

German Left Party leaders launch right-wing coalition

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Last weekend, Oskar Lafontaine and Sahra Wagenknecht, two leading members of Germany's Left Party, launched the #StandUp coalition, combining anti-corporate demagoguery with nationalist and xenophobic positions pioneered by the extreme right.

All major German newspapers reported extensively on the launch. In last Saturday's edition, *Der Spiegel* published three articles on the subject. These included a seven-author piece entitled "Stand up for Sahra," an interview with Wagenknecht, and an opinion piece authored by leading Green Party member Antje Vollmer, SPD parliamentary deputy Marco Bülow, and Left Party parliamentary deputy Sevim Dagdelen.

The initiative was announced in May in a five-page statement outlining its nationalist worldview.

Wagenknecht blamed refugees for the social crisis. Public administration, cities, and municipalities have been overwhelmed by the number of refugees, she wrote at the time. The "shortage of social housing, overstretched schools, and lack of kindergarten places" have been exacerbated by the uncontrolled influx of refugees—to the detriment of the "already disadvantaged." In the following passage, she declared, "If politicians continue to look on as radical Islamist hate preachers indoctrinate 5-year-olds with a worldview that makes integration next to impossible, the social climate will be poisoned."

To avoid a new round of criticism of such right-wing standpoints, the initiators of the project refrained from making their own political statement on the website. Instead, under the heading "The citizens must be heard," they presented a series of eighteen short videos.

Max, a student, complained of unaffordable housing costs in urban centers; camera operator Simon stated that environmental protection could not be conducted on the basis of political interests; dispatcher Daniela said we should not profit from the world's crises and wars; Margot, a pensioner, noted that she cannot afford her apartment on her low pension; pastor Kurt declared that there were too many foreigners in Germany.

The longest interview was with a trade union official, who pointed to the poor working conditions in many industries, and claimed that the new coalition movement will increase pressure on the government parties and force the adoption of better policies.

Earlier this year, Wagenknecht declared that the movement would be launched in the autumn and the latest indications are that the official launch will take place on September 4. Lafontaine and Wagenknecht have reserved the main hall at the federal press conference centre for this date.

There is a good reason why the project's launch has been accelerated. Resistance to the grand coalition's right-wing agenda is growing more rapidly and on a broader scale than many observers had expected. The adoption by the federal government of the Alternative for Germany's (AfD) far-right policies has triggered mass protests, with tens of thousands taking to the streets.

While support for the governing Christian Democratic Union/Christian Social Union (CDU/CSU) and Social Democratic (SPD) parties has continued to fall in polls below the historic low of last year's federal election, and support for the Left Party remains stagnant, 70,000 people protested in late May in Berlin alone against the AfD.

In June, the anti-racist petition initiated under the slogan "Solidarity instead of homeland" received 15,000 signatures within a short period of time. Chapters of the "Sea Bridge," which campaigns for emergency rescue at sea in the Mediterranean and the acceptance of refugees, were founded in over 90 cities.

In Munich, 50,000 people demonstrated under the slogan #HoundedOut against the CSU and federal government's refugee policies. Prior to this, 40,000 people took to the streets of the Bavarian state capital to demonstrate against Bavaria's new police law and the sweeping attacks on democratic rights it contains.

Lafontaine and Wagenknecht want to prevent this radicalisation from intersecting with a revival of the class struggle and the growing militancy among workers.

The struggle at Ryanair, where workers in Belgium,

Germany, Ireland, the Netherlands, and Sweden struck simultaneously yesterday, stands in stark contrast to Lafontaine and Wagenknecht's nationalist agenda. It demonstrates that the return of the class struggle is an international phenomenon and is increasingly assuming an international form.

Earlier this year, a strike movement developed among teachers in the United States in opposition to the official trade unions. In France, railway workers fought for three months against Macron's privatization of the state-owned SNCF and the planned lay-off of 120,000 workers until the struggle was strangled by the trade unions. In Romania, Ford workers rejected a miserable contract and took spontaneous strike action in the face of the union's opposition. Workers in other Eastern European countries are also rebelling against conditions of brutal exploitation.

Workers are disgusted by the right-wing policies of the Social Democrats, Left Party, and trade unions, which, in the name of defending production locations and maintaining international competitiveness, are attacking wages and working conditions, rearming the military, and sabotaging all workers' struggles.

Lafontaine and Wagenknecht fear that this development could move in an independent direction and that a socialist perspective such as that advocated by the Socialist Equality Party could win support. They want to prevent this at all costs. Despite their occasional criticisms of the SPD, where Lafontaine enjoyed a forty-year career, they repeatedly note that they want to strengthen it.

Wagenknecht told *Der Spiegel* that in the SPD and Greens, there are "many members who are fed up with supporting policies in the interests of the corporate and rich lobbies." Their "chances to substantially change their parties" would grow if her coalition gains strength, she added. "If there is enough pressure, the parties, even in their own interests, will open their lists for our ideas and campaigns."

The hope for "substantial changes" in the SPD and Greens is an illusion and a political dead end. Lafontaine encouraged similar illusions in 1998, when he organized the election campaign for Gerhard Schröder, who then enforced the Hartz labour laws and the Agenda 2010 austerity measures. This was also the case in 2007, when Lafontaine took over as leader of the Left Party, which advocates a no less right-wing and anti-worker line than the SPD.

The future role of the coalition is being kept deliberately vague. As a movement, it cannot stand independently in elections, meaning it will serve to strengthen the SPD, Greens, and Left Party. However, if the Social Democrats suffer a total collapse, as in Greece, France, and other countries, the movement could be transformed into a party to continue the pursuit of the same agenda.

The new coalition's policy is directed towards leading the growing militancy within the working class into a nationalist blind alley, strengthening right-wing elements who will combat this militancy politically, and physically if required, and bolstering the reactionary trade union bureaucracy. This is the logic of its nationalist and xenophobic programme.

In her interview with *Der Spiegel*, Wagenknecht once again spoke out against open borders and, in the style of the AfD, blamed refugees and Merkel's 2015 refugee policy for the social crisis. Wagenknecht stated, "Open borders are no help to the poorest, because they have no chance to go anywhere. We don't combat poverty in developing countries by attracting their middle class to Europe."

This is reactionary cynicism. While the financial elite makes unrestrained use of its right to invest and exploit the working class wherever it likes around the world, Wagenknecht denies the right to workers and refugee families from parts of the world scarred by war and starvation to live in the country where they are able find work, housing, and a decent standard of living.

Wagenknecht vehemently rejects the fundamental socialist principle that the working class is an international class with no fatherland and is united in struggle against capitalist exploitation, militarism, war, and fascism.

She connects her tub-thumping nationalism and defence of the nation state with Oskar Lafontaine, who in the 1990s as SPD chairman was already employing the rhetoric of the far-right to agitate against "foreign workers." With the threat, "Whoever abuses the right to hospitality has forfeited the right to it," Wagenknecht received praise from AfD leader Alexander Gauland.

This nationalism and hatred of foreigners, combined with the defence of the state security apparatus, are part of the political DNA of the new coalition. Workers should treat it with undisguised hostility, unite with workers in other countries and refugees, and wage a common struggle for socialism in opposition to capitalist exploitation, fascism, and war.



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