Socialist Workers' Party of Germany, Gotha Program (May 1875)

Abstract

The first workers' association in Germany, the General German Workers' Association [*Allgemeiner Deutscher Arbeiterverein*, or ADAV], was founded in 1863 by Ferdinand Lassalle (1825–1864). His idea of defeating capitalism through the establishment of producers' cooperatives was strongly opposed by several socialists who supported the teachings of Karl Marx (1818–1883). In August 1869, Wilhelm Liebknecht (1826–1900) and August Bebel (1840–1913) founded the Social Democratic Workers' Party [*Sozialdemokratische Arbeiterpartei*, SDAP], sometimes referred to as the Eisenach wing of German Social Democracy. Together with their followers, they endorsed Marx's teachings and his commitment to class struggle and revolution. The ADAV and the SDAP differed markedly in their views on socialist theory, the First International, the role of the state, trade unions, and universal suffrage—and on Bismarck. Despite these differences, members of both parties knew that unity meant strength. At the socialist congress held in the central German city of Gotha from May 22 to 27, 1875, the Lassallean and Marxist wings debated a new program and founded the Socialist Workers' Party of Germany [*Sozialistische Arbeiterpartei Deutschlands*, SAPD], which was renamed the Social Democratic Party of Germany [*Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands*, SPD] in 1890. The program contained some of Lassalle's controversial ideas, whereas socialist commitment to revolution did not appear in the text.

Please note: in the following excerpt, taken from a period translation, Sozialistische Arbeiterpartei Deutschlands is rendered in English as Socialist Labor Party of Germany, as opposed to Socialist Workers' Party of Germany. Both are common translations of the German party name and can be used interchangeably.

Source

I. Labor is the source of all wealth and all culture, and since universal productive labor is possible only through society, therefore to society, that is to all its members, belongs the collective product of labor. With the universal obligation to labor, according to equal justice, each should have in proportion to his reasonable needs.

In the present society the means of labor are the monopoly of the capitalist class; the servitude of the laboring class, which is the outgrowth of this, is the cause of misery and of slavery in all forms.

The liberation of labor demands the transformation of the means of production into the common property of society and the associative regulation of the collective labor with general employment and just distribution of the proceeds of labor.

The emancipation of labor must be the work of the laboring class, opposed to which all other classes are only a reactionary body.

II. Proceeding from this principle the Socialist Labor party of Germany seeks through all legal means the free state and the socialist society, the destruction of the iron law of wages, the overthrow of exploitation in all forms and the abolition of all social and political inequality.

The Socialist Labor party of Germany, though working chiefly in national boundaries, is conscious of the international character of the labor movement and is resolved to fulfill every duty which is laid on the

workers in order to realize the brotherhood of humanity.

The Socialist Labor party of Germany demands as a step to the solution of the social question the erection, with the help of the state, of socialistic productive establishments under the democratic control of the laboring people. These productive establishments are to place industry and agriculture in such relations that out of them the socialist organization of the whole may arise.

The Socialist Labor party of Germany demands as the foundation of the state:

1. Universal, equal and direct suffrage, with secret, obligatory voting by all citizens at all elections in state or community.

2. Direct legislation by the people. Decision as to peace or war by the people.

3. Common right to bear arms. Militia instead of the standing army.

4. Abolition of all laws of exception, especially all laws restricting the freedom of the press, of association and assemblage; above all, all laws restricting the freedom of public opinion, thought and investigation.

5. Legal judgment through the people. Gratuitous administration of law.

6. Universal and equal popular education by the state. Universal compulsory education. Free instruction in all forms of art. Declaration that religion is a private matter.

The Socialist Labor party of Germany demands within the present society:

1. The widest possible expansion of political rights and freedom according to the foregoing demands.

2. A progressive income tax for state and municipality instead of all those existing, especially in place of the indirect tax which burdens the people.

3. Unrestrained right of combination.

4. Shortening of the working day according to the needs of society. Abolition of Sunday labor.

5. Abolition of child labor and all female labor injurious to health and morality.

6. Protective laws for the life and health of the worker. Sanitary control of the homes of the workers. Supervision of the mines, factories, workshops and hand industries by an officer elected by the people. An effectual law of enforcement.

7. Regulation of prison labor.

8. Full autonomy in the management of all laborers' fraternal and mutual benefit funds.

Source of English translation: Wilhelm Liebknecht, *Socialism: What It Is and What It Seeks to Accomplish*. Chicago: Charles H. Kerr & Company, 1901, pp. 5–7; reprinted in Theodore S. Hamerow, ed., *The Age of Bismarck: Documents and Interpretations*. New York: Harper & Row, 1973, pp. 230–32.

Source of original German text: *Protokoll des Vereinigungs-Kongresses der Sozialdemokraten Deutschlands, abgehalten zu Gotha vom 22. bis 27. Mai 1875.* Leipzig, 1875, pp. 78–79; reprinted in Hans Fenske, ed., *Im Bismarckschen Reich 1871–1890*. Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche

Buchgesellschaft, 1978, pp. 141–42.

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