

Action Program of the Independent Social Democratic Party (1919)

Abstract

A more radical organization than its political cousin, the Independent Social Democratic Party of Germany (USPD) emerged after a left-leaning segment of the Social Democratic Party of Germany (SPD) split away in 1917. The USPD sought a middle course between Marxist revisionism and Soviet-style bolshevism. The USPD rose to over 120,000 members during the spring of 1918. After the November Revolution began in 1918, the USPD reached a settlement with the SPD and formally joined the Council of People's Representatives, its delegates constituting half of the revolutionary government. The coalition, however, did not last long. In December 1918, the USPD resigned from the Council in protest over the SPD's response to military mutiny in Berlin. Concurrently, the *Spartakusbund*, led by Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht, separated from the USPD and merged with other radical groups to form the Communist Party of Germany (KPD). After the first national assembly elections in January 1919, the USPD earned 7.6% of the votes. By 1922 much of the right-wing of the USPD had returned to the SPD, while a substantial segment joined the KPD. The USPD survived as a small splinter party of the Left until 1931.

Source

Leipzig, December 5, 1919

[...]

The proletarian revolution is divided into two great epochs: the struggle for winning political power and the assertion of power during the transitional phase from capitalism to socialism.

The liberation of the working class can only be achieved by the working class because all other classes, despite their conflicting interests, are based on the private ownership of the means of production and have the common goal of maintaining the foundations of capitalist society.

The interests of the working class are the same in all countries. [...] The liberation of the working class thus requires workers throughout the world to unite and engage in a common struggle. [...]

The winning of political power by the proletariat is the prelude to the liberation of the working class. In order to fight this battle, the working class needs the Independent Social Democratic movement, which wholeheartedly supports revolutionary socialism; the trade unions, which are committed to genuine class struggle and must be reorganized as combat organizations of the social revolution; and the system of revolutionary councils, which unites workers for revolutionary action.

The foundation of the Independent Social Democratic Party is the system of revolutionary councils. The party supports all efforts to expand the council system—even before the winning of political power—into a proletarian organization engaged in the struggle for socialism; to integrate all people who do physical and intellectual work; and to school them for the dictatorship of the proletariat.

[...]

In order to overcome capitalism and create a socialist society, the following measures must be taken:

1. The disbanding of the counterrevolutionary mercenary army; the disbanding of all militarily organized civil and police forces, the citizens' militias in cities and the countryside, the Technical Emergency Service [*Technische Nothilfe*] and police troops; the disarmament of the bourgeoisie and landowners; the establishment of a revolutionary militia.

2. Transfer of all privately owned means of production to public ownership.

[...]

3. Large land holdings and large forests must be immediately transferred to public ownership.

[...]

4. In cities and predominantly industrial communities, privately owned property must be transferred to community ownership. Sufficient housing must be provided by the local authorities.

5. Systematic regulation of the system of food distribution.

6. Collectivization of the entire public healthcare system.

7. Collectivization of all public schools and educational institutions. [...]

8. Designation of religion as a private matter. Complete separation of church and state. [...]

10. Abolition of all laws discriminating against women in public and private legal relationships.

11. Introduction of a monopoly under public law for the advertising sector, with responsibility transferred to local government associations.

12. Reorganization of the entire system of public law according to socialist principles.

[...]

14. Establishment of friendly relations with all nations. Immediate initiation of alliances with socialist republics.

The dictatorship of the proletariat is a revolutionary instrument for eliminating all classes, abolishing class rule and achieving a socialist democracy. Once a socialist society has been secured, the dictatorship of the proletariat will end and socialist democracy will develop its full potential.

[...]

The historical task of the Independent Social Democratic Party is to provide substance, direction and objectives for the workers' movement, to lead and serve as a standard bearer for the revolutionary proletariat in its struggle for socialism. The Independent Social Democratic Party is convinced that by bringing together the proletarian masses it will accelerate and ensure the complete and enduring victory of the proletariat. To this end, the Independent Social Democratic Party is also striving to establish an international revolutionary movement of workers from all countries that is capable of action. Its commitment in word and deed to the principles and demands of this program is the precondition for the unification of the working class. It is only through the proletarian revolution that capitalism can be overcome, socialism can be established and the liberation of the working class can be made a reality.

[...]

Source of original German text: “Aktionsprogramm der Unabhängigen Sozialdemokratischen Partei,” (1919), in *Deutsche Parteiprogramme 1861–1954*, ed. Dr Wolfgang Treue, vol. 3 of *Quellensammlung zur Kulturgeschichte* (Göttingen, Frankfurt, Berlin: Musterschmidt Wissenschaftlicher Verlag, 1955), 94–97.

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