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Germany

# “A Heavy Blow”

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**Following years of turmoil, a resolution has finally been reached inside Die Linke, the democratic socialist party in the German parliament closely linked to the Rosa Luxemburg Foundation. Sahra Wagenknecht, previously Die Linke’s parliamentary co-speaker and one of its best-known faces, announced her resignation from the party on Monday together with nine other MPs. They will now form a new organization, Bündnis Sahra Wagenknecht (BSW), to prepare the launch of a new party in early 2024.**

**The split in Die Linke brings years of internal conflict to an end and offers the party the chance to move on. But Wagenknecht’s departure will also downgrade Die Linke’s parliamentary privileges and with that significant resources. Rosa Luxemburg Foundation Chair Heinz Bierbaum spoke with Loren Balhorn about what Wagenknecht’s new party will mean for Die Linke and left-wing forces in Germany as a whole.**

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**Sahra Wagenknecht and nine other MPs from Die Linke’s parliamentary faction announced their resignation from the party on Monday and their intention to found a new party later this spring. Sixteen years after the establishment of a nationwide force to the left of Social Democracy, Die Linke is undergoing its first serious split. What does this move mean for the German Left both in- and outside parliament?**

Wagenknecht's decision means the loss of Die Linke's status as a parliamentary faction in the Bundestag. Even if Die Linke remains in parliament as a group, it will lose considerable resources and, more than anything, political influence. It will be less visible. This inevitably also will lead to a weakening of the party as a whole.

I worry that personnel debates and the competition between Die Linke and the Wagenknecht project will continue to remain in the foreground and overshadow political issues. That said, the timing is still open as to when the separation will actually take place. In any case, it is already clear that it will weaken left-wing forces as a whole. The founding of a second party will not strengthen the broader Left — on the contrary.

**What is the medium-term plan? When will the party stand for elections, and what will it even be called?**

I assume that the new party will run in the European elections next year. Under what name, I don’t know. So far, the project is highly focused on Wagenknecht as a person. Everything depends on her.

**Before you became chair of the Rosa Luxemburg Foundation, you were President of the Party of the European Left (EL), in which Die Linke historically plays an important role. Will the split have consequences for the European Left?**

The decision of Wagenknecht and her comrades-in-arms to leave Die Linke and found a new party is a heavy blow for the European Left. Die Linke has always been an essential part of the EL, looked up to by many other left-wing parties around Europe. The weakening of Die Linke will also weaken the EL.

This is especially true with regard to the European elections, where the EL had hoped to present itself as a united and strong left-wing force. Instead, we are dealing with splits. This is also the case in France, for example, where the NUPES coalition, which was successful in the last parliamentary elections in France, will no longer contest the European elections as a united alliance.

**The new party comes after years of feuding between Wagenknecht and the leadership of Die Linke. Can you explain what the main points of contention are? What was ultimately the trigger for this final break?**

Wagenknecht has always accused the party leadership of not caring enough about social issues and putting more emphasis on climate issues and diversity. In my opinion, this is not true, although it is the case that there are different emphases within Die Linke. These points of contention were never really seriously discussed. The debate was highly personalized.

The migration issue, where there are very clear differences, also played a major role. The party leadership rightly criticized Wagenknecht's position on this issue. There are also differences around the Ukraine war.

**According to its founding manifesto, the new party stands for “reasonableness and justice” — but that could mean all kinds of things. How would you describe the new party's political orientation, and how does it differ from Die Linke?**

So far, the party doesn't have a concrete programme. The statements are very general and vague. It is clear that they want to offer a new political home to people who no longer feel represented by the existing parties, and they are mostly focused on the social security of so-called “ordinary people”. Their messaging is especially aimed at non-voters.

Some speculate that the new party could weaken the Alternative für Deutschland, the right-populist party that has been surging in the polls. I don't think so.

**At Monday's press conference, Wagenknecht and other MPs from her circle were joined by Ralph Suikat, a millionaire entrepreneur who has campaigned for a just tax system for years.**

**Wagenknecht's political rapprochement with small business owners is nothing new — for years, she has written about the need to protect innovative entrepreneurs from the power of big monopolies. The BSW founding manifesto speaks of “those who make an effort and do good, honest and solid work” in contrast to those who are “only driven by the motivation to make more money out of money”.**

**How would you explain her class perspective? Isn't it a bit strange for someone who led the Communist Platform, the hard-line current in Die Linke, for years?**

On economics, Wagenknecht's politics have been ordoliberal for some time now. She wants the state to provide a regulatory framework to strengthen private entrepreneurship. In her view, the real opponent is finance capital.

Wagenknecht thus operates within a nostalgic social-democratic and highly bourgeois framework that has nothing to do with a class orientation derived from the conflict between capital and labour. These days, it's hard to believe that she was once a leading representative of the Communist Platform.

**Many in Die Linke welcomed the news of the split, hoping that the party can now present a united face and hopefully find its way to its former strength. It's no secret that the party has struggled, and many members cite Wagenknecht's public attacks on the leadership as the source of its difficulties. Will it be easier for the party to win back lost ground now that she's gone?**

Wagenknecht's step does indeed represent a kind of political clarification, but it will not catapult the party back to its

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former strength as some seem to think. It will not solve the party’s deeper problems. There are still contentious debates within the party, such as over the focus on ecological and/or social issues. Here, we can see how the failure to conduct a proper debate in recent years has really taken its toll.

**Amira Mohamed Ali, until recently Die Linke’s parliamentary co-speaker and now the chair of BSW, said on Monday that she and the others are leaving “without resentment” and do not want to attack their former party, but instead focus on issues like social justice, peace, and “freedom”. What do you think Die Linke should focus on in the future?**

Amira’s statement is as correct as it is banal. Social justice and peace are, of course, key issues for the Left. Die Linke must, and does, focus on the cost-of-living crisis and social security. Peace is and remains a central issue where Die Linke must agree on a common position despite differences of opinion on certain questions. Germany urgently needs a shift in migration policy, which must be humane and integrative.

A central issue for Die Linke is the ecological transformation of the economy and especially of industry. We fight for a socio-ecological transformation, which also means tackling the question of social justice.

That said, it is not only about protecting the jobs of affected workers, but also about including them in the transformation process itself. That means we have to link the green transition to concepts of economic democracy, which in turn means cooperating with the trade unions will be crucial. A real socio-ecological transformation will only succeed if it begins within the structures of the status quo, but then begins to transcend them — and that means adopting a socialist perspective.

Source: [Rosa Luxemburg Stiftung](#)

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