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Germany

Anti-Zionist, Revolutionary and Internationalist

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Comrade Rudolf (Rudi) Segall was 90 years old on April 6th, 2001. Ten years ago, our German-language sister publication, Inprekorr, wrote: "Rudi belongs to a generation which is dying out, who as Jews have suffered oppression, anti-semitism, racism and who have nonetheless rejected the temptation of Zionism which believed that the Jewish question could only be solved to the cost of the Palestinian people. His internationalism remains as un-shakeable as his loyalty to the Fourth International ..." Daniel Berger spoke with Rudi as his birthday approached.

DB: *You fled the Nazis in 1934 and emigrated to Palestine. While there you split from the Zionist movement because you could not bear the contradiction with your own socialist beliefs. What made you a socialist?*

RS: To become a socialist is really problematic. For me it was certainly a conscious opposition developed in my parents house and at school. Among my own circle of friends, there were no socialists.

I had involved myself strongly in the youth movement, the Wanderbewegung, which was also intensively involved with the cultural phenomena of those times. Here there was the beginning of political discussion, at the bigger meetings some groups sang revolutionary songs; we went to exhibitions and the theatre (Brecht was being staged in Berlin).

Thus, I turned slowly from my model, Walter Rathenau, to Landauer (Call to socialism). I studied for a year in Königsberg in 1930, where I read Trotsky's My Life - that had a strong influence on me.

However, I still was not clear about my future path during the rise and eventual victory of Hitler. Through my links with a Zionist group my image of a different society fused with the conceptions that were common to all workers movements with this image of a socialist society, which largely connected with my earlier ideas. As a socialist, I identified with the group Haschomer Hatzair (Young Watch) that believed the Zionist state must be socialist.

DB: *You visited Israel a few years ago. What has become of this country? Was what the Zionist state does today, i.e. the oppression of the Palestinian population, already present in the Zionist ideology of the 1930s? Was the establishment of Israel through the expulsion of the Palestinians already central in the political philosophy of Zionism?*

RS: The plan for the Jewish settlement of Palestine, without consideration for the population already living there ensured that basically between the beginning of the Zionist project and today nothing changed.

From 1935 to 1939 I lived in a Haschomer Hatzair kibbutz, at a time when this socialist island understood itself as a pioneer of Zionist society. This conception is today completely outdated, but the Kibbutz was already at that time in reality a bastion for the penetration of Zionist colonisation against the interests of the Palestinian population. Thus it is no miracle that a high percentage of the Israeli military elite came from the Kibbutz. For some of us the contradiction between the socialist ideal and the behaviour in relation to the resident population became ever bigger, so that a large group left the Kibbutz in order to carry out political work.

DB: *How do you deal with the reproach, which is somewhat common at least in Germany: "those who are against the state of Israel and who fundamentally criticize Zionism are anti-Semites"? Is it really the case that one cannot*

separate anti-Zionism from anti-Semitism, that the two are related?

RS: Here we are dealing with completely different phenomena: anti-Zionism is a fight against imperialist oppression, exploitation and expulsion, thus a fight against a nationalism of the worst kind. Anti-Semitism is the utilization of nationalistic feelings for the maintenance of imperialistic goals. These two attitudes are thus absolutely contrary.

DB: *You joined the Fourth International (FI) in 1938 in Palestine. In 1947 when you returned to Germany, you found there were only a few surviving comrades of the FI. The others had died in the concentration camps, emigrated, or been killed by Stalin's murder gangs. There was thus only a very weak organization of the FI here. What induced you to remain a revolutionary Marxist at a time of the triumph of Stalinism on the one hand and the emerging cold war on the other?*

RS: In Palestine we believed firmly in the coming revolution in Germany (and in Europe), on the basis of Trotsky's prognosis that that would be the outcome of the war. In the last months of the war we had observed that things were turning out differently than forecast; but it was quite a while until we realized finally the true state of things.

It seemed to me nevertheless that our revolutionary hopes would not be buried for always. We hoped firmly that we would strengthen our movement over time so that it would play an important role in the coming events. The unshakeable optimism of Ernest [Mandel] certainly had a very large influence on us. The internationalism of our movement above all helped me to believe in future success.

DB: *How did the structure of the German section develop after the war? Who were these people, where did they come from, what did they do? Were you still in fear of the Stalinists?*

RS: One must say first of all that only a few comrades survived the Nazi period, and those who emigrated did not return. Admittedly a set of Austrian comrades from Palestine returned, who for a whole time continued to work in Austria. The only comrade who returned from the comrades operating in former times in Germany was George Jungclas (he spent the Nazi period in Denmark).

Later still Wolf Salus returned. He was born in 1909 in Prague and was in the youth wing of the KPD. In 1929 (at the age of 20) he was a cofounder of the Trotskyist movement in Germany - he was in a concentration camp. After the war he helped build the movement in Czechoslovakia, before fleeing to West Germany, where we worked together. In 1953 he was murdered in a Munich hospital by a GPU agent.

Ernst Scholz (born in 1904) was also driven out from the Sudetenland, and was active in Augsburg from the early 1950's up to his death in 1997. From Palestine there was Sigi and Ruth Rothschild and, later, Berthold Scheller and Jakob Moneta. The remaining comrades were recruited by Schorsch (George) Jungclas.

DB: *In recent years at least there has been much talk of the impossibility of socialism. Since 1989, we have been politically and ideologically on the defensive with the big difference from the post-war period that there is now no longer a mass workers party. Where do you see the parallels with the late 1940's/early 1950's and what can you pass on from your long political activity in post-war Germany?*

RS: We divided our activity, although perhaps not consciously at the time, into two directions. On the one hand it fell upon us to win new individual members who through discussion felt that our organisation would be the right place for them to achieve their aims.

On the other hand however we always strove to look out for organisations who shared the same objectives as us where it would be possible not only to win over individuals but the whole group to our position.

In principle our activities do not change at present. The non-existence of a mass workers party meant however that we have had a lot of ground to cover. The attempt to co-operate with those organizations close to us is necessary, but we drew the conclusion from the experience with the KPD that each such collaboration - with the goal of fusion - can only have prospects of success if basic preparations are made.

In terms of the post-war period we gained much experience and shed some illusions. Personally my experience showed me that the only constant is continuing change.

I hope firmly that once again the emergence of mass movements throughout the world can be taken up by us and our allies, in such a manner that the way to socialism remains possible.