

Seventy-five years since the liberation of Auschwitz

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When units of the 60th Army of the 1st Ukrainian Front of the Red Army liberated the concentration death camp at Auschwitz 75 years ago today, they confronted evidence of the most horrific crimes in human history. “Human beings, or rather skeletons, were lying in the cots with only a covering of skin and distant stares,” recalled a Red Army soldier. Around 8,000 prisoners, on the verge of death, were all that remained from the far more than 1 million people killed at Auschwitz in less than five years.

Over the preceding days, the SS had evacuated the camp, forcing 60,000 prisoners into death marches westward, or immediately executing them. They left behind 837,000 women's dresses, 370,000 suits, 44,000 pairs of shoes and seven tons of hair, which came from an estimated 140,000 people and contained traces of the poison gas Zyklon B.

Auschwitz was at the heart of the machinery of industrialised mass murder that spanned the entire continent. Jews, Sinti, political opponents of the Nazi regime and others were deported to the death camp from every part of occupied Europe. Many had been previously interned in other concentration camps, often several, of which there were 11 within the borders of modern-day Germany alone. In addition, there were numerous concentration camps in the Baltic states, Poland, the Netherlands, France and Austria. A total of 6 million Jews were murdered in the Holocaust.

In most camps, inmates were exterminated through forced labour, undernourishment and severe abuse. The concentration camp system was closely tied to big business. Dozens of companies established factories around the Auschwitz camp to exploit forced labourers. They included companies such as Krupp and Siemens-Stuckert. The huge corporation IG Farben, which was a conglomeration of major companies, like Bayer, BASF and Höchst, even ran its own concentration camp, Auschwitz III, where some 11,000 people were interned.

Centuries-old latent prejudice and aggression against the Jewish people combined with Hitler's hatred of the organised workers' movement and socialism to mobilise and politicise the crazed anti-Semitism upon which Auschwitz was based. As the social democrat Konrad Heiden wrote in his Hitler biography, published in 1936, “The workers movement did not repulse Hitler because it was led by Jews, but rather the Jews repulsed Hitler because they led the workers' movement.” Hitler was brought to power by the ruling class to destroy the entire workers' movement. Anti-Semitism was a weapon to achieve this end.

The destruction of the Social Democrats, the Communist Party

and the trade unions was the precondition for launching the Second World War and putting the persecution of the Jews into practice. “The downfall of the German socialist movement cleared the way for the destruction of European Jewry,” insisted David North in his book *The Unfinished Twentieth Century*.

However, it was only with the outbreak of the Second World War that the murder of Europe's Jews could be realised. The extermination of the Jews merged with the war of annihilation against the Soviet Union, which claimed the lives of 27 million people and was, from the outset, aimed at physically eliminating the entire political and intellectual elite, “Jewish Bolshevism” in Hitler's words, and securing German hegemony for centuries to come.

“The barbaric character of imperialism, the highest stage of capitalism, found its most finished expression in this military campaign of annihilation,” wrote the Sozialistische Gleichheitspartei (Socialist Equality Party) in its Historical Foundations document.

The images of this horrendous crime of capitalism are deeply burned into popular consciousness and will be remembered as long as humans live on this planet. “Fascism, never again!” is the deeply felt slogan of the vast majority of the population in the face of the resurgence of the extreme right.

Even German President Frank-Walter Steinmeier felt compelled, in his speech at the Shoah Memorial in Yad Vashem, to warn of the return of anti-Semitic, völkish-nationalist and authoritarian conceptions. “We cannot say that we Germans have learned from history when only a heavy wooden door prevented a right-wing extremist from carrying out a bloodbath in a synagogue on Yom Kippur in Halle,” the president declared.

The danger posed by fascism is undoubtedly greater today than at any time since the unconditional capitulation of the Third Reich. With the Alternative for Germany (AfD), a right-wing extremist party is represented in Germany's federal parliament for the first time, with over 90 seats. Right-wing terrorist networks threaten and murder political opponents, and neo-Nazi gangs carry out rampages against refugees.

However, warnings about the threat of fascism from Steinmeier and other representatives of the ruling elite ring hollow. In recent years, they have increasingly embraced the agitation and policies of the AfD, thereby creating the ideological climate and political conditions that have facilitated its rise. Germany's head of state has played a key role in this process. Shortly after the AfD's electoral

success in the 2017 federal election, he stated that one must remove “the walls of irreconcilability” around the far-right party and develop “German patriotism.”

Shortly thereafter, Steinmeier met with AfD parliamentary group leaders Alexander Gauland and Alice Weidel to consult on the formation of a new government. The Grand Coalition was then sworn into office in March 2018, elevating the AfD as the official opposition. The other parties left open the chairmanships of several important parliamentary committees for the AfD to occupy, and have closely cooperated with the right-wing extremists ever since.

The trivialisation of the crimes of the Nazis and the struggle against anti-fascism are being carried out by the entire ruling elite. In his speech on the 80th anniversary of the outbreak of World War II, Steinmeier uttered not a single word about the extermination of the Jews. This was a clear concession and a signal to the AfD, which describes the Nazis as “so much bird shit in over a thousand years of glorious German history.” When students protested last October against AfD founder Berndt Lucke being allowed to return to his teaching post as a professor, Steinmeier accused them of “aggressively prohibiting debate,” which was “not acceptable.”

A key role in relativising the worst crimes in human history is being played by the right-wing extremist Professor Jörg Baberowski, who is backed by the German government and defended against any criticism by a large portion of the media. The professor of Eastern European history at Berlin's Humboldt University told *Der Spiegel* in February 2014 that he supported the rehabilitation of the since deceased Ernst Nolte, an anti-Semite and Nazi apologist. “Nolte was done an injustice. Historically speaking, he was right,” said Baberowski, before adding by way of explanation, “Hitler was not a psychopath, he was not vicious. He did not want to talk about the extermination of the Jews at his table.”

There was not a single voice raised in protest from the professoriat or media against this breathtaking whitewash of the Nazis' crimes in the most widely read German news magazine. On the contrary, the International Youth and Students for Social Equality and the Socialist Equality Party (Sozialistische Gleichheitspartei) were denounced by the media because they critiqued Baberowski at public meetings and in leaflets. The administration at Humboldt University insists to this day that Baberowski is not a right-wing extremist and that “attacks in the media” on him are “unacceptable.”

Emboldened by the backing from the political establishment that he has received, Baberowski has gone even further. He told the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* a few days ago that Hitler did not want to know anything about the greatest crime in human history. “Stalin revelled in cruelty, while Hitler did not do so. He didn't want to hear anything about Auschwitz, which makes the matter even worse,” wrote the newspaper in a paraphrase of Baberowski's remarks.

The claim that Hitler didn't want to know anything about Auschwitz is a well known ploy by right-wing extremists to deny that “the murder of European Jewry was the outcome of a systematically pursued policy, and that this policy was pursued by

the highest authority of the ‘Third Reich,’ Adolf Hitler,” according to Hitler biographer Peter Longerich, in reference to his report against the British Holocaust denier David Irving.

Seventy-five years after the liberation of Auschwitz, such right-wing filth is being printed in one of Germany's largest circulation newspapers. And not only that. The Foundation of Memorials in Saxony has invited Baberowski to deliver the keynote address at its main commemoration event for the 75th anniversary of the end of World War II, along with German Defence Minister Annegret Kramp-Karrenbauer.

According to the foundation, the event will not only commemorate the victims of World War II, but also the victims of the dictatorships in Eastern Europe, which “were accompanied by suffering and persecution once again.” The plan is for eye witness accounts to be read from prisoners of the Soviet special internment camp in Torgau, where thousands of Nazis and war criminals were imprisoned after the war.

The purpose of this historical revisionism at the highest levels of government and by large parts of the media is to make right-wing extremist positions socially and politically acceptable once again. Under conditions of the deepest capitalist crisis since the 1930s, the ruling elite is returning to a policy of vicious attacks on the working class at home and militarism abroad.

Neither the destruction of thousands of jobs in the auto industry, nor the neocolonial occupation of Africa, nor the drive to rearm for a third world war can be imposed through democratic means. As it did 90 years ago, the ruling elite is turning to authoritarian and fascist forms of rule. Baberowski himself declared in 2014 that the war on terror could be won only if one were prepared to “take hostages, burn villages, hang people and spread fear and terror.” This is the language of the Nazis and their wars of annihilation.

This development is by no means confined to Germany. It applies to the ruling elites of all countries. French President Emmanuel Macron praises the fascist dictator Philippe Pétain and deploys the army against Yellow Vest protesters. In his xenophobic and nationalist policies, British Prime Minister Boris Johnson relies on support from members of the far-right Britain First party, while in the US, Trump seeks openly to mobilise a fascist base to enforce a vast programme of rearmament and criminal preparations for war.

These policies have no support among a large majority of the population. On the contrary, bitter working class struggles are erupting around the world as workers and young people protest against social inequality, militarism and dictatorship. However, without a revolutionary leadership and a clear programme, these movements cannot be successful, giving the bourgeoisie the opportunity to impose its policies of fascism and war yet again. To prevent a relapse into capitalist barbarism, the decisive task is the building of the International Committee of the Fourth International, the world party of socialist revolution.



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