

Initiative für einen Gedenkort ehemaliges KZ Uckermark e.V. /

Initiative for a memorial site at the former concentration camp Uckermark

Seventy-three years ago, the youth concentration camp for girls and young women and later extermination site Uckermark was liberated by the Red Army. We commemorate all those who were incarcerated here between 1942 and 1945, who had to do forced labor here, who were murdered. We also remember those who survived and whose suffering was not recognized but denied for decades.

The youth concentration camp and later extermination site Uckermark was designed to rob individuals of their rights and dignity in the most brutal way, to humiliate them, to dehumanize them, to exterminate them. To us, commemoration means remembering these human beings – not the numbers to which the Nazis wanted to reduce them. We want to remember them as people who lived, loved and suffered. Remembering their lives is to counteract the Nazis' will to exterminate them.

Commemoration means warning

The Italian author and Auschwitz-survivor Primo Levi once said: „It happened, therefore it can happen again.“ For us this implies that in place of the wish to draw a line under this history, to wipe the slate clean, we will continuously remember what happened in this place. We need this memory in order to understand the past and how it came to be: What were the social relations of the time? How come so many Germans shared a dehumanising ideology? How did they come to take part – through major and minor actions – in the realization of this ideology into a murderous practice?

Remembering is the foundation of any 'Never again'. *Commemoration*, for us, goes one step further, as the people affected become the starting point and focus of this *remembering*.

Survivors' stories indicate the existential nature of the moment of liberation, which happened around these days 73 years ago. But they also indicate that afterwards things were not simply 'over'. National socialist ideology and ongoing persecution were part of their bitter everyday lives for decades. Confronted with a society shaped by perpetrators and their self-pity, there was no space for the survivors' perspectives. Nor for what it means to have to live with their memories.

And yet, Germany presents itself as a purified nation, as a people that has done its homework. The past is presented as a process that has reached completion and that only needs to be accounted for – as if the task were to come to terms with it. We want to counteract this 'coming to terms' with the past, including the mentality of drawing a line under it. This is why our initiative looks at the societal causes and continuities. We hope to show how key concepts of the national socialist ideology exist to this day. The life stories of survivors of the concentration camp Uckermark speak volumes of this.

Our initiative not only foregrounds commemoration. We also understand our commemoration as integral to anti-fascist activities. The necessity of this anti-fascist work becomes obvious when we look at all the victims of and people affected by right-wing violence as well as state-sponsored racism. The magnitude of the task at hand becomes apparent when we look at how our society deals with people victimized and affected by racism and prejudice. Rather than foregrounding their needs and perspectives, these people are all too often brushed off as marginal to society, while the absurd fears of the right-wing centre are presented as the starting point of political action.

Remembrance and commemoration connects us to the families and friends of victims of right-wing violence in the last decades. They organize to counteract the silence about the deeds and victims, in order to foster investigations and to prevent this from happen again. The families and friends of those murdered by the NSU, of Burak Bektas from Berlin, of the Arslan family and others from Mölln fight for the remembrance of the victims and for making their voices heard.

We explicitly do NOT mean to equate the victims of national socialism with Nazi violence today. But we want to learn from each other and join forces in our remembrance and commemoration, in campaigning for memorial sites and memorial celebrations.

A new danger lies in the efforts of AfD people, to reverse this 'course of commemoration'. An example is Björn Höcke, who called the Holocaust Memorial in Berlin a 'Monument of Shame'. This is clearly about breaking the minimal consensus of the remembrance and commemoration culture.

At least since the federal elections, we not merely have to fight for and shape a self-determined commemoration. Petra Rosenberg, chairperson of the state association of German Sinti and Roma in Berlin-Brandenburg, put it this way when speaking on the day of commemoration and forewarning/ Tag der Erinnerung und Mahnung in September 2017: „With the AfD entering several committees in foundations, we must not only create and preserve memorial sites and memories, but we must defend them.“ Therefore we welcome the change of the law on the foundation of the memorial sites of Lower Saxony from February this year to exclude the AfD from the foundation council.

For this work, we need strong alliances and a strengthening of the victims' perspectives. Ibrahim Arslan has fought for both over the last few years, and this is why we have invited him to speak to us here today. Dear Ibrahim, thank you very much for making your way out here.

For solidarity in the struggle against fascism and war!