

Political Principles of the Social Democratic Party (May 1946)

Abstract

Issued a few weeks after the merger of the SPD and the KPD in the Soviet occupation zone, the political principles of the SPD from May 1946 reflect the anti-Communist stance of Kurt Schumacher, the leading SPD politician in the western zones. Like the party's founding appeal, which had been published nearly a year earlier, the 1946 principles advocated a Socialist economic system with far-reaching state guidance and control. They also called for the nationalization of mineral resources and key industries. At the same time, however, these principles also emphasized the unity of socialism and democracy and sharply rejected "totalitarian thinking and behavior," and in this way took clear aim at developments in East Germany. The SPD's concluding declaration of support for German unification and European integration further underscored its position.

Source

I.

In the period between the two World Wars, the forces of high capitalism and reaction attempted everywhere to escape the socialist consequences of democracy. They were able to succeed in Germany because of the country's economic, historical, and intellectual circumstances.

In the Third Reich, the destruction of the political power of the working class threw democracy off course, and the lack of democratic decision-making and control served as the critical precondition for the European catastrophe. The failure of the German bourgeoisie and of that segment of the workers' movement that did not recognize the value of democracy to class politics constitutes the guilt of the German people.

The Third Reich fomented conflict among nations with the very same methods it had used to violently suppress class conflicts within the country. The inevitable result of the dictatorship was war, which led to total military and political collapse and to the destruction of the existing foundations of economic, political, and cultural life. These foundations have thus been rendered useless for the construction of a new Germany. In economic terms, what was once an immense concentration of vast production capacities has given way to paralysis, to dissolution. Conditions have emerged under which no class, no people, no form of economy can exist.

The German people are isolated in the world and must bear the consequences of the National Socialist war of conquest and of the war crimes committed against the oppressed peoples.

In light of all this, the Social Democratic Party sees its mission as bringing all of Germany's democratic forces together under the banner of socialism. It is not only political power relations that must be changed but their economic foundations as well. Only a complete transformation can give the German people economic and social opportunities and guarantee peace and freedom.

Socialism and Self-Administration

Present-day Germany is no longer in a position to endure a private-capitalistic economy geared toward profit, and it can no longer afford to pay profits based on exploitation, capital dividends, or economic

rents. Existing ownership structures no longer reflect either social conditions or social needs. They have become the greatest obstacle to recovery and progress.

The needs of all people must be met by the existing large-scale private ownership of the means of production and the potential aggregate output of the German national economy. A just social order must replace current conditions, under which the great majority has lost everything and a minority has grown wealthier.

Social Democracy seeks a socialist economy based on planned direction and collective decision making. The collective good must be the only decisive factor in determining the scope, direction, and distribution of production. An increase in the means of production and the output of consumer goods is the precondition for the necessary integration of Germany into the web of international economic relations.

The means of production can be nationalized in different ways and in different forms. In socialism, there is no single way, no bondage, no dictated “barracks socialism,” no uniformity. There is no socialist society without the most diverse types of enterprises and forms of production. Socialism calls for as much economic self-administration as possible, with the most vigorous participation of workers and consumers.

II. The immediate measures

Nationalization must begin with natural resources and basic industries. All enterprises involved in mining and the production and processing of iron and steel – including the manufacture of semi-finished products – must be nationalized, along with the better part of the chemical and synthetic industries, all large enterprises in general, all types of public utilities, and all segments of the manufacturing industry that are pushing to become large-scale enterprises.

A cooperative philosophy must be encouraged; enterprises in the crafts sector, commerce, and agriculture must work together on common operational tasks, and consumer cooperatives must be given the broadest support.

Socialist planning encompasses all means of transportation, the insurance system, and the supply of money and loans, which must be organized anew.

Agrarian and Land Reform

Fundamental agrarian and land reform, including the expropriation of large landholders, must be introduced immediately. Ownership and management of large land holdings must be transferred to individuals, as part of farms, small plots or settlements, or they must be transferred to cooperative farms under joint ownership. They must not be broken up in a manner that jeopardizes their efficiency. This is the precondition for social justice in the countryside, for finally providing more people with housing, for finding an initial solution to ending the hardship of our refugees, for promoting production, and for increasing food supplies for the German people.

Small and medium-sized enterprises in agriculture, commerce, industry, and the crafts sector will have to perform important tasks in the economic order sought by the Social Democrats, and they should evolve within this framework.

The German housing sector must be placed under the strictest public control. It must be financed by all of society and not only by the communities that suffered destruction. Housing procurement is among the most urgent of tasks. In a period of housing shortages, providing sufficient accommodations for all is the top priority, not the comfort of a few.

Equalization of Burdens – Financial Reform

The equalization of burdens requires fundamental, all-encompassing financial and monetary reform. A minimum level of subsistence must be guaranteed, and mass consumption must be sustained. Burdens must be shared between the haves and the have-nots in order to create a society without privileged or disadvantaged groups.

With its economic policy, German Social Democracy strives for the economic liberation of the individual. For this reason, it views socialism as the program of workers, of employees and civil servants, of those in intellectual professions and of the middle class, of farmers, and of all people who live by the fruit of their own labor and not by the means of capitalist exploitation.

Only when all forms of exploitation have been overcome will people enjoy their full rights and be able to develop personal values.

III. “Only one Democracy”

German Social Democracy sees its political mission as making the masses aware of the revolutionary changes in social life that are both necessary and inevitable. Their goal is to win the majority of the population over to socialism.

The only path to this goal is a strong democracy that is ready to fight. There is only one kind of democracy. There is no such thing as a bourgeois or a proletarian democracy, just as there is no such thing, for present-day Social Democracy, as a reformist or a revolutionary socialism. Every form of socialism is revolutionary if it pushes forward and helps reshape society.

Democracy is the best form of the political struggle for all workers. For us socialists, it is a necessity, both in terms of morals and power-politics. Social Democracy wants people to participate voluntarily and on the basis of personal conviction, yet it also wants its followers to have the right to voice criticism.

There can be no socialism without democracy, without freedom of thought, and without the freedom to criticize. By the same token, there can be no socialism without humanity and respect for the human individual.

Just as democracy is a prerequisite for socialism, so, too, is it constantly under threat in a capitalist system. German democracy needs socialism because of Germany’s special historical conditions and because of the special nature of German intellectual development. German democracy must be socialist; otherwise counter-revolutionary forces will destroy it once again.

Freedom and Socialism

The character of German Social Democracy lies in its uncompromising commitment to freedom and socialism. The Social Democratic Party of Germany is proud that it was the only German party that stood up for the ideals of democracy, peace, and freedom, at great sacrifice. It is also the party of democracy and socialism in Germany today.

German Social Democracy firmly rejects any return to totalitarian thinking and behavior. In accordance with this basic stance, it will pursue a policy of independence and autonomy vis-à-vis all forces at home and abroad, and it will regulate its relationship with other parties.

Social Democracy is not content with the historical legitimacy it has acquired through the grand history of its struggle for freedom. It intends to continue demonstrating its claim to being a leading force in German politics through its outstanding achievements for the state and the people, and through its honest, upstanding, and practical policies.

IV. Current Demands

In the area of state and administrative policy, Social Democracy strives for a democracy that is borne by the joint participation and joint responsibility of all citizens. It wants a republic characterized by extensive decentralization and self-government.

The German republic of the future shall be made up of federal states that do not see their own existence as their highest purpose but regard themselves as building blocks of a larger national order. The bearer of state power shall be the German people as a whole.

None of the current federal states and provinces should regard its existence and boundaries as guaranteed. There is no sufficient historical legitimacy that overrides present exigencies.

Administrative Reform

The administration must be reformed from the bottom up, and lower-level pillars of communal life must be given as much authority as possible. The people, represented by their parties, will determine the tasks and goals of the administration. All employees and civil servants working for public bodies must be protected by a uniform employment law and through the preservation of their rights as citizens.

All citizens are eligible for public office, irrespective of origin, faith, race, or gender, in keeping with the law and in accordance with their qualifications and accomplishments.

All citizens must be equal before the law. No one may be denied access to his statutory judge. Special courts are prohibited.

Church, State, and Culture

Freedom of belief and conscience for all; separation of church and state. This will give the churches – and all communities that share a single worldview – the opportunity to achieve their particular objectives in freedom. No one will be obligated to disclose his religious convictions.

Art, science, and their teachings shall be free in order to rebuild our destroyed cultural and intellectual life. Through the achievements of art and science, the German people will regain the trust and respect of the world.

The general school system must be public. Schools shall be rid of totalitarian and intolerant views and shall educate young people in the spirit of humanity, democracy, social responsibility, and international understanding. Educational opportunities must be open to all Germans solely on the basis of their ability and without regard to faith, class, or ownership of property.

Freedom of opinion and freedom of criticism must find expression in freedom of the press.

Labor Law – Social Welfare

A uniform labor law must be created. Every citizen shall be given the opportunity to earn a living through work. If it cannot be proven that an appropriate job is available to him, then he is entitled to support. Everyone will be given the same opportunity to choose a profession and to participate in occupational training. Everyone has the right and the duty to earn a living through work.

In order to protect and promote working and economic conditions, freedom of association must be guaranteed for all people and professions. Works councils with extensive rights will be set up in enterprises to represent the interests of workers.

The welfare and health care system is a public matter. In order to maintain health, protect motherhood, and provide for the economic consequences of accidents and old age, a uniform social insurance system shall be created, and the insured parties must be allowed an active role in organizing it. Ensuring the welfare of young people is a public task. The victims of war and the [Nazi] dictatorship are entitled to adequate support.

V. German Unification

German Social Democracy acknowledges our obligation to make reparations within the framework of what is economically feasible for the German people. It supports the punishment of the guilty parties and war criminals.

Social Democracy strives to integrate the new Germany into the new international organization of nations. Germany needs the economic, social, and political support of democratic nations.

Allied Policy

The new Germany suffers not only from the legacy of the Third Reich, but also from the fact that the occupying powers have no common policy toward Germany. German Social Democracy awaits the day when a resolution of the problems in Germany and the world will allow the occupying powers to implement a consistent policy toward Germany and end the policy of occupation zones.

The policy of economic ruination, human enslavement, and mass extermination – the policy pursued by the National Socialist dictatorship – must have no place in the age of democracy.

Just as democracy is not secure without the economic liberation of the individual, it is likewise impossible without the national freedom of the people. German Social Democracy strives to preserve Germany as a national, economic, and governmental unity. Only when Germany is preserved as a whole will its youth, in particular, come to see the ideals of peace, democracy, and socialism not only as the result of the collapse of the Third Reich, but as a desirable higher necessity. Only then will Social Democracy be able to lead a successful fight against any type of re-emergent nationalism.

The Internationalization of Europe

Like socialists in all countries, German Social Democrats advocate national independence, but they are aware that the days when individual states enjoyed unrestricted sovereignty have since passed. Not parts of Germany, but all of Europe must be internationalized.

The goal of German Social Democracy is a United States of Europe – a democratic and socialist confederation of European states. It wants a socialist Germany in a socialist Europe. This is the only way for Europe to achieve solidarity with the peoples of all continents.

Together with socialists in all countries, Social Democrats are waging a battle against all forms of exploitation, imperialism, fascism, reaction, and hegemonic nationalism. Social Democracy is a great history-making force that can secure peace and freedom for all peoples.

Immediate Action

Socialism is no longer a distant goal. It is the task of the day. German Social Democracy calls for an immediate socialist initiative to tackle all the practical problems in the state and the economy.

German Social Democracy is conscious of the magnitude of its tasks. It wants to be nothing more than a party among other parties, but it intends to distinguish itself through the correctness of its insights, the clarity of its policies, and the effectiveness of its measures. Its confidence that its policies will be

successfully implemented derives from the fact that today the class interests of German workers are aligned with the necessities of the entire German nation and reflect the understanding and determination of all progressive and liberal-minded people all over the world.

Source: Political Principles of the Social Democratic Party (May 1946); reprinted in Theo Stammen, ed., *Einigkeit und Recht und Freiheit: westdeutsche Innenpolitik 1945-1955*. Munich, 1965, pp. 120-26.

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