



German History in Documents and Images

Volume 3. From Vormärz to Prussian Dominance, 1815-1866

The Liberals: Founding Program of the German Progressive Party (June 9, 1861)

The program of the German Progressive Party, founded in Prussia in 1861, outlines the basic principles of liberal politics, emphasizing German national unity and rule of law, including an independent judiciary. Other major themes are the increased power and expansion of the elected Lower House of the Prussian Parliament vis-à-vis the House of Lords and government, public education, and the separation of church and state.

"We are united in loyalty to the king and in the firm conviction that the Constitution is the insoluble bond that holds prince and people together.

But, no less [importantly], considering the major and far-reaching upheavals in Europe's state systems, we have come to realize that Prussia's existence and greatness depends on a solid unification for Germany, which cannot be imagined without a strong central authority in Prussia's hands and without common German parliamentary representation.

For our domestic institutions we demand a solid liberal government, which sees its strength in the respect for citizens' constitutional rights and understands how to strictly enforce its principles at all levels of the state service, and which, in this way, shall earn and maintain the respect of the other German tribes.

In the legislative field, it appears to us that a strict and consistent realization of a constitutional state is a primary and unconditional necessity. We therefore especially demand legal protection by way of truly independent judges and for this protection to be accessible to everyone, accordingly [we demand] the elimination of the indictment monopoly of a dependent prosecuting attorney, the abolition of the law of April 8, 1847, on the procedure for conflicts of authorities, the abolition of the law of February 15, 1854, concerning conflicts regarding judicial prosecutions owing to official acts, [we demand] in general, real responsibility on the part of civil servants, [and] finally the restoration of authority to jurors for political and press offenses.

Further, we demand, finally, the enactment of the law envisaged in Art. 61 of the Constitution concerning ministerial responsibility.

No less necessary, it appears to us, for Prussia's honor and for the consolidation of the Constitution, is the establishment of municipal [local], district [county], and provincial

constitutions based on principles of equality and self-administration, which would require the abolition of administration based on a society of orders and of the manorial police.

The equality of all religious denominations guaranteed in Art. 12 needs to be emphatically safeguarded. Improving the teaching system in primary school as well as in secondary school and in the Gymnasium can only take place by finally enacting the Instructional Law after eliminating unconstitutional ministerial regulations and standards. With respect to this Instructional Law, as well as in regard to urgent marriage legislation, the separation of state from church must be upheld and completed (where the latter is concerned, by adopting obligatory civil marriage).

The unexpectedly large burdens that were imposed on the country in the foregoing legislative period absolutely demand that the economic energies of the country be unfettered, and that consequently the revision of the trade legislation, as has already been laid down in resolutions from the current Chamber of Deputies, be brought to life.

Whenever the honor and position of power of our Fatherland need to be preserved or attained through a war, no sacrifice will ever be too great; in the interest of sustainable warfare, however, it strikes us that the greatest thrift is advisable for the military budget in peacetime. We entertain the conviction that the maintenance of the militia, the general introduction of physical education for youth, [and] the intensified conscription of able-bodied men for a two-year period of service would provide for the complete military prowess of the Prussian people at arms.

But achieving these goals will [. . .] remain a pious wish so long as there is no thoroughgoing reform of the current House of Lords* along a constitutional path. Above all, therefore, this must be energetically sought as the beginning of all reforms. [. . .]"

Source: Wolfgang Treue, *Deutsche Parteiprogramme seit 1861* [*German Party Programs since 1861*], 4th ed. Göttingen: Muster-Schmidt Verlag, 1968, pp. 62-63.

Translation: Jeremiah Riemer

* The upper house of the Prussian parliament – ed.