

Retired German General Erich Vad and the militarist agenda behind the “Revolt for Peace” of the Left Party’s Sahra Wagenknecht

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In a recent article, the *World Socialist Web Site* revealed that the initiators of the so-called “Revolt for Peace” have completely different objectives than the majority of those who have signed its petition. While resistance to the NATO proxy war in Ukraine is growing throughout Europe, Sahra Wagenknecht and Co. are “abusing opposition to the war for a nationalist and militarist agenda,” the WSWs wrote.

The Sozialistische Gleichheitspartei (Socialist Equality Party, SGP) placed the building of an international anti-war movement at the centre of its campaign for the recent Berlin House of Representatives (state assembly) election, meeting with great approval and support in working class neighbourhoods.

The correctness of the SGP’s assessment of the “Revolt for Peace” is underscored by the leading role played in the initiative by figures such as retired Brigadier General Erich Vad, an ardent militarist and long-time insider of Germany’s security policy apparatus. At a rally on Saturday, February 25, in front of the Brandenburg Gate in Berlin, Vad will deliver one of the main speeches, along with Left Party politician Sahra Wagenknecht and feminist Alice Schwarzer, co-initiator of the “peace petition.”

In the media, Vad regularly warns of a “third world war” and criticizes the delivery of Leopard 2 battle tanks to the Ukrainian military as a “military escalation” that threatens to develop a dangerous “momentum of its own.”

But he formulates this criticism of the official war policy as a dyed-in-the-wool militarist. On the “Maischberger” talk show he recently stated: “I am not against arms deliveries on principle. Nor am I a pacifist. Nor am I opposed to war in principle.” The German government, he said, lacked the “strategy and objectives” to get through a “conflict with a belligerent nuclear power.” Currently, “we are wasting young men with a high fighting morale every day for nothing, in their hundreds, thousands.”

The general knows about what he speaks. From 1992 to 1995, Vad served on NATO’s International Military Staff and in the General Secretariat of the Western European Union. He then served on the Armed Forces Command Staff in the Department of Defence and in the United States Central Command, where he was responsible for “special operations in Bosnia and Herzegovina.” After further service in the Foreign Ministry under Joschka Fischer, he became defence policy adviser to the Christian Democratic (CDU/CSU) opposition faction in the Bundestag (parliament) in 2001.

From 2006 to 2013, Vad was a group leader in the Federal Chancellery, secretary of the Federal Security Council and military adviser to Chancellor Angela Merkel, emerging as “the most influential general in the Federal Republic,” according to observers.

After Merkel promoted him to general in 2010, to keep him in office longer than planned, Vad’s duties during the war in Afghanistan included shielding the Chancellery from any responsibility in the parliamentary committee of inquiry into the Kunduz massacre. Currently, Vad works as an arms lobbyist in the Bundestag and advises, among others, the Swiss arms manufacturer Ruag and the military supplier Northrop Grumman Litef.

When such a figure criticizes the German government, he does so from the standpoint of the military interests of German imperialism. This becomes particularly clear when Vad complains in the media about the allegedly “dilapidated” state of the Bundeswehr (armed forces) and its “lack of operational readiness.” In May of last year, for example, he described the special fund of €100 billion for the Bundeswehr, which Chancellor Olaf Scholz (Social Democrat, SPD) announced in the Bundestag immediately after the Russian invasion of Ukraine, as completely insufficient to ensure German war readiness as a “permanent

task of the state.”

Vad told *Redaktionsnetzwerk Deutschland* that the defence industry was faced with the task of “increasing capacities in a wide variety of areas as quickly as possible, while delivering the required quality, dispensing with reviews under procurement law and serving the Bundeswehr as a premium customer in the best possible way at all times. This presupposed a “correspondingly high level of defence spending,” he said.

The insufficient militarization of society was due to “German structural pacifism” (Vad in the *Neue Zürcher Zeitung*) and an “unrealistic hypermorality” (Vad in *Die Presse*). Apparently, the general is incensed that war and rearmament are hated by large parts of the population because of German crimes in two world wars.

The WSWS already reported in detail on the ideological basis of Vad’s war policy in a background article in 2010. The general publishes in German nationalist journals from the environment of the radical right-wing “Institute for State Policy” and is an avowed follower of the constitutional lawyer Carl Schmitt, who as “crown jurist of the Third Reich” was one of the most important intellectual pioneers and admirers of Hitler.

In an article entitled “Freund oder Feind—Zur Aktualität Carl Schmitts” (Friend or Foe—On the Actuality of Carl Schmitt), which appeared in April 2003 in the right-wing extremist magazine *Sezession*, Vad advocated Schmitt’s conception of a “European metropolitan area” that would have to “raise an adequate claim to power” and take action with “appropriate geopolitical and geostrategic measures” against “powers foreign to the region.” What should be sought, Vad said, was an “equal partnership with America,” but the “political leadership” of the time was too weak to implement it.

In the same article, Vad defended Schmitt’s “collaboration with the Nazi regime,” referring to the late right-wing historian Ernst Nolte, by saying that the latter “alone seemed capable of preventing its complete collapse.” In a piece for the far-right *Junge Freiheit*, Vad opposed the Wehrmacht exhibition, stating that it was “not sufficiently apparent that much of what happened at the time—especially in partisan warfare and reprisals as well as hostage shootings—was covered by the laws of war at the time.”

That such a historical revisionist and aggressive militarist as Vad is a prominent figure in the so-called “Revolt for Peace” is no accident. His political orientation and goals coincide at their core with those of Sahra Wagenknecht and her husband Oskar Lafontaine. Like Vad, both advocate an extreme nationalist program and pursue the goal of strengthening German and European militarism, especially vis-à-vis the United States.

In his latest book, Lafontaine calls “the Europeans, above all Germany” the “most loyal vassals” of the United States. To carry through “the liberation of Europe from the military tutelage of the US,” Lafontaine says, “an independent European security and defence policy” was necessary. A “joint defence alliance between Germany and France” must also be able to assert its military interests against both the US and Eastern Europe, he added.

As for Wagenknecht, in her 2021 diatribe “The Self-Righteous,” she called for the creation of a national “sanctuary” that would have to be directed against “left-liberal cosmopolitanism,” “urban elites,” refugees and immigrants. Both Lafontaine and Wagenknecht have made it clear that their initiative is also open to politicians in the far-right Alternative for Germany (AfD) and far-right actors, as long as they conceal their imperial war flags and refrain from “political propaganda for abstruse goals.”

The extreme right-wing agenda of the leading political minds behind the “peace petition” is a warning. You cannot build a movement for peace with militarists, nationalists and right-wing extremists. Those who reject the arms shipments and warmongering of the German government and its NATO allies and want to stop the threat of a third world war need a clear political perspective and orientation.

The only way to prevent a catastrophe is to mobilize the international working class against capitalism and the national elites who are daily enriching themselves from war in every country. The International Committee of the Fourth International and its sections—in Germany, the *Sozialistische Gleichheitspartei*—are fighting to give progressive expression to the widespread opposition to war and to arm it with a socialist programme.

To this end, the *World Socialist Web Site* and the International Youth and Students for Social Equality (IYSSE) will host an online event on Saturday, February 25, at 1 p.m. US EST, where leading socialists from Germany, Australia and the US will oppose all varieties of nationalism and militarism and outline a strategy for the working class and youth to put an end to imperialist war.



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