

# The Mobilization of the Countryside: Program of the Agrarian League [*Bund der Landwirte*] (1912 version)

## Abstract

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The Agrarian League's political program is characterized by a combination of narrow interests and lofty rhetoric concerning the general welfare. The League promoted protectionist agricultural policies, which remained a vital point of contention between liberals (who generally opposed protectionism) and conservative landowners (who generally supported it) throughout the Wilhelmine period.

## Source

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The Agrarian League strives for the preservation and strengthening of our current political system on a Christian-monarchical foundation. It takes the principled stance that the interests of all national, productive labor [should] be given just and equal consideration. It fights against the exploitative system of international big capital, as well as against biased, unfair favoritism toward big capital in general.

In accordance with experiences drawn from the economic life of all peoples, the League fundamentally believes that a normal development of the national economy – one that is beneficial to both producers and consumers – cannot tolerate large and sudden fluctuations in the price of the chief agricultural commodities that are necessary to feed the people; that, instead, only a slow but steady rise in price over longer periods of time offers material expression of the progressive culture of a nation. The League simultaneously regards the shaping of the conditions of the national economy in this way as a precondition for the healthy development of the trades, industry, and commerce.

Accordingly, the most immediate goals of the Agrarian League are:

1. It aims at legal rules that, in the equal interest of producers and consumers, are suitable for bringing about a permanent, moderate commodity price formation in line with production costs.

With respect to trade policy, the Agrarian League therefore expects that the deputies elected with its support will: a) reject any further trade agreement that contains a relaxation of agrarian customs tariffs vis-à-vis the tariff agreements that have now been concluded or [contains] other relief and encouragement for the importation of agricultural products, b) support the introduction of an effective duty on milk and cream in the German General and Treaty Customs Tariff [*General- und Vertragszolltarif*].

The Agrarian League also demands:

2. Prevention of any weakening of the existing stock market laws and the further systematic expansion of extensive reform legislation in the area of the commodity and stock exchange. An expedient arrangement of credit for agriculture, trade, and the self-employed middle class<sup>[1]</sup> [*Mittelstand*].
3. Effective protection of our animal husbandry against epidemics from abroad. Regulations for the gradual implementation of the recovery of our domestic animal stocks with sufficient state support. Supplementation of the meat inspection law with a prohibition against the import of prepared meat, as well as tougher controls on the import of lard and bacon.
4. Legal measures to protect genuine production from adulteration and unfair competition from the surrogate industry; protection against the adulteration of fertilizers and commercial feed.

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5. Simplification of the administration of workers' insurance.<sup>[2]</sup> Change in the old age and disability law with respect to *Klebezwang*<sup>[3]</sup> and an appropriate distribution of the burdens. Further, appropriate expansion of the circle of those insured to members of the middle class in agriculture, commerce, and small trade.

6. Suitable consideration of the particular nature of subsidiary agricultural trades in legislation in order to preserve them as such for the agricultural enterprises, to keep them from being disconnected from agriculture and from being unilaterally exploited by big capital.

7. Appropriate consideration for agricultural interests in the construction and running of public transportation installations. Traffic parity between agriculture and industry, elimination of customs and traffic preferences for foreign products.

8. Compilation and suitable arrangement of all legal provisions touching on agriculture into a separate Agrarian Law, which reflects the nature of the rural property in line with German-legal notions.

9. Promotion of and careful consideration for the interests of the middle class in a manner that is closely linked with the well-being of agriculture, namely the artisan class and the local, respectable merchants; a corresponding consideration for and promotion of the interests of salaried municipal, state, and Reich civil servants, in order to preserve for everyone the many individual middle-class lives that exist among them. The guideline for this must be the demands that have been raised by the representatives of these groups.

## NOTES

[1] A note on the translation: although *Mittelstand* can be translated approximately as “middle class,” the term also has certain ideological connotations – namely positive ones – and is thus more than a strictly economic designation.

[2] Whenever the agrarians said, “Simplification of the administration of workers' insurance,” [“Vereinfachung der Verwaltung”], what they really meant is cutting payments and services and reducing costs for employers; some even meant abolishing workers' insurance altogether. [Please note: this information has been graciously provided by Prof. Dr. Hans-Jürgen Puhle (Johann Wolfgang Goethe-Universität, Frankfurt am Main). For a detailed analysis of the Agrarian League within the context of Wilhelmine politics, please see his book, *Agrarische Interessenpolitik und preussischer Konservatismus im wilhelminischen Reich (1893–1914). Ein Beitrag zur Analyse des Nationalismus in Deutschland am Beispiel des Bundes der Landwirte und der Deutsch-Konservativen Partei*. Hannover: Verlag für Literatur u. Zeitgeschehen, 1967, c1966.]

[3] *Klebezwang* (literally: being forced to paste), refers to the obligation (under the Alters- und Invaliditätsgesetz) to buy stamps for (and paste them into) the workers' annual insurance cards in order to show that the contributions to the insurance had been paid on a monthly, quarterly, or annual basis. Industrial workers usually kept the insurance cards themselves and did their own pasting. Agricultural workers, laborers, and domestics, however, were usually incapable – or considered incapable – of keeping their cards in order (or had no place to store them, etc.), so it was usually the employer's responsibility to keep these cards on their behalf, to buy the stamps, and to paste them in for them, i.e. to make sure that their workers were properly insured. This constituted additional work, which employers were eager to avoid. [Again, with thanks to Prof. Dr. Hans-Jürgen Puhle for explaining this concept.]

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Jürgen Puhle, *Agrarische Interessenpolitik und preussischer Konservatismus im wilhelminischen Reich (1893–1914). Ein Beitrag zur Analyse des Nationalismus in Deutschland am Beispiel des Bundes der Landwirte und der Deutsch-Konservativen Partei*. Hannover: Verlag für Literatur u. Zeitgeschehen, 1967, c1966, pp. 315–16.

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