

Twenty years since the fall of the Berlin Wall

Statement of the Bund Sozialistischer Arbeiter, October 18, 1989—Part 3

Overthrow the Stalinist bureaucracy! Build workers' councils in East Germany!

7 November 2009

Twenty years ago, on November 4, 1989, witnessed the biggest demonstration in the history of East Germany (German Democratic Republic, GDR). Approximately 1 million people gathered in the centre of East Berlin to protest against the ruling Stalinist bureaucracy.

The demonstration in Berlin was the peak of a wave of protests that had begun in Leipzig two months previously and had grown week by week. The Stalinist SED (Socialist Unity Party) regime had already resigned at this point. On October 18, the Politburo head and long-time state council chairman, Erich Honecker, was replaced by Egon Krenz. Shortly afterwards other despised SED functionaries, such as Erich Mielke, head of the GDR secret police, the Stasi, and Kurt Hager, the party's head of propaganda, also resigned from their posts.

On November 9, five days after the mass demonstration in Berlin, the SED opened up the Berlin Wall. This began the process of the dissolution of the GDR, which, following a joint treaty and currency union with the west of the country, eventually ended with the reunification of Germany.

At the November 4 demonstration, however, there was no mention made of such a course of events. Instead, the mass protest took the form of political and social opposition to the Stalinist regime, and was dominated by such slogans as: Free elections! Resignation of the government! Abolition of the SED's monopoly on power! Abolition of the privileges of the party and state functionaries! Dissolution of the Stasi!

The speakers at the Berlin demonstration were representatives of the petty-bourgeois opposition in East Germany and consisted of artists, priests and lawyers who sought to defuse the anger and concerns of those attending by appealing for a "dialogue" with the regime. Those organising the demonstration also allowed prominent members of the SED to speak, including Gregor Gysi, Günter Schabowski and the long-time assistant head of the Stasi, Markus Wolf.

The Bund Sozialistischer Arbeiter (Socialist Workers League), the predecessor of the Partei für Soziale Gleichheit (Socialist Equality Party of Germany), distributed an appeal at the demonstration in the form of a pamphlet. Prior to the demonstration, thousands of copies of this appeal had been smuggled across the east-west border, which was still closed at this point. As a Trotskyist party, the Bund Sozialistischer Arbeiter (BSA) fought against the Stalinist regime from a left standpoint and had been banned from conducting any activity since the foundation of the East German state in 1949. The SED conducted an uncompromising campaign of repression against any underground oppositional movements, while at the same time establishing close ties with the West German federal republic and its leading political figures—Willy Brandt, Helmut Schmidt,

Helmut Kohl and Franz Josef Strauß—from the 1970s onwards.

The BSA was the only political tendency to put forward a program of opposition to the Stalinist bureaucracy based on an international socialist perspective. The party's warning of the catastrophic social consequences of the introduction of capitalism, which would in turn inaugurate a new period of imperialist conflicts and wars, has been completely vindicated by the course of events.

The appeal issued by the BSA welcomed the opposition to the GDR regime. It stressed the connection between the crisis in the GDR and the crisis of world capitalism, whose "most important political prop" for the previous six decades had been precisely the Stalinist bureaucracies. The allies in the struggle against the SED were therefore neither "Gorbachev, the leader of the Stalinist headquarters in Moscow, nor Western capitalist politicians, nor the Social Democratic Party or union bureaucrats, but only the international working class."

On the 20th anniversary of the fall of the Berlin Wall we are republishing this appeal. In the coming days and weeks the WSWs will publish a series of articles dealing with the background and results of the reunification of Germany, further reports and commentaries relating to the 20th anniversary, as well as additional material from the archives of the BSA.

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This statement by the Central Committee of the Bund Sozialistischer Arbeiter, the predecessor of the Partei für Soziale Gleichheit, was published on October 18, 1989, in the BSA's newspaper, Neue Arbeiterpresse. Below we post the third and concluding part of the statement. Part 1 was posted November 5; Part 2 was posted November 6.

The Trotskyist program of political revolution

The Fourth International under the leadership of the International Committee of the Fourth International and its German section, the Bund Sozialistischer Arbeiter, fights for this second, socialist road out of the crisis of East Germany and all the other Stalinist deformed and degenerated workers' states.

The program of political revolution was developed by Leon Trotsky during the 1930s in the fight against Stalinism. It applies fully to the deformed workers' states, too, which were created after World War II by

the Kremlin bureaucracy in Eastern Europe. The basis of this program is that the Stalinist bureaucracy itself poses the greatest threat to the remaining gains of the October Revolution in the Soviet Union and to the nationalized property relations in Eastern Europe, and that the bureaucracy constitutes the greatest obstacle for the completion of the world socialist revolution.

The political revolution, the overthrow of the counterrevolutionary bureaucracy by the working class in the Soviet Union and the other countries ruled by this bureaucracy is, therefore, an inseparable part of the program of world socialist revolution. Only through such a political revolution can the gains of October, especially the nationalized planned economy, be defended and purged of all bureaucratic deformations. Only in this way can the Soviet and Eastern European working class unite with their class brothers in the capitalist West in order to complete the world socialist revolution and build socialism.

This is the only program with which the working class in East Germany will be able to defend itself not only against capitalist restoration from within, but also against military aggression from the imperialists. The necessity and the striving of the capitalist powers in the West to reconquer the territories in the Soviet Union, Eastern Europe and China, which they lost after the October Revolution, is all the more urgent for the German bourgeoisie. After having lost two world wars, this bourgeoisie today again has a highly productive industrial power, oriented towards export on the world market, but has only half of its former territory as an internal market and basis for economic or military warfare.

The danger of war, rooted in the objective contradictions of the capitalist mode of production, its insoluble world crisis and the objective necessities of the capitalist class, cannot be banned by disarmament talks, but only by overthrowing capitalism. The imperialists will not react to Gorbachev's latest offers to disarm the Soviet Union by stopping or even reducing their preparations for war. Rather, at the moment, they temporarily prefer to stake their interests on the restoration from within, that is, they hope that the Stalinist bureaucracy in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe will smash the nationalized property relations and the planned economy and in this way organize the conquest of "*lebensraum* (living space)" in the East" and the "reunification of Germany" on a capitalist basis.

This is why their political strategists have stressed that at the moment the main issue is to support the "reform movement" in East Germany and not to harm this movement by loud and premature calls for "reunification." They rightly fear that this would only reinforce the mobilization and resistance of the working class in East Germany against the policies of capitalist restoration.

The counterrevolutionary role of social democracy

The main aim of the West German bourgeoisie in the face of the mass movement in East Germany is, just like in 1953, to stabilize the rule of its agency in East Germany, the SED bureaucracy, and to prevent a revolutionary uprising of the working class. In pursuing this aim, they rely above all on the social democratic bureaucracy.

In the early 1970s, the SPD-FDP government with its "new Eastern policies" under Willy Brandt rushed to help the crisis-ridden bureaucracy in Poland and East Germany. At the same time, with huge credits and the "Eastern trade," they pushed open the door for the West German banks and corporations into Eastern Europe. After the declaration of martial law in Poland, the SPD-FDP government under Helmut Schmidt was the first government in the West that guaranteed extensive support to the Wojciech Jaruzelski regime in Poland, in order to secure the interest payments to the West German banks with the help of the military dictatorship.

As soon as the mass exodus and the demonstrations announced coming workers' uprisings in East Germany, posing an extreme threat to the stability of the SED bureaucracy, the SPD immediately, under the cover of a campaign for "reforms" and "democracy," began to support that wing of the bureaucracy openly calling for capitalist restoration. The West German bourgeoisie ordered Hans-Jochen Vogel, the leader of the SPD, to travel to Poland and Hungary as an emissary of capitalism, praising the blessings of a "free market economy." His call for a "Marshall plan for Eastern Europe" is not dictated by concern for the fate of the working class. Millions of workers in Poland and Hungary are presently getting a taste of these "advantages of a free market economy" in the form of 1,000 percent inflation, growing mass unemployment and hunger. Rather, Vogel's call is dictated by his support of capitalist restoration against the working class.

The Bund Sozialistischer Arbeiter therefore warns the workers in East Germany against the siren songs by the SPD on "democratic socialism" and "help for the people in the East." In West Germany, these same social democratic bureaucrats in the leadership of the SPD and the trade unions are presently organizing an intensification of exploitation in all factories through speedup, rationalizations and weekend work. In the name of "defending the industrial base of the FRG," they support the profit drive of the national corporations and the shutdowns in the steel and mining industry and support the Kohl government in attacking old age pensions and health care. The Bund Sozialistischer Arbeiter calls on the workers in West Germany to drive the social democratic handymen of capital out of the workers' movement and to unite with the workers in East Germany in the struggle against Stalinism and capitalism.

In the capitalist West, the fight for a workers' government, based on workers' councils, which will expropriate the corporations and banks without compensation and put them under workers' control; in the East, the struggle for the political revolution to overthrow the Stalinist agencies of capital—this is the way to unite the Soviet Union, all of Eastern Europe and, as part of it, Germany, on a socialist, revolutionary basis and to establish the United Socialist States of Europe as the first step towards a world socialist republic.

A warning against Pabloism

Directly opposed to this proletarian, internationalist program are all other programs that deny the revolutionary tasks and abilities of the international working class, consider capitalism to be stable for generations to come and assign the capability for "reforms" or "self-reform" towards socialism to the Stalinist bureaucracy or to its "left wing." Based on these theories, they preach subordination to this supposedly "progressive" part of the bureaucracy. These programs of petty-bourgeois tendencies within the workers' movement have in the course of history repeatedly demonstrated their nature as programs for the salvation of the Stalinist bureaucracy. They are directed totally against the working class.

The Bund Sozialistischer Arbeiter in this context warns the working class specifically against Pabloism, which broke with Trotskyism, an opportunist tendency which developed in the Fourth International on the basis of these theories during the early 1950s under Michel Pablo and Ernest Mandel.

In Germany, the followers of Pablo and Mandel around Georg Jungclas had by 1953 already liquidated the Trotskyist party. During the workers' uprising of June 17, 1953, they rejected the perspective of political revolution by ascribing a progressive role to the Stalinist bureaucracy, refusing to demand the immediate withdrawal of the Soviet troops. They

bear direct responsibility for the suppression of the uprising and the death of numerous workers.

During the revolutionary uprisings of 1956 in Poland and Hungary, which culminated in the establishment of independent workers' councils, or in 1968 in Czechoslovakia, the Pabloites called on the working class to support Gomulka, Nagy or Dubcek as representatives of a wing of the Stalinist bureaucracy which was supposedly "friendly to the workers," "inclined towards reforms" and "anti-Stalinist." In reality, these bureaucrats had in no way broken with the program of Stalinism, the reactionary program of "socialism in one country." They had in no way turned towards the international working class in order to mobilize for the overthrow of the bureaucracy and the program of world socialist revolution. Inevitably, they therefore paved the way for a restabilization of the Stalinist bureaucracy, be it with or without the help of Soviet tanks.

Today, the Pabloites support the policies of capitalist restoration. In his latest book *Beyond Perestroika*, Ernest Mandel writes: "From the viewpoint of the Soviet working people and the world proletariat Gorbachev would today be the best solution for the USSR" (German version, 1989, p. 268). In the Federal Republic, the Pabloites have united with the most diseased cheerleaders of Stalinism from the student movement, the Maoist KPD-ML, to form the VSP. Just like all other petty-bourgeois radicals and reformists (as for example, the Maoist MLPD in the Federal Republic or the SDP in East Germany), they stand for the "defense of the postwar borders." They claim that these borders were a result of the defeat of fascism and therefore of a progressive nature. In reality, what they defend is the conspiracy between imperialism and Stalinism which was hatched in Yalta and Potsdam against the working class. These opportunists claim that the only alternative is "imperialism or Stalinism." In this way, they try to cover their subordination to the Stalinist bureaucracy with the "progressive cloak" of an "alternative to imperialism."

The Fourth International does not defend any national borders, but fights to overcome these borders through the unification of the international working class on the basis of a common program: the program of world socialist revolution.

The Bund Sozialistischer Arbeiter calls on all workers in Germany to rally behind this program:

- Forward to the political revolution to overthrow the Stalinist bureaucracy in East Germany!
- Build workers' councils and put the state, economy and society under their control!
- Throw the bureaucracy out of all their positions! Abolish their privileges!
- Defend the expropriations and planned economy against capitalist restoration! Purge the economy of all bureaucratic elements and place it under workers' control!
- Unite with the working class in the Soviet Union, China and throughout Eastern Europe for the political revolution!
- Unite the political revolution in Eastern Europe with the socialist revolution in Western Europe!
- Drive the social democratic bureaucrats out of the workers' movement and fight for a workers' government, which will expropriate the capitalist corporations and banks without compensation and place them under workers' control!
- Forward to the United Socialist States of Europe!
- Build the BSA, the German section of the Fourth International, in East Germany!

Concluded



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Socialist Equality Party visit:

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