

The 'Real Insidiousness'

'The real insidiousness of the biography is that its formidable documentation will gain it acceptance as history.' – *Publishers Weekly*, New York

IT SEEMS SOMEHOW FITTING, *writes the author*, to preface a biography of the Nazi propaganda chief with a brief history of the concerted attempts made around the world in 1996 to suppress it.

I began work on the book in 1988. By then I had a twenty-five year record of success with England's leading publishing houses. Macmillan London Ltd had become my regular publishers, and this biography was signed up by Adam Sisman, their editorial director. He told me that they intended to keep all my books in print. In 1989 there was a company reshuffle, and a young female, Felicity Kate Rubinstein, aged just twenty-nine, became CEO. (She was coincidentally the niece of Michael Rubinstein, who was my lawyer for thirty years.) Several members of Macmillan's staff left in dismay, including Adam Sisman. The Hon. Roland Philipps replaced him; he was even younger than Felicity, in fact he was born in the month when I delivered my first best-seller *The Destruction of Dresden* to William Kimber Ltd in 1962.

The Macmillan company's internal papers indicated that their new chief, Felicity Rubinstein wanted to revoke Sisman's agreements with me. I know this, because I obtained sight of the files during subsequent litigation against authoress Gitta Sereny, who had wrongly accused me of stealing microfiches of the Goebbels diaries from Moscow archives. In July 1991 she married Philipps, her somewhat younger editorial chief, and the pieces fell into place. On December 12 that year an important Jewish body in London held a secret meeting to plot ways of pressuring Macmillan to violate its contracts with me and stop publishing my works. Until now their efforts had been rebuffed. With Rubinstein's ascendancy they had the leverage they needed.

On July 6, 1992, two days after I arrived back at Heathrow airport from Moscow with the long-lost diaries of Dr Goebbels, a sensational world scoop, young Roland Philipps signed a memo ordering their entire stock of books written by me to be destroyed; there was to be no publicity, it said, and I was not to be informed. Unaware of the growing antipathy, I meanwhile set

about reworking the book to use the new diaries. In September 1992 I wrote to Macmillan's formally withdrawing the book (anxiety about the lowering quality of their finished books was the sole underlying cause, and I told them so). From 1988 until the final typescript was completed on September 7, 1994 the biography went through eight handwritten and typescript drafts. Meanwhile Felicity left Macmillan's in 1993 to set up a literary agency.

I confidently planned to issue my own Focal Point edition in November 1994, but that summer Hodder-Headline's managing director Alan Brooke, who had published several books by me over the years, made an offer for *Goebbels*. My diary records that he phoned me at 11:45 a.m. on August 17, 1994, and agreed a purchase price. A week later he cancelled the deal without explanation (something unheard-of in the publishing industry, I am told).

'The project has been vetoed from above,' he said.

'Nothing he can do about it,' I recorded. 'He sounded very upset.'

My agent later said that 'John le Carré,' a thriller writer, had warned Hodder's chairman, Tim Hely Hutchinson, who is now group CEO of Britain's biggest publisher Hachette UK, that if they did not cancel the deal, he would pull out as a Hodder author. (In a letter, 'Le Carré' denied it.) We went ahead alone.

I still suspected nothing, but the book soon ran aground in other countries. In Italy my regular publisher Arnoldo Mondadori bought the rights, and heaped praise on the biography, and in France Albin Michel signed it up. Both translated the book; neither eventually published, and neither has ever explained why. In retrospect, it can be seen that global forces were at work.

IN THE UNITED STATES my books had been published for thirty years by leading Madison Avenue publishers – among them were The Viking Press, Simon & Schuster, Avon Books, William Morrow, Macmillan, and Little, Brown. They had often hit the bestseller lists – most recently my Rommel biography. But *Goebbels* would run into obstacles here too.

On March 22, 1995 my U.S. literary agent Ed Novak, who controlled the only six advance copies to reach American soil, accepted an offer made by the senior editor of St Martins Press (SMP), Tom Dunne. He had published several other books by me, and for a while things went well. On October 13, 1995 SMP routinely asked what was new in the book. I replied:

What is new: Of course, I am the first and so far *only* historian to have had full use of the 75,000-page Goebbels Diaries that were discovered in the Moscow secret state archives in 1992. I am said to be one of only three historians capable of reading the handwriting. From these diaries we get new insight into the ruthless conduct and planning of Hitler's political conspiracies and military operations; we have fresh evidence about the role of Goebbels (and Albert Speer) in planning and inspiring the Final Solution. On a personal level we learn much about the tortured psyche of the Nazi propaganda minister, from the warped mind created by his physical

deformities, through his late sexual development, to his family problems and romantic escapades with Germany's most beautiful film actresses like Lida Baarova. The photographs, most of which have never been published before, also deserve a mention.

Shortly after that the fat really hit the fire. There had already been disconcerting scenes in the London newspaper district when I returned from Moscow carrying the Goebbels diaries in July 1992, with street demonstrations, organised newspaper boycotts, and some intimidation. (*The Sunday Times* editor-in-chief Andrew Neil, who had bought rights from me, told me that he had never experienced anything like it.) Now, echoing these methods, Jewish organisations in the United States started an extraordinary campaign against St Martin's Press, SMP, for having bought the rights, and against Doubleday, Inc., who had made this work their Military History Book Club selection for May 1996. None, and I can only repeat it: none, of the hostile organisations had actually seen the book.

The 'Anti-Defamation League of the B'nai Brith,' a wealthy New York based lobby, began the agitation in February 1996. Worried SMP executives phoned me in London to report that they were getting 'hate mail' about my involvement in 'Holocaust controversies.' I had never actually written on the subject. The pressure was increased. Millionaire novelist Elie Wiesel and other Jewish authors threatened the publisher with withdrawal of their services. A seriously nasty smear campaign was beginning. Some writers, notably Christopher Hitchens, hastened to my defense. On March 18, American newspapers published a Jewish Telegraph Agency despatch about the horrific 1995 Oklahoma City bombing: it showed pictures of myself and the convicted (and later executed) bomber Timothy McVeigh. Citing the London-based Institute of Jewish Affairs as their source, this disgusting report accused me of supplying McVeigh with the 'trigger mechanism' for his bomb.

Shortly after midnight on March 21, 1996, four days ahead of its publication, Reuters news agency began issuing an advance preview of what the influential New York trade journal *Publishers Weekly* intended to say in an anonymous review about this book. 'British historian David Irving, whom critics have accused of being a Nazi apologist,' it said, was about to get 'blistering prepublication reviews' for the book, which *Publishers Weekly* was calling 'repellent,' and alleging there was 'an agenda to Mr Irving's documentation.' The *Publishers Weekly* reviewer claimed that in this book 'Nazi brutality is almost always retaliation for the plots of international Jewry and the criminality of domestic Jews.' Baffled by the violence of this sudden and totally justified broadside, SMP's Tom Dunne told Reuters that both he and his editors were mystified at such suggestions.

The campaign however intensified. The American author Jonathan Kellerman wrote to Dunne: 'David Irving's identity as a neo-Nazi and Holocaust denier is well known. . . Your attempt to elevate him to mainstream status

in the U.S. is the single most repugnant act I've witnessed in over a decade of publishing. You should be ashamed of yourself. Don't send me anymore [*sic*] books for blurbs. Anything with the St. Martin's label on it will go straight in the trash.'

A hitherto unknown Atlanta professor, Deborah Lipstadt, was soon exposed as a prime mover; she taught Jewish religious history at a minor university in Georgia. *The Washington Post* quoted her on April 3 as saying: 'In the Passover Hagadah, it says in every generation there are those who rise up to destroy us. David Irving is not physically destroying us, but is trying to destroy the memory of those who have already perished at the hands of tyrants.'

Like all the other critics, of course, she had not read the book. There were only six copies in the United States. The first reviews were already appearing in the British press, and they were brilliant. Thanks to the anonymous critics at *Publishers Weekly* and the Reuters agency however, the rest of the world's press was reverberating to this organised campaign – and in London I was crippled by pneumonia and unable to fight back.

In New York, the newspapers reported that there were street demonstrations against SMP, bomb threats, letter writing, and further orchestrated advance notices in the insider trade journals *Kirkus* and *Library Journal* (which shared offices with *Publishers Weekly* in New York City); somebody published the home addresses of SMP's executives on the Internet. With unconscious irony, *Publishers Weekly* closed its now formally published review with this accusation: 'The real insidiousness of the biography is that its formidable documentation will gain it acceptance as history.'

THE PUBLISHING HOUSE SMP told the press that they would not surrender to intimidation. 'Yes they will,' I told my diary. *Goebbels* now reached New York. *The New York Times* printed Tina Rosenberg's wan admission that it was 'a Rolls-Royce of a book, with costly color photos.' According to my editor Tom Dunne it had been appraised, and praised, by seven different editors. After weeks of assurances to the contrary, Norman Oder of *Publishers Weekly* phoned me late on April 3, 1996 with word that SMP had thrown in the towel.

'If we had known who David Irving was. . .,' stated their CEO Thomas J. McCormack in an extraordinary apology released to the press (the rest was couched in the same excruciating abject vein). McCormack had dined at my family home in Mayfair, London, more than once, and he had published other books by me and on my recommendation. Now he did the dirty on his own author, releasing the communiqué to the newswires at 6:21 p.m. in New York (without sending a copy to me in London).

I want to emphasize, *continued McCormack*, that we are not canceling under coercion – publishers can often be at their best in resisting pressure – nor was our decision prompted by mere embarrassment. . .

The final decision about whether or not to go forward with *Goebbels* fell

on my desk. Among many other things I did, I at last sat down to examine the page proof myself. I despised it intensively.

There were several reasons for this, but one was sufficient for me: The subtext of Goebbels was in my judgment this: The Jews brought it on themselves. My feeling was that this is at base an effectively anti-Semitic book, an insidious piece of Goebbels-like propaganda that we should have nothing to do with.

I let McCormack's three-page communiqué pass as being the outpourings of a frightened man. He was married to a Jewess, he reminded the media, and his family was Jewish. It did not save him. He was sacked shortly after.

Of course his less encumbered rivals moved to snap up the now high-profile project. On April 9 Steve Wassermann of Random House Inc., encouraged by Robert Harris, (author of *Fatherland* and a mutual friend), asked to see *Goebbels*. Random House carried the ball for only fifteen days. On April 25, Wassermann sent to me an article from the previous day's *New York Post*: a mole had blown the whistle, and his project was dead.

A literary agent, Keith Korman of Raines & Raines Inc., told trade journals now that my future would be 'floating face down dead in the water.' Two years later, on August 13, 1998, my old editor Don Fehr at Basic Books contacted me having just read the book; his attempts too were killed off at higher levels. When other minor imprints offered to publish *Goebbels*, hoping to capitalize on its notoriety, I rather petulantly told them: 'I may be floating in the water, but I prefer to choose my own stretch of river.'

The loss of the U.S. market was of course very painful, the more so since none of the American edition's mindless killers had actually seen the book.

I turned my attention to Professor Lipstadt, who had been at the center of the campaign. She was author of a subsidised paperback, *Denying the Holocaust: The Growing Assault on Truth and Memory*. It was defamatory and untrue, and largely dead anyway – by 1996 remaindered as unsaleable. Since her publishers had peddled her book in England, within the jurisdiction of our Defamation Act, there was one remedy open to me. I could strike back at her book's dangerous libel, inserted at the last moment at the behest of Yad Vashem in Jerusalem, that I am a 'Holocaust denier.' Cross examination would reveal who was behind the campaign – and what.

Acting in person – *i.e.*, without lawyers – I had the writ served on Lipstadt in September 1996. The resulting London libel trial in January 2000 lasted over three months. The professor appeared in court flanked by forty expensive lawyers and hired historians, powered by a thirteen-million dollar defence fund created by Hollywood entrepreneur Stephen Spielberg and other donors of more questionable integrity; she herself did not venture into the witness box or offer herself for cross-examination.

Dazzled perhaps by the wealth displayed in his courtroom, Mr Justice Gray allowed her defence even though he had a copy of this book in front

of him. I called his judgment ‘perverse,’ and others agreed. The late George Carman, QC, one of Britain’s leading libel counsel, told his son privately that he felt Gray was wrong. Readers may concur.*

After the negative outcome of the Lipstadt trial, my possessions including my entire research archives, including 40,000 index cards, were seized in May 2002. (The Trustees appointed to do so informed me four weeks earlier that they were always given ‘these high-profile political cases.’)

For five years my possessions were held in a Sussex warehouse where Lipstadt’s experts were allowed to paw over them. At least one, Tobias Jersak, was caught stealing from them. It took five years of further litigation to force the authorities to return them to me. By then, many files, including all my research on Goebbels and Himmler, were inexplicably missing, for which the Trustees had to pay me substantial damages. Another of Lipstadt’s experts, the German professor Peter Longerich, subsequently published at short intervals highly-acclaimed biographies of both Goebbels and Himmler. *Honi soit qui mal y pense.*

I OFFER ONE REDEEMING postscript to what is otherwise a dusky story. On May 6, 1996 *Time* magazine, published a letter from Wisconsin, USA:

I am a Jew whose parents lost their families in the Holocaust. I grew up in Israel among Holocaust survivors. Since I was a child, I have read every book I could find on Nazi Germany. I have tried to understand why and how the Germans came to carry out their plan for exterminating the Jews.

I have read all of Mr Irving’s excellent books. He is no ‘apologist for Adolf Hitler.’ His words record the extermination of the Jews and provide evidence of Hitler’s direct involvement. Mr Irving is not an anti-Semite, nor is he a supporter of Hitler or Nazi Germany. His books, more than any others I have read, help explain what happened in Germany.

If we are to prevent future exterminations, we have to eradicate hate. The process must start with free speech and the ability to discuss openly all aspects of history and express all viewpoints. Mr Irving through his writing has made a large contribution toward preventing future Holocausts.

Publishing this letter at the time, signed by Josef Hose, of Madison, Wisconsin, I commented: ‘It is comforting to think of six million *Time* magazines around the world containing this prominently displayed letter, from a Jew, vindicating everything I have worked for as an historian.’

* For the whole story see www.fpp.co.uk/StMartinsPress. Readers who agree with Sir Charles Gray, QC, no longer a High Court judge, can write him at his chambers, 5 Raymond Buildings, Gray’s Inn, London WC1R 5BP; they may wish to draw his attention to passages of this book which he overlooked in court.