

How the Revolutionary Internationalist Organisation (RIO) is sabotaging the fight against the pandemic in Germany

Johannes Stern
22 February 2021

The pseudo-left Revolutionary Internationalist Organisation (RIO), which operates around Germany's Left Party and the trade unions, is playing a particularly nasty role in sabotaging the struggle against the pandemic. RIO is the German offshoot of the Morenoite "Trotskyist Fraction-Fourth International" (FT-CI).

In a statement entitled "#ZeroCovid: What are the tasks of the left and the working class?" the editorial board of *Klasse gegen Klasse* (*Class against Class*), RIO's online publication, feigns support for #ZeroCovid. It should be "a political goal to reduce contagion to zero and eradicate the pandemic." The whole statement, however, is aimed at directing workers and youth toward the trade unions and establishment parties responsible for the official pandemic policy and the mass deaths.

The *World Socialist Web Site* has evaluated the #ZeroCovid petition initiative as an expression of growing opposition to the official "profits before lives" policy that has already caused the deaths of more than 750,000 people across Europe. The petition, which has now been signed by over 100,000 people, is inspired by the call published in December by several hundred renowned scientists in the medical journal *The Lancet*. It calls for "a European shutdown in solidarity."

Our commentary on the petition explains that the demands it raises can only be realised through the independent mobilisation of the working class based on a socialist programme. The Sozialistische Gleichheitspartei (Socialist Equality Party) and the WSWs are therefore fighting to build independent action committees in workplaces and schools so that workers take safety measures against the virus into their own hands and organise a general strike to close schools and non-essential workplaces.

At the same time, we stress that the struggle for such an offensive requires a break with the elements in the #ZeroCovid campaign, "who are working specifically to divert the growing opposition to government policies to let it

fizzle out without effect."

RIO is one of the most corrupt tendencies to play such a role. When it calls for the "building of committees against pandemic and crisis" and speaks of an "emergency programme of the working class" and the "perspective of a general strike" so that it is "not us but the capitalists who pay for the crisis," this is a political fraud. RIO and its allies are not fighting for the independent, revolutionary mobilisation of the working class, but its subordination to the trade unions and bourgeois parties and thus the capitalist politics of death.

The *Klasse gegen Klasse* statement says, "Only if we organise at the grassroots level to impose a plan of struggle on the bureaucratic leaderships of the trade unions and the reformist parties with the perspective of a general strike against pandemic and crisis can there be a progressive way out." And further, "To this end, we would like to invite all left-wing, social and trade union organisations to a debate. ... In particular, we also address this proposal to the Network for Militant Trade Unions (VKG) and the groups active in it."

The claim that the Social Democratic Party (SPD), Left Party, Greens and the trade unions could become the starting point for a general strike and a progressive solution to the crisis under pressure from the "rank and file" is absurd. These are not reformist forces that would represent the immediate interests of the workers in a limited sense but right-wing bourgeois organisations and apparatuses that serve solely the goals of German capitalism and imperialism.

In the year of the pandemic, this has become particularly clear. At the end of March 2020, the Left Party and the Greens voted for the "Corona virus emergency packages" put together by Social Democratic Finance Minister Olaf Scholz, which mainly benefited the financial oligarchy, the big corporations and the military.

Since then, the federal states led by SPD-Left Party-Green coalitions have been at the forefront of policies opening up

the economy to squeeze these huge sums out of the population again. Contrary to scientists' warnings, they are keeping non-essential workplaces open and are now forcing teachers and students back into face-to-face classes.

The same reactionary role is played by the trade unions. They also supported the German and European bailouts for the banks and are now organising the reopening of schools. In workplaces, they act as a kind of industrial police, forcing workers to work despite mass infections and organising job and wage cuts in the interests of the corporations. They categorically reject a comprehensive lockdown to contain the pandemic, as called for by the #ZeroCovid initiative.

If *Klasse gegen Klasse* appeals to these forces, it is not an oversight but the result of their class orientation, political physiognomy and history. The FT-CI, of which RIO has been a member since 2011, is not a Trotskyist tendency despite its name. It stands in the tradition of the Argentine Pabloite Nahuel Moreno, who advocated the liquidation of the Fourth International in Latin America and subordinated the working class to bourgeois and petty-bourgeois nationalists—from Juan Peron in Argentina to Fidel Castro in Cuba. At its core, Morenoism is bourgeois politics garnished with pseudo-Marxist rhetoric.

RIO's politics are in this tradition. Unlike other pseudo-left tendencies in Germany such as Marx21 (affiliated with Britain's Socialist Workers Party) and the SAV (affiliated with the Socialist Party in England), it is formally outside the Left Party, being part of the "red-red-green" trade union milieu. Its best known representative, Wladek (alias Nathaniel) Flakin, writes regularly for the Left Party papers *Junge Welt* and *Neues Deutschland*. The trade union initiatives that RIO supports are not independent structures, but part of the official trade union apparatus, designed to absorb and suppress the growing radicalisation of workers and youth.

A prime example is the "Network for Militant Trade Unions," (VKG) which RIO and *Klasse gegen Klasse* "particularly address" in their statement. The VKG is an amalgamation of different trade union structures and is led by jaded pseudo-left and Stalinist bureaucrats and representatives of the Left Party.

Among its founding organisations are the Federation of Democratic Workers' Associations (DIDF) and the Network for a Combative and Democratic Verdi. Spokespersons are former Daimler works council representative Christa Hourani (from the Stalinist Deutsche Kommunistische Partei), Angelika Teweleit of Socialist Organisation Solidarity (SOL, a split from SAV) and Angela Bankert (SAV), who currently heads the state list of the Left Party in North Rhine-Westphalia for the Bundestag (federal parliament) elections.

Where RIO and the "left" unions it celebrates stand in the class struggle and the fight against the pandemic is becoming clear, especially internationally. In the US, the leadership of the Chicago Teachers Union (CTU) last week agreed with the city's school board and Democratic Mayor Lori Lightfoot on a plan to gradually reopen schools despite the rampant pandemic. In a statement, RIO's American affiliate, Left Voice, praised the CTU, hailing the deadly deal as "a particularly important victory."

In Spain, the FT-CI grouping Corriente Revolucionaria de Trabajadores y Trabajadoras (CRT) openly opposes measures to contain the pandemic. Articles in their online publication *Izquierda Diario* condemn even the limited lockdowns imposed by Spain's central and regional governments, which are far from sufficient to defeat the virus, as an unacceptable attack on democratic rights.

For example, in a January 20 article sarcastically titled "More restrictions, the recipe for confronting the third wave," the CRT wrote, "As if it were a tap, they [the PSOE-Podemos government] are limiting our freedoms and movements at their will. ... Once again, they are forcing us into a life of home to work and work to our homes."

This could only be written by a tendency that has contempt for the health and lives of millions of workers and their families. While scientists warn that school openings could result in hundreds of thousands of additional deaths in Germany alone, at current incidence levels and with the new viral strains, the Morenoites are agitating against the coronavirus measures in the style of right-wing "liberals," denouncing them as "authoritarian measures."

The fact that the FT-CI feigns support for #ZeroCovid and a European lockdown in Germany, while explicitly opposing it in Spain, underlines the Morenoites' nationalism. They articulate not the interests of the international working class but those of the wealthy and selfish middle-class layers who are moving sharply to the right under conditions of the capitalist crisis and fearing, above all, a revolutionary movement of workers.

In the struggle to contain the pandemic, as in the struggle against social attacks, fascism, militarism and the stepping up of police -state powers, they are on the other side of the barricades.



To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact