

How the pseudo-left tendencies in Germany are sabotaging the fight against fascism

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The pseudo-left tendencies within and around the Left Party are reacting to the mass demonstrations against the neo-fascist Alternative for Germany (AfD) and the increase in strikes and protests here and internationally with a further shift to the right. They fear that the opposition to fascism and the anger over social inequality, anti-refugee agitation and a pro-war policy supported by all the establishment parties will slip out of the control of the government and trade union bureaucracy and take on independent forms.

While the Sozialistische Gleichheitspartei (Socialist Equality Party, SGP) is fighting to develop the protests and strikes into a conscious movement of the working class against the government and capitalism, the main pseudo-left groups—Marx 21, SAV and RIO—are defending the very organisations responsible for right-wing politics and the rise of the fascists. Their orientation towards the ruling parties, the trade unions and the bourgeois state is not directed against the AfD, but aims to suppress an independent socialist movement of the working class against capitalism, fascism and war.

This is particularly evident in Marx 21's call for an AfD ban. The state capitalist tendency originated as a satellite of Britain's Socialist Workers Party (SWP). In a commentary, Janine Wissler, who moved seamlessly from the state capitalists to become co-chair of the Left Party, declares that a "state party ban" on the AfD would be "a hard blow against the most powerful right-wing structure in decades." "An AfD ban would not only close the money tap but would also entail a comprehensive ban on [its] activities. The AfD and direct successor organisations would no longer be allowed to be active."

In order to avoid appearing as a completely uncritical supporter of an oppressive state apparatus that is riddled with right-wing forces, Marx 21 notes pro forma that the demand for a ban was also associated with "many pitfalls." For example, the state apparatus had "repeatedly shown in the past that it is blind in the right eye." Only to then reiterate her demand: "If an anti-fascist movement rallies behind a ban campaign, we should not be sectarian and defiant."

Opposition to the conception that the bourgeois state can play a role in the fight against the right has nothing to do with sectarianism but is an elementary prerequisite for building a truly anti-fascist movement. The state apparatus is not only "blind in the right eye," but a centre of the right-wing conspiracy. Germany's police, military and secret services are permeated by far-right forces and play a central role in the rise of the AfD.

This is most evident when looking at the Office for the Protection of the Constitution, as Germany's domestic secret service is called. For years, it was led by a fascist, Hans-Georg Maassen, who met with representatives of the AfD on several occasions to discuss his agency's reports about "anti-constitutional" groups. Maassen had been appointed by the establishment parties to head the domestic intelligence service in order to strengthen the right-wing networks and direct the state apparatus even more openly towards the illegalisation of Marxism and the suppression of all left-wing opposition.

It is the height of historical falsification for Marx 21 to justify the call for the bourgeois state to act against the fascists in the name of Leon Trotsky. "It cannot be our strategy to focus solely on a social revolution that will then do away with fascism," the group writes. "In the spirit of Trotsky's image of the primary struggle against the revolver of fascism in the hand and the hardly less important struggle against the slow-acting poison of capitalism, our goal must first be to knock the weapon out of the opponent's hand."

The assertion that Trotsky—alongside Lenin the most important leader of the October Revolution and founder of the Left Opposition and the Fourth International—relied on the bourgeois state to suppress fascism turns reality on its head. Trotsky fought vehemently against the Social Democratic Party (SPD) position that the bourgeois state and its organs could be used to fight fascism. In "What Next?" Trotsky characterised the SPD's policy as a slavish orientation towards the state, police and Reichswehr (Armed Forces) in the struggle against Hitler, (calling on the state, "Help! Intervene!") concluding, "In this manner the reformists who have outlived their own day work for the fascists along bureaucratic lines."

History confirmed Trotsky's warning. Hitler was brought to power in January 1933 by a conspiracy between politics, big business and the military. On March 23, 1933, all the bourgeois parties voted in favour of the "Enabling Act" and handed Hitler and the Nazis dictatorial powers.

Trotsky did not make the "revolver-poison" comparison to justify support for the reactionary forces that then helped Hitler to power, as Marx 21 suggests. It comes from a letter to a German worker-communist from December 1931, which was published under the title "Wie wird der Nationalsozialismus geschlagen?" ("How will National Socialism be defeated?") published in English as "The impending danger of fascism in Germany"). In it, Trotsky advocates the tactic of the united front against the Stalinist policy of social fascism.

The Communist Party (KPD), under Stalin's influence, strictly refused to stand up for a united front against the Nazis with the SPD—which, unlike today, was still supported by a considerable section of the working class. Instead, it advocated an ultra-left line that equated social democracy with fascism, divided and confused the working class and exposed large sections of the petty bourgeoisie to Hitler's fascist demagoguery. The KPD not only rejected any co-operation with the SPD against the fascist danger, but in some cases even made common cause with the Nazis—for example when it supported the referendum initiated by the NSDAP (Nazi party) in 1931 to overthrow the SPD-led state government of Prussia.

Trotsky fought against this disastrous policy. He declared that the Central Committee of the KPD "starts out with the idea that it is impossible to vanquish Fascism without first defeating the social democracy." While this was absolutely correct on a "historical scale," Trotsky wrote, this did not at all mean "that with its aid, that is, by simple repetition, one can solve the *questions of the day*."

"An idea, correct from the point of view of revolutionary strategy as a

whole,” Trotsky goes on, “turns into a lie and at that into a reactionary lie, if it is not translated into the language of tactics.”

Since it was not possible that the KPD would “defeat both social democracy and fascism” in the coming months, the rejection of the united front amounted to the KPD leadership considering “the victory of fascism inevitable.” It is in this context that Trotsky cites the “revolver-poison” comparison. In order to knock the revolver out of the Nazis’ hands, a united front with the SPD had to be advocated.

Trotsky did not advocate mixing the programmes of the KPD and SPD. He rejected the slander by the KPD that he was demanding it support the semi-dictatorial regime of Heinrich Brüning as a “lesser evil”, as the SPD did. The question of whether Hitler or Brüning were the “lesser evil” made “no sense, for the system against which we are fighting needs all these elements. But these elements are momentarily involved in conflicts with one another, and the party of the proletariat must take advantage of these conflicts in the interest of the revolution.”

The tactic of the united front served this purpose. “When one of my enemies sets before me small daily portions of poison and the second, on the other hand, is about to shoot straight at me, then I will first knock the revolver out of the hand of my second enemy, for this gives me an opportunity to get rid of my first enemy. But that does not at all mean that the poison is a ‘lesser evil’ in comparison to the revolver.”

The united front as advocated by Trotsky served to free the workers from the paralysing influence of social democracy in the face of the fascist danger and to win them over to a revolutionary socialist programme against capitalism. The letter, which Marx 21 significantly neither mentions nor quotes exactly, states: “And this common front of direct struggle against fascism, involving the entire proletariat, must be utilized in the flank attacks against the social democracy, which are for all that no less effective.”

Trotsky insisted that ultimately only a “social revolution” could stop fascism. He understood like no other that fascism was a product of the capitalist crisis and can only be stopped by the independent mobilisation of the working class. He opposed the capitalist policy of fascism and war with the strategy of world socialist revolution. This remains the only viable perspective today.

Unlike in the 1930s, however, there is no mass fascist movement and no mass workers’ parties today, but the role of the state and the bourgeois parties is the same. Just like back then, the bourgeois institutions and parties, which today include the SPD, are reacting to the capitalist crisis by turning towards fascism. They have systematically strengthened the AfD and integrated it into parliamentary work at federal and state level. The AfD’s programme—mass deportations, massive military armament and support for the genocide in Gaza—has long been put into practice by them.

When the governing parties and the trade unions now intervene in the mass protests against the AfD under the slogan “Together for Democracy,” their aim is to cover their own right-wing agenda and subordinate the protests to the state apparatus.

This orientation is supported by all the pseudo-left. The SAV (Socialist Alliance), originated as the German affiliate of Britain’s Militant Tendency/Socialist Party. Like Marx 21, it is an integral part of the Left Party, and is also fuelling illusions in the bourgeois state in its articles on the protests. “A consistent ban on all fascist organisations and their dismantling, the confiscation of their property and the imprisonment of Nazi perpetrators of violence and racist agitators who are currently on the loose, combined with a clear stance by the state against racism and support for anti-fascist networking and educational work, would help in the fight against the right,” reads one article.

The SAV knows exactly how absurd it is to ascribe such characteristics to the state apparatus, which is riddled with right-wing extremists and is waging a veritable war against anti-fascists and left-wingers. “However,

this is not the strategy of the bourgeois parties or those in economic power,” the article states tersely. The “demand for a ban on the AfD by the state” was therefore “not being made.”

This does not change the reactionary orientation. While Marx21 explicitly calls for the state to act against the fascists, the SAV does so indirectly by fuelling illusions in the nominally “left” governing parties and by calling out to the Left Party and the trade unions. The SPD and Greens represent a “democratic antithesis” to the AfD, the SAV suggests in a statement entitled “How do we stop the AfD and the shift to the right?”

At the same time, it appeals to the Left Party to intervene more actively in the protests in order to put a stop to them: “The Left Party must decide whether it will passively support the protests and position itself as another ‘democratic party’ alongside the SPD and the Greens or whether it will distance itself from them, intervene with its own demands and take a clear stance against austerity policies and state racism.”

The very admission that its parent organisation, the Left Party, is de facto no different from the SPD and the Greens exposes the SAV as an essentially right-wing, bourgeois tendency. As the leading parties in the federal coalition government, the SPD and the Greens are constantly stepping up the pro-war course against Russia and in the Middle East, boosting rearmament and making the working class pay for it. Only last week, the federal coalition passed the largest war budget since the end of the Second World War, accompanied by fierce attacks in the areas of health, education and social welfare.

At the same time, the coalition government is implementing the fascists’ programme on refugee policy. On January 18, it passed the “Repatriation Improvement Act,” which further restricts the rights of refugees and prepares for the mass deportations demanded by the AfD. Asylum seekers without the right to remain who have been living and working here for years can now be picked up without warning, detained for almost a month and forcibly deported. The police are not only allowed to search their accommodation and mobile phones, but also the accommodation of neighbours without a warrant.

The Left Party is not positioning itself against “cutbacks and state racism,” as the SAV would have us believe, but is vehemently in favour of them. Wherever it governs at state level together with the SPD and the Greens, it is particularly aggressive in implementing its anti-refugee and anti-working-class programme. Thuringia, in particular—where the Left Party has its only state premier, Bodo Ramelow—is notorious for conducting brutal deportations, has high deportation rates and assists the strengthening of the AfD by the establishment parties, in which the Left Party is also actively involved.

The same right-wing orientation of the pseudo-left can be seen in their glorification of the trade unions. The SAV claims these play a “central role” in building a movement that “removes the breeding ground for the AfD” and “can overcome the conditions from which right-wing forces benefit.” The trade unions “bring together workers with and without a migration background and explain to their members the clash of interests between workers and capitalists.”

This is nothing but cloud cuckoo land. In fact, the trade unions have long been exclusively on the side of the capitalists in the class struggle. By selling out labour disputes and strikes and systematically suppressing the class struggle, they are the ones creating the “breeding ground” for the fascists and defending capitalist relations on an extreme right-wing basis. They explicitly support the government’s reactionary policies.

Just a few days ago, the leadership of the Confederation of German Unions (DGB) and leading works council representatives renewed their pact with the government and the corporations at the invitation of Federal President Frank-Walter Steinmeier. The aim is to push ahead with the right-wing war and austerity policies and suppress the growing opposition to them in the working class.

The Revolutionary Internationalist Organisation (RIO) is the German offshoot of the Morenoite “Trotskyist Fraction-Fourth International” (FT-CI). Although not formally part of the Left Party, it takes on the task of lending this right-wing orientation towards the governing parties and trade unions an “independent” or even “anti-capitalist-revolutionary” veneer. In an editorial on the mass protests on its website *Klasse Gegen Klasse* (*Class Against Class*), it emphasises the need “for an anti-fascism from below instead of from above” and declares: “The governing coalition parties, the unions and corporations are not allies in the fight against the right.”

Only to then propagate an alliance with precisely these right-wing forces! “What we have in mind ... not just a ‘united front among the left,’” writes RIO. “It is not enough for all left-wing forces to coordinate actions against the right. This would not reach the millions of people who are prepared to take to the streets against the AfD, but who have not yet broken with the government and its organisations in the expanded state.”

In other words, RIO’s “united front” includes even the nominally right-wing capitalist parties that feign support for the anti-AfD demonstrations. And organisations such as the trade unions and Fridays for Future (FFF), which RIO praises particularly vehemently. RIO does this in the full knowledge that it is supporting a right-wing and pro-militarist agenda in every respect.

The parties of the coalition government had “moved so far to the right that they are implementing an AfD-lite programme,” writes *Klasse gegen Klasse*. And the Left Party was also pursuing a policy geared towards government participation, “which, together with the SPD and the Greens, was responsible for the fact that in no other federal state were as many deportations carried out as in Berlin.” FFF had an “adapted attitude towards the government,” which was expressed in its support for the Greens and “in the pro-Israeli position of FFF Germany.”

The same applied to the trade unions, “whose leaders have called for pro-Israeli rallies together with the government, the Left Party and the Christian Democrats (CDU/CSU).” Nevertheless, the leadership of the “large mass organisations” such as the trade unions and the climate movement “must be forced to radicalise their demands and methods and break off their relations with the bourgeois parties.”

This has something of political schizophrenia about it. The leaders of the FFF and the trade unions, such as Luisa Neubauer (Greens/FFF) or DGB chairwoman Yasmin Fahimi (SPD), are themselves bourgeois politicians and will never sever their ties with themselves and the parties to which they belong. They are reacting to the protests by pursuing their pro-capitalist and militaristic programme, which is essentially the same as that of the AfD, ever more aggressively.

The term “united front” is used by RIO to disguise this reality. As explained above, the united front tactic proposed by Trotsky in the early 1930s in Germany aimed to unite the working class in the face of the fascist threat, both to overcome the fatalism of the KPD and to free the workers from the paralysing influence of social democracy and win them over to a revolutionary socialist programme.

RIO’s “front” is aimed at the opposite goal and serves to subordinate the workers to right-wing bourgeois organisations. The trade unions today—just like the SPD and the Left Party—are no longer reformist organisations that represent the interests of their members, at least in day-to-day issues, but are a kind of corporatist mafia that organises the destruction of jobs and wages in the interests of the state and big business, suppresses strikes and social struggles in order to enforce the government’s pro-war policy against growing resistance.

When the pseudo-left glorifies these forces as allies in the struggle against fascism, this is not a misunderstanding, but is rooted in their own class orientation and political history.

The Trotskyist Fraction-Fourth International (FT-CI), to which RIO has belonged since 2011, is not a Trotskyist tendency despite its name. It

follows the traditions of the Argentinian Pabloite Nahuel Moreno, who pursued the liquidation of the Fourth International in Latin America and repeatedly subordinated the working class to bourgeois and petty-bourgeois nationalists—from Juan Peron in Argentina to Fidel Castro in Cuba—with disastrous political consequences.

Marx 21 emerged from the International Socialist Tendency (IST), founded by Tony Cliff, which declared its hostility to the Fourth International and Trotskyism more than sixty years ago. At that time, it labelled the Soviet Union as “state capitalist” and refused to defend it in the event of an attack by the imperialist powers. Like earlier varieties of “state capitalism,” Cliff’s stance was an accommodation to imperialism and a form of anti-communism garnished with leftist phrases.

As a former member of the Committee for a Workers International (CWI), the SAV has its roots in the British Militant Tendency, which is notorious for attributing a progressive character to even the most right-wing social democratic organisations. Until the mid-1990s, the SAV worked within the SPD, trying to give it a left-wing and even socialist veneer. It plays the same role today in relation to the Left Party.

With their orientation towards the capitalist state and right-wing bourgeois parties and organisations, Marx21, SAV and RIO do not speak for the interests of the international working class. They articulate the interests of wealthy middle-class layers who, in the deepest crisis of capitalism since the 1930s, are moving far to the right and fear an independent revolutionary movement of the workers. The struggle against fascism, just like the struggle against militarism, social cuts and war, requires a ruthless reckoning with these pro-capitalist and historically anti-working-class currents and their reactionary concepts.



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