

German Left Party makes nationalist appeal

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The deputy chair of the German Left Party, Sahra Wagenknecht, has spoken out against educating young unemployed people from other European countries.

She told *Die Welt* that the invitation by German Economics Minister Philipp Rösler (Free Democratic Party—FDP) to young people from southern Europe to undertake their education in Germany was a “slap in the face for hundreds of thousands of young people who live in Germany, many of whom have never had a chance.”

“Before we entice talent from other countries, we need to start an education offensive in Germany and educate the lost generation,” Wagenknecht said. She referred to internal figures from the Federal Employment Agency, according to which almost a million people in Germany aged 15 to 35 were unemployed in May.

Wagenknecht’s argument is reminiscent of the crude slogans of the neo-Nazis. In place of the international solidarity of workers and youth, she advocates their division along national lines. “Jobs Just for Germans” is a popular slogan of the fascist German National Party (NPD).

Embarrassed by Wagenknecht’s nationalist rhetoric, some representatives of the Left Party are trying to backpedal. Dietmar Bartsch, deputy chair of the party’s parliamentary group, claimed that the Left Party would not “play off young unemployed people in Greece, Spain and Germany against each other.” Member of Parliament Stefan Liebich said the Left Party stood for open borders. “So everyone is welcome,” he said.

But Wagenknecht’s nationalist slogans are neither a mistake nor an accident. They arise logically from the social and political orientation of the Left Party.

The party is responding to the worsening of the international economic crisis by turning to the nation-state. It wants to strengthen the state in order to protect the German economy, and especially the upper-middle

class, against international competition, and to suppress class contradictions.

In this, Wagenknecht plays a leading ideological role. In the 1990s, as spokeswoman of the Communist Platform, she defended the regime in East Germany and its Stalinist and nationalist program of “socialism in one country.” Today she is a supporter of post-war chancellor Ludwig Erhard and his policy of “Ordo-liberalism”, i.e., state intervention to support the free market.

The arch-conservative Christian Democratic politician Erhard played a crucial role in post-war German capitalism as economics minister and chancellor, based on an economic theory that linked the free market with a national regulatory framework. (See: “Left” figurehead of German Left Party praises meritocracy and the market).

In an interview with the *Straubinger Tageblatt*, Wagenknecht said recently: “Anyone who thought the old Federal Republic [West Germany] was good can actually vote only for the Left Party.” She appealed particularly to the German upper-middle class, which, she said, “would be better off” with the Left Party.

The appeal to the Federal Republic of Konrad Adenauer and Erhard, whose foreign policy was shaped by the Cold War and whose domestic policy was marked by intolerance, anti-communism and cultural backwardness, speaks volumes about the political orientation of Wagenknecht and the Left Party.

Wagenknecht expressly rejects a socialist perspective—the international mobilization of the working class for the expropriation of the banks and corporations and the socialist reorganization of society. The “model of a centralized planned economy” failed in the East Germany, she said in the above interview. But she says nothing about the responsibility of the Stalinist state party in the former East Germany, which suppressed workers’ democracy, sabotaged economic

planning and eventually led the way to capitalist restoration.

The Left Party's advocacy of the free market, the nation-state and the upper-middle class inevitably means a further shift to the right. This lends the nominal red color of the party a distinctly brown hue. The right-wing nationalist slogans coming from its ranks are not new.

Party founder Oskar Lafontaine, who is both politically and personally linked to Wagenknecht, railed against "foreign workers" in 2005. It was the duty of the state "to prevent fathers and women becoming unemployed because foreign workers took their jobs through low wages", he said at the time at a meeting in Chemnitz.

Lafontaine recently called for a "production-oriented wage policy" within the European Union. To align wages in the southern European countries to the low productivity that prevails there and reach "nearly balanced competitiveness", he suggested a return to national currencies. Then, through devaluation, "countries such as Greece, Portugal and Spain would become 30 percent cheaper."

This proposal aims to divide the European working class and play workers off against each other. Wagenknecht supports him and admits that there is "considerable overlap" between the right-wing anti-euro party *Alternative for Germany* (AfD) and the Left Party. The AfD is "correct in many points in their criticism of the currently practiced euro rescue," she recently said.



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