

The Liberals: Founding Program of the German Progressive Party (June 9, 1861)

Abstract

The program of the German Progressive Party, founded in Prussia in 1861, outlined the basic principles of liberal politics, emphasizing German national unity, the rule of law, and not least an independent judiciary. Other items on the agenda included the expansion and increased power of the House of Deputies [*Abgeordnetenhaus*], the lower house of the Prussian parliament, in relation to both the aristocracy-filled upper house, the House of Lords [*Herrenhaus*], and the government. The program also advocated public education and the separation of church and state.

Source

We are united in loyalty to the king and in the firm conviction that the constitution is the insoluble bond that holds sovereign and people together.

But, no less importantly, considering the major and far-reaching upheavals in Europe's state systems, we have come to realize that Prussia's existence and greatness depends on a solid unification for Germany, which cannot be imagined without a strong central authority in Prussia's hands and without common German parliamentary representation.

For our domestic institutions we demand a solid liberal government that sees its strength in respect for citizens' constitutional rights, understands how to strictly enforce the principles thereof at all levels of the civil service, and in this way will earn and maintain the respect of the other German tribes.

In the legislative arena, it appears to us that the strict and consistent realization of a constitutional state is a primary and unconditional necessity. We therefore demand, in particular, legal protection by way of truly independent judges and that this protection be accessible to everyone. Accordingly, [we demand] the elimination of the prosecution monopoly of a dependent prosecuting attorney; the abolition of the law of April 8, 1847, on the procedure for conflicts of jurisdiction; the abolition of the law of February 15, 1854, concerning conflicts in judicial prosecutions for official acts; in general, real responsibility for civil servants; finally, the restoration of jurors' jurisdiction in political and press offenses.

We further demand final enactment of the law envisaged in Article 61 of the constitution concerning ministerial responsibility.

No less necessary, it appears to us, for Prussia's honor and for the consolidation of the constitution, is the establishment of municipal, district, and provincial constitutions based on the principles of equality and self-administration and with the abolition of the corporative principle and manorial police.

The equality of all religious denominations guaranteed in Article 12 needs to be emphatically safeguarded. The improvement of education in elementary schools, secondary schools, and *Gymnasien* can only take place by finally enacting the Instructional Law after eliminating unconstitutional ministerial regulations and standards. With respect to this Instructional Law, as well as in regard to urgent marriage legislation, the separation of state from church must be upheld and completed, in the latter case by adopting obligatory civil marriage.

The unexpectedly large burdens that were imposed on the country in the preceding legislative period

absolutely require that the economic energies of the country be unfettered, and that consequently the revision of the trade legislation, as has already been laid down in resolutions by the current House of Deputies, enter into life.

When the honor and power of our fatherland need to be preserved or attained by means of war, no sacrifice will ever be too great for us. In the interest of sustainable warfare, however, it strikes us that the greatest thrift is advisable for the military budget in peacetime. We are convinced that the maintenance of the militia, the general introduction of physical education for youth, and the intensified conscription of able-bodied men for a two-year period of service would provide for the complete military prowess of the Prussian people-in-arms.

But achieving these goals will [...] remain a pious wish so long as there is no thoroughgoing reform of the current House of Lords along a constitutional path. Above all, therefore, this must be energetically sought as the beginning of all reforms. [...]

Source: Wolfgang Treue, *Deutsche Parteiprogramme seit 1861*, 4th ed. Göttingen: Muster-Schmidt Verlag, 1968, pp. 62–63.

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Recommended Citation: The Liberals: Founding Program of the German Progressive Party (June 9, 1861), published in: German History in Documents and Images, <<https://germanhistorydocs.org/en/from-vormaerz-to-prussian-dominance-1815-1866/ghdi:document-383>> [July 14, 2025].