

Saxon People's Party, Founding Program (August 19, 1866)

Abstract

The Saxon People's Party, led by August Bebel (1840–1913) and Wilhelm Liebknecht (1828–1900), championed the interests of the working population, but its initial program stressed democracy, not socialism. It called for universal manhood suffrage not only for Reichstag elections but also for state-level and municipal elections. It also advocated strong parliamentary and democratic institutions, German unification (of a particular kind), abolition of all class privileges, free public education, and independent, public court proceedings. The party's genesis and program reflected the "greater German" [*großdeutsch*] and democratic orientation of the party's main constituency. In 1866, especially in Prussian-occupied Saxony (though not only there), a program that condemned Prussia's "conquest" of Germany and Bismarck's conflict with the Prussian parliament held great appeal. The Saxon People's Party was predecessor to the Eisenach wing of Social Democracy (also led by Bebel and Liebknecht), which slowly gained ascendancy over the Lassallean wing after the two groups merged in the German Socialist Workers' Party in 1875.

Source

Demands of Democracy

1. Unrestricted right of self-determination of the people; universal, equal, and direct suffrage with secret ballot in all spheres of state life (parliament, chambers of the federal states, municipalities, etc.); public militia instead of standing armies; a parliament vested with the greatest absolute authority, which in particular has the power to decide matters of war and peace.
2. Unification of Germany within the framework of a democratic system of governance; no hereditary central authority. — No small Germany [*Kleindeutschland*] under Prussian leadership, no Prussia expanded by annexation; no greater Germany [*Großdeutschland*] under Austrian leadership, no triad system [*Trias*]. These and any similar dynastic, particularistic efforts, which would only result in lack of freedom, fragmentation, and foreign rule, are to be combated resolutely by the Democratic Party.
3. Abolition of all privileges attached to class, birth, and religious faith.
4. Improvement of the people's physical, intellectual, and moral education. Separation of schools from church, separation of church from state and of state from church; improvement of the institutes for teacher training and a worthy status for teachers; elevation of elementary schools to the rank of a state institution with education free of charge; procurement of funds for and establishment of institutes for the further education of those having passed elementary school age.
5. Promotion of general prosperity and the liberation of work and workers from oppression and fetters of any kind; improvement of the situation of the working class, freedom of movement, freedom of trade, general German right of residency, promotion and support of the cooperative system, especially producers' cooperatives, so that the conflict between capital and labor will be reconciled.
6. Self-administration of municipalities.
7. Heightening of the sense of justice among the people through the independence of the courts; courts

with juries, particularly in cases concerning political and press offences; public and oral court proceedings.

8. Promotion of the political and social education of the people through a free press, rights of free assembly and association, and freedom to form unions.

Source: August Bebel, *Aus meinem Leben*, 3rd ed. (East) Berlin: Dietz, 1961, pp. 163–64. Republished with permission.

Translation: Erwin Fink

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