



Volume 4: Forging an Empire: Bismarckian Germany, 1866-1890 Program of the German Progressive Party (November 25, 1878)

The Progressive Party had a longer tradition than almost any other party in the Bismarckian era. But during the 1870s Progressives found it increasingly difficult to reconcile support for Bismarck's foreign policy with clear opposition on domestic issues. In 1878, at a time when Bismarck was turning away from liberalism, and only one month after the Anti-Socialist Law came into effect, the Progressive Party stood at a crossroads. The revised program it adopted at a party congress held in November 1878 opposes socialism and calls for new alliances with the Right, but it defends classic liberal principles. Among the latter, it advocates a parliamentary system, the rule of law, reduced military spending, free trade, separation of church and state, as well as freedom of expression and the press. On the other hand, its less liberal aspects were summed up in Rudolf Virchow's keynote address to that congress: "We must position ourselves as independent men – independent from the government above, and also from the masses below, which threaten the existing social order. [. . .] I believe, therefore, that we must seek support on the Right, among independent men, among the productive population, among property-owners, among the core of good old German burghers." The Progressives' attempt to steer this middle course was greeted with short-term electoral success: from 26 seats won with less than 7% of the popular vote in 1878, they increased their total to 60 seats in 1881 with about 13% of the vote.

The German Progressive Party, having formed in 1861 during the dual battle for the unification of the German Fatherland and the preservation of the constitutional rights of parliament, still pursues as its ultimate goal the establishment of firmer foundations for the German state system by guaranteeing civic freedom, raising the moral and material welfare of the people, and strengthening the constitutional rights of its parliament. Loyal to the Kaiser, conforming to the constitution of the federative state, the party will fulfill the tasks that arise for the German Reich and the German people. At the same time, these tasks delimit the basic line that the political activities of the party will have to maintain in conformity with the constitutions of the federated states. In view of this, the party congress has resolved to identify the following tasks as guiding principles around which party members will rally:

1. Development of the parliamentary constitution through strengthening the rights of the Reichstag and establishing a Reich government responsible to it; also the preservation of universal, equal, direct, and secret suffrage as well as the three-year legislative period. – Granting per diem pay to the members of the Reichstag.

2. Complete implementation of the state based on the rule of law, especially equality before the law without consideration of class and party; passing judgment by jury on political and press offenses; and guaranteeing freedom of the press, assembly, and association.
3. Development of the full military strength of the people while taking into consideration economic interests; therefore, reduction and more even distribution of the military burden through shortening the length of service and the full application of universal compulsory military service. Annual determination of the military's effective peacetime strength through the budget act.
4. Preservation of the Reichstag's right to approve annual state budgets; until that right is fully guaranteed, maintenance of the states' matricular tax contributions to the Reich [*Matrikularbeiträge*] in a different form on the basis of a fairer distribution scale; distribution of the tax burden according to individual taxable income; in particular, no overburdening of the less well-to-do classes through disproportional taxes on general consumer goods; adherence to the proven principles of the policies of the Customs Union [*Zollverein*]; no tax and tariff policies serving one-sided interests. – No monopolies.
5. Maintenance of freedom of movement, freedom of trade, and freedom to form unions; further extension of economic legislation, especially for the protection of life and the health of workers, women, and children; extension of liability; industrial arbitration tribunals; legal recognition of associations founded on the principle of self-help (pension funds, employers' associations, labor unions, and arbitration offices); promotion of general and technical education for the working class; and reform of legislation governing joint-stock companies.
6. Determination of the terms required in the public interest for the establishment and operation of railroads through Reich laws and handling of the latter by Reich authorities with direct executive power; by contrast, rejection of the Reich railroad project.
7. Individual freedom of conscience and freedom of worship; definition of the legal jurisdiction of ecclesiastical and religious communities vis-à-vis the state by way of state legislation; accordingly, general legislation concerning religious communities without consideration for individual confessions and without preferential treatment or neglect of certain churches; in particular, determination of the conditions under which religious communities are recognized by the state and must be given the rights of corporate bodies.
8. Independence of schools vis-à-vis the church, irrespective of regulations concerning religious instruction; general, mandatory elementary education, free of charge.

Source: *Deutsche Parteiprogramme* [*German Party Programs*], Berlin, 1894, pp. 39-40.

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