

The Soviet victory in the Battle of Berlin ended Nazi terror

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In one of the war's most iconic images, Red Army soldiers raise Soviet flag over the ruins of the Reichstag, Berlin, on May 2, 1945. Photo: Yevgeny Khaldei

May 9, 2020, is the 75th anniversary of the defeat of Nazi Germany and the end of World War II in Europe. At least 80 million people died in the Second World War, 3 percent of the world's population. Among them were millions of Jewish, Roma, disabled, LGBTQ2S and other people gassed, shot or starved to death because the Nazis deemed them "unfit to live."

World War II and the rise of fascism that preceded it were the products of monopoly capitalist rivalry and a capitalist economic crisis not unlike the one we see today. The Soviet Union, the world's first socialist state, played the decisive role in ending it.

Operation Barbarossa, the Nazi invasion of the USSR, was the biggest military operation in history. The Nazis controlled all the resources of occupied Europe. Italy, Finland, Hungary, Romania and Spain joined Germany in the invasion.

Twenty-seven million Soviet soldiers and civilians lost their lives. Seventy thousand Soviet cities, towns and villages were destroyed. In the hero city of Leningrad alone, 1.5 million people died from hunger, artillery and bombs during an 837-day siege.

But in brutal battles in Moscow, Leningrad, Stalingrad and Kursk, the multinational Soviet Red Army broke the back of the Nazi war machine, fought its way west to Germany and ended the Nazi dream of a "Thousand-Year Reich."

On the night of April 30, 1945, Soviet soldiers first raised the red Soviet flag atop the Reichstag, high over Berlin. A few hours earlier, below the streets of the German capital, Adolf Hitler shot himself in his underground bunker.

Fighting continued for two more days. On May 2, German forces in Berlin surrendered and this famous picture was taken by Soviet war photographer Yevgeny

Khaldei. On May 9, the German high command surrendered. The war raged for three more months in Asia until the surrender of Imperial Japan on Aug. 15.

Four hundred and twenty thousand U.S. soldiers and sailors died in the war, but for the U.S. capitalist ruling class, many of whom had supported Hitler before the war, World War II was the best thing that ever happened. The global devastation put U.S. banks and corporations at the center of the world capitalist economy and gave birth to the U.S. military-industrial complex and the permanent war economy that is still with us today.

The bodies of the dead were not buried, and ruined cities still smoldered when the U.S., Britain and West European capitalist powers turned on their World War II allies — the Soviet Union and anti-fascist partisan movements in Europe and Asia. They launched the nuclear arms race and the “Cold War,” which was in reality a bloody onslaught against the rising forces of socialism and national liberation all over the world. These events will be the topic of an upcoming series in Struggle-La Lucha.

