The Fahne des Kommunismus carries two letters from Trotsky, in which he takes a position on our group.

Trotsky sums up his general evaluation of us in the following sentences:

“Truly I needed no time ... in order to ascertain that the Brandler-Thalheimer group stands on the other side of the barricades ... Our task consists in explaining that the Brandlerite faction is only a new gateway to the social democracy...

Of course one can say that this is an exaggeration: Brandler and Thalheimer are not yet social democrats. Of course, they are not yet social democrats and, of course, they are not the present social democracy, but one must understand how to observe phenomena in their development ... Permit me to remind you once more, that young, particularly oppositional, opportunist factions, are no 'nicer' in relation to the old social chauvinist parties, than a little piglet is 'nicer' than an old swine”.

In order to make such a 'ascertainment', Trotsky, of course, did not need much time. He has simply repeated what the official Comintern press says. The only original thing in his 'ascertainment' is the choice of abusive terminology, which demonstrates in Trotsky an otherwise wholly unusual preoccupation with rustic psychology and the problems of livestock farming.

This manner in which Trotsky treats the questions of the international labour movement shows, how right we were, in describing him as the most consistent representative of ultra-left politics.

While those faithful to the party-line still attempt to cobble together an 'analysis' of the objective situation, out of scraps of theses and newspaper clippings, in order to conceal their nakedness. Trotsky scorns all such apparel, even those reminding him from afar of the pedantic customs of earlier times.

He does not even make an attempt to examine the objective situation in the different countries, the relationship of class forces, or the perspectives of the class struggle. He has his own infallible yardstick with which he separates the righteous from the unrighteous and places them on the different sides of the barricades.

The decisive questions for him are: The attitude towards 1923, to the Anglo-Russian Committee, to the Chinese Revolution, and to the theory of the building of socialism in one country.
Here anyone not swearing on the Trotskyist formula stands on the other side of the barrier, pardon, the barricade, which separates the small Trotskyist groups from the earthly world and its problems. The present questions of the international labour movement, the present tasks of the revolutionary workers, are absent from the Trotskyist creed. Here the slogan holds good - to paraphrase Heine: “The earth we relinquish to the piglets and the swine”.

Trotsky literally says:

“Today it is an honour for any genuine revolutionary to remain a ‘sectarian’”.

We, the Opposition in Germany are also a minority and we are not afraid of being a minority. But we are not a sect and we have no wish to be one. We agree with Marx who, at beginning of the labour movement when it did not yet contain masses always fought sectarianism with all his strength. A minority does not need to be a sect. It can become one at the moment it, instead of participating in the movement of the great masses, instead of seeing its aim as looking after their interests, boxes itself off from it, if it concerns itself with problems not connected with this movement, but which have been especially chosen for a purpose.

Trotsky’s confession of sectarianism is therefore much nearer the truth than he himself suspects. Sectarianism is the content of the activity of Trotsky and his adherents. For example, it is characteristic that Trotsky states, by the way, the necessity of a platform of transitional demands and a correct tactic in the trades unions. But he does not believe that to be decisive. What is decisive is, how one stands regarding his creed. What one should do today, the practical tasks, are secondary for him. How that manifests itself can be seen with Trotsky’s adherent Urbahns. The Leninbund is one day in favour of work in the trade unions, another day for the struggle-leaderships. They get their day-to-day slogans now from the KPD CC, and then from us. They do not know what they want. If one is a bit sharp with them, then at each appropriate and inappropriate opportunity, they fire off the Trotskyist article of faith, whereupon the theory of the building of socialism in one country is the source of all evil. That is the purest type of sectarianism.

Today the conflict over the united front tactic and the trade union question is occupying all sections of the Comintern. But these are not decisive questions for Trotsky. Decisive are 1923, the Anglo-Russian Committee, etc, etc. As long as the world has not recognised that Trotsky was correct in all these questions, he generously leaves it to itself in its own filth, until then he does not concern himself with the situation today and what is happening today.

But now to the content of the Trotskyist article of faith. On 1923 he says:

“It (Brandler’s policy) led to the great catastrophe in late 1923 ….. This catastrophe is the political precondition for the subsequent stabilisation of European capitalism.”

In a word: Brandler has stabilised capitalism. No one else has yet formulated the October Legend so crudely. One arrives at such conclusions when one is, like Trotsky, of the opinion that in 1923 all the preconditions for a victorious armed uprising were present, and that it all failed only because Brandler and Thalheimer had overslept. The question of whether the conditions existed in October 1923, that Lenin named in 1917 as the preconditions for the uprising, is not posed by Trotsky. An examination of the objective situation in 1923 does not interest him.
On the question of the Anglo-Russian Committee we took a position at the time (in the circle of some comrades, as a public appearance was not possible), against both Stalin as well as against Trotsky and Zinoviev. We are of the opinion that negotiations at the top level with the reformists cannot be fundamentally opposed, but under certain circumstances are necessary and useful. Only one should not, of course, want to sit at a table with the reformists merely for conversing together, but only when it concerns a distinct practical aim. During its first stage of existence the Anglo-Russian Committee served just such a distinct aim, namely the struggle for a united trade union international. Later, however, as this slogan was dropped, the Anglo-Russian Committee ceased to have any immediate practical significance and actually transformed itself into an opportunist top-level combination. It adopted decisions on all sorts of questions, and everyone knew that they were only generalities which committed nobody to anything. Trotsky’s attitude to the Anglo-Russian Committee is, however, different to ours. He represented the viewpoint that it was inadmissible to sit at a table with Purcell, i.e., the old ultra-left attitude towards the united front tactic.

Neither were we in agreement with Stalin or Trotsky on the Chinese Question. We were against the policy of unconditional support to the Kuomintang. We criticised that in order to get unity with the Kuomintang, one paralysed the proletarian class struggle in China, held the mass movement back, throttled strikes, etc. We were however, simultaneously, against the attitude of Trotsky and his friends, who were against any, even transitory, collaboration with the national-revolutionary bourgeoisie. By the way, today Karl Radek, who in his time, was in agreement with Trotsky on the Chinese Question and was the China-specialist of the Opposition, also states, that Trotsky’s attitude to the Chinese Question stood in direct contradiction with that of Lenin. Recently Trotsky has namely advanced the view that in China only the slogan of the socialist dictatorship of the proletariat is valid, but not that of the democratic dictatorship of workers and peasants. According to Trotsky then, the bourgeois, the national, the agrarian revolution in China is already concluded.

In a previous issue we have already taken a position on Trotsky’s hobby-horse, the theory of the building of socialism in one country. As far as we are concerned, as regards the Soviet Union, another question seems to be decisive. Namely, that of whether the Soviet Union is a dictatorship of the proletariat or not. Among the Russian Trotskyists the discussion over this question resulted in sharp differences and has led to a split in the group. In a letter, Trotsky advanced the view that the Stalin-Rykov block was an expression of the middle-peasants and the kulaks. His closest Russian adherents are of the view that Soviet Russia is governed by a "block of the reactionary elements or the town and the village". That in not our view but that of the social democracy. We are by no means inclined to identify with Stalin's policies from A to Z, nor to ignore the deficiencies of the CPSU’s policies, but the starting point for our criticism is the fact that the Soviet Union is a Workers’ State. We criticise that which is inappropriate from the standpoint of the maintenance and the strengthening of the proletarian dictatorship and the socialist construction. However, we stand with the Soviet Union against the capitalist world on one side of the barricade! But here Trotsky has lost his war.

Trotsky turns against our criticism our position on the peasant question in Russia and writes:

“The middle layer of the peasantry represents a social protoplasm. It uninterruptedly and unalterably assumes certain forms in two directions: towards capitalist ones through the kulaks and towards socialist ones through the semi-proletarians and agricultural labourers. Anyone who ignores
this fundamental process, anyone who speaks of the peasantry in general, anyone who does not see
that the 'peasantry' has two hostile faces, is irretrievably lost”.

The confirmation that a differentiation occurs among the middle peasantry, that it unceasingly
separates out into proletarianised and capitalist elements, should on no account induce us to not
notice the fact that today the majority of the population of the Soviet Union consists of neither
agricultural labourers nor of kulaks, but of middle peasants. Trotsky disregards this fact and that is
what we criticise him for.

Therefore Trotsky’s article of faith does not accord with our conception. We are unable to adhere to
any of the points mentioned by him. The falseness of this article of faith is also shown by its
blocking the way of Trotsky and his adherents from dealing with the present political
problems.

Trotsky has, for his part, gained sympathy with many, particularly outside Russia, who were
dissatisfied with the ruling party regime. This sympathy holds good for those persecuted by Stalin.
Numerous groups in different countries which otherwise uphold the most contradictory conceptions
adhere to Trotsky. However, personal sympathies for a leader who has gained great merit in the past
are not a suitable basis for a political association. That requires principled agreement. All the groups
adhering to Trotsky have necessarily ended up in the channel of sectarianism. All the groups not
wanting to pursue ultra-left politics have gradually distanced themselves from Trotsky.

At the moment in which Trotsky makes the attempt to set up his Trotskyist International from
Constantinople, a large part of his adherents in almost all countries have already left him or are
about to do so.

What is gathering around Trotsky is a sect, which swears allegiance to the great leader and his
article of faith. Anyone who has doubt will be rejected, as with Souvarine in France, who did have
great personal sympathies for Trotsky, but in some questions dared to have his own opinion.

Trotsky is infallible after all. In one of his recent articles on The Permanent Revolution and the Line
of Lenin, he states, that Lenin polemicised against him without having read Trotsky’s fundamental
work on the Russian Revolution of 1905.

Those who refuse to go along with such a game, ourselves, for example, get excommunicated by
Trotsky.

This method seems familiar to us. It is not patented by Trotsky. It in a poor imitation of the methods
of the Comintern apparatus.

It is a sad image presented by Trotsky, when he sets himself up in Constantinople as a Anti-Pope
and dispatches his excommunications. He will not gain anything for the future by that, but only blot
out the memory of his past.

Note by Mike Jones.

The two letters which appeared in Fahne des Kommunismus, the organ of the Leninbund, were replies by Trotsky
to letters from Boris Souvarine. An English rendition of both, dated 25.4.29 and 12.6.29 respectively, can be found
in Writings of Leon Trotsky (1929), Pathfinder Press, New York, pp.111-116 and pp.155-160. The quotes from the
letters are translated from Gegen den Strom, presumably the texts as published in Fahne des Kommunismus. Where I made a comparison with the Pathfinder version there were minor inaccuracies and errors. For example: "one must know how to approach events in their development" (p.157) for: "...one must understand how to observe phenomena in their development" (11 ... die Erscheinungen in ihrer Entwicklung zu sehen ... Hugo Urbahns was the main leader of the Leninbund.