

Berlin bans Soviet flags on Liberation Day

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In large parts of Berlin it will be forbidden to display Soviet flags during the commemoration of the liberation of Germany from fascism in 1945. Among places included in the ban are memorials, commemorative sites, and historical buildings where survivors of the Holocaust and the Nazi war of extermination and their relatives, as well as opponents of the war, traditionally hold events.

According to a general order issued by the Berlin police on May 4, the ban will be in effect from May 8 at 6 a.m. to May 9 at 10 p.m. in parts of the districts of Treptow-Köpenick, Friedrichshain-Kreuzberg, Lichtenberg, Marzahn-Hellersdorf, Mitte, Reinickendorf, Pankow and Spandau. The list of memorial sites and areas where the ban applies fills two and a half A4 pages.

The implications are breathtaking. With German tanks, placed in the hands of the Ukrainian state, now once again taking aim at Russian forces, and the threat of a third world war growing daily, the Berlin Senate (state administration) governed by the Social Democratic Party (SPD), Left Party and Greens, is prohibiting Holocaust survivors from displaying the flag of their liberators. World War II veterans are banned from wearing the emblem under which many sacrificed their lives in the fight against fascism.

A spokesman for the Berlin police told the newspaper *Junge Welt* that the ban was implemented to avoid “provocations and conflicts,” adding in Orwellian fashion that “remembrance should be in the foreground.”

In reality, any political remembrance of the Second World War and its victims is being criminalised. The ban even extends to items on military uniforms and Saint George's ribbons worn by Red Army veterans. Russian and Ukrainian military songs, as well as “flags and banners with a Russian or Ukrainian connection,” are also prohibited unless they are part of wreaths and

floral arrangements.

The Berlin police claim that “displaying the flag of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR)” is “likely to glorify the Russia-Ukraine war.” This turns reality on its head. In the Red Army, Russian and Ukrainian soldiers fought together against the Nazi Wehrmacht (Army), enduring unimaginable sacrifices.

The ban is at the behest of the so-called “Red-Red-Green” Senate of the SPD, Left Party and Greens in Berlin. Only one day before the prohibition was imposed, the Senate had decided to “quietly and non-publicly commemorate” the end of the war, i.e., not to hold any commemorative occasions for the historical events on that day.

Berlin's Mayor Franziska Giffey (SPD) said she would “publicly participate only in a solidarity event for the Ukrainian community” on Sunday. The end of the Holocaust, the victory over the Nazis in Berlin, the unconditional surrender of the Wehrmacht—all this is to be erased from public memory if the Berlin state executive has its way.

In recent weeks several Red Army memorials in Berlin, which the Federal Republic of Germany had specifically undertaken to protect and care for during reunification in 1991, have been desecrated. A particularly nasty attack was carried out on the memorial in Treptower Park, which was smeared with racist and right-wing extremist slogans such as “Death to all Russians.” The police, who were present, claim to have noticed nothing happening.

Now, on May 8, the day of liberation, the same police officers have been given license to harass former concentration camp prisoners or veterans of the Red Army for carrying flags of the Soviet Union.

The actions of the Red-Red-Green Senate are themselves an unprecedented desecration of the celebration of the Red Army's liberation of Europe from fascism. In the battle for Berlin alone, some

80,000 Red Army soldiers and allies died; 280,000 were injured. In total, 27 million Soviet citizens fell victim to the Nazis' war of extermination.

The fact that these victims and the liberators may no longer be commemorated with dignity has nothing to do with Russia's reactionary invasion of Ukraine, but with the aggression of German militarism. The NATO powers, which have systematically provoked the war, are now using the suffering of the Ukrainian population to carry out an unprecedented military escalation.

The historic crimes of German imperialism are being trivialised. German Chancellor Olaf Scholz (SPD) declared on Friday, during a speech in Hamburg, that Russia was waging a "war of extermination" and was committing a "breach of civilisation". Both terms have previously been used to describe the historically unprecedented crimes of the Nazis, in particular their planned extermination of 30 million Slavs and the industrial killing of six million Jews.

To apply these words now to the Russian invasion of Ukraine is to trivialise the Nazis' crimes against humanity in an unspeakable way. The war presently being conducted by Russia is based on poisonous nationalism, but it is not aimed at the complete annihilation of the Ukrainian population, nor is it anywhere near the scale of the Nazis' crimes.

It is the Putin regime's reactionary response to NATO's systematic aggression. In 2014, the German government, together with the US, supported a coup against pro-Russian Ukrainian President Viktor Yanukovich in order to bring the country under its own influence. From the beginning, it worked closely with fascists who stand in the tradition of the Ukrainian Nazi collaborator Stepan Bandera.

Even in 2014, the "end of Germany's military restraint," as the then Federal President Joachim Gauck put it, went hand in hand with the falsification of German history.

"It is hardly possible to pursue a responsible policy in Europe if you have the idea: We were to blame for everything. In relation to 1914, that is a legend," said Herfried Münkler, then a professor at Humboldt University, in the *Süddeutsche Zeitung* at the beginning of 2014.

His colleague Jörg Baberowski went one step further and cast doubt on the cruelty of the Nazis and their leader Hitler. In the newsweekly *Der Spiegel*,

Baberowski is quoted saying, "Hitler was no psychopath, and he wasn't vicious. He didn't want people to talk about the extermination of the Jews at his table." He compared the Holocaust to shootings during the Russian Civil War, explaining, "Basically it was the same thing: industrial killing." Elsewhere, he blamed civilian deaths that occurred during the war of extermination on the conduct of the Red Army.

The Red-Red-Green Senate has played a central role in this falsification of history from the beginning. Representatives of all three Senate parties backed the radical right-wing professor Baberowski. The Senate has covered for him time and again when he has advocated his positions and falsified history.

Most recently, the Berlin Senate worked to ensure that a misconduct complaint filed against the former president of the institution, Sabine Kunst, receive no positive reply. Kunst, defending Baberowski, had declared it "humanly understandable" that the professor physically assault students and threaten them. Previously, Kunst had described Baberowski's remarks on Hitler and the war of extermination as "not radical right-wing" and defended them. For the SPD, the Greens, and the Left Party, who are now banning the commemoration of the Red Army, such behaviour last autumn was simply not official misconduct.



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