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German Left Party leader backs new attack on immigrants

On Saturday, Left Party parliamentary leader Sahra Wagenknecht defended the decision of Essen Tafel to limit its food handouts to Germans. This puts her in the front ranks of the anti-refugee campaign that blames the social crisis in Germany on impoverished foreigners.

The Essen branch of the volunteer aid organization Tafel, which collects leftover food and distributes it to the needy, announced in December that it would register only German citizens at its issuing offices. The decision was implemented on January 10.

The chairman of Essen Tafel, Jörg Sartor, justified the discriminatory decision on openly xenophobic grounds. German pensioners were avoiding coming to get the handouts because foreigners had not behaved properly, he claimed. There was a “taker gene” among the Syrians and Russian Germans, Sartor told newsweekly *Der Spiegel*. Some would jostle and push, he said, and they lacked “a culture of queuing.”

While other branches of the Tafel organisation and representatives of many other relief organizations were outraged by the discrimination in Essen, a nasty campaign was started by the media and political circles to defend the preferential treatment being shown to those in need who have a German passport. The Left Party has now taken the lead in this xenophobic campaign.

In an interview with broadcaster Deutschlandfunk, Wagenknecht described the criticism of the decision in Essen, much of which had come from Tafel members, as a “moralized debate” that was “unduly hypocritical.” Although no one should starve, she said, certain groups were in a special position. “I would prefer,” she declared, “that people who live in

Germany, some of whom have been living here for a long time, often having paid contributions, who have also worked here, are not brought into such a competitive situation.”

While she referred only generally to poverty in the interview, Wagenknecht cited the admission of refugees as the main cause of the worsening social situation in Germany. In the manner of the far-right Alternative for Germany (AfD), the leader of the Left Party parliamentary faction blamed the “refugee crisis” for almost all social problems, stating: “The Tafel is just one part, there are many others. There are overburdened schools, there are housing problems. There are very many problems that have become more acute through the refugee crisis.”

She left open whether she would take offense at the exclusion of foreign students from schools or the refusal to rent apartments to those without a German passport.

Wagenknecht’s formulations echo those used by right-wing extremist circles. They are designed to shield those responsible for the social misery while scapegoating the weakest and most vulnerable members of society. Instead of attacking the billionaires, who in recent years have enriched themselves obscenely at the expense of workers, she points the finger at the poorest of the poor.

In a previous interview with *Business Insider*, Wagenknecht fanned fears of “hate preachers in the environment of certain mosques” in order to call for a restrictive refugee policy. She told *Cicero* magazine that an open border policy was “the opposite of what is left-wing,” arguing that there was “not an unlimited housing” supply and that more residents led to greater wage competition.

In fact, the Left Party itself has vigorously supported the policy of wealth redistribution over the past 25 years from the bottom to those at the top. Wherever the Left Party has held government office, it has overseen vicious social attacks. In the ten years of the Social Democratic Party-Left Party state executive in Berlin, it cut public-sector wages by 10 percent, sold off public housing to hedge funds, halted construction of new public housing and introduced low-wage jobs on a massive scale.

In North Rhine-Westphalia, where Essen Tafel has taken its xenophobic decision, the Left Party supported two austerity budgets of SPD-Green Party state governments, in 2010 and 2011, resulting in many social cuts. At the federal level, the Left Party voted in favour of the bank rescue package that handed over billions of euros to the banks.

Now, its parliamentary group leader declares that the intake of desperate war refugees is the cause of the catastrophic consequences of its own policy of social devastation. There is no significant difference between her line and that of the AfD.

For this reason, Wagenknecht has advocated parliamentary cooperation with the right-wing extremists and insisted that they chair critical committees in the Bundestag (parliament). “I think the AfD is entitled to undertake these functions,” she said on the ARD talk show “Maischberger.” She added, “That is parliamentary custom.”

The closer and closer the Left Party moves to the rhetoric of the AfD the less it is able to cloak its right-wing programme with left phrases. This applies not only to social attacks, but also to the rearmament plans of the new Christian Democratic-Social Democratic coalition government preparing to assume power.

As soon as negotiations on a coalition between the Christian Democrats, the Free Democratic Party and the Greens broke down last November, Wagenknecht ruled out new elections. Instead, she called on the Social Democrats (SPD) to quickly reach an agreement with the Christian Democrats (CDU/CSU).

Once the CDU/CSU and SPD had settled on a coalition agreement that provides for a massive increase in the defence budget, Wagenknecht tweeted an image of a rising armament budget with the text: “Bundeswehr (Armed Forces): mismanagement and leadership failure. Almost 20 percent more money, but not enough for socks and winter coats?”

The Left Party representative on the parliamentary Foreign Affairs Committee, Stefan Liebich, explicitly supported the speech at the Munich Security Conference by SPD Foreign Minister Sigmar Gabriel, who declared that Germany had to become a foreign policy “carnivore.”

Support for social attacks and German imperialism goes hand in hand with extreme right-wing politics. For this reason, Wagenknecht advocates positions akin to those of the AfD and calls for cooperation with the right-wing extremist party.

The Sozialistische Gleichheitspartei (Socialist Equality Party) opposes the right-wing party cartel with a socialist perspective. We stand for the unity of all workers in the fight against social cuts, war and capitalism. That is the only basis on which the interests of workers can be defended against all the parties in the Bundestag.