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Obituary

Leni Jungclas (1917–2009)

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Our comrade Helene Jungclas, known as “Leni“, died on June 28, 2009. Born Helene Perz on August 22, 1917, the child of a working class social democratic family from Cologne, she began her political activity in 1929 in the youth of the “Freidenker”, the "freethinkers” which up until the destruction of the workers’ organisations in 1933 provided a sort of secular alternative to the Christian churches for socialists and an important pillar of the workers' culture movement in countries like Germany and Austria.

At the end of the Weimar Republic Leni’s father left the Social Democratic Party to join the Left Socialist Party (SAP), created in autumn 1931 after a fierce struggle by the left wing inside the SPD against the policies of “defence of the Republic” by supporting the regime and swallowing the anti-working class measures of the conservative government. At 14, Leni joined the “Sozialistischer Jugendverband”, the SAP youth group. A milliner by profession, she participated in illegal work during the Third Reich.

After the war, like most of the former members of the SAP (which had not survived the debates of exile inside this party on the Popular Front, Stalinism, the unity of the socialist movement and so on) she joined the SPD and the association of working class youth in the “Falcons” (Sozialistische Jugend – Die Falken). From 1947, Leni formed part of a Marxist current inside the local section of the SPD, the future so-called “Trotskyist” nucleus in Cologne. At the beginning of the 1950s, she got to know Georg Jungclas, known as “Schorsch“, became his partner, and then began to be active in the ranks of the German section of the Fourth International. Schorsch was the political secretary of the German section from 1946 to 1967, a member of the leadership of the International from 1948 to 1974 [1].

With him, she was in all the struggles: "entryist" work in the Social Democratic Party and above all in the youth organisations which had crushing hegemony in the workers' movement in West Germany, against the SPD’s definitive abandonment of Marxism, not merely in practice, but also at the programmatic level (Bad Godesberg programme, 1959), movements against rearmament and the atom bomb, solidarity with the Algerian revolution and so on.

Without joining the "Trotskyist" current Leni's father, Will Perz, agreed to become the legal director for the little journal *Freies Algerien* (Free Algeria, 1958–1962): “If it is useful for the revolution I will do anything“, said the old social democratic militant. With her comrades in Cologne, Schorsch was the workhorse of the journal and many public initiatives, semi-legal and clandestine in support of the Algerian Front de Libération Nationale (FLN).

Leni has described the conditions the couple lived in: “The money Schorsch received from the organisation was hardly enough to pay for postal stamps, the telephone and a part of the expenses for political work. (...) Except during a fairly short period, we didn’t have an office, everything happened in our flat, the meetings took place in our living-room.“

In a speech made in 1997 at Leni's eightieth birthday party, our comrade Jakob Moneta noted: Schorsch was “said to have carried the little German Trotskyist movement on his shoulders. But we forget to add that it was Leni who carried Schorsch on her shoulders.“ It was Leni who carried out most of the household tasks and who earned the money which allowed them to survive and give hospitality to so many comrades. She worked first in a hat makers (she was the owner of a shop which also served as meeting room), later in a public service administration.

After the death of Schorsch in 1975, Leni continued until the end of her life to support the activities of our current as a

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member of the GIM, the VSP and after our effort of reorganisation in 2001, of the international socialist left organisation (isl). With her advice on political life, her formidable meals and her anecdotes on the life of quite a few leaders of the International in the 1950s and 1960s she will remain in the memory of those who have known her, in Cologne and elsewhere.

Friedrich Dorn

[1] See. Ernest Mandel, "Georg Jungclas", in Quatrième Internationale, N.S., no. 22, autumn 1975, p. 5–6;
<http://www.ernestmandel.org/fr/ecrits/txt/1975/jungclas.htm>