

Programmatic Guidelines for the Free Democratic Party (February 4, 1946)

Abstract

The revival of political liberalism, which had largely collapsed during the final phase of the Weimar Republic, made itself felt in Germany after 1945, rounding out a party spectrum that also included the KPD and the SPD (the two workers' parties), and the CDU (a bourgeois omnibus party [*Sammlungspartei*]). On February 4, 1946, the Free Democratic Party (FDP) of the British zone issued a set of guidelines that ran counter to the contemporary trend toward economic planning. The guidelines emphasized the value of private property and personal initiative to the economy and advocated a federal political system as well as the direct election of parliamentary delegates.

Source

1. Amidst the misery brought on by the coercive imperialistic state, the German people must not lose faith in itself. Firmly confident that the democratic idea, as in all parts of the world, will determine the future of nations in the heart of Europe, the Free Democratic Party is working towards the revival of a German Reich.

The new Reich, in organic reorganization as a whole, shall constitute a state. This state must be built on the broadest possible foundation from the bottom up. From the communities at the bottom, through the districts above them, to the federal states at the top, all must regulate their own affairs as free, independent, and self-governing bodies. The Reich will determine the limits of this autonomy, and it alone will conduct and determine policy.

2. The new Reich of the German people shall be integrated into the emergent organization of humanity as quickly as possible. A United States of Europe shall provide the firmest foundation for a United States of the World.

3. Internally, the Reich, as a state of the German people, shall be a true people's state, one that opposes any form of dictatorship and no longer tolerates any vestige of the old authoritarian state. Complete legal security shall protect the freedom of all citizens. There shall be only one law in Germany, an equal law for all, without consideration of person, social class, religion, race, or gender.

Naturally, equality of the law must also apply to elections at the community, district, state, or national level. The election procedure must allow voters to elect candidates directly. Replacing proportional representation and the party list system, both of which have a fragmenting effect, direct elections shall create stable, clear majority relations in parliament by means of majority decision, thereby ensuring strong political state leadership.

4. The rights of a free citizen include, not least, the right to an effective, coherent social policy, one that, by means of a socially just distribution of wealth, safeguards the human right to work, protects the old, the weak, and the sick and, in particular, provides adequate and dignified support for war widows, orphans, and invalids. The unions shall be transformed into responsible state organizations that ensure the protection of labor. The goal of this social policy is to prevent material want, to preserve human dignity and personal freedom, and to secure social harmony.

5. Like the state, the economy must serve the people and never be viewed as an end in itself. Therefore,

in accordance with the needs of the broad masses, the foremost goal of economic policy is to increase production in all sectors to satisfy the vital needs of a growing population living in a constricted space. This goal can only be achieved by reintroducing free enterprise and reducing economic bureaucracy. Thus, the planning and guidance that is crucial to overcoming this dire situation must not be bureaucratic; rather, it must manifest itself as the democratic self-management of the economy by its bodies under the controlling influence of the state. The planned economy must not become an end in itself that suffocates all life and free labor under state coercion.

Personal initiative and free competition enhance economic performance, and personal property is an essential foundation of a healthy economy.

On the other hand, the freedom of the economy must not be socially abused, and it must not lead to the predominance of the excessively powerful. We must ensure that the little people have the right and the opportunity to hold their own alongside the bigwigs, just as we must protect the rights of workers who are not self-employed, but who spend their lives employed by companies both large and small.

It is both the task and the obligation of the economy to satisfy the needs of the masses. To achieve this goal, the economy must be integrated into the global economy with an international division of labor.

6. What is true of the economy in general is even truer of agriculture in particular. The primary task of agricultural policy is to increase agricultural production. When and where the right to land ownership inhibits productivity instead of enhancing it, it is the task of a well-considered policy to ensure that this right also includes the obligation to actually utilize the land so as to achieve the highest possible level of production. Only this type of policy – and not arbitrary divestitures or expropriation – amounts to true land reform. The proven capability of German farmers, who are deeply rooted to the land, is the best guarantee of proper land use. A democratic agrarian policy must therefore be based on the preservation and promotion of the free class of farmers.

Source: Programmatic Guidelines for the Free Democratic Party (February 4, 1946); reprinted in Theo Stammen, ed., *Einigkeit und Recht und Freiheit: westdeutsche Innenpolitik 1945-1955*. Munich, 1965, pp. 108-09.

Translation: Thomas Dunlap

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