

Edict on Instituting a Popular Representative Body, issued by Frederick William III and State Chancellor Hardenberg (May 22, 1815)

Abstract

This brief but influential proclamation, issued during the Congress of Vienna, promised “the Prussian nation” a central assembly of representatives [*Landes-Repräsentanten*], drawn from the provincial estates [*Provinzialstände*]. But, in the face of conservative, anti-parliamentary opinion, it avoided specifying the new institution’s powers or explaining the criteria for election to it. As the post-1815 reaction deepened, this promise failed to attain realization before the Revolution of 1848 introduced parliamentarism in Prussia along new lines.

Source

We, Frederick William, by the Grace of God, King of Prussia, &c.

By our decree of the 30th of last month, we have ordained a regular administration for our monarchy, taking into consideration at the same time the former relations of the provinces.

The history of the Prussian States shows, indeed, that the happy state of civil liberty, and the duration of a just administration founded upon order, has hitherto found in the character of the Sovereigns, and in their union with their people, all that security which the imperfection and uncertainty of all human institutions would allow.

In order, however, that these advantages may be built on a still firmer basis, and that we may give to the Prussian nation a pledge of our confidence, and to posterity an authentic document of the principles upon which our ancestors and ourself have conducted the government of our kingdom with constant regard to the happiness of our subjects; and that those principles may be durably recorded by a written document, as the Constitution of the Prussian Monarchy, we have resolved as follows:

1st. A Representation of the people shall be formed.

2nd. For this end,

(a) The Provincial Assemblies where they still exist with more or less influence, are to be reestablished and modelled according to the exigencies of the times.

(b) Where there are at present no Provincial Assemblies they are to be introduced.

3rd. From the Provincial Assemblies, the Assembly of the Representatives of the Kingdom is to be chosen which will sit at Berlin.

4. The functions of the National Representatives extend to the deliberation upon all the objects of legislation which concern the personal rights of the citizens and their property, including taxation.

5. A Committee is to be formed at Berlin without delay, which is to consist of experienced Officers of State, and inhabitants of the provinces.

6. This committee shall employ itself.

(a) On the organization of the Provincial Assemblies.

(b) The organization of the National Representation.

(c) On the framing of a Constitution according to the principles laid down.

7. It shall meet on the 1st of September this year.

8. Our Chancellor is charged with the execution of this decree, and is to lay before us the labours of the Committee.

He names the members of it, and presides at its meetings, but is authorized, in case of need, to name a Deputy in his room.

Source of English translation: Edmund Burke, ed., *The Annual Register, or a View of the History Politics, and Literature, For the Year 1815*. London: Baldwin, Cradock, and Joy, 1824, pp. 387–88.

Source of original German text: *Gesetz-Sammlung für die Königlichen Preußischen Staaten 1815*. Berlin: Georg Decker, 1815, p. 103; reprinted in Walter Demel and Uwe Puschner, eds. *Von der Französischen Revolution bis zum Wiener Kongreß 1789-1815*, *Deutsche Geschichte in Quellen und Darstellung*, ed. Rainer A. Müller, volume 6. Stuttgart: P. Reclam, 1995, pp. 125–26.

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