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Basic biographical data

Name:	Otto Schüssler
Other names (byname, pseud. etc.):	Oskar F. ; Oscar Fischer, Oskar Fischer ; Oskar Fisher ; Fr. ; Meunier ; Julián Suárez ; O-r. ; Otto ; Ottoche
Date and place of birth:	August 8, 1905, Leipzig (Germany)
Date and place of death:	?, 1982, ? (Mexico)
Nationality:	German, Mexican (?)
Occupations, careers, etc.:	Worker, political organizer, editor
Time of activity in Trotskyist movement:	1928 - ca. 1945

Biographical sketch

Little is known about the family background, the childhood and education of Otto Schüssler who was born into a working-class family in Leipzig (Saxony, Germany) on August 8, 1905. He played an important rôle in the German and international Trotskyist movement of the 1930s and served as secretary to Trotsky several times.

His companion for many years was Gertrude Schröter*.

Schüssler earned his living first as a worker** and obtained a considerably broad general knowledge by intensive self-teaching and reading. Politically he was a close sympathizer of the far-left and became a member of the *KAPD (Kommunistische Arbeiter-Partei Deutschlands, Communist Workers' Party of Germany)*, a left splinter party which had emerged from the *KPD (Kommunistische Partei Deutschlands, Communist Party of Germany)* in 1920.

In 1928 he became – together with E.H. Ackerknecht (also known as *Bauer*) and R. Sobolevicius (also

* Unfortunately, we are lacking any biographical information about G. Schröter or any relatives of Schüssler.

** According to some sources he was employed as a packer with a Leipzig printing office specializing in art printing while according to other sources he earned his living as a bookbinder.

known as Roman *Well* who some years later was exposed as a *GPU* provocateur) – a founding member of a small Leipzig group of left oppositionists called *Bolschewistische Einheit* (*Bolshevik Unity*). This group could win over several leftist dissidents from the Saxonian *KPD*; some two years later, in March 1930, it fused with the Trotskyist minority tendency within the *Leninbund* (*Lenin League*) and with the *Linke Opposition am Wedding und in der Pfalz* (*Left Opposition in Wedding and in the Palatinate*) to form the *Vereinigte Linke Opposition* (*United Left Opposition*). Schüssler became one of the members of the *Reichsleitung* (i.e. the political committee) of the *VLO*; other leading figures of the *VLO* in 1930 were A. Grylewicz, J. Kohn, K. Landau, H. Schwalbach, Josef Weber, E. Wolf, the just-mentioned E.H. Ackerknecht, R. Sobolewicz et al. Like most of the other Leipzig Trotskyists, Schüssler sided with the *VLO* majority when a sharp and long-lasting factional struggle – mixed up with unbridgeable personal animosities – occurred within the ranks of the *VLO* ending in a split in 1931: both the majority and the minority – the latter under the leadership of K. Landau – now called themselves *Linke Opposition der KPD* (*Bolschewiki-Leninisten*) (*Left Opposition of the KPD, Bolshevik-Leninists*); while the Landau group continued to publish the (*ex-*)*VLO* organ *Der Kommunist*, the Grylewicz (majority) group launched a new organ, *Permanente Revolution* to which Schüssler, too, contributed articles after having proved his talents as a writer already in *Der Kommunist* and in various internal documents.

In spring 1932 Trotsky's elder son Lev Sedov, who at that time was living in Berlin as a student, as managing editor of the *Biulleten' oppositsii* and as a liaison man of the *International Secretariat of the International Left Opposition*, looked for a German-language secretary to his father. On Ackerknecht's recommendation Sedov chose Schüssler for the job, who thus in May 1932 went to Büyük Ada (Prinkipo Islands, Turkey) where exiled Leon Trotsky had settled some years before. Schüssler became one of Trotsky's favourite secretaries and carried out a lot of valuable secretarial, editorial and translation work during his one-year stay at Trotsky's home. In November 1932 Schüssler accompanied Trotsky on his famous trip to Copenhagen, and in 1933 a booklet featuring a balance sheet and documentation of the communists' disastrous policy in view of the rise of fascism to power in Germany was published with a preface by Leon Trotsky under Schüssler's pseudonym *Oskar Fischer*.

After leaving Büyük Ada in April 1933, Schüssler undertook a clandestine trip to Germany, commissioned with the re-organisation of the now illegal Trotskyist groups which soon had to suffer from harsh repression after the Nazis had seized power in Germany. When the last full-scale national conference of the German Trotskyists on German territory was held (clandestinely) in March 1933 at Leipzig, Schüssler *in absentia* became elected a member of the *AK* (*Auslandskomitee, Foreign Committee*) of the renamed *Internationale Kommunisten Deutschlands* (*IKD, International Communists of Germany*), the German section of the *International Left Opposition* (*ILO*)*. The *AK* was created in order to secure the political leadership of the *IKD* and to maintain liaison with other members and tendencies of the emigration and last but not least with the local Trotskyist underground groups operating in Germany under the difficult conditions of a fascist dictatorship.

One of the main tasks of the *AK* was securing the regular appearance of *IKD's* new exile paper *Unser Wort* which began to be published in Prague in spring 1933 under the editorship of Walter Held (pseud.: Epe). In summer 1933 Schüssler went to Prague (Czechoslovakia) succeeding Held at the editorial board of *Unser Wort* and eventually transferring it to Paris in autumn 1933, where he settled until 1939, with only a few interruptions. Besides being contributing editor of *Unser Wort* – signing most of his articles by 'O-r', the short of his pseudonym *Oskar Fischer* – he published articles in other contemporaneous Trotskyist papers, too.

* *ILO* was renamed *International Communist League* (*ICL*) in 1933 and *Movement for the Fourth International* in 1936.

According to Pierre Broué*, Schüssler from November 1933 until April 1934 served again – perhaps only occasionally – as a secretary to Trotsky who at that time lived at Barbizon (France).

In December 1934 Schüssler participated in the clandestine *IKD* conference, held at Dietikon (near Zürich, Switzerland), which regarding the question of *entrism* made a hotly debated decision in favour of Trotsky's suggestions. After the Dietikon conference, Schüssler (using mostly the pseudonym *Oskar Fischer*), together with his friend and close collaborator Josef Weber – better known by his pseudonym *Johre* – was the main leader and inspirer of the *IKD*. But the *Johre-Fischer* leadership – as this leading duo used to be called – was challenged again and again by various other German Trotskyist exile leaders who continued to form mini oppositions as for example did Walter Nettelbeck (pseudonym: Jan Bur); two times *Johre-Fischer* even lost the *AK* leadership for a short period of time. After several years characterized by continuing self-laceration, vitriolic factional struggles and often small-minded personal animosities, the *IKD (AK)* at the end of the 1930s had dwindled to a tiny and marginalized group, thus Schüssler and Weber (*Johre-Fischer*) found themselves as leaders of a more or less phantom organization. Some years before they had fiercely rejected Trotsky's suggestion to integrate the *Gruppe Internationale (Group The International)*, a Paris exile group led by the former Zinovievists Ruth Fischer and Arkadij Maslow, into the *IKD*, and in 1937 a struggle for influence flared up between *Johre-Fischer* and R. Klement** – another member of the *AK* of the *IKD* and at the same time an eminent figure of the *Administrative Secretariat of the Movement for the Fourth International* – which culminated in the launching of a rival paper issued by Klement, *Der einzige Weg*.

It should be added that Schüssler (under his pseudonym *Fischer*) and Weber (*Johre*) participated as German delegates in both the international conference of the *Movement for the Fourth International* (allegedly held at Geneva, factually held at Paris in July 1936) and in the founding conference of the *Fourth International* (allegedly held at Lausanne, factually held at Périgny [near Paris] in September 1938). At the latter conference Schüssler sided with those delegates who endorsed Trotsky's motion to immediately proclaim the new, *Fourth International*.

Shortly after the founding conference of the Fourth International, Schüssler decided to leave Paris and to go to Mexico where he arrived by ship in February 1939, served as Trotsky's secretary and guard again, along with it learning Spanish and engaging in the *Partido Obrero Internacionalista (POI, Internationalist Workers' Party)*, the Mexican section of the *Fourth International*. He lived in the fortress-like Trotsky house at Coyoacán until Trotsky's assassination in August 1940. Some 3 months earlier, in May 1940, Schüssler was arrested together with one of Trotsky's American secretaries, Charles Cornell, by the Mexican police colonel Leandro Apolinar Sánchez Salazar accused of passivity during the machine-gun raid on Trotsky's house led by Mexican Stalinist painter Alvaro Siqueiros. However, at the personal intervention of Trotsky, who had remained uninjured in this assault, Schüssler and Cornell were released after two days.

After the second attempt at Trotsky's life on August 20 and his death the day after, Schüssler remained in Mexico, took up a job and continued to be active in the Mexican section of the *Fourth International* under his pseudonym Julián Suárez. When the Mexican section eventually split at the end of World War II, he sided with Octavio Fernández Vilchis who launched a new group, *Grupo Socialista Obrero (GSO, Socialist Workers' Group)*. This dissident group – like some splinter groups in other countries, too – advocated a radical reform of Trotskyism including a total revision of its hitherto analysis of the class character of the USSR. Having abandoned some fundamentals of Trotskyism, *GSO* eventually was

* Broué, Pierre: [Biographical sketch] Schüssler, Otto, dit Julián Suárez / P.B. [i.e. Pierre Broué], in: *Dictionnaire biographique du mouvement ouvrier international : L'Allemagne / sous la dir. de Jacques Droz*, Paris, 1990, p. 436. Other sources, however, only mention Schüssler's service as a secretary from May 1932 to April 1933 and from February to August 1940.

** Murdered 1938 in Paris by the GPU.

repudiated by the *Fourth International* in 1946 and went out of existence shortly thereafter. For some time Schüssler irregularly contributed articles to the paper *Dinge der Zeit* which had been launched in Britain in 1947 and was later transferred to Germany by Schüssler's old friend and co-worker Weber (*Johre*) with whom he, however, had broken shortly after the War. Johre and with him the remnants of the *IKD* during the first years of the War had taken positions which were no longer compatible to those held by the *International Secretariat*; the *IKD* as a section of the *FI* factually did no longer exist at the end of the War. Johre became an advocate of the *Movement for a Democracy of Content* (*Bewegung für Inhaltliche Demokratie*) while Schüssler during the late 1940s turned to an anti-communist hardliner before he totally withdrew from politics and lost any interest in political matters; he even refused any contact with people reminding him on his past. Retired, he died aged 77 in Mexico in 1982 [no further details known].

*Selective bibliography**

- ***Selective bibliography: Books/pamphlets (co-)authored by Schüssler***

Mandel, Ernest: *Trotzkis Faschismustheorie* / Ernest Mandel. Im Anh.: *Leninismus gegen Stalinismus* / Oskar Fischer [i.e. Otto Schüssler]. - 2. Aufl. - Frankfurt a.M. : ISP-Verl., 1977. - 52, 31 pp. - (ISP-Theorie ; 6)

Schüssler, Otto: *Leninismus gegen Stalinismus : (Lehren der deutschen Katastrophe) / zusammengestellt von Oskar Fischer [i.e. Otto Schüssler]. Mit einem Vorw. von Leo Trotzki.* - Prag : Deutsche Sektion der Internationalen Linken Opposition, 1933. - 31 pp. [& various later ed.]

- ***Selective bibliography: Journals (co-)edited by Schüssler***

La Lutte de classes : revue théorique mensuelle (Paris) <TSB 0948>
 Unser Wort (Prag, later: Paris; later: Antwerpen; later: New York, NY) <TSB 1761>

- ***Selective bibliography: Journals and bulletins to which Schüssler contributed***

Dinge der Zeit (London)
 Internal Bulletin / Socialist Workers Party (New York, NY) <TSB 1548>
 International Bulletin / publ. for the International Executive Committee of the Fourth International by the Socialist Workers Party of the U.S.A. (New York, NY) <TSB 0540>
 Internationale Jugendinformation der IKL (Bolschewiki-Leninisten) (Kopenhagen, later: Oslo) <TSB 0744>
 Der Kommunist : Zeitschrift der Vereinigten Linken Opposition der K.P.D. (Berlin) <TSB 0846>
 La Lutte de classes : revue théorique mensuelle (Paris) <TSB 0948>
 Mitteilungsblatt der Reichsleitung der Linken Opposition der KPD (Bolschewiki-Leninisten, Sektion der Internationalen Linken Opposition) (Berlin) <TSB 1065>
 The New International (New York, NY, 1934-36 and 1938-58) <TSB 1089>

* TSB item numbers (e.g. <TSB 0716>) refer to Lubitz' *Trotskyist Serials Bibliography*, München [etc.] : Saur, 1993, which is out of print but available as PDF file within the framework of *TrotskyanaNet*. In TSB you can find detailed descriptions concerning the respective Trotskyist journals, newsletters, bulletins and the like.

Permanente Revolution / Linke Opposition der KPD (Bolschewiki-Leninisten), Sektion der Internationalen Linken
 Opposition (Berlin) <TSB 1192>
 Socialist Appeal (New York, NY) <TSB 1497>
 Unser Wort (Prag, later: Paris; later: Antwerpen; later: New York, NY) <TSB 1761>

• ***Selective bibliography: Books and articles about Schüssler***

- Broué, Pierre: [Biographical sketch], in: *Cahiers Léon Trotsky* <TSB 0277>, 1979 (1), pp. 71-73. [An abridged Engl. version transl. by Ted Crawford is available in the WWW:
<http://marxists.org/history/etol/revhist/supplem/scussle.htm>]
- [Broué, Pierre]: [Obituary] / [Pierre Broué?], in: *Cahiers Léon Trotsky* <TSB 0277>, 1982 (11), pp. 124-125.
- Broué, Pierre: Schüssler, Otto, dit Julián Suárez / P.B. [i.e. Pierre Broué], in: *Dictionnaire biographique du mouvement ouvrier international : L'Allemagne / sous la dir. de Jacques Droz*, Paris, 1990, p. 436. [Biographical sketch]
- Schüle, Annegret: [Biographical sketch], in: *Schüle, Annegret: Trotzismus in Deutschland bis 1933*, Köln, 1989: p. 156.
- Stobnicer, Maurice: [Biographical sketch], in: *Stobnicer, Maurice: Le mouvement trotskyste allemand sous la république de Weimar*, Thèse, Paris, Univ. de Paris VIII, 1980, pp. 353-354.

Note: More informations about Otto Schüssler are likely to be found in some of the books, pamphlets, university works and articles listed in the relevant chapters of our *Trotsky Bibliography*, 3. ed., München [etc.], 1999, e.g. in chapter 7.5.08.

Sidelines, notes on archives

Schüssler's correspondence with Trotsky and some documents in context with his work as a secretary to Trotsky are to be found in *The Papers of Leon Trotsky* (BMS Russian 13) and *The Exile Papers of Leon Trotsky* (BMS Russian 13.1), both archival collections being preserved at Houghton Library (Cambridge, Mass.); letters from Schüssler to Lev Sedov, Leon Trotsky and others are contained in the *Trotskii-Sedov Papers* (series 231 of the Boris I. Nicolaevsky Collection) held at the *Hoover Institution Archives* (Stanford, Cal.)

W. Lubitz, rev. April 2006

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