

BT Statement on DDR Elections

Critical Support to the SpAD

The following is a translation of a statement distributed in the DDR during the recent election campaign.

23 February 1990

Dear Comrades:

At this decisive historical juncture for the German working class it is the duty of all revolutionaries to unite with any forces prepared to struggle against capitalist reunification and to defend the system of collectivized property in the DDR. Your "Open Letter to All Communists" proclaims that, "Independent of existing political differences on many questions, we call upon all those who share our deep concern and wish jointly with us to defend the social gains of the DDR, to agree on and carry out actions with us." In this spirit we of the Bolshevik Tendency (BT—an organization founded by former cadres of the International Communist League—ICL) call on all workers and all those who defend the social gains of the DDR to vote for the candidates of the Spartacist Workers Party (SpAD) in the March 18 elections.

While calling for a vote for the SpAD, it is our duty to make clear our differences with the Trotzkistische Liga Deutschlands (TLD) which organized the SpAD and the American leaders of the ICL to which the SpAD is affiliated. Only a full and frank discussion of political differences within the left can clarify the road forward. We address our criticisms to all supporters of the SpAD, although we understand that the comrades of the Spartakist-Gruppen [DDR supporters of the TLD] are new to the ICL and cannot be held politically responsible for the historical mistakes of the ICL.

ICL's Imaginary "Political Revolution"

We must note first of all that the SpAD/ICL's assertion that the DDR today is in the midst of a proletarian political revolution is simply false. While the SED-PDS is in disarray, it is unfortunately not the case that, as yet, the working class is actively engaged in a revolutionary struggle to wrest political power from the discredited Stalinist bureaucrats and the parties promoting capitalist reunification which are already filling the power vacuum. A workers political revolution can open the road toward genuine socialism through instituting proletarian democracy and the rule of workers councils. We urgently hope that the workers of the DDR take the road of proletarian political revolution—but it does no good to mistake our subjective desires for reality. As we noted in our January statement:

"At the moment there is a political vacuum in the DDR. Unless workers councils are organized which establish their own organs of administration this vacuum will shortly be filled to the disadvantage of the working class through a newly elected or appointed Volkskammer [DDR parliament]. Workers councils must immediately institute supervision and control over factory and economic managers to stop the joint ventures and other

forms of penetration and control by Western capitalism already being put into place by Kombinat managers and foreign trade functionaries."

At every point in the class struggle revolutionaries can only project the next step correctly if we face reality squarely. As Leon Trotsky, co-leader with Lenin of the October Revolution, noted in 1928 in *The Third International After Lenin*: "On ascending the stairs a different type of movement is required from that which is needed to descend. Most dangerous is such a situation as finds a man, with the lights out, raising his foot to ascend when the steps before him lead downward." The SpAD/ICL claim that a proletarian political revolution is already underway, yet they cannot say exactly where it is taking place, who is carrying it out, or against whom. A very peculiar "revolution" indeed. This notion of a political revolution as something suspended in midair which simply "unfolds" as some kind of disembodied, semi-automatic process, can only disorient anyone who takes it seriously.

Never has the inextricable connection between proletarian political revolution and defense of collectivized property been clearer than it is today. Prime Minister Hans Modrow, as the representative of what remains of the SED-PDS "reform" wing, came out fully in favor of reunification, if only Kohl would agree to "neutrality." The treachery of the Stalinist misleaders is something the Trotskyist program allowed us to anticipate. In our January statement we noted that:

"Nowhere has even the most 'reform' of the Stalinists called for or supported workers councils as the basis of state power as Lenin did in 1917. This is no accident. The creation of such bodies can come about only through the destruction of all wings of the bureaucracy."

An actual proletarian political revolution in the DDR would pit the power of the insurgent proletariat against those elements of the Stalinist military and police apparatus which remain loyal to the regime. In Hungary in 1956 the workers created their own fighting squads and workers councils to coordinate the struggle. But today in the DDR there are no real workers councils. The so-called workers councils being formed are really shop stewards' bodies which only aspire to the class-collaborationist BRD-model of "Mitbestimmung" (worker-management committees). None of them are interested in the struggle for real workers power. It is vitally necessary to form workers councils to provide an organizational structure for the class-conscious elements of the working class to defend collectivized property and carry out the struggle for power.

In the "Open Letter to All Communists" the TLD calls for "joint patrols by soldiers of the Red Army, the NVA [DDR army], members of the Volkspolizei [People's Police], VP auxiliaries and workers defense groups from the factories" against fascists. Of course revolutionary

workers must be prepared to form a bloc with all anti-fascist elements—including Stalinists—against the fascist vermin. But the SpAD's proposed united front with the existing military apparatus, with its officer corps still relatively intact, is an implicit recognition that a political revolution is not currently underway. Moreover, the fact that the NVA and VPs, as the historic agencies of the rule of the SED, cannot stop the growth of capitalist reaction, underlines the necessity of proletarian political revolution. Indeed, a wing of the NVA officer corps supports Modrow's reunification program and is calling for an immediate alliance with the Bundeswehr.

Adaptation to Stalinism

While the TLD's "Open Letter" talks vaguely about the necessity to "replace the arbitrary rule of the Stalinist bureaucracy," it refers to the DDR simply as "our workers state." This formulation also appears in other ICL material. In fact the DDR, like all the states of East Europe, is a *deformed* workers state—to transform it into a healthy workers state, it is necessary to carry out a revolutionary struggle to overturn the Stalinist rulers and dismantle what remains of their repressive apparatus. From a Trotskyist standpoint this omission is an elementary error, one which, given the considerable political experience of the leaders of the ICL, we can hardly suppose was accidental.

This political deviation is paralleled by the TLD's 29 December 1989 letter to General B.V. Snetkov, Soviet commander in Germany, which appeals to him as a fellow "internationalist" to permit the "peaceful development of the political revolution unfolding in the DDR." This same letter, devoid of even a hint of criticism, applauds the Soviet military for standing as "a bulwark against those who dream of a new fascist nightmare" in Germany. This ignores the fact that the Soviet military for over four decades has also stood as a bulwark of the continuing rule of a succession of corrupt, anti-working class Stalinist parasites. On 17 June 1953 it was Soviet motorized units that gunned down workers on the streets of Berlin and preserved the Stalinist regime. We note that the TLD sent a copy of its paean to Snetkov's boss, Gorbachev. Perhaps the TLD leadership also considers him a fellow "internationalist."

Political adaptation to elements of the Stalinist bureaucracy is nothing new to the TLD/ICL. In 1982 the TLD's American parent, the Spartacist League/US, organized a contingent for a demonstration in Washington under the name of the "Yuri Andropov Battalion." At that time the ICL tops insisted that it was "obscene" to compare Andropov—who organized the crushing of the 1956 Hungarian workers political revolution—with Stalin. Posing as the Kremlin's American surrogates is something that the ICL leaders would perhaps like to forget, but it provides an index of their capacity for erratic political gyrations.

While the ICL correctly opposed the counterrevolutionary course of Solidarnosc in 1981 (as did the founding cadres of the Bolshevik Tendency), the International Secretariat of the ICL put forward a motion that was subsequently approved by the TLD, declaring that not

only would they support military blows by the Stalinists against the counterrevolution, but that they would also "take responsibility in advance for whatever idiocies and atrocities [the Stalinists] may commit." This motion was adopted at the 1981 conference of the TLD while a counterposed motion supporting military actions against capitalist reaction, but specifying that the group would "take no responsibility for acts of anti-proletarian character" was voted down and its mover driven out of the organization! In the 1980s the ICL leadership went so far as to hang a picture of General Jaruzelski in its international headquarters in New York.

For Leninist Egalitarianism! Against Slander and Bureaucratism!

While the SpAD/ICL raises the correct call for a Leninist-egalitarian party in Germany, the ICL itself is not organized along these lines but rather on the principle of unquestioning obedience to the leadership, and in particular to the group's guru, James Robertson. "J.R., J.R. is always right; and comrades that will always remain..." [parody of two lines of a well-known SED song]. In Lenin's party there was a lively and genuinely democratic internal life, which was reflected in vigorous internal debate and the frequent organization of internal factions and tendencies to argue for their particular views. But in the ICL there has not been an organized factional opposition for *twenty years!*

Cadres considered capable of presenting a political challenge to the leadership have been ruthlessly purged. In some cases comrades (including those of the BT) have been slandered as "racists" or even "fascists." A particularly ugly case of this occurred in Berlin in 1982 when Uli Sandler, a TLD central committee member, resigned from the organization. *After* he quit, the TLD leadership launched a vile slander campaign claiming he was a "fascist." Sandler has spent many years in the left in the BRD [West Germany] and has always been an active anti-fascist militant. Today he is a respected member of the Vereinigung der Verfolgten des Naziregimes--Bund der Antifaschisten (VVN).

While the SpAD, section of the ICL, calls for a "Leninist-Egalitarian Party," the ICL's top leader enjoys substantial material privileges at the expense of the membership. James Robertson occupies an extensive two-storied Manhattan apartment, with a hot tub installed with organizational funds and labor. Several years ago the group conducted a fund drive among its members to purchase an expensive summer house in California for the use of Robertson and his entourage.

While we do not believe the core leadership of the ICL is in any way revolutionary, we are nevertheless critically supporting the SpAD election campaign because it is carried out on a clear axis of opposition to capitalist restoration in the DDR while calling for the creation of workers councils as the means to prevent a capitalist takeover. None of the other groups participating in the elections, including the Vereinigte Linke and the Nelken, differentiate as clearly as the SpAD between workers councils and bourgeois parliamentarianism. At this moment it is vital to rally the working class against

the social democrats' promotion of a counterrevolutionary capitalist reunification, and to link this struggle to the necessity for workers political revolution in the DDR, the Soviet Union and throughout Eastern Europe.

We advance these criticisms to alert the revolutionary-minded workers and communists drawn to the SpAD campaign to the reality of the ICL. Forging a new revolutionary international worthy of the proud tradition of Lenin, Luxemburg and Liebknecht necessitates a

struggle not only against Stalinism and social democracy, but also against the ICL pretenders to the mantle of Trotsky. The truth is revolutionary and revolutionaries can have nothing to fear from the truth.

With Leninist greetings,
Jensen,
for the Bolshevik Tendency