

Impressions of Law and Order in Swabia

as seen by an American emigré Patrick Schmidt

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All over the world crime is on the upswing. Open any newspaper today and you will read about kidnappings, bank robberies, murders. It seems crime is now a part of our normal life. Even children are joining the crime wave. Just some time ago, a 10-year-old boy was brought to trial in New York City for having successfully robbed a bank.

Yet, there are areas in the world where the good guys win over the bad guys. One of these places is Swabia. It is an island of real law and order, and the only people living in fear are the gangsters. Swabia, the land with statistically the lowest crime rate in all of Germany, is the envy of all police commissioners.

Wanting to find out the real reasons why criminal elements stay clear of this region, I figured a visit to the courthouse in Uhlandstraße would indeed be most informative. So, one day I dropped into a trial that was going on. The following scene was taking place.

Judge: "Heff Gaunerle, do you understand the seriousness of the crime you have committed?"

Herr Gaunerle: "But your Honor, if you let me just explain the circumstances surrounding this case, you will..... "

Judge: "Don't give me any excuses. You have committed a most atrocious crime that would even make the devil turn red! "

Trembling with fear and staring at the ground Herr Gaunerle said meekly:

"Your Honor, there are moments in one's life where passion takes over and you lose complete control of your mind. I didn't mean it, really. "

Judge: "I have heard that excuse from every professional gangster who comes before me. But the wretched, inhumane criminal act you have committed leaves the whole community of Stuttgart in a state of shock. You should be ashamed of yourself for trying to get mercy from the court."

At this moment, I began wondering. What could Herr Gaunerle have done to get such a brutal, verbal lashing from the judge? Perhaps Herr Gaunerle had the cold-bloodedness of Jack the Ripper, the perversion of Marquis de Sade and the brutal organizational skills of Al Capone, all put into one. My mind was trying to fantasize his horrendous crime when the judge began to speak again.

"Now, Herr Gaunerle", he said in a firm and forceful voice, "I'm going to give you the maximum minishment the law allows me so as to sent an example for others."

There was no doubt in my mind that Herr Gaunerle would be sentenced to perpetuity. In other words, throw him into the darkest dungeon of Stammheim prison, lock the door and throw away the key.

“For willfully violating the *Ordnungsgesetz*, Paragraph 246, I hereby sentence you a fine of DM 50.”

Did I hear right? After a judge had accused you of the worst crime on earth, you would expect justice to be fully carried out. But a mickey mouse fine of DM 50. Something had to be wrong. After the court session, I hurried down to the Staatsbibliothek in Urbanstraße to find out what this *Ordnungsgesetz* was about to have gotten the judge so angry. After 15 minutes of searching, I found it under the “Gesetze der Stadt Stuttgart”. Paragraph 246 read as follows:

Persons who willfully do not do their
Kehrwoche as required shall be fined
up to but no more than DM 50.