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PRIVATE EYE

CAMERON BRINGS HOPE TO STORM-HIT BRITAIN



Letter from Vienna from Our Own Correspondent

AUSTRIANS started the new year with a curiously typical lack of interest in news that banker Gerhard Randa is finally to be investigated over allegations that he masterminded the spread of Bernie Madoff's pyramid scheme to the world.

The former CEO of Bank Austria was one of the country's most powerful financial figures, his bank owning 80 percent of firms on the Vienna stock exchange. Randa kept an iron control over the nation with his "jobs carousel", which offered politicians jobs in the Bank Austria empire as a reward for loyal service. To outsiders, the investigation was a sign he would at last pay the price for his role in the world's biggest financial fraud.

In reality, it is just for show. Like many another politically connected case, even if it goes to trial nothing will happen.

Take former MEP Ernst Strasser. Before our recent general election he was jailed for accepting bribes from undercover *Sunday Times* reporters. As expected, after the election he was cleared by the high court on a technicality so bizarre that even his defence team had not thought of it. Seemingly, it is only illegal to bribe a person in office for a specific reason; a more general bribe, of the sort designed to get a politician in the pocket, does not count.

Another case involved Tina Kroner-Taurer, who stole \$1.3m from children's charity World Vision in part to fund former MEP Karl Habsburg's political career. Like Strasser she was publicly jailed, but then quietly allowed to stay free after the judge "forgot" to sign the paperwork.

But having persuaded the world that Hitler was German and Beethoven was Austrian, it's easy to understand why outsiders who come here for *The Sound of Music* and Sacher Torte forget that Austria was also home to the spy classic, *The Third Man*, or spymaster Prince Metternich.

Austrians have managed to hide corruption in politics by giving MPs control of the prosecutors, and prosecutors control of the police. Police let prosecutors know about "sensitive" cases, and they in turn let their political bosses know, who then issue orders on which politically sensitive cases will not go ahead. This never causes any red faces, as officials are not obliged to admit an investigation has been quietly "shelved".

Austria, after all, is a country in which wanted posters are issued with the faces pixelated, and the interior ministry deletes press releases after a week so they don't breach a criminal's right to privacy.

This famous looking-the-other-way even featured in the case of Josef Fritzl, or "Mr F" as he was known here to protect his privacy. He locked his daughter up in a basement for 24 years, having seven children with her along the way. Not only did the neighbours and his wife see nothing, but he even brought up three of the children, claiming they were "foundlings" he had discovered on the street. Here gullibility might stretch credibility, but, after all, this is Austria, where even incestuous kidnappers are entitled to secrecy and we shouldn't ask too many questions.

The culture of "anonymous denunciation" also flourishes. Someone with a grudge can go into a police station and make the wildest accusations, but the police don't have to let the accused, or a curious journalist, know the accuser's name. Politically sensitive cases can be shelved, or indeed ordered to go ahead against political rivals – or troublesome reporters.

As a reporter at the respected Vienna daily newspaper, *Die Presse*, complained after she was recently denounced: "In a country in which the horrors of the Holocaust were caused in part by anonymous allegations by people against their Jewish neighbours, you'd think the tradition of anonymous denunciation would no longer be welcome."



FUNNY OLD WORLD

COMPILED BY VICTOR LEWIS-SMITH



● "Chronic alcoholics were causing a nuisance in the Oosterpark," Gerrie Holterman of the Rainbow Foundation told reporters in Amsterdam, "fights, noise, disagreeable comments to women. They find it impossible to hold down regular jobs, so we have offered them jobs cleaning the streets, and we pay them in beer and cigarettes."

"The day starts at 9am, when we offer them two beers and a coffee, before heading off to clean nearby streets. For lunch, they get two additional beers and a warm meal, then go out on the afternoon shift. At around 3.30 the shift is over, they get one last beer, ten euros, and half a pack of rolling tobacco, all paid for by government. They drink less, they eat better, they're kept busy during the day, and the streets are cleaner, so everyone benefits."

"We need alcohol to function," admitted 45-year-old Frank, "that's the disadvantage of chronic alcoholism. Lots of us haven't had any structure in our lives for years, so this is good for us. And when we leave here, we go to the supermarket and transform the ten euros we earned into more beers." (*Euronews*, 20/11/13. *Spotter: Charl Du Plessis*)

● "The facts of this case are not in dispute," Judge Ueda Tetsu told the District Court in Nagoya. "Ninety-one-year-old Kenji Watanabe was suffering from dementia, and was being cared for by his wife and his son. One morning in December 2007, while his wife was distracted, he wandered away from the house, walked to Kyowa station, and wandered onto the tracks where he died after colliding with a train on the Tokkaido main line. The incident happened at rush hour, and because the JR Tokai train company had to cancel thirty-four trains, and delay another twenty, an estimated 27,000 people were inconvenienced by the accident."

"Mr Watanabe's dementia had been diagnosed as 'independence level 4', meaning constant care was necessary. The framework for his care stipulated that his caretakers would not be distracted from watching over him, and thus they cannot evade their responsibility. Mrs Watanabe is liable for JR Tokai's financial losses, and although their son was living apart from his parents at the time of the accident, he was also a 'de facto carer', and is also liable. I therefore order them to pay 7,200,000 yen (\$70,000)

compensation to the JR Tokai company."

Speaking after the ruling, a family spokesman said "it's heartless of a big company to sue a father that couldn't even afford professional care Kenji. 20% of Japan's population is elderly, cases like this will continue to crop up." (*Ja Daily Press*, 13/8/13. *Spotter: Poraic Cahill*)

● "No one sets out to lose evidence," Dep. Police Commissioner Ross Barnett told a press conference in Brisbane, "and this has been a difficult set of circumstances. It's embarrassing for me at all, because the officer involved acted in good faith. We arrested and accused last week on suspicion of having stolen and swallowed two valuable diamond rings from an Indooroopilly jeweller, and held him in custody, waiting for the rings to pass through his system."

"With the benefit of hindsight, it's easy to say we should have conducted a second search of his stools, rather than simply waiting for him to tell us when the rings came out. His bail is conditional on us retrieving the rings, so we thought he had a vested interest in returning them. But it seems that one ring was thrown out in a medical waste bag at the weekend, and is now under a huge amount of landfill at a refuse site. The cost of search for it would be greater than its value, so it probably never be recovered. An X-ray confirmed that the other ring is still inside the accused, and we are taking him daily to airport, to use a special toilet belonging to Customs and Border Protection Services. But if it doesn't come out soon, we may be forced to consider medical intervention." (*ABC News*, 6/12/13. *Spotter: David Lennon*)



Schottenfrende

GERMAN WORDS FOR
THE HUMAN CONDITION

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Kühlschrankblockade

kuul-shrahnk - blob-kah-dub

Staring at the refrigerator, hungry but unsure of what to eat.

FRIDGE-FREEZE