# Auschwitz commemoration dominated by war propaganda, right-wing historical falsification

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The commemoration of this year's 78th anniversary of the liberation of the Auschwitz concentration camp on January 27 took place amidst NATO's escalation of the war against Russia in Ukraine and was dominated completely by imperialist war propaganda and right-wing historical falsification.

In the eyes of millions all over the world, Auschwitz has become the dominant symbol of the crimes of fascism in the 20th century. The camp was liberated 78 years ago by the Soviet Union's Red Army. Upon arrival, the soldiers found a vast complex of extermination and labor camps. Over 1 million people had been murdered here, including 900,000 European Jews. Overall, between 1.1 and 1.5 million people were deported to Auschwitz during the Second World War, among them at least 140,000 Poles, 20,000 Sinti and Roma—most of whom were murdered—and 10,000 Soviet prisoners of war. Countless thousands were forced to work in the labor camps that were run on behalf of the German chemical and pharmaceutical giant IG Farben. It was the predecessor of today's BASF and Bayer, two of the world's largest and most influential companies.

But these historical facts were under systematic assault at the official commemoration ceremony, which was placed fully in the service of imperialist war propaganda against Russia. Its aim was not to honor the memory of those who were murdered and the few survivors of the Holocaust who are still alive, but to beat the drums of war propaganda to justify new crimes of imperialism.

Russia had been disinvited from the ceremony to begin with, despite the fact that the Red Army liberated the camp, as well as most of Eastern Europe 78 years ago.

The director of the Auschwitz memorial, Piotr Cywi?ski, focused his speech not on a condemnation of the crimes of fascism and Nazism, but rather on a conscious relativization of the crimes of the Nazis by equating Russia's invasion of Ukraine to the wars waged by Hitler and the Holocaust. He said, "Auschwitz emerged out of the lust for power and megalomania." Today, he continued, "similar sick megalomania, similar lust for power, and similar-sounding myths about uniqueness, greatness, primacy… only written in Russian. Innocent people are dying en masse in Europe, again."

Even though Auschwitz is principally remembered as a major site of the Holocaust—its gas chambers murdered one-sixth of the Holocaust's 6 million victims—the Holocaust and the Nazis' death camps were largely ignored by Cywinski. Mentioning sites of Nazi massacres of Polish, French and Czech civilians but not the mass murder of the Jews, he said, "Wola district in Warsaw, Zamojszczyzna, Oradour and Lidice today are called Bucha, Irpin, Hostomel, Mariupol and Donetsk."

No convincing evidence has been provided for the imperialist allegations of Russian war crimes in the cities of Ukraine cited by Cywinski. By contrast, it has been documented irrefutably that the Nazis murdered between 40,000 and 50,000 Poles in the suppression of the Warsaw Uprising in the Wola district in 1944, 340 Czech civilians in the massacre of Lidice, and 643 French civilians in the massacre of Oradour, in France. Over 100,000 Poles were deported from Zamojszczyzna in an operation of ethnic cleansing that formed part of the Nazis' Generalplan Ost, which aimed at the expulsion of the Slavic population and the settlement of Germans in Eastern Europe.

There is no innocent explanation for the head of the Auschwitz memorial highlighting these sites over those of the Holocaust. These massacres have long been exploited above all by Polish, but also other European nationalist and far-right forces, in order to downplay the crimes of the Nazis against the Jewish population across the continent, which local nationalist and far-right forces either tacitly supported or directly participated in.

Mateusz Morawiecki, Poland's prime minister and a member of Law and Justice Party, went even further, claiming on Facebook, "On the anniversary of the liberation of the Nazi German death camp Auschwitz-Birkenau, let us remember that to the east Putin is building new camps." He provided no evidence whatsoever for this extraordinary claim. Hours later, he boasted on Facebook about Poland's role in pushing for Germany to send Leopard 2 tanks to Ukraine to wage war against Russia.

Morawiecki is a member of a party that has not only played a key role in NATO's war preparations against Russia, but is also infested with far-right and anti-Semitic forces. In 2018, the Polish government banned public mention of and research into the crimes of Polish anti-Semites during the Holocaust. It has since undertaken a large purge of academic institutions and museums, ousting people who have opposed the government's far-right historical revisionism. In 2019, the PiS government effectively allowed a pack of fascists to march in Auschwitz on the 74th anniversary of the liberation of the camp.

The unprecedented promotion of war propaganda and the deliberate minimization of the crimes of Nazism at the Auschwitz commemoration is inseparable from the renewed explosion of imperialist militarism now underway in Europe.

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The crimes of Auschwitz and German fascism more broadly were ultimately rooted in the breakdown of the capitalist system. The Nazi movement was brought to power by the German ruling class to smash the workers' movement and establish the hegemony of German imperialism in Europe. The virulent anti-Semitism of Nazism was rooted, primarily, in the political and ideological reaction against the internationalist and socialist workers' movement. The destruction of the Soviet Union became one of the central aims of German imperialism.

First, Germany sought to destroy the workers' state that had emerged out of the 1917 October Revolution, albeit degenerated under the Stalinist bureaucracy, and thus deal a major blow to the international working class. Second, German imperialism sought to establish full control over the vast raw material resources of that region in order to consolidate its position vis-à-vis its main imperialist rivals, above all, the United States.

These aims were the basis for a war that to this day remains the bloodiest in human history. It was based from the very beginning on criminal orders, placing Germany's waging of war outside any established international norms of warfare. In one of the criminal orders issued to the Wehrmacht, Eric Hoepner, commander of the 4th Panzer Group, instructed his troops on May 2, 1941:

> "The war against Russia is an important chapter in the struggle for existence of the German nation. It is the old battle of Germanic against Slav peoples, of the defence of European culture against Muscovite-Asiatic inundation, and the repulse of Jewish-Bolshevism. The objective of this battle must be the destruction of present-day Russia and it must therefore be conducted with unprecedented severity. Every military action must be guided in planning and execution by an iron will to exterminate the enemy mercilessly and totally. In particular, no adherents of the present Russian-Bolshevik system are to be spared."

The Nazi invasion of the Soviet Union in June 1941 marked a key turning point not only in the war but also in the development of the Holocaust. Auschwitz's gas chambers began operation a few months later, as the Nazis' Wehrmacht was massacring the Jewish population of the occupied Soviet Union en masse in mass shootings. The vast majority of the victims of the Holocaust were murdered between the summer of 1941 and late 1943.

The Red Army, composed of soldiers from throughout the Soviet Union and its different nationalities, fought against the Nazi invasion and played the central role in defeating Nazi Germany in the war. Despite the horrendous crimes of Stalinism, the Red Army, which had been founded by Leon Trotsky in 1918 to defend the conquests of the 1917 October Revolution against the invading armies, backed by the imperialist powers, still carried within it the spirit of the socialist revolution and social progress.

The disinviting of Russia from the official ceremony was therefore not just a major political provocation, but also part of a systematic effort to promote anticommunism and historical falsifications.

But Russia's President Vladimir Putin counterposed to the imperialist war propaganda historical falsifications and political lies of his own. He responded to the disinvitation of Russia from the official commemoration ceremony by creating a false analogy between Russia's invasion of Ukraine and the role of the Red Army in World War II, claiming that the aim of his war in Ukraine was to "de-nazify" the country.

The reality is that both the war in Ukraine and the resurgence of far-right forces and the unfolding imperialist war against Russia are ultimately the product of the decades-long Stalinist counterrevolution against the socialist October Revolution of 1917, which culminated in the 1991 destruction of the Soviet Union by the Stalinist bureaucracy. The Putin regime, which speaks for the interests of a tiny oligarchy that has enriched itself at the expense of the masses over the past 30 years, is the heir of this counterrevolution.

The Russian army, recruited largely from desperately poor people, is not a resurgence of the Red Army. Its soldiers are tragically being slaughtered in a war waged by the oligarchic regime in a desperate effort at a war of "national defense" whose principal goal is to safeguard the oligarchy's own privileges and somehow find a way to negotiate with the imperialist powers. The reactionary invasion of Ukraine by Russia's oligarchic regime and the accompanying historical falsifications and promotion of Russian chauvinism have been grist for the mills of the imperialist war machine and its propaganda and have served to further divide and confuse the working class.

The task of putting an end to the imperialist war now under way and of fighting the resurgence of fascist forces in Europe falls to the international working class. It must draw the lessons from the devastating consequences of the nationalist betrayal of the October Revolution by the Stalinist bureaucracy and counterpose to the imperialist warmongers and the nationalism of the Putin regime the strategy of a unified struggle by the working class across Europe and internationally in the fight for socialism.

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