

In France, Mélenchon advisor hails Wagenknecht's anti-immigrant Aufstehen group

By Alex Lantier
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Djordje Kuzmanovic, an advisor of Unsubmissive France (LFI) leader Jean-Luc Mélenchon, has hailed his German ally Sahra Wagenknecht's launching of the xenophobic Aufstehen (Rise up) movement. In a long interview with *L'Obs* on Wednesday, the former paratrooper and geopolitical analyst posed as a defender of French people against low-wage immigrant workers. He also tried to pass off his xenophobic line as a "Marxist" analysis.

Wagenknecht, a leader of the Left Party (Die Linke) and partner of Mélenchon's political associate, Oskar Lafontaine, founded Aufstehen at the beginning of September. She declared that Aufstehen was a movement "from below," though it advocates militarily reinforcing the European Union (EU) and hostility towards refugees. She condemned "free circulation and immigration as the main source of growing competition for low-paid work" and denounced refugees for creating "uncertainty."

Wagenknecht's appeal won her the applause of the German neo-fascists. The far-right newspaper *Junge Freiheit* (*Young Freedom*) hailed Aufstehen's role in "the debate on a return to the nation state" and declared that the only way to avoid social and political upheavals was to organise "a broad social debate on the massive problems caused by uncontrolled migration."

And Kuzmanovic added his applause to that of the German far right, hailing in *L'Obs* Aufstehen's chauvinist and anti-immigrant line as a strategy for LFI to win workers' votes.

He said: "Some left-wing voters are turning to right-wing populism, but the main problem is that most of the lower classes abstain. If there is an electorate to be won over, that's the one! The risk, if we do not

manage to do it, is to find ourselves in an Italian-type situation, where progressive forces are in tatters and the xenophobic right is in power. Sahra Wagenknecht's political line on the migration issue therefore seems to me to be a question of public cleanliness."

This is a reactionary proposal to develop LFI on political bases that are compatible with European neo-fascism. It is founded on a political lie, that is, the claim that the collapse in votes for social democratic, Stalinist or allied political parties is due first and foremost to a shift among workers toward support for neo-fascism.

In fact, if France's Socialist Party (PS), Germany's Social Democratic Party (SPD) and their LFI and Die Linke allies have lost voters, it is due above all to the right-wing shift of the petty-bourgeois, post-1968 student movement from which they drew their leaders. Amid a deepening social crisis and growing working-class opposition to the entire political establishment, their nationalist and anti-Marxist orientation allows them to rally to a line that is ever closer to a neo-fascist position.

Terrified by the eruption of revolutionary sentiment in the working class in the general strike of May-June 1968 50 years ago, these layers evolved steadily towards pro-war, pro-austerity positions. The "austerity turn" of the PS in France, the Spanish Socialist Party and Pasok in Greece in the early 1980s, the Stalinist restoration of capitalism in the USSR itself in 1991, and then the SPD's Hartz IV austerity laws, initiated decades of austerity by the social democrats and their Stalinist and Pabloite allies. Their electoral base has now collapsed.

The more recent founding of Syriza, Die Linke,

Podemos, LFI and now Aufstehen ultimately provided only a facelift for nationalist, petty-bourgeois forces coming from Stalinism or Pabloism—like Mélenchon, who began his political career in the *Organisation communiste internationaliste* (OCI) of Pierre Lambert. The OCI had broken with the International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI) and with Trotskyism in 1971. He joined the PS in 1976 and then worked closely under PS President François Mitterrand.

Syriza (the “Coalition of the Radical Left”), which has held power in Greece since 2015, is carrying out a violent austerity policy and detaining refugees in appalling conditions, packed into squalid internment camps on the Greek islands.

The sections of the petty bourgeoisie represented by Syriza, LFI and co. are moving sharply to the right, in line with the entire European political establishment. Kuzmanovic tries, of course, to maintain the fiction that his xenophobic policy differs fundamentally from that of the neo-fascists. He says, for instance, “We are against hunting down migrants: this is a great difference with the far right.”

For a refugee arriving in France, however, the difference between the current persecution of migrants and that advocated by Kuzmanovic would be small indeed.

Indeed, Kuzmanovic proposes to attack companies that hire refugees and only accept a tiny minority of the refugees who are fleeing towards Europe. “If we want to oppose unbridled migration and exploitation, we must attack those who hire unregistered workers,” he says. “As for the few tens of thousands of people who are fleeing war, we can take them. This is a duty inscribed in the Geneva Conventions of 1957 and 1962, which France signed.”

In fact, tens of millions of refugees are fleeing NATO and French imperialist wars in Iraq, Syria, Mali, Afghanistan and beyond. Kuzmanovic’s statement shows that he not only wants to deprive refugees arriving in France of a job, but above all to expel from France the vast majority of those fleeing war.

Conscious that he is vulnerable to left-wing criticisms that would expose his proximity to neo-fascist positions, Kuzmanovic issues xenophobic accusations that his critics are facilitating the hiring of foreign workers by French companies.

He declares: “If you are left wing and you have the

same position on the immigration as big business, there is a problem. ... What we are saying is not new at all. It is a purely Marxist analysis: capital is building its reserve army of labor. If it is possible to pay low wages to undocumented workers, this will drag all salaries down. You are telling us this is a far-right analysis? You are joking.”

This attempt to palm off xenophobic demagoguery praised by neo-fascists as Marxism is a repugnant political fraud. The *Communist Manifesto*, written by Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, begins by declaring, “The history of all hitherto existing societies is the history of class struggles,” and ends with a statement that has been celebrated for 150 years: “Proletarians of all countries, unite!”

The essential task of Marxists has always been to unite the working class in struggle, above all to overcome the national divisions along which the ruling class seeks to divide it. Marxists have always insisted that a common struggle against nationalism, neo-fascism and militarism—the stock-in-trade of dubious political operators like Kuzmanovic—would unite immigrant and native-born workers.

Kuzmanovic, a former paratrooper, worked in Rwanda in 1994, when Paris was supporting the genocidal regime of Juvénal Habyarimana, and participated in French intelligence operations in Yugoslavia. He is part of an entire layer of police and intelligence operatives within LFI, including the head of the General Confederation of Labor police union, Alexandre Langlois, and the Interior Ministry trade unionist Georges Knecht. Their integration into the apparatus of repression directed against the working class by French imperialism underscores that they have nothing in common with Marxism.

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