

Interview with Stefan Engel and Gabi Gärtner

An era of party building is ending – Great tasks ahead of the MLPD

Shortly after the MLPD's 10th Party Congress, Stefan Engel and Gabi Gärtner took the time for an extensive interview with *Rote Fahne* magazine. Both of them talked with us about the most important results of the Party Congress and the 1st plenary session of the new Central Committee, which meanwhile has taken place. They spoke about the starting situation after the election of the ultra-reactionary Donald Trump as US President and about the exciting new tasks lying ahead of the MLPD, not least of all the generation change in the party leadership. (The interview was published in German on *rf-news* on 18 November 2016 and appeared in the 25 November edition of *Rote Fahne* magazine.)

Rote Fahne: What does the election in the USA mean?

Stefan Engel: Trump's election victory in the US presidential election is a political thunderbolt. Trump being elected as president is an expression of the crisis-prone development of imperialism and will further intensify it at the same time. After all, an arch-reactionary, nationalist, racist and proto-fascist politician is about to become the 45th president of the USA, the most powerful imperialist country of the world. His reactionary political agenda packs a punch: protectionist economic policy, cancellation of international environmental agreements, ultra-reactionary refugee policy, cutback of sociopolitical reforms, chauvinist foreign policy, open support for the oppression of the Palestinians by Israel, etc. Since the reorganization of international production in the 1990s, US imperialism has lost an enormous amount of economic, political and military influence to its imperialist rivals, especially new-imperialist countries like China, Russia, South Korea, Brazil or Saudi Arabia. Trump's slogan "America first" serves the order of the most reactionary and most aggressive circles of US finance capital. In this way they want to reestablish the battered world power status of US imperialism.

Whether Trump's pompous announcements will become reality is an entirely different story. The power in the USA still will not lie with a president like Trump in future, but with the leading circles of the US-American international supermonopolies as part of solely ruling international finance capital. In the multipolar world today the USA cannot simply do what it likes. Especially the masses will have a say. Immediately after the elections ten thousands, mainly young people, in the USA started **nationwide demonstrations** and some blockades with the slogan "Trump is not our president". Worldwide Trump is confronted with the distrust and disapproval of the masses.

The shift to the right by the US government will have world-political consequences. It underlines **imperialism's general tendency towards open reaction**. This development will give a boost to ultra-rightwingers and reactionary nationalists also in other countries, but it will also increase the class contradictions considerably and challenge fights of the working class and the masses. In short: **the social polarization will notably aggravate on a global scale**.

All bourgeois pollsters and most of the bourgeois mass media had expected that Hillary Clinton would win the elections. How could they be so mistaken?

Stefan Engel: Hillary Clinton suffered a heavy defeat. She, like the opinion pollsters and the media obviously, mistakenly believed she could score in the election campaign by referring to her "political experience" in governmental agencies and her close links with Wall Street. But these were exactly her biggest drawbacks in the eyes of the masses! Precisely the fact that she was the declared ideal candidate of solely ruling international finance capital, the bourgeois mass media and the bourgeois political establishment became her downfall. The

vast majority of the US population simply do not want things to continue as before. The dissatisfaction with the social conditions is growing.

Trump hypocritically made use of that in his propaganda, arguing he was the thorn in the side of the establishment – even though he himself, as a real estate billionaire, has grown fat in this establishment and lives in clover. Trump developed a distinct **pseudo-social demagogy** – with empty promises and empty phrases about the *protection of jobs, growing prosperity for all by strengthening the US economy*, etc. In a weird way he connected this with a real flood of lies, intrigues and nationalist, anti-women and anti-communist smears, which – spread and repeated a million times – were designed to manipulate the masses.

The bourgeois media coverage in Germany now is insulting the masses, arguing that the US-American people in general had made a shift to the right. But also in the USA there is an unmistakable polarization, including not only a tendency towards a shift to the right, but a strong trend to the left as well. So the media likes to suppress the information that during the primaries Bernie Sanders and Hillary Clinton were neck-and-neck for a long time, although he had only a small fraction of her financial means and media presence. He expressly declared his sympathy for socialism – which enthused especially young people.

Surely, Trump could mobilize former non-voters from the right-wing dregs or people with a low class consciousness. Nevertheless, the biggest “party” among the eligible voters is the group of non-voters – around 40% of the potential voters.¹ Among them are many who consciously did not vote for one of the sham alternatives. “Neither the devil nor the deep blue sea” – was a slogan of progressive and revolutionary forces which was taken up particularly among the youth. In addition there are the migrants not entitled to vote, young and unregistered people rather belonging to the protest potential *against* Trump than to his supporters. Trump will be president although not even 30% of the eligible voters voted for him. In general a majority of voters voted tactically, mainly to prevent the respective rival candidate. All of this shows the **farce of bourgeois democracy** and that the **crisis of bourgeois parliamentarism has become a general phenomenon**. Among the masses the US election campaign especially expressed a growing search for a societal alternative, which can also be noticed on an international scale. In the end the US elections lacked a strong, clearly left-wing and progressive alternative that could have exposed Trump’s demagogy as well as Hillary Clinton’s.

What conclusions have to be drawn from it?

Stefan Engel: We see in various countries that governments shifting to the right get into trouble already after a short period of rule. After a first “state of shock” among the democratic forces, the protest of the masses and their need to position themselves are challenged even more. So Viktor Orbán in Hungary could not follow through on several of his projects, the ultra-reactionary government of Poland had to abandon essential anti-women and anti-democratic measures, and the governments in France and Germany at times reached a low point in the polls. The **most important conclusion is to strengthen real progressive alternatives worldwide:** building strong Marxist-Leninist, revolutionary parties in all countries of the world, joining the revolutionary forces, coordinating and cooperating in the ICOR. We have to create this societal alternative also in Germany and **develop it into a strong social force in the struggle for democracy, freedom and socialism**. A statement of the Internationalist List/MLPD² says: “It is time to **build a strong, progressive, revolutionary and internationalist left alternative** which is able to offer the masses a real societal alternative – the **Internationalist List/MLPD**. Everybody searching for a real societal alternative must be able to find it!”

How well advanced is the work of this Internationalist List/MLPD?

Gabi Gärtner: The election congress of the Internationalist Alliance on 2 October with its 500 participants was extremely successful. It impressed through its spirit of solidarity, its optimism,

1 Provisional election results, 15.11.16, Landeszentrale für politische Bildung Baden-Württemberg

2 www.internationalistische-liste.de

its militant-internationalist tenor. It unanimously passed an election manifest, principles of cooperation, principles of the candidates, elected an alliance council as a body to take decisions between election congresses, etc. Since then most of the state lists for the federal election in 2017 and the first direct candidates have been nominated; a few election initiatives have been founded already. The candidates represent a broad spectrum which overall **expresses the comprehensive program of this alliance**: from steel workers and miners, trade unionists and works council members to militant dairy farmers, activists of the militant women's movement and rebellious youth, a number of Kurdish, Turkish and Palestinian migrants, etc. The Internationalist List/MLPD unites individuals, migrant organizations, local left groups, youth groups, etc. This spectrum alone shows the great **potential of such a new alternative!** We made a good start to create a broad alliance in the struggle against the shift to the right of the government and the bourgeois parties. But this has to be developed even further. This is, after all, about the **foundation of a future anti-imperialist, progressive and internationalist united front**. This has long-range significance far beyond election day! The **Internationalist Alliance** is a movement which has to take roots more and more among the broad masses. The principal method to build this movement currently is to win supporters for this alliance. It must become clear that it not only includes manifold representatives and organizations, but is also **broad-based among the masses**. The 2,774 supporters reported to date (as of 17 November) is still far below what is possible and necessary. We can and should certainly win 10,000 to 15,000 supporters by the end of the year. Everybody who stands against the government's shift to the right, who wants to unite against this and the ultra-reactionary forces of the AfD (Alternative for Germany) should sign! The people have a great need to unite and strengthen a strong progressive movement at the left pole of society.

The candidacy of the Internationalist List/MLPD for the federal elections and the state elections in North Rhine-Westphalia (NRW) currently is the **concrete organizational form** of the Internationalist Alliance. In our work we have to pay more attention to the **different levels of consciousness**: First, broadest building of the movement of the Internationalist Alliance with the supporting signatures; second, collecting of signatures to qualify for the election and winning of fellow campaigners in the election initiatives for the state elections in NRW and the federal elections in 2017; and third, winning new members for the MLPD and for the various organizational forms of the militant opposition and for the alliance.

This work must be the **thread of any and all work**: whether in the factories, in the work among women, the environmental, youth or internationalist work. The unfolded societal polarization is the time for us, if we use it right.

The MLPD had been preparing its 10th Party Congress for more than one year. Now it took place. What were the most important results?

Stefan Engel: You can only understand the dimension of the Sonneberg Party Congress in its whole societal context. The **societal development has reached a turning point in various issues**. A relative stability of state-monopoly capitalism for decades in Germany has the tendency to disintegrate, and class consciousness is changing again after the Merkel government succeeded for years in providing for relative peace. The growing dissatisfaction of the masses, especially among the youth, is meanwhile reflected in mass activities. The 10th Party Congress was the **Marxist-Leninist answer to the shift to the right of the government**, the crisis-proneness of imperialism, and this change of mood among the masses.

The 10th Party Congress has given the self-transformation and learning process of the MLPD for its new societal role a big boost. It became very obvious how the organization increasingly has acquired the ability to consciously apply the dialectical method at the level of the doctrine of the mode of thinking and of systemic thinking in theory and practice. This hallmarks the future ability of the MLPD to creatively assess and solve all coming tasks and issues – also new and surprising developments. This was reflected in five essential results of the Party Congress:

In the center of the Party Congress was the discussion of the draft report of the Central

Committee and its unanimous adoption. This expressed the great trust of the whole party in its party leadership. At the same time a number of mistakes and shortcomings were appraised in a critical and self-critical way, and creative conclusions were drawn. I cannot remember any discussion of a draft report at a Party Congress that was informed by the conscious application of the dialectical method on such a high level.

A special feature of the 10th Party Congress also was the discussion and adoption of the changes to the party program of the MLPD. The Party Congress confirmed the proved party program of 1982 and **enhanced it with the advances in programmatic knowledge** achieved in our work since the year 2000. The reworked program thus offers the masses an excellent orientation in a complicated societal reality. The discussion of the **report of the Central Control Commission (CCC)** once again was something special. The CCC with its independent control of the CC from above is one of the most important conclusions from the revisionist degeneration of formerly revolutionary parties and an essential characteristic of the MLPD as a party of a new type. It is of fundamental importance for mastering the coming tasks of the MLPD that the CCC, but also the whole party, intensify their ability for dialectical cadre work, and that the CCC continues to consolidate its independence in the control mainly of the CC. We could elect a strong, rejuvenated CC with a high proportion of workers and women from the best array of candidates of all Party Congresses until now.

Last but not least, perhaps the most far-reaching decision of the whole Party Congress is the roadmap for a **generation change in the leadership of the MLPD**.

Why did the preparation of the Party Congress last so long? Were there any problems?

Gabi Gärtner: Party Congresses in the MLPD are shaped by an intensive unfolding of democracy, by creative ideological-political work. They are most closely connected to the tasks in class struggle. Our Party Congresses are not a formality, not orchestrated stage shows, not power games as we could recently witness again in the CSU. And they are not a forum for one weak compromise after another, as at the party congress of the Greens in Münster. The Party Congress of the MLPD is indeed the **highest organ of the party**; its resolutions are part of determining and developing its ideological-political line, and the future CC is strictly bound to the guidelines adopted by the Party Congress. The discussion of the draft report of the CC and of the draft party program unfolded the ideological-political initiative of all members. 3,100 motions for these two documents were the result, and there were 147 prepared speeches and 293 speeches in total. Of course, this takes time and was planned this way from the very beginning! Regarding the whole discussion, it must be borne in mind that the MLPD carried out comprehensive practical activities during the whole time – like the wonderful work for the solidarity pact with the Kurdish liberation movement.

In 64 internal and public events, for the preparation of the Party Congress the CC discussed new issues with the party rank and file and the masses, such as Marxist-Leninist social work, proletarian refugee policy, Marxist-Leninist youth work, or the development of new-imperialist countries.

And the **best array of candidates for the CC** that we have ever had can only be explained on the basis of such thorough preparation. There were 40 percent more candidates than could be elected. All were suitable in principle. 40 percent of the members of the new Central Committee are under 40 years of age. More than 70 percent have a proletarian class situation. Also the grown **women's proportion of 45 percent in the central bodies** is outstanding. A victory of the long-term promotion of women in the MLPD!

The MLPD is a revolutionary party of a new type and can be proud of practicing democratic centralism. There is probably no method of preparing and conducting a party congress that is more democratic than that used in the MLPD. Especially in the bourgeois and petty-bourgeois parties, all talking a lot about democracy, the mass of the members is excluded from the discussion and cognition process. There the functions are already distributed by the leading party bodies beforehand.

Why is the analysis on the development of new-imperialist countries of such importance?

Gabi Gärtner: The world economic and financial crisis that flared up in 2008 marked a caesura in the development of the imperialist world system. The most important new manifestation taking rapid shape in the world economy in this context is the **emergence of a number of new-imperialist countries**.

With this development, the inter-imperialist rivalry has intensified in such a way that even the **danger of a Third World War** has grown. New-imperialist countries like Saudi Arabia or Turkey are trying to conquer new areas of influence in Syria or in Yemen at all costs, while the old imperialist countries are fighting no less aggressively to keep their areas of influence. Many people are stunned by the brutality of the battle for Aleppo. **In principle, all imperialists** bear an **equivalent** responsibility for this war of annihilation.

In the multipolar world of today, no imperialist country is able to impose its conception of a redivision of the world without restrictions. The disagreement within the NATO, in the EU, regarding the attitude towards Russia, as well as the UN's far-reaching incapacity for action mark the open crisis of these international institutions. The Security Council of the United Nations was unable to pass a resolution on the Syria issue because the veto powers blocked each other. Also in the critically explosive hotbed of war in the Ukraine the imperialists are incapable of defusing this two-year war decisively. It is of great importance that we **condemn any imperialist action** in this confrontation and not get influenced by the bourgeois reporting, which currently calculatedly directs the main thrust only against Putin and Assad. All major imperialists are acting more or less as aggressive warmongers – and are supporting directly or indirectly fascist groups like the IS or the al-Nusra Front; they are waging war in Yemen, are making a lot of money with arms exports, etc.

We very much welcome the fact that the discussion on the development of new-imperialist states has been taken up and is being conducted in a lively way in the international Marxist-Leninist and working-class movement. The 10th Party Congress could contribute to that, and through the discussion with the international guests the MLPD got a lot of suggestions and hints to deepen this issue. The 10th Central Committee plans to publish a **“Blue Supplement” of Rote Fahne on the subject of the new-imperialist countries** in the next few months.

The Party Congress affirmed the thesis of the turning mood of the masses and of the new societal role which the MLPD has been growing into step by step recently. On what do you base this assessment?

Gabi Gärtner: In the past the bourgeois parties often still were seen by the masses as someone they could turn to – though in an increasingly unsatisfactory way. The SPD cultivated an image that social concerns are in good hands with them; the Greens claimed this for themselves in regard to environmental protection. Less and less remains of that. Due to their role as managers of the affairs of solely ruling international finance capital, in more and more issues the glamor obviously is gone!

Take refugee policy, for example. All other parties agree on the reactionary viewpoint that the access of refugees has to be limited. Only the MLPD with its proletarian refugee policy advocates that the refugees come according to the UN Refugee Convention – and at the same time must not be treated as second-class or third-class citizens. So it is a great success that the retroactive application of the requirement to reside in a certain area in Germany could be toppled: through a joint, organized struggle of the Monday demonstrations, refugees, MLPD, *Rebell* and non-party affiliated election alliances, mainly in Gelsenkirchen. With that an **essential part of the reactionary “integration” law failed**. Even more significant is the fact that this success materialized *against* the fierce resistance of all bourgeois parties and *against* the nearly daily anti-communist attacks in the print media.

Or let us talk about the **VW crisis**. What party dares to stand up at all to corporations like VW or Transport Minister Alexander Dobrindt? The VW Group, in unity with the state authorities, has betrayed millions of car buyers and the whole world, has poisoned the environment and the people willfully and with criminal energy – and what does Transport Minister Alexander Dobrindt do? He announces that the car buyers in Germany – unlike in the USA, where everybody gets at least US\$ 5,000 – will not be compensated. All bourgeois

parties naturally assume that the wage and salary earners, the masses in the communities and the taxpayers should bear the consequences and pay the bill. Only the MLPD advocates that the responsible persons must be made liable with their private assets and have to be prosecuted, starting with Winterkorn, the VW board of management and its supervisory board.

In the **mining industry**, again and again the MLPD and the militant miners' movement could win opinion leadership for a time in the struggle against the deprivation of concessionary (allowance) coal, against underground toxic waste and against the planned shutdown of the hard coal mining industry. In their struggle against the cancellation of free coal as component of their pensions, active and former miners and their families turn to the militant miners' movement *Kumpel für AUF* to the extent they comprehend that it was the Social Democrats who caused this cancellation.

Also, the **struggle for every job** in connection with closures and dismissals is meanwhile becoming a unique feature of the MLPD. All bourgeois parties including the Left Party only feel obliged to strive for the best possible social compensation plan, because all of them agree that the struggle for every job would be "useless". But especially the workforce of Opel Bochum underlined: the path of resistance enjoys great support in the working-class movement and in the population.

The new societal role of the MLPD among the masses is obscured and hampered at the same time due to the power structure. The attempt is made to isolate us. Basically, the MLPD still does not exist in the bourgeois media, while rightist forces and parties like Pegida and the AfD are systematically talked up. Our sphere of influence, the connections to self-run organizations of the masses, to organized movements and initiatives as well as individuals have grown considerably in recent years. At the same time the radius of action of the MLPD and its organizational strength are still too weak to completely fill its new role already today. This makes it all the more important to **strengthen the MLPD considerably**.

The Party Congress has decided on a generation change at the head of the party. What is meant by that?

Stefan Engel: Already at the beginning of 2015 I told the Central Committee that I shall relinquish the function of party chairman after the 10th Party Congress on health grounds. **I am very loath to hold an office without being able to actually fill it completely.**

On the other hand, it is indeed the right time to entrust the party leadership to a younger generation. Monika Gärtner-Engel and I still are in the good position to provide this younger generation with advice and assistance to become acquainted with this great responsibility.

We prepared this process of the generation change in the long run, and for years have put prominent emphasis on the most different training measures. A number of suitable cadres have developed who bring along the ability, experience and especially willingness to learn to take highest responsibility.

To entrust a younger generation in time is a tradition in the MLPD. 37 years ago, I myself, as youngest member of the then central leadership of the KABD (Communist Workers' League of Germany), was elected chief political officer and later chairman of the party. Of course, Willi Dickhut was ideological-politically more advanced and experienced, but he deliberately did not have himself elected to the Central Committee and concentrated his whole attention on the training and education of younger comrades. In this way it was not a caesura for the party when he passed away in 1992, and we could cope with the great loss of Willi Dickhut without bigger problems.

One need only think of the bitter experiences of the international movement and also the history of the working-class movement: how often were there setbacks after the departure of experienced leadership personalities, or even whole revolutionary parties collapsed or degenerated in a revisionist way because suitable comrades for the future leadership had not been developed in time.

The first plenary session of the new Central Committee took two decisions: First, I was elected as chairman of the MLPD for the tenth time. This function is only transitional until the beginning of April 2017. The second decision was to elect **Gabi Gärtner unanimously as new**

chairwoman of the party from April 2017. Until then she will learn the ropes as my deputy and relinquish her other tasks and functions to be able to concentrate completely on her new task. I myself will then concentrate on the leadership of the theoretical organ *Revolutionärer Weg* as member of the Central Committee. Monika Gärtner-Engel, who, of course, would be in the position to take over the party chair from me, also completely supports this decision. She took over the task of ICOR Main Coordinator in July 2016 and will be entrusted immediately with the leadership of the internationalism work of the MLPD. This provides important support for the new chairwoman because, before, these areas of responsibility had been directly concentrated in the function of the chairperson.

Gabi as revolutionary worker has already more than 13 years' experience in the party leadership and has performed great service especially as Organization Secretary of the party. She has a clear head, great ability and a willingness to learn. She embodies with her entire person also the authority necessary for such a function. She has a high impact especially on the working-class, women's and youth movements, and with her leading activity in the brigades in Kobanê has earned an excellent reputation also internationally.

The 10th Party Congress has entirely rallied behind this planned generation change, and the whole party has committed itself to contribute to the success of this generation change with its self-transformation. The trust I have gained within the party, among friends of the party and in the international Marxist-Leninist movement during the 37 years as party chairman was an important foundation to carry out this function. It is very important that the whole party does not face this generation change skeptically, but places the same confidence in Gabi.

The generation change in the party leadership and in various functions on central level will lead to a **change in cadre functions for at least 50 percent of our comrades**. This is a great task which can only be a success as a collective process.

This is another reason why the criticism and self-criticism campaign for 10th Party Congress will continue for some time. In this context the new Central Committee has shaped the term **qualifying and quality offensive**. That means that everybody works on the highest level for the new tasks and takes as steadfast benchmark for their work that only the best is good enough for the workers.

The transfer of the chair does not look like well-deserved retirement!

Stefan Engel: To be a Marxist-Leninist is not just a job that you leave behind you, ambling off when retirement time comes – but a **revolutionary attitude towards life**. There is a lot to do in the progressing process of the preparation of the international revolution, and I will further contribute my long-time theoretical and practical experiences in the revolutionary working-class movement.

I will concentrate on **theoretical work** and the **leadership of the *Revolutionärer Weg* editorial staff**. It is of elementary significance that our party creatively analyzes the essential new questions from the viewpoint of Marxism-Leninism and further develops it. In the focus will be the elaboration of the next edition of our theoretical organ *Revolutionärer Weg* on the subject **“The Crisis of Bourgeois Ideology, and the Doctrine of the Mode of Thinking”**.

The crisis of bourgeois ideology has the result that ever new variations and methods of manipulation of public opinion find use. The building of the MLPD is the story of the establishment of the superiority of the proletarian mode of thinking in struggle against the petty-bourgeois mode of thinking, which substantially comes from bourgeois ideology. This struggle is gaining considerable importance so that we definitely must determinedly address the publication of this new issue of our theoretical organ.

In parallel we are working on **“Biographical Reflections of the MLPD on the Role of Stalin”**. This will be a polemic to commemorate Stalin's work and his lifelong achievement in a critical way. It is time to provide more material to the masses to help them cope with the corrosive effect of the “Stalinism” and “Maoism” smear campaigns.

Of course, I will be on hand with help and advice for the new party leadership if necessary. But this must not be seen as a kind of coaching or that I pull the strings in the background and act as the gray eminence. In our party the elected party leadership is the real leadership. It will

get all the support it needs, but also carries the full personal responsibility!

Also, with the 10th Party Congress several members of the central bodies resigned for age and illness reasons. They belong to the first generation of party building. I wish to take this opportunity to thank them very much for their **life achievement!** Every one of them will continue to contribute in a suitable way.

With the generation change in the party leadership, in a certain sense **an era comes to an end**. This must be clear to everyone!

The successor generation in the party leadership already is a product of our party building work since the party founding and did not personally experience the complicated time of party building in the 1970s. It is shaped by the struggle for the party of the masses and has already performed great service in various areas of party building and class struggle and in the preparation of the international revolution.

The **generation change in the party leadership** is taking place in the middle of the described special societal situation. There is a special responsibility not only for continuing work on the achieved level – significant new requirements and possibilities in class struggle also will emerge which have to be addressed and fulfilled courageously and competently.

What is special about this generation change?

Gabi Gärtner: The whole **way** in which the discussion and decision making were carried out is special – because we have quite a number of very good and suitable comrades. The Party Congress and the following CC plenary session **discussed in solidarity, soberly and without any competitive demeanor, strictly from an objective point of view, and eventually reached a unanimous decision**. In every bourgeois or petty-bourgeois party such a situation would lead to a quagmire of speculation, power struggles, quarrels and intrigues. In the MLPD, however, it is about the cause, about how we fulfill our work as revolutionary workers' party in the best possible way – and jointly identify the best representatives for this and educate them. At this point, I warmly thank the Party Congress and the Central Committee for the trust they put in me. Obviously, this is also linked with big expectations which I do not want to disappoint.

What will the new party chairwoman do differently than before?

Gabi Gärtner: First of all, it is about implementing and developing the style of leadership “typical of the MLPD” in my own way. The previous party leadership and the party base have left us an excellent “heritage”: a stable party, manifold experience, the roots among the masses, an excellent ideological-political line and a functioning party apparatus. But – also a high standard! The work that Stefan Engel did for 37 years, and for 20 years together with Monika Gärtner-Engel, comprises a series of important characteristics which the 10th Party Congress declared irrevocably to be guidelines also for the future leadership:

- The unshakable fighting morale and the adamant proletarian class standpoint.
- The conceptual and theoretical work in order to qualify new phenomena and essential changes in the world in time and decide the strategy and tactics of the party.
- The willingness and ability to make a collective realize its potential, to learn from everybody, to adhere to principles while at the same time being open for new things.
- The highest level in the conscious application of the dialectical method at the level of the doctrine of the mode of thinking and of systemic thinking in order to avoid mistakes and attain a high degree of ideological-political accuracy.
- The differentiated, principled and at the same time sensitive cadre work.
- The deep trust in party and masses, the close connections with the party rank and file and the workers.
- The necessary boldness, prudence as well as determination in class struggle.
- The dialectical criticism and self-criticism, the open and critical-minded atmosphere of “open words” – always in unity with trust and solidarity.
- The molding of a proletarian style – against the affectations of functionaries, and

collaborating on equal terms.

- The scientific style of work with the highest work productivity.

So, while for me and the other succeeding comrades the focus will be on further developing the abilities needed for these quality characteristics, it is, of course, also about **developing our own leadership style**. One cannot and should not try to copy the leader personality of Stefan Engel. The “new” refers mainly to mastering the new tasks and requirements in our own way, relying on the whole party – and we will certainly also receive counsel from the experienced comrades. We need to find the right answers to the challenges that party building, class struggle and the preparation of the international revolution put in front of us.

Since 1 July 2016 Monika Gärtner-Engel has taken up the task of ICOR Main Coordinator. Has it been a smooth transition? And what is the ICOR planning to do?

Stefan Engel: The transition went off in a very consensual spirit, smoothly, almost as if it was an obvious thing to happen. This is certainly also due to the fact that the ICOR has already acquired a cohesiveness and stability and trustfully accepted the new Main Coordinator. Due to the grown feeling of togetherness and the recognition of the MLPD, the collaboration is developing in great solidarity and effectively.

The **ICOR has great importance in the present global situation**. As most recently shown by the election of Trump, many governments are shifting to the right. The ICOR will play a major role in making the masses draw progressive conclusions from this: instead of back to nationalism – onward to international liberation from the dictates of internationally solely ruling finance capital! The most important future development of the ICOR will be **the actual practical, mainly continental and regional cooperation and coordination of the struggles and the revolutionaries**. With the solidarity pact with the Kurdish liberation struggle, ICOR has shown the way this can be done. What was still a particularity here – the test and proof of this, with far-reaching impact, at a focal point of world politics – will become general practice.

What is more, the potentials are growing tremendously. From Africa, just recently an organization from Ivory Coast requested membership in the ICOR. Already now there are signs that the target set by ICOR Africa, to double the number of ICOR organizations in Africa by the next continental conference, is no illusion.

An important future task is the **struggle for world peace**: In today's proxy wars in Ukraine and Syria, it is difficult for the masses to identify an enemy and fight it. During the Iraq War that was easier with the everywhere hated main enemy USA. The revisionists play a shameful role today, as they complete the confusion by defending Putin or Assad and paralyze the peace movement by such confusion. In this regard, too, ICOR, with its unique knowledge and connection to the masses in the respective countries, must give a clear orientation and coordinate and revolutionize the struggle against a threatening Third World War.

In these struggles, the ICOR will put big emphasis in 2017 on anchoring socialism as societal alternative. The **100th anniversary of the October Revolution** is very well suited for anchoring the diverse experience, principles and earth-shattering effect of this first great victory of the proletarian revolution. The ICOR will conduct an international campaign to do so. We are happy to see that it is also supported by parties which are not ICOR members. Thus, from 27 to 29 October 2017 an international theoretical seminar with the title “Lessons from the October Revolution” will be held along with a big international cultural event on 28 October. Other ICOR parties also are developing a variety of initiatives: The Russian comrades invite us all to conduct an international demonstration in St. Petersburg! In Nepal, the NCP (Mashal) will hold a party congress on this occasion and wants to recruit 200,000 new members. In Tunisia there will be a regional seminar on 100 Years October Revolution, and in Latin America there will be a joint publication. So we will not commemorate the October Revolution in a nostalgic-dogmatic way, but interpenetrate the festivities most intensely with today's leadership of class struggles, the anchoring of socialism and the preparation of the international socialist revolution.

What are the most important tasks in the near future?

Gabi Gärtner: We will continue the **criticism and self-criticism campaign for some more time**. Its task is to combine the critical and self-critical assimilation of the results of the 10th Party Congress with their creative application in practice.

The focus of this will be our tactical offensive for genuine socialism in the framework of the Internationalist Alliance against the shift to the right of the government and the bourgeois parties. The building of this movement with the concrete form of organization of the Internationalist List/MLPD and the building of voters' initiatives as the form of organization of the alliance at the local level must now be tackled with determination by all party units and leading bodies. First, the participation of the Internationalist List/MLPD in the state elections in NRW in May 2017 will be on the agenda – as warm-up for the federal election campaign in 2017. In North Rhine-Westphalia, important focal points in class struggle interpenetrate. Namely the struggle against the shutdown of the mines and the underground storage of toxic wastes, the struggle against the destruction of jobs in the steel industry, the disputes over school and refugee policy, etc. This state parliamentary election will be a preliminary with great import on the federal election, which is why it is absolutely necessary that the Internationalist List/MLPD presents itself from the outset as societal alternative.

The generation change in the party leadership will bring about great changes in the whole party. We need a lot of new forces, assuming functions at all levels of the party and taking up new and higher responsibilities in the most diverse tasks.

In particular for our party groups in the big industrial enterprises it is important that the Party Congress is thoroughly assimilated and leads to a real self-change in the work. The 10th Party Congress dealt in great detail with the new requirements for triggering and leading workers' struggles in keeping with the new demands on the class consciousness of the working class. Without this process of self-transformation we will neither be able to maintain our influence in the big industrial enterprises, nor increase it. That is why this process is of fundamental importance for all party work.

In the **Marxist-Leninist youth work as the mass tactics of party building** we have made progress. But this has in no way become a common standard throughout the party. In this regard, a **decisive change in our university work also is necessary**. 52 percent of the youth are studying at universities today.

In the future we will focus ten percent of our party groups on university work and plan to have every county party organization where there is a university set up a university group of the MLPD, and also of the *Rebell*, by the 11th Party Congress. University policy must be led in future by the leaderships of our regional party organizations and be most intensely interfused with our youth work as a whole.

All things considered, the extension of our activities notwithstanding the **new-type work at the main line of struggle must be strengthened**. We want to deploy 40 percent of the forces and resources for this in the future. This was partly pushed aside due to many new tasks. We will concentrate 35 percent of the forces on neighborhood work and 15 percent on environmental work.

We are unhappy about a certain lack of good arguments in our agitation and propaganda and in the *Rote Fahne*. Instead we must **constantly work to develop new, convincing arguments**, and everybody is called upon to contribute. Reality is full of them!

We will also take the changed reading and information habits of the masses into account a lot more and make more use of the Internet, social media, etc., while taking into account security aspects. It is very important to us to extend the educational work at the party base and among the masses. The publication of our reworked party program and its discussion in public study groups certainly will be a main method for achieving this. We are already working on a commentary on the program – as important basic material for this educational work.

We will also continue to develop the work in new fields like proletarian refugee policy or Marxist-Leninist social work. Also, the Marxist-Leninist work among women must be strengthened at the organizational level, and the second most important line of struggle, environmental work, must take its firm place in the system of patient and systematic work among the rank and file. Not least, we will continue our proletarian financial policy

systematically. With our donation campaign we plan to raise 750,000 euros, ten percent of which will go to ICOR.

How will the results of the 10th Party Congress be assimilated and put into practice?

Stefan Engel: The development of class consciousness goes hand in hand with a growing desire for organization, consciousness and clarity. With its 10th Party Congress the MLPD is in the position to give convincing revolutionary answers to the questions of our times. It is important that our members take the time to study it in detail.

Soon the **reworked party program** will be published, which we want to distribute among the masses in ten thousands of copies.

It's a good time to win new comrades in arms for MLPD and *Rebell*; this must be done **already at the beginning of the offensive!** The objective of ten percent new members by the end of the year is important in order to be able to conduct this offensive all-sidedly. With our proven way of doing this, we won't talk anybody into becoming a member, but really convince them. First experience shows: The time is more than ripe for a big step forward in recruiting members! Membership in the MLPD, of course, involves a big change and enrichment also in one's personal life, which must be carried out wholeheartedly. The MLPD is the **organization of the practical activity of the revolutionaries**, in which particularly workers, with their most diverse abilities, can make an excellent contribution.

Thank you for the interview!