

what do socialists say?

Why Auschwitz matters today

AS I write this column it is 50 years to the day that the Russian army liberated Auschwitz.

Auschwitz is the most terrible name in a long list of terrible names—Dachau, Belson, Treblinka, Buchenwald and many others—which together represent the Holocaust, the most monstrous crime in human history.

But after 50 years, is it not time to let the past go—to stop dwelling on the detail of the cattle trucks, the wire, the gas chambers, the ovens, the architectural plans?

Is it not time to allow Auschwitz to fade into history?

No, it is not.

There are compelling reasons why the memory of Auschwitz and all it represents are of supreme importance and relevance right now.

The first and most acute is that today in Britain and across Europe there are people actively working to restore the regime that produced Auschwitz.

Business

In most countries they are small in number and politically weak, but not so weak they can be ignored.

In some countries they are becoming dangerously strong.

Some are street thugs who declare their Nazism in their dress and insignia. Some are secret terrorists. Some are small—or not so small—business people who stay in the background.

A few are academics working to rewrite history and some are "leaders" trying desperately to gain acceptance as "respectable" politicians.

One thing they all share is the understanding that the Holocaust is so appalling that its very existence must be denied or minimised.

That is why "historian" David Irving scours the

archives trying to show that his hero Hitler did not sign a direct order sending people to the gas ovens.

It is why the French National Front leader Le Pen calls the Holocaust "a mere detail of history", why the BNP's Derek Beackon tries to shrug it off, saying, "Lots of people died in the war", and why the BNP sells a pamphlet entitled *Did Six Million Really Die?*

The reason the Nazis deny the Holocaust is the reason we must insist on its remembrance.

The ovens of Auschwitz are the concrete expression of what Nazism was all about and will be about if it is ever allowed to triumph again.

The second reason why Auschwitz still matters is that it shows the ultimate logic of racism.

Of course, the vast majority of people who hold some or other racist ideas—who believe unemployment is caused by immigration, or "our culture" is being "swamped", or "Jews are running everything"—are not contemplating genocide.

Indeed they would probably be repelled by the idea.

That is exactly why it is necessary to remember and to remind people that at the end of the racist road lie the gas chambers.

A third reason is less obvious—it will be mentioned in none of the TV programmes and press articles marking the anniversary—but just as important.

It is that Auschwitz represents, also, the end of the road of capitalism.

Capitalism is the breeding ground of both racism and fascism.

It needs and nurtures racism as a justification for its exploitation of the Third World, as a means of dividing workers and as a scapegoat for its social ills.

Capitalism in crisis, threatened by working class revolution, needs and nurtures

fascism as a force to smash the workers' movement.

The Nazis did not come to power through the evil of the German people or the charisma of Hitler, but as a result of the extreme crisis of German capitalism.

Trading on anti-Semitism and nationalism, Hitler built a mass movement from the German lower middle class driven to despair by mass bankruptcies and unemployment.

Camps

At the decisive moment Germany's big capitalists lifted the Nazis into power in order to use them as a battering ram against the labour movement.

Hitler duly obliged. The first inmates of the concentration camps were communists, socialists and trade union activists.

Moreover the alliance between big business and the Nazis continued throughout the Third Reich, right up to the Final Solution.

Only when it was clear that Hitler was going to lose the war did the capitalists start to desert him.

It is not just the German capitalist class which bears responsibility either.

The Allied ruling classes knew what was happening. They could have leafleted Jews from the air to warn them. They could have bombed the railway lines to the camps or the camps themselves. They did nothing.

Auschwitz is the product of capitalism in another way too.

The Holocaust was industrialised murder, the mass production of death.

No pre-capitalist tyranny, however cruel, could have contemplated or achieved extermination on this scale.

Capitalism-racism-fascism-Auschwitz—that is the chain. Only socialism can break it once and for all.

by JOHN MOLYNEUX