

# German Left Party's Lafontaine launches AfD-style tirade against refugees

Johannes Stern  
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Like all of the bourgeois parties, the Left Party is using the Alternative for Germany's (AfD's) electoral success to justify adopting its xenophobic programme. The arguments in favour of this always follow the same pattern.

Oskar Lafontaine, the Left Party's founding father, claimed on his Facebook page that the key to the "lack of support from those on the lower end of the income scale" was "the misguided 'refugee policy'." This criticism does not only apply to the Left Party, he continued, "but all parties represented to date in the Bundestag (parliament)."

He railed against the "'refugee policy' of the justifiably punished 'refugee Chancellor,'" and criticised the two leaders of the Left Party, Katja Kipping and Bernd Riixinger, in an interview with the *Passauer Neue Presse*. He accused them—entirely incorrectly—of advocating the position of "accepting everyone who wants to come to Germany." This is "completely unrealistic."

In a manner typical of the AfD, Lafontaine plays the poorest sections of the population off against refugees, the vast majority of whom have fled wars in North Africa and the Middle East to come to Europe, as if it were the refugees—and not the SPD (and, in many states, also the Left Party)—who are responsible for Hartz IV, social cutbacks, the shortage of teachers, declining pensions and tax gifts to the rich.

"Social justice" obliges us "to help those who are most dependent upon it," Lafontaine wrote. It is impermissible "to impose the burdens of migration, including intensified competition in the low-wage sector, increased rents in areas of cities with affordable housing and growing problems in schools due to a rising share of students whose language skills are lacking, on those who are already losing out as income

and wealth inequality grows."

He then went on to add, "Experience in Europe teaches: if these people no longer feel they are represented by left or social democratic parties, they increasingly vote for right-wing parties."

It is obvious where Lafontaine is heading with this. It is not the social crisis, which the Left Party and SPD have inflicted in eastern Germany and the Ruhr region in particular, that has driven many workers to support the AfD, but rather the lack of a tough refugee policy from these parties. To cut the ground from under the AfD, the Left party therefore has to adopt its anti-refugee agitation, according to the logic of Lafontaine's argument.

In reality, all historical and international experiences teach that the adoption of the right-wing extremists' programme by the establishment parties does not weaken, but rather strengthens the right-wing extremists. Lafontaine also knows this. He is not concerned about undermining the AfD. The experienced politician, who spent 33 years in the SPD, 13 of them as minister president of Saarland and four as SPD leader, is an expert in the suppression of social conflict.

Lafontaine is much more troubled by the rise of social and political opposition than with the AfD's influence. He therefore has an interest in strengthening the right-wing, xenophobic ideology with which the AfD is directing mounting anger and outrage into a nationalist blind alley.

Significantly, Lafontaine connects his agitation against refugees with a shift closer to the SPD. In the *Passauer Neue Presse*, he advocated the formation of a red-red coalition at the federal level: "Those in responsible positions within the SPD and Left Party have to pursue this now in order to prevent the further

decline of the political left.” The SPD and Left Party could not afford to fight with each other in the new Bundestag, he said, adding, “That would be the wrong answer. Throughout Europe, one can see that a further splintering would not be helpful,” according to Lafontaine.

The anti-working class content of his right-wing offensive is obvious. Under conditions of an explosive social and political crisis in Germany and Europe, the SPD and Left Party are drawing closer together to suppress the mounting opposition to militarism, the strengthening of the repressive state apparatus and social cutbacks.

Significantly, Andrea Nahles, the SPD’s new parliamentary group leader who enjoys close ties to Lafontaine, adopted the same right-wing tone in a recent interview with *Der Spiegel*.

“We are not naive. When a million people come here, not all of them are going to be nice. And those who do not stick to the rules must face tough consequences,” she threatened, in typical AfD-style. Asked if the state should be capable of closing its borders, Nahles answered, “Yes, because a state must be able to be strong. It is a force for regulation, organisation, opportunity creating, but also punishment and restriction. If that is called into question, it won’t be good in the long-term.”

Lafontaine and Nahles are pursuing a definite strategy. Under conditions of a deepening social and political crisis in Germany and Europe, they are adopting the extreme right’s xenophobic and nationalist programme so as to divide the working class and strengthen the state apparatus against the threat of a social revolution.

Hardly anyone better embodies this policy than Lafontaine. Already in the early 1990s, he was among the hardliners on refugee policy. When in August 1990 North Rhine-Westphalia’s Minister President Johannes Rau (SPD), who later became German president, backed Lafontaine, *Der Spiegel* commented, “North-Rhine Westphalia’s SPD government wants to restrict the right to asylum—entirely in the spirit of Chancellor candidate Oskar Lafontaine.”

In August 1992, in the midst of a wave of xenophobic terror attacks, Lafontaine enforced the “Petersburg turn” with then SPD leader Björn Engholm, which brought about a new positioning of the SPD in foreign

policy and the effective abolition of the right to asylum in the so-called asylum compromise. A central component of this was the “third state rule.” This laid the basis for the current mass deportations: asylum seekers from “safe third countries” can be automatically rejected without any further review. Lafontaine described this as a “real step forward.”

After exiting the SPD in 1999, Lafontaine stayed loyal to his line. In 2004, he backed what was at the time a controversial plan from Interior Minister Otto Schily (SPD) to establish reception camps for refugees in Africa. In 2005, he then waged a deliberate campaign against “foreign workers.” The state was obliged “to prevent family fathers and mothers becoming unemployed because foreign workers take their jobs for low wages,” he stated in a notorious speech in Chemnitz.

Over the last three years, Lafontaine and his wife, the Left Party’s parliamentary group leader Sahra Wagenknecht, have repeatedly criticised conservative Chancellor Angela Merkel’s (CDU) refugee policy from the right. Their positions are now virtually indistinguishable from those of the right-wing extremist AfD. In the last televised debate prior to the election, AfD deputy leader Alexander Gauland praised the Left Party’s lead candidate by stating, “What Mrs. Wagenknecht says is right.”

Even Gregor Gysi, the traditional leader of the Left Party’s right wing, felt compelled in a recent comment in *Neues Deutschland* to warn of the end of the Left Party “as a left party,” if Lafontaine and Wagenknecht’s course is adopted.



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