



Gabi Fechtner, June 2020



Speech on the Unveiling of the Lenin Statue on 20 June 2020

Dear people of Gelsenkirchen,
Dear people of Horst,
Dear people who have come here from all over the globe,
Dear representatives of the press,
Dear friends and comrades!

Every era has its statues. The era of the memorials for racists, anti-Semites, fascists, anticommunists or other ultra-reactionaries is definitely over, and quite rightly these statues currently are being pulled down everywhere in the world.

But what comes after that? Every rebellion needs a positive goal if it is not to end in frustration, old ways or defeats. And so after attempted bans, court decisions, heated discussions, much excitement in the international press:

Today I cordially welcome you to the unveiling ceremony for the first statue of Vladimir Ilyich Ulyanov Lenin in West Germany!

I was often asked during the past weeks whether the erection of the statue was intended as a provocation. No, it is not a provocation, but perhaps it is the breaking of a certain taboo. A breaking of a taboo, because mass discussions about socialism are not on the agenda in this capitalist society, in which anticommunism is state religion.

You are not supposed to pay tribute to the representatives of socialism. Therefore, in a situation in which criticism of capitalism is omnipresent, we say it must cease that anticommunism can create an atmosphere in which one should better not get involved with socialism.

Perhaps some of you are familiar with this: if you take a position in favor of socialism, you are quickly denigrated as “extremist” or even a “Stalinist” and “Maoist.” So for the sake of bringing down anticommunism’s reservations and bans on thinking, this day also is part of the movement “Don’t give anticommunism a chance!”, and its culmination to date. We demand an open democratic discussion about the perspective of socialism and the freedom ideology of communism!

Already now we have sparked off a broad debate: That applies to the media. And the City of Gelsenkirchen has gone into reaction mode. Specifically because of Lenin it has installed a big anticommunist exhibition in Horst Castle. Now it wants to place its own information plaque

here right on the walkway. We welcome the broad discussions, but we insist that they be conducted democratically, among equals. We insist that the positions of Marxism-Leninism, of communism, have an equal say. We conduct this discussion in a democratic spirit! Incidentally, for today's event we have also invited critical persons to speak, as long as they are not fascists.

Over here, for example, we have the Free Democrats (FDP). If you have something constructive to say, then you are welcome also to express yourselves critically! However, when asked by us, the FDP refused this democratic discussion. So form your own opinion as to who is acting democratically in this debate. With the movement we are setting a marker which says there must be an end to the suppression of democratic discussion about socialism.

Today we witness the accelerated tendency towards a general societal crisis of the entire imperialist world system. Not just single laws or fields of politics are the subject of criticism. The entire foundation of society is called into question – most of all in the so-called showpiece democracy of the USA. We have to do today with the biggest world economic and financial crisis which capitalism has ever spawned. This capitalist crisis has already sent hundreds of millions of people – in the USA more than 40 million – into unemployment. This is often combined with poverty, and hunger crises such as we have never seen before threaten in the entire world. Yet at the same time, social wealth has grown immensely.

Since 2014 the equity capital of the 500 biggest corporations has increased from 11 trillion US dollars to almost 18 trillion dollars – 18 trillion dollars in the hands of the 500 biggest corporations, while the poorer half of humanity owns only two trillion dollars.

We witness a global health crisis which, officially, already has cost the lives of half a million people – the estimated number of unreported cases is many times higher. The warnings of the World Health Organization about such a pandemic were ignored by almost all the world's governments. In this respect they bear a certain responsibility for what is happening here.

The refugee crisis, with more than 20,000 deaths in the Mediterranean Sea since 2014¹, is intensifying.

The global environmental crisis threatens to call the entire natural foundations of life into question. The crisis of the bourgeois state and family system also is intensifying. This is all the result of capitalism, which now only exists in a crisis mode.

The fundamental contradiction of capitalism – that production is social while appropriation is private – is carried more and more to extremes. This contradiction is aggravating into a dangerous and intensified pursuit of maximum profits and spheres of power and influence for the tiny stratum of solely ruling international finance capital.

This is accompanied by the greatest danger of war since the Second World War and the questioning of all present foundations of life. The general societal crisis cries out for general societal change!

The answer to this crisis is genuine socialism! When we say this, then we must deal with the experience which humankind has gathered to date with the construction of socialism.

1

For this, Lenin's merits are immortal! In the middle of the First World War he analyzed and qualified dying, parasitic capitalism as the eve of the socialist revolution. He was the brilliant leader and organizer of the October Revolution in Russia and of the construction of the world's first socialist country. He proved that it is possible to overthrow capitalism.

Today this is presented as being beyond human imagination – but Lenin showed it is possible. Socialism can be achieved and built up through struggle, and capitalism is not the end of history.

In a complicated situation Lenin dared to call for the overthrow of the government in order to build socialism and to safeguard the successes of the democratic revolution against brutal tsarist rule and the counterrevolution.

Lenin's accurate analyses, farsighted forecasts, and the sure hand which he showed in issues of tactics stem from his theoretical work and his ability to apply the dialectical method at the highest level. This means analyzing the situation creatively, again and again, and further developing the analyses and assessments.

I would like to say a few things about Lenin's life:

Lenin was highly educated; he was a lawyer, and maintained a lively and critical exchange with artists and writers of his day and with bourgeois journalists and scientists all over the world. At the same time it was particularly important to him to merge with the life and struggle of the workers and small peasants, whose interests always guided his actions. After the October Revolution he lived in a two-room apartment. I would like to quote Clara Zetkin, a renowned German women's rights activist and communist, who reported after paying a visit to Lenin:

“But his private dwelling was of the utmost simplicity and unpretentiousness. ...

It was well known that the peasants provided ‘their Ilyitch’ with gifts of white flour, bacon, eggs, fruit, etc.; but it was also well known that nothing remained in Lenin's household. Everything found its way to the hospitals and children's homes; Lenin's family held strictly to the principle of not living better than the others....”

So Lenin was revolutionary in his thinking, feeling and acting – one can often tell this especially from the way a person lives. He was not one to make lonely decisions.

We were asked whether the erection of this statue is not a cult of personality. No, because we are honoring a person who was a real team worker, who set great store by consulting with other people. Everyone who worked together with him reported that Lenin always consulted with people who were knowledgeable in a specific subject area, be they scientist, soldier, peasant or worker. Everyone qualified to say something about his or her special subject was involved by Lenin in the joint work.

Lenin was a new type of statesman, as brilliant as he was modest. Lenin was unrelenting towards bureaucrats with party membership books who only looked after their own interests. At the end of his life he foresaw that a change in the mode of thinking of leading functionaries in party, enterprises, and administration can give rise to a restoration of capitalism, that is, the betrayal of socialism. For this reason he created an independent controlling body. He said that the Central Committee, too, had to be independently controlled from above. This is one reason why the betrayal of socialism was prevented under Lenin's leadership. Later, however, it became sad reality.

Lenin devoted his entire life to the struggle for the liberation of the oppressed. Lenin also stands for the achievements enforced directly following the October Revolution in 1917: With one of the first decrees the expropriation of big landowners without compensation and the distribution of the land among the poor peasants were ordered and promptly carried out. The feudal estates and the nobility were abolished and their property confiscated. In capitalist Germany today there is a huge discussion about the introduction of something as simple as a wealth tax. Although it would not really hurt those in power, even that is too much for them!

The rights of the national minorities, including even the right to break away to form a state of their own, were proclaimed. The soviet system and the organs of workers' control were organized – beginning from the factories and extending to all levels and organs of the state.

The eight-hour day was immediately introduced in all factories by law. Can you imagine? Today workers again must work 12-hour shifts; in hospitals there is partly 24-hour standby duty.

This shows how capitalism has gone backwards compared with the situation in the socialist Soviet Union more than 100 years ago. Men and women, legitimate and illegitimate children were given equal rights under law. Usury was prohibited, banks and factories socialized, health insurance was introduced, and so forth. At a time in which capital punishment was practiced everywhere, Lenin abolished it for Russia, making it one of the first countries to do so. What was regarded as impossible for centuries suddenly became possible! Why?

Because the paradigms of society had changed. When different paradigms prevail in society and maximum profit is not the central concern, then it is possible to change things and to put the interests of the working class and the broad masses first.

Therefore, we are for a socialist society, for overcoming this capitalist social system through revolution.

One of the most important decrees still is missing in this enumeration. It was even the first decree following the October Revolution: the decree on peace negotiations, on an immediate end to the First World War. The decree on an immediate armistice offered the main imperialist powers an immediate peace. In March 1918 peace was concluded despite large losses of territory. Lenin said: it is of paramount importance that we have peace, even if we have to sacrifice some territory.

But today they can't manage that either, when we look to Syria, where every imperialist fights for every meter of ground. Peace policy, too, is uniquely represented by socialism.

So there are many achievements, but perhaps some of you now think: "Well, you can't present this all in such a positive light – isn't it a simplification?" Or: "You can take a different view of this." So let us see what different view one can take of this and what accusations were raised against Lenin:

Shortly after the October Revolution, from March 1918, fourteen capitalist and imperialist countries launched a military attack on the liberated country under aggressive anti-Leninist slogans. Up to then they had warred among themselves, but suddenly they were united against socialism. In Germany, too, forces were mobilized. The later fascist Brigade Erhard participated in the invasion of socialist Russia. But when the Russian workers and peasants followed the call of Lenin, who said "we must defend our land and will not give up our gains" – these reactionaries, invaders of the country, of all people cried: "Lenin, a mass murderer!"

Some people believe that the slogan “Lenin, a mass murderer!” comes from the CDU or SPD, seeing as they spread this slogan in a big way particularly here in Gelsenkirchen. But do you know what the real source is? It was Adolf Hitler personally! He spread this lie, “Lenin is a mass murderer!” as early as in 1920 in his speeches!²

With this battle cry, the victims of the war that took place – an imperialist invasion – are simply attributed to Lenin and the revolutionaries, who were fully justified in defending themselves. Is it not shameful for SPD and CDU that they have taken up the same battle cry today?

We sharply condemn this reactionary historiography!

It is interesting what coalitions are formed even today where anticommunism is concerned. All newspapers currently are carrying a quote from a joint statement of SPD, CDU, AfD, FDP and Greens made in the district assembly Gelsenkirchen-West: “The communist leader Lenin stands for violence, oppression, terror, and horrible human suffering.” A bourgeois coalition, inclusive of AfD. Shortly before this, upon the election of Kemmerich as Minister-President in Thuringia, there was a huge scandal when he was elected with the votes of AfD. But where anticommunism is concerned there is complete agreement with the AfD. We criticize this Grand Coalition of anticommunism!

However, the bourgeois public has already become used to the atrocity stories spread about socialism. Anticommunism’s effect in Germany is chiefly attributable to its adaptability and the fact that any broad democratic discussion of its assertions and method is made impossible. Have you ever seen anyone from the MLPD in talk shows? I sometimes think our Economics Minister, Altmaier, must be able to be in three places at once. I get the feeling he is in three talk shows every evening. It’s always the same people there, but the MLPD gets no chance to speak. That is not a democratic debate – and this is how anticommunism is spread.

Modern anticommunism seemingly embraces democratic values. And then tries to make it look as if these values are best realized in capitalism, whereas socialism means only crime and inequality. Modern anticommunism even objects to being called anticommunist. No, they say, everyone can say whatever they want, of course; they just want nothing to do with the MLPD, which they term “Stalinists” and “Maoists”. When people hear these fighting terms, everyone who consider themselves to be solid citizens are supposed to wince. With that the issue supposedly is settled. That is their logic.

To make it clear: I am neither a Stalinist nor a Maoist – the same goes for the entire MLPD. But we defend the achievements of socialism – and also the representatives of socialism, Marx, Engels, Lenin, Stalin and Mao. How simple it is today to wag the finger at those who made the greatest sacrifices for this – and certainly could not avoid all mistakes! What would the world be like today if under the leadership of these people, in hard struggles, tsars and other feudal rulers were not overthrown, wars not ended, Hitlerite fascism not defeated? None of us could voice our opinions today if these battles had not been fought.

Doubtless – and this critical and self-critical position also is characteristic of the MLPD – these leading personalities, too, were not free of faults or errors. It would be absurd to claim that. Doubtless, during the time of Stalin and Mao Zedong, against their will crimes also were

²

committed in the name of socialism. In order to achieve socialism again, we have the greatest interest in appraising this. We even have installed a Historical Commission to make an exact investigation of all this – however, we do this with the goal of regaining socialism, and not extending the life of capitalism and reviling all alternatives.

However, our government politicians and the monopolies, who spread the anticommunist slander through their channels, in reality are not disturbed by mistakes made at the time of Lenin, Stalin or Mao. If our government and German corporations were disturbed by mistakes and crimes, their close cooperation with the regimes in Iran, Saudi Arabia, Turkey, Libya or also with Mr. Trump in the USA hardly would be imaginable.

How can they support an EU policy that costs the lives of tens of thousands of people in the Mediterranean Sea? Is this not a crime? They are not disturbed by these crimes. The communists, however, are made responsible for every victim of contemporary history. We will not be party to this kind of historiography. These slanders must be firmly opposed.

Of course, one can take it easy with the truth, seemingly set in stone, about socialism and capitalism as the “end of history”. But does this really give answers to the issues of our time, for instance why the countless promises of solutions to humanity’s problems are not kept in capitalism? Why capitalism gives birth to ever new crises, which are nothing other than symbols of its unfitness? These questions cannot be answered with preconceived anticommunist patterns! For the Nobel laureate in Literature Thomas Mann, anticommunism quite rightly was “one of the greatest follies of our epoch.” Anticommunism clouds the view at a time when it is so urgently necessary to see clearly!

Just as there can be no socialism without overcoming capitalism through revolution, there can be no socialist consciousness without overcoming anticommunist ideology. And precisely for this reason, the movement “Don’t give anticommunism a chance” is an immediate imperative.

The time is riper than ever to win over the workers and the masses worldwide for a new upsurge of the struggle for socialism.

Dear guests,

Perhaps you think the whole thing should be viewed a little more neutrally, a little less “ideologically”? That was how in February of this year the Gelsenkirchen building authorities justified the banning of the statue in front of the protected façade of the Horster Mitte: in all seriousness they said that the monument which you see here, still veiled, covers up the façade of the entire building.

Let me quote the building authorities themselves: “The value of the monument as an administrative building [i.e. the Horster Mitte] is massively impaired by the statue because the political statement which it obviously involves stands in contradiction to the political neutrality of a public administration building.”

First of all, Horster Mitte has not been an administrative building for decades, though it is a new-type services center serving the interests of the population of Gelsenkirchen. And it most certainly has never been politically neutral. The Horster Mitte is a center for diverse struggles of the miners, of internationalism, of refugee aid, of the rebellious youth, or also of the struggle against the closure of St. Josef Hospital, right around the corner from here. All these struggles were fought out here, planned here, and we are proud of this politically rarely neutral Horster

Mitte, in front of which the Lenin monument now is being unveiled. The Horster Mitte is also a center for progressive cultural events. The call for “neutrality” and “freedom from ideology” is merely the call to prostrate oneself to bourgeois ideology and so recognize the existing societal relations. SPD and CDU claimed that all Horst was against Lenin. However, in contrast to these bourgeois parties it is our daily business to hold hundreds of conversations, from door to door, at the weekly market, in enterprises and trade unions and on shopping streets, to discuss matters with people and find out their positions, and so we were able to gain our own impressions.

From the beginning we met with clear sympathy! As usual, the people of Horst like to argue, of course, and there were polarized discussions. However, dear SPD and CDU, we can also say this – the more you attacked Lenin, the more sympathetic he became to the people of Horst, because they said: If these parties attack Lenin, then there must be something good about the man.

Many took this occasion to inform themselves. Anticommunism increasingly lost effect in this discussion! Something has changed in people’s heads. That is exactly what we want: that the Lenin monument becomes real food for thought!

But the newcomer in the CDU, Sascha Kurth, was not to be deterred and started an online petition against the Lenin statue. Several weeks later, however, the petition had reached no more than eight percent of its signature target. Countrywide, instead of the hoped-for 2,200 signees, only 204 persons had signed, among them 165 from Gelsenkirchen and from Horst only 69. Apparently Mr. Kurth was unable to convince either the masses or his own party! To vindicate himself he said: corona was at fault. But everybody knows that during the corona period the Internet was used more than ever before. But simply not for a petition against Lenin – that is Mr. Kurth’s problem.

The calls of the City spokesman Schulmann to prevent the statue through creative activities were taken seriously only by fascists. They tried to defile the poster walls with stickers. We prevented this with the help of passers-by. We would like to call on them and you to protect the Lenin monument, to be vigilant, to let us know if someone tries to damage this statue, and thus ensure that it can continue to stand here.

We strongly protest against the scandalous approval by the Gelsenkirchen police of two fascist demonstrations which enable the Nazis to make the most of their role as shock troops against communism. When the fascists march, the counterdemonstrations of the antifascists regularly are removed to outlying districts. The fascists, on the other hand, can post themselves directly adjacent to our event. However, they could not mobilize many people for their action, even though the City had provided a setting for them with “#no place for Lenin.”

There the reactionary unity in anticommunism – here the progressive side – the lines are very clear today. But we will not let ourselves be provoked and will carry out our ceremony in an orderly manner.

Dear guests,

The postponement of this event due to corona enables us to hold the unveiling on the birthday of the MLPD, which was founded on 20 June 1982. Through today the MLPD embodies Marx’s and Lenin’s teachings for the present day. The MLPD is a revolutionary working-class party. In

the MLPD the workers really set the pace. That also goes for the leadership. I myself am a trained toolmaker. We are financially independent, finance ourselves with membership dues and donations from the population, and are reliant neither upon state party financing nor donations from corporations. That gives us the freedom to do and say what we think is right, and not to follow a “public opinion” prescribed by the dictatorship of the monopolies. Instead of squabbling in parliamentary groups, haggling over offices, and careerism, in the MLPD, based on democratic centralism, critical and lively discussion prevails, elections are held and decisions are made democratically, and then consistent and effective work and action are organized.

The MLPD plays a major role in many workers’ strikes and struggles; it supports struggles of the workers’, women’s and environmental movements, of antifascism and antimilitarism, and stands for a work in enterprises which no other party does anymore. I take this opportunity to inform you that this morning at ThyssenKrupp in Duisburg workers went on strike against layoffs there. Warm greetings to these workers!

Today mass layoffs are on the agenda everywhere, and these workers are sending out a signal with their independent strike. Best regards also to our factory group, which always is on the front line there. Much success in your struggle.

Our guiding principle is proletarian internationalism and international solidarity. In Germany we have become trailblazers of the struggle for democratic rights and freedoms against the rightward development of the Merkel-Seehofer government.

Our youth league *Rebell* organizes the rebellion of youth, most recently against the racist and anticommunist policies of Trump in the USA.

In the MLPD word and deed agree – sound theoretical investigative work, but also practical work with backbone. Not for nothing are we meanwhile the most embattled party in Germany.

Lenin’s words are famous: “Disunited, the workers are nothing. United, they are everything!” This remains highly valid to this day. Therefore, we invite you on this occasion to strengthen this party and its youth league.

Dear guests,

You will see that we have not chosen a high pedestal for Lenin. We do not want to emulate the Hercules statue, enthroned dozens of meters over Gelsenkirchen. We said we would take a small pedestal.

It befits Lenin that he meets the people of Horst, who pass by here every day on the way to work, to school or for shopping, on an equal footing. With Lenin we honor one of the men who have given their names to our party – but some people quickly noticed: Marx is missing! And since we always have an open ear for criticism, I can announce to you today that we have decided: Lenin will be followed by a statue of Karl Marx!

Thank you!