

The pseudo-left and identity politics: RIO solidarizes itself with “Gina-Lisa” and promotes law and order

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As opposition to social inequality and war continues to grow, pseudo-left organizations are advocating increased state powers based on various forms of identity politics. Their goal is to divide the working class and mobilize the support of more privileged and affluent layers of the middle class for military interventions and right-wing “law and order” politics. A prime example of this is the Revolutionary Internationalist Organisation (RIO), which operates in Germany in the sphere of the Left Party and the trade unions and is part of the international organization, “Trotskyist Fraction—Fourth International” (FT-CI).

For several days, this pseudo-Trotskyist grouping has displayed on its website a statement entitled “Solidarity with Gina-Lisa,” which welcomes the tightening of laws governing sexual offences that the German parliament passed unanimously at the beginning of July. Paragraph two of the statement, posted under the category heading “Women and LGBTI*”, reads “The basic principle ‘no means no,’ which we called out so loudly last time, has been enshrined in law. It’s about time. Feminists have been demanding this for a long time.”

Like the so-called “New Year’s Eve incident in Cologne,” the case of “Gina-Lisa Lohfink,” with which RIO declares its solidarity, has been used systematically by politicians and the media to strengthen the power of the state and tighten criminal laws.

In 2012, a sex tape was made available to the public in which Lohfink was seen having intercourse with two men. She later claimed that they had drugged and raped her. She then pressed charges. During evidentiary hearings a judge, basing herself on a review of video and photographic materials as well as a toxicology report, ruled that Lohfink had made false statements. The judge set the accused men free and instead required the former “Germany’s Next Top Model” participant to pay a fine in the amount of €24,000 for bringing false charges against them.

At this point, German Minister of Justice Heiko Maas

(Social Democratic Party, SPD) rushed in to insist that the case proved the urgency of his plan to tighten the laws on sex crimes. “If the perpetrators cannot be punished, that is a second bitter humiliation for the victim,” Maas told Germany’s *Bild* newspaper. The reforms for which he was fighting were “urgently needed in order to close glaring loopholes.” Offenders “must be strictly punished.” Manuela Schwesig (SPD), the minister of family affairs, entered the debate, declaring, “‘No means no’ must stand, the word ‘stop’ is clear.”

In fact, the case of “Gina-Lisa” is so dubious that even many in the bourgeois media have questioned Lohfink’s version of events. “The reality is that only one thing is clear in the Lohfink case: that nothing is clear,” wrote *Die Zeit* recently. Anyone who reads the records of the investigation must “come away with substantial doubts that the model was raped.” “Several details” contradict “the version of events described by Lohfink and her attorney.” The “no, no, no” heard in the film could “relate to the filming of the events, not to the intercourse itself,” writes the paper.

None of this has prevented RIO from placing itself at the forefront of the hysterical “law and order” campaign promoted by the government and supported by both opposition parties in parliament. “We are in solidarity with Gina-Lisa, not only because we think she has been done a gross injustice, but because in doing so we are also defending ourselves and our rights. Our organization against your violence!” declares the RIO statement.

In reality, the legal amendment praised by RIO (and the German minister of justice!) is neither a defence of “rights” nor a means of defending women against violence. It is part of a concerted campaign by politicians and the media to exploit an emotionally charged issue in order to strengthen the state apparatus and, in particular, to persecute refugees. The *World Socialist Web Site* has already provided a detailed account of the reactionary content of the so-called “no means no” law in an earlier article.

The revision of Paragraph 177 of the criminal code stipulates that sexual behaviour contrary to the “manifest wishes of another person” can now be punished with a sentence of up to five years in prison. The problem is that it remains entirely unclear when the wishes of another person become “manifest,” who determines this and whether the perpetrator himself must recognize it. The introduction of this ambiguous clause not only makes it easier to press charges against or investigate someone, but it also opens the floodgates to judicial arbitrariness. The new criminal code also greatly expands the definition of what constitutes a criminal offence.

An addition that will soon be incorporated into the new law recalls the principle of “family liability.” According to Paragraph 184 J, anyone who “belongs to a group of people who throng around someone in order to commit a crime,” can be imprisoned for “up to five years” if a member of the group perpetrates a sexual offence. Furthermore, the new legal provisions make it easier to deport immigrants convicted of a criminal offence, regardless of the severity of the sentence imposed upon them.

RIO is fully aware of the reactionary thrust of the law. There is “no reason to celebrate, since i[t] was carried out by racist means. At the same time, it made deportations easier,” says the statement. But this does not stop the group from once again explicitly supporting the expansion of the law: “Yes, we need better laws in order to make our lives easier.”

RIO’s call for harsher laws is not a momentary slip, but is consistent with the established practice of the group. Back on June 10, one of its leading representatives, Wladek Flakin, published an inflammatory article in *Junge Welt*, calling for tougher punishment of the US student Brock Turner, who was charged with sexual assault. Under the title, “USA: leniency for elite student,” Flakin blustered in the style of an extreme right-winger: “Only six months’ imprisonment after sexual attacks at Stanford University. The public is outraged.”

Flakin’s so-called outraged public is led by US Vice President Joe Biden, who—despite the rather nebulous and contradictory facts of the case—intervened in the ongoing proceedings and denounced the leniency of the sentence.

The *World Socialist Web Site* published an article opposing the propaganda campaign against presiding Judge Aaron Persky and commented:

The campaign around the sentencing of Turner, it should be stated directly, is lacking entirely in anything that might remotely be described as politically and socially progressive. The feminist professors at Stanford University who have whipped

up the campaign against Persky and who are screaming for a harsher sentence for Turner have not bothered to work out the implications of their positions and actions. The focus on ‘victims’ rights’—the notion that criminal proceedings are intended to facilitate convictions and satisfy the victim’s desire for revenge rather than ensure a fair trial for the accused—has been a trademark of right-wing legal theorists for decades.

The American political and media establishment has, through long practice, made a science out of turning tragedies into profitable sensations and political opportunities. The participation of self-described ‘left’ and ‘feminist’ and ‘progressive’ figures in these right-wing campaigns, side-by-side with state prosecutors and the gutter press, only testifies to the disoriented moods that prevail in these circles.

However, in the case of RIO, the issue is not so much “disorientation.” Rather, it is engaged in a conscious shift to the right on the basis of identity politics. In a de facto alliance with reactionary politicians such as Biden in the US and Maas in Germany, RIO’s hysterical campaign for more “toughness” toward alleged sexual offenders is directly bound up with the intensification of the class struggle on a world scale. Like the established representatives of the bourgeois order, its appendages in the pseudo-left sense that in the future only a “strong state” will be able to counter growing opposition to austerity and war.



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