

The denunciation of the Russian Revolution in Germany

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11 November 2017

In Germany's criminal code there is a paragraph declaring the slandering of the memory of the dead to be a criminal offence. Punishment for such a crime ranges from a fine to two years imprisonment. Yet this appears not to apply to historic figures. If one reviews the articles, contributions on radio and television, and films to mark the centenary of the October Revolution in Russia, the principal rule that applies is: "anything goes."

There was of course hysterical anti-communism during the Cold War. But even then a distinction existed between right-wing propaganda and scholarly work. Even if they were not socialists, serious historians understood that one of the greatest transformations in world history, which influenced the 20th century more than any other event, could not be dismissed with a tirade of insults against Lenin and the Bolsheviks, but required a serious study of its social and political driving forces.

For example, the American historian Alexander Rabinowitch, who grew up in an anti-Bolshevik milieu of Russian exiles, came to the conclusion in 1976, on the basis of a careful examination of sources in his book *Soviet Power: The Bolshevik Revolution of 1917*, that the Bolsheviks' goals enjoyed widespread support in the population in October 1917. By contrast, all other parties had largely lost their credibility.

One searches in vain for such a well-researched analysis today. Even the most grotesque falsifications are accepted in academic forums and renowned media outlets, without any objection being raised.

Typical of this trend is the article "The utopia of mass murder," which appeared in the *Frankfurter Rundschau* on the anniversary of the revolution. The author Arno Widmann, who was one of the co-founders of the Green Party-aligned *TAZ* newspaper in 1979, struggled to restrain his hatred for the October Revolution.

"Socialism," he wrote, "never existed at any point in time. Nowhere throughout vast Russia. From the outset,

the Bolsheviks practiced nothing more than the will to power and hatred towards democracy." The October Revolution, Widmann continued, "was not the awakening of a freer world. It was—from the outset and in almost all of its phases—a crime against humanity."

He continues in the same vein, "At no point was the Soviet Union an attempt to construct a more humane alternative to imperialism and war. It signified imperialism and war." And further, "The greatest geopolitical catastrophe of the century was not the collapse of the Soviet Union, but its establishment." Widmann concluded with the proclamation, "It cannot be allowed it to happen again under any circumstances."

Another example is the now 80-year-old songwriter Wolf Biermann, the son of a Jewish, communist worker who was murdered in Auschwitz. Biermann, who voluntarily moved to the German Democratic Republic (GDR) at the age of 17, enthused young people in West Germany in the 1960s with his rebellious songs. But following his forced deportation by the GDR regime, he developed into an embittered anti-communist, whose biting cynicism now only provokes disgust.

This has not prevented the mainstream media from providing him with a platform. On the anniversary of the October Revolution, Biermann delivered the comment on "Heute Journal," the main news program on the ZDF television channel, and the German Historical Museum invited him to participate in a panel discussion on the same day.

There, Biermann denounced communism as "animal testing on living human beings," and declared that Marx's basic idea was "the final solution of the social question." This comparison of the Nazi conception of the Holocaust with the perspective of socialism did not evoke a single protest from the audience. Biermann claimed that the attempt "to enforce the communist paradise on earth, without exploitation and oppression" can lead "only to

the worst hell of repression.” Anyone promising the “final solution” of all social conflicts is in reality an “enemy of humanity.”

Dozens of further examples could be cited of such gross historical falsifications. Among the most important academic representatives of this trend is Jörg Baberowski. The professor of Eastern European history at Humboldt University regularly publicises his views on the Russian Revolution on the radio and television, in newspapers, and through the Federal Center for Political Education (BPE), which is controlled by the Interior Ministry.

Baberowski described the revolution of 1917 as “a revolt of embittered people brutalised by the war, who literally drove the spirit of European civilisation, as well as the old order, out of the country.” The Bolsheviks, he claimed, were not victorious “because they offered the most attractive political programme, but because they were better perpetrators of violence than their opponents.”

Baberowski embodies the connection between the denunciation of the October Revolution and a right-wing extremist political agenda. The Humboldt University professor, who regularly issues right-wing commentaries on refugees and other political issues, can be described, according to a court ruling, as a “right-wing extremist.” In his academic discipline, he relies upon Ernst Nolte, who downplayed the Nazis’ crimes by referring to the “crimes of Bolshevism.” For his part, Baberowski described Hitler as “not vicious,” because he allegedly “did not want people to talk about the extermination of the Jews at his table.”

One year ago, Baberowski gave a lecture at Humboldt University about the Russian Revolution dedicated to the jurist Carl Schmitt, who theoretically prepared, justified, supported and defended the Nazi regime, and never expressed regret about this prior to his death in 1985.

Based on Schmitt’s theoretical conceptions, Baberowski accused the tsar and bourgeois provisional government of failing to be ruthless enough in the suppression of workers and peasants’ uprisings in 1917, and failing to establish a “commissarial dictatorship.”

“It would have necessitated very decisive measures, which could not have stopped short of bloodshed, the arresting of the executive committee of the workers’ and soldiers’ deputies, and, in the event resistance was attempted, the proclamation of a state of siege,” Baberowski quoted a member of the provisional government as saying.

Baberowski thus draws the lesson from the October Revolution that it is necessary to preempt social unrest

and revolutionary strivings by violently suppressing them and establishing a commissarial dictatorship. This is the key to understanding why, when it comes to lying about and falsifying the history of the October Revolution, the principle that applies is, “anything goes.” If the issue was merely an historical event that occurred a hundred years ago, the embittered denunciations of it would be hard to explain.

The October Revolution was not merely an episode in Russian history. It opened the epoch of the world socialist revolution. It was the result of the deep crisis of global capitalism, which found its most immediate expression in the outbreak of World War I. The war led to the deaths of millions of young men, who were senselessly slaughtered on the battlefield, and destroyed any illusions in a gradual, reformist improvement of society.

Although the Soviet Union, the workers’ state created by the revolution, remained isolated, degenerated and was ultimately dissolved by the counter-revolutionary Stalinist bureaucracy in 1991, the global capitalist crisis has intensified. Billions of people live in bitter poverty, while a tiny minority enjoys unheard of riches. At the helm of the world’s most powerful capitalist state stands a man who has openly threatened North Korea, China and Russia with nuclear weapons. Democratic freedoms are being shredded everywhere, to be replaced by censorship, surveillance and authoritarian forms of rule.

Under these conditions, interest is growing in the October Revolution, which proved for the first time that an alternative to capitalism is not a utopian dream but a real possibility, which can be realised through the conscious political struggle of the working class. The outraged denunciations are directed against this political awakening and are part of the preparations to violently suppress left-wing and socialist movements.



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