

NO MORE ROSTOCKS!
FOR A MILITANT WORKING-CLASS UNITED
FRONT
AGAINST THE FASCISTS

Action Program Presented by the
International Trotskyist Committee
September 1992

The Meaning of Rostock _____	1
How Have Things Reached This Point? _____	3
Why Have Antifascists Been Unable to Stop the Attacks? _____	6
Lessons of the 1930's _____	6
What Kind of United Front is Needed Now? _____	8
For Antifascist Defense Committees to Organize Workers' Defense Guards! _____	9
For an Orientation to the Working Class _____	10
The Political Struggle Against Fascism _____	12
For Action Committees to Wage the Antifascist Political Struggle _____	13
A Program of Action to Defeat the Fascists _____	13

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The Rostock events, what led up to them, and their aftermath have made clear that a new stage has been reached in the development of fascist activity in Germany. The fascists have now won a series of tactical victories, carrying out highly publicized, atrocious acts of violence against asylum-seekers and immigrant groups with relative impunity.

In Rostock the fascists wanted to show that they could make a German city theirs by focussing their national resources on a single target. The attacks on the Lichtenhagen hostel for asylum-seekers in Rostock and the events of the following days in the same city were the result of a national mobilization by fascist groups. These vicious crimes were accompanied by a further upsurge of fascist attacks in other East German towns and followed by the bombing attack on the Holocaust memorial in Berlin and the spreading of racist violence to the West.

All this means that an urgent challenge faces every progressive person and organization in Germany -- and, above all, the labor movement and the left: the challenge of defeating the new Nazis before they become strong enough to destroy us.

The fascists are gaining fundamentally because, despite the differences they have among themselves, they *share a strategy for exploiting the fundamental problems of German capitalism and bourgeois-democratic politics to build what is now a small, poorly organized current into a mass movement strong enough to take power and carry out its ruthless program.* Meanwhile the antifascist forces -- divided and either misled or disorganized -- have *no strategy aimed at defeating the fascists.*

This is what Rostock should make clear to every antifascist militant in Germany: we need a strategy to defeat the fascists *now.* We cannot afford to allow the fascists to exploit *our* weaknesses any longer. Whatever ups and downs the fascists will suffer over the next decade, they will continue, overall, to grow more and more powerful and dangerous *unless they are defeated by a mass movement with a militant and conscious strategy for crushing fascism.*

The Meaning of Rostock

While Rostock does not signal the emergence of a fascist mass movement, it does mark an important and terrible turning point in raising the level of confidence of the fascist thugs. Rostock also marks an important step forward in the capacity of the fascist leaders to carry out a strategy aimed at building a mass fascist movement in Germany over the course of the next decade. Such a fascist advance in Germany has already emboldened not only the German neo-Nazis but fascist forces in every country in the world.

Some antifascists in Germany continue to belittle the danger of the development of a mass fascist movement here, because today's fascist groups are small, most fascist and other racist activity appears to have been the work of unorganized individuals, and the fascist sects are themselves divided on basic questions. Such an attitude involves a refusal to learn from history. Today's little Hitlers have the real Hitler to learn from, and they are applying to today's conditions the methods that brought Hitler's fascists from the fringe of political life to the height of political power.

For some two years the fascist gangs have been on the rampage, beating, burning, and murdering -- a constant threat to immigrant workers, asylum-seekers and refugees, Turkish people, Jews, lesbians and gay men, and anyone perceived as an activist for any progressive cause or a supporter of the left. The fascists have revived the anti-Semitism of the Nazis. Fascist and other far-right parties have been able to register significant electoral gains.

This short-range growth of fascism, in the East and in the West, has been provoked by the collapse of Stalinist rule in the former German Democratic Republic (*Deutsche Demokratische Republik*: DDR) and by the

impact of recession and the economic and political costs of capitalist reunification. The economic hardships that capitalist reunification has intensified in the East, including massive unemployment, and growing economic fears in the West are the starting point for this rise of fascism. This condition has been combined with mass political cynicism and demoralization over the prospects and viability of socialist solutions to Germany's fundamental problems, in the face of the economic failure and political brutality of East German Stalinism and the collapse of Stalinism in the Soviet Union and throughout Eastern Europe.

But this is not merely a question of a temporary crisis. The capitalists and their politicians have no effective solutions to the fundamental problems the German economy and society now face. The basic conditions for the growth of fascism must therefore continue as long as German capitalism survives without solving a set of problems that are, in reality, intrinsic to the whole process of development of postwar German capitalism itself.

Fundamental solutions to these problems can come only from the anti-Stalinist left -- from forces committed to the socialist transformation of society on the basis of the initiative and the democratic rule of the working class with the support of all the other oppressed victims of capitalism, not the maneuvers, lies, and repression of a corrupt bureaucracy.

There is no point in complaining that the fascists have a strategy that is beginning to work. One can hardly profess shock that the fascists are fighting for fascism. The central problem we must solve now is the failure of the antifascist forces to prevent Rostock from happening. This failure is inseparable from the failure of the leaders of the labor movement and the left to project the socialist alternative to capitalism as anything other than Stalinist lies or an irrelevant utopia.

It is not enough for the antifascist forces to understand how bad the fascists are. We must understand how to beat them!

How Have Things Reached This Point?

Under the conditions of economic expansion, the West German ruling class has used "guestworkers" to fill unfilled jobs and as a source of cheaper labor since the 1950s. The German capitalists needed these immigrant workers badly and went to considerable lengths to attract them. But they also denied them equal rights, attempted to ghettoize them, and exploited divisions between German and immigrant workers.

In theory "guestworkers" were in Germany only temporarily, to be sent away when economic conditions no longer required their labor. But inevitably in practice many of these "guestworkers" became fully integrated into the German economy, including in basic industry, but integrated primarily into the lowest-paying and worst conditions in each economic sector they were brought into. By the 1970s many thousands of such workers had become in all but official terms permanent parts of German society. By now hundreds of thousands have learned the German language, raised families here, and developed traditions shaped both by their homelands and by German culture. Some have set up small businesses, and many have now spent all or most of their lives in Germany.

It was, of course, the intention of the German capitalists to use the fact that most of these workers came from countries much poorer than Germany to limit and undercut German workers' gains in pay. As long as German capitalism was expanding substantially, however, demand for both native-German and immigrant workers remained high enough and the labor movement strong enough to mitigate these intentions and provide modest but real gains in the standard of living of both groups of workers.

During this period the labor movement, led by the left, should have used its relative strength for a fight to win equal legal, political, and economic conditions for the "guestworkers." Only a militant struggle for these objectives by the German labor movement and left could have protected native-German workers' jobs and incomes while overcoming an increasingly important division in what was, in reality, the single German working class. Through the time of economic expansion, the failure of the German labor movement and left to prioritize such a struggle was to the advantage of the capitalists and the disadvantage of the working class as a whole. Now that long-standing failure is to the advantage of the fascists and the disadvantage of everything democratic, progressive, and humane in German society.

Now the conditions of the German capitalist economy have changed. Like the world capitalist economy as a whole, German capitalism is stagnating. German capital's need for immigrant labor has been replaced by the priority of providing native-German workers jobs, in particular in the economically devastated East. Further, the capitalists hope that the East German workforce itself can now play the role once played by the immigrants in undercutting the wage rates of West German workers. Thus the government's commitment to the presence and

security of immigrants diminishes, while the resentment of many economically vulnerable native Germans grows. This is especially the case in the East, where unemployment has soared since reunification and where the DDR bureaucracy's own use of "guestworkers" to fill labor shortages in better times paralleled that of the capitalists in the West, albeit on a smaller scale and with less exploitation of tensions between native-German and immigrant workers.

The situation of asylum-seekers and refugees is similarly no accident of history but intrinsic to the development of postwar German capitalism. Like other imperialists, the West German imperialists, to further their anticommunist program internationally and assert their right to dominate and exploit poorer countries, in particular in their own region, had to present West Germany as a "democratic" place of refuge for people fleeing repressive Stalinist or neocolonial regimes. The long-range aim of capitalist reunification made this an especially important policy with regard to East Germany. The breakdown of the Stalinist regime in the DDR and the collapse of Stalinist regimes throughout Eastern Europe made this policy especially useful to the aspirations of German imperialism, eager to advance its economic and political hegemony in the region.

The political aspirations of German imperialism are, however, at odds with the capacity of German capitalism to provide a place in the German economy for the asylum-seekers. In any event the main aim of the policy of encouraging political refugees to seek asylum in West Germany was never really to offer a "democratic" refuge to millions of victims of repression. Its central aim was to support an attack on collectivized economies and to promote the power of German capital, in particular in Eastern and Southern Europe. With its immediate tactical objectives achieved and its own economy more and more troubled, German imperialism's interest in providing a "democratic refuge" has diminished rapidly.

The German capitalists and politicians invited these people, often impoverished and the victims of political repression as well as economic hardship, to uproot themselves and join the feast of German democracy. Now these same "democrats," with unabashed hypocrisy, are entirely preoccupied with finding the most efficient way to chase the hungerers for democracy away from the table once and for all.

Once again, the response of the organized labor movement and left should be to make the cause of the asylum-seekers its own. The German capitalists invited them and should pay the costs of maintaining them until they can be fully integrated into the German economy. All those who wish to become German citizens should be allowed to do so, without restrictions and without delay, and all should be afforded equal rights and conditions with native Germans. For the German trade unions and left to take up the cause of the asylum-seekers with native Germans. For the German trade unions and left to take up the cause of the asylum-seekers would attack head-on the fascists' efforts to make the asylum-seekers scapegoats for the problems of German capitalism and would link the asylum-seekers and their families and friends in their homelands to the *genuinely* democratic traditions of the German working class and German socialism.

The failure of the German trade union leaders and left to wage a determined struggle for the rights of immigrant workers and asylum-seekers has inevitably set up the fascists to build a movement based on scapegoating and attacking them. In a context of growing tensions between West and East Germans, the fascist groups have adopted a policy of "uniting Germans" on the basis of hatred of "non-German" workers, small business people, and asylum-seekers. With this policy they have been able to project themselves as champions of a revitalized united Germany and defenders of the interests of economically vulnerable people in both the East and the West (without necessarily denying themselves the option of playing on resentments between West and East Germans in the future).

On this basis they have been able to appeal with growing success, in particular in the economically savaged East, to bankrupt or threatened small business people and other elements of the lower middle class, to unemployed and underemployed workers disillusioned with socialism, and to sectors of alienated semilumpenized youth. From these elements they have drawn the initial forces to create localized reigns of terror in Rostock and other places throughout Germany. From the most determined of these forces they expect to create the cadres to build their mass movement over the next decade.

The right-center coalition government has dealt with the economic problems now presented by immigrant workers and asylum-seekers with its own forms of racist attacks. It is attempting to close borders ever more firmly and taking a tougher and tougher line with asylum-seekers, only a tiny minority of whom have any chance of actually receiving legal refugee status. These policies of governmental racism and cruelty are shared by the Christian Democrats (CDU), the Christian Social Union (CSU), and the Free Democrats (FDP), who thereby place the German government itself in the position of doing the initial work of indoctrination for the fascists, treating immigrants and asylum-seekers as "alien" elements to be scapegoated for the problems of German capitalism.

Every step the government takes against immigrants and asylum-seekers merely emboldens the fascists. Not only do the neo-Nazis gain sanction from the "democratic" racism of the mainstream conservative and "liberal" parties. They can claim each new step in attacking the rights of immigrants and asylum-seekers as a response to their pressure, as a partial step in the direction of their program which only makes clearer the need for the implementation of the *whole* fascist program of genocidal attacks and expulsions by forces "consistent" enough to carry it out to the last pitiless detail.

In effect, the hope of the governing coalition has been that providing a "little bit" of fascism would prevent the real fascists from growing stronger. In the past this policy might have convinced people drawn toward the fascist program that they could get enough reaction and racism from the traditional parties without consorting with "extremists." But the growing impasse of the German economy and politics makes this policy dangerous now. It is a policy much more likely to feed more and more people to the fascists -- as the only force ruthless enough to be "consistent German nationalists" -- than it is to win away the fascists' base with the conciliation of "respectable" racism and "moderate" brutality.

Instead of taking up the cause of the victimized immigrants and asylum-seekers in a serious way, the leaders of the Social Democratic Party of Germany (*Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands*: SPD) have sought to avoid confronting the racism and chauvinism in German society, effectively tailing the government's policies "from the left." As the fascists mobilized for Rostock, the SPD dropped its prior opposition to the government's planned changes to the constitutional right of asylum. Their ideological allies in the bureaucracy of the German Trade Union Federation (*Deutsches Gewerkschaftsbund*: DGB) have stood by passively, refusing to organize union members systematically against the fascists. The trade union leaders in Rostock organized only small protest demonstrations carefully designed to avoid any confrontation with the fascists.

All this is compounded by the reluctance of the SPD and the trade union leaders to lead large-scale, militant resistance to layoffs and other attacks on workers' living standards, especially in the East. The militance of the public workers' strike last spring and the strong solidarity with that strike expressed by other workers showed the willingness to struggle of millions of German workers. But the bureaucrats' conservative traditions of conciliation and sellout still block the level of struggle by the organized labor movement that would be necessary to prevent real wage cuts and growing unemployment as the capitalists face more and more problems in maintaining high levels of profitability.

Increasingly in the East the role of the SPD in the West is being assumed by the former Stalinists now organized in the Party for Democratic Socialism (*Partei für demokratischen Sozialismus*: PDS). Because of its renunciation of Stalinist bureaucratic repression and the development of a real process of internal ferment including some left-wing currents, some workers in the East have come to hope the PDS could produce a new birth of socialism on democratic premises. Despite the socialist convictions of its membership and the involvement of many rank-and-file PDS supporters in militant struggles in the East, the PDS does not present itself as a party fighting today for workers' democracy or socialism.

Rather, the PDS is attempting to present itself as the party of East German regionalism, as East German resentment of the East's second-class status and continuing economic crisis more and more discredits the West German parties in the East. Even as a party of East German regionalism, the PDS has not fought for a policy of working-class political independence and struggle. Instead the PDS is seeking conciliatory alliances with East German procapitalist forces in a popular front that would inevitably be committed to continuing the privatization and resulting decimation of the East German economy, but "with a human face."

The PDS is making clear that the most important legacy of East German Stalinism is not the regime of bureaucratic repression but the conservatism, opportunism, and maneuverism of the Stalinist bureaucracy. For the problem of the Stalinist bureaucracy of the DDR was not only its repressiveness. Unable to rely on the democratic initiative of the East German workers, the DDR's Stalinist bureaucrats had essentially the same mentality as the top bureaucrats of the SPD and the DGB, minus the hypocrisy of some of the "democratic" rhetoric, but with the difference that these were "reformist" bureaucrats whom history had inconsiderately thrust into state power and forced to carry out some of their socialist program.

True to this political heritage, the PDS is also trying to draw workers in the East away from any mass militant fight against the fascist menace, limiting their response to support for the sort of passive demonstrations favored by the SPD and DGB leaders. Thus their "antifascist" policy is compatible with the PDS's general reluctance to organize or even participate in militant resistance to capitalist attacks on the working class in the former DDR, where they prefer instead the method of conciliatory alliances with bourgeois politicians "in defense of the East German people."

These are the conditions that led to Rostock and its aftermath. The question is not whether the capitalists wish to turn to fascism now. Undoubtedly, as a class, presently they do not. Overwhelmingly they prefer the mainstream parliamentary conservative parties. But the system they are committed to and the crisis and instability it faces must produce fascism in the current period. An appeal to the moral sensibilities of the bourgeoisie -- the underlying logic of the antifascist policies of the SPD, the trade union leaders, and the PDS -- is therefore a wasted effort. Only the independent, militant struggle of the mass of the German workers and oppressed can defeat the fascists once and for all.

The central question facing the antifascist movement is the strategy for building this militant and independent antifascist mass mobilization. But the main forms of antifascist action so far have avoided precisely this central question.

Why Have Antifascists Been Unable to Stop the Attacks?

In the past two years we have seen two main forms of antifascist struggle: peaceful protest demonstrations and sporadic battles in the streets. On the one hand, sections of the left and the trade union bureaucracy have called peaceful demonstrations, usually in response to particular fascist outrages. On the other hand, youth, initially identifying with the autonomist movement, have fought sporadic battles in the streets with gangs of fascists. These two forms of struggle have mirrored each other.

The peaceful demonstrations have been designed to avoid any confrontation with the fascists. After the speeches, everyone goes home, and the fascists, soundly denounced, remain undefeated. The implicit program of these demonstrations is an appeal to the German state to solve the problem of fascism.

The street-fighting youth have shown real courage in confronting groups of fascists and often delivering them real military defeats. These tactics represent an important step beyond passive demonstrations in fighting the fascists, but they, too, have been too limited, isolated, and sporadic. The individualistic and spontaneist tendencies of the autonomist movement have meant that no effective organization has been built on the basis of these confrontations to provide continuity to the antifascist struggle and to coordinate and spread actions across the country. Nor do these sporadic confrontations lead to any political struggle against the prejudices the fascists play on or to any struggle for progressive solutions to the economic, political, and social problems that actually produce fascism.

In the end, despite its militance and courage, the autonomist movement's forms of antifascist struggle have the same basic problems as the tactics of peaceful protest demonstrations. Once over, each event simply leaves the fascists free to carry on with building their movement. Further, the autonomist movement's tendency to disdain the organized labor movement and its sustained lack of links with organizations of the working class, immigrant and refugee groups, or other groups of the oppressed have made clear that the "autonomists" are both unwilling and unable to build the mass movement needed to smash the fascists.

Implicitly both the "peaceful demonstration" and the "autonomist street-fighting" methods of struggle treat any *decisive* defeat of fascism as unnecessary or leave it to the German bourgeois state. And while some trade union leaders have helped build the demonstrations and many trade unionists and other working-class people have been involved in both demonstrations and street battles with fascists, neither method of struggle focuses on the most important task: the mobilization of the organized labor movement to crush the fascists.

Lessons of the 1930s

In order to defeat the fascists decisively, we need a *method of struggle aimed at defeating them*, not just protesting their crimes or beating them in occasional, sporadic confrontations. In fact, Leon Trotsky argued for just such a method in the early 1930s in the period when Hitler's Nazis were pursuing the policies that led to the Nazis' taking power in the first months of 1933. Although there are obvious differences between the situation in the early 1930s and our situation now, it is still this method we must return to if we are to defeat the fascists now.

In the early 1930s Trotskyists in Germany called for a workers' united front, demanding that the Communist Party and the Social Democratic workers unite in action to smash the Nazis. The Stalinist Communist Party (*Kommunistische Partei Deutschlands*: KPD) refused to fight for a united front with the SPD, declaring social democracy to be "social fascism," the twin of Nazism. The SPD's passive legalism relied on parliament and the state to stop Hitler, because the Social Democrats were more frightened by the danger of a working-class revolution than

they were of the Nazis. The division in the workers' movement caused by these two fundamentally wrong policies allowed the Nazis to come to power. We must learn the lessons of those mistakes today.

Over against both Stalinist sectarianism and reformist opportunism, until the moment of Hitler's victory, Trotsky argued urgently over and over for a workers' united front to defeat the Nazis.

Election agreements, parliamentary compromises concluded between the revolutionary party and Social Democracy serve, as a rule, to the advantage of the Social Democracy. Practical agreements for mass action, for purposes of struggle, are always useful to the revolutionary party....

No common platform with the Social Democracy, or with the leaders of the German trade unions, no common publications, banners, placards! March separately, but strike together! Agree only how to strike, whom to strike, and when to strike! Such an agreement can be concluded with the devil himself, with his grandmother, and even with [SPD leaders] Noske [responsible for the deaths of Luxemburg and Liebknecht] and [Berlin police chief] Grzesinsky. On one condition, not to tie one's hands.

It is necessary, without any delay, finally to elaborate a practical system of measures -- not with the aim of merely "exposing" the Social Democracy (before the Communists), but with the aim of actual struggle against fascism. The question of factory-defense organizations, of unhampered activity on the part of the factory councils, the inviolability of the workers' organizations and institutions, the question of arsenals that may be seized by the fascists, the question of measures in the case of an emergency, that is, of the coordination of the actions of the Communist and the Social Democratic divisions in the struggle, etc., etc., must be dealt with in this program....

... The program of action must be strictly practical, strictly objective, to the point, without any of those artificial "claims," without any reservations, so that every average Social Democratic worker can say to himself: what the Communists propose is completely indispensable for the struggle against fascism. On this basis, we must pull the Social Democratic workers along with us by our example, and criticize their leaders who will inevitably serve as a check and a brake. Only in this way is victory possible. (Trotsky, "For a Workers' United Front against Fascism," 8 December 1931)

Obviously the situation today differs in a number of important respects from the situation in the early 1930s.

On the one hand, the neo-Nazis and other fascists do not -- so far -- represent a mass force with the immediate possibility of taking power. The mass of the German people continue to despise them. The economic crisis of Germany and the world is not -- yet -- as deep as then, and German imperialism, embattled after defeat in World War I, remains the strongest economic power in Europe.

On the other hand, the left is much weaker now than in the early 1930s. There is no mass party calling for workers' revolution. And the Social Democracy is more conservative and more craven, the trade union bureaucracy richer and more corrupt and much more deeply opposed to militant class-struggle policies.

But we must not deceive ourselves. The new generation of would-be Hitlers does not expect to take power in two years. Their tactics now are aimed at laying the basis for the creation of a larger, *mass* movement in the future. Hitler, too, after all, was once dismissed as the crazy leader of a fringe sect. Today's fascists expect to be able to build a mass movement over the next decade that can take power by exploiting a growing crisis of German imperialism, the weakness and confusion of the left and the labor movement, the refusal of trade union and socialist leaderships to mount effective antifascist struggle, and the naivete or despair of millions of progressive people. Such a movement in power would not merely repeat Hitler's crimes. It would do far worse.

Therefore *now* is the time to build the struggles to defeat the fascists, while, terrible as they are, they are still relatively small. *Now* is the time to recognize the real danger of fascism and build the united front that can prevent the fascists from realizing their strategy. Today's sectarians still see reformist politicians and trade union bureaucrats as such a danger that they cannot build common action with them against the fascists. Today's reformists still see revolutionaries as more dangerous than the fascists. Both are doomed to repeat the bloody mistakes of the 1930s unless they change course or others build the united front they fear.

What Kind of United Front is Needed Now?

It is necessary *now*, while the fascists are still relatively small, to deal them a decisive defeat, in order to keep them from building the mass movement that would be much harder to defeat. Naturally, we need a form of united front designed for *these* conditions.

On the one hand, we want to involve as many forces as possible in militant action against the fascists. On the other hand, we have to recognize that the struggle required to achieve the decisive defeat of the fascists has a number of different aspects (mass demonstrations, militant confrontation, national coordination of antifascist actions, political struggle against bigotry and chauvinism, political struggle for *socialist* solutions to the economic and social problems the fascists exploit) and that some forces will be prepared now to support some of these forms of struggle but not others.

We must build united fronts that unite all the forces that can be united at each of the necessary levels of an effective struggle to defeat the fascists decisively. We must be extremely flexible tactically at the same time as we are absolutely firm in arguing for our entire political perspective for defeating fascism. We must be prepared to build united fronts at each of the levels of struggle needed and to build united fronts within united fronts and alongside united fronts. The weakness and fragmentation of the left makes it especially important to draw into militant antifascist struggle all the forces prepared to fight for any element of an effective antifascist strategy. Revolutionary socialists must fight consistently for our entire strategy to defeat the fascists, but we must not present the more politically advanced elements of this strategy as obstacles to uniting all the forces that can be united at any level of militant antifascist struggle.

Similarly, while recognizing the need for a national militant antifascist organization to counter the national basis and growing national coordination of fascist activity, we must fight also to build militant local antifascist united fronts, even where such local groups are initially reluctant to be part of a national organization. We must organize both at local and national levels, since local struggles are doomed to defeat if a national movement is not built and any national organization will be essentially a paper entity if it is not based on strong local organizations.

Finally, we must not turn Trotsky's method of active struggle to defeat the fascists into its opposite by presenting it as a policy of waiting passively for the Social Democrats and trade union leaders to decide to take up a policy of militant mass action independent of the German bourgeois state. At present the Social Democratic politicians and the trade union bureaucracy are deeply opposed to any policy of militant mass confrontation with the fascists or to building any form of mass movement whose methods reject reliance on the German state and its police and courts.

We are, of course, fully willing to build mass peaceful demonstrations in united fronts with the Social Democrats and trade union bureaucrats, while attempting to give these demonstrations a more militant character and insisting on raising our full political perspective for defeating the fascists in them (marching separately but striking together, as long as our hands are not tied). And we recognize that the decisive defeat of the fascists requires the mobilization of millions of people whom we cannot reach today whom the reformist politicians and trade union leaders *could* mobilize -- if only they were willing to do so!

But our response to this situation must not be passive, polite appeals to the reformist leaders to listen to the logic of our arguments. Only if we build militant antifascist struggles and united fronts *independently* of the current leaders of the mass working-class organizations now do we have any possibility of forcing them onto the road of independent mass struggle in the future. This means that our highest priority now must be to organize those people who are prepared to fight the fascists now independently of both the German bourgeois state and the reformist political and trade union leaders. Most of these people will be youth, and many will be youth coming from or inspired by the struggles of the autonomist movement. Revolutionaries in Germany today must orient toward these antifascist youth and win them to an effective strategy to defeat the fascists.

We must persuade these antifascist militants of the overall correctness of the tactics of direct confrontation and military defeat of groups of fascists -- wherever the balance of power favors the antifascist forces. But we must win them to understand the importance of both local and national origination, leadership, and coordination of the antifascist struggle. We must also attempt to persuade them of the importance of political struggle against bigotry and for socialist solutions to the fundamental problems of German society. But we must unite whoever can be united at any of the levels of a genuinely militant and effective fight to defeat the fascists decisively.

The smaller united fronts we can build now on the basis of the tactics of effective militant confrontation and struggle against the economic and political roots of fascism *are not counterposed* to the mass united fronts we must call on the SPD, the PDS, the trade union leaders, and other forces larger than ourselves to build. On the contrary! These smaller struggles are a *condition for success* in the struggle to break the leaderships of these larger forces from their refusal to build independent mass mobilizations or create new, militant leaderships to take their place.

Only if we are willing and able to organize the relatively small united fronts against the fascists that we can organize now do we have any chance of forcing the reformist leaders to mobilize the larger forces we cannot reach today. Only if we do what we can do today can we develop, over time, the capacity to reach larger and larger forces ourselves independently of the reformist leaders. The fascist sects are not paralyzed by a fear of starting small. Neither must we be.

The new Nazis have a strategy to win -- to start small now, become a larger force on the basis of the victories gained by their smaller numbers now, and build that larger force into a mass movement that can take political power and destroy everything progressive and humane in German society. They are carrying this strategy out with ruthless determination. We must have a strategy to counter them -- to *defeat* them -- once and for all. And we must carry this strategy out with all the determination we can command.

For Antifascist Defense Committees to Organize Workers' Defense Guards!

In the face of the Rostock events, defense against fascist attacks is an immediate and urgent question. For many people it is a life-or-death question.

It is clear we cannot rely on the state. We have seen how the police took no action to stop attacks in Eberswalde and other towns and allowed the assault on the Lichtenshagen hostel in Rostock. We have seen how "arrested" fascists are quickly released and how antifascists are kept in jail.

It is imperative to build mass demonstrations to protest both fascist attacks and police complicity. But it is already clear that protest demonstrations will not stop fascist violence. It is important to defeat fascist gangs in particular confrontations. But it is also already clear that spontaneous, sporadic street fighting will not be enough to bring an end to fascist attacks or defeat the longer-range fascist strategy. Both these approaches failed to prevent the Rostock events, and they will fail to prevent further fascist victories in the future.

We need a policy of building and training organized workers' defense guards, to defend all the people threatened with fascist violence. We need organized antifascist defense guards to protect the homes and shops and cultural and religious institutions under attack by the fascist', including hostels for asylum-seekers, immigrant workers' housing, synagogues and mosques, and threatened institutions of the women's movement, youth, and the lesbian/gay community. These antifascist defense guards would also have to mobilize the widest possible positive action -- including mass pickets, occupations, and strikes -- to prevent fascists from using marches, rallies, television and radio appearances, film showings, and electoral campaigns to build their bases.

These defense guards must be organized locally and nationally and built up into a movement that can move from effective defense against fascist attacks to driving the fascist gangs off the streets and into oblivion.

We must campaign in workplaces and threatened neighborhoods and communities for the building of organized defense guards by trade union bodies and shop stewards' committees, by women's and lesbian/gay organizations, by the organizations and communities of the oppressed, by antifascist students and youth.

We must call on trade union leaders, the antifascist activists of the SPD, PDS, and other political organizations based on the working class, and on the mass organizations and leaderships of oppressed groups targeted by the fascists to support the building of antifascist defense guards personally and materially. But we must not wait for the trade union leaders or reformist politicians to build the defense guards themselves.

Revolutionaries must take a leading role in organizing antifascist militants prepared to form defense guards now while continuing to campaign in mass organizations to join in the effort. We must not let the current mass leaderships' refusal to mount any effective antifascist struggle leave the fascists the vacuum they expect to fill. We must do what we can now ourselves, in alliance with every militant determined to defeat the fascists, while campaigning to draw in larger forces in the future.

Local antifascist defense guards must be linked together in a common national network. Such a national network must have sufficient national organization and leadership to present a coordinated national response to future Rostocks.

All this means that it is an urgent priority to establish antifascist defense committees, uniting all antifascist militants committed to building antifascist defense actions now. These antifascist defense committees need to begin at once to build antifascist defense guards themselves. And they also need to begin immediately to campaign for trade unions and mass organizations of the oppressed to participate in building and to provide support for antifascist defense guards.

These antifascist defense committees must be well organized, democratic bodies, which make decisions by majority vote at open meetings after fully democratic discussion and elect a fully accountable leadership to coordinate antifascist actions in between frequent open meetings of antifascist militants. Only organizations that are fully democratic yet also capable of swift, united, and decisive action whenever necessary to fight the fascists can conduct a winning struggle against fascist violence. Such organizations will have to develop and empower tactical leadership at particular confrontations with the fascists to direct dangerous and difficult actions with skill and flexibility.

These antifascist defense committees will have to conduct the democratic discussions and convene the national conferences necessary to build an effective national organization of antifascist fighters.

In this process, as well as in the process of building defense committees and defense guards at the local level, great care will have to be taken for the organizational character of the committees themselves, so that the democracy and leadership of the antifascist committees can sustain and develop the dynamic of militant mass struggle necessary to defeat the would-be successors of Hitler. Either the bureaucratism characteristic of today's trade union leaderships and the leaderships of many other mass organizations or the looseness and amateurishness characteristic of the autonomist movement will doom any antifascist movement to failure. The militants of the antifascist defense committees will have to fight hard against both these organizational trends in order to build effective defense committees and defense guards at both the local and the national level.

The argument that the current generation of fascists are not well organized and therefore need not be regarded as a grave danger has now been refuted once and for all by the Rostock events. Of course today's fascists are fragmented and still relatively small in number. But Rostock and its aftermath have made clear how dangerous today's splintered and even atomized fascists can be. And the victories of today's splintered and atomized fascists are laying the basis for tomorrow's higher level of fascist organization, coordination, and mobilization.

Building effective defense guards will not only require defeating fascist attacks and stopping the fascists from organizing. It will also require struggling to overcome the ethnic and other divisions the fascists exploit.

In the first place this means that antifascist defense guards must also be antiracist fighters. To win, any movement of antifascist fighters must be united and unequivocal in opposing all forms of racism, chauvinism, and social and sexual prejudice. The antifascist defense guards must defend all the oppressed threatened by reactionary violence, whether stemming from organized fascist groups or other bigots: asylum-seekers and immigrant workers -- including Turkish people, Romanians, Bulgarians, Poles, and other Eastern Europeans, Vietnamese and other Asians -- as well as gypsies, Jewish people, activists of the women's movement, people with AIDS, radical youth, and lesbians and gay men.

Only a national network of militant antifascist defense guards capable of a high level of national organization, coordination, and mobilization and united in the defense of all oppressed people, can counter and defeat an increasingly national and coordinated fascist movement. This is the most urgently needed form of militant united front against fascism. Revolutionary socialists must take the lead in building it *now*.

For an Orientation to the Working Class

A militant antifascist movement with the substantial support of working-class people in the East and West and the refugee and immigrant communities could deal the fascists a serious setback now, even without the direct involvement of the trade unions, the SPD, the PDS, or other mass organizations. This would be important, both because it would save thousands of people from persecution and save many from death and because it would postpone the further growth of a fascist movement and give antifascist forces time to learn the lessons of the struggle and grow.

However, because fascism is an endemic feature of capitalism itself, such a setback could only be temporary. Future developments in the cycles of capitalist economy and politics would only too soon breed new forms of fascist vermin to threaten new epidemics of hatred and violence. In reality, only the replacement of capitalist economy with a fundamentally more just and productive economic system and the replacement of the hypocrisy of bourgeois parliamentary democracy with the genuine democracy of a workers' government will eliminate fascism.

The truly decisive defeat of fascism will require the mobilization of the organized labor movement and mass organizations of the other groups of people in German society who are victimized by the fascists. Only the organized labor movement combines an historic interest in the defeat of the fascists with the social power to smash the fascists decisively and eliminate the possibility of their regrouping to rise again. Despite the tendency of the petty-bourgeois left in Germany to disdain the trade unions because of the conservatism of the trade union bureaucracy, the public workers' strike last spring and the widespread support that strike had among the German people made clear that German workers have the capacity to wage militant and effective struggles now and demonstrated the potential power of the organized labor movement to defeat the fascists and transform German society.

This means that antifascist fighters must orient now toward these mass organizations -- and, in particular, toward the trade union movement. Even if today the reformist trade union leaderships are able to block official involvement of trade union bodies in militant antifascist struggle, it is essential to fight in the trade unions for trade union involvement in order to reach many militant workers who will support militant antifascist action regardless of the position of the trade union bureaucracy.

Further, since the fascists are certain to rise again from any setback dealt them by an antifascist movement that does not involve the organized labor movement, it is imperative that we start now to lay the basis for a longer-run struggle in the unions to draw them into a militant struggle against the fascists, even if we cannot win that objective now. We must not counterpose building a mass-based militant antifascist movement now under conditions in which trade union involvement will be very difficult to achieve, to the building of a larger mass movement including the unions in the future. Our ability to build a working-class-based antifascist movement now that could deal an important setback to the fascists would be the single most important thing we can do to pressure the trade union bureaucracy and convince workers in the unions to bring the unions into the inevitable next phase of antifascist struggle.

Finally, an orientation to the working class and, in particular, to the trade union movement, is essential in determining the character of the antifascist struggle itself.

Fundamentally any antifascist movement can have only one of two orientations: reliance on the bourgeois state to suppress the fascists or mobilization of the working class to defeat and destroy the fascists. These are the only two forces in modern society with sufficient power to block the development of a fascist mass movement. In reality, the failure to orient to the working class in fighting fascism must, objectively, mean an orientation to the state of the capitalists. But for the capitalists and their state, fascism, distasteful though it may be to most of them in relatively peaceful times, is a political option they may need in times of crisis. They cannot risk the elimination of the option of fascism because, despite the anti-capitalist demagoguery of some of the fascist leaders, the fascists exist fundamentally to save the capitalist system in crisis from the threat of workers' power.

In other words, every important facet of the antifascist struggle will be defined by whether or not an antifascist movement orients, in the short term and in the long run, to the working class or to the claim of the bourgeois state to be the essential expression and the central defense of the democratic aspirations of the mass of people.

Orienting to the working class will require concrete steps such as campaigning in trade union bodies and among trade unionists for trade union participation in militant antifascist action, inviting trade union leaders and spokespersons to antifascist meetings, and seeking discussion of the antifascist struggle at trade union meetings. Even though it may be difficult now, there is no reason to be pessimistic about the long-range outcome of the struggle to draw the organized labor movement into militant antifascist struggle, since for the workers above all the question of fascism is a question of life or death.

The Political Struggle Against Fascism

To defeat fascism, concrete steps to build action must be accompanied by a political struggle to combat the reactionary ideologies fascism feeds on and to mobilize wide, united action by workers and the oppressed to address the fundamental economic and social problems that spawn the fascists.

- We must combine the struggle to smash fascism with political struggle against racism, anti-Semitism, and all forms of ethnic bigotry. We must build and support self-defense and labor-movement defense against racist and anti-Semitic attacks. We must oppose the racist myth that asylum-seekers and immigrants are the source of German workers' problems -- opposing all attacks on the right to asylum and fighting for the abolition of immigration controls, for open borders, and for full legal, political, employment, and residence rights for asylum-seekers and immigrants.

- We have to fight sexism, since the subordination of women to men is a central part of the fascist program. We must struggle for women's organizations to be part of the working-class united front against fascism and for women and men to play an equal role in building and leading antifascist defense guards and all other forms of antifascist organization. We must oppose the right wing's antiabortion superstition and demagogy, defending a woman's right to control over her own body and fighting for free abortion on demand throughout Germany.

- We have to fight anti-lesbian/gay and sexist bigotry at the same time, organizing united action to defend lesbians and gay men against attacks and demanding the abolition of all forms of discrimination.

- Many of the fascists' recent attacks have focussed on Romanians, Bulgarians, Poles, and other people from countries that have in the past and are once again today regarded by German imperialism as part of *its* sphere of influence. The fascists rely heavily on pro-imperialist chauvinism to spread their poison. It is impossible to defeat the fascists unless antifascist fighters wage an unyielding political struggle against German imperialism and chauvinism. This means opposing the appetites and aspirations of German imperialism in all their forms, whether the German imperialists are collaborating with their imperialist allies or asserting themselves against their imperialist rivals: *Germany out of NATO and the Western European Union. No German forces in the Balkans. Not a pfennig to rearm the German imperialist state.*

- A political campaign by antifascists to mobilize working-class action against the fascists will have to take up the economic and social questions which the fascists exploit. It is impossible to defeat fascism decisively unless we can undermine the conditions that create fascism by presenting and fighting for progressive, socialist solutions to the fundamental economic and social problems facing the German people.

- We must support the formation of organizations of the unemployed, at both the local and national levels, linked to and supported by the trade unions, to fight for the interests of the unemployed and to unite employed and unemployed workers in struggles for essential social services and jobs and against unemployment and attacks on wages and working conditions.

- We have to put forward a program of action on unemployment. We must fight in the working-class movement for united action against firings, job loss, and short time (which means wage cuts). We must fight for a sliding scale of hours -- for worksharing with no loss in pay, operated under workers' control.

- To fight for these policies and combat fascist influence, united action by the working class in the East and the West is essential. We must call for joint action to equalize wages and defend all workers fighting layoffs, closures, and privatization.

- At the same time, we have to put forward a specific program of action to deal with the economic hardship and insecurity suffered in particular by workers in the East -- problems certain in the future to spread more and more to the West. We must fight for the immediate equalization of wages and working conditions on the most favorable basis for workers in the East and West. We must fight for the restoration of the social gains achieved for workers in the DDR which have been eliminated or undermined by the capitalist reunification and fight for the spread of these gains to the West.

We must struggle in the unions, workplaces, and working class communities for action against closures. Threatened enterprises should be occupied under democratically elected workers' committees. These struggles must be linked and extended, to build action against the capitalist takeover of state-owned firms. Instead of the capitalist plunder of the East, we must fight for the democratic development and implementation of a workers' plan to rebuild the East German economy, which will require a massive program of public works under workers' control, and the

spread of this model of workers' democracy and democratic socialist planning to the West.

For Action Committees to Wage the Antifascist Political Struggle

In the course of its development, the dynamics of the military struggle by antifascist defense groups to deal the fascists tactical defeats through direct action will inevitably raise political questions such as these that, to one degree or another, go beyond the immediate aim of the military defeat of fascist gangs in particular confrontations. Some antifascist defense groups will take up these issues systematically, in particular where revolutionary socialists have fought for the adoption of a program of action for struggle over many or all of these political questions. Other defense groups will essentially limit themselves to the tasks of immediate military defense against and confrontation with the fascists. In these cases it will be necessary to build, parallel and complementary to the antifascist defense groups, united-front action committees to carry out the broader political struggle necessary to the decisive defeat of fascism.

Whether these committees for political action against the conditions that spawn fascism are formed by antifascist defense organizations themselves or must be formed separately, they must continue to support and build antifascist defense guards on as broad a basis as possible while carrying out their larger political struggle. They must fight in a determined and flexible, nonsectarian way for the combination of the military (direct-action) struggle against fascism with the general political struggle against all the conditions that generate fascism.

These action committees must struggle to unite all the sectors of German society -- all the militant workers and oppressed -- that wish to defeat the fascists in a militant national united front to fight the fascists militarily and politically. And they must *combine* their struggle to organize whoever can be organized now for militant political action against the injustice, inequality, and oppression of German bourgeois society, *with the struggle* to draw in larger and larger numbers of people, including, above all, the mass organizations of the German working class and all the groups suffering oppression in German society.

We must place in this context the PDS's project of building Committees of Justice in East Germany to defend living standards and economic and political rights in the East. If these Committees of Justice develop as local organizations with an open membership, antifascist militants should join them and fight to make them democratic, rank-and-file-based organizations of militant struggle, linked to trade unions and organizations of the oppressed and with a strong antifascist thrust. We should call on these Committees to build antifascist defense guards themselves or to provide strong support to other forces that are building defense guards.

We would have to oppose any tendency to build these Committees as top-down, bureaucratic alliances of procapitalist and "workers'" politicians and some trade union leaders, set up primarily to promote polite discussion on how to dismantle the East German economy and restore capitalism with a little less pain. This would require a fight to make these Committees of Justice united-front organizations of rank-and-file action against privatization and unemployment, against fascism, and against all the inequalities and injustices suffered by East German workers since reunification. It would also require a perspective of linking East German workers' struggles against capitalist attacks with West German workers' struggles to defend living standards and working conditions -- in effect, a perspective of spreading Committees of Justice to the West.

A Program of Action to Defeat the Fascists

The threat of fascism is an urgent question *now*. If nothing effective is done, the fascist threat will only grow as the fascist movement grows more and more arrogant and more and more powerful.

The fascists will not go away. They must be defeated. Fascism is not simply the occasional symptom of extreme conditions. Fascism is endemic to the system of capitalist economy and bourgeois democracy. As the capitalist economy becomes less and less able to deal with fundamental problems, the fascists rise up to demand the setting aside of democratic gains, exploiting the contradictions and hypocrisies of bourgeois parliamentary democracy for their own barbaric aims.

Over the next years it will be made clear over and over that the real job of the police of the German state is not to defeat the fascists but to protect them against those who hate them. Passive protest demonstrations and speechifying will not defeat the fascists. Nor will spontaneous, sporadic violent confrontations.

Only an independent, militant mass movement of workers and the oppressed can decisively defeat the

fascists. We call on workers and youth, asylum-seekers and immigrants, on all people who are determined to defeat this threat before it is strong enough to attempt our destruction, to join with us in building struggles and organizations to fight for any or all of the following points.

NO MORE ROSTOCKS!

**FOR A MILITANT WORKING-CLASS UNITED FRONT
TO DEFEAT THE FASCISTS.**

**FOR ANTIFASCIST DEFENSE COMMITTEES TO
ORGANIZE ANTIFASCIST DEFENSE GUARDS.**

**FOR ANTIFASCIST ACTION BY THE TRADE UNIONS,
ASYLUM-SEEKERS, IMMIGRANT GROUPS, AND THE ORGANIZATIONS
AND MOVEMENTS OF WOMEN, YOUTH, LESBIANS AND GAY MEN,
AND ALL THE OPPRESSED.**

**FOR A NATIONAL CONFERENCE OF ANTIFASCIST FIGHTERS
TO ESTABLISH A MILITANT NATIONAL ANTIFASCIST
DEFENSE ORGANIZATION.**

FOR DEMOCRACY AND PROFESSIONALISM IN THE ANTIFASCIST MOVEMENT.

**NO UNDERMINING OF THE RIGHT TO ASYLUM!
FULL LEGAL POLITICAL, AND ECONOMIC RIGHTS
FOR ASYLUM-SEEKERS AND IMMIGRANTS.
FOR OPEN BORDERS!**

**FOR UNITED-FRONT ACTION AGAINST RACISM, CHAUVINISM,
SEXISM, AND ANTI-LESBIAN/GAY BIGOTRY.**

FOR UNITED ACTION BY WORKERS OF EAST AND WEST GERMANY.

**FOR FULL PARITY IN PAY AND WORKING CONDITIONS.
FOR EAST AND WEST GERMAN WORKERS.**

**FOR MASS MILITANT ACTION, INCLUDING STRIKES AND OCCUPATIONS,
BY TRADE UNIONS, FACTORY COMMITTEES, AND ORGANIZATIONS OF
THE UNEMPLOYED TO FIGHT UNEMPLOYMENT AND CLOSURES
LOCALLY AND ON A NATIONAL BASIS.**

**FOR ACTION COMMITTEES TO FIGHT FOR SOCIALIST SOLUTIONS TO THE
FUNDAMENTAL PROBLEMS OF THE GERMAN ECONOMY AND SOCIETY.**

International Trotskyist Committee

21 September 1992