

## IKD Statement to Essen Youth Conference

[Over July 3-4 an "international assembly of youth" was held at Essen, Germany. The initiating organization was the Alliance de la Jeunesse Pour le Socialisme (AJS, youth group of the Organisation Communiste Internationaliste, French section of the International Committee) along with the Young Socialists of Britain and the Junge Garde of Germany. Announcements appearing in the IC publications stated that 16 different youth organizations were represented. The statement reprinted below is the translation of a leaflet written by the IKD for distribution to the meeting. All footnotes are those of the translator.]

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Comrades!

This congress is taking place under the slogans of struggle against imperialism and Stalinism and for the Socialist World Revolution. Its concrete significance should lie in the fact that it constitutes a step on the path to the "Revolutionary Youth International" (RYI). But what contribution can an organization like the present RYI make to the solution of current problems of world revolution?

It is clear that today's revolutionary movement cannot start from scratch. The tasks of the present cannot be understood without an encompassing analysis of the prior history of proletarian struggle and of the organizations of the proletariat, and the appropriation [for our use] of the lessons to be drawn from that history.

The first three Internationals, each for different reasons, were not able to accomplish on a world scale the goal they set for themselves of the overthrow of the bourgeoisie and the establishment of socialism, and foundered prematurely. The total assimilation of the lessons from that experience constitutes the basis for the programmatic orientation of the Trotskyist movement, which was the only tendency of the international working class movement which was able to exhibit a correct revolutionary perspective for the struggle both against imperialism and against Stalinism after the Stalinist degeneration of the Comintern. We feel that to the present day, this perspective has not lost its validity: much rather, it still requires realization. An organization which, under current conditions, wants to make a contribution to the world revolution, must from the beginning be conceived of as Trotskyist.

But the RYI is precisely supposed not to be a specifically Trotskyist organization, but rather to unite within itself different youth organizations, groups and individual youths, who may have broken from Stalinist organizations, but who have not yet completed the conscious step over to Trotskyism. In a word, it is a question of an organization which in essence would be a centralist collective movement.<sup>1</sup>

Now of course, the comrades of the "International Committee" (IC), that is, especially the French OCI, the English SLL and the

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<sup>1</sup>collective: "Sammelbewegung," i.e. a movement which is a collection of small groups.

Bolivian POR agree with us that today, revolutionary politics can only be conceived of as Trotskyist. They openly say that the revolutionary youth organizations, which would later be the RYI, and even now organizations such as the French AJS, the English "Young Socialists" and the German "Junge Garde," can exist only through the political drive of organizations founded on the finished<sup>2</sup> program of world revolution, the "Transitional Program," as is said in the organ of the OCI, "La Verite," No. 550. They feel that this RYI can lead to Trotskyism; [a position] which they deduce from the claim that at the present time they already dispose of the "complete program for world revolution," by which they mean the 1938 "Transitional Program."

We consider this claim unjustified, because it is based on a schematic and rigid understanding of program. For even if the lessons of past struggles do form the indispensable basis of the program, the program is by no means exhausted by the summation and theorization of these experiences. Corresponding to changes in the conditions of struggle, the program itself undergoes a continual development, change and concretization, and this process cannot be completed in a purely theoretical fashion, but rather only through the mediation of struggle itself. The conditions under which this can happen are that the revolutionary organization in fact plays an active role in the class struggle, and is capable at least of leading a small part of the class. The program can be determined only in connection with the development of the class struggle and of the revolutionary organization.

But this connection is split apart in the IC's own understanding of itself. For the IC agrees that the Fourth International (FI) doesn't exist at present, yet on the other hand claims that it represents the continuity of the FI, because it does indeed already have available "the program of the FI." As opposed to the IC,<sup>3</sup> the tendency represented by the U.Sec. for example, has departed from the "Transitional Program" and thus ceased to be Trotskyist.

Now nothing could be further from our minds than to again confer on the U.Sec. its Trotskyist reputation. From the concrete reality of the U.Sec., from the theories it supports today and from its praxis, we deduce that on decisive points the U.Sec. stands opposed to the bases of revolutionary Marxism. But on the other hand, if one takes the "Transitional Program" qua document as a standard [of Trotskyism], the question of revisionism becomes merely a question of departing from the printed text, merely a problem of literary interpretation. This is a method which distinguishes itself by the subjectivism and arbitrariness of those who do the judging. For such people, nothing whatsoever is left to do, when the argumentation of the traditional texts ends, but to set themselves up as the ultimate standard. Thus the construction of the FI, which can certainly be understood only as a process of shifting and of regroupment of existing forces of the "world Trotskyist movement," as the collection of its best parts around a new axis, is surreptitiously turned into a purely organizational problem. Namely, how the IC can succeed in

<sup>2</sup>the French is "acheve"--finished, doesn't need any more work. The German gives simply "volle"--complete, i.e. all points are covered.

<sup>3</sup>i.e., from the point of view of the IC, not necessarily of the writers of this document.

spreading its influence, winning more comrades, groups and organizations to "the program" and thus in developing itself into the FI as the vanguard party of the world proletariat.

If, on the other hand, one considers building up the program as a process, as a task to be achieved in struggle, then the question is, what role can the RYI play in this process?

It is undoubtedly correct that the program can be built up only in struggle, but this characterization is not yet adequate. For here it is a question not of a program "given as such," but of the class program of the proletariat, which--just as with the revolutionary organization itself--itself can be developed only in the political struggle of the proletariat. The most pressing task of revolutionary cadre groups--and nowhere today do we have to deal with anything more than that--therefore consists in developing the political struggles of the proletariat and of evolving a concrete program of struggle, which will allow such groups to lead in struggle at first small, but then ever more meaningful sections of the proletariat. In the course of this process, these groups should integrate into their ranks the most highly developed elements of the proletariat and thus as proletarian vanguard organizations, themselves become a part of the class, even if they originally may have consisted overwhelmingly of intellectuals.

But the RYI is precisely to become not a specifically proletarian organization, but is to include youth in general, above and beyond all class categories. But what is the general interest of all youth supposed to consist in?

In the call for the congress, it is said: "youth wants to live, in hope and in freedom, and in order to live, it must struggle. Youth aspires to life, youth needs exalting perspectives. Bureaucrats and bourgeois offer only a sordid life, unemployment, misery, failure, war and suffering."

It cannot be denied that many young people portray their own situation that way. Yet the concept of youth only includes the growing generation, insofar as it has not yet gotten out of specific institutional forms of social integration (family, school, apprenticeship, university). At the corresponding level of self-understanding, "youth" still maintains a host of illusions about the formation of its further existence which, one after the other, will be shattered by social reality. Thus the lump, undifferentiated rejection of "the System" implies a situation of apparently identical interests in all sections of youth, and this appearance will remain as long as the struggle of the young continues to remain at its lowest level, the level of revolt.

But the appearance will be smashed as soon as the struggle attains a higher level. For youth does not stand outside the organization of society by classes. Any given young person has before him the perspective of later occupying a very specific social position, from which his interests derive. The problems of proletarian youth, central among them the questions of education, of downgrading,<sup>4</sup> of

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<sup>4</sup>"Entqualifizierung," lit. "dequalification."

the unemployment of youth, of being underpaid, are to the same degree also problems of the entire class, since the education of working class youth makes them into component parts of the process of reproduction of the class as a whole, since the proletariat is structured and formed with them, and since at the present time they are already placed in a competitive relation to their older class comrades. The goal of their struggle is not different from that of the class as a whole; the overthrow of the bourgeoisie and the establishment of the dictatorship of the proletariat as the means of constructing socialism.

But what interest in socialism does the high school student,<sup>5</sup> the university student, have? To be sure, it cannot be denied that the idea of a classless society is an "exhaling perspective." But for high school and university students, as well as others, actions and consciousness are in the main ultimately determined by their social situation. Indeed this is precisely characterized by educational privilege, through the expectation that they can later occupy a position above the proletariat, that they will not have to perform any physically demanding labor, that they will earn more and enjoy a greater social respect than the majority of the population. When they rebel, it is therefore not against the system because it is capitalist (although their protest can take on this ideological form), but insofar as it will never be able completely to fulfill these expectations. But they have nothing more to expect from socialism, since socialism means precisely the destruction of all social privileges, whereas the maintenance of privilege is bound to the existing system (in particular to the bureaucratic deformation of the workers' states).

A political movement of high school students and university students based on the interests specific to their strata can therefore only have a petty-bourgeois character. It cannot itself become the vanguard<sup>6</sup> of socialism, however much it might want to. Thus, even if the crisis of the capitalist system is thoroughly reflected in the minds of intellectuals, it is precisely Marxists who should not commit the fundamental error of taking the ideological expression for the driving force of the movement. In any case, under conditions of a sharper class struggle, the question of alliances<sup>7</sup> is now posed for the proletariat.

The consciousness which is expressed in the general rebellion of youth, thus merely reflects the still dominant position of the petty-bourgeoisie over the proletariat. The task of revolutionaries consists precisely in contributing to overcoming this state of affairs. The development of the revolution can be advanced in no way other than through the many-sided and decisive emphasis on the particular, specific class interests of the proletariat, through forming

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<sup>5</sup>"Oberschuler," i.e. college track high school student. As in England, students are split into university and working class track--into separate schools--at an early age. These are students preparing for the university.

<sup>6</sup>Vorkampfer: engaged in preliminary struggles.

<sup>7</sup>Bundnisfrage.

the proletariat as a class, both organizationally and in terms of self-consciousness. But proletarian youth cannot be excluded from that process. For to a far greater degree today than in the past, the largest part of proletarian cadre are recruited from the younger parts of the class; cadre who should lead the class and mediate its particular interests through consciousness. But if proletarian consciousness has to include the insight into the relationships and interests of all classes and layers of society, then present day revolutionaries cannot allow proletarian youth to remain unclear about the difference, and in some ways the contradiction, between their interests and those of the petty-bourgeois parts of the youth movement. On the other hand, the attempt to construct a similarity of interests between the entire youth and the proletariat, in reality winds up by splitting the young generation of the proletariat off from the older sections of the class, and thus by robbing youth of a decisive opportunity of gaining a foothold in the class itself for the perspective of proletarian revolution.

Comrades: From the consideration of all these arguments, it follows that the construction of the RYI is doomed to founder by its very conception. As a non-Trotskyist organization it would be unable to lead a truly anti-imperialist and anti-Stalinist struggle; as a non-proletarian organization it can make no positive contribution to the formation of a class program. It will be wrecked by its programmatic and socially disunified orientation as soon as it attempts to leave the area of general declarations and take the first steps into practical politics.

Comrades! The discussion around the perspectives of international revolutionary politics today must begin from the necessity of the FI, from the reasons for which, over 30 years after its proclamation, it does not yet exist at present, from the current situation of the "world Trotskyist movement," from the programmatic basis and the practical perspectives for its construction. But a discussion which already accepts the perspectives of the RYI as its precondition and only examines the "how" of that construction, can lead to no correct answer to the decisive questions of the era.

FOR THE PROLETARIAN CLASS LINE!

FOR THE CONSTRUCTION OF THE IV. INTERNATIONAL!

[translated by John H.]