



German History in Documents and Images

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

The Democrats: Gustav von Struve: Motion in the German Pre-Parliament (March 31, 1848)

In his motion in the German pre-parliament from March 31, 1848, the radical democrat and revolutionary Gustav von Struve (1805-1870) describes the essential nature and goals of democratic politics, the latter of which included the reduction of tax burdens, the achievement of national unity, the separation of church and state, the safeguarding of civil liberties, the fight against the predominance of the nobility, and the support of a republican state. The German pre-parliament prepared the ground for the German National Assembly, which opened in May of 1848.

We the undersigned place this motion before the German Parliament at Frankfurt a.M.: that it immediately approve the following overview of the rights of the German people and see to their implementation.

A long period of the most profound degradation weighs heavily on Germany. It may be characterized by the words: subjugation, stultification, and bleeding dry of the people. Under the influence of this system of tyranny, which, when broken in its power, still lives on in essence, Germany has more than once been brought to the brink of ruin. It has lost many of its most lovely provinces, and others are already severely threatened. The distress of the people has become unbearable. In Upper Silesia it has intensified to the point of famine.

Therefore all the ties that had bound the German people to the previous so-called order of things have dissolved, and it is the job of the assembly of German men which has come together on March 31 of this year in Frankfurt a. M. to create new ties with which the entire German people will be bound together into a free and great whole.

Security of property and person, prosperity, education, and freedom for all irrespective of birth, station, and creed is the goal toward which the German people aim. The means by which to attain these are:

1. Termination of the standing army of soldiers and its merger with the citizens' militia for the purpose of building a true popular defense encompassing all men capable of bearing arms.
2. Termination of the standing army of state officials and replacement of the same by an inexpensive government made up of freely elected men of the people.

3. Abolition of the standing armies of taxes that live off the marrow of the people, especially all those taxes that inhibit Germany's domestic commerce, internal tariffs, and ship duties that oppress agriculture, tithes, seigneurial dues and rents etc., which encumber trade, trade taxes, excises etc., and their replacement:
 - a) with a progressive income and property tax, by which the portion necessary for a livelihood remains free of all taxes;
 - b) with a tariff raised at the borders of Germany for the protection of its trade, its industry, and its agriculture;
4. Abolition of all prerogatives, whatever names these might carry, especially of the nobility, the privileges of wealth, a break with preferential legal venues, and their replacement with a general German civic law.
5. Abolition of the patronizing treatment of local governments and its replacement by a local government law based on local self-administration.
6. The closing of all monasteries and monastic institutions.
7. Abolition of the tie which previously existed between church and state and church and school, and its replacement with:
 - a) the principles of equal entitlement for all creeds, [the principles] of undiminished freedom of belief and conscience, of the free right of association, of self-administration for local governments and particularly their right to choose freely their clergy, teachers, and mayors.
 - b) improvement of the teaching profession and more evenly distributed pastors' salaries;
 - c) abolition of school fees and fees for pastors [for baptism, marriages].
8. Abolition of censorship, licenses, and sureties, and the replacement of these compulsory institutions by the principle of freedom of the press to the widest extent.
9. Abolition of secret and written inquisition courts and their replacement by public and oral jury courts.
10. Abolition of the hundreds of restrictions of personal freedoms of Germans from diverse stations and equal guarantees for them by a special law (habeas corpus act in the broadest sense of the word), which will also establish a law of associations and assembly in particular.
11. Elimination of the suffering of the working classes and the middle class, promotion of trade, the business profession, and agriculture. To this end, copious means are provided by the once enormous civil lists,* appanages, unearned and excessive salaries and pensions,

* Civil list: taxpayer's money used to support the household of the head of state – trans.

diverse donations and currently idle possessions of several corporate bodies, as well as domains of the land.

12. Rectifying the disproportion between labor and capital by means of a special labor ministry, which shall oppose usury and protect labor, in particular secure labor a share of the profits created by labor.

13. Abolition of the thousand-fold and mutually divergent systems of civil law, penal law, trial law, ecclesiastical law, and constitutional law, and matters of coins, weights, post office, railways etc., and their replacement by laws which, arising from the spirit of our time, establish the inner unity of Germany in spiritual [intellectual] and material terms along with its freedom.

14. Termination of the disunity of Germany and the restoration of division in imperial districts with all due consideration to present conditions.

15. Termination of the hereditary monarchy (despotism) and its replacement by freely elected parliaments headed by freely elected presidents, all united in the federalist Confederal Assembly on the model of the North American free states.

German people, these are the principles with whose help alone, in our view, Germany can become happy, respected, and free.

German brethren East and West, we urge you to support us in the effort to unify you and obtain inalienable human rights for you. In Frankfurt a. M. we will remain united until a freely elected parliament can take charge of Germany's fate. In the meantime, we will draft the necessary bills and, with a freely elected executive committee, prepare the great work of Germany's recovery.

Source: W. Blos, *Die deutsche Revolution 1848/49* [*The German Revolution 1848/49*], p. 487 ff.

Original German text reprinted in Ernst Rudolf Huber, ed., *Deutsche Verfassungsdokumente 1803-1850* [*German Constitutional Documents 1803-1850*], vol. 1, *Dokumente zur deutschen Verfassungsgeschichte* [*Documents on German Constitutional History*], 3rd ed., rev. and enl. Stuttgart: W. Kohlhammer, 1978, pp. 332-34.

Translation: Jeremiah Riemer