

Handout: The David Irving Case

The Facts of the Case

David Irving is a British historian whose work has largely focused on the Nazi regime led by Adolf Hitler from 1933 to 1945. During this period in Germany the Nazis killed millions of German and other European Jews. This massive killing is known as the 'Holocaust'. The exact number of Jewish people killed during the Holocaust is not known, but the usual accepted estimate is 6 million. There are many Jewish people in Australia today who lost whole families during this period, and for whom the Holocaust is a fundamentally important part of their past and present. At least 6 million ethnic Poles, Soviet civilians, gypsies, homosexuals and people with disabilities were also killed by the Nazis during the Holocaust.

Irving challenges the accepted view of the Nazi Holocaust against the Jews. He argues that:

- the number of deaths of Jews has been exaggerated
- there is no evidence that Hitler actually ordered the Holocaust
- gas chambers on display at the Nazi extermination camp at Auschwitz, in Poland, are not genuine, and therefore are not evidence of the mass murder of the Jews in this way
- the furnaces at Nazi concentration camps were to burn bodies to stop the spread of disease, and are not evidence of mass murder – just of sensible hygiene precautions.

He does not deny that huge numbers of Jews were killed – through starvation, disease, beatings, execution squads, and some by gassing – but he does question the extent of killing by gassing. In doing this he, in effect, rejects the testimony of thousands of survivors, who swear that millions of fellow Jews were exterminated by gassing. He says that their evidence is largely imagination or speculation, not eyewitness evidence.

Irving's views are supported by many anti-Semitic (anti-Jewish) and pro-Nazi extremists. Irving wanted to visit Australia to give a series of lectures at public meetings. If he had done so, there could have been angry and even violent protests and clashes.

The Human Rights Issues Involved

Australia has legislation outlawing racial vilification (the belittling and abusing of people on racial grounds), and has common law remedies for defamation (the lowering of somebody's reputation through lies or deliberate inaccuracies). The Minister for Immigration has the power under the Migration Act to refuse a visa to a person with a criminal record. Irving has a criminal record in Germany and Canada for speaking about his views. Irving says the convictions are themselves illegal.