

How the pseudo-left RIO group in Germany is manoeuvring to cover the right-wing policies of the trade unions and Left Party

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The Revolutionary Internationalist Organisation (RIO), together with the Revolutionary Socialist Organisation (RSO), is taking part in the Bundestag elections for the first time with three constituency candidates in Berlin and Munich supposedly to build an “anti-capitalist and socialist alternative” (RIO). Their candidacy has nothing to do with this. It is a desperate attempt to create a new means of subordinating the growing opposition to war and cuts to the capitalist parties and trade union bureaucrats in the face of the crisis in the Left Party.

To achieve this, RIO does not skimp on radical phrase mongering in its programmatic statements. “We believe, in contrast, that only a consistent socialist opposition on the streets and in workplaces, schools and universities can stop the power of the banks and corporations, the war, deportations and the climate catastrophe,” it says in its 14 proposals for the Bundestag (federal parliament) elections. “We believe that the Left Party cannot be reformed into such a force and that all attempts to do so are doomed to failure.” They repeatedly write about “[workers’] councils”, “revolution” and “socialism”.

For RIO, such phrases only serve to provide a left cover for the trade union bureaucrats and bourgeois politicians. As soon as the group leaves the terrain of electoral sermonising, it does everything it can to subordinate the growing protests to these very forces. When hundreds of thousands of workers and young people took to the streets to protest against the far-right Alternative for Germany (AfD) and the shift to the right by the entire political establishment, RIO orientated the movement towards the Social Democrats (SPD), Greens, Left Party and trade unions:

With their joint votes with the AfD, the [Christian Democrats] CDU/CSU and [Liberal Democrats] FDP are finally breaking the “firewall” promise, which was only cosmetic anyway. The SPD and Greens must now turn their backs on their previous racist migration policy, which has only helped the right wing to rise.

The SPD and the Greens have not only paved the way for the AfD, but they have also put the fascists’ programme into practice. Eighty years after the Nazis’ war of extermination, they are once again rolling German tanks against Russia, returning to the methods of genocide in Gaza and are responsible for the most brutal deportation regime since Hitler. Asking these capitalist politicians to refrain from their racist migration policies is hard to beat in terms of absurdity. But behind the absurdity lies the attempt to orientate the protest movement towards these parties. A year ago, RIO had already called for a “united front” with the SPD and Greens in the fight against the right. The group is also trying to do the same with regard to the trade union bureaucrats:

Trade unions should, for example, call on pilots not to carry out deportation flights. Collective bargaining in the public sector could turn into a huge protest against the policies of the coming government before the general election if the demands for higher wages were combined with political demands against the shift to the right.

The trade unions have fully backed the government’s war policy with the corporatist “Concerted Action “ and have since been trying to push through brutal wage cuts and redundancies in order to prepare German companies for trade war on the backs of the workers and to squeeze billions for armaments out of them. They play the key role in suppressing the class struggle and are widely hated. When RIO glorifies these forces as bulwarks in the fight against the right, it wants to strengthen the union apparatuses and subordinate the protests to them.

RIO describes the Left Party as an unreformable steward of capitalist misery, but also wants to hoist them up to take the levers of the protest movement:

In order to turn its words into action, the Left Party must use all the means at its disposal to mobilise for protests and blockades and defend them against police repression. In the trade union ver.di, it must advocate a politicisation of the current collective bargaining rounds.

The party that is an integral part of the deportation machinery in the federal states, steps up the police state measures and works closely with the AfD in parliamentary committees, should therefore become the main organiser of the protests against the right. There is no clearer way to summarise RIO’s orientation.

To justify this policy in the service of the bureaucracies, RIO plays down the extreme escalation of the class struggle and German militarism. While the ruling class in Germany is preparing historic attacks on workers in the name of its pro-war policies, destroying hundreds of thousands of jobs and further reducing real wages, RIO declares that no major struggles are to be expected. In a sort of perspective article, “On the political situation” from 28 December, it combines this downplaying with an outline of its own role:

At VW, the bureaucracy was able to use the power it had built up over decades, at least for the moment, to the extent that it

prevented any dynamisation. In other plants, which may be located at the edges of the supply chain, this may not always succeed. There, local works council structures could also develop positions and strategies that differ from those of the IG Metall [union] leadership in the interests of self-preservation. For the left, it is important to keep a close eye on opportunities to advocate the extension of strikes and for the workforce itself to decide on prospects in assemblies.

RIO assumes that the trade unions will be able to quietly suppress resistance to the jobs massacre and cuts in real wages. The group is not even challenging this. Instead, it observes the situation until workers in individual companies break out of the union straitjacket. Then they take action to prevent a serious struggle against the bureaucracy from developing.

RIO may wish all it wants that the unions can successfully suppress the class struggle. The scale of the attacks on workers will inevitably lead to fierce clashes, which will increasingly turn against the apparatuses. The Sozialistische Gleichheitspartei (Socialist Equality Party) is therefore calling for the establishment of rank-and-file action committees that organise workers independently and unite them internationally. RIO stands on the other side of the barricades and defends the nationalist trade union bureaucracy.

Even more blatantly, RIO romanticises the capitalist crisis when it comes to German militarism. Although the group constantly speaks out against rearmament and arms supplies, it systematically plays down the aggressiveness of German imperialism. The article already quoted states:

The foreign policy of the future German government, regardless of the constellation, will not be decided primarily in Berlin, but will have to respond above all to Washington, Beijing and Moscow. [...] The foreign policy situation hardly allows Germany to play a leading role in Europe.

RIO thus not only plays down the enormous aggression of German militarism but denies and downright apologises for it. To what extent is Germany reacting to Moscow? “Putin wants to enforce his control over Eastern Europe,” answers RIO in the text. After Germany and NATO deliberately provoked Putin’s reactionary invasion of Ukraine in order to control Ukraine and subjugate Russia militarily, RIO claims that Germany was only reacting to Russia’s supposedly imperial desires! This is indistinguishable from the daily war propaganda of the bourgeois media. German tanks are rolling against Russia again, and once again Russia is supposed to be the aggressor without having fired a shot in Germany’s direction.

This liaison with German militarism, like the support of the bureaucracies, is a direct result of the group’s historical roots and class character. RIO emerged as a split-off from the state-capitalist “Workers Power Group” (“Gruppe Arbeitermacht”), with which it still has links, and joined the “Trotskyist Fraction--Fourth International” (FT-CI) in 2011. The FT-CI follows in the tradition of the Argentinian 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.

In Germany, too, it exists in the form of constant regroupments within the pseudo-left swamp formed around the trade unions and the Left Party. It usually plays the role of giving these manoeuvres a “left” veneer. In January 2023, for example, when the Left Party suffered one catastrophic

election result after another due to its right-wing capitalist policies, it organised a conference entitled “Revolutionary Break” together with other pseudo-left groups such as GAM or the Funke Group. At the conference, Left Party members discussed whether and how they should abandon the sinking ship.

The decision to run in the federal elections together with the RSO is part of this manoeuvre. At a panel discussion with representatives of the Stalinist “Aufbruch Münster”, the Left Party and the party of former Greek finance minister under SYRIZA Yanis Varoufakis, Mera25, the RIO candidate for Friedrichshain-Kreuzberg, Inés Heider, explained that her initiative did not claim to be the “non-plus-ultra” (“there is nothing better”), but “that there will still be many breaks and mergers on the way to becoming a revolutionary party.”

What emerges from the regroupment of parts of the Left Party, Mera25 and small Stalinist grouplets is the opposite of revolutionary politics. This can be seen from the fact that in all its calls for a “revolutionary break”, RIO makes no reference whatsoever to Leon Trotsky or the central historical experiences of the Trotskyist movement. The reason for this is simple. RIO and the FT-CI have nothing to do with Trotskyism and the Fourth International he founded. Their self-designation as “Trotskyists” merely serves as another cover for their defence of the bureaucracies.

Trotsky, who led the October Revolution together with Lenin, defended the socialist principles of internationalism and workers’ democracy against Stalinism and social democracy. The founding of the Fourth International was aimed at breaking workers from the old bureaucracies and was particularly directed against all those tendencies that tried to prevent this break through political manoeuvring. Trotsky understood that the working class could only overthrow capitalism if it intervened in political events independently of all bourgeois forces. That is why, with the Fourth International, he insisted on building a revolutionary leadership based on the central historical lessons and fighting for political clarity.

This is the exact opposite of what RIO is organising. They obscure and falsify the historical questions and the history of the Trotskyist movement. On this basis, they are mobilising all sorts of washed-up groups of Stalinists and social democrats for their bankrupt regroupment project, which aims to cover for the right-wing bourgeois parties and trade union bureaucracies and prevent a real break with these reactionary forces.

They are undertaking this initiative at a time when masses of workers are turning away from the trade unions and looking at the SPD and the Left Party with contempt and anger. The historic social attacks, mass layoffs and wage cuts that all the establishment parties want to implement in the name of trade war and war after the elections will lead to fierce class struggles, which will also be directed against the trade union bureaucrats. In this situation, RIO is trying to rescue these bureaucracies with its manoeuvre to found a “revolutionary” party and all sorts of left-wing phrases.

The Sozialistische Gleichheitspartei, on the other hand, is taking part in the elections to arm the coming workers’ struggles with a socialist perspective. This requires a relentless political struggle against the trade union apparatuses and the Left Party and the pseudo-left swamp that surrounds it. It requires the clarification of the role of social democracy, Stalinism and pseudo-left organisations like RIO, which do not represent the interests of the workers but speak for the wealthy upper middle classes, who are themselves part of the trade union bureaucracy and thus a pillar of the capitalist order.



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