

German Left Party politician Sahra Wagenknecht denounces COVID-19 protection measures

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Leading Left Party politician Sahra Wagenknecht has emerged as the most prominent mouthpiece for vaccination opponents in Germany. This was made patently clear to the broad public during her appearance on the ARD talk show “Anne Will” on October 31.

Wagenknecht boasted that she had not been vaccinated and would not allow herself to be vaccinated. Vaccination is an individual decision, she declared. It was wrong to claim that vaccination was an act of solidarity with others. “Those who get vaccinated are protecting themselves first and foremost,” she remarked.

She condemned protective measures against the virus ordered by the government as an attack on individual freedom. Since everyone could get vaccinated and thus protect themselves, she said, protective measures on the part of the state were no longer necessary.

Wagenknecht had to admit though that vaccinated people can infect others, but used this as an argument against protective measures. She rejected the existing 2G and 3G rules, which only allow fully vaccinated, recovered and tested people access to certain buildings and events, on the grounds that the issue was “who is infecting whom.”

Wagenknecht justified her own refusal to be vaccinated by citing possible side effects and long-term consequences, for which, as the SPD health expert Karl Lauterbach emphasised in the programme, there is no scientific evidence whatsoever. The new vaccines had now been inoculated half a billion times, Lauterbach said, “If there had been side effects, we would have noticed it.”

Wagenknecht and her husband Oskar Lafontaine have been agitating against COVID-19 vaccinations for some time. Left Party founder and veteran Lafontaine, who is 78, belongs to the group of those at high risk, and has been vaccinated. That has not prevented him, however, from agitating against advocates of vaccination.

In August, for example, he called Lauterbach, a doctor of medicine and epidemiologist who advocates limited protective measures, a “Covidiot” who is “arm in arm with the pharmaceutical industry.” Lafontaine also described the vaccination of children as “irresponsible,” declaring there was no convincing argument in favour, but several against.

At the end of October Wagenknecht had already ranted and raved against pandemic protection measures in her weekly video podcast. Her vicious tirade would have earned the praise of all those right wingers who militantly oppose all effective measures to contain the spread of COVID-19.

She described the decision of the Social Democrats, Greens and Free Democrats, who are preparing to form the next federal government, to end the epidemic emergency measures as “good news,” while expressing her outrage that certain protective measures will be retained during a transitional phase. She mentioned face-mask requirements and 2G and 3G regulations, which she called “complete nonsense.”

Although rates of infection in Germany are soaring, Wagenknecht swept aside all scientific evidence to claim that if everyone has the opportunity to be vaccinated, no one must be protected from the unvaccinated. “Everyone is responsible for himself,” she said. Freedom is “when everyone has the right to harm himself.” The same was true for the consumption of cigarettes and alcohol.

Wagenknecht also praised the “Freedom Day” declared by British Prime Minister Boris Johnson on July 19. She said it had worked, resulting in fewer hospital admissions despite high incidences. In reality, 11,620 Britons have died from COVID-19 since that day. An additional 3.4 million have become infected, bringing the total number of deaths to over 165,000 and the number of infected to over 9 million. The virus is spreading explosively in British schools in particular, with one in 12 secondary and one in 33 primary school pupils infected (all figures from November 5).

Notwithstanding this devastating record, Wagenknecht assumed the role of advocate for all vaccination deniers, as if they represented a persecuted and oppressed minority. They were being pressured, blackmailed and ostracised for lacking solidarity, she claimed. “There are no limits to the totalitarian fantasies.” The unvaccinated are being treated like prison inmates on day release, she scolded, referring to Austria, where the government is considering a lockdown on those refusing vaccination.

The stance adopted by Wagenknecht and Lafontaine is antisocial and politically criminal. Put into practice, their proposals would cost millions more lives—in addition to the between 5 to 15 million who have already fallen victim to the pandemic worldwide. In particular it is workers and the poor, who unlike the rich and super-rich can hardly protect themselves, who would be most affected.

Wagenknecht’s claim that vaccination is an individual decision and not a question of solidarity recalls former British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher’s notorious statement that there is no such thing as society, only individual men and women.

The pandemic is not an individual problem, it is a social problem. The transmission of the virus and resulting mass infections can only be stopped by a united, international social response. Unlike smoking and alcohol consumption, the virus, which spreads from person to person via aerosols, cannot be contained on the basis of individual abstinence, but only by social protective measures.

With their campaign against such protective measures, Wagenknecht and Lafontaine are aligning themselves with fascist figures like Donald Trump, Jair Bolsonaro and the far-right elements who set the tone at the demonstrations against lockdown measures. All of these forces portray their opposition to vaccination and protection in a populist manner as a fight for “freedom,” when in reality they are sacrificing the lives of millions of people on the altar of profits for the financial oligarchy.

In its most pronounced form, they represent a policy adopted by almost all capitalist governments under slogans such as “learning to live with the virus” and the “new normal.” This “new normal” is not measured in terms of saving human lives, but solely in terms of profit factors. “Death and severe disease” are tabulated against “workdays lost, business closures, and school-absenteeism rates,” as the management consulting firm McKinsey most recently did.

This is not the first time that Wagenknecht and Lafontaine have assumed positions associated with the far right. With regard to refugee policy, they have both pursued a course for some time that hardly differs from that of the far-right Alternative for Germany (AfD). This spring Wagenknecht published her new book *The Self-Righteous*, in which she advocates a völkisch-nationalist ideology, rages against cosmopolitanism and open-mindedness, promotes protectionism and a strong state and denounces migrants and refugees. We reviewed the book on the WSWS.

Leading representatives of the Left Party have tried to distance themselves from Wagenknecht’s recent remarks on the pandemic, but the fact that such far-right nostrums are permitted in the Left Party raises fundamental questions that cannot be settled by merely seeking to distance oneself from the source.

Any type of healthy political organisation would immediately repel such right-wing elements. Not so the Left Party. Wagenknecht was elected leading candidate by the North Rhine-Westphalia (NRW) state organization, the biggest in the Left Party, for the federal election held in September when her nationalist diatribe *The Self-Righteous* was already on the market. During the election campaign she repeatedly appeared alongside other leading Left Party representatives.

The NRW state arbitration commission recently rejected an application for Wagenknecht’s expulsion arguing that her policy proposals would warrant her expulsion, but that the political damage done was not solely her fault: “Responsibility lies equally with the party, which for many years has not politically resolved the increasingly fiercely fought conflict over the views of the opposition.”

The party has failed to “resolve” the conflict with Wagenknecht because it supports her course in practice. The state of Thuringia, for example—the only federal state with a Left Party premier—has consistently played a pioneering role in dismantling coronavirus protection measures. Currently it has the highest seven-day incidence of all federal states, at 355 per 100,000. With 7.4 percent of all inhabitants infected with SARS-CoV-2 it has the second highest rate behind the state of Saxony. Thuringia also leads nationwide when it comes to the deportation of refugees.

Since the Party of Democratic Socialism (PDS) was founded 32 years ago, the Socialist Equality Party and its predecessor insisted that, as successor organisation to the Stalinist ruling Socialist Unity Party (SED) of East Germany, the PDS was a bourgeois organisation and we refused to collaborate with it. The formation of the Left Party through a merger of the PDS with breakaway Social Democrats led by former SPD leader Oskar Lafontaine did nothing to change the political nature of the organisation. On the contrary, Lafontaine always saw the task of the SPD and then the Left Party as the suppression of class struggle.

The role of depicting the Left Party as left-wing, socialist or even Marxist was left to pseudo-left currents such as the Pabloite United Secretariat, the SAV, Marx21 and others who joined the party and quickly made their careers within it.

Decades of right-wing policies on the part of the Left Party in a series of federal states and numerous municipalities where it has held power, combined with the escalation of social inequality and class struggle, have made it impossible to maintain the fiction that there is anything socialist or progressive about the Left Party.

In September’s federal election, it fell short of the five percent mark and lost almost half of its seats. It was only thanks to three direct mandates that the party was able to reenter parliament. In Germany’s states, it

continues its right-wing government policy. In addition to the states of Thuringia, Berlin and Bremen, the Left Party is preparing to govern in a coalition with the SPD in the state of Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania.

The party is increasingly disintegrating. One wing orientates towards the petty bourgeoisie on the basis of identity politics in an attempt to secure a social basis for the right-wing policies of the Left Party, another faction orients towards the reactionary trade union bureaucracy. The Wagenknecht wing is seeking to mobilise the backward dregs of society to the same end. Her far-right positions flourish in the stench arising from the party’s rot.

The pseudo-lefts react by clinging even more tightly to the Left Party. The SAV—internationally attached to the Committee for a Workers’ International (CWI)—has published several articles in recent months under the slogan: “Despite everything stay in the Left Party and fight!” It also explicitly opposed expelling Wagenknecht from the party because of her ultra-right positions. “The SAV is against expelling Sahra Wagenknecht, this dispute is to be decided politically,” it stated.

This confirms that the organisation joined the Left Party not based on false hopes and illusions, but rather because it shares its class orientation. It is oriented towards those layers of the affluent petty bourgeoisie that are moving to the right in the face of growing class tensions.

The financial opportunities opened up by the Left Party to the pseudo-left careerists also play a significant role. In its statement of accounts for 2020, the Left Party lists income of 34 million euros and net assets of 45 million euros. In addition, the Rosa Luxemburg Foundation, which is affiliated to the party, received 82 million euros from the federal budget. These totals do not include parliamentary salaries, staff salaries and the remunerations received by party members occupying well-paid positions in various state governments and local administrations.

It is significant that the Left Party is moving further to the right and disintegrating at a time when the SPD, Greens and FDP are preparing to take over government to implement a programme of mass layoffs in the auto industry, social cuts, militarism and domestic rearmament. To the left of this “traffic light” coalition (based on the respective parties’ colours), there is no opposition party worthy of the name other than the Socialist Equality Party (Sozialistische Gleichheitspartei-SGP).

The SGP is small in numbers, but possesses a socialist programme that embodies the future. As the German section of the Fourth International, it is oriented towards the most powerful social force: the international working class, which is increasingly going into struggle. All those who seriously wish to fight for a socialist future, and oppose militarism and fascism, should join the SGP now.



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