



Volume 5. Wilhelmine Germany and the First World War, 1890-1918

The Independent Social Democratic Party of Germany: Guiding Principles (April 1917)

The growth of grassroots labor protest accompanied the split of the Social Democratic party. In March 1916, the majority of the Socialists in the *Reichstag*, who had lost their patience with the lack of discipline within their own ranks, voted to expel eighteen of their own members who had voted against another round of war loans. The banished Socialists reconstituted themselves and, after the Russian upheaval in March of 1917, formally founded their own party, called the Independent Social Democratic Party of Germany (USPD).

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Berlin, April 9-11, 1917

In the interest of the working class, the opposition within the Social Democratic Party of Germany wishes to pursue an independent and autonomous policy, which will be guided by the basic principles and demands of the party program, the resolutions of the party congresses, and the resolutions of international congresses. The opposition stands in fundamental opposition to the existing system of government, to the war policy of the federal government, and to the policy that the executive committee of the nominal [Social Democratic] party has pursued in the tow of the government. To distinguish itself from this party, the new opposition organization takes the name: Independent Social Democratic Party of Germany. The program and organization of the party are to be shaped by the lessons won during the war, which will only be completely possible when party comrades have returned from military service and the bases of the party have been restored in free discussion. Until then, just as the party program provides the basis for policy, so do the organizational statutes of the Social Democratic Party of Germany provide the basis for organizing the opposition. Party comrades are obligated to apply the statutes in a democratic spirit and especially to strive to make all important decisions on a democratic foundation. Now that the [Social Democratic] leadership has used the state of war violently to deprive members of the opposition party of their rights and to expel these members from the party illegally, the opposition has formed an independent organization.

Source: USPD Grundlinien [Guiding Principles of the Independent Social Democratic Party of Germany] (April 1917), in Karl Wippermann, et al., ed., *Deutscher Geschichtskalender* [German Historical Almanac] 33 (1917), p. 782.

Reprinted in Wolfdieter Bihl, *Deutsche Quellen zur Geschichte des Ersten Weltkrieges* [German Sources on the History of the First World War]. Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1991, pp. 266-67.

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