

# Is Sahra Wagenknecht founding a new party?

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Is Sahra Wagenknecht founding a new party? This question has been circulating in the media for weeks. The Left Party politician herself has not yet confirmed this. But it is well known that her relationship with the party leadership is fractured. Leading media outlets, including the right-wing tabloid *Bild*, are offering Wagenknecht a platform and encouraging her to take this step.

What would be the role of a Wagenknecht party?

It would seek to steer widespread opposition to the Ukraine war into a nationalist cul-de-sac. According to opinion polls, 30 to 60 percent of the German population oppose NATO's actions against Russia and the associated sanctions. But this opposition finds no expression in the Bundestag (federal parliament). All the parliamentary groupings—from the Left Party to the conservative Christian Democrats (CDU/CSU)—stand united behind NATO's war course.

Wagenknecht and her husband Oskar Lafontaine, who quit the Left Party in March, reject the Russia sanctions and ascribe a share of responsibility for the war to NATO. But they do not represent a peace policy. The basis of their attitude is anti-Americanism. They oppose the war not from the standpoint of the international working class, but from the standpoint of German imperialism, whose interests are incompatible with those of American imperialism. A Wagenknecht party would not be a party of peace but a German nationalist war party.

Lafontaine has long held this position and reiterated it in his recent book, *Ami, it's time to go: A plea for Europe to assert itself*. He calls Germany, the world's fourth-largest economic power, a vassal of the United States. The US needs "vassals to go along with its aggressive foreign policy," he writes. "Among the most loyal vassals are the Europeans, first and foremost Germany. That is why we have the situation we are in now."

This is not the language of socialism, but the language of the far-right Alternative for Germany (AfD). The leader of the AfD's ultra-nationalist *völkisch* wing, Björn Höcke, told an audience of 8,000 in Gera on German Unity Day: "We are being driven into a war that is not

ours by an alien power [the US] and a foreign-dominated federal government."

Like Höcke, Lafontaine advocates Germany's military build-up. He calls for "the liberation of Europe from US military tutelage through an independent European security and defence policy" and "a joint defence alliance between Germany and France." This is not "peace policy" but a German great power policy.

The view that NATO is a temporary alliance, and that the US is an adversary of German interests is widespread in ruling circles.

Earlier this year, foreign policy expert Josef Braml published a book with the programmatic title *The Transatlantic Illusion*, which was universally praised. "If the European Union is to be a 'global player' and not a plaything of other powers, Germany above all must decisively correct its foreign policy toward the United States as well," it states. Germany's interests were "not always identical or compatible with those of other states, not even with those of the supposed protective power, the United States."

Most representatives of the German ruling class, however, consider an open break with the US to be premature. They are afraid of provoking the militarily and economically superior superpower precipitately and want to gain time to rearm militarily. They are using the Ukraine war as a welcome pretext to increase the arms budget, strengthen German influence in Eastern Europe and subjugate Russia with its vast mineral resources—a goal that the Kaiser and Hitler already pursued without success.

The conflict within the Left Party also revolves around these issues. It is not a dispute between a left wing and a right wing, or between a pro-war faction and a peace faction, but between two right-wing, pro-imperialist currents.

The party majority, under co-chairs Janine Wissler and Martin Schirdewan, supports NATO's war policy. It declares Russia the sole aggressor and demands its military withdrawal as a precondition for negotiations.

Bodo Ramelow, the Left Party's only state prime minister, even calls for arms deliveries to Ukraine.

When Wagenknecht called for an end to sanctions against Russia in the Bundestag (federal parliament) and accused the government of launching “an unprecedented economic war against our most important energy supplier,” the party majority was outraged. The same thing happened when she attacked the Greens for their belligerence in her weekly YouTube broadcast: “For me, the Greens are the most hypocritical, removed from reality, mendacious, incompetent, and—judging by the damage they cause—currently also the most dangerous party we currently have in the Bundestag.”

In early December, about a hundred Left Party officials gathered in Berlin to demand the expulsion of Wagenknecht and her supporters. “We want a party,” their statement read, that “condemns in the strongest terms Russia's criminal war of aggression and the war crimes committed by Russia and advocates punishing those responsible.”

Some officials, led by party founder Gregor Gysi, are trying to hold the party together. They fear the end of the Left Party if Wagenknecht, along with her five to eight parliamentary supporters, leaves the 39-member Bundestag faction. The latter would lose its faction status and with it considerable funds. About 150 faction staffers would have to vacate their desks. The party, which is losing election after election and suffering an acute loss of members, would not make it back into the Bundestag.

If Wagenknecht founded a new party, it would be the fourth in her political career, each more reactionary than the previous one.

In the summer of 1989, at the age of 20, Wagenknecht joined the Socialist Unity Party (SED), the Stalinist party of state in the GDR (former East Germany), as hundreds of thousands were turning their backs on it. Shortly thereafter, the Berlin Wall fell. In the SED's successor party, the PDS (Party of Democratic Socialism), Wagenknecht then became the figurehead of the Communist Platform, an association of old Stalinist functionaries.

After the merger of the PDS with the West German (Election Alternative) to form Die Linke (Left Party), Wagenknecht said goodbye to the pseudo-Marxist phraseology of the Communist Platform. She earned a doctorate in economics and embraced the liberal economic policies of the post-war Adenauer era. She went on to become the most prominent face of the party, which was firmly involved in government work in East

Germany.

It was also then that Wagenknecht found herself—politically and personally—with Oskar Lafontaine, who had held the highest party and state offices in the Social Democratic Party (SPD) for 40 years and then helped found the Left Party. In 2014, she married him.

In the years that followed, the right-wing course of the Lafontaine-Wagenknecht duo became increasingly apparent. They agitated against refugees and cozied up to coronavirus deniers. Last year, Wagenknecht published a book, “The Self-Righteous,” attacking the party leadership's orientation toward petty-bourgeois gender and identity politics from the standpoint of a leaden *völkisch* nationalism.

A Wagenknecht party would bring together all these reactionary elements. That is why it is hyped up by some media outlets—up to and including those openly on the far right. Significantly, the current issue of *Compact* magazine promotes Wagenknecht on its cover as “the best chancellor” and a “candidate for left and right.”

Dubious polls predict double-digit election results for her. Respondents usually have to answer whether they “could imagine” voting for a Wagenknecht party, not whether they would actually vote for it.

In fact, there is no reason to believe that a new version of the discredited Left Party under the leadership of Sahra Wagenknecht would succeed. An earlier push by Wagenknecht in this direction, the “Aufstehen” (“Stand Up”) movement, was a resounding failure in 2018.

The working class, the vast majority of the population, is not moving toward nationalism and war, but toward internationalism and class struggle. The perspective of the Sozialistische Gleichheitspartei (Socialist Equality Party) and the Fourth International, fighting for an international movement of the working class against war, social inequality and capitalism, is gaining support.



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