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**Abstract:** This article looks at David Irving who was arrested in Austria in November 2005 for Holocaust denial, which is a crime in the country. He was sentenced to three years in jail. On an earlier visit, in 1989, Irving had asserted that there were no gas chambers at Auschwitz, a Nazi extermination camp in occupied Poland. Yet the sentence struck even Irving's critics as harsh. He had not only pleaded guilty, but also recanted, having, he said, in the meantime read the diaries of Adolf Eichmann, an SS officer who was a top organizer of the Holocaust.

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*It really happened***Section:** Europe**David Irving's trial****A Holocaust denier changes his mind, but still faces three years in jail**

Dateline: VIENNA

DAVID IRVING'S academic engagements have dried up since his reputation was shredded in 2000, when a British judge called him a racist and a fraud. But his thirst for publicity is unsated. That may be why he took the strange risk of agreeing to speak to a right-wing student group in Austria last November, despite an outstanding arrest warrant.

Mr Irving, once seen as a serious historian, was promptly arrested. This week he was sentenced to three years in jail for Holocaust denial, which is a crime in Austria. On an earlier visit, in 1989, Mr Irving had asserted that there were no gas chambers at Auschwitz, a Nazi extermination camp in occupied Poland. Yet the sentence struck even Mr Irving's critics as harsh. He had not only pleaded guilty, but also recanted, having, he said, in the meantime read the diaries of Adolf Eichmann, an SS officer who was a top organiser of the Holocaust.

That recantation infuriated his supporters among the kooks and thugs of the neo-Nazi right. They had previously idolised him as the only mainstream historian who shared their scepticism about the Holocaust. Now they think he's a traitor. But *it* did not help Mr Irving. Although he is appealing against the conviction, so too is the prosecution: *it* wants a longer sentence (the maximum is ten years).

Most Austrians seemed pleased with the verdict. The sight of the country's tough law against Nazi propaganda being used to convict a posh British controversialist serves, if nothing else, to distract attention from lingering unresolved questions about the country's past. Austria's own neo-Nazi fringe largely stayed away from the trial.

While Mr Irving fights the next legal round, another trial on Holocaust denial will cause yet more controversy. The defendant is John Gudenus, a right-wing member of Austria's upper chamber of parliament, who told a newspaper last year that gas chambers existed only in Poland, but not in the Third Reich. As he did not deny their existence outright, merely calling for more research on the matter, he may fare better than Mr Irving.

Meanwhile, the world's best-known Holocaust denier, Ernst Zundel, deported from Canada last year, faces 14 charges in next-door Germany. Observers are hoping for a mention of his pet theory that the Nazis invented UFOs, and still fly them from a base in Antarctica.

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