

Spartacus and Trotskyism (1946)

2019 Introduction

After the Second World War, the *Communists' League "Spartacus"* emerged from illegality in the Netherlands as one of the few groups in the world that put forward the struggle of the working class against all imperialist camps, i.e. against fascism, against bourgeois democracy and against Stalinism. They were also opposed to the Trotskyism of the so-called *Fourth International*, which took part in the Second World War in defense of Russian state capitalism.

The following text from the communist League's weekly publication 'Spartacus' in 1946 shows how the Trotskyists tried to get a grip on the League and how they falsified the history of the latter's main predecessors, the R.S.A.P., portraying the proletarian internationalists as *ultra-radicals*. This Trotskyist tactic is still relevant today.

With reference to this first time translation, we have added a concise *glossary* on the most important organizational expressions of the historical communist Left in the Netherlands.

Spartacus and Trotskyism

We have never felt much inclined to enter into an ungrateful dispute with the Trotskyists, neither in illegality nor afterward. As far as we can remember, there has only been one polemic on our part. This happened when some Trotskyists and V.S.V. comrades (1) in Zutphen, in a meeting where one of the leaders of the Trotskyist R.C.P. (Revolutionary-Communist Party) spoke, by means of a motion, expressed the wish that the possibilities of fusion between R.C.P. and Spartacus would be taken into consideration (2). We were of the opinion that the answer given by us in our weekly, and orally in Zutphen by one of our speakers at a later meeting, would have been sufficient. It appears that this is not the case, especially with regard to the R.C.P., so we would like to reiterate our position. The reason for this is as follows.

From time to time we notice that the R.C.P. continues its attempts to ~~grow~~ foster the mood among Spartacus comrades, that both political tendencies belong together. It is an old trick, which we have known for a long time from Leninist, Stalinist and Trotskyist parties. For example, in the case of the Stalinists it was sometimes called "united front", often "popular front", but in essence it was always aimed at the formation of fractions within the organization of a different movement. Trotskyism, which is so much weaker from an organizational point of view, has in this, as Trotsky himself demonstrated throughout his life, the particularly accentuated form of **entry** into other political organizations, through ideological work, conquering the organism or, if that doesn't work, creating a new scission. The latter then goes hand in hand with the vilification of previously adulated, but not sufficiently obedient "leaders". We are not surprised by this method of achieving one's goal through obscure back roads. Nor that it sows hatred as well as confusion, for this is the natural consequence of such manipulations. Trotskyism, which, as has been said, applies

this type of work more regularly, systematically and somewhat more overtly, has thus made itself hated in circles of revolutionaries throughout the whole world.

Wherever we look, [at] America, France, Belgium, the Netherlands; everywhere the words fusion and quarrel are most closely connected. Because if a merger had been carried out, and if the organized group work had started, then the most inferior arguments, the most serious slander and insinuations were not too bad to achieve the goal.

The R.C.P. is well aware that it is useless to openly knock on the door of the Communist's League "Spartacus" for a merger. There are two reasons for this. The first is that, knowing the past, "Spartacus" does not know of any good or honest intentions with Trotskyism.

The second reason is that the Communist's League "Spartacus" sets itself completely different tasks than the Trotskyist parties.

From one of our comrades we have just received a letter for inspection, which was sent to him by an R.C.P. leader. Apart from the fact that it deals with cases and mentions names that should understandably be omitted, it asks our comrade to work within "Spartacus" for the unification of the organizations.

The letter-writer, while pointing out himself and his comrades as modest people, goes so far as to propose the plan that the weekly publication of such a new formation would be called: '*De Tribune*' (3). He says verbatim:

"I am a Leninist and they say they are against it. Would that really be the case? I doubt it. The issue is much more superficial."

One sees what is going to happen. When the fusion-weapon is to be struck like an axe into the other organization, it is suggested that the differences are only superficial.

But then the greatest impudence comes up. A so-called copy of another letter, allegedly sent in April 1946 to the Communists' League "Spartacus" in Amsterdam, is added to this letter, in which it is recognized that "*the disputes that are currently separating us are incompatible within the discipline of one party*", but at the end of which the plan is put forward to publish a joint discussion organ and to hold discussion meetings, so that after a certain period of time a decision can be made as to whether or not a closer cooperation is possible.

This so-called copy closes the door. We have never received such a letter, and it was known to the R.C.P. from earlier occasions that "Spartacus" did not appreciate it the least. Here is an enhanced example of the methods to use members of an organization and to encourage them to fraction-work.

We would also like to go into the contents of this so-called copy for a moment. We read:

"Both your movement and ours are the result of the R.S.A.P. (4) While our party has made the Leninist program of the old party its own, and has drawn the consequences from it, which at the time were not yet sufficiently seen by the R.S.A.P., like: [first and foremost] affiliation to the IV. International", ... etc.

“On the other hand, your organization (i.e. Spartacus) has increasingly distanced itself from the R.S.A.P. program, which”, ... etc.;

And subsequently:

“It was inevitable that we would all make mistakes after the sudden loss of an experienced leadership, often numerous mistakes. Both you and we had insufficient experience.”

Modesty adorns man, one sometimes hears, but this modesty is a bit too obvious. Both made mistakes, but the R.C.P. has drawn the right consequences, which the R.S.A.P. did **not yet**, mind you: not **yet**, see sufficiently.

Too bad for the R.C.P. that the facts are slightly different. Of course, we also recognize that the R.S.A.P. has gone through a development and that the revolutionary workers could not dwell on the R.S.A.P. position. But the development for the R.S.A.P. has been characterized by outgrowing the Trotskyist movement. It has never actually belonged to that formation and it has come up against it in ever sharper conflict. This was done with the consent of the “experienced leadership” and in spite of the fact that from time to time some supporters of Trotskyism entered and left the R.S.A.P. as fractionists. In the end the relations were so sharp tense that Trotsky, in accordance with the method mentioned above, said that *“Sneevliet was connected with the Dutch government by means of silver cords”*. So there is less reason for the R.C.P. to consider the ten fallen comrades as their comrades.

This distancing from Trotskyism by the R.S.A.P. did not only apply to the “Russian method” applied used in the so-called Fourth International, which ruled out any possibility that thoughts different from the official ones by Trotsky could come to fruition. It was not only a condemnation of the entry and fraction politics, but it was also closely related with the growing awareness within the R.S.A.P. that already in the first period of the Russian Revolution germs were present in Bolshevism that had to lead to everything that would be written down later on account of Stalinism.

That’s why Sneevliet, unlike Trotsky, who doesn’t say anything interesting about it in *“My Life”*, nor in the *“History of the Russian Revolution”*, called Kronstadt *“a black page in the proletarian struggle for freedom”*.

It is **for this reason** that in the then monthly publication of the R.S.A.P. *“De Rode October”* some articles by E. Bauer appeared about *“Rosa Luxembourg in our time”*, in which her critique on the abolition of the workers’ democracy in Russia was expressed and how this had to lead to a government of party leaders and to paralysis of the councils.

And it is **therefore**, that the R.S.A.P. deleted from its program of principles the phrases about “the unconditional defense of the Soviet Union.”

In illegality, this development has continued and the issue of a completely new reorientation of the party, whereby the old trade union policy and parliamentarianism would be re-examined, and the entire stakes of the movement would be directed towards enterprise committees and propaganda for the councils, was not completed by those whom the R. C. P. calls *“our experienced leaders”*, but against whom they

had fought as Stalinists or as Trotskyists, due to the blow that struck the old formation in March and April 1942. (5)

However, the line has continued, so the issues have become even less 'superficial' than they were before the war.

It is clear to us, that social-democracy, Stalinism and Trotskyism are all tendencies that accept state socialist ideas, ideas which were once combated by the then still united social-democracy, for example by W. Liebknecht and against which, by the way, Marx himself had also fulminated.

It is clear to us that just now capitalism grows towards ever more extensive state exploitation, called "socialization" by the state socialists, but that this does not lead to Communism, but to state capitalism. And from that point of view, much of what happened in Russia becomes very understandable to us.

The task of "Spartacus" is to direct all its forces towards bringing the insight that the liberation of the working class must be the work of the working class itself, and that no brilliant leaders or parties can take over this task from the proletariat.

This concept brings with it that the new becoming international party, which has to form, among others, the cadres for the mass actions to come, has also been assigned a completely different task.

Not the task of forming its own power and its conquest of power, but a serving task in the coming to consciousness and international solidarity of the struggling masses.

Never will one read in "Spartacus" what Cannon, the leader of the official Trotskyists in America, wrote:

"A Trotskyist does everything for the party, even if he has to crawl into the mud."

Those who accept this are also ready to go through everything that unfortunately so many former revolutionaries underwent in the third international.

We like to leave it to capitalism and to old-style parties to teach the workers how to crawl through the mud.

Our task is to propagate independent thinking and pride among the workers. That is why it can't be useful to make the impression in any way, as if there is a familiarity between Spartacus' views and the State-socialist and party-political views of Trotskyism. The creation of common publications in view of considering closer cooperation at a later date only bears the evil to feed the thought of such kinship.

One may, as is done in the letter, reproach us with ultra-radicalism from that side. The consequences of Trotskyism, that encourages workers to vote for the C.P.N., which it characterizes itself as nationalistic and treacherous, notably with the argument to thus strengthen the class understanding by "*transitional slogans*", will become clear enough in the long run.

For it are "*transitional slogans*" that can only lead to new defeats for the working class, because they distract it from its real task, the organization of the struggle. Just as the workers once expected "*freedom, work and bread*" by voting for the S.D.A.P., so will those who vote for the C.P.N... From the representatives of that party "higher wages and lower prices" will be wrongly expected. This is not a "progressive

transitional policy” but one of retreating into low parliamentarianism.

We do not participate in this, neither in such parliamentary and party politics, nor in supporting state-socialist ideas.

We only hope that this will mark the positions between Trotskyism and Spartakism once and for all.

Source: Spartacus and Trotskyism, in *Spartacus*, weekly of the Communists' League 'Spartacus', jg. 6 (1946), no. 26 (29 June), p. 4/5. Facsimile scan: <http://aaap.be/Pdf/Spartacus-Weekblad/Spartacus-Weekblad-06-1946-26.pdf>

Translation: J.J., July 27, 2019. Accentuation according to source.

Transcription, Glossary and proofreading: F.C. August 4th, 2019.

(Some linguistic corrections, August 6, 2019)

Notes

- 1) VSV = Vereniging van Spartacus-vrienden (“Friends of Spartacus Association”)
- 2) ‘Spartacus and the Trotskyists’, *Spartacus*, Weekly of the Communists' League “Spartacus”, Vol. 6 (1946), no. 1 (5 January). Facsimile scan available at: <http://aaap.be/Pdf/Spartacus-Weekblad/Spartacus-Weekblad-06-1946-26.pdf>. (Dutch language) This weekly paper in Dutch language was issued by the League from May 1945 to the end of 1949. The collection can be consulted at the Antonie Pannekoek Archives.
- 3) See Glossary: ‘*De Tribune*’
- 4) See Glossary: ‘*Revolutionair-socialistische Arbeiderspartij*’
- 5) See Glossary ‘*Marx-Lenin-Luxemburg Front*’

Glossary

De Tribune first appeared in 1907 as a weekly of the Marxist opposition within the Social-Democratic Workers Party (S.D.A.P.). After the editors, David Wijnkoop, Jan Ceton and Willem van Ravesteyn, were expelled from the SDAP at the Deventer congress in 1909, the periodical continued as a publication of the **S.D.P. party they had founded. The S.D.P. changed its name in 1918 to the Communist Party of the Netherlands/Communist Party Holland (C.P.H.)**. From October 1913 the periodical was published twice a week as a newspaper and in April 1916 *De Tribune* became a daily newspaper. The newspaper was published until 1937.

The **Revolutionair-socialistische Arbeiderspartij** (R.S.A.P.; “Revolutionary Socialist Workers’ Party”) was a Dutch anti-stalinist communist party, formed in 1935

as a merger of the Revolutionary Socialist Party (R.S.P.) and the Independent Socialist Party (O.S.P.). In this new party, which had some 3,700 members, the former OSPs were in the majority numerically, but the former RSPs dominated ideologically. The first chairman of the R.S.A.P. was O.S.P.-founder Piet J. Schmidt, who became secretary to Sneevliet. In November 1936 Schmidt was expelled, after which Sneevliet took over the chairmanship. In the 1937 parliamentary elections, the RSAP lost its only seat. An ideological rift between Sneevliet and Trotsky also took place in that year, after which the Trotskyists separated as a Group of Bolshevik-Leninists (G.B.L.) in November. The R.S.A.P. did not join the Fourth International. The R.S.A.P. was dissolved on 14 May 1940, a day before the Dutch capitulation.

The Marx-Lenin-Luxemburg Front: As had already been decided in secret in 1938, some 600 RSAP members reorganized themselves as an underground organization called Marx-Lenin-Luxemburg Front. Leaders of the MLL-front were Sneevliet, Willem Dolleman and Abraham Menist. The front supported the February strike, cooperated with De Vonk and published the periodical Spartacus. Remarkably, the Front also tried to get in touch with German soldiers who were against the war; for other resistance movements such contact was out of the question. Within the Front, political struggles continued, especially about whether or not to support the Soviet Union, as Trotsky had called for. Sneevliet was against this and saw the war between U.S.S.R. and Nazi Germany as one between two imperialist powers. After the war, the R.S.A.P. was not re-established. Sneevliet and other leading figures were executed in 1942. The rest of the group split up into the Committee of Revolutionary Marxists (C.R.M.) and the Communistenbond 'Spartacus' ("Communists' League Spartacus"). The latter organization was joined by members of the pre-war Group of International Communists, which consisted of the former members of the left-wing Communist Workers' Party of the Netherlands (K.A.P.N.), e.g. Henk Canne Meijer, and the Communist Workers' Party of Germany (K.A.P.D.), among whom Jan Appel.

(The references are to a large extent based on Wikipedia)

This re-edition was published first by [A Free Retriever's Digest. An internationalist Articles Selection & Review](#)