

Capitalism, German nationalism and fake populist demagogy—the program of Sahra Wagenknecht’s new party

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After a long hesitation, Sahra Wagenknecht announced on Monday the formation of a new party, which had been expected for months. With Wagenknecht, nine other members of the Bundestag (federal parliament) have left the Left Party, whose fraction will shrink to 28 members and lose its official status as a parliamentary fraction.

Members who have joined the “Alliance Sahra Wagenknecht–For Reason and Justice” (BSW) include the Left Party’s former parliamentary group leader Amira Mohamed Ali, the former party leader Klaus Ernst, and Sevim Dağdelen. The BSW is preparing the foundation of the new party, which is to take place next January.

The founding of the party takes place in the midst of the deepest social crisis since the existence of the Federal Republic. The parties that have dominated German politics for decades are rapidly losing support, while the number of strikes and protests is growing. More and more people are looking for ways to fight for their interests outside established parliamentary politics.

Sahra Wagenknecht’s initiative is directed against this. The new party is intended to prevent resistance to social decline, poverty, war and oppression from challenging the capitalist social order and uniting with the struggles of the international working class. It opposes the perspective of the world socialist revolution advocated by the Sozialistische Gleichheitspartei (Socialist Equality Party) with a right-wing, nationalist perspective.

Amira Mohamed Ali justified the founding of the party at the federal press conference, arguing that “many people in our country have lost confidence in politics” and “no longer feel represented by any of the existing parties.” They did not want to sit idly by and watch “more and more people turn away from democracy in disappointment and no longer go to the polls.”

The Wagenknecht party openly rejects the class struggle. All its writings and utterances are permeated by a narrow-minded nationalism. There is not a single reference to the struggle of the international working class—the pension protests in France, the strikes in the American car industry or the mass demonstrations against war.

There is also no mention of the wage strikes at the post office, the railways and in the public service in Germany, which are increasingly taking the form of a rebellion against the trade unions. One of the declared goals of the new party is to strengthen the trade unions and works councils, which play a key role in dividing the workers and suppressing the class struggle. Like these, the Wagenknecht Party is striving for corporatist cooperation between trade unions, business associations and the state.

In contrast to the Left Party and other pseudo-left parties, which hide their right-wing policies behind a veil of “left” and “socialist” phrases, the Wagenknecht Party openly advocates the market, competition and private property. At the press conference, Wagenknecht indignantly rejected the accusation that she wanted a “state economy à la GDR [former East Germany].” Her goal was “a fair meritocracy with more competition and strong small and mid-sized businesses.”

The founding manifesto complains about social ills, social inequality and the power of money: “A society whose most powerful actors are only driven by the motivation to make more money out of money leads to growing inequality, the destruction of our natural livelihoods and war.” However, the Wagenknecht Party strictly rejects interference with capitalist property or even the expropriation of banks and corporations.

It does not demand even minor measures that were previously found in any social democratic programme, such as the introduction of a wealth tax or an increase in the top tax rate. Instead, it speaks only in general terms of a “fair tax system that relieves low-income earners and prevents large corporations and very wealthy individuals from escaping their fair share of the financing of the community.” The wording is so vague and non-binding that Finance Minister Christian Lindner of the Free Democrats could agree with it.

The Wagenknecht Party does not want to abolish capitalism. Instead, it promises to transform the senile capitalism of the 21st century into a dynamic youth through all sorts of miracle cures. It wants to renew German capitalism by freeing it from dependence on the US and helping competition and the principle of performance to break through again. It promises a

return to the economic policy of the 1950s and the détente policy of the 1970s, as if the clock of history could be turned back.

The first chapter of the founding manifesto, “Economic Reason,” is a hymn of praise for industry, small businesses and the free market. “We strive for an innovative economy with fair competition, well-paid secure jobs, a high proportion of industrial value added, a fair tax system and a strong middle class,” it says. “German industry is the backbone of our prosperity and must be preserved.”

Since “many markets no longer work” due to the failure of the antitrust authorities, “dominant large companies” and “overpowering financial concerns” are to be broken up and their market power limited. Significantly, the manifesto mentions only US companies: Blackrock, Amazon, Alphabet, Facebook, Microsoft and Apple. The Wagenknecht party has no objection to German large companies and financial concerns. The latter are to be strengthened at the expense of their rivals. “We need future funds to promote innovative domestic companies and start-ups and not billion-dollar subsidies for overseas corporations,” says the manifesto.

The second chapter, “Social Justice,” is not aimed at the broad masses of the working population, but rather fosters the old illusion of a limitless ascent. It does not advocate the socialist demand for social equality, but for “a fair meritocracy with real equal opportunities.” It deplores the fact that the “promise of advancement of the social market economy” no longer applies, and demands: “Personal prosperity must not be a question of social origin, but must be the result of diligence and individual effort.”

Behind this programme of petty-bourgeois illusions lies a nationalist and militarist policy.

The chapter “Peace” is a barely veiled plea for war and rearmament. It is opposed to “the resolution of conflicts by military means,” but above all because such operations are currently taking place predominantly within the framework of the US-dominated NATO alliance.

If rearmament serves German interests, the Wagenknecht Party is in favour of it. “The Bundeswehr (German army) has the task of defending our country,” says the manifesto. “It must be adequately equipped for this task.” It advocates “a self-confident policy, which ... is based on the insight that US interests are sometimes significantly different from our interests.” The aim is “an independent Europe of sovereign democracies in a multipolar world,” which prevents Europe from being crushed “between the US and the new power bloc around China and Russia.”

When asked at the press conference about the conflict in the Middle East, Wagenknecht supported Israel’s genocidal war against the Palestinians. “Of course, Israel has the right to defend itself against the brutal attacks of Hamas,” she said. “No rational person can see it any differently.”

However, she is worried that the conflict will continue to

escalate and hopes “that perhaps more thoughtful action will prevail.” As a reason for her hope, she referred to statements by US President Joe Biden, who assured the Israeli government of his full support and has already sent two aircraft carriers to the region to expand the war against Iran.

The last chapter of the manifesto, “Freedom,” consists of two paragraphs, both of which are directed against democratic freedoms.

The first warns of the threat to freedom posed by “Cancel Culture” and “political authoritarianism that presumes to educate people and regulate their lifestyle or language.” However, it does not mention the massive rearmament of the police and security apparatus, for the simple reason that Wagenknecht, like the Left Party, supports police armament.

The second paragraph is aimed at refugees and migrants. The “coexistence of different cultures” could indeed be “an enrichment.” However, this only applies “as long as the influx remains limited to an order of magnitude that does not overwhelm our country and its infrastructure.” Migration was “not the solution to the problem of poverty in our world.”

At the press conference, Wagenknecht was even more explicit. “Uncontrolled immigration under the label of ‘asylum’ must be stopped at all costs because it completely overwhelms our country,” she explained, scapegoating refugees for the social crisis. In view of the lack of housing, teachers and educators, it was completely irresponsible to allow immigration.

This shows the party’s orientation particularly clearly. It does not declare war on the financial oligarchy and the bureaucrats, but on refugees! Wagenknecht does not want to stop the brutal wars and end poverty, but instead wants to channel the opposition into right-wing and nationalist channels. To this end, she hopes to mobilise small business owners and self-employed people who are being crushed under the pressure of the global market.

Workers must firmly reject this repulsive project. The only way to fight against war and inequality is to build an international movement against capitalism. This perspective is represented by the International Committee of the Fourth International and its German section, the Sozialistische Gleichheitspartei (Socialist Equality Party).



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