

Germany: Left Party leader seeks to dupe the electorate

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Former Left Party chairman Oskar Lafontaine has warned his party to maintain a certain critical distance from the Social Democratic Party and the Greens. In an article this week in the newspaper *Junge Welt*, he emphasized that the Left Party could only hold its own if it resists becoming “another wing of the German Unity Party”, by which Lafontaine means all the established bourgeois parties in Germany.

There are good reasons for Lafontaine’s warning.

Following the election of a new leadership last year, the new co-chairpersons of the Left Party, Katja Kipping and Bernd Riexinger, have gone out of their way to stress that the Left Party would be a reliable partner in any future government. Earlier this year an “internal reform document” was made public which outlines the strategy of the new leadership. It refers to “a perspective for power for a leftist coalition in the federal government” and advocates “concrete cooperation” with the SPD and Greens. The *Osnabrücker Zeitung* wrote in January that the document implied that “no more conditions would be made for a coalition at the federal level”.

Until recently the Left Party had cited four conditions as the basis for collaboration with the SPD and Greens: No military operations abroad, a ban on the exports of armaments, a minimum monthly income of €1,000 euros (US\$1,300) for all, and increased taxes for the wealthy. Now the two Left Party leaders have dropped these requirements, maintaining that the SPD and Greens had adopted their own policies since taking opposition after their defeat in the last federal election. SPD policies of “basic social security, a minimum wage, pensions and protection against poverty in old age, or for banking regulation are moving in the same direction as the Left Party”, the internal paper declares.

The Left Party went even further in its embrace of the

SPD. Parallel to the official celebrations by the SPD of its widely despised anti-social Agenda 2010 and Hartz IV laws, Kipping declared that the Left Party would drop its former opposition and no longer promote the slogan “Hartz 4 must go” in the upcoming general election. She told the political magazine *Cicero* of her own orientation to so-called “lifestyle politics”. The Left Party will continue to seek to win the support of “precarious social layers”, she said, but “in addition to left-wing populism, we need a targeted approach to the creative-ecological milieu.”

Kipping also announced a change of party policy on the issue of war. Last December Kipping and her deputy Jan Van Aken signed the appeal “Syria: freedom needs assurance” calling for intervention in Syria. Signatories of this call to arms in the name of human rights include the general secretary of the SPD, Andrea Nahles, the federal leader of the Greens, Claudia Roth, and the Chairman of the Foreign Affairs Committee of the German parliament, Ruprecht Polenz (CDU).

Lafontaine now fears that such blatantly right-wing policies will cost the Left Party votes in the general election. Should the party fail to cross the necessary 5 percent threshold in September, it would then not be able to support the SPD and Greens in government—the aim to which Lafontaine aspires. This is why Lafontaine now favours a facelift for his party.

To this end he has resorted to his usual bag of tricks.

He has no problem in castigating the anti-social and anti-democratic nature of modern capitalist society and the political system. He cites the American writer Gore Vidal who declared, “Apparently, a democracy is a place where numerous elections are held at great cost without issues and with interchangeable candidates.” In the US, Lafontaine continued, “there is a one-party

system with two right wings”, which defend the interests of big corporations.

The Americanization of German politics has led to a situation “where we have a one party system with four wings”—referring to the SPD, the Greens, the conservative Christian Democrats (CDU), and the free-market Free Democrats.

Lafontaine then goes on to list the ways in which all of the established German parties defend the interests of the financial elite, concluding that their promises of social fairness printed in their election programs are duplicitous and simply a “bad joke”.

Lafontaine, however, then puts forward his own proposal to dupe the electorate.

He claims that the Left Party is not part of the Unity Party. Instead it has a “unique selling point” because it favours an economic order in which “all receive the full benefits of their labour”. This system leads to “democratically-run enterprises rather than authoritarian economic structures involving temporary work, contract work, low pay and mini jobs”.

In the article, Lafontaine makes no attempt to explain what he means by “the full benefits of labour”, nor his version of “democratically run enterprises”.

In fact, in every economic system, including a socialist run economy, a part of labour income is utilised to finance social requirements. In order to overcome the glaring social inequality that characterizes today’s society, and improve education, health care and affordable housing, this contribution must be increased. This must be done at the expense of the private owners of capital, who are pocketing an ever larger share of the wealth created by the workers.

To this end it is necessary to nationalise the banks and big corporations, place them under democratic control, overthrow capitalism and establish a workers’ government.

Lafontaine is adamantly opposed to such a perspective. Behind his hollow phrases he seeks to defend the unions and their corporatist collaboration with the employers—a system which has long since been transformed into a mechanism for the suppression of workers by a privileged trade union and works council bureaucracy. Lafontaine’s promises to humanize capitalist forms of exploitation is linked to his glorification of the policy of former SPD leader Willy Brandt. Lafontaine believes he can hold back workers

from turning to a revolutionary socialist perspective with his palaver about “democratically run enterprises”.

Two years ago his partner, co-thinker and deputy Left Party leader Sahra Wagenknecht, devoted an entire book this question. Her book glorified Germany’s post-war conservative chancellor Ludwig Erhard (CDU), arguing that the current crisis erupted because both the conservative parties and the SPD had betrayed the heritage of the “social market economy”.

In fact, the policy propounded and defended by Ludwig Erhard, known as *ordo-liberalism*, was nothing less than a specific German form of neo-liberalism. Erhard supported private property and free markets, but sought to establish certain forms of state control.

Wherever the Left Party has exercised political power, i.e., currently in the state of Brandenburg, or during its 10-year reign in the Berlin Senate, it has carried out anti-social policies which equal or out do those implemented by CDU-led state governments. This is the reality behind all of Lafontaine’s huffing and puffing.

Lafontaine published his article in *Junge Welt*, a neo-Stalinist paper that occasionally issues some criticism of Lafontaine’s rivals in the Left Party. Workers should treat his latest exercise in social reformist demagoguery with the contempt it deserves.



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