

One would think he should be, given his history. He's known to people in the field but not necessarily to a broader public. When did you start thinking about doing a biography, and why?

I started-- let me try to remember. I think it was 1999, about, 2000. I worked-- from '98, I worked about 10 years for the biography, and when I came to Frankfurt and worked at the Fritz Bauer Institute, I must say, before I started in Frankfurt, I didn't know Fritz Bauer.

So when I started there, I realized how important he was for our history. So I thought-- first I wanted to start in '98, but then there were lots of other projects and a little bit I followed his -- What do you think it's in English? [SPEAKING GERMAN]? We followed his steps--

Yeah, his tracks, yes.

--through history in working about-- first about Adolf Eichmann and then about the Auschwitz trial. Then I wrote the biography.

Right. Right.

And step by step, it became clearer for me how important he was.

Yes, yeah, yeah. Do you think that's clear to the German public now or not yet?

I think not yet, not yet.

Yeah.

Actually, we had this discussion about the exhibition in Frankfurt about Fritz Bauer and whether he was homosexual. And I think he was not, and there are no proofs. And I am asking myself, why do we have this discussion now? It's of no importance for his life or for what he did. And now you can read in the newspapers he was a Jew, he was a member of the Social Democratic Party, and he was a homo. So this is-- I cannot understand this discussion and why the people are focusing on this.

Yeah.

This is not important for the life of Fritz Bauer.

Yeah. Well, actually, that was one of the things I was going to ask you because I did-- I was just at the American Academy in Berlin for a very short time, for a few days. I managed to get to Frankfurt and see that exhibit. I also went to Ludwigsburg to see the Ludwigsburg operation.

And I looked at the coverage. A lot of the coverage mentions the homosexual issue, but it's not the central thing. And I asked the people at the exhibition what's--

Did you see the exhibition?

Yes, I did. Yes. Yeah. And there are those Danish police reports which claim that he admitted to having had one homosexual affair or something. I asked them what they felt the significance of that was, and they say only that he had another secret to keep. Do you feel-- did you-- by the way, did you know about these Danish police reports when you wrote your biography? Because you didn't include them, I don't think.

I mentioned them in my book as a rumor because I asked myself, who gave the Danish police the information that Fritz Bauer now lives in Denmark? So when he came in-- it was in '36. He came as a Social-- member of the Social Democratic Party and not as a Jew. And so I don't know if this was very-- there was a Social Democratic government in

Denmark and why should the police persecute him, should have persecute him. And who gave them the information? So I think it was the Gestapo.

Well, apparently--

I can't prove this, but-- because it's not in the archives, but my idea is--

But they did-- they did interrogate Bauer about his activities, so they were clearly monitoring him. And apparently-- I gather it wasn't-- it was pretty common for the Danish police, despite Denmark's reputation as this liberal place, to monitor immigrants, especially from Germany.

And so I don't know. There was clearly a discussion with him about all this. Whether the police report is fully accurate or not I don't know. So in your book you just said that there was a rumor of something? Because I don't--

Yes, and I think that he had to fear that they send him back to Germany. But you know what this would have meant.

Oh, of course.

Concentration camp.

Of course. And by that time, the fact that he was Jewish would have also been equally important, yeah.

Yes.

And the other thing-- I know-- I know that-- I also talked to Ilona Ziok about her film, and she also says, why do they even mention, stress that he was Jewish. Well, in the times, he may have been a secular Jew, but the fact that he was Jewish was a factor, obviously, given the climate in Germany. That certainly-- yes, he was probably imprisoned initially as a Social Democrat, but he had to know that being Jewish only made him more vulnerable.

Yes, and the situation became worse for him in '38 and '39 when he was arrested. He was arrested as a Social Democrat and not as a Jew in 1933.

In '33, yes, yes, yeah, yeah, yeah. Yeah. But the fact that he was Jewish could have become a factor soon enough, obviously. Yeah, yeah. And also--

But--

Yeah? Sorry.

--when he came back in 1949, why it is so important that he was a Jewish immigrant? He came back not as a Jew. He came back as the person, Fritz Bauer, and the lawyer and not as a Jew.

Yes, but it's-- however, he felt-- the public perception, of course, given everything that had happened, anybody of Jewish origin was seen as a Jew. Yeah, that-- yeah. So the fact that he was [? glaublos, ?] as he would tend to say-- there was not-- I don't think changed that, probably. I don't know.

He was not member of the Jewish community, and he was, that sense he was glaubenslos, and he was fond of the Humanist Union.

Yes.

So he was as Jewish as I'm a Catholic.

Yeah, well, but if you were--

Otherwise we would argue with racist arguments.

Yeah. Well, if the kind of origins of people were considered important as they were at the time-- for all the wrong reasons of course-- then you would be described as a Catholic. So certainly, having been in the Balkans, if they asked you your religion, it didn't matter whether you were a believer or not.

But yeah, there's that, but you believe-- but just on the point, you believe he was not-- he was-- you believe he was not homosexual.

There's no proof of it.

Yeah, yeah. Yeah.

So why should I speculate about that?

Yeah, yeah.

This is my most important point. It's not necessary to speculate about the sexuality of a person.

Right. And then the one other thing that I think-- that I think you did not mention in your book, as far as I could see, was in '33, when he was released, there was this business, which was, again, in the exhibit, about the loyalty oath, that he-- they say he signed a loyalty oath to get out of the camp in '33, which-- the copy of which in the newspaper there says "Fritz Hauer," which they say is a typo. But they say there are other documents which say "Fritz Bauer." Were you aware of that loyalty oath before?

Yes, I have heard about it, but it's not proved. If you don't have the proof for these documents, I don't want to speculate in my book. It may be, but it's-- I don't know.

Yeah. Well, there are these documents, which-- like the one they show where-- the actual loyalty oath, and his name is there. There was apparently nobody by the name of Fritz Hauer there. It would seem unlikely.

Well, if you want to get out of the concentration camp, I think there were a lot of things you do.

Oh, absolutely, absolutely. And that's why I don't think it's exactly-- it would be something terrible if he signed this. It'd be quite understandable.

I think so, too.

And given his family situation also, he would be worried if he doesn't get out and help his family then things could only get worse. So that's why I don't think it's-- I don't think it was in any kind of accusatory way that-- but it seems to be just part of the record there that he probably did this, which, again, does not detract from his life story and what he accomplished.

It's like you say, it's not so important.

Yeah. But I guess my question is, in writing this-- and I know, again, in the documentary that Ilona Ziok did. She also left any discussion of it out. But did you feel it would detract from his story if you even brought up this issue?

It should be tracked?

Or do you do you think it would be negative for his image to include that?

About the rumors?

Well, it was more than rumors. There were these documents with his-- which apparently-- which appear to confirm that he actually did sign this to get out of the concentration camp, which, as you say, is quite understandable.

Well, I think it is playing with sentiments against homosexuals.

Well-- oh, I'm talking about the--

[BOTH TALKING] document still exist?

Yeah. Yeah. It is playing with prejudices against homosexuals? But in terms of-- the loyalty oath had nothing to do with homosexual issues. Yeah.

No. Ah, now you are talking about [BOTH TALKING] document again?

Yes, yeah. Yeah.

No, that's-- this is of no importance.

OK.

I think it's not very interesting whether he signed this or not because if he signed it, it's understandable, like you said. And if it's not true, it's not true. That's not very interesting.

OK. And then I wanted to ask you-- I think I asked you this in an email. I don't-- I can't remember whether you said something about it. Did you come across much in terms of his contacts with Jan Sehn in Poland?

No.

No? No, OK.

I have not. I only know that Jan Sehn died in Frankfurt.

Yes.

And I didn't, no.

Yeah, he died in Frankfurt in '65, which is sort of-- it's sort of ironic, at the very least, that he dies there in '65 and Bauer in '68.

'68, yeah.

Yeah, yeah. Did you-- and how did you feel about the whole issue of Bauer's death? Do you think-- there are-- there have been these, again, speculation. Could there have been any-- could this have been more than just a natural death?

I don't know. The only thing I know is that we don't know how he died, and we have the documents. And it's not clear what happened at this weekend. And everything is speculation.

Right.

What's important is to say that we don't know it, and this also says something about his situation that he was maybe-- I think he was very lonely.

But when you say he was very lonely, are you saying this could have been a suicide or--

No, I don't think so.

Yeah, yeah, yeah.

I don't think so.

Yeah. Yeah. And how do you-- how much do you think he was-- he felt threatened physically? I know you write-- I think you mentioned he carried a gun. He was authorized. Do you-- and he got a lot of threats, which you write about in your book. Do you think--

Yeah, these telephone calls during day and night and the letters.

Yeah. Yeah. But do you think he-- do you get-- did you get the sense that he really felt physically threatened by this?

It's not easy to say.

Yeah. Yeah. It can't be-- yeah, of course it's not-- it's not a pleasant experience to be threatened constantly, but some people have-- it depends on their personality. Some people seem to be able to not get too concerned. Others, obviously, get more concerned. I just was wondering, in doing all this research, whether you had a sense of his level of concern.

I don't know. Threatened physically? I don't think so.

You don't think so, yeah, yeah, yeah, OK. Right. OK. And then in terms of-- one of the things I find really interesting is that, with Bauer's theory during the Auschwitz trial basically that people who are part of a machine of death and going into it knowing what they are involved-- that is really-- his theory was that that should be enough to indict them, right?

Yes.

Yeah. That you don't have to prove--

For him--

Yeah?

--they were perpetrators.

Anybody who participated, yes.

In Auschwitz and in every concentration camp.

Yeah. Yeah. Yeah.

Because they knew what happened there. Everyone who was in Auschwitz knew--

--what was happening.

--about the gas chambers and the murder of millions of people.

Right, right.

It's like the Murder I-N-C.

Yeah, yeah. Yeah, yeah. Yeah. Of course, the German courts did not generally take that approach, and of course-- and

even in the Auschwitz trial that approach was not exactly accepted. But it's interesting that now, with-- in the end, the Demjanjuk case, in effect, vindicated the Bauer view, didn't it? Because it said--

I'm not sure. I'm not sure.

Yeah.

I would like to discuss this with Eli Rosenbaum because I think he was accused by [INAUDIBLE] for aiding and abetting and not as a perpetrator, Demjanjuk.

Well, first of all, Demjanjuk case is, as you know, very complicated because in the beginning there were clearly some mistakes made, and he maybe was-- he was misidentified probably. But in the end, as I understand it, the German court, although there was not a final ruling, basically said, as part of this machinery, knowing he was in places like Treblinka and what the purpose of those camps were, that that was enough to make him guilty.

And I think that was the basis, as I understand it, in Ludwigsburg--

To make him guilty for aiding and abetting or--

Well, yeah, as being-- yeah, I'm not sure what the formal charge is, but guilty of being part of this, basically, as you say, Murder Inc, whatever the formal legal charge is. And that's what has also prompted, for instance, Kurt Schrimm and the Ludwigsburg people to go after remaining Auschwitz guards they can find on the same basis, not looking for witnesses to prove individual crimes but simply on the basis that they were Auschwitz guards.

And very late, of course, but this seems to be to a little bit of a vindication of the Bauer argument. I don't know if you see it that way, but that was-- it appears to--

I really don't know it.

Yeah, yeah. OK.

I should read the judgment.

All right. All right. Oh, and one other thing I found very interesting at the end of your book-- I had not known about-- that Bauer had been thinking about doing a play about Oscar Wilde. Yeah. That's--

He wanted to write about Oscar Wilde and about Kafka.

And Kafka as well. Yeah. Now, was he going to write the play or was going-- he wanted to-- did you have the impression he wanted to actually write the play?

Yeah, he wanted to write about Oscar Wilde.

Yeah, yeah.

That was the idea. But I never found the script.

Do you think he started writing?

I don't know.

Yeah, yeah.

[BOTH TALKING]

Yeah, yeah. And do you think his interest in him was purely as a persecuted playwright? Or I hate to bring it up again, but Oscar Wilde, of course, was very known-- who had been persecuted for his homosexuality as well. Do you think that was at all a factor in his interest?

I don't think so.

OK. All right.

He was very interested in literature and went to the theater in Frankfurt as often as he could.

Had he written any-- attempted to write any plays before? Do you know?

No.

Yeah, yeah, yeah. But he went to the theater often?

Yeah.

Yeah. Yeah. OK. OK.

Is that the phone?

Yeah, I can ignore that. That's all right. It's nothing important. I'll just let it ring.

Call from--

And-- OK. Oh, the other thing-- I'm sorry to skip around, but I just sort of jotted down things. Getting back to that business in the '33 and whether or not there was a loyalty oath, did-- Schumacher spent about 10 years in the camps, right? Didn't he?

Mm-hm.

Right to the end of the war. But he was in the same camp as Bauer in the beginning in '33. Is that correct?

Yes.

Yeah, yeah, yeah. So do you have any idea whether this was standard procedure to try to get people to sign loyalty oath, whether Schumacher would have been offered one or not? Or they just wanted to keep him locked away?

I don't know.

Yeah, yeah.

I don't know.

Yeah.

I've never heard this about Schumacher.

Yeah, yeah, yeah. And Schumacher and-- and Bauer, after the war, continued to be on good terms, right?

There are not very much document about this, but they corresponded, especially when Fritz Bauer was in Denmark and tried to--

--come back.

--come back to Germany. He wrote some letters to Schumacher to help him.

Right. Right, right, right. Yeah. OK. And by the way, so how long did you work at the Fritz Bauer Institute?

10 years.

10 years? Wow.

10, 11 years, yeah.

Wow.

I think I started in 1996 and left it in 2006 or '07. No, it was '07, I think.

2007.

And then I went to the ITS. But I was in International Tracing Service for one year. And from there, I went to Munich and made-- wrote the concept for the NS Documentation Centre. It was not accepted.

Oh, really?

And there was a huge discussion about it.

Yeah, yeah. Right. But did you feel-- at the Fritz Bauer Institute, was there-- the main mission there is to document the Nazi era, right? Or--

Yes.

Yeah. But was there even there a lot of interested in Fritz Bauer himself?

During my time, not.

Not.

It was very difficult. It was a very difficult situation there.

In what way?

I think for political reasons. There were lots of troubles during that time, and there were some people who didn't like that I wrote the biography and some people who helped me.

But why would they not be happy with the Fritz Bauer autobiography?

That you should ask them.

Yeah. OK. But do you feel that-- actually, I know-- again, I know Ilona Ziok has very strong views on some of this, and she feels that they are actually-- the exhibition is trying to in some ways discredit Bauer. I did not get that impression just going through the exhibition, but do you feel that that's the case?

I didn't see the exhibition. I was not invited to participate. It was interesting for me.



You were not invited? Oh.

No. What's her name? [? Ball, ?] I think.

Oh, yeah, [? Molika ?] [? Ball, ?] yes, yes. I spoke to her, yes.

We had some telephone calls, and I said, of course I help you. But we should make a contract because I've collected a lot of material. And then I never again heard about it.

I see. Yeah. And now there's also this--

And the reason for that I don't know. I think-- it was --

Yeah. And somebody else made another film about Bauer, right? Or was there something in television?

Yes, [INAUDIBLE], the second program, yeah. But I didn't see the film.

Yeah, that one I haven't seen either. I don't know what it's like. And I know you also now have this other biography of Bauer by Ronen Steinke.

Ronen Steinke, yeah. He started with this rumor. He was the one who wrote about the-- I think he was the first one who said there were two secrets, and this is his Jewishness and the homosexuality.

Yeah, well, the Jewishness doesn't seem like a secret. It isn't-- although Bauer-- I guess he wrote that in the '20s that Bauer identified himself as Jewish on some application, some formular kind of-- which he may have. I don't know that--

I don't think so.

Yeah. All right. Well, listen, when you come to the United States, please do let me know. I was only in Germany a short time, so I was not able to get to Munich. And I only got your coordinates, and so I figured it'd be easier to do here. But I hope we can meet in person at some point.

That would be nice.

Yeah.

I'm coming at the end of August.

At the end of August, wonderful, wonderful. OK. And I assume you'll be living in Cambridge, in Boston, right?

Yes, yes.

Yeah, yeah, yeah. And how long is the fellowship? One academic year?

One year.

Yeah, yeah. OK. Well, terrific. I look forward to seeing you at some point. I suspect you'll also come at some point to New York and Washington, right?

Yes, of course.

Yeah, yeah. Well, please let me know when you're heading this way.

OK.

OK. Well, thank you very much. It always helps.

Thank you.

Again, as I say, I found your book fascinating, but always helps to just ask a few--

It should be translated into English.

Yes. Yeah, I know.

I hope I can do something when I'm in Cambridge.

Right, right. Yeah, you should-- yeah, I think it's always better to try to work on that in person. But publishing these days in the United States is very-- it's difficult, and I know some translations are-- some publishers are reluctant. But I think some of the bigger university presses like Harvard, and Yale, and so forth might, you would think, would be open to something like this.

Maybe a shorter version.

Yes, yeah, yeah. Great. Well, thank you so much. Pleasure to speak to you.

Thank you. Bye-bye.

OK. Bye-bye.