



## German History in Documents and Images

Volume 4: Forging an Empire: Bismarckian Germany, 1866-1890  
Program of the Catholic Center Party's Reichstag Caucus (late March 1871)

After German unification the Catholic Center Party developed into the most stable political force in the Reichstag. It won between 90 and 105 seats, with 23-26% of the popular vote, in every Reichstag election from 1874 to 1912. Although its voters were drawn almost exclusively from the Catholic milieu, the party was able to avoid other parties' heavy dependence on particular classes, regions, or doctrines. Championing the autonomy of the federal states, civil and religious liberties, and adherence to the constitution, the party's program from 1871 stressed justice rather than denominational affiliation as the "basis of governance." After bitter conflicts with Bismarck during the *Kulturkampf* ("cultural struggle") of the 1870s, by the mid-1880s a normalization of relations with the government took place. Even before that point the Center had become adept at allying with either Right or Left, with Bismarck or the opposition, depending on its own priorities.

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"Iustitia fundamentum regnorum" ["Justice is the basis of governance."]

The Center Party caucus in the German Reichstag has put forth the following principles for its activities:

1. The basic character of the Reich as a federative state shall be preserved; accordingly, those tendencies that aim at changing the federative nature of the Reich constitution shall be counteracted; and no more of the self-determination and autonomous activities of the individual states shall be sacrificed than are irrefutably required for the interests of the whole.
2. The moral and material welfare of all levels of society is to be promoted as much as possible; the party shall strive for the constitutional establishment of guarantees towards the civic and religious freedom of all citizens of the German Reich, and particularly, for the protection of religious communities.
3. The caucus debates and decides, according to these principles, on all issues being discussed in the Reichstag, though without individual members being barred from diverging from the decision of the caucus when they cast their vote in the Reichstag.

Source: Karl Bachem, *Vorgeschichte, Geschichte und Politik der deutschen Zentrumspartei* [*The Pre-History, History, and Politics of the German Center Party*], 9 vols., vol. 3. Cologne: Bachem, 1927, pp. 137-38.

Original German text reprinted in Felix Salomon, ed., *Die deutschen Parteiprogramme* [*German Party Programs*], Issue 1, *Vom Erwachen des politischen Lebens in Deutschland bis zur Reichsgründung 1871* [*From the Awakening of Political Life in Germany to the Founding of the Reich in 1871*], ed. Wilhelm Mommsen and Günther Franz, 4th ed., Leipzig and Berlin: B.G. Teubner, 1932, pp. 166-67.

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