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“Revisionism”¹ in Germany and Austria: The Evolution of a Doctrine

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Development of “revisionism” since 1945

Most people understand so called „revisionism“ as just another word for the movement of holocaust denial (Benz 1994; Lipstadt 1993; Shapiro 1990). Therefore it was suggested lately to use the word „negationism“ instead. However in the author’s point of view „revisionism“ covers some more topics than just the denying of the National Socialist mass murders. Especially in Germany and Austria there are some more points of National Socialist politics some people have tried to minimize or apologize since 1945, e. g. the responsibility for World War II, the attack on the Soviet Union in 1941 (quite a modern topic), (the discussion) about the number of the victims of the holocaust a. s. o.. In the seventies the late historian Martin Broszat already called that movement „running amok against reality“ (Broszat 1976). These pseudo-historical writers, many of them just right wing extremist publishers or people who quite rapidly turned to right wing extremists, really try to prove that history has not taken place, just as if they were able to make events undone by denying them.

A conception of “negationism” (Auerbach 1993a; Fromm and Kernbach 1994, p. 9; Landesamt für Verfassungsschutz 1994) or “holocaust denial” (Lipstadt 1993, p. 20) would neglect the additional components of “revisionism”, which are logically connected with the denying of the holocaust, this being the extreme variant. As Auerbach puts it, in truth they all are apologists of National Socialism (Auerbach 1993a, p. 36). Therefore all efforts to rewrite history with the aim of apologizing or de-criminalizing National Socialism for

1 The word is put between quotation marks to set it off any serious efforts of true historians to revise some thesis of historiography.

personal or political purposes will be called “revisionism” in this article. In Austria and Germany the word “revisionism” has a historical background quite different from that in the USA. In the latter it is connected to a historical tradition of the twenties when historians re-interpreted the history of US entering the war (see later on). In the first mentioned countries the word is sometimes associated to a trend in the German labour movement at the beginning of the twentieth century (Bailer 1992; Landesamt für Verfassungsschutz 1994).²

“Revisionism” is mostly connected with right wing extremism or neo-Nazism, even if the authors do not regard themselves as rightwing-extremist their publications are being used and instrumentalized by those political groups. Since National Socialist ideology is inseparably associated with the unbelievable crimes of this regime all these groups which try to revive that ideology have to fight the remembrance on the crimes. They have to white wash the leading National Socialists and their politics in order to win followers. The historical roots of “revisionism” reach back into the late forties and early fifties when tendencies to minimize the National Socialist crimes as well as to excuse the starting of World War II by the Hitler-Regime arose.

One of the first European “revisionists”, Maurice Bardéche, according to Lipstadt “a French fascist” (Lipstadt 1993, p. 50), already mixed the said themes in a way that set the fashion for many of the following “revisionist” publications. In 1948 he published a book *Nuremberg or the Promised Land* where he contended that documents concerning the Holocaust had been falsified, that the “final solution” just meant the transfer of the Jews to ghettos in Eastern Europe. Bardéche argued that Jews were not victims of National Socialism, but have to be held guilty for the offspring of World War II. National Socialist Germany had to defend herself against communism and Stalin’s lust for power all over Europe.

Paul Rassinier started his publishing activities in the late forties with his books *Crossing the Line* and *The Lie of Ulysses* in which he tried to prove that the accusations against the National Socialists were false and unfair. Later on Rassinier sort of specialized on denying the National Socialist genocide against Jews. Both, Bardéche as well as Rassinier, in some way came out of the ranks of collaboration with the German occupation power though Rassinier started

2 Recently left wing historians have used the term historical revisionism for tendencies of historians like Emil Nolte or Rainer Zitelmann (Karl Heinz Roth 1994) who are no “revisionists” but sometimes prepare the ground for them as it is worked out later on in this article. We have to ask if such a parallel use of terms does not help to minimize right wing extremist “revisionism” and therefore produces the contrary of the planned aim.

his contacts as prisoner in the concentration camps of Buchenwald and Dora. Later he wrote that the direct contact to the SS had caused his entirely different point of view (Baier 1982, pp. 89 f.). One of Bardéche’s relatives again was executed for collaboration (Fromm and Kernbach 1994, p. 10). Bardéche himself edited Rassiniers books in France (Baier 1982, p. 97).

In Germany and in Austria “revisionism” started with the denial of Hitler’s responsibility for World War II respectively the glorification of the German soldiers’ virtues with former National Socialists playing a leading part. Among the first of these books in Germany was Peter Kleist’s *Auch du warst dabei* (You took part also) which became an example for all later authors (Graml 1989). Kleist himself was a close assistant to National Socialist Foreign Minister Joachim von Ribbentrop and the Minister of the occupied eastern territories Alfred Rosenberg. Kleist presented three lines of arguments which can be found in many “revisionist” publications since then:

1. the accusation against the Treaty of Versailles of 1919, which he uses as excuse for almost every brutal measure of National Socialist politics;
2. the contention that western European statesmen supported by the Jewry of the world just wanted to demolish prospering and powerful Germany;
3. playing down of National Socialist reality by using glossing over terms (Graml 1989, p. 68).

One of the first Austrian apologists was Erich Kernmayr (Erich Kern) a former National Socialist and member of the SS and after 1945 prominent activist in a number of right wing extremist organisations. He started with glorifying the German World War II soldiers and their heroic fight against the enemies of the “Reich” as well as by emphasizing the “crimes” of the Allies against the German people (Lasek 1994).

From the beginning European “revisionist” authors clearly showed a tendency towards apology of their own individual past as well as the German people’s past. “Revisionism” in the USA shows itself in a somewhat different way claiming another tradition. The term “revisionism” has a different connotation in the US-historiography which modern “revisionist” try to use by choosing that name. After World War I a group of American historians using archival material argued that contrary to the prevailing American opinion Germany had not sought to go to war 1914. That historiographic movement was called World War I revisionism. One of these was Professor Harry Elmer Barnes who “soon

surpassed ... every other revisionist in his vehement criticism of American foreign policy” (Lipstadt 1993, p. 32). After 1945 the said Barnes became the “father” of American holocaust denial. Using similar methods he wrote some of the first attacks on the historiography of the Holocaust and became promoter of David Hoggan, one of the central contemporary “revisionists”. The same time some of Barnes texts and books, especially those on Western civilization were required texts at prominent US-universities (Lipstadt 1993, p. 67). In the light of this development we can state: On the one hand right wing extremist “revisionists” uses the traditional name reaching back in the twenties of the 20th century to camouflage their political background and to claim historical seriousness which is not theirs. On the other hand there is a personal and methodical tradition from excusing Germany’s war-guilt after both World Wars to contemporary “revisionism”. After 1945 US-”revisionism” obviously stands in a similar anti-Semitic tradition as in Europe. In the sixties both lines of “revisionism” found together when David Leslie Hoggan’s book *The Forced War* was published by Herbert Grabert in Germany in 1961. That book is in some distant way based on Hoggan’s Harvard dissertation in which he had stated that Hitler had not wanted war but that Great Britain was to be held responsible for the outbreak of World War II. What he published later on was quite different however. Now the Germans had become innocent victims of English, American and Polish efforts to start the war and to destroy a prospering Germany.

Hoggan’s book marked a change and progress in “revisionism” compared to German apologetic literature published before. His statements radically criticize the policy of the USA and Great Britain; Hoggan’s Hitler is a peace seeking, faultless statesman full of virtues. For the first Hoggan broke with the “revisionist” tradition of not using archival material. He gave his book a scientific appearance by citing a lot of that material and literature which have just one big problem: most of it is either a fake or a misinterpretation of authentic documents (Graml 1989, pp. 70 f.). In that way Hoggan however founded a “revisionist” tradition which is lasting up to now.

In the following years apologetic literature of a new quality was published in Germany and in Austria. The main topics stayed in excusing National Socialist policy, accusing the former Allies of responsibility for the outbreak of World War II and deploring the fate of Germany and the Germans. There was Udo Walendy who published *Truth for Germany (Wahrheit für Deutschland – Die Schuldfrage des Zweiten Weltkriegs)* in 1962 which was just a rewriting of Hoggan’s statements. Walendy misinterpreted and falsified historical literature and archival material in a really shameless way as the historian Hermann Graml (1989, p. 73) shows.

In Austria Franz Scheidl, a man of academic education but a furious anti-Semite, published his work *Geschichte der Verfemung der Deutschen (History of the Defamation of the Germans)* stating among other things that World War II was a war between Germans and Jews. International Jewry had declared war on Germany and therefore the Jews themselves were to be held responsible for the German atrocities against them, as there were deportation, forced wearing of the yellow star, separation of Jews from Germans. Scheidl doesn't even mention the mass murders, well knowing that these are the heaviest accusation against National Socialist Germany. In his book *Das Drama der Juden Europas (The drama of the Jews in Europe)* published in Germany in 1965 Paul Rassinier already doubted the number of Jews murdered, thus catching up a since then everlasting “revisionist” theme.

Rassinier has found a series of followers in that string of argumentation who not only refer to differing numbers of murdered in serious historical works but even construct sort of evidence in citing never existing letters of the International Committee of the Red Cross, using pseudo-statistics about the Jewish population in the world or aimfully misinterpreting statistics about deaths in concentration camps (Benz 1994; Neugebauer 1992).

In course of the so-called “Hitler-wave” of the seventies books of obvious “revisionist” character were published as well as books of quite serious historians though with sometimes doubtful tendencies (e. g. Maser 1971; Fest 1973, 1977).

So the British pseudo-historian David Irving produced his description of Hitler stating that Hitler did not know anything about the so-called “final solution” and the mass murdering of Jews, having neither wanted nor ordered these crimes. That book (*Hitler's War*) was followed by a whole series of biographies about leading National Socialists like Rudolf Heß, Erwin Rommel u. a. (Lasek 1994, p. 543). The late historian of the Institute for contemporary history in Munich, Martin Broszat, unmasked Irvings pseudo-scientific methods at the example of *Hitler's War* (Broszat 1986).

The seventies were the decade when Holocaust denial fully came to life. Until then even the most extreme neo-Nazi groups did not totally deny the use of the gas-chambers for murdering people. According to Lipstadt the first generation of “revisionists” “sought to vindicate the Nazis by justifying their anti-Semitism” (Lipstadt 1993, p. 52), arguing that the Jews as enemies of Germany had deserved the atrocities against them. But the second generation of “revisionists” turned to totally denying the Holocaust and the existence of gas-chambers for mass murder in German concentration camps. Therefore the

newly published books of the seventies distinctly mark a new quality in “revisionism”.

Graml regards that as just a logical result of the Hitler apology boom of the years before as Hitler could not be presented as a great politician and statesman as long he was implicated with the greatest crime of our century (Graml 1989, p. 80). So far Graml’s point of view, but there are other explanations too:

While right wing extremist groups were quite successful in Germany and Austria during the sixties the political climate favoured the left side of the political spectrum in the seventies. We can find right wing extremist and even neo-Nazi radicalisation simultaneous with left wing radicalisation in the seventies as well (Bailer and Neugebauer 1994; Benz 1989). It was quite necessary for these political aims to excuse National Socialism of the Holocaust in order to be able to do neo-National Socialist propaganda once more. In the second half of the seventies historians, social scientists and teachers began to react to the problem of “revisionist” publications, conferences were held (Internationale Konferenz 1977) and articles of refutation of neo-Nazi history lies were written (e. g. Broszat 1976).

Nevertheless the standards of “revisionist” literature were published in those years. For instance there could be mentioned:

- Thies Christophersen, *Die Auschwitz-Lüge* (1973)
- Austin App, *The Six Million Swindle. Blackmailing the Germany People for Hard Marks with Fabricated Corpses* (1973)
- Richard Harwood, *Did Six Million Really Die?* (1975), the same year edited by Volkstum Verlag in German language (*Starben wirklich sechs Millionen?*)
- Arthur R. Butz, *Der Jahrhundert-Betrug* (1977), published in the USA already 1976 – *The Hoax of the 20th Century*.
- Robert Faurisson, *Es gab keine Gaskammern* (1978)
- Wilhelm Stäglich, *Der Auschwitz-Mythos. Legende oder Wirklichkeit. Eine kritische Bestandaufnahme* (1979) (could be translated as *The Myth of Auschwitz. Legend or Reality? A critical Survey*).

Themes of contemporary “revisionist” writing

The themes of “revisionist” writing were settled at the end of the seventies. Since then methods have changed, but almost no new topics were introduced by “revisionists”. The main strings of argumentation can be grossly categorized

as follows although there can be found differentiations in the categories themselves which cannot all be listed here.

The “revisionists” chose those subjects which most clearly demonstrate the criminal character of the National Socialist regime whereby denying of the holocaust as the worst crime has become the most central theme since the seventies. In the whole there can be seen two main fields of themes: the first referring to World War II and National Socialist guilt for war-crimes, the second one concerning atrocities against Jews especially denying the planned and executed mass murder in industrial scale of millions of Jewish people (Bailer-Galanda 1992a; Bailer 1994).

Minimizing and denying guilt for and in World War II

As shown above “revisionism” started in the late forties and early fifties with disputing the National Socialist responsibility for the outbreak of World War II. There are two main arguments:

1. It is stated that the “Weltjudentum” (Jewry of the world) had declared war on Germany already in 1933 and that Germany herself simply had to react (Auerbach 1993b).
2. “Revisionists” maintain that Germany got too powerful during the thirties. Therefore the western Allies decided to destroy their rival and supported Poland in provoking World War II.

In the last years especially the subject of a defensive character of the attack on the Soviet Union in June 1941 was raised stating that Stalin had already planned an invasion of National Socialist Germany and Hitler had to defend Germany and the German people in attacking Russia in a preemptive strike (“Präventivkriegsthese”). All these theories should be classified as pure apologetic propaganda even though the “Präventivkriegsthese” (Preemptive War Thesis) has found partisans beyond right wing extremist circles and veteran organizations in the last years (Ueberschär 1987).

In addition to these arguments we can find the myth of the heroic and brave German soldier who never committed any crimes against humanity and rules of warfare.

In the context of German warfare some “revisionists” especially David Irving in his first books try to show prominent or leading National Socialists

in a positive light. Mainly Rudolf Heß who is shown as a misunderstood peace bringer (Emmerer 1993) and Walter Reder, responsible for mass murder on Italian civilians (Dokumentationsarchiv 1985), were those characters especially apt for right wing extremist adoration as martyrs of the German cause since both stayed imprisoned quite long after 1945. It is remarkable that Reder was put backstage after his liberation from Italian imprisonment. His use for right wing extremist propaganda was reduced that way.

If German crimes are not entirely denied they are at least set off against allied atrocities regardless of truth and fiction as if these deeds could minimize the German guilt. Main themes are the expelling of the German population of Eastern Europe (Czechoslovakia, Yugoslavia, Poland) and the bombing of German cities during the war, especially the attack on Dresden. The numbers of victims are mostly exaggerated to an enormous extent (Mayr 1993).

Diverting from the fates of allied – especially Soviet – prisoners of war in German camps a book by the Canadian journalist James Bacques just came right. Bacques stated that the USA would have let starved almost a million German prisoners of war. Though this book presents no proof for that statement (Steininger 1993) it is still being advertised and positively reviewed in a lot of Austrian and German right wing extremist papers.

National Socialist crimes against Jews

The most important accusations against National Socialism refer to its planned and industrially executed extermination of European Jews. This crime became the central theme of “revisionist” literature during the last twenty years. There is a number of reasons for stressing this subject.

1. The murdering of the European Jews is the heaviest accusation against National Socialism as being a crime of singular dimension in the history of mankind. The only way to a revival of National Socialist ideology leads over minimizing or denying that crime.
2. “Revisionists” use the fact that the “final solution” is a crime of almost unbelievable dimension and therefore they hope people can easily be convinced that the Holocaust was an invention of allied propaganda. It is certainly easier to imagine that the murder of millions of people has not taken place than being forced to realize that Auschwitz-Birkenau and the other extermination camps (Treblinka,

Sobibor, Chmelno, etc.) just were huge slaughter houses for human beings.

3. Denial of the Holocaust is a kind of anti-Semitism and anti-Semitism still is a widespread prejudice in Germany and Austria as well as in the USA. The Anti-Defamation League in New York points out that “revisionism” is a new method of propagating anti-Semitism (Anti-Defamation League 1989; 1993). As we will show later on holocaust denial uses existing anti-Semitic habits of thought just to “prove” that the Holocaust did not take place.
4. Denying the Holocaust is used to question the legitimacy of the state of Israel and the German payments of reparation and indemnification to the Jewish people.

Minimizing and/or denial of the atrocities against the Jews include the following lines of argumentation (Spann 1992; Shermer 1994):

- denial of the intentionality of the genocide primarily based on race
- denial of the use of gas-chambers and crematoria in course of a highly technical well organized extermination program
- doubting and minimizing the number of five to six million killed Jews (Benz 1991)
- excusing the atrocities against the Jews as a necessity in the course of the war; only traitors, criminals, spies and enemies of National Socialism had been killed
- stating that the persecution and murdering of the Jews had just been the deeds of subordinate officials. Hitler and other leading National Socialists had neither ordered nor intended these murders.
- naming the Jews themselves as responsible for their fate because they had declared war against Hitler’s Germany; interpreting World War II as a conflict between Jews and Germans.
- questioning the authenticity of Anne Frank’s diary. The description of the young girl’s life in her hiding place in Amsterdam moved hundreds of thousands readers all over the world and therefore it seemed necessary for Rightists to state that the book was not authentic. Meantime a great research project of the Netherlands Institute for War Documentation proved the diary to be the original writing of the young girl Anne Frank though the edited versions differ because of minor corrections by Anne Frank’s father, interpreters and publishers (Rijksinstituut 1988; Bailer-Galanda 1992 b).

Conspiracy theories

All “revisionist” theories must necessarily be founded on the belief of a huge world wide conspiracy which induces and has induced thousands of people to tell the same story about persecution of Jews and mass murder with poisonous gas. That conspiracy must have worked quite hard to produce those thousands of documents in many archives which deal with National Socialist crimes. But those conspiracy theories are an old element of anti-Semitic agitation propagating a world wide plot of Jews to reach for the reign of the whole world. See for instance the *Protokolle der Weisen von Zion* which were produced by Russian anti-Semites about one hundred years ago and still are quoted in right wing extremist writing.

Methods of “revisionism”

The first to deal with the methods of pseudo-historiographic “revisionist” writing was the late leader of the Institute for Contemporary History in Munich Martin Broszat (Broszat 1986). In the meantime he was followed by other historians (e. g. Graml 1989; Spann 1992; Lipstadt 1993; Benz 1994).

Presenting themselves as serious scientists

Most of the “revisionists” try hard to give their publications a serious and scientific appearance to find their way to a readership outside right wing extremism. They want to hide their propagandistic aims some deny that they have any contact to neo-Nazi groups or are right wing extremists themselves. As Lipstadt (1993, p. 217) puts it: “They attempt to project the appearance of being committed to the very values that they in truth adamantly oppose: reason, critical rules of evidence, and historical distinction.” They argue to be just interested in finding the historical truth but their use of historical facts unmasks this assertion as pure propaganda.

The use of documents

While the very first German “revisionists” did not use any documents for their pseudo-historical writing their followers really went to archives or at least pre-

tended to use authentic historical material to put more weight to their publications. One of the first “revisionists” working that way was David Irving who joined the ranks of the total deniers some years ago but started as apologist of leading National Socialists including the “Führer” himself. He really went into archives and found historical materials not being used until then. Therefore his works called historians on stage to analyse his way of using these documents (Broszat 1986). Irving as well as Hoggan and others use the sources in an eclectic way: referring to documents which seem to support their theses neglecting those which would contradict their maintaining.

Documents are also interpreted in the aimed sense and sometimes intentionally misunderstood when for instance Irving argues, the German word “ausrotten” would not mean exterminate when used by National Socialist officials. In that way the clearly named intention for murder is diverted into the intention of expelling the Jews.

Constructing a different history (Geschichtsklitterung)

The course of historical events is cut into pieces and put together to an entirely different and false picture of historical events. “Revisionists” make use of just these events proving their theories and leave out all others, similar to the above explained method of misusing and misinterpreting documents. Additionally there are constructed wrong causal connections between historical events for instance by stating the atrocities against the German Jews were sort of a revenge for the bombing of Dresden (Spann 1992, pp. 17 f.).

Production of “historical” material

Sometimes it is quite difficult for “revisionists” to prove that history had not happened by using existing material. So there is a tradition in producing exonerating documents or testimonies of witnesses. Already in 1977 the right wing extremist publisher Druffel Verlag edited the memoirs of the prominent National Socialist architect Hermann Giesler which the historian Hermann Graml (1989, pp. 77 ff.) easily could prove to be invented a very unskilled way. In 1988 the Austrian neo-Nazi Gerd Honsik published his book *Freispruch für Hitler. 36 ungehörte Zeugen wider die Gaskammern* (Acquittal for Hitler. 36 until now not heard witnesses against the gas chambers) in which he presented

interviews or pseudo-interviews with more or less prominent National Socialists denying the Holocaust and the existence of gas-chambers.

In 1987 another Austrian, Emil Lachout, produced a pseudo-document in which he contended that an allied commission had found out that there were no gas-chambers in certain concentration-camps. That pseudo-document was published in a series of right wing extremist magazines of Austria and Germany. Lachout even acted as a witness for the defense in the trial against the Canadian “revisionist” Ernst Zündel. In the meantime there is no more ado about him.

Hiding behind prominent or pretended authorities

Many “revisionist” publications show a large and impressive apparatus of footnotes and references whereby the authors of those pamphlets hope that everyone trusts in the correctness of citations in historiographic works. This camouflage is used not only in referring to not existing documents but in citing the books of prominent historians like Raul Hilberg and others as well. But they cite as they use documents: they quote out of context and that way misuse leading historians to buttress their own position (Graml 1989; Shermer 1994).

One standard argument in that context is the maintaining that the International Committee of the Red Cross had stated that only 300.000 Jews died in the course of National Socialist persecution. This lie has been repeated for decades though the Red Cross itself has many times formally denied having ever published such a number of victims. That does not hinder “revisionists” from further using the authority of the Red Cross for their propaganda (Benz 1994).

If there are no authorities to be employed they quote each other pretending “revisionists” to be serious writers, scientists or historians (see above).

Exploiting of errors and differences in tiny details

“Revisionist” writers conclude from differences in small details or from irrelevant errors of historians that all results of historical research concerning National Socialist crimes are wrong. Debates between historians like the discussion intentionalists – functionalists (Kershaw 1985) are taken for a debate about the veracity of the entire field.

Making use of public belief in the objectivity of natural sciences

The latest development in international “revisionism” is the use of claimed scientific research to “prove” that the gas-chambers in Auschwitz-Birkenau or in Mauthausen could never have functioned as instruments for mass murder by poisonous gas.

For the first time this argument was used in a trial against the Canadian neo-Nazi Ernst Zündel who was accused of denying the Holocaust. The French “revisionist” Robert Faurisson engaged Fred Leuchter supposed expert in constructing gas-chambers for executions in American jails.

In Zündel’s charge Leuchter travelled to the extermination camps Auschwitz and Majdanek in Poland where he illegally took so called samples out of the ruins of the gas-chambers and other facilities and had them chemically analyzed on residues of Zyklon B though chemically there could not be expected any (Bailer 1992). According to the results of his “technical” investigation Leuchter stated, that in his “engineering opinion” the mass murder with Zyklon B could not have taken place. During cross-examination in the Court of Toronto Leuchter had to admit that he had never been an engineer and that he had no historical knowledge about the Holocaust besides some information from Faurisson and other “revisionist” sources. The Canadian Court refused to take Leuchter’s report as part of the recorded file. Later investigations showed that in contrary to his own assertions Leuchter was no expert in constructing gas-chambers either (Shapiro 1990; Lipstadt 1993, pp. 169–179). Nevertheless Fred Leuchter became the most famous figure of “revisionism” for some time. His report was sold all over the world and German versions were spread by the Austrian neo-Nazi Walter Ochensberger and the German “revisionist” Udo Walendy. The propagandistic aim could easily be seen by comparing these versions. It could be shown that these differed even in the numbers of the so called results of Leuchter’s calculations (Bailer-Galanda 1992c). That is a most remarkable doing by people who claim to be just and only interested in finding the truth and who accuse others of every error and mistake they can discover.

In the meantime mostly historians refuted Leuchter (Wegner 1990; Auerbach 1993c). Jean-Claude Pressac a French apothecary having done almost ten years of research on the question of the building of the Auschwitz crematoria and gas-chambers (Pressac 1989, 1993) writes about the “Leuchter-Report”: “Based on misinformation which leads to false reasoning and misinterpretation of data, “The Leuchter Report” is unacceptable. It was researched illegally, ignoring the most straightforward of historical data, and founders in

gross errors of measurement and calculation. What is inexcusable is Leuchter taking historians for idiots. Leuchter's ultimate errors definitively land "The Leuchter Report" in the cesspool of pretentious human folly" (Pressac 1990, p. 31).

This new tactics of denying the Holocaust by means of natural sciences seemed to be successful and was able to impress less informed people. So it did not take long to find followers for Leuchter. In 1991 in the course of a trial against the German old and neo-Nazi Otto Ernst Remer a German Rudolph a young German chemist working with the Max Planck Society was engaged by Remer's lawyer to repeat Leuchter's investigation. In the meantime his report is spread in different versions which accordingly to the propagandistic aim quote him differently as it happened already with Leuchter. Though Rudolph's report even looks more scientific and serious than Leuchter's it is as scientifically wrong as Leuchter's (Bailer 1995). Rudolph was dismissed by the Max Planck Institute and has finally found his way to right wing extremist circles who publish his report.

A little bit different is the case of the Austrian engineer Walter Lüftl who was president of the Austrian federal engineering association and an expert for questions of structure and buildings. He wrote technically and chemically untenable papers (Bailer 1995) about the – as he thinks – impossibility of murdering human beings with Zyklon B and carbon monoxide and sent these papers to Austrian politicians and journalists. He was asked by Remer's lawyer to produce an expertise for Remer's trial but allegedly refused. Nevertheless he was forced to retreat as soon as his papers became known in the public. The Department of Public Prosecution in Vienna investigated against him but dismissed the case reasoning Lüftl being no "revisionist" or right wing extremist. Since then Lüftl is celebrated as a new hero of international "revisionism" being the first real expert (though he writes nonsense) to deny the murders in the gas-chambers and additionally having not been prosecuted by an Austrian court what "revisionists" wrongly interpret as proof for Lüftl writing the truth (Deutschland in Geschichte und Gegenwart 3/1994).

The international network of "revisionism"

"Revisionism" and holocaust denial have become central elements of right wing extremist and neo-Nazi propaganda during the last years. That means that "revisionist" publications are spread by these organisations as well as by the

existing international “revisionist” network itself. These two means of transport for “revisionism” cannot really be separated as they go hand in hand.

As is pointed out above there were close connections between “revisionism” in Europe and Northern America from the seventies on which still exist today and have even become closer the last years.

The organizational centre is the Institute for Historical Review (IHR), founded in 1978 by the leader of the anti-Semitic right wing extremist Liberty Lobby, Willis A. Carto. The first director was William David Mc Calden, co-founder of the neo-Nazi British National Party (Lipstadt 1993, p. 137; Landesamt für Verfassungsschutz 1994, p. 19). The IHR organizes regular conferences and publishes the *Journal of Historical Review* which presents a platform to all apologists and Holocaust deniers. Traditionally there are many contacts to German and Austrian “revisionists” as well as to “revisionists” in Canada, France, Great Britain and other countries all over the world. So for instance the said papers of the Austrian Walter Lüftl were published in the IHR’s *Journal of Historical Review* quite soon. The IHR organizes regular conferences on “revisionism” which are attended by authors and “revisionists” from USA, Canada, Germany, Austria and other countries.

There are also contacts between IHR and like-minded Europeans and the US-organization NSDAP-AO of Gary Rex Lauck who spreads neo-Nazi material to Germany and Austria and supports “revisionist” meetings in Europe (Schmidt 1993).

Another overseas “revisionist” centre has its seat in Toronto, Canada and is organized by the German-Canadian Ernst Zündel. His “Samisdat” publishing house produces newspapers, reprints and distributes “the usual array of anti-Semitic, racist and Holocaust denial material” (Lipstadt 1993, p. 158) and sends National Socialist music favourites, Hitler speeches, videocassettes of Leuchter’s visit to Poland etc. all over the world. Between 1978 and 1980 two hundred shipments of neo-Nazi and “revisionist” material by *Samisdat Publications* were sent to Western Germany.

In Europe the “revisionist” network has strings in a series of countries. In Spain Pedro Varela and his *CEDADE (Circulo Espanol de Amigos de Europa)* does not only publish and spread “revisionist” and neo-Nazi material but gives shelter to legally prosecuted friends as well. Gerd Honsik one of Austria’s leading activists and diligent writer of anti-Semitic, neo-Nazi and Holocaust denying books has fled to Spain after being sentenced by an Austrian Court because of his neo-Nazi activities. Supported by CEDADE he still produces his paper *Halt* and sends it to Austria. A short time ago the German old- and neo-National Socialist and Holocaust denier Otto Ernst Remer, sentenced by a German court, also fled to Spain where he was welcomed by Honsik.

Great Britain contributes the said pseudo-historian David Irving as well as structures of the *Nationalist Front*. From Sweden anti-Semitic and “revisionist” publications by the Austrian born Ditlieb Felderer are distributed. Felderer regularly visits the IHR conferences and supported Ernst Zündel during his trial in Toronto (Landesamt für Verfassungsschutz 1994). In Switzerland Max Wahl produces his “revisionist” paper *Eidgenoss* and spreads it in Austria and Germany. Thies Christophersen, author of *Die Auschwitz-Lüge*, dispatches his magazine *Die Bauernschaft* which deals with “revisionist” themes and other neo-Nazi contents from Denmark.

The German and Austrian networks consist of neo-Nazis as well as of traditional right wing extremist organizations and parties and even spread their propaganda beyond that area into parts of the non-extremist population. Extremist groups and publishers of these two countries traditionally cooperate closely.

In Germany some publisher houses have specialized on “revisionist” themes since the fifties. For instance the *Grabert Verlag* which first published Hoggan’s book (*Der erzwungene Krieg*) and Stäglich’s *Der Auschwitz-Mythos* and is still editing the “revisionist” paper *Deutschland in Geschichte and Gegenwart*. The *Druffel Verlag* which edits anti-Semitic and “revisionist” books has a similar program. Advertisements of these publishing houses can be found in many German and Austrian right wing extremist newspapers. Some of these regularly give place to themes of Holocaust denial and to National Socialist apologists. Since many years the *Deutsche Nationalzeitung* has fought against “anti German lies” and still maintains to unmask allied re-education and propaganda. It takes up each up to date theme: in 1978 the TV-serial Holocaust, in the last years it was steadily repeating that the number of victims in Auschwitz had been corrected and last it was trying to denunciate Steven Spielberg’s film *Schindler’s list* as historically untrue. The paper is sold publicly at newspaper sellers in Austria and Germany though it was prosecuted by Austrian Courts already some years ago. The editor of *Deutsche Nationalzeitung* Dr. Gerhard Frey is a quite rich man and leader of the party *Deutsche Volksunion* which had some success in regional elections.

Magazine like German *Code* which was sold at Viennese train stations only recently but nowadays is distributed by subscription only as most right wing extremist papers do or *Nation (and) Europa* often deal with “revisionist” themes as well as the quite recently founded paper *Nation* which is produced in eastern Europe but written by Austrian and German right wing extremists. The said Otto Ernst Remer edited the *Remer Depesche* which concentrates on the denial of the mass murder of Jews in National Socialist extermination camps and tries to minimize the number of the Jewish victims of persecution.

The organization background is supplied by neo-Nazi groups like the *Amt für Volksaufklärung und Öffentlichkeitsarbeit* which is lead by the professional German neo-Nazi Ewald Bela Althans, one of the successors of the late leader Michael Kühnen who himself was a “revisionist” activist. Other Kühnen successors who must be mentioned in that respect are Christian Worch and his *Nationale Liste* and the *Nationalistische Front* lead by Meinolf Schönborn. The *Nationaldemokratische Partei Deutschlands* (NPD) is amongst the most traditional right wing extremist parties in Germany. It was founded already in the sixties and has survived ups (remarkable successes at elections) and downs since then. Right now it cooperating the *Deutsche Liga für Volk and Heimat* a right wing merger movement without much significance. All these political parties and groups organized, supported or attended “revisionist” meetings during the last years in Germany where prominent authors like Irving, Faurisson or Leuchter were invited.

Most of these German activities reach Austria as well. Austrian neo-Nazi organizations and papers traditionally have close connections to German like-minded friends (see to the following persons and organizations Dokumentationsarchiv 1994). Walter Ochensberger with his monthly *Sieg* acted as a centre for contacts between Austrian, German and international neo-Nazis and “revisionists”. Meanwhile he is in jail for his neo-National Socialist activities, his paper is not appearing any more. Already mentioned Gerd Honsik numbers among the most important Austrian “revisionist” authors in the neo-Nazi scene though he lost most of his influence after his flight to Spain. The *Volkstreue außerparlamentarische Opposition (VAPO)* lead by the neo-Nazi Gottfried Küssel who was sentenced in the meantime had the closest connections to Germany since Küssel had been nominated as the successor of the late Michael Kühnen. Members of this militant neo-Nazi group took part in demonstrations in memory of Hitler’s deputy Rudolf Heß in Germany and attended most of the international “revisionist” meetings during the last years. Beside these militant organizations there are traditional right wing extremist groups which concentrate on right wing extremist cultural activities and organize regular meetings which are attended by like-minded persons not only from Austria but from Germany and other European countries as well. At these meetings “revisionists” present their ideas, the papers of these organizations regularly content articles about Holocaust denial or National Socialist apologetic themes. Most outstanding are *Arbeitsgemeinschaft für demokratische Politik (AFP)* and *Deutsche Kulturwerk Europäischen Geistes* brother to a German group with the same name.

A monthly with a more serious appearance to be named here is the *Aula* which represents the so called New Right in Austria and tries to found bridges to right wing conservatives as well. This paper belongs to the political surrounding of the *Freedom Party (Freiheitliche Partei Österreichs)* a party which got more than 20 % at the federal elections of October 1994. Its publishing house (*Aula Verlag*) is owned by an association of university graduates most of them being members in German-nationalist student associations (*Burschenschaften*). *Aula* sometimes publishes positive references to “revisionists” like the above mentioned David Irving, Germar Rudolph or Walter Lüftl. Especially the fact that Lüftl was not accused for his papers was celebrated by the *Aula* (*Aula* 7–8/1994).

Papers belonging to the *Freedom Party* itself are not free of “revisionist” tendencies either. Party members and representatives evoked public protests by doubting the Holocaust or by minimizing the National Socialist crimes (Bailer and Neugebauer 1994). The party’s leader Jörg Haider himself had to retreat as Landeshauptmann /head of provincial government/ of Carinthia for praising the National Socialist employment³ policy in June 1991.

“Revisionist” tendencies or sympathy for “revisionist” arguments can be found outside the organized right wing extremism in Austria as well as in Germany. German historians fought the so-called Historikerstreit (quarrel of the historians) in 1986 in which the historian Ernst Nolte took a prominent part. Nolte then pleaded for a historization of National Socialism whose uprising he interpreted as a German reaction to communism in the Soviet Union. Nolte did not see National Socialist crimes as a singular event in our century but wanted them to be compared and connected with the crimes of Stalin’s dictatorship. He was vehemently contradicted by historians and other scientists, especially Jürgen Habermas (Diner 1987; Historikerstreit 1987). Since then Ernst Nolte formerly an honoured historian and researcher about fascism turned to the right furthermore. In his last book Nolte (1993) shows his sympathy for “revisionist” authors some of them he even grants to be scientists though he himself does not doubt the facticity of the Holocaust. Nevertheless Nolte at least doubts the number of victims and shows understanding for the National Socialist policy against the Jewish population of Europe. Lipstadt comments Nolte’s and other German historian’s positions: “Though these historians are not deniers, they helped to create a grey area where their highly questionable interpretations of

3 Haider spoke of the “ordentlichen Beschäftigungspolitik des Dritten Reiches”, that means the correct employment policy of the Third Reich.

history became enmeshed with the pseudo-history of the deniers; and they do indeed share some of the same objectives” (Lipstadt 1993, p. 209). No wonder that the *Journal of Historical Review* printed a quite positive review of Nolte’s last book and found place for a long interview that Nolte had granted. (*Journal of Historical Review* 1/1994)

Historians like Nolte and people like Herbert Fleissner the owner of a number of publishing houses in Germany publishing books of David Irving among others help to reestablish German nationalist feelings by playing down the German guilt (Diner 1987). That is the point where all “revisionist” in Germany and Austria meet with those historians. The “revisionists” make use of the fact that the National Socialist past was thrust aside, feelings of guilt and responsibility for National Socialist crimes were denied. A lot of people in Austria and Germany do not want to be remembered of National Socialism. The past is felt as a burden. So there are people beside right wing extremism who grab for any excuse of National Socialism and thereby feel excused themselves (Benz in Diner 1987). Veteran soldier organizations give an example for that. In Austria the most read newspaper *Neue Kronenzeitung* gives space for “revisionist” arguments (Botz 1994) which are – as said above – one way of uttering anti-Semitism. A historization of National Socialism relativizes the crimes of Auschwitz but would be welcomed by not only a few Germans and Austrians. Though in that point the German situation differs from the Austrian. Germany after reunification shows a tendency to revival of nationalist feelings which has no place in Austria because of the entirely different political conditions.

But nobody is to believe that “revisionism” could be reduced on right wing extremism.

The legal situation

In 1985 the German Bundestag passed a law which made the denying of the Holocaust punishable. This *Gesetz gegen die Auschwitz-Lüge* was vehemently opposed by right wing extremists in Germany and Austria. But Holocaust denial could only be prosecuted if it was uttered in close connection with defamation of the Jews. That condition led to different and contradictory sentences of the German Bundesgerichtshof and the Bundesverfassungsgerichtshof. While the Bundesgerichtshof stated that simple denial of the Holocaust without intention of defamation or propagating National Socialist ideology was not to be punished the Bundesverfassungsgerichtshof reasoned that denial itself was an attack on dignity of man of the Jews living today. Therefore an amending of the

law became necessary and was planned already in May 1994. But the amendment was mixed with another law the Social Democrats refused to agree. Since there are no differences between the governmental coalition and the Social Democrats in the case of Holocaust denial the amendment will probably be passed quite soon (Landesamt für Verfassungsschutz 1994).

In Austria neo-Nazi activities can be punished according to the Verbotsgesetz originally dating back to 1945. This law was passed to forbid the NSDAP and to hinder any revival of that party or its ideology. As a result of problems of the forties it got more and more difficult to execute that law in connection with neo-National Socialist activities. Besides that the law contained no passage which clearly stated that denial of the Holocaust meant activity in National Socialist sense though Austrian courts and judges interpreted the law that way. When “revisionism” became a central argument of neo-Nazi propaganda in Austria too, it took long and various discussions until the law was finally amended in February of 1992. Beside other changes there came a new section into the law which explicitly forbids the denial or gross minimizing of National Socialist genocide or of other National Socialist crimes against humanity. This amendment makes it definitely easier for the courts to deal with neo-Nazi propaganda and “revisionism”. Sentences against leading Austrian right wing extremists like Ochensberger, Honsik and Küssel show that the discussions about the National Socialist past and the amendment of the Verbotsgesetz helped to change the public climate against neo-Nazi and right wing extremist activities.

Summary

“Revisionism” is not really a new phenomenon. It started already in the first years after the end of World War II but has changed its character since then. With growing distance to the reality of the National Socialist dictatorship it became easier for the remaining devotees of that ideology to play down crimes and guilt until they turned to total denial of the main crime, the Holocaust. The movement for a historization of the years 1933–1945 invites all those who finally want to put an end to the so-called “Vergangenheitsbewältigung”, to all the discussions of the past. But it is necessary not to bury that memory not only for political morality but as well for the danger neo-Nazism, racism and anti-Semitism still mean today. In the aftermath of the fundamental changes in Europe since 1989 there new political and economical problems have arisen. Right wing extremism and in his course “revisionism” find new followers. States and politicians can cope with these problems by using laws and courts.

That for sure is one necessary answer. But developing a sensible conscience against racism will be as necessary as refusing right wing extremism in all his appearances. This problem cannot be solved by historians only. Everyday politics have to create the basis of a secure and content living for as many people as possible and they have to make clear that right wing extremism can never be a possible partner in government or official life.