument of destiny. In a letter to Hugh Dykes, copies of which were sent to the media, Irving asked if his motion was “the best that the gallant but dwindling band of gullible believers in the ‘gas chambers’ can do?” And he warned him that “if you persist in believing in ‘gas chambers’ at Auschwitz you are on a loser.”¹⁶² A year later, Irving sent another batch of Leuchter Reports to Parliament, this time to members of the House of Lords. The occasion was the War Crimes Bill designed to give British courts greater jurisdiction over certain war crimes committed in Germany and German-held territory during the Second World War. In an accompanying letter, Irving predicted that “five years from now even the dourest academic will accept that the ‘gas chambers’ displayed at Auschwitz are as false as the one removed at Bonn’s insistence from the site at Dachau—a propaganda legend just like the ‘soap made from victims of the Nazis,’ which Israeli historians last month finally admitted was also a grotesque wartime untruth.”¹⁶³

Casting himself as the central protagonist in a great historical drama and making prophetic statements, Irving tied his reputation ever more doggedly to Auschwitz. At the press conference he declared that he was “quite happy to nail my colours to the mast” and inferred from Leuchter’s conclusions concerning the Auschwitz gas chambers that there had been no gas chambers anywhere. When a journalist asked him if this implied that he also denied the gas chambers of Sobibor and Treblinka, Irving answered “I think *prima facie* if they turned out to have been faked at Auschwitz then it’s equally likely that they’d turn out to be fake at the other places behind the Iron Curtain too.”¹⁶⁴

His position was remarkable, given the fact that within weeks after launching the Leuchter Report he received a first indication that Leuchter

had produced a dud. A fellow traveler from South Africa, David A. Crabtree, had obtained a copy of the Leuchter Report through his daughter, who had attended a lecture Irving had given in Johannesburg. He wrote Irving that he found it interesting reading and that its major conclusion was “well founded.” Yet he was troubled by the “elementary errors of fact and reasoning in the text.”¹⁶⁵ Crabtree enclosed a 5-page critique in which he defined some of Leuchter’s observations as “total rubbish, good evidence to brand the author as a scientific ignoramus.”¹⁶⁶ On page after page he corrected Leuchter’s figures and challenged his reasoning. Crabtree’s observations troubled Irving, and he shared his concerns with Zündel. In his response, Zündel accepted that the report could be vastly improved but said that a court order forbade him to do so. If he violated the order, he would lose his right to appeal, he would forfeit the bond that kept him out of prison pending his appeal, he would immediately be arrested and, after completing his sentence, he would automatically be deported. As an alternative to tinkering with the Leuchter Report, Zündel suggested that a new expedition could be mounted to Auschwitz, this time accompanied by a professional television crew. Irving should join as a narrator. “This would give you ‘instant expert’ status and let you talk more forcefully and convincingly with ‘eyewitness status,’” Zündel told Irving. In addition, Irving’s presence “would make the whole thing a serious archaeological history endeavour.”¹⁶⁷ Zündel also suggested that if the Poles made it impossible to take samples, they would amalgamate the new discoveries with the Leuchter samples. And even if the whole thing were to end in scientific failure, Zündel saw the commercial benefits: Irving would end up with “a very marketable product in the Irving image of media Razzle Dazzle.”¹⁶⁸

Crabtree’s critique, written from a perspective sympathetic to Leuchter’s effort, was not the only indication that there were profound problems with the Leuchter Report. In early August Irving received from Mark Weber an anonymous 23-page German critique, entitled “A critical Comment on the So-called Leuchter Document” (“Kritische Stellungnahme zum sogen. Leuchter-Dokument”). Written by octogenarian German retired civil servant and amateur historian Werner Wegner, it was to be published in 1990 as a chapter in the monumental *Die Schatten der Vergangenheit: Impulse zur Historisierung des Nationalsozialismus (The Shadows of the Past: Impulses towards a Historicization of National Socialism)*, published by Propyläen Verlag.¹⁶⁹ Weber told Irving that he was worried about the impact of the essay.¹⁷⁰ He had reason to do so: Wegner amply demonstrated that Leuchter’s science did not pass critical muster.¹⁷¹ Irving had to admit that Wegner’s chapter was “very cogent.”¹⁷²

A final blow to the credibility of the Leuchter Report materialized a few months later, when Irving received through the good offices of Colin M. Beer another utterly devastating critique of the Leuchter Report, written, allegedly, by an unnamed “friend” of Beer.¹⁷³ In the first six conclusions, the report dismantled Leuchter’s science. The seventh conclusion proved harsh to Irving, while the eighth and last conclusion turned the Leuchter Report into a boomerang returning into the face of the negationists:

7) The Leuchter Report on its own does not conclusively prove that the buildings in question were used as gas chambers. Equally its conclusions that they could not have been do not stand up to rigorous analysis. Contrary to Irving’s assertions forensic science is not exact except in detective fiction. At best it is a matter of

balancing probabilities. In all such cases it must be considered in the light of all available evidence. In this context the omission of all other evidence from the Leuchter Report is damning.

Leuchter is not, in spite of his undoubted (if gruesome) expertise, a forensic scientist. He is also not a historian. Had he been either his first reaction should have been that his investigation contradicted the mass of available evidence. Where this occurs there are the following probabilities.

- a) The mass of evidence is wrong
- b) His conclusions are wrong
- c) The contradiction is due to a significant factor being wrong or omitted.

Leuchter, having correctly analysed the problem in the light of his own experience then simply assumed that this conclusion invalidated all the other evidence available and reported accordingly. A forensic scientist or skilled historian then would have asked what factor would have eliminated the contradiction. The reports of a 30–45 minute death time would have pointed him at 100 ppm gas concentration and lead to a fundamental reassessment of his report. Once the 100 ppm assumption is made, all the Holocaust evidence falls into place and the accurate and detailed evidence of the Leuchter Report confirms them. Which leads to our final conclusion.

8) The evidence of the Leuchter Report, when taken in the context of the times and in full consideration of all other evidence[,] is consistent with that other evidence and together strongly supports both the fact and the scale of the massacres in the gas chambers of Birkenau provided that assumption is made that the gas chambers operated at relatively low toxic concentrations.¹⁷⁴

The report was devastating. Irving had to admit as much when he responded to it in a letter to Mr. Beer. As to the general thrust of its argument, he wrote that “I agree, in fact, with many of your friend’s criticisms.”¹⁷⁵

In conclusion: within six months after the publication of the Focal Point edition of the Leuchter Report, it had become clear to Irving that he had tied his fortune to a dud. But Irving refused to retreat. Instead, he revised his magnum opus, *Hitler’s War*, to remove all references to the use of Auschwitz as an extermination camp. For example, in the original edition, Irving described how in the spring of 1942 the Germans rounded up Jews in France, Holland, Belgium, and Slovakia to send them to Auschwitz where, upon arrival, “four in every ten were pronounced fit for work; the rest were exterminated with a maximum of concealment.” In the new edition, Irving dropped the reference to the selection and the killing and replaced it with a sanitized account of Himmler’s visit to Auschwitz in July 1942. After having toured “the immense synthetic rubber plant being erected by forced labor,” Himmler inspected the camp accompanied by, among others, Gauleiter Fritz Bracht. Introducing a false analogy, Irving wrote that “whatever later historians would claim, Hitler never visited any concentration camp, let alone Auschwitz. Historians would also claim that Himmler witnessed the ‘liquidation’ of a trainload of Jews on this occasion. This is apocryphal—devoid of any documentary substance.” Indeed, there is no wartime German document that provides a detailed schedule of Himmler’s visit of the camp—his service calendar tersely mentions “Inspection of the camp of the inmates and the women’s camp”¹⁷⁶—but in 1946

Höss provided an extensive report of Himmler's visit, and it contained a description of Himmler attending the arrival and selection of a transport from the Netherlands. "Himmler very carefully observed the entire process of annihilation. He began with the unloading at the ramps and completed the inspection as Bunker 2 was being cleared of the bodies. At that time there were no open-pit burnings. He did not complain about anything."¹⁷⁷ Irving did not refer to this evidence but instead quoted a postwar statement by Bracht's deputy, Albert Hoffmann, who had accompanied Himmler around Auschwitz.

Conditions were, he volunteered, considerably worse than those he had seen at Dachau in 1938. "Maltreatment did occur, and [he] has actually seen the [crematory] ovens where bodies were being burned." But Hoffmann's interrogation report significantly added, "He totally disbelieves the accounts of atrocities as published in the press." (By late 1945 the world's newspapers were full of unsubstantiated, lurid rumors about "factories of death" complete with lethal "gas chambers.")¹⁷⁸

And thus Irving transformed fact into parenthetical rumor.

In the 1977 edition of *Hitler's War*, Irving described the deportation of more than 400,000 Hungarian Jews to Auschwitz and wrote that "in Auschwitz, the defunct paraphernalia of death—idle since late 1943—began to clank again as the first trainloads from Hungary arrived."¹⁷⁹ The new edition recorded that "four hundred thousand Jews were being rounded up in Hungary; the first trainloads arrived in Auschwitz as slave labor for the now completed I.G. Farben plant."¹⁸⁰ And whereas in the 1977 edition Irving described Auschwitz as "Himmler's ghastly secret," which was revealed in the "horrifying revelations" of Vrba and Wetzlar published in "reputable Swiss newspapers in early July,"¹⁸¹ the 1991 edition contained none of this evidence.¹⁸²

Irving invited Leuchter and Faurisson to help him launch the publication of the new edition of *Hitler's War* with personal appearances. Preparations began in the early summer, when Irving began to inform the press. Some proved less than excited about the prospect of a Leuchter speech in Britain. On July 12, the *Jewish Chronicle* ran the headline "Keep Holocaust 'Apologists' Out of Britain, Home Secretary Is Told." The article quoted David Winnick, M.P., who said that "revisionists and apologists for Nazism are highly offensive to the memory of all those who were murdered. It contaminates British soil to have them here." Irving was said to be unmoved by the protests: "I won't be intimidated, I won't knuckle down."¹⁸³ In the end, anti-Irving activists were able to convince the government that Leuchter's presence would not serve public interest, and, while still in the United States, Leuchter had been informed by the Immigration and Nationality Department that the Home Secretary had given directions "that you should not be given entry to the United Kingdom on the grounds that your presence here would not be conducive to the public good."¹⁸⁴ Both Irving and Leuchter decided to ignore this letter, the former because he needed Leuchter to attract the attention of the media, the latter because he had been convinced by Zündel that a lecture tour to Europe could be profitable: the latter had lined up some "catacomb meetings" in Germany where Leuchter would speak before his appearance with Faurisson in London. The date for Leuchter's appearance was set for November 15. To mark the importance of the occasion, Faurisson was to give an introductory lecture while Irving was to function as the host.

On November 11, 1991, Faurisson and Leuchter arrived in Britain,

despite the exclusion order. Notwithstanding, Irving had distributed a flyer to advertise the launch of the expurgated edition of *Hitler's War* that announced in large type "Leuchter Is Coming!"¹⁸⁵ This publicity triggered a dramatic chain of events which undoubtedly served Irving's desire for publicity but brought Leuchter and his wife some very uncomfortable hours in a London police station and the indignity of immediate deportation. The setting was the Chelsea town hall, which was rented for the occasion. In his welcoming word, Irving described the "revisionist" project he, Faurisson, and Leuchter had undertaken as "the greatest intellectual adventure of the twentieth century."¹⁸⁶ Irving praised Faurisson as a scholar experienced in "microscopic textual analysis, the analysis of words in enormous detail," and concluded his introduction with the statement that "Faurisson is one of the bravest historians I know."¹⁸⁷

The French academic talked for some time about the impossibility of the gas chambers and then vacated the platform for the main speaker of the evening: Leuchter. According to an article in the *Sunday Telegraph* entitled "Death's Salesman Cut Off before His Time," Irving introduced Leuchter with "Boy, have we got a treat for you," and proceeded to tell the audience how he had smuggled Leuchter into the country. According to the article, Leuchter started in form. "It was like listening to a lesson in how to gas people"—a lesson meant to show that the Germans had not done so. The police were present in case of trouble, but because Irving had publicly told the audience that Leuchter ought not be there, they had checked to see if indeed there was an exclusion order. Confirmation came within five minutes. A police officer standing in the wings interrupted Leuchter and asked him to come with him. A chief inspector explained to the disappointed crowd: "Fred Leuchter has been made subject of an exclusion order to this country and in order to resolve the matter, a gentleman who goes by that name has agreed to come to the police station in order to resolve the matter."¹⁸⁸ The article also recorded Irving's answer when asked if he was mad: "When you're working on the edge of intellectual hyper-strain, sometimes you must say: 'Have I flipped?' Unfortunately, there's no intellectual thermometer you can slip in your mouth to find out."¹⁸⁹

The same day that the *Sunday Telegraph* ran the story, Leuchter issued his own press release, stating that the United Kingdom had "joined the ranks of terrorist nations of the world." The Home Secretary had violated international law when he incarcerated Leuchter in a frigid cell "with known felons (a dangerous and potentially lethal place for a maker of execution equipment)." It was defiantly signed by "Fred A. Leuchter Jr., Citizen of the United States of America."¹⁹⁰

Later that month *The Independent* ran a long article about the event and its context in an article entitled "David Irving Resells Hitler's War." It carried a photo of Irving and Leuchter just before the intervention by the police. Interestingly enough, it also provided a telling quotation the *Sunday Telegraph* had not chosen to print: "Mr. Irving told his Chelsea audience that in the new edition of *Hitler's War* they would 'not find one line on the "Holocaust." Why dignify something with even a footnote that has not happened?"¹⁹¹

Irving's defiant language signified his decision to advance ever more aggressively. With that, an increasingly aggressive rhetoric took the place of his earlier calls to science. If the statements he made about Auschwitz were not so appalling, Irving's predicament following the exposure of Leuchter's ineptitude could be described as tragic. But his statements were appalling. For example, in a lecture given in Toronto in 1990 he not only

proclaimed what was to become his favorite summary of case on the Holocaust—“more people died on the back seat of Senator Edward Kennedy’s motor car in Chappaquiddick than died in the gas chamber in Auschwitz”—but also provided another example of his infinite ability to mock the victims. Obviously comfortable with maritime terms and undoubtedly inspired by the review of Mayer’s book that had appeared in the newsletter of the Institute for Historical Review, Irving embroidered the metaphor of the cruise ship Holocaust. It was a huge vessel “with luxury wall-to-wall fitted carpets and a crew of thousands” and “marine terminals established in now virtually every capital in the world, disguised as Holocaust memorial museums.” But Irving predicted that the ship was in for rough seas, because the Russians had made available “the index cards of all the people who passed through the gates of Auschwitz.” (This, by the way, was a lie; the Russians had provided access to the death books that recorded the deaths of registered inmates of Auschwitz.) As a result, “a lot of people are not claiming to be Auschwitz survivors anymore.” Irving predicted that the hoax would collapse as people began to challenge the survivors, beginning with the tattoos on their arms. “Because the experts can look at a tattoo and say, ‘Oh yes, 181,219 that means you entered Auschwitz in March 1943.’” Irving advised the survivors that “if you want to go and have a tattoo put on your arm, as a lot of them do, I am afraid to say, and claim subsequently that you were in Auschwitz, you have got to make sure a) that it fits in with the month you said you went to Auschwitz, and b) that it is not a number which anyone has used before.”¹⁹²

In lectures given in Europe, North America, and Australia, Irving dragged Auschwitz down and was in turn dragged down with it. In early 1990, Irving declared in a lecture given in the German town of Moers that perhaps 30,000 people had been killed in Auschwitz. “Bad enough. No-one of us would like to approve of that. Thirty thousand people in Auschwitz from beginning to end—that is as many as we English killed in Hamburg in one night.” The camp had not been an extermination camp, he argued, and it did not have homicidal gas chambers. Therefore the gas chambers in Auschwitz shown to the tourists were phony. “I say the following thing: there were no gas chambers in Auschwitz. There have been only mock-ups built by the Poles in the years after the war.”¹⁹³ On April 21, 1990, Irving made the same argument to 800 people assembled in the Löwenbraukeller in Munich.¹⁹⁴ A Bavarian public prosecutor decided to take action. After 1979, the German penal code defined Holocaust denial as a punishable offence that carried a maximum sentence of two years in prison. On July 11, 1991, a magistrate’s court convicted Irving for his remarks and fined him DM 7,000. Irving appealed. On May 5, 1992, the District Court of Munich convicted Irving for defamation in conjunction with the offense of denigrating the memory of deceased persons and fined him DM 10,000. Irving appealed again, claiming that there was no evidence for the operation of the Auschwitz gas chambers. He lost this second appeal in 1993. The 25th Criminal Chamber of the Regional Court of Munich increased his fine to DM 30,000. The language of the judgment was harsh for a man who claimed to be the preeminent historian of the Third Reich. “Had the Accused applied his endeavours in an unprejudiced manner, not marked by any ideology of the Right, he would always have been in a position to assess accurately the numerous historical sources and witnesses.”¹⁹⁵ His conviction not only gave him a criminal record but also led to a decision by the German Ministry of the Interior to ban Irving from using German federal archives. This was followed by his exclusion from

the very country to which he had devoted his life. In Germany, Irving had become *persona non grata*.

Irving had chosen Auschwitz as his battlefield—one that he (incidentally) had never visited. In January 1992, the *Jewish Chronicle* characterized him as “describing himself as a ‘field marshal’ who would tour the ‘battlefield’ only once the final victory had been achieved.”¹⁹⁶ But victory had not come his way. Auschwitz had proved to be Irving’s Waterloo. It had made him into a felon, and it had subjected him in Canada to the indignity of arrest and deportation. If he was to clear his name, it could only be by proving that he had been right all along—an attitude that came naturally to the man who described himself in his press statement announcing the publication of the Leuchter Report as “controversial—but always right.” For Irving, therefore, there was no escape from Auschwitz. In private, he was willing to admit that his endorsement of Leuchter’s conclusion had been a disaster. In early 1993, he wrote Zündel that his life had been perfect until they crossed paths. “In April 1988 I unhesitatingly agreed to aid your defence as a witness in Toronto. *I would not make the same mistake again*. As a penalty for having defended you then, and for having continued to aid you since, my life has come under a gradually mounting attack: I find myself the worldwide victim of mass demonstrations, violence, vituperation, and persecution.”¹⁹⁷ Irving’s reasoning was, of course, fallacious. His problems did not derive from his willingness to support Zündel but from his eagerness to exploit the Zündel trial for his own purposes.

But whatever disaster his involvement with Auschwitz had brought him, Irving remained unable to publicly retreat from the issue, and he continued to make it the focus of provocative and ill-considered pronouncements. In 1993, he claimed that probably 100,000 Jews had died in Auschwitz—“but not from gas chambers. They died from epidemics.” Of these probably 25,000 had been murdered. “If we take that generous figure, then I would say that 25,000 people murdered in Auschwitz in three years is still half the number of people that we murdered in Hamburg, burning them alive in one night in 1943.” As to the “real” fate of the Jews, Irving reached back to one of his earlier ideas: most Jews had been killed by Allied bombs after having been evacuated from the camps in the winter of 1944/1945. “The concentration camp inmates arrived in Berlin or in Leipzig or in Dresden just in time for the RAF bombers to set fire to those cities,” Irving claimed. “Nobody knows how many Jews died in those air raids.”¹⁹⁸

Irving not only added new themes to his lecture offerings, he also looked for new publishing initiatives, and in this he remained fatally attracted to Auschwitz. In 1992, a book entitled *Air Photo Evidence* appeared in Canada which formed, together with the Leuchter Report, the bookends of revisionist obsession with the gas chambers. If Leuchter had tried to prove through the chemical analysis of some wall samples that no gassings had taken place, John C. Ball from Delta, British Columbia, thought he could do the same through the study of air photos of Auschwitz and Birkenau taken by Allied planes on April 4, May 31, June 26, August 25, and September 13, 1944. Ball’s reasoning was simple: “Nothing is hidden from air photos. Looking at the air photos will be just as if we went back in time to World War II to take a series of airplane flights over the different areas.” His alleged aim was equally simple. “My objective was to *analyze* World War II German controlled detention camps in Poland for evidence to confirm the claims that mass murders, burials, and cremations had been conducted there”¹⁹⁹—a statement that, given the contents of the

book, reminds one of Leuchter's often-repeated assertion that he went to Auschwitz to prove that the gas chambers had been efficient killing mass installations. Of course, like Leuchter, Ball came to the opposite conclusion: "There is *no* evidence mass murders and cremations occurred at or near the Birkenau crematoriums, which were visible from both inside and outside the camp, or the Auschwitz I or Majdanek detention camps."²⁰⁰ In fact, as a 16-page insert that accompanied the Ball book declared, the situation was quite the opposite of what all witnesses had described: "Auschwitz inmates enjoyed a wide range of healthy activities."²⁰¹

Unlike the Leuchter Report, Ball's book, published by the author, did not have much of an impact. Yet both Zündel and Irving believed that it had potential. It was exceedingly well illustrated with many seemingly informative air photos from the National Archives in Washington. The problem was the text, which was in fact nothing more than a series of captions to the photos. In 1993, Zündel bought the German rights for the book, but at the same time Irving found a right-wing German publisher who would distribute the book under Irving's Focal Point imprint. The deal was that Irving would write a foreword as he had done for the Leuchter Report that would, as he explained to Zündel, make the book understandable.²⁰² In the end, the whole project collapsed. Ball was not to be another Leuchter, and *Air Photo Evidence* was not to be another Leuchter Report. As a publisher of path-breaking negationist pamphlets, Irving had begun to lose his touch.

Irving increasingly began to reap the bitter harvest of the carelessly phrased seeds sown in the years before. He always had taken pride in his prophetic gifts, and in 1991 he had announced that the Holocaust "hoax" would have only another two years of life. "Gradually the word is getting around Germany," he had told a Canadian audience. "Two years from now too the German historians will accept that we are right. They will accept that for fifty years they have believed a lie."²⁰³ But in 1994 he had to admit that his prophecy had not been realized and that the "rotting corpse" of the "profitable legend" of the Holocaust still had some life in it.²⁰⁴ In an interview he gave to the New York-based author Ron Rosenbaum, Irving expressed defiant pride in having made negationism highly visible. "So what started out as a historical footnote in my *Hitler's War* in 1977 has now become so important that prime ministers and presidents have to [denounce] it," Irving claimed proudly. But pride was mixed with regret, and as he talked to Rosenbaum he admitted even a sense of embarrassment in conjunction with the people he had come to associate with. "I'm not blind," Irving told Rosenbaum. "I know these people have done me a lot of damage, a lot of harm, because I get associated then with those stupid actions."²⁰⁵

But Irving did not give up hope that some *deus ex machina* would redeem his 1988 conversion by revealing the "real history" of Auschwitz. In January 1995, Irving believed that his moment had come, with the apparent bouleversement of a prominent French magazine on the issue of Auschwitz. In order to mark the fiftieth anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz—an occasion that testified to the universally shared significance of Auschwitz as the central symbol of the Holocaust—the French magazine *L'Express* carried a section with articles about the camp. One of these, written by journalist and historian Eric Conan, concerned the problems of historic preservation, restoration, and presentation.²⁰⁶ Conan's article provided a solid account of problems conservator Witold Smerk faced in controlling the decay of the remaining barracks, which had been erected as

temporary structures more than fifty years earlier, and the degradation of the hair, shoes, and other exhibits in barracks not equipped with any climate control.²⁰⁷ And then there was the great problem the museum authorities faced in removing from the presentation the overly communist interpretation of the murders that had taken place at the site—one that had inflated the number of victims while simultaneously suppressing the Jewish identity of the vast majority of those killed. Conan quoted a senior advisor to the museum and to the Ministry of Culture, who said that there was now a unanimous resolve “to make an end to the nationalist-communist discourse at the place, and find for the genocide of the Jews a central place in the memory of Auschwitz.” In the five years since the fall of communism much had been achieved. “The biggest blunders have been rectified but the main discussions are never-ending and far from being settled. I may even say that the essential debates, distressing and sometimes unexpected, are only beginning.”²⁰⁸

Conan described the ongoing discussions of the museum with people from all over the world about how to improve the presentation, including a short description of a conference that I attended in 1993. And then he turned to two “delicate” subjects: the issue of the hair, which many Jews would like to see removed from the exhibition and buried, and the problem of ill-considered restorations done shortly after the war. The most important was the reconstruction of the gas chamber in Crematorium 1. “Everything there is wrong: the dimensions of the gas chamber, the locations of the doors, the openings for pouring in Zyklon B, the ovens that were rebuilt according to the recollections of some survivors, the height of the chimney.”²⁰⁹

Conan’s discussion about the problems of the restoration, conservation, and presentation of Crematorium 1 were perfectly justified. Yet his article would prove excellent raw material for negationists. Indeed, they immediately hailed Conan’s article as a breakthrough.

Irving celebrated Conan’s article in the May 1995 issue of his newsletter named *Action Report*.

**L’Express: “Tout y est faux”—Everything About It Is Fake
*French Make a Clean Breast: Admit Forty-Seven-Year Auschwitz
“Gas-Chamber” Fraud***

Paris—Braving the risk of prosecution under France’s draconic new Fabius-Gayssot Law, the mass circulation national weekly magazine L’Express has admitted that the gas chamber shown to tourists at Auschwitz is a fake—built by the Polish Communists three years after the War.

This was the claim which British writer David Irving made in Munich in April 1990: a remark for which the German government fined him DM 30,000 (\$22,000) and banned him from Germany in 1993.²¹⁰

Although he remained silent about Conan’s discussion of the wartime history of Crematorium 1, Irving defined the “admission by L’Express that ‘everything is fake’ about the Auschwitz gas chamber” as “the fourth great triumph for the world-wide revisionist movement”—the other three were the admissions that “there were never homicidal gas chambers in Dachau,” that “the soap story was a propaganda lie,” and that not four million, but only between one and 1.5 million people had been murdered in Auschwitz. “Now the Auschwitz gas chamber legend is finally crumbling too. Just as the leading revisionists promised that it would.”²¹¹

As Irving had indicated, the issue had great personal importance for him because he had been convicted in Germany for stating that the gas chambers shown in Auschwitz were fakes. Ignoring the fact that he had made a statement about all the gas chambers, and that Conan's article only concerned the gas chamber in Crematorium 1—those of Crematoria 2, 3, 4, and 5 were never reconstructed—Irving felt that the time had come to call for a revision of the case, and he called all his supporters “to tell German diplomatic officials and journalists about the article and its findings.”²¹² Irving's reaction to Conan's article once again clearly revealed that he felt that his own reputation was tied up with Auschwitz.

Irving refused to recant his position on the Auschwitz gas chambers even when, in 1995, he showed a surprising willingness to abandon the extremely offensive position he had adopted in 1988. When interviewed in July 1995 on Ron Casey's morning radio show in Australia, Irving remarked that if Churchill had accepted Hitler's 1940 peace offer, “the world would have been spared a lot of suffering and would also, incidentally, have been spared what is now called the Holocaust.” When Casey pointed out to Irving that he had admitted that the Holocaust had happened, Irving tried first some evasive action. “I don't like talking about the Holocaust as though there was only one Holocaust, it's just that I get a bit unhappy about the fact that the Jewish community have tried to make a monopoly of their own suffering.” Casey did not give up and elicited from Irving a statement that up to 4 million Jews had died in the concentration camps “of barbarity and typhus and epidemics.”²¹³ Thus, by the middle of 1995, Irving seemed to abandon the extreme negationist position he had taken in his Battleship Auschwitz speech given at the Tenth International Revisionist Conference and in fact conceded that up to 4 million Jews had been killed in concentration camps, a number that actually exceeded Raul Hilberg's estimate, based on a careful study of the evidence, that of the total number of 5.1 million Jewish victims up to 3 million Jews had been killed in the camps.²¹⁴ Yet even in retreat Irving did not change his views concerning the Auschwitz gas chambers. He attributed the deaths to “barbarity and typhus and epidemics,” carefully avoiding mentioning the gas chambers.

Irving's remarks generated much anxiety in negationist circles, especially after they had been picked up by the anti-Fascist monthly *Searchlight* and published in their September issue. In response, Faurisson wrote Irving on September 29, 1995, to ask him if he had indeed had admitted to the killing of 4 million Jews.²¹⁵ Irving did not respond, claiming later that he had not received the letter. He only engaged Faurisson's complaint when the latter published his letter in the newsletter of the negationist Adelaide Institute. In response, Irving wrote a letter to Faurisson which suggested the possibility that the interview had been edited “to fake what I actually said,” and repeated that while the number of victims could have been as high as 4 million, the causes of death would have been “air raids, forced marches, starvation, disease, epidemics, old age.”²¹⁶ Faurisson was not impressed. He waited for three days and then responded curtly, asking him for his evidence that perhaps 4 million Jews had died. “Why not 5,100,000 as Hilberg says? Or any other figure?” Faurisson asked.²¹⁷

Rigid as ever, Faurisson was very disappointed, and on July 7, 1996, he sent a letter to the Adelaide Institute, which published it as their lead article in August. In it Faurisson reviewed Irving's career as a negationist. In the early 1980s he had been like a “half-pregnant woman,” reluctant to jump in 1988 onto the revisionist bandwagon in Toronto, yet “benefiting from the enormous work I had done for years and under the worst circum-

stances for my family and myself, and benefiting also from the fact I had won F. Leuchter to both E. Zündel's and my revisionist views." Yet in 1991, Faurisson began to have doubts about Irving's willingness to suffer both jail time and financial ruin for his beliefs. "In recent years I have watched Irving become more and more upset, and trying to distance himself from the revisionists. . . . We are, in this way, getting back to the 'half pregnant woman'!" He counseled Irving that "if he stops changing and shifting, if he decides to repeat clearly what he first said about the 'shattering' *Leuchter Report* and the 'sinking battleship, Auschwitz,' without desperately trying to regain the favour of the 'Establishment,' he will be respected and feared by everybody, including his worst enemies: It is the best tactic."²¹⁸

Faurisson's public criticism challenged Irving's idealized image. By the time Faurisson's letter appeared in print, Irving's retreat had ceased, and he announced publicly that he would make a stand. His battle was to take the form of a libel action against Penguin Books Limited and Professor Deborah Lipstadt of Emory University in Atlanta, respectively publisher and author of a study of negationism entitled *Denying the Holocaust*.

To have a fight one needs two, and Irving chose wisely when he decided to initiate his suit against Lipstadt. Of all the people who had said nasty things about him, Lipstadt was the least likely to give in without a fight. Born in New York City in 1947, she received an intensive Jewish education. At the City College of New York, she read political science and history. She spent two academic years in Israel (1966–1968) and was there during the Six-Day War. This experience triggered a turn to Judaism, and after her return to the United States she enrolled in the graduate program of Judaic studies at Brandeis University. On receiving her doctorate, she was appointed first at the University of Washington, then the University of California Los Angeles, and following that at Occidental College in Los Angeles. In Los Angeles she became interested in the indifference of the American press to the fate of the Jews in Nazi Europe. The result was a passionate book, *Beyond Belief: The American Press and the Coming of the Holocaust 1933–1945* (1986).

As she researched the largely unconscious patterns of denial that had marked contemporary American reporting of the Holocaust, Lipstadt became interested in the highly conscious patterns of negationism that had gained increasing visibility in the early 1980s. In 1984, Lipstadt proposed to Professor Yehuda Bauer, head of the Vidal Sassoon Centre for the study of Anti-Semitism at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, that she write a book on the historical and historiographic methodology of American negationists. In the original proposal, Lipstadt mentioned that negationists "find it expedient to associate themselves with those such as David Irving who do not deny that the Holocaust took place but seek to shift the blame to others." One of the particular questions the book was to answer was the measure in which World War I revisionism had influenced "people such as App and Butz and those such as David Irving who, though they may not deny the existence of the Holocaust, do shift the blame from Hitler."²¹⁹ In 1988, Bauer and Lipstadt arrived at a formal agreement. After four years of research the first draft was completed; it treated Irving as a minor figure in the story of negationists. In a critique of the manuscript, Bauer urged Lipstadt to adopt a more worldwide perspective, as it limited itself to American and French negationists. "Americans are so provincial anyway," Bauer noted. "I would not like to strengthen that." Reviewing Lipstadt's treatment of negationism in various other countries, Bauer observed that

“Irving is mentioned, but not [as] the mainstay of Holocaust denial today in Western Europe.”²²⁰

Bauer’s call was justified, and Lipstadt recognized this. She immediately set out to find more material on Irving. When asked for help, Antony Lerman of the Institute of Jewish Affairs in London obliged and sent her some clippings. When the book finally appeared, Irving had become an important protagonist in the story. Lipstadt, who had by then moved to Emory University in Atlanta, now defined Irving as “one of the most dangerous spokesmen for Holocaust denial.” She charged that “familiar with historical evidence, he bends it until it conforms with his ideological leanings and political agenda.”²²¹

*Cover, Denying the Holocaust
(1993). Collection of author.*

Lipstadt's book first appeared in 1993 in the United States under the imprint of The Free Press, a subsidiary of Macmillan. In 1993, Irving did not act. First of all, the American libel laws made success very unlikely: not only would the burden of proof be on him, but following the Supreme Court judgment in the case of *New York Times vs. Sullivan*, as a public figure Irving would have to prove that Lipstadt had made her criticisms of him with knowledge of falsehood or with reckless disregard for the truth. The book appeared in Britain in 1994 under the imprint of Viking, a subsidiary of Penguin. If he were interested in a suit, he had a chance: singularly and strikingly, British libel law favors the plaintiff and not the defendant. The plaintiff only needs to make the charge that certain remarks are defamatory. Unless the defendant claims that the plaintiff misunderstood the ordinary meaning of the words at issue, or their innuendo, the law requires that the defense justify the words by proving the alleged libel to be "substantially" true.

Yet for two years nothing happened. Irving was not interested in pursuing Lipstadt in the courts. In fact, Irving enjoyed confronting her directly in the hustle and bustle of the free market of ideas. On November 11, 1994, he joined the audience for a lecture about negationism Lipstadt was to make at DeKalb College, located in Atlanta, Georgia. During the question-and-answer period Irving rose to hijack the meeting in a manner not much different from his tactic at the 1983 *Der Stern* press conference. He charged that Lipstadt's claim that there were abundant proofs for the gas chambers in Auschwitz was false and that there was no blueprint for the gas chamber showing the holes through which the Zyklon was inserted. He offered a thousand-dollar reward if she could produce that document. As the meeting dissolved into chaos, he unrolled a large wartime aerial photograph of Auschwitz, challenging Lipstadt to show him the mountains of coke necessary to incinerate the alleged number of victims. Then he offered those present free copies of his Göring biography. In the diary account that he wrote the next day and which he immediately faxed to his supporters, he described his offer as an attempt to get the better of Lipstadt in her own backyard. Many students accepted the free copies. Irving noted in his diary that not since his intervention in the *Der Stern* press conference "had success smelt so sweet, and been (in my view) so richly deserved."²²²

The paths of Irving and Lipstadt parted again. Both had other things on their minds. Lipstadt had been appointed to the United States Holocaust Memorial Council, the body that oversees the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington, D.C. Miles Lerman, the chairman of the Council, asked Lipstadt to run the Education Committee, which supervised the Education Department of the museum, and appointed her to the museum's Executive Committee. She was too busy to be concerned about Irving. This changed, however, in the spring of 1996. The New York publishing house St. Martin's Press was about to publish Irving's biography of Goebbels. Many protested, but Deborah Lipstadt was particularly vocal in her opposition to the publication of the Goebbels biography, accusing Irving and St. Martin's Press of killing the victims of the Holocaust a second time. At the last moment, St. Martin's Press stopped publication. The collapse of the deal meant a great financial loss to Irving—he was to claim later that he had lost \$500,000. Irving blamed a Jewish conspiracy, and much of his anger was focused on Lipstadt. According to the *Washington Post*, Lipstadt compared the publication of Irving's Goebbels biography with the publication of a treatise on pedophilia by Jeffrey Dahmer, the murderer and cannibal of a dozen young men. Irving resented being compared to a pedophile, as he was to state four years later in his opening

statement in the Royal Courts of Justice in London. “It is enough for the label to be attached, for the attachee to find himself designated as a pariah, an outcast from normal society.” He intended to teach Lipstadt a lesson. In July, Irving announced his response in his *Action Report*: “Prof. Lipstadt is about to receive a writ from me for her tract Denying the Holocaust which she has foolishly started peddling within the jurisdiction of the British Courts.”²²³

On September 5, 1996, Irving issued a writ of summons, which triggered an action in which Penguin and Lipstadt, if they chose not to settle, would have to prove that the statements that Irving considered libelous were justified. His complaint involved, apart from the quote given above, six other passages and one footnote. Two of the passages were crucial, and both related to Irving’s involvement with the Leuchter Report. In the first passage, Lipstadt wrongly claimed that Irving had been involved in the preparation of the Leuchter expedition to Auschwitz. “Both Irving and Faurisson advocated inviting an American prison warden who had performed gas executions to testify in Zündel’s defense, arguing that this would be the best tactic for proving that the gas chambers were a fraud and too primitive to operate safely.”²²⁴ Irving did indeed have a point. Lipstadt was in error. As we have seen, Irving was not involved in this stage of the Zündel defense.

The second passage was more damaging to Irving.

David Irving, who during the Zündel trial declared himself converted by Leuchter’s work to Holocaust denial and to the idea that the gas chambers were a myth, described himself as conducting a “one-man intifada” against the official history of the Holocaust.

In his foreword to his publication of the Leuchter Report, Irving wrote that there was no doubt as to Leuchter’s “integrity” and “scrupulous methods.” He made no mention of Leuchter’s lack of technical expertise or of the many holes that had been poked in his findings. Most important, Irving wrote, “Nobody likes to be swindled, still less where considerable sums of money are involved.” Irving identified Israel as the swindler, claiming that West Germany had given it more than ninety billion deutsche marks in voluntary reparations, “essentially in atonement for the gas chambers of Auschwitz.” According to Irving the problem was that the latter was a myth that would “not die easily.” He subsequently set off to promulgate Holocaust denial notions in various countries.²²⁵

The language of the passages was plain enough, and in the “Statement of Claim” attached to his writ of summons, Irving charged Lipstadt with having “falsely and recklessly” written these defamatory words, and he charged that Penguin “falsely and recklessly” published them. Referring to the “natural and ordinary meaning of the words complained of,” Irving made eleven complaints, one of which concerned his integrity as a historian:

- (iii) that the Plaintiff routinely, perversely and by the way of his profession but essentially in order to serve his own reprehensible purposes, ideological leanings and/or political agenda
- distorts accurate historical evidence and information
 - misstates
 - misconstrues
 - misquotes

- falsifies statistics
- falsely attributes conclusions to reliable sources
- manipulates documents
- wrongfully quotes from books that directly contradict his arguments in such a manner as completely to distort their authors' objectives and while counting on the ignorance or indolence of the majority of readers not to realise this.²²⁶

Three of his complaints directly concerned Auschwitz:

(vi) that before Zundel's trial began in 1988 in Toronto the Plaintiff, compromising his integrity as an historian and in an attempt to pervert the course of justice, and one Faurisson wrongfully and/or fraudulently conspired together to invite an American prison warden and thereafter one Fred A. Leuchter an engineer who is depicted by the Defendants as a charlatan to testify as a tactic for proving that the gas chambers were a myth.

(vii) that the Plaintiff after attending Zundel's trial in 1988 in Toronto having previously hovered on the brink now denies the murder by the Nazis of the Jews;

(viii) that the Plaintiff described the memorial to the dead in Auschwitz as a "tourist attraction."²²⁷

In addition, Irving complained of the innuendo of having been identified as a "Holocaust denier."

10. The Plaintiff will show at the hearing of this action that the true or legal innuendo of the words "Holocaust denier" is that any person described as such wilfully perversely and with disregard to all the existing historical evidence denied and continues to deny all and any occurrence of one of the worst crimes known to history namely the mass murder by whatever means by Hitler's agents and their associates of the Jewish people and hence genocide and a crime against humanity.²²⁸

Irving claimed an entitlement to aggravated damages because Lipstadt would have pursued a "sustained malicious vigorous well-funded and reckless world-wide campaign of personal defamation" against Irving which had brought him, among other things, "hatred, ridicule, contempt, risk of personal injury, and/or assassination."²²⁹

It was difficult to argue that Irving had misunderstood either the ordinary meaning of Lipstadt's text or its innuendo. And so Penguin and Lipstadt had a simple choice: either to give in or to engage Irving in court. With some hesitation at first, the publishers and lawyers at Penguin convinced first themselves and then its new parent company Pearson, who was to have the ultimate financial liability, that in defending *Denying the Holocaust* it would continue a line that had begun years earlier when it had refused to withdraw from publication D. H. Lawrence's *Lady Chatterley's Lover* and, more recently, Salman Rushdie's *The Satanic Verses*. For Lipstadt, there was no need to convince herself. She was resolved to engage Irving from the outset. But it was also a difficult course of action, because it would be necessary to prove in court that Lipstadt had been *substantially* right in her claim that Irving had distorted historical evidence and manipulated documents to serve his own ideological purposes. While the defendants did not have to prove the truth of every detail Lipstadt had written,

they had to justify the truth of the sting of the defamatory charges. This meant that, among other things, the defense would have to demonstrate that Irving had misrepresented the historical record concerning Auschwitz. In order to determine the instances that he had engaged in special pleading, suppression of evidence, or even the invention of evidence as it related to that camp, the legal team that was to be assembled would need an expert on the history of Auschwitz.