

30 October 1997

Statement regarding the complaint by Jeremy Jones about the Adelaide Institute web site

My name is Brian Martin. I am an Australian citizen, reside at 40 Euroka Street, West Wollongong NSW 2500 and work as a social scientist at the University of Wollongong. I am also president of Whistleblowers Australia, a voluntary organisation. My comments should not be taken to represent the views of the University of Wollongong or Whistleblowers Australia or members of either organisation.

Outlined here are my background and expertise, my views about the Holocaust and my views about free speech and their relevance to the Adelaide Institute's web site. In summary, while I disagree with many of the views expressed on this web site, I believe that the cause of truth is advanced by permitting it to remain uncensored.

Background and expertise

As a researcher since the early 1970s, I have published quite a number of books and many dozens of articles in a range of fields, including stratospheric modelling, astrophysics, numerical methods, environmental issues, peace issues, social studies of science and technology, education and democracy. More details of my background and a full list of publications are available on my web site at <http://www.uow.edu.au/arts/sts/bmartin/>.

One of my principal areas of research and action has been suppression of dissent and how to overcome it, beginning with studies nearly two decades ago. I was lead editor of the book *Intellectual Suppression* (1986), have published numerous articles on this topic, was co-organiser of Australia's first national conference on intellectual suppression in 1993, helped set up Dissent Network Australia, am president of Whistleblowers Australia and have given advice to hundreds of individuals about dealing with suppression. Both my research and personal experience have given me insight into the dynamics associated with free speech issues.

Knowledge of Holocaust issues

For two decades I have been engaged in study and action on promoting the use of nonviolent resistance to military aggression and repression. In my book *Uprooting War* I examined institutional forces underlying war, including the state, bureaucracy, the military and patriarchy. This has led to engagement with studies of genocide, since most genocides are made possible by the power of states and militaries. Consequently I have examined a number of studies of genocide, such as Raul Hilberg's classic study of the Holocaust, Helen Fein's comparative study of the extermination of the Jews in different countries under the Nazis, Zygmunt Bauman's commentary on Holocaust studies and Leo Kuper's important study of genocide. Thus, while being familiar only with secondary literature (and therefore very far from being a Holocaust scholar), I am aware of some important studies in the field.

Based on my studies, it is my view that:

- the Holocaust occurred;
- while having some unique elements, the Holocaust can best be understood as one of a set of cases of genocide;
- there is much to be learned about the corruptions of power and how to overcome them by studying genocide and other gross human rights violations.

As for Holocaust revisionism, I have seen some material but find little to convince me or attract my interest. A recent analysis in *The Skeptic* seems balanced to me.

I make these comments not because my knowledge of and views about the Holocaust are of any special significance in themselves, but rather to place in context my views about the Adelaide Institute web site.

Connection with Fredrick Toben

I helped set up Dissent Network Australia. Basically, it is a publicly available list of people who are willing to be consulted concerning suppression of dissent. Isla MacGregor and I administer the list and have accepted entries from all people who have requested to be on it. It contains people with a diversity of political and social opinions. Fredrick Toben is one of 41 people currently on the list. He lists his areas of special interest or experience as "Jewish-Nazi Holocaust: to question the details of the alleged gassings of millions of people in homicidal gas chambers at Auschwitz without being called a 'racist', 'neo-Nazi' or 'hate-monger'."

Views on free speech

I have made in-depth studies of several scientific controversies. In a number of these—such as nuclear winter, fluoridation and origin of AIDS—one side has had far less scientific credibility than the other. Nevertheless, in such controversies, debating the issues has social and intellectual value.

- The weaker side may have a germ of truth even if overall it is judged to be wrong.
- The dominant side can be kept honest and even improved by engaging with critics.
- An ongoing debate can keep people thinking for themselves rather than accepting the standard view simply because it is dogma or unopposed.

The search for truth is aided by debate, because claims are tested rather than protected from scrutiny. This is of special relevance to those who study the issue in depth. When debates become public, they have the advantage of putting both claims and values in the spotlight and promoting a more aware population.

On a pragmatic level, when defenders of the orthodox view attempt to suppress opponents and refuse to debate them, this can sometimes backfire by making the proponents of orthodoxy seem arrogant and making banned views more attractive to some, as in the case of the fluoridation controversy.

In summary, attempting to shut down debate weakens the opportunity to seek the truth and weakens the ability of people to learn how to judge issues for themselves. It may also make unorthodox views more attractive to some.

All these points apply to Holocaust revisionism in general and the Adelaide Institute web site in particular. My view is that the best way to respond to Holocaust revisionism is to present the facts and arguments about the Holocaust so that people can judge for themselves.

It is inevitable that speech will offend some people. If speech is to be banned because it is offensive to someone, then there will be little left that can be said freely. The danger with banning speech is that the power to ban is likely to be used by powerful groups to serve their interests. The good intentions behind banning certain speech do not mean that the power to ban will not be misused. Likewise, even if some speakers have bad intentions, this does not mean it is wise to restrict their speech, as discussed by John Swan and Noel Peattie in *The Freedom to Lie*.

Web sites do not force themselves on anyone; they can be considered analogous to books sitting in a library. Furthermore, web sites can be accessed anywhere in the world, so it would be easy for the Adelaide Institute to put its

material on web sites in other countries where it can still be accessed in Australia.

I know of several Australian cases where defamation law or other pressure has been used to shut down web sites or prevent publication of their addresses. (Information about these is available through my own web site.) The web provides ample opportunity for lengthy responses to claims, yet in these cases the critics of the sites did not attempt to provide responses, but sought only to censor. These examples show how strong the impulse can be to stop unwelcome speech rather than reply to it. It is precisely this impulse that must be resisted.

Dr Brian Martin

Associate Professor

phone: 02-4228 7860 (home), 02-4221 3763 (work); fax: 02-4221 3452

e-mail: brian_martin@uow.edu.au; web: <http://www.uow.edu.au/arts/sts/bmartin/>

References

- Zygmunt Bauman, *Modernity and the Holocaust* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1989).
- Helen Fein, *Accounting for Genocide: National Responses and Jewish Victimization during the Holocaust* (New York: Free Press, 1979).
- Raul Hilberg, *The Destruction of the European Jews* (Chicago: Quadrangle, 1961).
- Frank Miele, "Giving the Devil his due: Holocaust revisionism as a test case for free speech and the skeptical ethic," *Skeptic*, Vol. 2, No. 4, 1994, pp. 58-70.
- Leo Kuper, *Genocide* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1981).
- Michael Shermer, "Proving the Holocaust: the refutation of revisionism and the restoration of history," *Skeptic*, Vol. 2, No. 4, 1994, pp. 32-57.
- John Swan and Noel Peattie, *The Freedom to Lie: A Debate about Democracy* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 1989).