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Germany

The creation of the International Socialist Organization (ISO) – a step forward to overcome the fragmentation of the left

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It is often said that Trotskyists love to split. The RSB (Revolutionärer Sozialistischer Bund – Revolutionary Socialist League) and the isl (internationale sozialistische linke – international socialist left) have proved that this is not always true by unifying to form the ISO. [1] *Die Freiheitsliebe* spoke with Manuel Kellner, the editor of the monthly Sozialistische Zeitung – SoZ. This interview was published on December 6, 2016 by *Die Freiheitsliebe*, a “portal for critical journalism” in Germany.

What do you expect of the new organization?

It will certainly be a framework for exchanges based on solidarity between comrades, which will allow a rigorous discussion of the political situation and the responses that the left must make to the current challenges. For this, the participation in the life of the Fourth International and its debates is an asset. For the activists, this framework will be even more helpful than in their former organizations. For us, a key task for such an organization is to do everything to ensure that its members acquire a culture and political education which is their own – a structure which dictates to its activists what they have to think and do, concocted by a few leaders, has no interest for us.

The creation of the ISO is also a small sign of encouragement precisely at this time when the workers' movement and the political left are so deeply and so permanently on the defensive, because it is a step in the direction of the overcoming of the fragmentation of the radical left, even when this is done on such a modest scale.

During the period when we prepared this unification, we have learned to better understand the strengths and weaknesses of both organisations involved. The RSB has more consistency and requirements in its organizational life, the isl has more of opening and influence in wider circles. We will try to bring together the strengths of each.

What will be decisive is our ability to collaborate and interact with the young people who are politicizing today in an emancipatory sense. In this field we have made progress but these are still fragile shoots. We are confident of our own strengths to think that we can make a useful contribution to the debate about socialism of the 21st century. We are also modest enough to know that we have much to learn from the other components of the radical left. If however the older ones among us, many of whom have been active since the end of the 1960s or the early 1970s, all disappear without having passed their knowledge and experience on to a sufficient number of younger people so that they appropriate them in their own way, this would be really very unfortunate.

According to our information, this regroupment is taking place in the context of the discussions around the New Anti-capitalist Organization [2]. Do you share this point of view? What is your opinion? What balance sheet do you draw of this experience?

We, the activists of the isl, have been able to see that the activists of the RSB are no longer content to explain where the other groups of the left are wrong and where they are right. Even more, in the course of these discussions, the RSB has demonstrated that it was ready to discuss on an equal footing with others, and to include its own organization in a broader framework if this could allow the construction of a more significant revolutionary socialist force.

Thus we have had more and more confidence in the possibility of the unity of our isl with the RSB, without damaging ourselves. During these three years where there have been many meetings of reflection, conferences, leadership

meetings, participation in movements and actions – work in common in the framework of the trade union left already existed before – this impression was constantly reinforced. And more and more, in the discussions, the same positions and divergences could appear among the activists of the two groups.

As for the NaO, the process has failed due to various problems which were unresolved. One of them was the lack of proportion between the modest size of the participating forces and the large size of the trumpet in which they wanted to blow. The model, the NPA, in France has already undergone a serious crisis. In Germany, there is no sign of a revolution, but in the process of the NaO there was a competition as to who would have the more radical revolutionary position. This could not end well.

From our point of view, as the isl, the objective of unifying the anti-capitalist forces could not exclude on the one hand those who define themselves thus within Die Linke, nor on the other hand the Interventionistische Linke. [3] Given that the small NaO, next to them, could not have a lot of authority, the process that it wanted to initiate should in fact have kept an open character over the long term. But in the NaO, there were too many people who preferred to declaim slogans. And for some components of the NaO, the process was of interest only to the extent that it allowed them to strengthen their current. The worm was thus already in the fruit and after some time it was no longer possible to continue.

The isl and the RSB are both members of the Fourth International. There are however significant differences. How do you settle them? Will the ex-activists of the RSB be active within Die Linke or will the members of the isl leave it?

The currents from which the RSB and the isl originate were certainly members of the Fourth International, but for decades they had different positions. While the isl was part of the large majority which has always sought rapprochement with other currents of the radical left, the RSB supported a minority, who saw rather in these attempts (which at the end of the account have often failed) a harmful propensity to self-destruction.

In connection with this, the internal life and the political culture were quite different in the RSB and the isl. During the years which preceded the unification we have discussed this a lot. We at the isl have been very surprised to see to what point rapprochement has been possible on this level also. While we had to agree on our organizational weaknesses, the members of the RSB could see the interest in being actors in a process of refoundation of the radical left, which has led them much closer to our conceptions.

We were thus able not only to formulate the same view on our programmatic positions, but also a document of definition of what we are, as well as to establish a simple operating mode suitable for a small organization. The RSB has agreed, among other things, that members of the organization are active in Die Linke and its left wing, in particular in the AKL. [4] The discussion has also had the effect that our activists question themselves more (and continue the reflection) on the definition of the objectives of this work, and the ISO as a whole has absorbed this reflection and this discussion and will continue.

On what basis is the reunification taking place?

On the basis of a common programmatic statement, a document that describes what we are and what we want, statutes and a resolution on the political situation and the tasks that are before us.

After the integration of the latest changes, these texts will be published and proposed for discussion. From our point of view these texts are not engraved in marble but are rather of proposals to extend reflection in common with other components of the radical left, so as to develop our own positions in liaison with the knowledge, the experiences, the

intellectual traditions of these other forces.

The ISO will support *Sozialistische Zeitung* as an independent journal and will publish new publications like a paper magazine of the organization and an Internet site. Up to now the ISL and the RSB have published *Inprekorr* together with contributions from members of the Fourth International from around the world. Now we have the ambition to combine this existing publication with a magazine of the organization more focused on the issues that are debated in Germany.

What are your projects and priorities for the future?

We consider the development of the forces of the right and of the extreme right as the major challenge which is closely related to the continuation of the capitalist offensive and current trends towards the destruction of solidarities. For us the anti-fascist struggle in the framework of the widest possible alliances is very important but also the development of a radical critique (which goes to the roots of the issue of power and of property) of the political system in the service of capital.

Activity in the workplaces and the unions remains for us a crucial axis and in this area we want to broaden our field of reflection and action, developing an orientation of class struggle, with new experiences of organization and union work among the precarious which are particularly difficult to organize.

Furthermore we consider ourselves as an integral part of the movement for the defense of the environment and we participate in particular to the mobilization against the use of fossil fuels, with priority given to the extraction of lignite. In this movement, we advance our ecosocialist ideas. The powerful interests of trusts and capitalist groups oppose protection of the climate. From our point of view, this fight can be won only if the interests of the employees for useful jobs and well-paid employment are related to ecological requirements.

This is of course also valid on the international plane. Climate justice is today an integral part of the fight against planetary social injustice and without connecting the environmental and social problems, without redistribution from the top to the bottom, without advancing the issues of ownership and authority, these problems which are so oppressive will not be resolved.

International solidarity with all those who rise up against the oppression, against pillage and war is an essential task. And we begin by sweeping before our own (Western) door, but we do not cede to the growing pressures to choose one camp against the other and before this fatal logic that “the enemy of my enemy is my friend”.

We also want to strengthen the work of internal education through organizations and training associations like the Rosa Luxemburg Foundation (RLS), local Rosa Luxemburg clubs and SALZ e.V. [5]

[1] As we reported here [The Foundation of an International Socialist Organisation \(ISO\)](#). For the founding resolution of the new organisation see here [Germany: What we are and why we fight - resolution of the ISO.IV](#)

[2] The process of constitution of the Neue antikapitalistische Organisation (NaO) began in 2011 at the initiative of left activists in Berlin. It took a few successful initiatives but has not been able to count on the dynamic hoped for. It was dissolved in 2015

[3] “Interventionistische Linke” (IL) is a national “post-autonomist” network. Among those involved are some former members of the KB, a

non-dogmatic Maoist group of the 1970s and 1980s. It is based in part on the conceptions of the social centers in Italy. This network places the “social question” at the center of its concerns (not only antifascism and anti-racism), and is ready to participate in broad alliances. It played an important role in the mobilizations against the G8 Summit in 2007, the NATO Summit in Strasbourg in 2009, the transportation of nuclear waste in 2010, and against the European Central Bank: "Blockupy".

[4] For an analysis of Die Linke and its various currents, see the theses adopted by the ISL [Die Linke and our activity within it](#).

[5] The Rosa Luxemburg Foundation is an emanation of Die Linke. All parties present in the parliament have their own Training and Study Institute, with state subsidies. The Bildungsgemeinschaft Salz e.V (Soziales, Arbeit, Leben & Zukunft) is a training organization that also has official support, but is at the same time an independent association which works with currents the more to the left. Manuel Kellner is one of its facilitators.