



Volume 4: Forging an Empire: Bismarckian Germany, 1866-1890 German Radical Party, Founding Program (March 5, 1884)

The founding of the German Radical Party in 1884 aimed at reuniting the fragmented liberal parties. The Progressive Party merged with the Liberal Union, also known as the “Secessionists” (1880) from the National Liberal Party. Under the leadership of Eugen Richter (1838-1905), the new party championed parliamentarism and constitutionalism, civil liberties, free trade, freedom of occupation, and the annual approval of government budgets by parliament. The party's other leaders included Rudolf Virchow (1821-1902), Ludwig Bamberger (1823-1899), Heinrich Rickert (1833-1902), and Theodor Barth (1849-1909). Even these luminaries could not retain the support enjoyed by the two liberal parties prior to the merger. Whereas those parties in combination had won 105 Reichstag seats in 1881 with 42% of the popular vote, by 1887 the Radicals held only 32 seats, based on about 13% of the vote. A rebound occurred in 1890 when the party more than doubled its seat total to 66 and increased its share of the vote to 16%.

1. Development of a truly constitutional state system within the framework of guaranteed cooperation between government and parliament and by the means of a responsible Reich government; defense against all attacks on the rights of parliament, especially maintenance of the one-year fiscal period, of approval of state revenues, and of freedom of speech.
2. Protection of the rights of the people: preservation of secret, universal, equal, and direct suffrage; safeguarding of electoral freedom, particularly by means of granting per diem pay to parliamentary deputies; freedom of the press and of association; equality before the law irrespective of person and party; complete freedom of conscience and religion; legislative regulation of the relations between the state and religious communities, providing equal rights for all confessions.
3. Promotion of the people's welfare on the basis of the existing social order. Support for all efforts aimed at improving the situation of the working classes, with full maintenance of their rights of independence and free association; also combating state-sponsored socialism, as well as any measures aiming at patronage by the state and at constraining occupational and commercial life and freedom of trade and movement.

4. Fairness and consideration for the people's productive capacities in the taxation system; relief regarding the necessities of life; no tariff and economics policies serving special interests; no monopolies; legislation and effective supervision by the Reich concerning the railroad system.

5. Maintenance of the full military strength of the people; full application of universal compulsory military service, with the possibility of reduced terms of service; determination of the military's effective peacetime strength in each legislative period.

All this is aimed at consolidating Germany's national unity, in loyalty to the Kaiser and in conformity with the constitution of the federative state.

Source: *Volkszeitung* [*The People's Newspaper*] (Berlin), no. 56, March 6, 1884, p. 2.

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