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Internationalism and *Realpolitik* Between the Blocs. The Trotskyist Movement in Switzerland during the 1950s and 1960s

The Trotskyist movement in Switzerland during the whole 20th century was shaped by two important characteristics of the Swiss political system. The first was the inertia of a reform orientated political culture that made even Lenin say that Switzerland would be the last remnant of capitalism, even when the revolution would be victorious in the whole rest of Europe. The second was Switzerland's self-image as a neutral country, a country between the blocs that did not want to take a side.¹ Both aspects were in a way fundamental for the political activities of the Trotskyists in Switzerland.

In July 2016 I started my PhD project aimed to study the Trotskyist movement in Switzerland between 1948 and 1969.² Although the Trotskyists, their activities and their organizations have been looked into quiet well for the period before the Second World War as well as for the decades after the ruptures of 1968, the 1950s and 1960s have only been rudimentarily explored.³ This may be due to the fact that the actual Trotskyist organisations in these two decades were quite small and restricted to particular regions in Switzerland. This stands in contrast to the first Trotskyist structures in the 1930s, which were linked to radical changes in the Communist Party of Switzerland, and to the self-conception and tight organization of a new generation of activists following the events of 1968.

Nevertheless, the period in focus was not only a transitional period for the Trotskyist movement in Switzerland. The Trotskyist political conceptions and theories are rooted in a particular national and international context, namely in the context of a world that was divided in two blocs as a result of the Second World War. References on Trotsky's opposition to Stalin and Stalinism - not as much on a personal level but in terms of a theoretical framework - were important as a foundation for the political agitation of the Trotskyists in Switzerland and for establishing their international contacts. Mainly because of the difficult situation for political agitation in Switzerland itself, the Trotskyists - especially Heinrich Buchbinder, one

¹ For the history of Switzerland in the Cold War and how the Swiss „neutrality“ was interpreted and used by politicians and the military, see: Thomas Buomberger: *Die Schweiz im Kalten Krieg 1945–1990*, Baden, hier + jetzt, 2017; Jakob Tanner: *Geschichte der Schweiz im 20. Jahrhundert*, München, C. H. Beck, 2015.

² My PhD-Project is part of a broader attempt of researching the history of Trotskyism in Switzerland. There is the possibility of other dissertations in this context in the future.

³ For research on Trotskyism in Switzerland until 1949, see: Jean-François Marquis: *Proletarische Aktion. Une organisation révolutionnaire en Suisse (1945-1949)*, Genève, Université de Genève, 1983 and David Vogelsanger: *Trotzkismus in der Schweiz. Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte der Schweizer Arbeiterbewegung bis zum Zweiten Weltkrieg*, Zürich, Universität Zürich, 1986. The new Trotskyist organizations after 1968 are discussed in Benoît Challand: *La Ligue marxiste révolutionnaire en Suisse romande (1969-1980)*, lic. diss., Fribourg, Chaire d'histoire contemporaine de l'Université de Fribourg, 2000, and Frank Nitzsche: *Aus dem Schatten in die Reichweite der Kameras. Die Entwicklung trotzkistischer Organisationen in Deutschland, Österreich und der Schweiz unter besonderer Berücksichtigung des Einflusses der neuen Sozialen Bewegungen von 1968 bis heute*, PhD diss., Siegen, Universität Siegen, 2006.

of the leading figures of Swiss Trotskyism in the 1950s and 1960s – focussed on international politics, on networking, and on bringing together different political activists and organizations.⁴ This can be seen, for example, in their extensive political and infrastructural support of Algerian revolutionary activists in European exile during the Algerian war of independence.⁵ Many of the international contacts as well as the influence of the Swiss Trotskyists are not well known until now, even though there are traces in the extensive archive stocks.

Notwithstanding the situation in Switzerland was not that easy for self declared Marxists, the Trotskyists did play a role in the social and political movements in Switzerland. There were only a few dozen Trotskyists in Switzerland during the first two decades of the Cold War period, but many of them received an extensive formation in Marxist theory and political agitation and were able to intervene in different contexts. One of them was the movement against nuclear armament.⁶ The way the Trotskyists helped to build the movement and shaped its political articulation can be seen as exemplary for the political influence small groups had on broader political mobilizations. Especially the attempts to forge links to the trade union movement and their will to build international alliances on their topic are points that will guide the analysis of the Trotskyist movement in Switzerland and will help to discuss their influence, their projects, their political ideas and finally their particular position between the two blocs, located in a so-called “neutral” country in this phase of the Cold war, 1948-1969.

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⁴ For an early example is the movement in solidarity with anti-colonial resistance, in which the Swiss Trotskyists played an important role, see: René Holenstein: Was kümmert uns die Dritte Welt. Zur Geschichte der internationalen Solidarität in der Schweiz, Zürich, Chronos, 1998; Monika Kalt: Tiersmondismus in der Schweiz der 1960er und 1970er Jahre. Von der Barmherzigkeit zur Solidarität, Bern, Lang, 2010.

⁵ On the relations between the Algerian independence movement and European revolutionaries, see: Ian Birchall (ed.): European Revolutionaries and Algerian Independence, 1954-1962, London, Socialist Platform, 2012; Jeffrey J. Byrne: Mecca of Revolution. Algeria, Decolonization, and the Third World Order, New York, Oxford University Press, 2016; Allison Drew: We are no longer in France. Communists in Colonial Algeria, Manchester, Manchester University Press, 2014.

⁶ See Markus Heiniger: Die schweizerische Antiatombewegung 1958-1963. Eine Analyse der politischen Kultur, lic. diss., Zürich, Universität Zürich, 1980.