**Assault on education**

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Chile provides a case study. After the 1973 coup, led by Augusto Pinochet with US support against democratically elected Socialist President Salvador Allende, “the military seized control of campuses and swept out those they felt sympathized with Allende rule,” as the Christian Science Monitor put it.

Active-duty generals were appointed to run the universities and primary and secondary schools were placed under the rule of mayors appointed by Pinochet to promote full government control of classroom instruction.

Targeting educators was a priority with strict penalties imposed on what could be taught, leading to the firing of thousands of university professors and teachers, while others were forced out by sweeping cuts in educator pay.

Privatization, sharp cuts in public education funding, and corporate control of curricula was a major goal, including the elimination of political science and sociology in favor of vocational and business programs, and banning of texts.

The cuts and restrictions “sharply increased economic discrimination in higher education,” said Allende’s former education superintendent Ivan Nunez, producing a privatized, corporatized school system that became more elitist. Implicit was the recognition that an egalitarian education system produces generations of young people who study the society they live in, think critically, and pose a major impediment to dictatorial rule. It would take 17 years until democracy finally was restored in Chile.

Comparisons with Nazi Germany are always fraught with overstatement. But it is worth emphasizing Hitler’s reign started not with death camps, but with an onslaught on education and those it deemed as undesirables. Just weeks after Hitler’s rise to Chancellor in 1933, Germany enacted a Civil Service law that as historian Jarrell Jackman wrote in The Muses Flee Hitler, immediately “forced over 1,000 scholars from their academic positions as either ‘politically unreliable’ or ‘non-Aryan’.”

On May 10, 1933, Nazi student groups carried out book burnings in 34 university towns across Germany.

On the bonfires went some 25,000 ‘un-German’ books especially those by Jewish writers from Albert Einstein to Sigmund Freud, socialists, and communists, like Bertolt Brecht, August Bebel, and, of course, Karl Marx, literary and political critics of fascism and the Nazi regime, and foreigners considered advocates of social justice, such as Helen Keller targeted for championing rights for women, workers, and the disabled.

Speaking at the largest boon bonfire in Berlin, propaganda minister Joseph Goebbels would declare that “Jewish intellectualism is dead” and he endorsed the students’ “right to clean up the debris of the past”. In the prescient words of banned, 19th century Jewish poet Heinrich Heine, “Where they burn books, they will also ultimately burn people.”

“Nazi mentality”, wrote Jackman, “held that only a small segment of humankind belonged among the chosen citizenry” and that the ‘undesirables’ should be “segregated from the rest of society”. Those defined as ‘non-Aryan’ or undesirables – which would also include people of color, lesbians and gays, the disabled, Gypsies, socialists, communists and any other opponents of the regime “were linked together in one form of conspiracy to destroy the purity of the German Volk.”

“Since everyone was either supportive of German purity, or too scared to speak up for fear retribution, the Nazi Party could push any policy they wanted,” writes Julia Rittenberg, calling it “a necessity for dictatorial control. Fascist leaders seek to crush any thoughts that might encourage resistance to their regime.”

US history is stuffed with examples of racial and gender oppression, repression of those viewed as ‘undesirable’, censorship of education and history, and book banning, all intended to suppress any perceived threat to the dominant political class and white supremacy. In the wake of Trump’s demagogy and attempted coup, the past two years illustrate the most dangerous illustration of those attacks on democracy.

Last year alone, more than 1,600 books were banned from school libraries, involving 138 school districts in 32 states, according to a report from PEN America.

Books sympathetically portraying diversity, especially featuring LGBTQ individuals and works, including children’s books, describing struggles against racism by Black, Latino and civil rights figures, and human sexuality lead the list.

In Tennessee where one school district notoriously banned the graphic novel series ‘Maus’ about the Holocaust, Rep. Jerry Sexton, sponsor of a bill to police school libraries, said he would burn books he considered inappropriate. A Texas school district official told educators if they kept books about the Holocaust in their classrooms, they would be required to offer “opposing” viewpoints to comply with a new state law.

Excerpted: ‘Burning Books and

Destroying Education on the Path to

Fascist Dictatorship’.

Courtesy: Commondreams.org