Program of the Catholic Center Party's Reichstag Caucus (late March 1871)

Abstract

After German unification the Catholic Center Party developed into the most stable political force in the Reichstag. It won between 90 and 105 seats, with 23–26 percent of the popular vote, in every Reichstag election from 1874 to 1912. Although its voters were drawn almost exclusively from the Catholic milieu, the party was able to avoid other parties' heavy dependence on particular classes, regions, or doctrines. Championing the autonomy of the federal states, civil and religious liberties, and adherence to the constitution, the party's program from 1871 stressed justice rather than denominational affiliation as the "basis of governance." After bitter conflicts with Bismarck during the *Kulturkampf* ("cultural struggle") of the 1870s, by the mid-1880s relations with the government were normalized. Even before that point the Center had become adept at allying with either Right or Left, with Bismarck or the opposition, depending on its own priorities.

Source

"Iustitia fundamentum regnorum" ["Justice is the basis of governance."]

The Center Party caucus in the German Reichstag has put forth the following principles for its activities:

1. The basic character of the Reich as a federative state shall be preserved; accordingly, those efforts that aim at changing the federative nature of the Reich constitution shall be counteracted; and no more self-determination or autonomous activities of the individual states shall be sacrificed than are irrefutably required for the interests of the whole.

2. The moral and material welfare of all levels of society is to be promoted as much as possible; the party shall strive for the constitutional establishment of guarantees toward the civic and religious freedom of all citizens of the German Reich, and particularly, for the protection of religious communities.

3. According to these principles, the caucus debates and decides on all issues being discussed in the Reichstag, though without individual members being barred from diverging from the decision of the caucus when they cast their vote in the Reichstag.

Source: Karl Bachem, *Vorgeschichte, Geschichte und Politik der deutschen Zentrumspartei,* 9 vols., vol. 3. Cologne: Bachem, 1927, pp. 137–38; reprinted in Felix Salomon, ed., *Die deutschen Parteiprogramme*, vol. 1, *Vom Erwachen des politischen Lebens in Deutschland bis zur Reichsgründung 1871*, eds. Wilhelm Mommsen and Günther Franz, 4th ed., Leipzig and Berlin: B. G. Teubner, 1932, pp. 166–67.

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