Farewell to Herma Huber, a fighter for Trotskyism

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On midday, 23 July, Socialist Equality Party (SGP) members, relatives and friends bid farewell to their comrade Herma Huber. She passed away on 25 June, already seriously ill, in her Frankfurt flat, at the height of an extreme heatwave. In 1971 Herma was a founding member of the Socialist Workers League (BSA), the forerunner of the SGP, remaining a member until her death, and thereby contributing to the rebuilding of a section of the Fourth International in Germany.

The ceremony at the Höchst Main Cemetery began with a service in the funeral hall. The first piece to be played was Richard Clayderman's piano ballad "Pour Adeline"—a piece that Herma not only loved but could also play herself. "She had inherited her father's musical talent," explained Ulrich Rippert, SGP Honorary Chairman, who delivered the eulogy. He continued:

"Her father played four instruments and worked as an entertainer here in Frankfurt. Herma used to say that her piano teacher continued to give her lessons free of charge when the family could no longer afford to pay for them."

Rippert emphasised: "Herma was extraordinary in many ways. Her willingness to help others was almost boundless. (…) But she was also a fighter for justice and equality and, above all, against war and fascism." He explained:

> Herma was a child of the post-war era. She was born in 1949, less than four years since the end of the war and the crimes of the Nazis. Frankfurt resembled a ruin. Herma grew up in a working-class family whose circumstances were shaped by the brutality of war and fascism and were extremely difficult.
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> She was 14 years old when the Auschwitz trials began here in Frankfurt and the monstrous crimes of Nazi fascism dominated the headlines. Herma was part of a generation haunted by the question: How was such a relapse into barbarism possible in a developed and cultured country? At the time, many attributed the cause of fascism to mass psychology and the susceptibility of the German people to seduction. But Herma was not satisfied with simple and superficial answers. She wanted to get to the bottom of things.

Rippert spoke of joint study trips to the Dachau concentration camp memorial and subsequent discussions, which centred on the connection between fascism and capitalism. "We realised very quickly that Hitler had been financed by big industry and brought to power in order to crush the working class. But then another question arose: why hadn't the working class prevented this catastrophe?"

To answer this, Rippert, Herma Huber and other young workers at the time studied the writings of Leon Trotsky intensively. Only he had defended the perspective of socialism against Stalinism:

> Trotsky had shown that Hitler could only come to power because Stalin, with his policy of social fascism, had divided and oppressed the working class.
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> Based on this understanding, Herma became a committed Trotskyist and saw her main task as building a new Marxist leadership within 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 focused all her efforts on building this party and the International associated with it.

Rippert then turned to the emergence of the Green Party in the early 1980s, which played a major role in the state of Hesse and particularly in Frankfurt, where Joschka Fischer emerged as a radical street fighter only to go on to become the first Green government minister:

> Herma warned against harbouring illusions in the Greens and resolutely opposed them. She emphasised that there is only one social force capable of solving society's problems, and that is the working class. But to do so, it needs a revolutionary, socialist party. Herma detested the Green turncoats.
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> When Helmut Arens, who had served on our party's executive committee for many years, stood as a

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candidate in state elections, Herma was a tireless campaigner. At countless information stands, she also argued against the Left Party, which spouts left-wing rhetoric whilst pursuing right-wing policies.

Finally, Rippert paid tribute to Herma Huber's struggle, which she continued even when she was already seriously ill with cancer:

> She seized every opportunity for discussion and repeatedly declared: The struggle against war and fascism requires the mobilisation of the working class and the building of the Socialist Equality Party. She was convinced that the political ideas and principles she had embraced in her youth were taking on great significance in the current situation, and that the party she had helped to found in 1971 would play a leading role in the coming struggles of the working class.

Rippert emphasised, addressing Herma: "We thank you for your many years of tireless political struggle. We are saddened and miss you. But as a founding member of our party, you have a firm place in our history and we will always remember you as a fighter for Trotskyism."

The attendees then proceeded through the cemetery and gathered once more at the urn grave, where Marianne Arens from the SGP Executive Committee read out several letters of condolence. Below are two letters from two long-standing Trotskyist veterans of the International Committee of the Fourth International.

Comrade Barbara Slaughter of the Socialist Equality Party in Britain wrote:

> Please accept my deepest condolences on the death of our Comrade Herma. She was one of the few comrades who, having been a founding member of the BSA so long ago remained firm in her commitment to revolutionary internationalism ever since. She has devoted her whole life to the building of a section of the Fourth International in Germany—a life which is part of that continuity of endeavour that reaches back to the early days of the Socialist movement in Germany.
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> … I knew her as a person of integrity and kindness. But what I remember most of all was her wry sense of humour, which came across despite the language barriers.
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> I understand from your obituary that Herma had a great talent for music, especially for playing the piano. As a lover of music myself, I greatly regret that I never heard Herma play. I think it is important that comrades appreciate each other in an all-sided way and I would have loved to appreciate that about her. But Herma was such a modest person I am sure she would never have pushed herself forward, even when that was possible.
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> I think it is important to understand why and how comrades decide to devote their lives and their talents to the building of the revolutionary movement.
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> Your description of Herma, as part of that generation that sought answers to the questions of why and how Nazism triumphed in Germany was extremely powerful. But Herma went on to understand why it was that the working class was unable to prevent the catastrophe, most importantly because of the crimes of Stalinism. She, along with a small group of comrades, drew the conclusion that only the Fourth International could provide the necessary leadership based on revolutionary internationalism.
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> It is clear that she never lost her conviction in the revolutionary role of the international working class and she herself continued that fight to the very end of her life.
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> With warmest regards,
> Barbara

Comrade Fred Mazelis of Socialist Equality Party (USA) wrote from New York:

> I want to personally extend my deep sympathy, and above all my solidarity with the entire German section at this time. Uli's article powerfully summed up the meaning of our historical continuity and the fact that the International Committee, leading the Trotskyist movement, is the Marxism of today, the voice of the working class and the socialist future.

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