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Freedom of opinion: memorial work for Helmut Diwald on the Index Books on the bonfire

A book is banned from sale due to a footnote written in Latin.

BY HELMUT MÜLLER

Since December last year, at the request of the States Attorney, The criminal police Tübingen have been investigating Robert Hepp, sociologist in Osnabrück, who is suspected of propagating the "Auschwitz Lie". The case involves an essay the scholar contributed to the memorial work "Hellmut Diwald - Sein Vermächtnis für Deutschland" ("Hellmut Diwald - his legacy for Germany") edited by Rolf-Josef Eibicht, published 1995 by Hohenrain-Verlag of Tübingen. It is well-known that in the decade of the '70's the historian Hellmut Diwald fell into disfavor in the freest state in German history because of his support for historical truth.

In the book, which is now on the Index, there is a passage in Latin in which Professor Hepp addresses himself exclusively to his professional colleagues and casts doubt on the idea of "common knowledge" as a basis for factual knowledge. However, the rather moderate meaning "I dispute" ("ich verneine") was intensified by a hired translator into "I deny" ("ich leugne"). In addition, the officials have not proceeded very scrupulously in this case: Professor Hepp was also accused of responsibility for the distribution of the book. Many authors recognized for their special expertise are represented in the book, including many university professors and lecturers, writers and even a suffragan bishop. In the meantime the remaining copies of the book have been confiscated.

In a conversation with Zur Zeit the editor of the book said there was "an unleashing of the justice system against people who think differently", and that we had now come to the pass where one could not speak the truth even in Latin. This behavior is an act of criminal politics, especially from the standpoint of the principles of 1848, said Rolf-Josef Eibicht.

The actions of the judicial officials have aroused surprise in the Federal Republic not only among the authors of the book. Across the country, many people have announced support for Professor Hepp and expressed concern that the book might be burned. This has not happened in public for 65 years, but today it is about to happen secretly by burning in a garbage dump.