

# **WILLI DICKHUT**

***AN EXCEPTIONAL WORKING-CLASS LEADER AND  
REVOLUTIONARY THEORETICIAN - ROLE MODEL FOR YOUTH***



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# ***AN EXCEPTIONAL WORKING-CLASS LEADER AND REVOLUTIONARY THEORETICIAN***

## ***ROLE MODEL FOR YOUTH***

Solingen, 8 May 2015. The Youth League *Rebell* demands a square be named after Willi Dickhut





## ***WILLI DICKHUT***

1904–1992

**Fitter/mechanic**

**1926 to 1966 member of the KPD**

**Active resistance against  
Hitlerite fascism**

**Working-class theoretician**

**From 1969 on building of the MLPD**

**Member until his death**

## 1. CHILD AND LEADER OF THE WORKING CLASS

Willi Dickhut came from a humble background. He was trained as a fitter and lathe operator, worked for decades in industrial enterprises, and was an exceptionally skilled worker. He belonged to the *most conscious revolutionary workers of his day*. He combined the *scientific level of his work with proletarian simplicity*. Willi Dickhut led many *workers' strikes* and political struggles against disciplinary measures and participated in the general strike against the fascist Kapp Putsch in 1920. He was a trade union member for 70 years. He developed the idea of *constructive work in the unions* and exemplarily practiced it. *Workers' newssheets* were an integral part of his rank-and-file work. He initiated them – written by, with and for workers – in many factories, spicing them with wit and humor and composing them with care. He himself wrote hundreds of articles for them.

Willi Dickhut pioneered the work in *enterprises and unions as main fighting line of the MLPD*. He understood it under present-day conditions to be a “*school of class struggle*.” Willi Dickhut characterized the work in the trade unions as, above all, an *ideological struggle* with which the millions of members can be won for the revolutionary class struggle. He stood for making the unions *fighting organizations* for the defense and improvement of the wage, working and living conditions of the workers, and criticized any kind of class collaboration policy. Organization of *class struggle*, on the other hand, can only be the *revolutionary party*, the building of which was a matter close to Willi Dickhut's heart. Under his editorship the book, *Trade Unions and Class Struggle*, Nos. 11 and 12 of



Willi Dickhut with fellow workers at Meis Co. in Solingen

the *Revolutionärer Weg* series, was written as a handbook for the work in enterprises and trade unions.

Willi Dickhut stood for the *leading role of the working class, as only revolutionary class, in the class struggle and socialist construction*, and helped to carry this through also in the building of the new Marxist-Leninist party. In the 1970s, with a temporary freeze on the admission of intellectuals to the forerunner organization of the MLPD, he saw to it that it became a genuine working-class party and also is led by workers. Willi Dickhut always had an open ear for the worries and problems of ordinary people. He *withstood all attempts at bribery*. When US authorities in 1945 offered him, as leading local politician, the posh villa of former fascists, he declined the offer. After the KPD was banned in 1956, it was natural for him to go back to work as a fitter in a factory.



Last day at work before retiring in 1969

## **2. ORGANIZED COMMUNIST, IMPLACABLE TOWARD THE BETRAYAL OF SOCIALISM**

In 1926, at the age of 21, as young worker Willi Dickhut became a *member of the KPD* (Communist Party of Germany). He called this day the most important day in his life. Willi Dickhut never was a lone warrior, but in his work always looked to see how and where he could make the best organized contribution. He was one of the few people who dialectically assessed the development of the *old communist movement*. In 1928/29 he was able to gather eight months' *experience as a skilled worker in the socialist Soviet Union*. Already then he was outraged about manifestations and tendencies of bureaucratism in socialist construction. After the Second World War, until the KPD was banned in 1956, Willi Dickhut was fulltime *county secretary of the KPD* in Solingen, Remscheid, and Hagen; a member of the *Land* leadership of

North Rhine-Westphalia, and of the leadership of the Cadre Department of the Party Executive Committee. In all stages of his life he waged an *ideological struggle* and was implacable toward bourgeois and petty-bourgeois deviations in the working-class movement: against dogmatism<sup>1</sup>, revisionism<sup>2</sup>, or reformism. Early on, he sensed and recognized the misdirected development of the KPD in the 1950s as a de-



Willi Dickhut in 1945

parture from Marxism-Leninism, and criticized bureaucratic and heartless treatment of cadres. This is why he attentively followed the dispute over the general line of the international communist movement. The then still Communist Party of China under Mao Zedong's leadership criticized the *revisionist betrayal of the socialist Soviet Union subsequent to the Twentieth Party Congress of the CPSU in 1956*. In unison with the leaders of the Socialist Unity Party (SED) in the German Democratic Republic (GDR), the revisionists in the KPD fulminated against this debate. They forbade Willi Dickhut to order and study literature from China. The leadership of the KPD expelled him and his wife Luise from the party for his refusal to stop ordering the material. He lost

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<sup>1</sup> A way of thinking which rigidly sticks to familiar general truths and does not investigate new phenomena, does not evaluate new experiences.

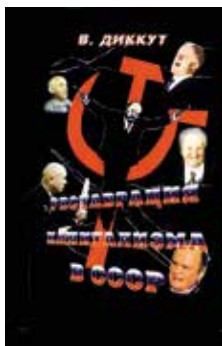
<sup>2</sup> A revisionist is someone who wants to reconcile the fundamental contradiction between capitalism and socialism, but still poses as a Marxist or Marxist-Leninist.

former comrades and friends, many of whom now gave him the cold shoulder or even viciously slandered him. But Willi Dickhut remained adamant. *He was not to be reconciled with the betrayal of socialism.*

### **3. WORKER-THEORETICIAN OF INTERNATIONAL IMPORTANCE**

Willi Dickhut defended Marxism-Leninism, creatively applied it, and further developed it. He took stock of 70 years' experience in class struggle and party building in 33 books, innumerable brochures, and hundreds of reports and papers, speeches and letters. Many of them have been translated into *eight languages and distributed in 57 countries*. Willi Dickhut was not born with the ability to write books. He acquired the necessary theoretical knowledge with iron discipline under difficult conditions. *Applying Marxism-Leninism to the pressing issues of our times that needed to be solved*, and further developing it for that purpose, was the spirit that pervaded his work. His aim was to provide orientation to the working class and the broad masses. He detested dogmatism – drumming Marxism-Leninism into people's heads as pure book knowledge – as he did vulgarization and superficiality. He shaped the style that theoretical elaborations, too, must be *concise, concrete, and comprehensible*.

Willi Dickhut provided scientific proof that *the old KPD had degenerated* beginning in 1956. Only then did he consider it legitimate – at the age of no less than 65 – to set about building the new-type Marxist-Leninist party. However, he set conditions: firstly, that the new party has a clear *ideolog-*



Books by Willi Dickhut, translated and distributed worldwide, including *The Restoration of Capitalism in the Soviet Union* in Russian and, to the right of it, in French; *Trade Unions and Class Struggle* in Turkish.

*ical-political line*, or that it focuses on elaborating this line. It should not only be based generally on Marxism-Leninism, but apply Marxism-Leninism to the concrete conditions of today and further develop it. Secondly, that it be strictly oriented to the *working class*. The *theoretical organ Revolutionärer Weg* (Revolutionary Way) came into being. Willi Dickhut took charge of the editorial staff in 1969, directing it until 1991 for issues 1 to 24. Since 1992 – beginning with No. 25<sup>3</sup> – the editorial team of *Revolutionärer Weg* has been headed by *Stefan Engel*.

Willi Dickhut had always asked himself how the revisionist betrayal could come about despite the fact that in the GDR and the old KPD hundreds of thousands of cadres had been trained in Marxism-Leninism. He revealed the connection between dogmatism and revisionism, and as one conclu-

<sup>3</sup> By 2022 the *Revolutionärer Weg* series had grown to 37 issues.

sion developed the concept of the *ideological-political line*. In particular, he *opposed displacing the ideological struggle* by shortsighted or actionist, purely political assessments or activities. On the other hand, he impressed upon comrades that theoretical work and ideological struggle must not be abstract, but always must be a guide to political action. The key to *assimilating Marxism-Leninism critically and self-critically and applying it creatively* is the *mastery of the dialectical method*. Only then is it possible to distinguish essential from nonessential, fundamental statements from time-bound statements, instead of mechanically applying them to the present situation. This is the only way to defend the universally valid statements of Marxism-Leninism creatively and not distort them or call them into question. This creative work with the system of *Revolutionärer Weg* is through today the guarantee of the proletarian character of the MLPD. With the book, *The Restoration of Capitalism in the Soviet Union (Revolutionärer Weg, Nos. 7 to 9)*, Willi Dickhut elaborated the hitherto lacking proof that, and how, in the Soviet Union socialism was destroyed economically, politically, and ideologically, and what conclusions have to be drawn from this. It was the first book of his that developed a worldwide impact.

With *Revolutionärer Weg*, Nos. 16 to 19, in 1977–79 Willi Dickhut elaborated his main work, the *analysis of state-monopoly capitalism in the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG)*. He established that monopoly capital has totally subordinated the state, that the organs of the state apparatus are fused with those of the monopolies, and that monopoly capital has set up its economic and political rule over all of society. In content and method his analysis provided a guide to scientific work that is still applied by the MLPD today.

## 4. IMBUED WITH THE DIALECTICAL METHOD

Willi Dickhut strove with a great wealth of ideas to develop his work further always in keeping with the requirements of the time. He acquired the ability to do this through *hard training in the dialectical method*. Even in the old communist movement he fought against the disregard for dialectics. Early on, and under the most complicated conditions in fascism, he trained his understanding of *dialectical materialism* and its application. Examples of this are his studies, “Proletarian Resistance against Fascism and War” and “Materialist Dialectics and Bourgeois Natural Science.” “You have to have the firm will to find your way in fields previously unfamiliar to you. By penetrating into them, you strengthen your grasp on the dialectical method.”<sup>4</sup> One foundation of his creative power was that he always worked out a *concrete analysis* of the

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<sup>4</sup> Visit on 3 April 1986

Birthday party in 1986 at Willi Dickhut's home (second from the right, Willi Dickhut; to his left, Stefan Engel, longtime companion and chairman of the MLPD)



concrete situation and of the mode of thinking of the masses. Mechanical routine was unknown to him. His *theoretical work* interpenetrated in an all-around way with his *practical work*. When epochal events of world history occurred, Willi Dickhut thus was able to courageously develop a bold plan, implement it in a well-thought-out manner, and flexibly develop the strategy and tactics further.

One principle and guideline which he imparted to all comrades is *threefold thinking*. This means to think through everything, firstly, in *depth*, secondly, in *perspective*, and thirdly, translate this into *systematic activity*. So his work was effective because it was always well thought-through, down to the practical implementation, instead of building castles in the air or giving abstract, mechanical instructions. This enabled him to identify new phenomena and essential changes and make *correct prognoses*. For example, that the socialist October Revolution no longer can be the model revolution of the future, but that the international socialist revolution must be prepared.

During democratic-antifascist reconstruction after 1945, Willi Dickhut was a leading antifascist local politician in Solingen for a time and leader of the KPD parliamentary group in the city council. He was regarded as the architect of a cooperation between KPD and Social Democratic Party (SPD) in the early 1950s that caused a stir throughout the republic. Willi Dickhut realized a *principled yet flexible alliance policy*. He treated the problem of the mode of thinking scientifically, and not as a moral issue, in order to help people prevail over the petty-bourgeois mode of thinking and strengthen the proletarian mode of thinking. He emphasized that any *unity of action* must be on the basis of struggle.



The KABD (forerunner of the MLPD) at the May Day demonstration in Mannheim in 1977

## **5. GUIDING SPIRIT OF THE NEW-TYPE PARTY**

Willi Dickhut set the course so that together with others, with Stefan Engel playing a leading role, a real feat was achieved: following the revisionist betrayal of the old communist parties, leaving behind the confusion of the petty-bourgeois ML movement in the FRG, a *Marxist-Leninist party of a new type* was formed. It was a hard struggle for the proletarian line, for the orientation to the working class, and against the vanities of individual self-appointed leaders. Self-conceit and petty-bourgeois claim to leadership, arrogance, sectarianism and disdain for the masses, opportunism and pragmatism, dogmatism and revisionism were incompatible with such a Marxist-Leninist working-class party.

In 1982 the MLPD could be founded. For 37 years, Stefan Engel as chairman led its construction. As essential conclusion from the revisionist betrayal, Willi Dickhut worked out the foundations of the doctrine of the *mode of thinking* with his books on the *dialectical method*: No. 6 in the *Revolutionärer Weg* series; No. 24, *The Dialectical Unity of Theory and Practice*; *The History of the MLPD*; No. 15 in the *Revolutionärer Weg* series, *Fight Liquidationism*, and the book, *The End of Socialism?* The central message is: “Petty-bourgeois thinking can destroy a proletarian party! Socialist construction is impossible with a petty-bourgeois mode of thinking! Petty-bourgeois thinking can destroy socialist society!”<sup>5</sup> Starting from Stefan Engel’s book, *The Struggle over the Mode of Thinking in the Working-Class Movement*, No. 26 of the theoretical organ *Revolutionärer Weg*, the doctrine of the mode of thinking was *creatively further developed by the MLPD, summarized, and applied to the issues of today*. The question of the mode of thinking even has become considerably more important since then. The petty-bourgeois mode of thinking seemingly takes a critical attitude toward capitalism while at the same time defending it against any societal alternative. Now the government makes use of an entire *system of the petty-bourgeois mode of thinking as main method of government*. Overcoming this is the basis for the masses to decide in favor of the path of proletarian class struggle.

As lesson from the revisionist degeneration of formerly communist parties, Willi Dickhut took up Lenin’s idea again concerning the necessity of *independent control commissions*. Based on this model, he built up the Central Control Commission in the MLPD and assumed its leadership from 1972

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<sup>5</sup> Willi Dickhut, *The End of Socialism?* p. 23



Event marking the founding of the MLPD in 1982. In the middle Stefan Engel

to 1976, before the founding of the party. He shaped the *party's system of self-control*: control from below by the members, the self-control of the cadres, and control from above by the CCC. He was firmly convinced that particularly the leading bodies and leading comrades had to be *independently controlled*. In the leadership of the CCC he developed an equally consistent and helpful dialectical cadre work. With his minutely detailed tactics in the fight against *liquidationism*<sup>6</sup> he provided an education which ensured that the MLPD did not have to go through any liquidationism and any split since its founding.

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<sup>6</sup> Liquidators are petty-bourgeois forces in the working-class and people's movement whose views and actions lead to subversion, division and destruction of organizations of the working class or to the transformation of progressive movements and organizations into props of monopoly rule.

Willi Dickhut trained the comrades to *comprehend every activity as conscious application of the dialectical method*. Stefan Engel developed this further, among other things with twelve semesters dealing with the conscious application of the dialectical method. In this way the MLPD fought for and achieved work on the basis of the proletarian mode of thinking.

As dialectical negation of the KPD's work among women, Willi Dickhut developed the idea of promoting *nonparty self-run organizations of the masses of women*. With the doctrine of the mode of thinking, the MLPD comprehensively geared its work to promoting non-party-affiliated forms of organization. In them, with the aid of the persuasion work of the Marxist-Leninists, the masses learn to take their cause into their own hands, to work together in organized fashion, and to become an independent force in the struggle for the liberation of humanity. This was a basis for orienting the *Marxist-Leninist youth league to being a school for life of the proletarian mode of thinking* for the masses of youth. His whole life, Willi Dickhut *trained* younger comrades and above all *worker-cadres*: as cadre officer in the KPD or in the building of the MLPD, where he consciously never took on leadership positions. The youth and children were particularly dear to his heart.

## 6. UNSHAKEABLE WILL

Throughout his life, Willi Dickhut was an *indomitable fighter* who *never vacillated*. He put his entire life in the service of proletarian principles: from every detail of workaday life to the elaboration of ideological-political foundations or practical class battles. Willi Dickhut was imbued with a *deep appreciation of the necessity* of doing what has to be done from the viewpoint of the emancipation of the working class, without regard for the immediate success, his personal reputation, or bitter defeats. For him there was *no such thing as a hopeless situation*.

During Hitlerite fascism, the most brutal form of terror and counterrevolution in capitalism, Willi Dickhut took the lead in carrying out organized, *illegal antifascist and communist* resistance. In the Börgermoor concentration camp he organized active resistance in connection with ideological persuasion work among the prisoners and subversion work among the guards. Willi Dickhut recognized: to counter the fascist propaganda and demagoguery it is necessary above all to *influence the mode of thinking of the masses*. Willi Dickhut was a fierce opponent of imperialist wars and provided guidance for the struggle against the danger of a new world war, among other things with his book, *War and Peace and the Socialist Revolution (Revolutionärer Weg, No. 22)*. To him there was *never a reason to be skeptical of the party or the masses*, but only the incentive to improve the arguments, develop party work to a higher level, and strengthen the close relationship with the masses in systematic rank-and-file work. Even when he stood virtually alone for a time in his own revisionist, degenerated party, *he knew no defeatism, let alone capitulation*.

Even in fascist interrogations he was willing to accept death instead of betraying the class struggle and his comrades to the fascists. “The more difficult the fighting conditions, the more consciously, accurately and unerringly Willi worked.”<sup>7</sup>

Willi Dickhut was a trenchant *polemicist* and always dealt very concretely with the statements of his opponents in order to pick them to pieces. His sharp wit and dry humor went hand in hand with deep empathy and human warmth. Willi Dickhut was never satisfied with mediocrity. His motto: *Only the best is good enough for the workers!* “He hated careless-

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<sup>7</sup> Stefan Engel, Speech on the Occasion of Willi Dickhut’s death, 31 May 1992

**The Red Foxes children’s organization in Solingen congratulated Willi Dickhut on his birthday. Among them, Gabi Fechtner, second from the left.**



ness, superficiality and routine in work.” But Willi Dickhut also was “anything but an ascetic...; he knew how to enjoy himself.”<sup>8</sup>

Willi Dickhut proved: there is no mystery to a proletarian mode of thinking and a Marxist style of work. Anyone can acquire them. He wrote to a young *Rebell* member as guidance: “To be among the strongest, one must have unshakable convictions and the iron will to act.”<sup>9</sup> This, his bonds with the masses and his confidence in them, his systematicness and discipline, were the source of his unbroken confidence in victory, of his inventiveness, of his clarity of purpose – in short, his “proletarian ambition to dedicate himself to the working class all his life with all his strength, all his knowledge and ability, as long as it is possible.”<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>9</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>10</sup> *ibid.*

## VOICES ABOUT WILLI DICKHUT

### **Erika Steffens, a former colleague:**

"He could work very well and did much to modernize things at the company for the benefit of the workers. For example, he helped me get the same pay grade as the men.... In the forty years I worked at the factory I never met anyone else with whom one could work so well and who was such a good colleague as Willi Dickhut."<sup>1</sup>

### **Head of the Solingen City Archive, Ralf Rogge<sup>2</sup>:**

"Truly outstanding are Willi Dickhut's activities in the first phase after the end of the Second World War and at the beginning of the occupation by the victorious Allies. For the KPD, he is the leading personality who immediately after the cessation of hostilities in Solingen in April 1945 strove for a comprehensive, antifascist, new start in all areas of society and politics." Regarding his circulars illegally distributed at the risk of his life during Hitlerite fascism, later published in the book, *Proletarischer Widerstand gegen Faschismus und Krieg* (Proletarian Resistance Against Fascism and War), Ralf Rogge writes: "During this period his more than remarkable documents assessing the political situation also originated.... They show the dedication and political will with which Willi Dickhut sought to draw the most realistic possible picture of the war situation for himself and his comrades, at a time when the press had to toe the fascist line, in order to derive from them opportunities for political action. All in all, and particularly at the local level, a unique source. We are fortunate to have them among our archival holdings."

### **Boris Gunko, one of the founders of the Marxist-Leninist Platform of Russia, and Pavel Bylevsky wrote in the brochure Немецкий дневник (German Diary):**

"The MLPD was fortunate to have one of the most important theoreticians of our time, Willi Dickhut (1904–1992), at its side at its beginnings and until the end of his life. ... As in the days of Lenin, it was necessary to found a party of a new type which was completely free of the burden of opportunism and capable

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<sup>1</sup> Quoted from special issue of Rote Fahne on the death of Willi Dickhut, May 1992

<sup>2</sup> Solingen City Archive, 20 May 2015. Ralf Rogge, "Willi Dickhut – Remarks about his importance for the history of the City of Solingen" – written on behalf of a district council in Solingen in connection with a citizens' proposal for naming a street after Willi Dickhut

of further developing Marxism under present-day conditions.... The theoretical questions most important for practice were answered in the theoretical organ of the KABD ... *Revolutionärer Weg*, published since 1970. In accordance with the theory, which was based on the study of life, the practical work of the party developed." (Moscow, 2000, pp. 34/35)

**Khan Rano of the Communist Party of Bangladesh said in an interview with Monika Gärtner-Engel on 29 November 2018:**

"The *Revolutionärer Weg* series of the MLPD is of significance for the entire revolutionary world movement. What was worked out in it is by no means important only for Germany. The books should be studied everywhere in the world. Very important is the question of the applied dialectical method. I can only recommend these books to everyone. Particularly important today are the books of Stefan Engel – from the doctrine of the mode of thinking to *Götterdämmerung* ... to the book *Dawn of the International Socialist Revolution*."

**There were only a few members of the DKP who later apologized for their defamation of Willi Dickhut. One of them was Marburg professor Georg Fülberth. At the end of an obituary for Willi Dickhut he writes:**

"Beyond all political differences, the image of a courageous and unbroken man remains, an outstanding representative of a sorely tried generation of men and women communists."<sup>3</sup>

**A speaker from Wuppertal at the seminar on the tenth anniversary of Willi Dickhut's death:**

"It must have been in the late 1970s. I was in Düsseldorf at a demonstration.... Willi Dickhut's charisma greatly impressed me. What he said – and particularly how he said it – was authentic through and through. This was a worker who spoke, who knew exactly what he was talking about. Not one word turned out to be a buzzword. His speech pleasantly differed from party jargon, from the parroting and pompousness that were so common then. When he said 'imperialism,' then you began to listen again: his entire life experience was behind the word; theory that he had made his own. This is how Willi Dickhut came across to me: clear and comprehensible, calm and at the same time militant."

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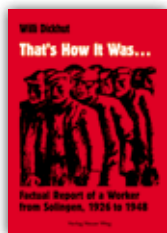
<sup>3</sup> Obituary of 18 May 1992, written for the newspapers *Unsere Zeit* and *Sozialistische Zeitung*

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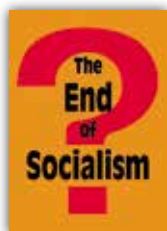
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The headquarters of the MLPD will soon be named “Willi-Dickhut-Haus.”