

German Left Party leader praises right-wing politician Peter Gauweiler

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10 April 2015

On March 31, Peter Gauweiler, who represented the extreme right-wing of the Christian Social Union (CSU), stepped down from his post as deputy party chairman and resigned his seat in parliament. One day later, Oskar Lafontaine, former chair of the Left Party, congratulated him in a column appearing in *Bild* with the words: “Being faithful to oneself is difficult. Peter Gauweiler does it. Bravo!”

Gauweiler justified his withdrawal and resignation from parliament on the grounds that he no longer backed the government’s euro bailout policy and rejected the CSU leadership’s support for the “aid programs” for Greece.

Lafontaine praised these positions, writing: “Gauweiler won’t participate in the Greek bailout any longer. He sees no sense in paying back old debts with ever newer debts. He’d rather give up his position in the party and his seat in the parliament.”

Gauweiler has for decades been among the most right-wing political figures in Germany, earning himself the nickname “Black Peter.” In the 1980s, as Bavarian minister of state, he called for mandatory testing of persons infected with HIV and their segregation into special detention centers. In the late 1990s, when an exhibition on war crimes committed by the Wehrmacht was to be shown in Munich, Gauweiler organized a massive protest campaign against it. He denounced the exhibition as a malicious slander of German soldiers and tried to block it with legal action.

In 2003, he demanded “the inclusion of a reference to God” in the constitutional treaty of the European Union. As a right-wing, nationalist opponent of the EU, he often went before the Federal Constitutional Court with suits against the so-called “euro bailout policy.”

As a member of parliament, where he was rarely present, the attorney had the highest additional income to his parliamentary allowance. According to data from *Spiegel Online*, it amounted to almost €1 million last year.

Lafontaine’s support for Gauweiler is not new. After Lafontaine’s resignation as SPD chairman and federal minister of finance, they co-wrote a column in the right-wing tabloid *Bild* from 2001 to 2003. Since then, they have become close friends.

The two would write on the same subject, with Lafontaine

writing under the motto “My heart beats on the left,” while Gauweiler wrote under the motto “My heart is in the right place.” Most of the time they were in agreement—as was the case with the call for the “Restriction of Immigrants,” national sovereignty with respect to the EU, or the rejection of the US-led wars in the Middle East.

In 2009, when Lafontaine was chairman of the Left Party, they staged a joint campaign appearance in a Munich beer hall. Gauweiler and Lafontaine “brought a cozy unity to the packed Paulaner-Festsall,” reported *Focus*. “The atmosphere in the hall resembled a CSU convention.”

The staunch anticommunist and millionaire Gauweiler “was in top form” as he lashed out at “the deregulation of hedge funds, high manager salaries, or the practice of credit lending in the economy,” added the *Süddeutsche Zeitung*.

In June of last year, Lafontaine—again in *Bild*—congratulated Gauweiler on his 65th birthday. Already at that time he praised the steadfastness and independence of his right-wing friend as well as his success as an attorney, who “has long remained independent, including of his party.”

Lafontaine’s approval of Gauweiler’s retirement is a political invitation. Under conditions in which the traditional “popular parties” are rapidly losing influence, a political collaboration of both men in a right-wing populist party is no longer ruled out.

The decision of Sahra Wagenknecht, who has lived with Lafontaine for three years and married him at the end of last year, to no longer campaign for the position of deputy chair of the Left Party’s parliamentary fraction, should be considered in this context.

In a lengthy interview with the Berlin *Tagesspiegel*, Wagenknecht justified her decision with nearly the same words as Gauweiler. She linked her withdrawal from the Left Party leadership to the Left Party’s support for “further emergency loans to Greece.”

Wagenknecht said: “Greece was already broke in 2010. It was completely irresponsible of Ms. Merkel to squander billions in tax revenues on it ... It was a mistake for Greece to be admitted into the monetary union. It hurt the Greek economy ...”

Greece, she added, “urgently needs a program to reactivate its economy, combat sleaze and corruption, and promote new business ventures out of which value creation will return to the

country.” Wagenknecht considers the main problem to be the lack of social stability. “The middle class is shrinking everywhere,” she said.

Asked about the coalition government formed by Syriza and the far-right populist Independent Greeks (Anel), Wagenknecht justified it on the grounds that circumstances required Syriza to find a coalition partner. Anel could not, however, be compared to the German AfD (Alternative for Germany) and certainly not with the NPD (National Democratic Party), she continued.

If one were able to compare Syriza’s coalition partner with a German party, she said, “it would most likely be the CSU.” In Germany, the move toward an alliance between the Left Party and the CSU would “certainly take some getting used to,” but was not out of the question, said Wagenknecht. “If the CSU would take the Bavarian constitution seriously,” it could put forward a much better program with the Left party than the “idiotic toll” [a toll on passenger vehicles proposed by the CSU which would affect only foreign motorists in Germany].

It is too soon to predict how far the overtures of Lafontaine and Wagenknecht will go with regard to the CSU-dropout Gauweiler or the CSU itself. But one thing is clear: Lafontaine and Wagenknecht are responding to rapid and fundamental political shifts.

The announcement by President Gauck, Foreign Minister Steinmeier and Defense Minister Von der Leyen a year ago that Germany must again play a role “in Europe and in the world,” that its influence must be commensurate with its size, and that it requires an active and militaristic foreign policy “in a world full of crises and upheavals,” has profound political implications.

The return of German great-power politics is bound up with a growing desire for distance between Germany and the US government. In view of growing transatlantic tensions, Lafontaine and Wagenknecht position themselves as political trailblazers pushing for a greater independence and self-sufficiency for German imperialism.

It was in this sense that Lafontaine spoke at the beginning of the year to the so-called “Rosa Luxemburg Conference” of *Junge Welt*. There he said that as long as Germany was a member of NATO and that NATO was dominated by the US, Germany was not sovereign.

Lafontaine said, “Germany was involved in practically every war waged by the United States of America, because every war that it waged has depended on US facilities in central Europe. We were never uninvolved. And so long as that is the case, we are not a sovereign country.”

During the subsequent podium discussion, Lafontaine defended former chancellor Helmut Kohl, a member of the Christian Democratic Union (CDU), with the words: “He would not have joined in every twist and turn of American policy, as has the priest’s daughter who currently sits in the chancellery.”

The political common ground found by Lafontaine and the

arch-reactionary Gauweiler rests on these nationalist foundations. Their criticism of the government concentrates on its subordination to the US. Their “peace policy” is directed against the US-dominated Nato. Their criticism of capitalism is directed against the International Monetary Fund and the US-dominated World Bank. Their criticism of “neo-liberalism” is crude anti-Americanism and serves as a watchword in the call for German “sovereignty,” a code word of the extreme right.

They are supported by former Stalinists in the Left Party. Not so long ago, Sahra Wagenknecht stood in the leadership of the so-called Communist Platform, a fraction in the Party of Democratic Socialism (PDS). It was a melting pot of old Stalinists and DDR nostalgists.

In the years of the Cold War, they stood on the other side of the iron curtain, while today many of them combine their criticisms of Nato and American war policy with the support of German great-power politics.

Some of these Stalinist cynics, including former top agents of the Stasi, gather together in the editorial board of *Junge Welt*. It is not an accident that Gauweiler was often able to find a voice in this paper for years. In 2005, an interview with him conducted by Jürgen Elsässer appeared under the title “In some ways I am closer to Lafontaine than to Merkel.” Elsässer, who still worked for *Junge Welt* at the time, today maintains extreme right-wing positions and supports Pegida.

It is not to be excluded that Lafontaine and Wagenknecht are planning to create a new political formation from the alliance between old Stalinists and right-wing conservatives. Lafontaine’s friend Jean-Luc Mélenchon is already preparing the political terrain for similar initiatives in France.

The author also recommends:

From pseudo-left to New Right: The trajectory of France’s Jean-Luc Mélenchon
[18 October 2014]



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