

Rightward shift rips apart the Sahra Wagenknecht Alliance

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On January 6, the premier of the state of Brandenburg, Dietmar Woidke, (Social Democratic Party, SPD) announced the end of the governing coalition with the Sahra Wagenknecht Alliance (BSW). Previously, three of the 14 BSW members of the state parliament, including deputy premier and finance minister Robert Crumbach, had defected to the SPD parliamentary group. Woidke is now seeking to form a coalition government between the SPD and the Christian Democratic Union, CDU, which would have a majority in the state parliament thanks to the influx of the renegade BSW members.

Brandenburg is just one of the German states in which the BSW is falling apart, two years after its foundation. In Saxony, where the party supports a minority government of the CDU and SPD, bitter battles are raging over the successor to Sabine Zimmermann, who stepped down as state party chair for health reasons. In Thuringia, which is governed by a three-party coalition of the CDU, the BSW and the SPD, the national leadership of the BSW is in a constant conflict with the state leadership. In Saxony-Anhalt, almost half of the BSW state executive committee were voted out at a special party conference. There are also fierce disputes raging in Hamburg and Bavaria.

The party is in decline in the polls. Six months after its founding, the BSW won 6.2 percent of the vote in the 2024 European elections. A few months later, it became the third-strongest party in three state elections in eastern Germany, with double-digit results, and joined the government in two states. Since then, it has been on a downward spiral. In the federal elections in February last year, the BSW narrowly failed to clear the 5 percent hurdle for entering the federal parliament. It now stands at 3 to 4 percent in nationwide polls, and even in its East German strongholds, its poll ratings have more than halved.

Any attempt to understand the disputes within the BSW is met with the stench of a bitter mudslinging match: with vicious accusations, insults and abuse—but barely a serious political word spoken.

In Brandenburg, Crumbach declared that the party, for which he served in government for a year, is no longer fit for anything, not even for the opposition. He described it as a “troublemaker” that no longer wants to shape society. Wagenknecht countered with accusations of “betrayal” and “electoral fraud.” BSW state chairwoman Friederike Benda accused the renegade MPs of having “abused their roles in the BSW for months in order to blackmail the party” and said that Crumbach lacks the courage to “fight for a real political project.”

In Thuringia, BSW Finance Minister Katja Wolf is praising the loyal cooperation with the CDU and SPD and accuses the federal leadership of pursuing a “path of fundamental opposition.” There is also talk of “Stalinist methods” on the part of the federal headquarters. Federal chairman Fabio de Masi retorts that the BSW did not enter the political arena “to grill a few bratwursts in Thuringia.”

Despite the personal mudslinging, it is ultimately political reasons that are tearing the BSW apart. From the outset, the party’s programme, policies and election promises were based on a fundamental lie: it

presented itself as an anti-war party and a party of social justice, but defended the capitalist system that produces war and social inequality, and allied itself with the parties defending capitalist rule.

The BSW condemns NATO’s role in the Ukraine war and advocates reconciliation with Russia, but defends the capitalist interests for which the war is being waged, governs together with the war parties CDU and SPD, and supports the rearmament of the German army (Bundeswehr). Its criticism of NATO is directed only against the US, while it supports German militarism. “We are not naive. In today’s world, Germany needs a Bundeswehr and needs a well-equipped Bundeswehr,” Wagenknecht declared a year ago.

The BSW denounces growing poverty, low pensions, social inequality and the problems of small businesses, but strictly rejects a socialist programme that would curtail the power of big business. Instead, it fosters the reactionary illusion that a nationalist economic policy can solve social problems.

The BSW’s nationalism is directed against the international working class, which comprises billions of people, is closely linked through the global production process and is exploited everywhere by the same global corporations. Similar to the far-right Alternative for Germany (AfD), the BSW attempts to divide the working class by agitating against refugees and migrants and supporting the arming of the repressive state apparatus.

The BSW and the AfD

The intensification of the social crisis, massive military rearmament and the growth of the AfD are tearing the BSW’s web of lies apart. It is simply no longer possible to maintain the semblance of anti-militarism and social equality while at the same time cooperating with the parties ruling in Berlin, which are pushing ahead with rearmament, war and social cuts.

The so-called “pragmatists” in the BSW are responding to this by abandoning their oppositional rhetoric, deepening their cooperation with the SPD and CDU or, as in Brandenburg, defecting to the SPD. This is what lies behind Crumbach’s accusation of “troublemaker” and Wolf’s praise for the party’s loyal cooperation with the CDU and SPD.

Wagenknecht and her loyalists, for their part, are trying to maintain their distance from the hated Berlin parties, at least in words. At the same time, they are moving even further to the right, seeking to close ranks with the far-right Alternative for Germany (AfD) and preparing to support an AfD government.

The state elections due in September in Saxony-Anhalt and Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania, in which the AfD is predicted to win between 38 and 40 percent of the vote, are already casting their shadow. Forming a government against the AfD would then only be possible, if at

all, through the coalition of all other parties.

Already last November, Wagenknecht advocated that the AfD be involved in political decisions at a state and federal level in order to “tame” the right-wing extremists, as she put it. The firewall to the far right had failed, she told Redaktionsnetzwerk Deutschland. After the state elections in Saxony-Anhalt and Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania, the BSW would not support coalitions against the AfD. Her party was no longer available for alliances whose only common denominator was to keep the AfD out of power.

After the break-up of the SPD-BSW coalition in Brandenburg, the remaining BSW faction, for the first time, voted unanimously in favour of a motion put forward by the AfD. It called for the dissolution of the state parliament and immediate new elections. The motion failed because a two-thirds majority was required for it to be passed, but the precedent has been set.

Other representatives of the Wagenknecht camp go even further. Last year, for example, Saxony state parliament member Jens Hentschel-Thöricht appeared at a demonstration in Görlitz alongside the fascist Freie Sachsen (Free Saxons).

The BSW is not the only party moving closer to the far right. In the CDU and other parties, there is a growing tendency to further dismantle the firewall against the AfD. The AfD has always been promoted or treated with kid gloves by Germany’s ruling circles because they needed it to push through their own right-wing agenda. The AfD’s refugee policy and its demand for an increase in military spending to 5 percent of GDP are now official government policy.

Now, however, serious consideration is being given to directly involving the far-right party in the federal and state governments. Until now, this has been prevented primarily by the AfD’s relations with Russia and the fear of fierce popular resistance. But as in the US, the ruling class in Germany also tends to throw all democratic norms overboard in the face of the deep crisis.

Wagenknecht’s political career

The fact that Wagenknecht is to the fore in the campaign to enable the AfD to share power in Germany can only surprise those who have been deceived by her demagogic chatter. Since the beginning of her political career 35 years ago, she has always sought to absorb social outrage and political discontent and channel it into reactionary pro-state channels.

It began when she joined the SED, the Stalinist state party of the GDR (former East Germany), a few months before it collapsed.

In the 1990s, Wagenknecht was spokesperson for the Communist Platform within the Party of Democratic Socialism (PDS), the successor party to the SED. At that time, she still used Marxist phrases. She served as a left-wing fig leaf for a party that had supported the introduction of capitalism in the former GDR and now played a key role in suppressing resistance to the resulting social catastrophe.

She later took on leadership roles in the Left Party, which PDS leader Gregor Gysi and former SPD chairman Oskar Lafontaine, Wagenknecht’s current husband, founded in 2007 in response to the decline of the SPD. The Left Party’s task was to continue to secure government majorities for the SPD, which had been discredited by its Agenda 2010 that undermined wages and working conditions, so that it could continue its anti-worker policies. In Thuringia, the Left Party even provided the head of government for 10 years in the form of Bodo Ramelow. The result was the growth of the far-right AfD.

Although she belonged to the inner circle of the Left Party, Wagenknecht also sought to keep her distance from the rest of the party

leadership. As a star guest on talk shows and on her podcast “Wagenknecht’s Weekly Review,” she railed against war and social injustices for which her own party was partly responsible. She had meanwhile discarded the writings of Karl Marx and replaced them with homilies to “reasonable” capitalism, praise for the “middle class” and attacks on migrants.

When the Left Party also fell apart due to its anti-worker policies, Wagenknecht and her supporters founded the BSW. From the outset, the new party was designed to suppress any real opposition to war and capitalism. This applies not only to its programme, but also to its organisational structure. Wagenknecht’s aim was not to build a democratic alternative to the established parties, but rather to create a new bureaucratic hurdle.

Only hand-picked candidates approved by Wagenknecht’s leadership circle were admitted into the BSW. In the summer of 2025, the party, which had won nearly 2.5 million votes in the European elections a year earlier, reported only 2,600 members nationwide, and only recently has it relaxed its membership requirements.

Proven functionaries of the Left Party, such as Katja Wolf, who was previously mayor of the city of Eisenach, seasoned trade union bureaucrats such as Sabine Zimmermann, who had been DGB (German Trade Union Federation) chairwoman in the Zwickau region, former SPD members such as Robert Crumbach, who had been a member of the SPD for 40 years, and a few small business owners were accepted. There are no fundamental political differences between them. But the intensification of class antagonisms is tearing this unprincipled grouping apart.

The WSWS has followed Wagenknecht’s career for many years and warned of the reactionary implications of her politics. In 2016, we discussed her book *Wealth Without Greed*, a plea for nationalism and the market economy, and in 2021, her nationalist diatribe *The Self-Righteous*.

The fact that she is now moving ever closer to the AfD confirms our warnings and proves what we have always emphasised: war, social inequality and fascism can only be fought by mobilising the international working class for a socialist programme that targets their cause, the capitalist system.



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