

In memory of Herma Huber, founding member of the German section of the International Committee of the Fourth International

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It is with deep sorrow that we announce that Herma Huber, a founding member of the Socialist Workers League (BSA) and its successor the Sozialistische Gleichheitspartei (Socialist Equality Party, SGP), passed away on June 25 at the age of 77 after a long, serious illness. For nearly six decades, Herma was an indefatigable fighter for the building of the Trotskyist party in Germany and the International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI).

Although not a member of the party's executive committee, she belonged to the large number of indispensable members who, without hesitation, through great personal commitment and great willingness to make sacrifices, enable the day-to-day political struggle of the party. Without comrades like Herma, the political life and existence of the party would not be possible.

Despite her severe cancer, she continued to participate in meetings and educational work until just a few days ago. Herma was firmly convinced that the political ideas and principles she had adopted in her youth would gain great significance in the current situation, and that the party, at whose founding she had participated in September 1971, would play the leading role for the working class in the coming struggles.

Those who knew her were deeply impressed by her selflessness and willingness to help others. Above all, when it came to helping younger comrades understand political questions, Herma explained them patiently and thoroughly. When support was needed so that comrades could participate in international conferences and educational events, Herma gave generously. On the donation list for the release of Bogdan Syrotiuk, the socialist opponent of war who fights for the unity of Russian and Ukrainian workers to end the war between Russia and Ukraine stoked by NATO, who is therefore imprisoned by the far-right Zelensky regime, there are several large contributions from Herma Huber.

A child of the post-war period

When Herma was born in March 1949, the Nazi crimes and horrors of the Second World War were only four years in the past. Together with her sister Uschi, who was two years older and herself played an important role in the party in the early years of the BSA, Herma grew up in a working-class family whose circumstances were very difficult, shaped by the brutality of war and fascism.

Her father was a light entertainment musician, playing several instruments: clarinet, flute, trumpet, violin. He earned his money through

performances in clubs, at events and family celebrations. She inherited her musical talent from him. She played the piano very well, so well that her piano teacher was willing to continue teaching her even when her father could no longer pay for the lessons.

Her father was an opponent of the Nazis, but less out of political conviction than because he did not want to be told what to do or not to do. During the war, he was temporarily placed with a farming family in the South Hesse village of Oberjosbach to recover from an illness or injury. There he became friends with the farmer's daughter, and when his wife was killed in the last major bombing raid on Frankfurt in the spring of 1944, he married the young woman from Oberjosbach after the war ended.

The young family was burdened with major problems from the start. After the war, Frankfurt, like Berlin and many other German cities, resembled a landscape of rubble. The housing shortage was severe. The family of four had only one room and had to share the bathroom with a neighbouring family. Her father had to give up his freelance work as a musician and eventually found work at the post office to support the family.

Herma did well at school, was sent to the Elisabethengymnasium in Frankfurt and earned her Abitur (university entrance qualification) there. Her sister Uschi had a Jewish schoolfriend, and both sisters were part of the revival of Jewish cultural life in Frankfurt. Of the once 30,000 Jews in Frankfurt, only a few dozen had survived the Holocaust and, in the early 1960s, developed a lively reconstruction effort. As a teenager, Uschi took part in a several-week trip to a kibbutz in Israel.

The Frankfurt Auschwitz Trial (1963–1964)

Herma was 14 years old when the Auschwitz trial began in Frankfurt at the end of 1963. The Auschwitz concentration camp with its 47 satellite camps and its extermination camp Birkenau, where over a million Jewish people were murdered, had come to epitomise the Holocaust.

Through their Jewish friends, Herma and Uschi soon found out about the Nazi crimes, and they realised with dismay that official politics acted as if nothing had happened. After the war, the Adenauer government had proclaimed the so-called "Stunde Null" (zero hour), claiming that the greatest crimes in human history, committed by the Nazis, belonged to a past that was closed and with which they had nothing to do.

But beneath the surface, everywhere, at all levels of society, in business, politics, the media and above all in schools and universities, the old Nazi

elites and their networks dominated. The Chancellery was headed by Hans Globke, who had drafted anti-Semitic laws and decrees as a ministerial councillor under the Nazi dictatorship. The Federal President was Heinrich Lübke. He had been a concentration camp builder and chief construction manager of the Peenemünde Army Research Centre, where the Nazis had built V2 rockets in underground military facilities, using concentration camp prisoners and prisoners of war, whom they treated with extreme brutality.

The Frankfurt Auschwitz trial tore apart this veil of hypocrisy. Suddenly, the headlines were full of information about the monstrous atrocities of Auschwitz.

In later years, Herma often drew attention to an article that another founding BSA member, Sybille Fuchs, had written about the significance and impact of the Auschwitz trial. It states:

That West Germans began to closely follow the Auschwitz hearings was largely due to the testimony of 359 witnesses from 19 countries, including 211 camp survivors. The trial, which required witnesses to recall the terrible events with the precision that is required in a criminal prosecution, often put excessive demands on the survivors. The accused, flanked by their attorneys on benches normally occupied by town councillors, were, for the most part, indifferent to the proceedings.

Herma was part of a generation that sought answers to the questions: How can one understand the monstrous crimes of Nazi fascism? How was such a regression into barbarism possible in a developed and cultured country? But she belonged to those who were not satisfied with cheap, simple answers and moral appeals. She wanted to get to the bottom of things.

I remember the early 1970s, when I also lived in Frankfurt and, together with Herma and other comrades, organised trips for young people to the Dachau concentration camp memorial site near Munich. On one of these trips, we spoke with a surviving inmate who was very moved as he reported on the torture and called on us to adopt the Buchenwald oath: "Never again fascism! Never again war!"

At that time, Herma was intensely involved in political discussions. The studies she had begun in music and political science receded into the background. In these discussions, the connection between fascism and capitalism quickly became clear. We read Hitler's speech before the Düsseldorf Industry Club, a critical turning point in his rise to power. We knew the pamphlet "I Paid Hitler," which Fritz Thyssen had written in England. We knew that Hitler had been financed by the banks and heavy industry because he had promised to smash the organised workers' movement. We also knew that Hitler's hatred of the Jews was closely linked to his hatred of the working class.

But then another question arose: Why had the working class not prevented this catastrophe? So we studied the history of the workers' movement. The Stalinist regime in the German Democratic Republic (GDR, East Germany) repelled us. We knew that the Stalinists had crushed the workers' uprising on June 17, 1953 in East Berlin and had bloodily suppressed the 1956 revolution in Hungary. And when Soviet tanks crushed the Prague Spring in the summer of 1968, it was clear to Herma and her political circle of friends, which included me, that we rejected and fought against Stalinism. We grappled with the important distinction between anti-Stalinism from the left and anti-Stalinism from the right; that is, we rejected the right-wing critics of Stalinism who were anti-communists; and we fought against both Stalinism and capitalism for an international socialist perspective.

Herma took part in an intensive study of the writings in which Trotsky

had exposed the counter-revolutionary role of Stalinism. This made it possible to understand the German catastrophe. The working class had been unable to prevent fascist terror because of the false policies of the Stalinist Communist Party (KPD), which had labelled the Social Democrats (SPD) as "social fascists," rejected a united front against the Nazis and divided the working class. Trotsky and the International Left Opposition, by contrast, had advocated a united front—joint fighting measures by the KPD and SPD against the Nazis.

Based on this understanding, Herma became a convinced Trotskyist. She saw her main task as building a new Marxist leadership in the working class. She took part in the founding conference of the BSA as the German section of the International Committee of the Fourth International and concentrated all her work on building this party and the International Committee of the Fourth International of which it was part.

She broke off her studies, took a job at the post office and from then on regarded the "wretched earning of a living" as inevitable in order to financially support the building of the party and ensure the political education of younger comrades. At the post office, she rose through the ranks from an apprenticeship and finally to more senior levels. Most recently, she was an inspector at the now-privatised Postbank.

At her workplace, Herma fought against the deterioration of working conditions and increasing exploitation, and did not shy away from conflict with the local union functionaries. When the post office was privatised in the course of the 1990s, this dismantling of the state-owned company was accompanied by massive mass layoffs and the closure of post offices. Herma courageously opposed this course, which aimed at maximum profit for shareholders. In early 1992, she wrote in an article for the then party newspaper *Neue Arbeiterpresse*:

Under the McKinsey plan for the postal service, 25,000 jobs are to be cut in the east and 45,000 in the west, i.e., a total of 70,000. In the telecommunications sector, too, 16,000 jobs are threatened. For 4,112 newly trained technicians throughout the federal territory, only 1,800 jobs are planned ... In order to prevent the planned job cuts at Postbank, it is necessary to organise a joint labour struggle of all three postal sectors in east and west. But this is only possible if a political struggle is waged against the trade union bureaucracy of the DPG [German Postal Union, Verdi's predecessor] itself, for a new leadership and perspective. (*Neue Arbeiterpresse*, 10 January 1992)

But in all workplace struggles, Herma always emphasised that the central and most important political task was to build a new revolutionary socialist party in order to overcome the crisis of leadership of the working class. For Herma and all BSA members, it was clear that this was only possible within the framework of the International Committee of the Fourth International.

After the split from the WRP in 1985–1986

The opportunist degeneration of the British Workers Revolutionary Party (WRP) increasingly put the BSA under pressure in the 1970s and 1980s. The WRP leadership tried to push the German section in an opportunist direction. This led to severe political and organisational crises and nearly destroyed the section.

The British section and its leader Gerry Healy enjoyed great authority in the BSA, based on the long struggle Healy had waged against Pabloite

revisionism in the 1960s and on his role in founding the BSA in 1971. But over the course of the 1970s, Healy drifted towards the Pabloism he had fought against in the 1960s. He established opportunist relations with Labour politicians, Stalinists, trade union leaders and bourgeois-nationalist rulers in the Middle East and put pressure on the BSA to follow suit.

In 1982 and 1984, when the Workers League in the United States, under the leadership of David North, presented a comprehensive critique of Healy's theoretical conceptions and the opportunist degeneration of the WRP, this marked the beginning of a thorough political and theoretical re-arming of the party.

The BSA organised fortnight-long summer schools for several years in order to draw the lessons from the split from the WRP in 1985-1986 and to re-examine the history of the ICFI. Herma participated with great enthusiasm, and the fact that Tamil, British and comrades from other sections also took part in these schools was inspiring and important for her.

Of particular and lasting significance for her was her participation, at the turn of 1997-1998, in the International Summer School on "Marxism and the Problems of the 20th Century," hosted by the Socialist Equality Party (Australia) in Sydney, with delegations from around the world.

After Herma reached retirement age and left her work at the post office, she took part in numerous party campaigns, whether to collect signatures for the party's participation in elections, to discuss with workers and young people at factory struggles, or to publicise a central party event. For example, until the coronavirus pandemic, she regularly supported the party's meetings at the annual Leipzig Book Fair, and in doing so she achieved great things. Especially younger comrades who experienced such a campaign for the first time felt in good hands with her and today fondly remember how encouraging it was to work with her.

When Herma spoke at party schools and conferences, she repeatedly referred to the early years of the BSA. She usually named three things that were decisive for her and the roughly two dozen founding members to join the ICFI:

- First: Trotsky's analysis of fascism. In it, Trotsky explains the connection between capitalism and fascism and shows that there is only one social force to prevent fascism and war: the working class.

- Second: The fact that the International Committee upheld Trotsky's assessment of Stalinism as a counter-revolutionary agency of world imperialism. In Germany, which was divided for decades into the West German Federal Republic and the German Democratic Republic, and where the Berlin Wall stood between two great lies, this was particularly important. The Stalinist GDR leadership called itself "socialist," and West German imperialism claimed to embody "democracy and freedom."

- And the third and perhaps most important attraction of the ICFI was its adherence to the revolutionary role of the working class and to internationalism. The so-called '68 movement—that is, the rebellious students of the late 1960s—understood "revolution" not as a socialist movement of the working class, but as liberation from sexual and other conventions of bourgeois society. Based on the pessimistic and reactionary theories of the Frankfurt School, they rejected the working class and held it responsible for fascism.

Despite her severe cancer, she often spoke recently about the topicality of these questions in the face of war, growing fascist parties, mass layoffs and the return of class struggle.

Comrade Herma represented an important part of the founding cadre of our party, without whose tireless work and willingness to make sacrifices we would not be able to build the Sozialistische Gleichheitspartei as the leading revolutionary party of the working class today.

We will always remember Herma Huber as a fighter for Trotskyism!

Funeral:

Thursday, 23 July, 12:00 PM
Friedhof Höchst, Sossenheimer Weg 75
65929 Frankfurt am Main



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Socialist Equality Party visit:

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