

Auschwitz liberation commemorated in Poland amid state-led campaign for historical revisionism and war

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28 January 2020

On Monday, a ceremony commemorating the 75th anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz on January 27, 1945, by the Red Army took place at the memorial site of the former death camp. The heads of state of Poland, Germany, Israel, Ukraine and Hungary attended at the ceremony. About 200 survivors of the camp, most of whom are now in their late 80s and 90s, were in attendance.

Auschwitz was a central site of the crimes of Nazism and above all its genocide of European Jewry: between 1.1 and 1.5 million Jews were gassed at Auschwitz. An estimated 140,000 Poles, 20,000 Sinti and Roma and 10,000 Soviet prisoners of war, as well as hundreds of homosexuals and Jehovah's Witnesses were deported to Auschwitz. Thousands of them were gassed and tens of thousands died from hunger, diseases, forced labor, exhaustion or torture.

Millions around the world are moved by the memory of horrors of fascism and profoundly troubled by the recent resurgence of anti-Semitism and fascist forces internationally. On Twitter, hashtags like #NeverAgain and #Auschwitz75 were trending on Monday, and millions were reading the extensive coverage in the media and interviews with the few remaining survivors. Several survivors spoke powerfully and urgently at the ceremony, warning of a repetition of the crimes committed by the Nazis and a resurgence of fascism and anti-Semitism today.

However, the politicians speaking at the ceremony form part of governments that are directly responsible for the resurgence of fascist and anti-Semitic forces and far-right historical revisionism.

In opening the ceremony, the Polish president Andrzej Duda from the ruling far-right Law and Justice Party (PiS) stated that the crimes perpetrated in Auschwitz were historically unprecedented and that a repetition of these crimes had to be prevented. He referred to the "organized, systematized mass murder" of the Jews, and the murder of Soviet prisoners of war, Poles and gypsies.

Unlike five years ago, when the Polish government

explicitly denied recognizing that the camp was liberated by the Red Army, Duda acknowledged in a half-sentence that "soldiers of the Red Army" liberated Auschwitz. A substantial portion of his speech was devoted to highlighting that Poland, which was invaded by the Nazis on September 1, 1939, was the "first victim" of Nazi aggression. Duda also insisted that Poles had offered the "largest organized resistance movement against the Nazis in Europe." He denounced historical falsifications and Holocaust denial, and the "instrumental use of Auschwitz for some other aims."

Israeli president Reuven Rivlin also spoke, condemning a resurgence of anti-Semitism.

The German president Frank-Walter Steinmeier, who visited Auschwitz for the first time on Monday, stated: "Auschwitz, that is the sum total of voelkisch thought, racial hatred and nationalist madness." Steinmeier described Auschwitz as a "place of horror and German guilt" and urged preventing a resurgence of similar horrors today, including in Germany.

Duda's and Steinmeier's condemnations of fascism and anti-Semitism stand in stark contrast to the political record of their own governments. In the past few years, the Polish and German governments have spearheaded a massive shift to the right and a systematic promotion of historical revisionism in Europe. In Germany, the neofascist Alternative für Deutschland (AfD) was consciously built up by the bourgeoisie and made the main opposition in parliament. The German state has been funding and directing neo-Nazi terrorist networks that have assassinated and targeted immigrants and left-wing politicians.

The far-right positions of professor Jörg Baberowski, who claims that "Hitler was not vicious" and who has most recently stated that Hitler "didn't want to hear anything about Auschwitz" have been promoted by the media, while it unleashed a massive campaign against his critics. The German ministry of education has explicitly backed Baberowski. (See also: "Seventy-five years since the

liberation of Auschwitz”)

In Poland, the PiS government, which includes several notorious anti-Semites, has systematically built up far-right paramilitary formations. In 2018, President Duda signed a bill into law that criminalizes mention of Polish participation in crimes by the Nazis against the Jews. Polish government representatives, including Duda himself, have repeatedly participated in marches by the far-right. Last year, a group of fascists was allowed to march in Auschwitz on the 74th anniversary of its liberation.

The Ukrainian government of Volodymyr Zelensky maintains close ties to neo-Nazis and has recently named a number of Nazi collaborators and anti-Jewish pogromist “national heroes.” In Hungary, Viktor Orbán’s government spearheaded the Europe-wide shift of the bourgeoisie toward authoritarianism and a brutal oppression of refugees and has similarly promoted racism and anti-Semitism.

The mass popular revulsion and opposition to these policies is the main reason that these politicians felt forced to pay tribute to the victims of the Holocaust and fascism and refrain from blatant historical falsifications at the ceremony on Monday.

Nevertheless, the ceremony was overshadowed by the advanced preparations of the imperialist powers for war. Just days before the commemoration, the US began moving its troops across Europe in preparation for the NATO Defender-Europe-20 exercise in the spring. With an estimated 37,000 troops from the US and other NATO powers, it will be the largest NATO military exercise in a quarter century, openly aimed at war preparations against Russia.

The commemoration in Poland on Monday had been preceded by one in Jerusalem, where US Vice President Mike Pence and the Israeli prime minister Benjamin Netanyahu agitated for war against Iran. Duda had boycotted the ceremony in Jerusalem because he was not invited to speak, whereas Russian president Vladimir Putin was invited to speak. Duda’s boycott of the ceremony was part of an increasingly heated diplomatic row between Warsaw and the Kremlin over World War II.

Following an EU resolution from September 2019, which blamed both the Soviet Union and Nazi Germany for World War II, and equated the crimes of “communism” with those of Nazism, the Kremlin has initiated a major campaign to justify the Hitler-Stalin Pact of August 1939, and argue that Poland was in part to blame for World War II. In response, Warsaw has doubled down on the claim that both the Soviet Union and Nazi Germany started World War II.

Both are based on historical falsifications about the character of both Stalinism and the origins of the war. The Hitler-Stalin Pact, which significantly facilitated the Nazi attack on Poland, was the culmination of a series of

disastrous betrayals of the working class by Stalinism, which were rooted in the nationalist betrayal of the 1917 October revolution by the Soviet bureaucracy.

The Stalinist policies of the Comintern had made it possible for Hitler to come to power in Germany in 1933 without encountering organized opposition from the 6 million-strong working-class movement. In 1936-1938, the Stalinist bureaucracy engaged in a campaign of mass murder against revolutionaries in the USSR and Spain, targeting centrally Trotskyists, and socialist and Marxist workers and intellectuals. It culminated in August 1940 in the assassination of Leon Trotsky by a Stalinist agent.

However, despite the counterrevolutionary role of Stalinism, the Soviet Union remained a degenerated workers’ state. The Trotskyists defended it against the attack of German imperialism which followed in June 1941 and the Red Army played a central role in the fight against Nazism. The Russian oligarchy, for which Putin speaks, emerged out of the Stalinist bureaucracy which dissolved the USSR in 1991. Riddled by crisis and terrified by the prospect of social upheavals by the working class, it now ever more aggressively promotes the counterrevolutionary politics of Stalinism.

The false equation of Nazi Germany with the Soviet Union has long served as the basis for right-wing historical falsifications, especially in Eastern Europe, combining the promotion of aggressive anti-Communism with a relativization of the crimes of fascism. While Nazi Germany was no doubt the aggressor that started World War II and responsible for the worst crimes in human history, the root causes of the war lay in the irresolvable contradictions and crisis of the world capitalist system. It is this same crisis, which is much more advanced today, that underlies the resurgence of fascism and the danger of a third world war.



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