

TERAMO : IL CASO FAURISSON

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A STEP TOO FAR?

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Should Holocaust deniers be prevented from airing their views? And, if so, how far is it right to go in stopping them? The questions arise because of what happened over here on Thursday night in the central Italian university city of Teramo.

Robert Faurisson, a retired academic who has been convicted five times in his native France for denying crimes against humanity, had been invited by a member of the staff to give a lecture. His host is one Claudio Moffa, a professor who runs the university's master's programme in Middle Eastern studies.

Moffa was asked by the university authorities to think again. He refused. So the rector, Mauro Mattioli, decided the only thing left was to temporarily shut down the university, which he did.

He said his decision was forced on him by security considerations. In a statement, the university authorities spoke of a "climate of tension that could endanger the safety of students".

Indeed, when Faurisson tried earlier today to speak at a hotel, there were scuffles with protesters and the event was cancelled. However, it is also worth noting that the rector had been given a clear indication by Italy's centre-left government of what was expected of him.

In a letter quoted by *La Repubblica*, the higher education minister, Fabio Mussi, said "inviting to an Italian campus a figure ... who denies the gravity of the Shoah has no academic merit, but merely bears witness to a mediocre provocation".

For professor Moffa, on the other hand, it is a question of academic and intellectual freedom. His website vaunts a declaration of support for his initiative, signed by more than 20 other Italian academics.

The professor claims that he is not himself a Holocaust denier. But his most recent relevant posting to the site is entitled "Why Faurisson and the 'deniers' convince me more and more".

Picking up on the prison sentence given to David Irving and the various penalties inflicted on his guest, he poses the following question: "Why is ... judicial harassment that smacks of manic obsession necessary if the arguments of Faurisson and Co are indeed 'unfounded'?"

Answers anyone?

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