

German Left Party leader launches right-wing nationalist movement

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7 September 2018

Two things stood out when Sahra Wagenknecht and her closest supporters launched the motley political movement “Stand Up” on Tuesday. In her brief press statement, Wagenknecht, the chair of the Left Party faction in the German parliament, stressed that the movement came “from below,” i.e., was a so-called “grass roots” movement.

In fact, the official launch of this supposed “movement from below” was held at the very top—in the federal press conference hall in Berlin. Only selected journalists have access to this hallowed site. A normal press card is not sufficient, and the chairman of the federal press conference organization decides entirely on his own who gets to ask questions. The hall, just a stone’s throw from the Chancellery, is the place where the chancellor or her spokespeople hold official government press conferences.

There was huge media interest when Wagenknecht announced the founding of her populist movement on Tuesday. All of the main news channels and journalists based in Berlin were assembled in the hall.

There was nobody “from below” on the stage. Instead, political old timers took turns lamenting the loss of votes and continuing decline of their respective parties.

Wagenknecht herself complained that the Left Party had been unable to win sections of voters who had deserted the Social Democratic Party (SPD). The mayor of the northern German city of Flensburg, Simone Lange, who ran as a candidate for the party presidency at the last SPD party congress, said she was alarmed by the SPD’s loss of influence.

Sitting alongside Lange, Ludger Volmer announced that, as a founding member of the Greens, he disapproved of his party’s “process of adjustment” to the political mainstream. Volmer himself was a state secretary at the Foreign Office when it was headed by Green Party leader Joschka Fischer. In that capacity he tossed aside his previous pacifist positions and advocated German participation in the wars in Kosovo and Afghanistan.

These representatives of a “red-red-green” alliance were supported by Prof. Bernd Stegemann and the Hamburg-based communications expert Hans Albers. Stegemann pompously refers to himself as the spiritus rector of this “movement from below.”

The second glaring thing about the event was its proximity to

the events in Chemnitz, where right-wing extremist and fascist hordes took to the streets last week to hunt down foreigners while the police stood by. In response 70,000 people gathered at a concert on Monday in a powerful demonstration of mass opposition to the mobilisation of the far-right.

Although Wagenknecht’s press conference had been announced long before, it appeared to be a reaction to the growing resistance to racism and xenophobia by youth and workers in cities across Germany in what is a genuine grass roots movement.

This conclusion is substantiated by the five-page appeal distributed by the new movement’s founders to the press conference. It makes clear that Wagenknecht’s project is not a left-wing initiative against capitalism, but rather a right-wing nationalist offensive directed against foreign workers.

Already in her first statement on the new movement last May, Wagenknecht blamed refugees for the social problems in Germany. In that statement she complained that the country’s public administration, cities and communities had been overwhelmed by refugees. The problem of “already inadequate social housing, overburdened schools and insufficient daycare places” had been aggravated by the uncontrolled influx of immigrants, to the detriment of the “already disadvantaged.” This claim was followed by the sentence: “It is no wonder then that the social climate is poisoned when politicians look on as hate preachers of a radicalised Islam teach five-year-old children a world view that makes integration almost impossible.”

The latest statement makes no reference to “Islamist hate preachers” and seducers of children, but the political thrust remains the same. Once again refugees are held responsible for growing social distress.

The new text lists the most serious social issues. Among other points it notes that half the population in Germany today has a lower real income than at the end of the 1990s. This is followed by the sentence: “Many regard free movement and immigration as the main source of increased competition for low-paid jobs.”

This xenophobic position is repeated two paragraphs later. The statement asserts that the destruction of social cohesion, growing dissatisfaction and feelings of impotence create a breeding ground for hatred and intolerance. It concedes that the

main reasons for fears about the future are the crisis of the welfare state and global instability, but then adds, “The refugee issue has led to additional uncertainty.”

According to Wagenknecht, Chancellor Angela Merkel’s handling of refugee immigration was irresponsible. “Cities, communities and volunteers” had been left on their own, leading to a situation where the “many existing problems” were aggravated by immigration.

The catalogue of demands, with headlines such as “For a new peace policy,” “Secure jobs, good wages, decent pensions,” “Stop privatization,” “Protect the animal and plant world” and “Save democracy,” reads like a stale rehash of the failed promises of reform made in past decades.

The utterly reactionary content of the program becomes apparent wherever the demands become concrete. At the heart of the “new peace policy” is the development of the Bundeswehr [German army] as “part of a European security community”—a demand that corresponds exactly to the military policy of the federal grand coalition government.

With regard to Europe, the appeal calls for a “European Germany in a united Europe of sovereign democracies.” An additional clause, “while maintaining cultural autonomy and with respect for tradition and identity,” which featured in the May appeal, has been omitted because it too obviously echoed the policy of the far-right Alternative for Germany (AfD). However such a “Europe of sovereign democracies” resembles the demand for a “Europe of fatherlands” proposed in the 1960s by French President Charles de Gaulle—a demand that was subsequently taken up by a host of right-wing nationalist parties.

The appeal issued Tuesday is thoroughly nationalist and pro-capitalist. The terms “socialism” and “socialist” do not appear. Criticism of “global finance capitalism” is combined with demands for the buildup of the “German domestic market” and increased state repression. The police and judiciary are to be given more staff and better equipment.

It comes as no surprise therefore that AfD chief Alexander Gauland is full of praise for the new movement. The initiative has “the chance of overcoming party political trench warfare and could therefore give impetus to the substantive disputes in political discourse from a leftist standpoint,” Gauland declared on Tuesday. In the same AfD statement he praised Wagenknecht as a politician capable of “putting aside blinkers and identifying the real concerns and needs of broad sections of the people beyond pathos and ideology.”

Even the right-wing extremist weekly *Junge Freiheit* celebrating Wagenknecht as the representative of a new nationalism. The latest issue of the newspaper features Wagenknecht on the front page with the headline, “Back to the Nation?”

The article declares that with her commitment to the nation state Wagenknecht is trying to “revive a long buried left-wing tradition.” In a front-page commentary, the founder and chief

commentator of the paper, Dieter Stein, writes that the movement initiated by Wagenknecht is pushing ahead with “the debate about a return to the nation state”—and that is to be welcomed. Otherwise, there would be serious political upheavals “without a broad social debate on the massive problems of uncontrolled migration” and its social consequences.

Stein emphasises that Wagenknecht’s initiative is of great importance even if it is “short-lived due to the immediate emergence of internal contradictions, divisions and resistance.” Wagenknecht is putting not only the left, “but also the middle and conservatives under pressure. And that’s good.”

In a second article in the same issue of *Junge Freiheit*, Karlheinz Weißmann similarly praises Wagenknecht’s initiative. Weißmann is a leading representative of the German “New Right.” Together with Götz Kubitschek, he founded the far-right think tank Institute for State Policy (IfS) and is committed to reviving and spreading the rightist theories of Ernst Jünger, Carl Schmitt, Arthur Moeller van den Bruck and other representatives of the “Conservative Revolution.”

Weißmann points out that the right-wing nationalist views of Wagenknecht and her husband Oskar Lafontaine are not new. Already 13 years ago, Lafontaine made the “scandalous statement” at a rally in Chemnitz that fathers and women would be made unemployed “due to foreign workers with low wages taking away their jobs.”

He then praises Wagenknecht because she has openly declared that “the capacity of Germany in terms of immigration is exhausted” and border security “belongs to the self-evident powers of the state.” Basically, he writes, “there is only one movement similar to the one espoused by Wagenknecht—the movement ‘La France insoumise,’ which Jean-Luc Mélenchon founded in the run-up to the 2017 French presidential election.” Mélenchon in France, however, could draw on the tradition of a national Jacobinism, which was never quite extinct in France, but never existed in Germany, according to Weißmann.

The tradition of nationalism in Germany is notorious. The combination of social demagoguery and nationalism has a relentless political logic and inevitably leads in an extreme right, fascist direction. Workers and youth must confront this right-wing offensive with disgust and enmity.

Wagenknecht’s effort to build a right-wing political amalgam confirms the standpoint of the Socialist Equality Party (SEP): The fight against social inequality, war and dictatorship requires the building of an international socialist workers’ party which is irreconcilably opposed to the Left Party and its pseudo-left supporters.



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