

Ninety years since the Nazi book burnings

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Ninety years ago today, the Nazis made an attack on culture and literature at the beginning of their reign of terror that led to the war of extermination and the Holocaust. Beginning May 10, books burned first in Berlin and later in other cities.

The works of Thomas and Heinrich Mann, Stefan Zweig, Kurt Tucholsky, Carl von Ossietzky, Erich Maria Remarque, Erich Kästner and many other writers were publicly burned. Everything humane, progressive and promoting solidarity was to be eradicated.

At the center of the book burning were the writings of socialists and Marxists. One of the fire oaths was: “Against class struggle and materialism, for *Volksgemeinschaft* and an idealistic attitude to life! I hand over to the flame the writings of Marx and Kautsky.”

Also burned were the writings of Friedrich Engels, Rosa Luxemburg, Karl Liebknecht, August Bebel, Franz Mehring, and also those of Vladimir Ilyich Lenin and Leon Trotsky, the two leaders of the October Revolution of 1917 in Russia.

Trotsky understood more than any other the character of Nazi terror. “The bonfires which burn the impious literature of Marxism light up brilliantly the class nature of National Socialism,” he wrote in “What is National Socialism?”

And further: “Everything that should have been eliminated from the national organism in the form of cultural excrement in the course of the normal development of society has now come gushing out from the throat; capitalist society is puking up the undigested barbarism.”

The anniversary of the book burning must be a warning to workers and youth worldwide. Today the same contradictions are developing that led to barbarism in the 20th century. The danger of fascism

and world war is back.

Above all, the ruling class in Germany continues its crimes of the past. Eighty two years after the war of extermination against the Soviet Union, German tanks are rolling against Russia again.

And the rehabilitation of fascism is also well advanced. At Berlin’s Humboldt University, where the 1933 book burning originated, Nazi crimes are downplayed and justified.

“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,” Humboldt professor Jörg Baberowski told *Der Spiegel* in 2014.

In the same interview, Baberowski backed Nazi apologist Ernst Nolte, who had already justified National Socialism in the 1980s as an understandable reaction to the Russian October Revolution.

While Nolte was roundly condemned for his theses at the time, the enemy for the ruling class today is once again unanimously on the left. For its criticism of Baberowski and the return of German militarism, the *Sozialistische Gleichheitspartei* (Socialist Equality Party in Germany-SGP) has been placed under surveillance by the Office for the Protection of the Constitution [the German Secret Service].

As in the 1930s, the bourgeoisie is horrified by the growing radicalization and movement to the left among workers and youth. It fears that this opposition is increasingly coming together with the SGP’s international socialist perspective.

Ninety years ago, the workers were prevented by their leadership from taking up the struggle against Hitler. This time it is necessary to ensure that Heinrich Heine’s warning, “*wherever they burn books they will also, in the end, burn human beings*,” does not prove true again.

Necessary for this is the building of the SGP and the Fourth International as a new mass socialist party that

will unite the working class internationally and end capitalist barbarism once and for all.



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