

On the death of Ernst Schwarz (1957-2001)

A fighter for socialist perspectives in the workplace

19 January 2001

Completely unexpectedly, comrade Ernst Schwarz died of a heart attack last weekend. He leaves behind him a wife and child. For many years he was a member of the German Socialist Equality Party (Partei für Soziale Gleichheit—PSG) and in the mid-90s, standing on a socialist platform, he was elected onto the factory trade union committee in the steelworks where he worked—Krupp Hoesch AG.

Amongst his fellow workers he was renowned for the fearless and vigorous manner with which he uncovered abuses inside the factory and fought for improvements. Above all, however, he was an uncompromising opponent of the opportunist politics of the trade unions and the majority of the factory trade union committee who, behind the backs of the workers, carried out one rotten compromise after the other. Ernst Schwarz made no secret of his conviction that the only genuine solution to the problems which arose in the workplace was for workers to take up socialist perspectives and fight on that basis.

Ernst Schwarz joined the Bund Sozialistischer Arbeiter (BSA—predecessor organisation to the PSG) as a youth of 17-18 years in the early 1970s. He had just begun his apprenticeship as a fitter at the Henrichshütte in the Ruhr town of Hattingen. During that period he took part in many meetings and seminars, tirelessly participating in discussions over socialist perspectives.

Later he often related that at that time two standpoints became anchored in his consciousness which he was to hold on to throughout his life. He rejected a society based on exploitation and repression which had given rise to such perfidies as fascism, war and the Holocaust. At the same time and already at a young age he realised that the main obstacle to a progressive transformation of society was the opportunist leadership of the working class in the form of the social-democratic and Stalinist organisations.

There exist photos of Ernst taking part on a May Day demonstration in 1975 in the city centre of Essen. He is surrounded by three stewards from the German Stalinist Party (DKP) who are attempting to rip down a banner of the Bund Sozialistischer Arbeiter protesting cuts in the German social state implemented by the government at that time led by social democrat Helmut Schmidt. Despite his courageous efforts, the Stalinist thugs were able to tear down all of the banners being carried by the Trotskyists.

Ernst Schwarz was a determined opponent of the Stalinist regimes and the bureaucracies dominating the working class long before the coming down of the Berlin Wall and the collapse of East Germany. But contrary to many who opposed Stalinism from a right-wing nationalist standpoint, Ernst's opposition was based on a left-wing perspective. As a socialist he was a convinced internationalist. He utilised every opportunity to take part in discussions with workers from other countries. Three years ago he travelled to Sydney, Australia to take part in a seminar organised by the Fourth International using the opportunity to acquaint himself with the situation of Australian steelworkers as well as contacts from all over the world.

Ernst emphatically defended his corner when it came to political polemics. Even those close to him politically can recall vigorous exchanges and differences of opinion. But for Ernst every discussion turned on the issue of how the influence of socialist ideas, and thereby the political development of the working class, could be furthered.

Every acquaintance of Ernst quickly learnt that his political convictions went hand in hand with a generous propensity to help others. “Solidarity” for him had a very concrete and practical content. Inside the vigorous and temperamental exterior was a sensitive person who

exhibited great warmth in the way in which he cared for his family and friends.

Despite his tragic early death the life of Ernst Schwarz serves as a fine model for others. He belonged to the few who did not adapt and jettison their principles. He was not the type of person to just complain about how bad everything was, but instead fought courageously and uncompromisingly for a better world. In that respect he stood in the best traditions of the socialist workers movement. At the time of his death he was just 43 years old. We are all very saddened by his death.



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