Interview with Germany's Left Party chair: a declaration of political bankruptcy

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The half-hour "summer interview" with Left Party leader Janine Wissler, which Germany's major broadcaster ARD transmitted at prime time on 16 July, was a declaration of political bankruptcy.

The German government is organising the biggest rearmament offensive since Hitler and provoking a nuclear confrontation with Russia; it is saddling the working class with the costs of this through inflationary cuts in wages and social spending; it is strengthening the state's repressive apparatus and condemning thousands of refugees to misery and death by sealing off European borders. But Left Party leader Wissler has literally nothing to say about any of this.

The whole interview makes it clear that the Left Party, which governs together with the Social Democrats (SPD) and the Greens in several federal states, would also be prepared to enter the federal government at any time and support its policies of war and social austerity.

Millions of workers in the railways, public services, hospitals and large industrial corporations are looking for ways and means to defend their wages and jobs, drawing inspiration from the mass protests in France and other countries. But Wissler's criticism of the government, to the extent that she voices any at all, was informed entirely by concern that she and the union apparatus might lose control of workers' struggles.

She provides advice to the federal coalition of the SPD, Greens and Liberal Democrats (FDP) on how to calm down the class struggle and avoid open confrontation. But she says nothing to encourage workers to fight against the three-party coalition and does not say a word about the screaming social inequality and obscene fortunes of the super-rich who have gorged themselves on the financial crisis and pandemic at state expense.

Her gaze does not reach beyond the national borders. She carefully avoided any reference to the class struggles in France, Britain and other countries because, like the government, she fears the development of such a movement in Germany as well.

Wissler spends more time getting worked up about her party colleague Sahra Wagenknecht than criticising the government. In last year's "summer interview," she defended Wagenknecht, even though Wagenknecht had just published a new book that takes up arms against cosmopolitanism and cultural openness, advocates protectionism and a strong state, and denounces immigrants and refugees as depressing wages, strike-breakers and elements alien to German culture.

But in the meantime, Wagenknecht is openly speaking out against the German government's arms deliveries to Ukraine and NATO's war policy. She does this not from the anti-militarist standpoint of the international working class, but from the right-wing, nationalist standpoint of those sections of the German bourgeoisie that want to rearm and wage war independently of the USA. But any questioning of the official war propaganda is already going too far for Wissler.

The majority of the Left Party, including Wissler, stand behind the government's pro-war policy. In the interview, she repeated their justification for the war point by point: "It is clear to me that it is a war of aggression [on Russia's part], which cannot be justified by anything. Russian troops have no business in Ukraine, we demand the withdrawal of all Russian troops." She indirectly answers the question of whether this also included German arms deliveries to Ukraine with a yes: "Ukraine has a right to self-defence."

Wissler adds that the war must be ended as soon as possible. In essence, "everyone agrees that this war will also be ended at the negotiating table"—a statement that NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg, German Foreign Minister Annalena Baerbock (Greens), Ukraine's President Volodymyr Zelensky and other warmongers would also agree with as expressed in this generality.

Meanwhile, Wissler also supports NATO. When asked whether the Left Party's resolution calling for the dissolution of NATO still applied, she answers in the affirmative. The wars that NATO had waged in the past, some of which were contrary to international law, would not become better and fairer because Russia was waging a war of aggression, she said. But the "utopia" that NATO would be replaced by a global security alliance in which all relevant actors, including Russia, would be represented, had "for the time being been pushed into the distant future" by this war.

Translated into plain language, this means: "In principle, yes, we are in favour of dissolving NATO. But only when we have defeated Russia and are strong enough to wage war without the USA itself."

Wissler also openly or indirectly backs the reactionary policies of the German government on other key political issues.

Although 1,875 people have fallen victim to the European Union's isolationist policy in the Mediterranean alone since the beginning of the year, and the Greek coast guard recently sank a boat carrying 750 refugees, intentionally or negligently, off the port city of Pylos, Wissler did not utter a critical word about the EU and its murderous refugee policies. Instead, she confined herself to demanding more financial support from the German government for municipalities to accommodate refugees.

On climate protection, she stated several times that it must be "socially just," without explaining what this means concretely. A force was needed "that puts pressure on the government coalition to do more for climate protection." She does not say that climate protection is not compatible with the policy of the government, which places the profits of the rich above the needs of society. Nor did Wissler mention the coronavirus pandemic, in the course of which the government's "profits before lives" policy claimed at least 175,000 lives in Germany.

Wissler does not even like to openly distance herself from the law-and-order policies of the right. She evaded the question of what she thought about the new Christian Democratic Union (CDU) Secretary General Carsten Linnemann's demand that young people who fought in swimming pools be judged in summary criminal proceedings. She answered that she would like to see such law-and-order policies also applied to the criminal activities of companies and managers.

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Wissler and Marx 21

Janine Wissler has been co-chair of the Left Party for two and a half years. She had been elected to head the party in February 2021 together with Susanne Hennig-Wellsow, who has since been replaced by Martin Schirdewan.

At the time, the media had taken pains to portray Wissler as a left-wing counterpart to Hennig-Wellsow, who, as the right-hand woman of Thuringia state Prime Minister Bodo Ramelow, belongs to the governing wing of the Left Party. Wissler, who was 39 at the time, was a member of the fake-Trotskyist current Marx 21, formerly allied with Britain's state capitalist Socialist Workers Party, and had joined the Left Party via the Linksruck and WASG groups.

The *World Socialist Web Site* did not share this assessment; even then we described Wissler as a "leading bourgeois politician who agrees with Hennig-Wellsow on all central issues." We referred to Wissler's activities in the Hesse state parliament, to which she had belonged since 2008.

In 2008, she had agreed with the social democrats and the Greens to support a SPD-Green minority state government, which then failed due to the resistance of some SPD deputies. In 2018, she tried again to forge a state government alliance with the SPD and the Greens. As parliamentary group leader in the Hesse state parliament, she also forged close ties with business representatives in the financial metropolis of Frankfurt.

However, we judged Wissler not only on the basis of her practice in Hesse state politics, but also and above all on the basis of the international current to which she had belonged since the age of 17 and by which she was politically educated.

Tony Cliff

Linksruck was the German offshoot of the so-called "state capitalists," based on the British socialist Tony Cliff. Cliff had been expelled from the British section of the Fourth International in 1950 for refusing—under the pressure of Cold War anti-communist hysteria—to defend North Korea in the war with the US.

Cliff held that the Soviet Union was "state capitalist" and not, as the Fourth International assessed it, a degenerated workers state in which the regime had degenerated under the Stalinist bureaucracy but the property relations created by the 1917 October Revolution continued. Cliff and his followers refused to defend the Soviet Union and the deformed workers states against imperialist attacks, which was tantamount to supporting imperialism.

The formula "Neither Washington nor Moscow, but international socialism," which became the political trademark of the Cliff tendency, served to support the crimes of imperialism in practice while distancing itself from them in words. The defence of the most right-wing policies under the cover of pseudo-left phrases became the modus operandi of the "state capitalists" and their numerous offshoots on all other political questions as well.

For decades, they served as a "left" fig leaf for social democratic parties. When Janine Wissler joined the Linksruck group as a student, it was active in the SPD's youth organisation and engaged as foot soldiers for the social democratic candidate for chancellor, Gerhard Schröder. After Schröder's socially regressive Agenda 2010 policies, some SPD and trade union bureaucrats, fearing to lose all influence over the working class, turned away from the SPD. They established the WASG and then founded the Left Party together with the Stalinist successors to the state party in the former East Germany. Linksruck also changed hosts at the same time. It formally dissolved itself, joined the Left Party and formed the Marx 21 network there.

The experts on right-wing politics in a left-wing guise were welcomed with open arms. Shortly before, the group, consisting of a few dozen members, had almost collapsed due to internal differences and scandals. Now, lucrative career opportunities opened up. Wissler was not the only one to rise to a top post. Christine Buchholz, Nicole Gohlke and Hubertus Zdebel sat in the Bundestag (federal parliament) for several legislative periods. Buchholz, who like Wissler comes from the party's Hesse state association, was a member of the parliamentary defence committee for twelve years and regularly visited troops stationed abroad.

Marx 21 played a key role in advancing the right-wing policies of the Left Party. The network supported the imperialist intervention in Syria, celebrated the right-wing coup in Ukraine in 2014 as a "democratic revolution" and has since intensively promoted pro-Western regime change in Russia.

The far-right Alternative for Germany (AfD) has profited from these right-wing politics. In eastern Germany, where the Left Party once had its strongholds, it is now below 10 percent in the polls, while the AfD is the strongest party with almost 30 percent. Nationwide, the Left Party stands at 4 percent in the latest ARD Deutschlandtrend. This means it would not make it over the 5 percent hurdle to enter the Bundestag. The three governing parties at federal level together now only have 38 percent. With 20 percent, the AfD is in second place behind the CDU and ahead of the chancellor's party, the SPD.

In the summer interview, Wissler had nothing to say about the decline of the Left Party and the rise of the AfD, which is teeming with far-right extremists and neo-Nazis, except that the Left Party was too divided and too preoccupied with itself. As if the rise of the far-right was a communication problem!

In reality, the anti-working-class, militarist and nationalist policies of the federal government and its support by the Left Party are the reason the AfD is strengthening. The government's adoption of AfD policies paves the way for the far-right and puts them in a position to channel the frustration and anger of petty-bourgeois layers and, to some extent, workers, into reactionary, nationalist waters.

The rise of the AfD shows the political bankruptcy of Marx 21 and similar political groupings that cavort within and around the Left Party. The International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI) and its German section, the Sozialistische Gleichheitspartei (Socialist Equality Party), have been fighting these tendencies for decades. We call them "pseudo-left"—i.e., right-wing parties that lend themselves a left-wing covering. They do not represent the working class, but privileged sections of the upper middle class who feel threatened by the intensification of the class struggle and respond by becoming more integrated into the government and the state.

The ICFI has always rejected a policy that meant subordinating itself to the bureaucratic apparatuses in the name of broad left unity. We fight for the independence of the working class from the social democratic and union apparatuses and their pseudo-left appendages. Only an international party based on and defending great historical principles is able to resist the political pressure of the ruling class and win the confidence of workers in times of revolutionary upheaval.

And such times are now developing. The loss of confidence in the establishment parties, the decline of bourgeois democracy, the unprecedented gulf between rich and poor, the return of fascism and war, the general crisis of capitalism are only the first signs of huge revolutionary upheavals in which the masses—as Leon Trotsky wrote about in the Russian Revolution—will intervene directly in historical events.

The Left Party, Marx 21 and all other pseudo-left groups are an obstacle to this. They do not prepare the working class for the struggle for a socialist society but do everything to prevent it. That is why, in the face of the deepest social crisis, they are turning further and further to the right.

Those in Germany who seriously want to fight against war, against fascism and for a socialist society must build the Sozialistische Gleichheitspartei. The importance of its struggle for principles is now becoming visible: The international socialist programme of the International Committee of the Fourth International is coinciding with a powerful upsurge of class struggle, while the Left Party and its pseudo-left

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appendages have transformed themselves into deeply reactionary and militarist forces.

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