

BSW Congress: Why Sahra Wagenknecht's party in Germany is not an anti-war party

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Following its formation two years ago, the Sahra Wagenknecht Alliance (BSW)—a split from Germany's Left Party (Die Linke)—won notable results in the state elections in Thuringia, Brandenburg and Saxony. It capitalised on the widespread opposition to the mad, reckless escalation of military spending and presented itself as an anti-war party.

Yet its support collapsed just as quickly when, in coalition governments with the pro-war Christian Democratic Union (CDU) and Social Democratic Party (SPD), it aggressively implemented social cuts and expanded the repressive state apparatus.

At its congress last weekend, the party—soon to be renamed the “Alliance for Social Justice and Economic Reason”—responded by reviving its anti-war rhetoric in an attempt to win back voters. At the same time, however, it reaffirmed its determination to pursue its right-wing, pro-capitalist programme. This alone exposes its thunderous denunciations of war as empty bombast.

The main speakers delivered fiery denunciations of war and rearmament. “You're not getting our children!” shouted BSW co-chair Amira Mohamed Ali in her opening speech, praising the school strikes against the reintroduction of conscription. She railed against “threatening rhetoric and war propaganda” and warned of nuclear war.

Wagenknecht also spoke against the militarisation of Germany and accused the opposition parties in the Bundestag [parliament] of backing the government's war policy. “These Green latte-macchiato militarists are now even trying to outdo the CDU in their newfound euphoria for weapons. The Alternative for Germany [AfD] is part of the fan club of the arms lobby too. And then there's the Left Party—how honest is that? They talk about disarmament but then vote in the Bundesrat [upper house of parliament] for the largest rearmament package in German history.”

What Wagenknecht conspicuously omitted was that the BSW itself has joined coalition governments with the war parties CDU and SPD, and at state level is hacking away at social spending to free up funds that ultimately flow into federal military rearmament.

In Brandenburg, for example, BSW Finance Minister Robert Crumbach pushed through the abolition of 345 teaching posts and worsened staffing ratios in nurseries—despite vocal public opposition. The police, by contrast, were granted 100 additional posts.

In Thuringia, too, the BSW is cutting social programmes, public transport and cultural funding. Wagenknecht even lauded this orgy of cuts, declaring: “Our finance ministers have presented budgets that have created more fiscal room for investment than any other party.”

The glaring contradiction between congress rhetoric and real-world policy stems from the fact that the BSW is pro-capitalist and pro-imperialist in every respect.

“At the BSW, our protests are not directed against the Bundeswehr [armed forces],” Wagenknecht insisted at the congress, emphasising that it must be well equipped. The BSW does not oppose the war against Russia because it rejects the predatory aims of German capitalism, which—as in the 20th century—seeks to seize the country's vast resources. Rather, it objects that this goal cannot currently be realised by waging war against a nuclear-armed Russia.

On the defence of German capitalist interests, however, the party is entirely explicit. “If our economy is to have a future, we need affordable energy and good trading relations with as many partners as possible—with the United States, but also with the BRICS states [Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa, etc.],” Mohamed Ali declared. As an export-dependent economy lacking raw materials, German capitalism has long pursued access to markets and energy—driving it, in the last century, into two world wars and the worst crimes in human history.

Today, too, the global capitalist crisis is intensifying the struggle among the great powers over a new division of the world. In these conflicts, the BSW unambiguously sides with German capital and—like all war propagandists—claims that this is in the interests of workers in Germany.

“No more servility and vassalage toward Washington,” reads the BSW congress motion. “We are fighting for a sovereign Europe that defines its own security interests and

creates a stable peace order with all neighbours, including Russia, based on a balance of interests and mutual security.” To this end, Germany needs “technological and digital sovereignty” and “a strategic industrial policy that overcomes dependencies in key future sectors.”

This is exactly the programme underpinning the government’s massive rearmament drive. How is German capital supposed to assert its “sovereignty,” secure markets and raw materials, and reduce dependencies except through military force? Capitalism has reached a point where imperialist contradictions openly collide—seen today in the sharp and escalating tensions between Germany and the US. Those who accept capitalist constraints and rally behind their own ruling class inevitably follow the logic of war.

The only realistic basis for a movement against a third world war is the struggle against capitalism. Only the expropriation of the major banks and corporations and their placement under democratic control can avert catastrophe. This requires nothing less than the mobilisation of the international working class—the producers of society’s wealth, who bear the full burden of war and crisis—based on a socialist perspective.

Wagenknecht and her BSW are fiercely hostile to such a perspective. Saving capitalism is written into Wagenknecht’s political DNA. When she joined East Germany’s Stalinist ruling party, the SED, in early summer 1989, it had long since oriented itself towards capitalist restoration. In the SED’s successor party, the Party of Democratic Socialism (PDS), she played a key role in covering this capitalist turn with stale Stalinist phraseology.

As the PDS plunged into crisis due to its budget-cutting policies in the eastern German states, Wagenknecht and her now husband Oskar Lafontaine were instrumental in merging the PDS with discredited SPD, trade-union bureaucrats and pseudo-lefts from the WASG to form the Left Party (Die Linke)—a project designed to divert mass anger over the SPD’s Agenda 2010 social cuts into pro-capitalist channels.

Today, as opposition to war and social cuts grows, Wagenknecht’s efforts to rescue capitalism take on openly right-wing forms. With no room left for social compromise, she replaces limited social demands with rancid nationalism and unabashedly pro-business rhetoric.

Even before the congress, Wagenknecht published a guest article in the right-wing Springer press. In a tone indistinguishable from the far-right AfD, she railed against “hand-outs for the work-shy” and “uncontrolled immigration,” bluntly demanding a “right-wing agenda.” In her words, such a programme—“right-wing in its original sense”—meant protecting the property and privileges of the middle classes, explicitly against refugees and the

unemployed.

This agenda dominated the BSW congress. Calls for higher wages or wealth taxes appeared only in passing. At its centre were demands that could have been lifted straight from the neo-liberal Free Democratic Party (FDP)—such as the call for a “just meritocracy with fair opportunities for advancement and a strong middle class.” To achieve this, the BSW proposes channelling public resources into German industry.

The reactionary nature of the BSW was most clearly revealed in its incitement against immigrants. While business interests were extolled, the desperate people fleeing NATO’s wars were scapegoated for social problems. Wagenknecht declared in her speech that the right to asylum had created “problems with housing, crime and the shadow economy.” In her narrative, responsibility for the social catastrophe lies not with massive military spending or the billions handed to the wealthy, but with society’s most vulnerable.

Given this agenda, it is hardly surprising that the BSW has already offered itself as a potential majority-maker for the AfD. On November 10, Wagenknecht announced at a press conference that the BSW supported the formation of “governments of experts” relying on shifting parliamentary majorities. In such a scenario, the BSW would be prepared to form majorities with the fascist AfD.

Nothing of its pacifist rhetoric would survive participation in a federal government. The material capitalist interests the BSW advocates far outweigh its platitudes about diplomacy. This can already be observed in Brandenburg and Thuringia, where the BSW is jointly implementing deep social cuts with the establishment parties of war. Most recently, it sparked a dispute over public broadcasting in order to distract from its own record.

Anyone who wants to fight against war must not orient themselves to Wagenknecht’s right-wing, pro-capitalist agenda. They must build an international, socialist anti-war movement. This is the perspective advanced in Germany by the Sozialistische Gleichheitspartei (SGP, Socialist Equality Party), together with its sister parties of the Fourth International throughout the world.



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