Left Party steps-up anti-immigrant agitation in Germany

Johannes Stern
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One of the most significant political developments of the New Year has been the transformation of Germany's Left Party into an open proponent of right-wing, law-and-order, anti-refugee policies.

Since the leader of the Left Party's parliamentary group, Sahra Wagenknecht, joined in calls for a crackdown on refugees with her statement earlier this year that "whoever abuses the right to hospitality has lost the right to be a guest," other leading members of the Left Party have expressed similar opinions.

It is revealing that Wagenknecht received praise from the extreme-right Alternative for Germany (AfD) party. "Mrs. Wagenknecht summed up the situation very well," stated the deputy chairman of the right-wing extremist party, Alexander Gauland, and repeated Wagenknecht's demand, "Whoever comes here voluntarily must behave like a guest. If they do not want to or cannot do so by being violent or disrespectful towards his host, he must leave Germany immediately."

For her part, Wagenknecht has sharpened her openly right-wing, German nationalist rhetoric, which hardly differs from that of the AfD. After Wagenknecht's statements prompted some criticism from within the parliamentary group according to media reports, the Left Party leader returned to the offensive.

Wagenknecht's entire line of argument is typical of right-wing populists. She declared that "the overwhelming majority of the population is of the opinion that people to whom we have extended protection should respect the rules of our country." This was an "entirely normal opinion."

At the same time, Wagenknecht sought to play off the poorest sections of the population against refugees, combining all of this with calls for additional police and the strengthening of the repressive apparatus of the state. If people are being accepted, it was necessary to "ensure their integration into society," she told *Tagesspiegel*. The competition for housing would "inevitably drive rents higher," and the labour market was also not unlimited. There were already 2 million skilled workers in this country living on mini jobs.

Last Thursday, Wagenknecht went a step further. On *Redaktionsnetzwerk Deutschland* she criticised Chancellor Angela Merkel from the right in the style of the Christian Social Union or even AfD. Merkel's refugee policy had led to a "total failure of the state" in Germany, "in the social area as well as in domestic security." This was "really irresponsible." Germany would be "torn apart" if another million refugees arrived. "Of course there are capacity limits, whoever denies this is not wise to the world."

On the same day, *Junge Welt* (a newspaper which supports the Left Party) cited Wagenknecht as being in favour of expanding the state's repressive apparatus. "The government must finally adopt the necessary measures to end the failure of the state. We require an investment offensive immediately, among other things for more police, affordable housing. […] Criminal acts like those in Cologne must be acted upon. It is the task of the state to ensure that criminals are held to account. To that end there is the criminal code which applies to everyone, regardless of their origin, skin colour, religion or residency status. No legal free zone can be allowed to exist, neither for criminals nor citizens' militias." *Neues Deutschland*, a national newspaper aligned with the Left Party, left no doubt that Wagenknecht's statements correspond to the Left Party's programme. The newspaper commented that it was "in no way betraying values to consider the deportation of criminals to be a legitimate means for the legal state, even if they have made asylum

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applications."

According to a *Tagesspiegel* report, members of the parliamentary fraction from six tendencies gave their support to Wagenknecht. These included former music producer and current European spokesman Dietmar Dehm; the Left Party's representative on the parliamentary defence committee, Alexander Neu; the former party chairman Klaus Ernst; the ex-Stalinist and party foreign policy spokesman Wolfgang Gehrcke; the former ver.di functionary Michael Schlecht; and Michael Leutert, a Left Party representative to the German Parliament from Saxony. *Tagesspiegel* cited some of their remarks. Leutert absurdly sought to use the Geneva refugee convention, in which the right to asylum is guaranteed as a basic right, to justify deportations. There it is stated that refugees had to obey the laws of the host country, he claimed, before adding, "For the average person that means, if I invite someone into my home and he steals from me, he has to leave."

Leutert not only intends to withhold basic democratic rights from refugees, but also wants to either deport or detain them. "In principle, there are then only two options," *Tagesspiegel* cited him saying. "To deport people. Or enforce our rule of law with more police, more judges and more prisons."

He continues, "We don't want upper limits like the CSU. But we can't accept and integrate a million refugees every year." One has to "pose this problem pragmatically, not with ideology." Otherwise, one runs the risk of not being heard or taken seriously in "the extremely tense situation."

He cynically added, "If we ruin our society, there will be nobody left to help refugees." The events in Cologne were "only a small foretaste," but the real problems were still to come. For example, when "the 10,000 Muslims living in Chemnitz say 'we want a mosque'."

Leutert leaves no doubt about the layers the Left Party is appealing to with such reactionary slogans—not among the working class, but rather the declassed petty bourgeois elements who have joined in the extreme right-wing, racist and anti-Muslim AfD and Pegida rallies. Of course, it is racism that is being preached there, explained Leutert. Whoever wants to go there cannot be stopped. Only then to note, "But we must give an answer to those who ask us, how many refugees do we actually still want to accept?"

The Left Party has not restricted itself to words. In Thuringia, where Left Party state premier Bodo Ramelow leads a Left Party-SPD-Green coalition, they are imposing their "answer" in practice. Last year, 460 people were deported. According to the *Thüringer Allgemeine Zeitung*, this is "twice as many as in past years." In total, 1,600 people "returned," 1,154 allegedly "voluntarily."

For several weeks, the "left" government has been enforcing mass deportations. The *Thüringer Allgemeine* wrote at the end of last year, "Recently, in the course of several mass deportations carried out at night, 200 people from the Balkans were flown back. Families with children were mainly affected, some of whom had been living in Germany for years."

The extreme right-wing refugee policy of the Left Party is no aberration. It arises directly out of its nationalist, pro-capitalist and imperialist character. After the party joined the drive to war last year, it is now showing its true face in domestic policy, especially in its stance towards refugees.

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