

Platform of the Social Democratic Party (1921)

Abstract

At the advent of the Weimar Republic, the Social Democratic Party of Germany [Sozialdemokratische Partei, or SPD] was Germany's largest political party. Formally Marxist, the party had been riven by divisions between reformists and radicals since the turn of the century. Supported primarily by working-class men and women whose voices had been underrepresented in Wilhelmine Germany, it was the largest and most influential member of the "Weimar Coalition," the first government formed under the Weimar Republic. The SPD advocated a united struggle against class privilege and prerogative and called for equal rights and obligations for all, regardless of sex or race. Further, the SPD appealed for the transformation of capitalism into socialism. The SPD's class-oriented rhetoric limited its political appeal nationally. Its message failed to resonate with Germans beyond the working class, and many Germans believed that the Social Democrats had been responsible for the "stab in the back" that supposedly led to Germany's defeat in World War I. Though the SPD tried to underscore its commitment to democracy and republicanism, German conservatives often intentionally conflated Social Democracy with the revolutionary Marxism of the Communist Party of Germany [Kommunistische Partei Deutschlands, or KPD] and the Independent Social Democratic Party of Germany [Unabhängige Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands, or USPD], conjuring up images of a Bolshevik terror in Germany. The party platform of the Social Democratic Party was first presented in Görlitz on September 21, 1921.

Source

Görlitz, September 23, 1921

"The Social Democratic Party of Germany is the party of the working class in the cities and countryside. It aims to bring together all people who do physical and intellectual work and who depend on the fruits of their labor in order to promote shared knowledge, the attainment of common goals and the establishment of a community to fight for democracy and socialism.

The capitalist economy has placed a significant proportion of the production facilities that have been rapidly developed by modern technology under the control of a relatively small number of large factory owners. It has separated vast numbers of workers from these means of production and transformed them into a non-propertied proletarian class. It has increased economic inequality and set a small affluent minority in opposition to broad segments of society that waste away in destitution and misery. It has made the class struggle for the liberation of the proletariat a historical necessity and a moral demand.

[...]

However, the Social Democratic Party must not restrict itself to defending the republic from the attacks of its enemies. It must also fight to ensure that the economy is controlled by the will of the people formed in a free democratic state, and to renew society in the spirit of a socialist community.

[...]

It is not fighting for new class privileges and rights, but for the abolition of class rule and the classes as such. It is fighting for equal rights and duties for all people, regardless of gender or descent. It is doing battle fully aware of the fact that this fight will decide the fate of mankind at the national and

international level, in the nation, state and local community, in unions and cooperatives, in the workshop and at home.

The following demands apply:

Economic policy. An end to the capitalist exploitation of land, natural resources, and natural sources of energy; utilization of these resources for the national community. Legal measures to stop the extensification of agricultural land and the practice of not using agricultural land or of using it wastefully for private luxury. National control over the capitalist ownership of the means of production, above all over syndicates, cartels and trusts. [...] The organization of the economic council system as a system that represents the social and economic interests of workers, employees, and civil servants.

Social policy. Uniform labor legislation. Guarantee of the right to organize. Effective protection of workers' rights: a statutory work day lasting a maximum of eight hours [...] a ban on night work for women and young people. [...] An uninterrupted period of rest lasting at least forty-two hours per week. Annual leave with continued payment of wages. [...] The transformation of social insurance into a general national welfare system. The promotion of international workers' rights on the basis of these achievements.

The general right of women to work.

A well-planned population policy adapted to the social needs of the working class. Special provisions for families with many children.

[...]

Constitution and administration. Measures to secure the democratic republic and strengthen the unity of the Reich. Expansion of the Reich to form an organically structured unitary state. [...] Superior status of the democratic parliament in relation to occupational organizations. Democratization of all state institutions. Full constitutional and factual equality for all citizens of Germany older than twenty, regardless of gender, descent or religion.

[...]

Religion is a private matter, a matter of inner conviction, not a party or state matter: separation of church and state.

[...]

International relations and international socialism. The international unity of the working class based on democracy as a guarantor of peace

A League of Nations that does not exclude any nation that recognizes its statutes and in which the parliaments of all countries are represented by delegates according to party strength. The expansion of the League of Nations into a true working community of shared culture and law. [...]

International disarmament guaranteed by the League of Nations, reduction of the armed forces in all states to the level required for both the domestic security of these states and the enforcement of international obligations through the joint action of the League of Nations. Assignment of all colonies and protectorates under the supreme authority of the League of Nations [...]. Revision of the Peace Treaty of Versailles to achieve economic relief and recognition of national rights of existence.”

Source of original German text: “Programm der Sozialdemokratischen Partei (1921),” in *Deutsche Parteiprogramme 1861-1954*, edited by Dr. Wolfgang Treue, *Quellensammlung zur Kulturgeschichte*, vol. 3 (Göttingen, Frankfurt, Berlin: Musterschmidt Wissenschaftlicher Verlag, 1955), 97–102.

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