



Many Germans were as committed to opposing Hitler as the UK.

Ian Birchall commends a book that's a timely reminder of that fact

National myths are still very much with us, as we saw during the debate about Brexit. The "spirit of the Blitz" has been invoked to describe the impact of coronavirus.

So restoring the truth about the Second World War is a deeply relevant task. Arguably it was two wars in one – a war between empires for power and profit, and a mass popular movement of resistance to fascism.

Hence it cannot be seen simply as a war against Germany, in which all Germans were responsible for their state's crimes. A significant section of the German population remained deeply opposed to Hitler and all his policies. As Marilyn Moos shows, in the early years of Hitler's rule the main enemy was the organised working class – the trade unions and the political parties of the left. The regime's priority was to destroy these. Of course the vile anti-Semitism was there from the very beginning, and it should never be underestimated, but it was not the central priority – some Zionist organisations survived until the late 30s.

What Steve Cushion and Marilyn Moos have done is to assemble a mass of information about the development of opposition to Nazi rule, and to rescue from the neglect of history the many courageous individuals and groups who opposed Hitler's rule.

The opposition could take a variety of forms, from sabotage to jokes. The Dresden Trotskyists passed themselves off as an organisation of mountaineers in order to smuggle oppositional literature across the frontier. Robert Havemann, later an East German dissident, helped to found a group to support forced labourers.

Many resistors paid the ultimate price – the Nazi regime



Fighting the common enemy

was quick to crush those who tried to resist it. But the resistance was not wholly ineffective. In the last year of the war Germany began to bombard Britain with missiles – the so-called V2 rockets. But only half the planned number of V2s were actually produced, partly as a result of sabotage by workers. As Marilyn points out: "some Londoners will have owed their lives to these acts of bravery".

Steve challenges the myth of the French Resistance. The very name is misleading – it presents the struggle in France as though it were a fight for national independence. In fact the German occupiers had a lot of friends in French society – Steve

cites a French factory owner as saying: "I would rather see my country occupied by the Germans than my factory occupied by the workers." There was a deep-lying anti-Semitism in French society; sometimes it was the French who demanded more repressive measures against the Jews.

Many of the activists in the Resistance were not French at all, but people of various nationalities who were fighting to weaken and destroy fascism, which they saw as an international threat. These included many Germans, some of whom had fought in Spain and after the defeat of the Republic found themselves in France.

Many Germans participated in the tactic favoured by the Resistance and especially the Communist Party – the assassination of individual German soldiers. But Steve also recalls the case of Martin Monath, a German exile living in France, who played a central role in producing the paper *Arbeiter und Soldat* which argued for fraternisation between French citizens and German soldiers, seen as

potential activists for a revolutionary upsurge in Germany at the end of the war.

In commending this volume of two-books-in-one, I should declare an interest, namely that I have known both authors for many years – Marilyn for over half a century – and have been active alongside them in many campaigns. They are activist historians. They are not buried in the archives, seeking to advance their academic careers, but see their historical work as just one aspect of their political activism.

Hence their historical understanding is illuminated by their political experience. They live in a very different world from that of the 1930s and 1940s – though as they note in their conclusion, there are some "frightening similarities" between our world and that which gave birth to Hitler. But they know from their own lives the importance of organising collective action.

It seems that over the coming months we shall have plenty of time for self-education. This book deserves to be widely read.

● Anti-Nazi Germans: Enemies of the Nazi State from within the Working Class Movements. *By Marilyn Moos*; German Volunteers in the French Resistance. *By Steve*

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Spike Lee



Michael Moore



Andrea Arnold

such as Dog Woof and Dartmouth Films, they make up a small portion of what is on at your local fleapit.

Margaret adds: "There is a political edge to seeing and discussing films which are not on general release. There is a long tradition linking left politics with an interest in the moving image, with a critique of the commercial film business and practical attempts to develop more varied ways of showing and making films."

But the co-op needs support to thrive as it move into its fourth decade – and members believe a dedicated, left-wing film club is as relevant as ever.

● For details, contact Monique Buchli at contact.lsf@gmail.com



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