

The model, the Saudi prince and the U-boat commander: David Irving's secret backers

by D.D. Guttenplan and Martin Bright

THEY are a colourful group bound in a dubious cause: a London pensioner, a Saudi prince with an estate in Ascot, a former Nazi U-boat commander and a glamorous blonde model.

All are part of the international support network for David Irving, the writer branded a racist, an anti-Semite and a falsifier of history by a High Court judge.

Their backing allows him to continue to propagate his views on the Holocaust and support his lavish lifestyle despite his court defeat.

Irving, who operates out of a Mayfair flat and spends much of the year in Florida, has always kept his finances a closely guarded secret.

Now an *Observer* investigation has begun to unravel the web of contributors and companies that keep Irving's crusade on the march. Until now they have been anonymous.

British contributors also fear they might be held liable

for a substantial portion of the £2 million in costs incurred by Irving's opponents.

The revelations come on the eve of a bankruptcy hearing triggered by the failure of Irving's libel action against American academic Deborah Lipstadt and Penguin Books.

In April 2000 the court awarded costs to Lipstadt and her publishers and ordered Irving to pay £150,000 on account to Penguin. Irving is in court tomorrow because of his failure to pay. His defeat in the High Court has not deterred him from pursuing his libel action against the writer Gitta Sereny and this newspaper, even though that case hinges on many of the same issues. The law permits bankrupts to sue for libel and keep any money awarded from such suits.

Irving's most recent newsletter advertises 'The Next Battle' - his suit against *The Observer* - as well as a Special £150,000 Appeal: 'To defeat Lipstadt permanently and inflict the Six Million Dollar loss on her backers...' The



Prince Fahd bin Salman, centre, agreed to fund Irving, left, after a meeting arranged by Michele Renouf, right. The prince and another donor, a U-boat commander, are now dead.

reference to dollars is deliberate. Of the 4,017 names on Irving's active contributors list, 2,495 are in the United States and Canada. One was Henry Kersting, a tax-avoidance specialist from Hawaii. According to Irving, Kersting was a former German U-boat commander who was 'just deeply concerned with politics. He wasn't anti-Jewish'.

In an exclusive interview, Irving said Kersting, who died two years ago, made all his donations in cash. 'He was a strange character. He would phone me in Key West and say "I'm sending over another 10 flowers," or "I'm sending over five flowers by Fedex". And then the Fedex van would come the next day and there was \$5,000 in cash. Or \$10,000 in cash.' On another occasion Kersting

asked Irving to meet him in Amsterdam, where he gave him a paper bag containing \$50,000 in cash. Irving is reluctant to comment on living contributors whose names are known to *The Observer*, including one from Sweden and another from Switzerland who between them loaned £17,500. He refused to even discuss Albert W. Hess, who lives in

Florida and loaned Irving \$45,000 to fund his activities. A supporter of Udo Walendy, the German neo-Nazi and publisher of the German translation of the British Holocaust denial tract *Did Six Million Really Die?*, Hess was himself a featured speaker at one far-right Florida gathering. *The Observer* can also reveal the financial details of Irving's

mysterious 'fighting fund'. Irving's newsletter *Action Report* solicits donations, but fans who prefer to make their contributions in the form of a loan or investment are then directed to either Focal Point Publications or Parforce UK Ltd - a registered company set up by Irving's Danish wife, Bente Hogh, and his accountant, Alan Kentto, to publish his books. This puts it out of the reach of creditors.

Frederick Atkin, a former insurance company employee, loaned Irving £5,000. Atkin, 69, told *The Observer* that he was motivated by 'pure greed': 'It was an investment as far as I was concerned. He always seemed above board to me.'

Another Briton, Nigel Hogg of Whitley Bay in Northumberland, invested £5,000 with Irving's publishing company and was repaid in full with interest. He was not prepared to comment on his connection with Irving or whether he supported his views: 'This is a private matter. I am not a current funder of David Irving.'

The British donors rely on Irving's absolute discretion. Under the law any third parties who help to fund a libel action can potentially be made to help pay the costs if the action is not successful.

'If I was ever to get an order against me by the court for

having been maintained by outsiders,' Irving said, 'then... I have firmly established in my own mind the principle [that] on the date that such an order is made I'll come straight back here and destroy all the files, rather than reveal the names of the people who donated to me.'

But he confirmed that all money paid to him potentially ends up in his fighting fund.

'It all comes through the same pipeline,' Irving explained. 'Cheques are written to Focal Point. Some of the cheques are now written to Parforce UK Ltd. As I am Focal Point I don't really take much trouble to separate the investment side in my head from the litigation funding side because, at the end of the day, it's all the same pot.'

In July, Irving thought he'd finally found his ideal benefactor: Prince Fahd bin Salman of Saudi Arabia. The son of the governor of Riyadh and eldest nephew to King Fahd invited Irving to Harewood, his estate in Surrey. Just a month earlier Fahd had accompanied his father on a trade mission to Britain when he met the Queen and the Prime Minister.

The meeting with Irving was arranged by Michele Renouf, the mysterious blonde model who had been a constant presence at Irving's side during the trial. Renouf is an Australian taxi-driver's daughter who styles herself 'Lady Renouf' thanks to a six-week marriage to Sir Francis Renouf, the late New Zealand financier. The prince agreed terms by telephone from Riyadh a few days later. Renouf confirmed Irving's account of the negotiations in an email to *The Observer*: 'Tragically, the following day, the generous and fit prince died suddenly,' she added.

D.D. Guttenplan is the author of *The Holocaust on Trial*, now available in paperback from Granta Books.

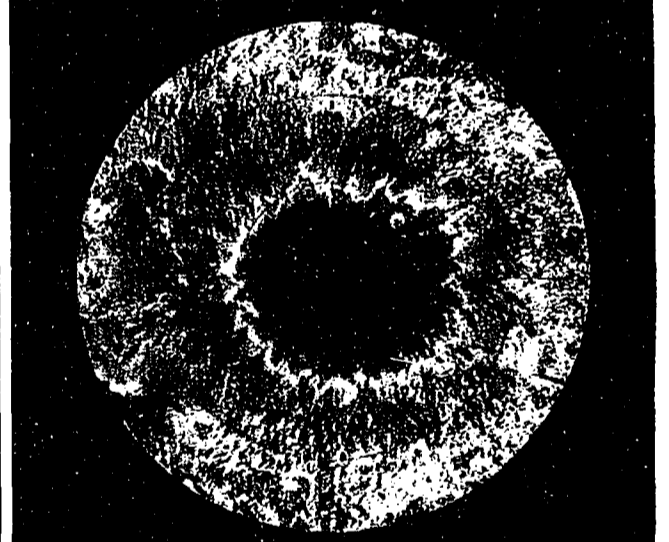


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Water find hints at life on Mars

by Robin McKie
Science Editor

MASSIVE fields of ice have been discovered on Mars, raising hopes that the Red Planet could support life.

The speed and extent of the discovery of water has stunned scientists who had only just directed instruments on the US Mars Odyssey spacecraft towards the planet. The data they have received is the strongest indication yet that the planet once harboured life, and may still support it today.

'The signal we're getting is loud and clear. We're not just looking at surface frost. There's lots of ice on Mars,' said Stephen Saunders, project scientist for Odyssey.

Water is the matrix of life. Without it, biology is impossible. Hence, scientists' joy at finding large amounts in the planet's southern hemisphere.

'This is very good news,' said Prof Colin Pillinger, leader of Britain's Beagle 2 mission, which aims to land a robot-probe on Mars next year. 'Wherever you find [water] on Earth, you find life. This discovery has to be very encouraging.'

Odyssey is the first spacecraft to reach Mars since two planetary probes were destroyed during their final approaches to the planet in 1999. It is designed to conduct

the first chemical analysis of the entire Martian surface.

The craft - launched on 7 April from Cape Canaveral - reached Mars in October and has been slowly manoeuvring itself into a low orbit since then. Last week, scientists turned on their instruments and began surveying the planet. Within hours they were rewarded with reams of data, including strong evidence of water. Such early results are unprecedented in a mission of this nature.

'We have a whopping signal,' said Arizona University's William Boynton who directs the probe's water-detectors. 'It blew us away.'

Odyssey uses three different devices to determine the chemical constituents of Martian soil. The planet's surface is bombarded by cosmic rays, and each chemical constituent of its soil emits a high-energy sub-atomic particle when struck by such radiation. Each chemical produces a particle of a particular type and energy, and this acts as a signature for its presence.

All three water-detectors on Odyssey have observed substantial amounts of water in the Martian soil. 'The fact we see a clear signature of ice from three different instruments makes the conclusion that there are significant amounts... a sound one,' said Boynton.