

# Introduction

TELL the truth and shame the Devil. That was one of my mother's sayings, one I came to hear quite frequently. So I'll get this off my chest first. I have a criminal record. Of sorts: well, not as such: well, in Germany and Austria it is a kind of – that is, it used to be – an offence: but it isn't now, or won't be forever. For the time being however writing History can be dangerous. Here goes.

In November 1989, touring Austria, where all but two of ten public lecture functions had as usual collapsed, I erred: I maintained that a particular building they showed the tourists at Auschwitz in Poland was a fake, run up for various reasons post-war. A few weeks later, in Germany in 1990, I said the same thing. I was speaking on World War II history, on which my knowledge is “unparalleled,” to use the overly generous words of Mr Justice Gray ten years later in London.<sup>1</sup> In January 1993 a Munich court solemnly fined me thirty thousand marks, around \$20,000, for the remark, because it “defamed the memory of the dead,” to quote the quaintly named law invoked. In January 1995 the Polish authorities publicly admitted that they had erected the building concerned in, eh, 1948, three

1 Mr Justice Gray's Judgment, Apr 2000. This can be read most easily on our website at <http://www.fpp.co.uk/trial/judgment>

years after the war had ended.<sup>2</sup> They still display it to the tourists, and they still don't tell them unless they ask, but there is a line of very small print beneath the sign outside the entrance that admits it; and Germany still does not admit mistakes or give refunds.

Many years later, midst much international puzzlement, the Austrian government arrested me for what I had said seventeen years earlier in 1989, and in 2006 they sentenced me to three years in jail under their unique *Verbotsgesetz*, or Banning Law. The two laws, the German and the Austrian, did not exist anywhere else on earth.

It is an odd life, being a non-conformist historian, one who thinks for himself. Here in the Austrian jail libraries I found many of my books, being loaned to prisoners to read, including my biography of Adolf Hitler. Hearing of this, the jail authorities in Graz-Jakomini Prison asked me to autograph them. Hearing of that, the justice ministry in Vienna ordered all my books removed from the shelves and burned. They are trying to shake off their Nazi image, they explained to the newspapers; and we should hope so too, since most of the death camp commandants were Austrians, as indeed were the Gestapo chief Ernst Kaltenbrunner, the Adolf Eichmann family, and Herr Hitler himself.

Therefore I am writing these pages as a bemused and not ungrateful guest of the Austrian government; I am in solitary confinement in a grim, stone-walled building; I am wholly protected from the outside world, with neither newspapers nor radio nor television, and forbidden telephone contact too. Time for me has suddenly stood still, rudely suspended on November 11, 2005. With almost all expenses paid, I am unexpectedly enabled to pause in man's brief rush through Time, the blink of a gnat's eye which is called one's life, and to take stock of all these other things that happened to me – if indeed they ever really did.

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*March 20, 2006, Josefstadt Jail, Vienna.*

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2 See for instance the article by Pierre Conan in *L'Express*, Paris, Jan 19, 1995, <http://www.fpp.co.uk/Auschwitz/docs/Conan.html>

# Part One

