

Nothing learned from Auschwitz

By Johannes Stern
6 February 2018

On the 73rd anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz, the German parliament (Bundestag) held a special sitting to commemorate the victims of Nazism. Many people around the world mark this day. The name of the concentration camp, which was liberated by the Soviet Red Army on 27 January 1945, is a synonym for the greatest crimes in human history and the barbarity of capitalism in its most extreme form.

The commemorative meeting was dominated by a massive contradiction. The main speaker this year was the German-British cellist and Holocaust survivor Anita Lasker-Wallfisch, who spoke with penetrating words recalling the horrific regime that drove her, her older sister Renate and millions of Jews and other persecuted people into the Nazi extermination camps. At the same time, she made a connection between that period and today's "world full of refugees," calling for more humane treatment of immigrants fleeing repression and poverty.

While some in the audience sitting on the sidelines were visibly moved, the applause Lasker-Wallfisch garnered from the assembled politicians of all parties could only be described as dishonest and cynical. Just a cursory glance at the Bundestag makes clear that the same ruling class that made Hitler chancellor 85 years ago is returning to its infamous traditions.

Participating in the commemorative meeting were some 90 deputies from the Alternative for Germany (AfD), an openly right-wing extremist party that embodies all of the filth that led to the mass murder of European Jewry: racism, nationalism and extreme militarism.

The president of the Bundestag, Wolfgang Schäuble, who has been at the forefront of the austerity diktats of Brussels and Berlin, which have plunged millions into poverty in Greece and other countries, did not utter a single word about the AfD in his speech. Instead, he indulged in platitudes, such as, "It must disquiet us

when, every day, people are attacked only because they appear different," and "witch hunts and violence should have no place in our society."

The hollowness of these phrases is shown by the failure of the establishment parties to in any way distance themselves from the AfD on this memorial day. Instead, they have integrated this far-right, racist party more deeply into the structures of government.

Peter Boehringer, Sebastian Münzenmaier and Stephan Brandner, three representatives of the AfD's extreme right, were given the chairmanship of important parliamentary committees. Boehringer, who will now head the budget committee, is a neo-liberal racist; Münzenmaier is a convicted hooligan; and Brandner a confidante of the neo-Nazi Björn Höcke, who describes the Holocaust Memorial in Berlin as a "Monument of Shame."

It is no accident that the German ruling class, in attempting to install a right-wing government behind the backs of the people, is directly resting on the AfD. In recent days, it has become ever clearer that the next grand coalition between the Social Democrats (SPD) and Christian Democrats (CDU/CSU) will seek to implement the programme of the extreme right. Already in the paper produced during the initial coalition talks, the SPD and CDU/CSU adopted the demand for an upper limit on the number of refugees. Last Tuesday, they agreed to abolish the right of family reunion for refugees.

The central task of the next government will be to revive German militarism and drive forward the great power politics that twice led to the catastrophe of world war in the 20th century. The aggressive comments of military brass and influential media outlets leave no doubt of this.

At the start of the week, the former inspector general of the Bundeswehr (armed forces), Germany's most senior military officer, Klaus Naumann, wrote a guest

column for the *Süddeutsche Zeitung* in which he made clear what he expects from the next grand coalition. “In the coming years, at least one of the three Army divisions must become combat ready, helicopters must be able to fly again and U-boats sail,” wrote Naumann. At the same time, “the motto ‘train as you fight,’ the principle of realistic training and exercising, must once again become part of the everyday experience of the Bundeswehr,” he added.

Shortly after the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, Naumann, the author of the 1992 Defence Guidelines, called for Germany to use military means to pursue its economic and political interests. Today, he dreams of imperialist campaigns of conquest, including in the Arctic. With a potent army, he writes, Europe could “begin to extend the protection of its sea lanes in the Arctic Ocean, as well as along the new maritime silk road in the Indian Ocean.” These are “matters of survival for an EU dependent on foreign trade, which lacks any Asia strategy,” he continues.

Naumann is not alone in behaving as if the crimes of German imperialism in two world wars had never happened.

In the current edition of the newsweekly *Der Spiegel*, under the headline “Unwilling World Power,” a certain Ullrich Fichtner complains that Germany, “70 years after the war, and soon 30 years after the fall of the [Berlin] Wall,” has “still not learned to define its interests on the basis of its values and actively pursue them.” Instead, “a majority of the citizens [live] in the belief that foreign policy can be avoided somehow, and hardly anybody convincingly opposes such nonsense.”

The author—perhaps he should be greeted with “Heil Fichtner”—finds himself overwhelmed by old Nazi fantasies. “Every child should know that a colossus like Germany has no choice as to whether or not to exercise power,” he thunders at his readers. Germany, after all, is “an 800-pound gorilla, and when this boy moves, the windowpanes in Manchester and Rome, in Warsaw and Lyon, shake.”

In 2014, after Humboldt University Professor Jörg Baberowski was quoted in *Der Spiegel* saying Hitler was “not vicious,” the Sozialistische Gleichheitspartei (Socialist Equality Party) analysed his statements and warned of the objective driving forces of a return of German militarism: “The propaganda of the post-war era—that Germany had learned from the terrible crimes

of the Nazis, had ‘arrived at the West,’ had embraced a peaceful foreign policy, and had developed into a stable democracy—is exposed as lies. German imperialism is once again showing its real colours as it emerged historically, with all of its aggressiveness at home and abroad.”

As in the first half of the 20th century, the working class confronts the alternative of socialism or barbarism.

To prevent the ruling class imposing its programme of social counterrevolution, war and dictatorship, the working class must seize the initiative and unite internationally to overthrow capitalism. The current strikes in Germany’s engineering, automotive and electrical industries are of great significance in this regard. They must be expanded and made the launching pad for a broad political mobilisation for new elections. It is only in this way that the ruling class can be prevented from bringing to power a government that stands in the traditions of German imperialism’s criminal past.

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