# The Liberals: Heppenheim Program of the Southwest German Liberals (October 10, 1847)

## Abstract

This report in the *Deutsche Zeitung* from October 15, 1847, summarizes the discussions between the south German and Prussian Rhineland liberals who met in Heidelberg on October 10, 1847. Responding to the radical democrats' Offenbach Program of September 12, 1847, the liberals called for a reorganization of the political order, namely the creation of a German nation-state, on the basis of the Prussian-dominated German Customs Union [*Zollverein*]. They also advocated greater civil liberties and the abolition of serfdom and feudalism.

## Source

Now, to begin with, regarding the promotion of national concerns through joint leadership and representation, there was general agreement that nothing fruitful was to be expected from the Federal Assembly [*Bundesversammlung*] as it exists as present. Regarding the establishment of estates-based constitutions, of free trade and commerce, of river navigation, and the free use of the press etc., the Federal Assembly has not solved its task as set out in the Federal Act [*Bundesakte*]; the federal military constitution has provided neither for a general armament of the people nor for a regularly organized federal army. By contrast, the press has been placed under pressure of censorship, and the minutes of the Federal Assembly are shrouded in darkness, from which resolutions emerge from time to time that lay obstacles in the path of every free development. The sole bond of shared German interests, the Customs Union [*Zollverein*], was not created by the Confederation, but rather outside of it, through treaties between the individual states; even the negotiations about a German commercial credit law and a postal union were not conducted by the Confederation, but rather by plenipotentiaries of the individual governments. In light of these and similar observations the question arose: whether representing the nation at the Federal Assembly might bring about improvement and therefore be put forward as a desirable goal for friends of the fatherland? Speaking for the affirmative was the peoples' receptiveness to the edifying thought, the consideration that the only possible way to justify a representation for all the federal states would be with the given organ of the confederal governments, and the expectation that the strengthened public opinion would also aim to achieve this and thereby open the way to a German policy and to an energetic development of all the intellectual and material resources of the nation. In opposition, it was argued that, however edifying the thought, the prospect of its realization just was not there. The Confederation includes members that are simultaneously foreign powers, like Denmark and the Netherlands, who would never warm to a pro-German policy and the strengthening of German power; others are, at the least, not exclusively German powers, and also contain territories like East Prussia, which, while German, do not belong to the Confederation. Furthermore, a national representation would also require a national government, equipped with the powers of the highest authority of the state, which does not exist in a confederation under international law. The goal of unifying Germany behind a German policy and common leadership and the cultivation of national interests will be sooner achieved when one wins over public opinion to [the goal of] further developing the *Zollverein* into a German Union. Here, one already has an administration, albeit deficient, which could stand by the improvements that it desperately needs, and a representation of notables, who could be picked from the chambers and from other bodies among the [Customs] Union's states. The *Zollverein* already has the management of a number of important common interests in its hands, and it also has treaty relations with foreign states. Here, therefore, lay the seed of a union policy through which

no foreign members would be disturbed, and other and related interests would be tacked onto the trade and commercial relations, e.g. the transportation system of land and water roads, equal taxation, especially for excise duties, trade rules, navy, consulates, trade law and the like. Through this kind of development toward power, the German Union would exercise an irresistible force of attraction for the accession of the remaining German states, finally induce the annexation of the Austrian federal states, and in doing so establish a true German power. This train of thought, which naturally we can only hint at here, but which was reviewed and discussed in detail, ultimately united all the arguments, though with the addendum that, while it would be preferable to work toward developing the Customs Union and a representation of its population in a Customs Congress by notables, no other opportunity should be left unused for strengthening the idea of German unity. It is indisputable that the participation of the people here by way of elected representatives is indispensable, and that the course of development of the century and of Germany make unification by tyranny impossible, so that the only way to achieve this is through and with freedom. Just as, after this agreement, everyone present felt obligated to act in this sense to the best of his abilities and on every occasion, both personally in his public position as well as among friends—in just the same way there emerged a gratifying harmony of convictions with respect to the resolutions that are to be proposed in all the German parliaments, as identically worded as possible, though with attention to the special conditions of the individual states. Liberating the press so that Germans can participate in the unhindered effectiveness of this most powerful of educational means and be liberated from the shame that is so often thrown in their faces from abroad, because they have not yet achieved one of the highest ideals of free nations, one which has long been promised to them; public and oral jury trials, separation of administration from the judiciary, transfer of all branches of the judiciary, of administrative justice, and of police power to the courts, and drawing up practical police penal laws, liberation of the soil and its cultivators from medieval burdens, independence of local government in the administration of their affairs, reduction of expenditures for the standing army, and introduction of a popular militia etc. were all thoroughly reviewed; likewise the constitutional means appropriate for emphasizing the just claims of the people. Mainly, though, the assembly devoted time and attention to the means for combating impoverishment and suffering, as well as the associated question of the tax system. But since such important and sweeping subjects could not be discussed in just a few hours by way of certain proposals, such as those on the management of the system of poor relief and the instructional system, on income tax etc., a commission was nominated from delegates of different states in order to report and make proposals over the next few years concerning the tax system and conditions among the poorer classes, whereby special attention is to be paid to a just distribution of public burdens for bringing relief to the lower middle class and workers.

Source: *Deutsche Zeitung*, Heidelberg, October 15, 1847; reprinted in Ernst Rudolf Huber, ed., *Deutsche Verfassungsdokumente 1803–1850*, vol. 1, *Dokumente zur deutschen Verfassungsgeschichte*, 3rd ed., rev. and enl. Stuttgart: W. Kohlhammer, 1978, pp. 324–26.

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