

# Godesberg Program of the SPD (November 1959)

## Abstract

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After the SPD suffered election defeats by Konrad Adenauer's CDU in 1953 and 1957, there was a growing awareness within the SPD that attracting new strata of voters would have to involve a fundamental reform of the party's goals and program. The economic successes of the 1950s, which derived from a social market economy based on private property, and the emergence of a new middle class made the socialist positions of the SPD seem obsolete. In foreign policy, its demand for reunification on neutral terms could no longer command a majority given the FRG's firm integration into the Western community.

The Godesberg Program of November 1959 represented a fundamental change of course from the "party of the working class to a party of the people" – the SPD no longer stood for socialism of the Marxist variety. Private property and free market principles were acknowledged, and the role of the state was limited to general tasks involving planning and guidance. The program was rounded out by the affirmation of the importance of national defense and socio-political demands, such as co-determination in the workplace, equality for women, and improved educational opportunities.

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Socialists aim to establish a society in which every individual can develop his personality and as a responsible member of the community, take part in the political, economic and cultural life of mankind.

Freedom and justice are interdependent, since the dignity of man rests on his claim to individual responsibility just as much as on his acknowledgement of the right of others to develop their personality and, as equal partners, help shape society.

Freedom, justice and solidarity, which are everyone's obligation towards his neighbours and spring from our common humanity, are the fundamental values of Socialism.

Democratic Socialism, which in Europe is rooted in Christian ethics, humanism and classical philosophy, does not proclaim ultimate truths – not because of any lack of understanding for or indifference to philosophical or religious truths, but out of respect for the individual's choice in these matters of conscience in which neither the state nor any political party should be allowed to interfere.

The Social Democratic Party is the party of freedom of thought. It is a community of men holding different beliefs and ideas. Their agreement is based on the moral principles and political aims they have in common. The Social Democratic Party strives for a way of life in accordance with these principles. Socialism is a constant task – to fight for freedom and justice, to preserve them and to live up to them.

### *Basic Demands for a Society Worthy of Man*

From the acceptance of Democratic Socialism follow certain basic demands which must be fulfilled in a society worthy of man.

All peoples must submit to the rule of international law backed by adequate executive power. War must be ruled out as a means of policy.

All peoples must have equal opportunities to share in the world's wealth. Developing countries have a claim to the help of other peoples.

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We are fighting for democracy. Democracy must become the universal form of state organisation and way of life because it is founded on respect for the dignity of man and his individual responsibility.

We resist every dictatorship, every form of totalitarian or authoritarian rule because they violate human dignity, destroy man's freedom and the rule of law. Socialism can be realised only through democracy and democracy can only be fulfilled through Socialism.

Communists have no right to invoke Socialist traditions. In fact, they have falsified Socialist ideas. Socialists are struggling for the realisation of freedom and justice while Communists exploit the conflicts in society to establish the dictatorship of their party.

In the democratic state, every form of power must be subject to public control. The interest of the individual must be subordinated to the interest of the community. Democracy, social security and individual freedom are endangered by an economic and social system in which striving for profit and power are the distinguishing features. Democratic Socialism therefore aspires after a new economic and social order.

All privileged access to educational institutions must be abolished. Talent and achievement should be the sole criteria of advancement.

Freedom and justice cannot be guaranteed by institutions alone. Technology and organisation are exerting a growing influence on all areas of life. This creates new dependencies which threaten freedom. Only diversity in economic, social and cultural life can stimulate the creative powers of the individual without which man's mind is paralysed.

Freedom and democracy are only thinkable in an industrial society if a constantly growing number of people develop a social consciousness and are ready to help shoulder responsibility. A decisive means to this end is political education in its widest sense. It is an essential objective of all educational efforts in our time.

### *The Order of the State*

The Social Democratic Party of Germany lives and works in the whole of Germany. It stands by the Basic Law of the German Federal Republic. In accordance with the Basic Law it strives for German unity in freedom.

The division of Germany is a threat to peace. To end this division is a vital interest of the German people.

Not until Germany is reunited, will the whole people be able freely to determine the content and form of the state and society.

Man's life, his dignity and his conscience take precedence over the state. Every citizen must respect the convictions of his fellow men. It is the duty of the state to protect freedom of faith and freedom of conscience.

The state should create the conditions in which the individual may freely develop his personality, responsible to himself but conscious of his obligations to society. Established fundamental rights do not only protect the freedom of the individual in relation to the state; they should also be regarded as social rights which constitute the basis of the state.

The social function of the state is to provide social security for its citizens to enable everyone to be responsible for shaping his own life freely and to further the development of a free society.

The state becomes a truly civilised state (*Kulturstaat*) through the fusion of the democratic idea with the

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ideas of social security and the rule of law. It depends for its content on the forces prevalent in society, and its task is to serve the creative spirit of man.

The Social Democratic Party affirms its adherence to democracy. In a democracy the power of the state is derived from the people and the government is always responsible to Parliament whose confidence it must possess. In a democracy the rights of the minority as well as the rights of the majority must be respected; government and opposition have different tasks of equal importance; both share in the responsibility for the state.

The Social Democratic Party aims to win the support of the majority of the people by competing under equal conditions with other democratic parties in order to build a society and a state that accord with the essential demands of democratic Socialism.

Legislature, executive and judiciary should operate separately and it is the duty of each to serve the public interest. The existence of three levels of authority—Federal, State, and Local – ensures the distribution of power, strengthens freedom and through co-determination and co-responsibility gives the citizen manifold access to democratic institutions. Free local communities are vital to a living democracy. The Social Democratic Party therefore supports the principles of local self-government which must be extended and given adequate financial support.

Associations in which people of different groups and sections of the population unite for common ends are necessary institutions of modern society. They must be democratically organised. The more powerful they are, the greater is the responsibility they carry, but the greater also is the danger of their abusing their power. Parliaments, administration and courts must not be allowed to come under the one-sided influence of vested interests.

Press, radio, television and cinema fulfill public tasks. They must be independent and free to gather information wherever they wish, to comment on it and to distribute it, and to form and express their own opinions. Radio and television should remain under the control of public corporations, and be directed by free and democratic boards. They must be safeguarded against pressure from interest groups.

Judges must have outer and inner independence if they are to serve justice in the name of the people. Lay judges should play an equally important part in jurisdiction. Only independent judges can pass judgment on criminal offences. Neither wealth nor poverty should have an influence on people's access to courts or on jurisdiction. Legislation must keep pace with the development of society if justice is to be done and if the people's sense of justice is not to be violated.

#### *National Defence*

The Social Democratic Party affirms the need to defend the free democratic society. It is in favour of national defence.

National defence must be adapted to the political and geographical position of Germany and therefore stay within the limits imposed by the necessity of creating the conditions for an easing of international tensions, for effectively controlled disarmament and for the reunification of Germany. Protection of the civilian population is an essential part of a country's defence.

The Social Democratic Party demands that the means of mass destruction be banned by international law in the whole world.

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#### *The Economy*

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The goal of Social Democratic economic policy is the constant growth of prosperity and a just share for all in the national product, a life in freedom without undignified dependence and without exploitation.

The Second Industrial Revolution makes possible a rise in the general standard of living greater than ever before and the elimination of poverty and misery still suffered by large numbers of people.

Economic policy must secure full employment whilst maintaining a stable currency, increase productivity and raise general prosperity.

To enable all people to take part in the country's growing prosperity there must be planning to adjust the economy to the constant structural changes in order to achieve a balanced economic development.

Such a policy demands national accounting and a national budget. The national budget must be approved by Parliament. It is binding on government policy, provides an important basis for the policies of the autonomous central bank, and establishes guiding lines for the economy which keeps its right to make independent decisions.

The modern state exerts a constant influence on the economy through its policies on taxation, finance, currency and credits, customs, trade, social services, prices and public contracts as well as agriculture and housing. More than a third of the national income passes through the hands of the government. The question is therefore not whether measures of economic planning and control serve a purpose, but rather who should apply these measures and for whose benefit. The state cannot shirk its responsibility for the course the economy takes. It is responsible for securing a forward-looking policy with regard to business cycles and should restrict itself to influencing the economy mainly by indirect means.

Free choice of consumer goods and services, free choice of working place, freedom for employers to exercise their initiative as well as free competition are essential conditions of a Social Democratic economic policy. The autonomy of trade unions and employers' associations in collective bargaining is an important feature of a free society. Totalitarian control of the economy destroys freedom. The Social Democratic Party therefore favours a free market wherever free competition really exists. Where a market is dominated by individuals or groups, however, all manner of steps must be taken to protect freedom in the economic sphere. As much competition as possible – as much planning as necessary.

### *Ownership and Power*

A significant feature of the modern economy is the constantly increasing tendency toward concentration. Large-scale enterprises exert a decisive influence not only on the development of the economy and the standard of living but also on the structure of the economy and of society. Those who control large industrial concerns, huge financial resources and tens of thousands of employees do not merely perform an economic function but wield decisive power over men; wage and salary earners are kept in a position of dependence, and not only in purely economic and material matters.

Wherever large-scale enterprises predominate, free competition is eliminated. Those who have less power have fewer opportunities for development, and remain more or less fettered. The consumer occupies the most vulnerable position of all in the economy.

Increased power through cartels and associations gives the leaders of big business an influence on politics and the state which is irreconcilable with democratic principles. They usurp the authority of the state. Economic power becomes political power.

This development is a challenge to all who consider freedom, justice, human dignity and social security the foundations of human society.

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The key task of an economic policy concerned with freedom is therefore to contain the power of big business. State and society must not be allowed to become the prey of powerful sectional groups.

Private ownership of the means of production can claim protection by society as long as it does not hinder the establishment of social justice. Efficient small and medium sized enterprises are to be strengthened to enable them to prevail in competition with large-scale enterprises.

Competition by public enterprise is an important means of preventing private enterprise from dominating the market. Public enterprise should safeguard the interests of the community as a whole. It becomes a necessity where, for natural or technical reasons, economic functions vital to the community cannot be carried out in a rational way except by excluding competition.

Enterprises which are built up on a voluntary collective basis and whose purpose it is to satisfy demand rather than earn private profits help to regulate prices and serve the interests of the consumer. They perform a valuable function in a democratic society and should be supported.

Large-scale publicity should give the people an insight into the power structure of the economy and into business practices in order that public opinion may be mobilised against abuses of power.

Effective public control must prevent the abuse of economic power. The most important means to this end are investment control and control over the forces dominating the market.

Public ownership is a legitimate form of public control which no modern state can do without. It serves to protect freedom against domination by large economic concerns. In these concerns power is held today by managers who are themselves the servants of anonymous forces. Private ownership of the means of production is therefore no longer identical with the control of power. Economic power, rather than ownership, is the central problem today. Where sound economic power relations cannot be guaranteed by other means, public ownership is appropriate and necessary.

Every concentration of economic power, even in the hands of the state, harbours dangers. This is why the principles of self-government and decentralisation must be applied to the public sector. The interests of wage and salary earners as well as the public interest and the interests of the consumer must be represented on the management boards of public enterprises. Not centralised bureaucracy but responsible co-operation between all concerned serves the interests of the community best.

#### *Distribution of Income and Wealth*

The competition economy does not guarantee by itself just distribution of income and wealth. This can only be achieved through measures of economic policy.

Income and wealth are distributed unjustly. This is not only the result of mass destruction of property through crises, war and inflation but is largely due to an economic and fiscal policy which has favoured large incomes and the accumulation of capital in the hands of a few, and which has made it difficult for those without capital to acquire it.

The Social Democratic Party aims to create conditions in which everybody is able to save part of his rising income and acquire property. This presupposes a constant increase in production and a fair distribution of the national income.

Wage and salary policies are adequate and necessary means of distributing incomes and wealth more justly.

Appropriate measures must ensure that an adequate part of the steadily growing capital of big business

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is widely distributed or made to serve public purposes. It is a deplorable symptom of our times that privileged groups in society indulge in luxury while important public tasks, especially in the fields of science, research and education, are neglected in a way unworthy of a civilised nation.

### *Agriculture*

The principles of Social Democratic economic policy apply also to agriculture. The structure of agriculture, however, and its dependence on uncontrollable forces of nature call for special measures.

The farmer is entitled to own his land. Efficient family holdings should be protected by modern laws on land tenure and leases.

Support of the existing system of co-operatives is the best way of increasing the efficiency of small and medium sized holdings whilst maintaining their independence.

Agriculture must adjust itself to the changing economic structure in order to make its proper contribution to economic development and to assure an adequate standard of living to the people working in it. These changes are determined not only by technical and scientific progress, but also by the changes in the location of the market within the framework of European co-operation and by the fact that the German economy is increasingly linked with that of the rest of the world. The modernisation of agriculture and its efficiency are a public responsibility. The interests of the farming population are best served by the integration of agriculture into an economy with high productivity and an ever more widely distributed mass purchasing power. Price and market policies necessary to protect agricultural incomes should take into account the interests of the consumers and of the economy as a whole.

The cultural, economic, and social condition of the entire farming population must be improved. The lag in social legislation must be overcome.

### *Trade Unions in the Economy*

All wage and salary earners and civil servants have the right to free association in trade unions. They would be helplessly exposed to those in positions of command in enterprises and concerns unless they were able to confront the latter with the united force of their free and democratically organised trade unions and freely to agree on working conditions.

Trade unions fight to secure wage and salary earners a fair share of the country's wealth and the right to a voice in decisions affecting economic and social life.

They fight for greater freedom and act as representatives of all working people. This makes them an important element in the constant process of democratisation. It is the unions' great task to enable every employee to shoulder responsibility and to see to it that he can make use of his abilities.

Wage and salary earners whose contribution to production is decisive have so far been deprived of an effective say in economic life. Democracy, however, demands that workers should be given a voice and that codetermination be extended to all branches of the economy. From being a servant the worker must become a citizen of the economy.

Co-determination in the iron and steel industry and in coal mining marks the beginning of a new economic structure. The next step should be the establishment of a democratic organisational structure in all large enterprises. Co-determination by employees in the independent administrative bodies set up in the economy must be secured.

### *Social Responsibility*

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Social policy must create the essential conditions which allow the individual to unfold himself freely in society and which determine his life according to his own responsibility. Social conditions that lead to individual and social hardship cannot be accepted as inevitable and unchangeable. The system of social security must correspond to the dignity of responsible individuals.

Every citizen has the right to a minimum state pension in case of old age or inability to earn a living, or at the death of the family's provider. This pension is supplemented by other personally acquired pension claims. In this way the individual standard of living will be sustained. Social allowances of all kinds, including pensions for war-disabled and their dependents, must be regularly adjusted to the rise in earned incomes.

Technology and modern civilisation expose people to many dangers to their health. They threaten not only the living generation but future generations as well. The individual is unable to protect himself against these hazards. The Social Democratic Party therefore demands comprehensive health protection. Health policy must be perfected, and the conditions and ways of living must be shaped in a way conducive to making life in sound health possible. Public health protection, especially protection at work and effective methods of preventing damage to health in individuals, must be developed. A sense of personal responsibility in respect of one's health must be aroused and the doctor of one's choice must be given full facilities for the preservation of health and prevention of illness. The professional freedom of decision of doctors must be ensured. The provision of adequately equipped hospitals is a public task.

Since all people should have an equal chance to live, all must have access to the treatment made available through modern technical research when they are in need of it, regardless of their financial position. Such medical treatment must be supplemented by adequate economic assistance in the case of illness.

Working hours should be progressively shortened without prejudice to income levels and in step with the development of the economy.

In order to cope with particularly difficult situations in life and in special cases of need, the general social allowances must be supplemented by individual care and social aid. Social aid should be given in co-operation with independent voluntary welfare organisations and institutions for mutual aid and self-help. The independence of free welfare organisations must be protected.

All labour and social legislation should be ordered and compiled in a surveyable code on labour legislation and a code on social legislation.

Everyone has a right to a decent place in which to live. It is the home of the family. It must therefore continue to receive social protection and must not be the mere object of private gain.

The housing shortage must speedily be eliminated through effective building programmes. Public housing must be encouraged and social considerations must be taken into account when determining rents. Speculation in real estate should be prohibited and excessive gains from the sale of real estate taxed away.

#### *Woman-Family-Youth*

Equality of rights for women should be realised in the legal, economic and social spheres. Women must be given equal opportunities in education and occupational training, in the choice and practice of professions and in earnings. The special psychological and biological characteristics of women should not be disregarded because they have equal rights. The work of the housewife should be recognised as an occupation. The housewife and mother is in need of social assistance. Mothers of children of pre-school age and school-age should not be compelled by economic need to seek gainful employment.

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State and society must protect, support and strengthen the family. By supporting the material security of the family, society recognises its moral value. Effective help should be given to the family by generous tax allowances for parents, and by maternity benefits and family allowances.

Young people must be enabled to manage their own lives and grow up ready to assume their responsibilities towards society. It is therefore the task of state and society to strengthen the educational function of the family, to supplement it where it does not suffice, and, if need be, to provide an alternative. A system of grants and scholarships must ensure that special abilities and aptitudes of young people are fully developed in their vocational and professional training.

The protection of the young workers must be adjusted to present-day social conditions and educational experience. If the young people are entrusted at an early stage with a share in the work and responsibilities of adults, they will become well-informed and determined democrats. Progressive youth legislation should guarantee the young people's right to education and development of their personality. In all areas of life which concern education or the encouragement and protection of youth, the welfare of youth must have priority over all other considerations.

#### *Cultural Life*

The creative powers of the individual must be given a chance to unfold freely in a full and diverse cultural life. The state should encourage and support all forces willing to make a contribution to cultural progress. The state must protect the citizen against all attempts by power groups or sectional interests at making the people's spiritual and cultural life subservient to their own purposes.

#### *Religion and Church*

Only mutual tolerance which respects the dignity of all men regardless of differences in belief and conviction, offers a sound basis for political and human co-operation in society.

Socialism is no substitute for religion. The Social Democratic Party respects churches and religious societies. It affirms their public and legal status, their special mission and their autonomy.

It is always ready to co-operate with the churches on the basis of a free partnership. It welcomes the fact that men are moved by their religious faith to acknowledge their social obligation and their responsibilities towards society.

Freedom of thought, of religion and of conscience, and freedom to preach the gospel must be protected. Any abuse of this freedom for partisan or anti-democratic ends cannot be tolerated.

#### *Education*

Education must give an opportunity to all freely to develop their abilities and capacities. It must strengthen the will to resist the conformist tendencies of our time. Knowledge and the acquisition of traditional cultural values, and a thorough understanding of the formative forces in society, are essential to the development of independent thinking and free judgment.

School and university should bring up youth in a spirit of mutual respect. Youth should be taught to appreciate the values of freedom, independence and social responsibility as well as the ideals of democracy and international understanding. The aim should be to encourage tolerance, mutual understanding and solidarity in our society in which so many philosophical viewpoints and systems of value exist side by side. The curricula of schools should therefore pay proper attention to education for citizenship.



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### *Our Way*

The Socialist movement has an historic task. It began as a spontaneous moral protest of wage earners against the capitalist system. The tremendous development of the productive forces with the help of science and technology brought wealth and power to a small group of people, but only destitution and misery to the workers. To abolish the privileges of the ruling classes and to secure freedom, justice and prosperity for all was and remains the essence of the Socialist aim.

The working class had to rely on its own resources in its struggle. It acquired self-confidence by becoming conscious of its own position and by its determination to change this position by united action and the experience of success in its struggle.

Despite heavy setbacks and some errors the Labour movement succeeded in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries in winning recognition for many of its demands. The proletarian who was once without protection and rights, who had to work sixteen hours a day for a starvation wage, achieved the eight-hour day, protection at work, insurance against unemployment, sickness, disability and destitution in old age. He achieved the prohibition of child labour and night work for women, the legal protection of youth and mothers, and holidays with pay. He successfully fought for the right to assemble and to form trade unions, the right to collective bargaining and to strike. He is about to obtain the right to co-determination. Once a mere object of exploitation, the worker now occupies the position of a citizen in the state with equal rights and obligations.

In several countries of Europe the foundations of a new society have been laid under Social Democratic governments. Social security and the democratisation of the economy are being realised to an increasing extent.

These successes represent milestones on the march forward of the Labour movement which has demanded so many sacrifices. The emancipation of the workers helped to enlarge the freedom of all men. From a party of the working class the Social Democratic Party has become a party of the people. It is determined to put the forces unleashed by the industrial revolution and the advance of technology in all spheres of life to the service of freedom and justice for all. The social forces which built the capitalist world cannot tackle this task. Their historical record is one of impressive technical and economic advance, but also of destructive wars, mass unemployment, inflation which robbed people of their savings, and economic insecurity. The old forces are unable to oppose the brutal Communist challenge with a better programme for a new society, in which individual and political freedom is enhanced, and economic security and social justice guaranteed. This is why they cannot satisfy the claims for assistance and solidarity from the young states which are about to throw off the yoke of colonial exploitation, to shape their destinies in freedom and to insist on participation in the world's wealth. These states are resisting the lure of Communism which is trying to draw them into its sphere of influence.

Communists are radical suppressors of freedom and violators of human rights and of the self-determination of individuals and peoples. The people in the countries under Communist domination are increasingly opposing the Communist regime. Even in those countries changes are taking place. Even there, the longing for freedom is growing which no system can wholly suppress in the long run. But the Communist rulers are fighting for their own survival. They are building up military and economic power for which their peoples have to pay the price and which represents an increasing threat to freedom.

Only the prospect of a society based on the fundamental values of democratic Socialism can offer the world new hope, a society resting on respect for human dignity, on freedom from want and fear, from war and oppression, which is built in co-operation with all men of good will.

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This message is addressed to all men and women in this country as well as in other parts of the world.

In Germany Socialists are united in the Social Democratic Party which welcomes to its ranks all who accept the fundamental values and demands of Democratic Socialism.

Source: *Basic Programme of the Social Democratic Party of Germany*. Bonn: the Social Democratic Party of Germany, 1959, p. 5-17, 20-22; reprinted in Jan Goldstein and John W. Boyer, eds, *University of Chicago, Readings in Western Civilization*, vol. 9, *Twentieth-Century Europe*, Chicago, London: University of Chicago Press, 1987, pp. 419-25.

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