

German Left Party leaders prepare to form new right-wing movement

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For the past two months, an appeal for the formation of a new political movement has been circulating on the Internet. The name tentatively proposed for the new movement is #fairLand and its initiators are two longstanding leaders of Germany's Left Party, Oskar Lafontaine and Sahra Wagenknecht.

Wagenknecht told *Der Spiegel* magazine that the new project was still incomplete and the name would be changed. The new coalition of diverse political forces is to be launched this autumn as a "digital network."

The five-page appeal is entitled "For a just and peaceful country." The appeal quickly reveals that far from being an ostensibly left-wing initiative, this new project is instead another political turn to the right by Lafontaine and Wagenknecht, the founder and the current parliamentary leader of the Left Party.

The text begins by arguing that the reformist conception of achieving social equality and prosperity has failed. "The promise of improvement bound up with the social market economy, i.e., that anyone who works hard can also become prosperous, is no longer valid in an epoch of temporary work and low-wage jobs." There then follow a number of facts about a "deeply divided country."

Already in the third paragraph, Lafontaine and Wagenknecht blame refugees and asylum seekers for the growth of social tensions. For many, they write, "free movement and immigration inside Europe" meant "more competition for low-paid jobs."

In a passage that could be taken from the far-right Alternative for Germany (AfD), the appeal continues: "The refugee crisis has led to great insecurity in Germany." Public administration, cities and communities have been overwhelmed by the many refugees and social problems aggravated. The "lack of social housing, overburdened schools and inadequate kindergarten places" have all been exacerbated by the uncontrolled influx of refugees—to the chagrin of the "already disadvantaged."

This is followed by the sentence: "When those with political responsibility continue to look on as radicalised Islam's preachers of hate convey their view of the world to children barely five years old, then integration is almost impossible, the social climate is poisoned."

This racist tirade does not prevent Lafontaine and Wagenknecht from writing in the same paragraph: "We reject racism and xenophobia." This also parallels the style of the AfD, which always claims it is not xenophobic, but merely reflects the alleged concerns and fears of the population.

Lafontaine and Wagenknecht stress that they do not intend to found a new party, but rather to establish a coalition of forces from across the party spectrum and among non-voters. "#fairLand is a non-partisan movement to which anyone who supports its goals can contribute," the text reads, i.e., all those who are no longer prepared to sit back and accept that "radicalised Islam's preachers of hate" propagandise among children should work together.

The call defends capitalism and is thoroughly nationalist. The terms "socialism" and "socialist" do not appear. While Lafontaine and Wagenknecht criticise "global finance capitalism," they do not advocate the expropriation of the banks and corporations, but rather the promotion of national-based capitalism. The appeal calls for the strengthening of the "German domestic market" and the repressive apparatus of the state. The police and judiciary are to be better staffed and equipped.

The appeal calls for a "European Germany in a united Europe of sovereign democracies, respecting cultural autonomy, tradition and identity." This is reminiscent of the hackneyed demand for a "Europe of Fatherlands" proposed in the 1960s by French president Charles de Gaulle, which was then taken up by numerous right-wing, nationalist parties. The call for the "preservation of cultural autonomy" comes directly from the odious political program of the AfD.

The right-wing slogans of Lafontaine and Wagenknecht are not new. Already in the 1990s, Lafontaine (at that time chairman of the Social Democratic Party, SPD) resorted to the jargon of the far right and warned of the danger of "foreign workers."

Wagenknecht has also threatened refugees, asserting that "those who abuse our hospitality have forfeited the right to our hospitality." AfD leader Alexander Gauland praised Lafontaine and Wagenknecht for their xenophobia and uses the same language to vilify all those of non-German origin. In her book *Wealth without Greed*, Wagenknecht calls for more national autonomy and a strong nation-state to protect the domestic economy against the superior power of the multinationals.

What is new is that these right-wing slogans are now being used to provide the basis for a new political movement, which also aims to attract members of the AfD. Lafontaine and Wagenknecht are responding to the resurgence of class struggle and the growing militancy of workers increasingly freeing themselves from the grip of the unions, the SPD and the Left Party.

The return of class struggle is an international phenomenon. Workers are increasingly disgusted by the right-wing policies of

social democracy, fake “lefts” and the unions, who, in the name of defending individual factories and competitiveness, impose wage and job cuts, support German militarism and sabotage every labor dispute.

The US has witnessed a powerful strike movement of teachers, who have come into growing conflict with the unions. In France, rail workers are opposing President Emmanuel Macron’s reform of the SNCF state railway and the slashing of 120,000 jobs. The workers overwhelmingly repudiated the sell-out prepared by the rail unions. In Romania, Ford workers rejected their contract and took spontaneous strike action in opposition to the union officialdom. Workers in other Eastern European countries are also rebelling against extreme forms of exploitation, while public sector and engineering workers have also taken strike action in Germany, with considerable public support.

The Lafontaine-Wagenknecht initiative is meant to head off this growing militancy and divert it into a nationalist dead-end. They aim to mobilise right-wing forces to oppose militant workers politically and, if necessary, physically, and strengthen the bureaucratic apparatus of the unions. This is the inevitable logic of their xenophobic and chauvinist program.

Lafontaine and Wagenknecht have each long championed the defence of the bourgeois order and a strong state.

The 74-year-old Lafontaine, who joined the SPD at the age of 23, has devoted his political career to the suppression of the class struggle. While students and many members of the SPD youth organisation (Jusos) took to the streets in the late 1960s, Lafontaine was busy forging his career in Saarland in municipal and state politics.

As mayor of Saarbrücken, the capital of the state of Saarland, he was the pioneer of compulsory labour for the unemployed in the mid-1970s, while imposing austerity measures at a municipal level. Later, as premier of Saarland, he organised the rationalisation of the state’s coal mining and steel industry, in close cooperation with the unions, with the loss of thousands of jobs.

As SPD chairman, Lafontaine helped Gerhard Schröder take power as federal chancellor in the late 1990s. Lafontaine served as finance minister in Schröder’s new cabinet. Following pressure from the international financial markets and press, Lafontaine resigned his government posts without putting up any fight, allowing Schröder to go ahead with austerity measures in the shape of his Agenda 2010.

Lafontaine returned to politics after the SPD was voted out of office and rapidly lost influence. He played the key role in forming a coalition between the WASG (Election Alternative for Work and Social Justice) and the PDS (Party of Democratic Socialism) to form the Left Party. The WASG was a collection of spent SPD and union bureaucrats based in West Germany who quit the sinking ship of the SPD. The PDS was the successor party to the ruling East German Stalinist Socialist Unity Party (SED), which collapsed in 1990.

Wagenknecht joined the Stalinist SED shortly before the fall of the Berlin Wall and began her political career as figurehead of the “Communist Platform,” a faction in the PDS, which vehemently defended the crimes of Stalinism while supporting capitalist

restoration. After receiving her doctorate in economics, Wagenknecht rapidly replaced Marx’s *Capital* on her bookshelf with volumes praising *ordo liberalism*, the specific German form of neoliberalism that served as a guide for the reactionary Christian Democratic Union (CDU) chancellors Konrad Adenauer and Ludwig Erhard.

Sahra Wagenknecht, who married Lafontaine in 2014, is the living embodiment of the transformation of Stalinist bureaucrats into right-wing defenders of capitalism. Her own nationalism draws directly from the conceptions of Stalinism.

The # fairLand appeal is addressed to representatives of the SPD, the Left Party, the so-called “workers’ wing” of Germany’s ruling conservative parties, the AfD and the trade unions, along with privileged layers of the petty bourgeoisie, who are moving sharply to the right following the collapse of social reformism. Such forces are terrified by the inability of the reformist apparatuses to head off class struggle amidst signs of a radicalisation of the working class and great social upheavals. They realise their privileged position is under threat and are demanding police-state measures while seeking to channel growing social opposition in a right-wing direction.

These layers react to the growing tensions between the imperialist powers, especially between Europe and the United States, by demanding that Germany functions as a superpower based on military strength. Wagenknecht repeatedly calls on the government “not to subordinate itself to the US, but develop an independent policy.”

Similar developments are taking place in other countries. In France, Jean-Luc Mélenchon, a friend and colleague of Lafontaine, is seeking to build a right-wing populist movement that combines social demagoguery with nationalist slogans that bring them into the orbit of Marie Le Pen’s fascist National Front. In Greece, Syriza formed a government with the far-right ANEL that has imposed the European Union’s harsh austerity program.

Lafontaine and Wagenknecht’s effort to build a right-wing movement vindicates the position of the Socialist Equality Party (SGP) that the fight against social inequality, war and dictatorship requires the building of an international socialist workers’ party irreconcilably opposed to the Left Party and its pseudo-left supporters.



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