

Holocaust and the free speech

By Anwer Mooraj

MANY were appalled to know that David Irving, a far-right British historian and researcher of the Second World War, had been jailed in Austria for three years for denying the existence of the Holocaust.

The indignation has spread to other countries, and in Britain, where they have started passing around the hat, there is dismay that the verdict could turn Irving into a rightwing martyr. What happened to free speech and freedom of expression? What happened to the right to express one's opinion without fear of censure?

David Irving has no shortage of champions. In a six-page essay in *The New York Review of Books* Gordon A. Craig, a leading scholar of German history at Stanford University, noted Irving's claims that the Holocaust never took place and that Auschwitz was merely "a labour camp with an unfortunately high death rate." Though "such obtuse and quickly discredited views" may be "offensive to large numbers of people", Craig argued that Irving's work is "the best study we have of the German side of the Second World War" and that "we dare not" disregard his views.

Another ally is the commentator Mark Hand who offered some seductive arguments: "Should people who downplay the Confederate States of America's treatment of slaves and the US government's treatment of Native Americans face criminal charges? Should the people who publicly contend that the US government was justified in killing hundreds of thousands in Hiroshima and Nagasaki face criminal charges? Should the people who deny the wickedness of the US invasions of Vietnam and Iraq face criminal charges? Should the people who deny the wickedness of Israel's conduct against Palestinians face criminal charges? Of course not!

He continues, "we are dealing with a simple yet extremely dangerous case of nation-states gone wild. Instead of addressing their complicity in modern-day atrocities — such as providing either unabashed logistical support for or tacit approval of the US government's crimes around the world — these governments arrest people for public speech. Irving, Zundel and others who face criminal charges of 'denying the Holocaust' have not committed violence against anybody. They have not given orders to soldiers to invade and occupy another country. They have not given orders to police or soldiers to arrest and imprison individuals without charges. They have not given approval to secret police, soldiers or prison guards to torture individuals. "Irving, Zundel and others have expressed their opinions about one of the most despicable periods in our world's history. These expressions might anger people. But these people are not in positions of power today that would give them the means to implement policies that mimic the conduct of the Nazis. Today, the leaders of liberal democratic governments are the ones with the authority, police and military firepower to mimic selected policies of the Nazis and the policies of other notorious regimes in our world's history without fear they will face the

consequences of their deadly actions.

“If one does not like what some people might say or write about the Holocaust, then that person should ignore it... What we should not ignore is when nation-states, with their monopoly on violence, lock up people for expressing their opinions about government atrocities committed 60 years ago. More important, we should not ignore the fact that the governments that are locking up individuals for speaking their mind about the actions of the Nazis are the same governments aiding and abetting (or refusing to denounce and stop) the atrocities committed today by the world’s only superpower and its confederates.”

The Holocaust has never been a big issue in Pakistan where the Jewish population is negligible and anti-Semitism, if it does exist, stems from the actual or perceived treatment meted out to the Palestinians by the Israelis. This has not stopped the occasional critic from exhuming this dreadful event from the pages of history and from questioning the six-million-figure which now appears to be the generally accepted number of Jews that were killed by the government of the Third Reich either through gassing or other forms of extermination.”

They have pointed out that the Nazis couldn’t have possibly carried out such a massive, wholesale annihilation because they just didn’t have the necessary rolling stock to transport Jews from different parts of occupied Europe to the concentration camps in Poland. In their opinion the figure probably ranges between 600,000 and a million. But, and this is significant, none of these critics ever suggested that wholesale executions did not take place. The gassings were inhuman and totally unjustified. But the question nevertheless remains: should a historian be persecuted 60 years after the event, just because he doesn’t subscribe to the official, or majority view?

This question also raises another important issue. Will those European governments sensitive to crimes against Judaism that lock up people who claim that the Holocaust never took place, start rounding up those newspaper editors who reproduced those disgraceful, blasphemous caricatures and start putting them on trial for crimes against Islam? Muslim leaders know this will never happen because European governments have always been practising the policy of double standards. In fact, European governments and their mouthpieces in the media take cover under the cloak of free speech to justify publishing insults against Muslims who have now replaced the communists as the universal enemy, but forget all about free speech and the right to have one’s say, when one of their own kind decides to defy conventional thinking of atrocities committed against Europe’s Jews. As it is, quite a few Muslims believe the blasphemous cartoons were part of a fiendish plot to keep Turkey out of the European Union.

And so, while Vienna is celebrating the 250th anniversary of the birth of Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart and the rich and famous are flocking to the opera house to hear ‘The Marriage of Figaro’ — surely the greatest opera ever composed — David Irving will spend the next three years in prison for giving two speeches in Austria in 1989, whilst Ernst Zundel faces up to five years in prison for publishing his opinions on the Zundel site website while living in Canada.

While it is a little sad that pockets of intolerance have moved to the West, it is interesting to note that while David Irving has a lot of supporters who believe he is being punished for his extreme rightist views, he appears to have an equal number of detractors who see him as some sort of literary fascist agitator. In fact, the edition of the Daily Mail dated May 1, 1959 quoted Irving as saying, 'You can call me a mild fascist if you like'. Critics believe he was much more than that. He referred to Adolf Hitler as 'Herr Hitler' and according to the Anti-Defamation League Irving also supported apartheid in South Africa, racist cartoons, and gave an appreciative view of Nazi Germany. In fact, by the early 1980s Irving was starting to be seen as a Nazi sympathizer.

In 1977 Irving published *Hitler's War*, the first of his two-part biography on Adolf Hitler. In it, Irving tried to describe the war from 'Hitler's point of view'. He portrayed Hitler as a rational, intelligent politician, whose only goal was to increase Germany's prosperity and influence on the continent. Irving's book faulted the Allied leaders, most notably Winston Churchill, for the eventual escalation of war. He also claimed that Hitler had no knowledge of the Holocaust; while not denying its occurrence, Irving claimed that Heinrich Himmler and his deputy Reinhard Heydrich were its originators and architects.

Irving's works were generally ignored by academics, and often criticized as inaccurate when reviewed by specialists. However, his command of language and a wealth of anecdotes led generalists to write favourable reviews in the popular press, and many of his works sold well, such as *The Destruction of Dresden*.

He was particularly noted for his mastery of the voluminous and scattered German war records. His revisionist portrayal of Winston Churchill in *Churchill's War* made quite a few Conservative loyalists wince when he described England's Grand Old Man as 'a debauched alcoholic, a coward, an unabashed racist, and a corrupt warmonger servile to the interests of 'international Jewry''. Irving also accused Churchill of 'selling out the British Empire' and 'turning Britain against its natural ally, Germany. Harsh words, but do they justify locking up a person for three years?

How should exponents of free speech approach the problem of Holocaust denial? In this short extract, Professor Timothy Garton Ash charts the progress of this conflict.Â Free Speech and the Study of History. Timothy Garton Ash Wednesday, 28 October 2015 - 6:00PM. WATCHED. Free the Nipple! Professor Joanna Bourke Thursday, 12 March 2020 - 10:00AM. WATCHED. The Holocaust speech by Pope John Paul II The words of the ancient Psalm, rise from our hearts: "I have become like a broken vessel. I hear the whispering of many - terror on every side - as they scheme together against me, as they plot to take my life. But I trust in you, O Lord: I say, 'you are my God.'" In this place of memories, the mind and heart and soul feel an extreme need for silence. Silence in which to remember. Silence in which to try to make some sense of the memories which come flooding back. Silence because there are no words strong enough to deplore the terr The Dutch public prosecutor has appealed against a court ruling acquitting a Muslim group of insulting Jews with a cartoon suggesting they invented the Holocaust, in a case testing the bounds of free speech. The court ruled last month the cartoon published by the Arab European League (AEL) showed "bad taste" and was "exceptionally offensive," but it acquitted the group on charges it insulted Jews because of the context in which the cartoon was published. In announcing its appeal, the public prosecutor said on Tuesday it was essential to determine whether the cartoon was &qu