

There are a number of books dealing with the German resistance to Hitler and the nazis during the period 1933-1945 in the English language , but only a few deal with resistance from the working class and labour movement. British communist Allen Merson's pioneering " Communist Resistance in Nazi Germany" Len Crome's " Unbroken Resistance and Survival in the Concentration Camps " and Lore Wolf's " One Life Is Not Enough A German Woman;s Anti Fascist Fight " are three examples and are well worth seeking out. We can now add another book " Anti Nazi Germans Enemies of the Nazi State From Within the Working Class Movement " by Merilyn Moos and " German Volunteers in the French Resistance " by Steve Cushion published in one volume by Community Languages.

The two authors concentrate completely on the anti nazi struggle from within the working class movement. This is crucial because many books on the German resistance to Hitler only deal with plots in the upper echelons of the German military with an occasional nod to valiant groups like those involved with the White Rose organisation. Moos, whose father was a leading German anti fascist and one time member of the K.P.D ( German Communist Party) outlines the organisations resistance in Nazi Germany. She examines the actions of the K.P.D and its members, the S.P.D.(Social Democrats), Trotskyists, and other anti fascist groups. The great strength of her section of the book is when she shows example after example of those heroic women and men who despite torture, internment in concentration camps and murder, continued to resist Hitler's regime.

Moos shows that without doubt, German communists played the most significant role in the resistance. Her research portrays vivid pictures of those who risked so much by giving brief outlines of their lives. Just one example is that of the communist wrestler Werner Seelenbinder who acted as a courier in the resistance until he was arrested in 1942 with other members of his group and was beheaded in 1944. Members of the S.P.D, Trotskyist groups and others showed extreme courage and the author gives many examples of their heroism. A few Jewish anti fascists also organised, the most notable example being the Herbert Baum Group led by the communist Baum. These organisations and individuals as well as campaigning and sabotaging the war effort also helped Jews, gave support to the millions of slave workers in the country and attempted to win over members of the armed forces. One independent group that stands out were the Edelweiss Pirates who were working class youths aged between 14 and 18 who committed acts of sabotage, attacked members of the Hitler Youth and hid Jews. These outstanding youngsters like the other resistance groups , when captured were brutalised, sent to concentration camps and executed.

Resistance groups worked within prisons and concentration camps. Aware of informers they heroically helped the most vulnerable prisoners Jews and Soviet prisoners of war who were given the worst treatment by the guards. German resistance organisations operated despite the extreme danger in the concentration camps. They also organised escapes and stole or bribed corrupt guards to obtain weapons and hide them for the time of liberation.

So well organised was the anti fascist committee in Buchenwald that they were able to liberate the camp themselves a day before the American troops arrived.

In the second section of the book, Steve Cushion examines the role of Germans in the French Resistance. By the beginning of the war, in 1939, numbers of Germans were already in France, some were anti fascists who left Germany during the 1930s and others were German volunteers of the International Brigades who were interned in camps in France after Franco's victory. These men and women made up the first recruits to the French Resistance. As well as fighting alongside the French, they successfully won over a number of the huge German occupation army in the country. The latter was extremely dangerous work as individual Germans had to be approached with great care and they could never be sure their efforts would be successful. Cushion gives many examples of the heroic actions of these German anti fascists. The majority were Communists but also numbers of Socialists, Trotskyists and Anarchists played a most significant part in the struggle.

A number of Germans conscripted into the armed forces who had been members of left wing organisations before Hitler's rise to power took the first opportunity not only to desert, which was extremely dangerous itself, but to seek out and join local resistance groups. Cushion gives the example of Thomas Helmut, an anarchist who had fought in Spain, was conscripted, sent to France and deserted to join the resistance. In action against German troops, he was wounded and when the soldiers realised who he was, he was instantly shot dead. Regarded as a traitor in West Germany after the war, he and other German anti fascists who gave their lives are honoured by memorials in France and the book provides a number of photos showing them. In fact both sections of the book are well illustrated with pictures of those amazing Germans who risked all to destroy fascism.

I have a couple criticisms of the book, not the least, Ian Birchall's introduction which in the first paragraph suggests those who voted Brexit in the referendum are patriots who deny the heroic role of the Red Army in winning World War 2 !! Moos made an error in her first chapter where she confuses Len Crome, the author of "Unbroken Resistance and Survival in the Concentration Camps" with the subject of the book, Jonny Huttner, who later became Crome's brother in law. Despite these examples I feel the authors have shown excellent and ground breaking research which has produced this book which does great justice to those Germans who fought fascism at home and abroad for twelve long years until Hitler's ultimate defeat. What is so inspiring and valuable are the many accounts given of those individuals who so valiantly fought the twin evils of racism and fascism. They were the true face of Germany and Marilyn Moos and Steve Cushion are to be congratulated for this important book which as they note in the final section of the book is published at a time when the far right is raising its ugly head throughout the world.