

# Socialist and antifascist books mutilated in a Berlin library

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Workers at the main library in the Berlin district of Tempelhof-Schöneberg revealed earlier this month that a number of books authored by socialist and anti-fascist authors had been wilfully mutilated. The destruction of the books was discovered at the end of July and made public by the head of the district's libraries, Boryano Rickum, who expressed his opinion that far right extremists were behind the attack.

Rickum told the news magazine *Der Spiegel* that a trainee at the library found a basket containing seven books that had been cut up in such a manner as to make them unreadable. He said: "All of them had one thing in common: they critically deal with right-wing social tendencies or relate the biographies of socialists, namely Karl Marx and Clara Zetkin." He concluded: "I see a clear right-wing extremist motivation behind the crime."

The library head stated, quite correctly: "Libraries have to ensure that freedom of expression and freedom of information are guaranteed. So now we have no choice but to fight back. When books are destroyed because of their content, something fundamental is at stake that concerns the whole of society."

Rickum declared that the library intended to obtain fresh examples of the destroyed books and put them prominently on display. He encouraged the public to read the books that had been mutilated and expressed his wish that other libraries follow his example.

In a short period of time, Rickum's tweet revealing the damage to the books went viral with many messages from persons and other libraries expressing their outrage at the attack and expressing their support for the stance taken by the library staff.

The library in Neuss posted a photo of its prominent display of a series of books dealing with far-right extremism and the politics of the far-right Alternative

for Germany (AfD), and wrote, "Last week we heard about the horrific incident at the library in Berlin. We followed the library's call to highlight the destroyed titles and other thematically appropriate media."

In an utterly hypocritical manner, local politicians, including the district councilor for culture Matthias Steuckardt (Christian Democratic Union, CDU), and Berlin's culture senator Klaus Lederer (Left Party) expressed their opposition to the abuse of books.

In fact, all of the parties in the German parliament and the Berlin Senate have collaborated politically with far-right extremists and bear direct responsibility for the growing political influence of parties such as the AfD.

In the Reinickendorf district assembly in Berlin, the CDU lined up with the AfD last year to impose a discriminatory, anti-Muslim ban on headscarves for schoolgirls, while in the same year the Social Democratic Party (SPD) voted alongside the AfD in the Berlin district assembly of Spandau to defeat a motion calling for the drawing up of a local "Wealth Report."

In March this year the head of government in the state of Thuringia, Bodo Ramelow (Left Party) used his deciding vote to secure AfD deputy Michael Kaufmann a position as vice president in the state parliament.

In an interview with *Belltower News*, libraries director Rickum responded to the question of whether a parallel could be drawn with the mutilation of books today with the notorious burning of books carried out by the Nazis in 1933. "The comparison is obvious, of course," Rickum noted, while declaring that a significant difference was that the book burning in 1933 was carried out at the direct instigation of the state and supported by librarians who, at that time, "provided the Nazi regime's henchmen with literature lists."

One of the authors of the books damaged in Berlin, Lou Zucker, also drew a parallel with the Nazi assault on culture. The author of a recently published biography of the leading Marxist revolutionary Clara Zetkin, tweeted: “In the Tempelhof-Schöneberg library, books were destroyed that deal critically with #nazis and right-wing structures. My biography about Clara Zetkin was amongst them. Books are just paper. But we know the history. I want to ensure the damage is limited to paper!!”

Zucker’s reference to history is entirely appropriate. Her remarks recall the famous line from the play *Almansor* (1821) written by the outstanding German-Jewish author Heinrich Heine: “Where they burn books, they will, in the end, burn human beings too.” (Dort, wo man Bücher verbrennt, verbrennt man am Ende auch Menschen.) Copies of Heine's books were among the many burned on Berlin’s Opernplatz in 1933, and his warning is now engraved on the site.

The extent of the opposition to far-right attacks on culture in Germany was already evident in the broad support on the part of cultural institutions and artists for the Declaration of Many, which declared in 2019, “Right-wing populism stands in hostile opposition to the art of the many. Right-wing groups and parties frequently disrupt events, aim to determine repertoires, polemicise against the freedom of art and above all are working on the re-nationalisation of culture. Their disrespectful reaction to people seeking refuge, to dedicated artists and dissidents, clearly shows how they plan to deal with our society should a shift of power in their favour become reality.”

The far right and neo-Nazis carry out such vile and cowardly attacks on culture and on anti-fascists because they sense that the majority of the population vehemently oppose them. At the same time these reactionary forces are given support by Germany’s official parties and are either acquitted or given light sentences for their offences by German judges, “blind in the right eye.”

This powerful opposition to the far right and its cultural barbarism is being systematically undermined not only by Germany’s main political parties but also by influential forces in the country’s universities.

The burning of books in 1933 took place across Germany at the instigation of the National Socialists. One of the biggest fires took place across the road from

the Humboldt University and is referenced briefly by an exhibition currently featuring in the hallway of the university’s main library (Jacob-und-Wilhelm-Grimm-Zentrum).

One of the placards on view reads: “Many members of Friedrich-Wilhelms Universität, which was renamed Humboldt Universität in 1949, adopted National Socialism wholeheartedly, with staff and students participating in the burning of books by Jewish, gay and left-wing writers or by authors who were otherwise deemed “unsuitable.”

At the same time the exhibition fails to mention the role of prominent academics currently active at the university, such as the right-wing extremist professor Jörg Baberowski, who promotes the activities of the far right, has sought to rehabilitate the Nazi apologist Ernst Nolte and is vehemently opposed to socialists and socialism.

In February 2020, Baberowski went so far as to physically assault a student at the university and tore down posters of the International Youth and Students for Social Equality (IYSSE).

Baberowski continues, up until today, to enjoy the support of the Humboldt University’s President Sabine Kunst, a member of the SPD.



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