

German Left Party leaders launch right-wing #Standup initiative

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Left Party politicians Sahra Wagenknecht and Oskar Lafontaine have thus far avoided publishing an official statement setting forth the policies of their new initiative bearing the name #Standup (*#Aufstehen*). But the closer they come to the September 4 launch of their movement, the clearer its aims become. They are promoting far-right politics.

Earlier this month, the conservative newspapers *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* and *Die Welt* published interviews with Wagenknecht and Lafontaine in which the Left Party leaders announced their xenophobic and nationalist initiative.

The goal of #Standup, declared Lafontaine in his interview with *Die Welt*, is to secure “a different majority in the Bundestag [parliament].” The platform will be aimed at members of the Left Party, the Greens and the Social Democratic Party (SPD), but it will not exclude the conservative Christian Democratic Union (CDU) or the far-right Alternative for Germany (AfD). Lafontaine added that one possible result of his initiative could be the “reunification of the SPD and Left Party” and the establishment of a “large left-wing people’s party.”

This is an effort to contain and manipulate growing opposition to the right-wing policies of the grand coalition government, which consists of the Christian Democrats (the CDU and Christian Social Union [CSU]) and the SPD. But workers well remember that it was the SPD and Greens who pushed through unprecedented social cuts and initiated the revival of German militarism when they were the ruling coalition between 1998 and 2005. They also know that in the states where they hold power, the Left Party and Greens are implementing the grand coalition's policies.

The social demands that Wagenknecht and Lafontaine present in their interviews remain completely generic and bland. Nothing goes beyond phrases about the “social market economy” and “higher wages and pensions,” such

as can be found even in the election programs of the free-market Free Democratic Party (FDP). Even these hollow phrases contradict the political practice of the Left Party, which conforms to the right-wing agenda of social attacks, militarism and the build-up of the police powers of the state.

The interviews of Lafontaine and Wagenknecht do not, in any event, centre on these issues. Rather they focus on anti-refugee agitation, the stirring up of nationalism and the call for German “independence.” The two politicians thus line up behind the politics of the grand coalition and offer their services in imposing them on a largely hostile population.

To this end, they employ the methods of the neo-fascist AfD. The SPD and Greens, when they were in power, destroyed the welfare state. The Left Party created a social catastrophe wherever it was in government. Now the Left Party leaders are blaming the most vulnerable layers of society for the poverty created by their own policies.

“Social problems such as child and old-age poverty, low wages, poor social benefits and too little social housing” are being compounded by immigration “through wage and rent competition,” declared Lafontaine.

In her interview with the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, Wagenknecht said, “You have to talk about problems that arise from large-scale immigration and lack of integration.” She added: “Of course, there is even more competition for apartments and jobs today. Studies show that without immigration, the long upturn in Germany would have led to much stronger wage growth in the lower-wage segments.”

This right-wing agitation is fully in line with the grand coalition, which is establishing deportation camps across Germany with the collaboration of all Bundestag parties. The grand coalition’s policies are pushing up the number of refugee deaths in the Mediterranean and aiding the

traffickers of the Libyan Coast Guard.

While surveys show that up to two-thirds of the population reject this extreme shift to the right, Lafontaine claims that far too many politicians are stigmatized as being right-wing. “It has become fashionable today, even in journalism,” he says, “to stigmatize many demands that have existed for decades as being close to the AfD. In this light, even Willy Brandt would be said to be close to the AfD. Anyone who works to limit immigration, as I do, is close to the AfD.”

Lafontaine justifies the adoption of AfD policies by the grand coalition and his own party by claiming that in this way the AfD will be weakened. He compares the current situation to the blatant restriction on the right to asylum by the CDU, FDP and SPD in May 1993.

“At that time, over one million asylum seekers and immigrants came to us,” he declares. “Refugee shelters and houses burned down in different places. In this situation, we passed the asylum compromise, according to which people who come from a neighbouring European country have no right to asylum in Germany. Support for the [far-right] Republicans then dropped significantly.”

That is a blatant lie. In fact, the right-wing extremists achieved their biggest electoral successes in nine of the 16 states after the so-called asylum “compromise.” The far-right German People’s Union (DVU) recorded its best results to date in five out of seven states where it stood for election. There is no doubt that right-wing extremists benefited from the implementation of the policies of the CDU/CSU and SPD. Today, this applies to an even greater degree.

Lafontaine is adopting the policies of the AfD not to weaken it, but because he agrees with the neo-fascists on fundamental issues. In his interview, he does not rule out cooperation with right-wing extremists. The sister party of the Left Party in Greece, Syriza, has been in coalition with the far-right Independent Greeks for many years and is implementing ferocious social cuts along with them.

The political overlap with the AfD is not limited to refugee policy. In the face of escalating trade wars and growing conflicts between the major powers, Lafontaine and Wagenknecht invoke the so-called national interest. “Our key industries must not be destroyed by international hedge funds, which are concerned only with making quick returns, as is currently the case at Thyssen-Krupp,” says Wagenknecht.

“Social equality and democracy currently work only within individual states. On a global level, there is no leverage for it,” continues the Left Party parliamentary

faction leader. “Of course, states must protect their citizens from [social] dumping.”

This is exactly the argument used to justify trade wars. Regarding the US, Wagenknecht declares, “We should not subordinate ourselves to a policy that contradicts our interests.”

Lafontaine and Wagenknecht model themselves on the French politician Jean-Luc Mélenchon and his party Indomitable France. The supposedly “left” Mélenchon embraces nationalism and militarism and calls for the reintroduction of compulsory military service.

It is not surprising that #Standup has been welcomed by the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, which has already courted the AfD. Jasper von Altenbockum, who in 2015 demanded that the AfD be “given a chance,” is impressed above all by the form of the movement, which renounces democratic processes and principles. “They contrast the model of representative democracy with the model of a direct *Führer-Demokratie* (leader democracy),” he writes, “and thus feed the yearning that the ‘majority’ or the ‘people’s will’ once again call the shots.”

He continues: “Anti-liberalism and immigration criticism” bring to mind the AfD. “What they say about skill shortages and migration or integration could also come from the right wing of the CDU, if it still existed.”

In fact, the CDU has not lost its right wing. The whole party—as well as the CSU and the SPD—has moved far to the right and the grand coalition is putting the right-wing AfD’s program into action. But the return of militarism, the anti-refugee agitation and the social cuts are provoking the resistance of broad social layers, as seen most recently in the mass demonstrations in Munich and Berlin. Wagenknecht and Lafontaine offer their services to suppress and intimidate this opposition.



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