



German History in Documents and Images

Volume 8. Occupation and the Emergence of Two States, 1945-1961
Appeal to the German People by the Christian Democratic Union (June 26, 1945)

On June 26, 1945, former members of the Catholic Center Party, along with politicians who had been close to the bourgeois resistance during the Third Reich, founded the Christian Democratic Union (CDU), a new kind of supra-confessional omnibus party [*Sammlungspartei*]. Unlike those parties affiliated with particular confessions during the Weimar Republic, the CDU sought to appeal to Catholics and Protestants in equal measure. Although the party was bourgeois in character, it had important roots in the Christian labor union movement. The idea of Christian Socialism shaped the CDU's founding appeal but did not meet with equal support from all party segments, since members were influenced by diverse regional identities. Apart from emphasizing Christian-democratic values in society, the Christian Democratic Union also called for the nationalization of mineral resources and key industries.

German People!

Amidst the worst catastrophe that has ever befallen a country, the party of the Christian Democratic Union of Germany, out of ardent love for the German people, calls upon Christian, democratic, and social forces to assemble, work together, and build a new homeland. The deification of a criminal adventurer has plunged us into a morass of guilt and shame, and a free democratic order can only emerge if we remember the culturally formative moral and spiritual forces of Christianity and increasingly draw upon this source of strength for our people.

This task is unspeakably difficult. After 1918, our political leadership salvaged state, cultural, and economic institutions from the military collapse. The villages, towns, factories, workshops, fields, and forests that had not been destroyed served as the foundation for the gradual revival of the nation.

Today, however, we stand before a monstrous legacy, before a rubble heap of moral and material values.

This time, it was an unscrupulous dictator and his followers who frivolously started a war and waged it until our nation was bled dry. Hitler left the country in devastation and desolation. With mendacious national slogans and hollow proclamations of peace, he tricked his own people and other nations, and shamefully abused the idealism of our youth. And this youth, which fought in good faith for its Fatherland, could not but become the victim of an insane leadership. Great is

the guilt borne by broad segments of our people, who were all too willing to degrade themselves as Hitler's backers and henchmen. All guilt must be atoned for. The great number of Germans whose hands remain clean suffer along with those who are burdened by guilt. They were unable to prevail against violence and terror. Fighters of genuine democratic sentiment, Protestants, Catholics, innumerable Jewish citizens, as well as men and women of all classes, suffered and died under this rule of terror. In the spirit of their legacy, united by the same love for our people, we recognize our duty to accompany this people on the path to repentance, the path to rebirth.

The terrible magnitude of the injustice perpetrated during Hitler's rule obliges us to call to account the guilty and their accomplices, to exercise strict justice, without leniency, yet without any thirst for revenge. The travesty of Hitler's state must now be replaced by a truly democratic state founded on the people's commitment to loyalty, sacrifice, and service to the common good, as well as on a respect for the rights, honor, freedom, and human dignity of the individual.

The rule of law must once again become the foundation of all public life. The lie that "whatever benefits the nation is right" must yield to the eternal truth that "the nation only benefits from what is right." It is essential that we restore the independence and the orderly process of law. The call for just judges runs through the entire German nation like a single cry. Any arbitrary abuse of the law must be ruled out. A Gestapo and its terror must not exist again. With utmost frugality, we must build public life largely on the basis of self-government and voluntary work. Parliament must facilitate a trusting, brotherly collaboration among all parties supporting democracy and all forces eager to rebuild the country.

We demand a public life that is free of lies, mass hysteria, and mass demagogy as well as a responsible press whose highest law is the commitment to the truth. We call for spiritual and religious freedom of conscience, independence of all church communities, and a clear separation of church and state.

Parents must be granted the right to raise their children so that they respect God, their elders, and the value of experience. Religious instruction organized by the church must be part of their upbringing. Through the pernicious teachings of racial hatred and incitements to violence, Hitler poisoned the minds of large numbers of our youth, and they must be led back to the path of true moral values. Science and art must develop freely, and the doctrines of a genuine humanity, whose German heralds belong to all of humanity, must support the moral renewal of our people.

Because of the immeasurable misery of our people, we must rebuild our economic life and ensure work, food, clothing, and housing for all without regard to personal interests or economic theories, and based on strict planning. Top priority must be given to the emergency program for bread, housing, and work. It is crucial that the state own natural resources, if for no other reason than to protect the state, for all time, from the illegitimate influences of economic conglomerates. Mining and other key monopolistic industries in our economy must be clearly subordinated to the state.

We support private property ownership that secures personal development but that also remains tied to responsibility for the general public.

Industry, trade, and commerce are called upon to play a decisive role in the reconstruction effort and must therefore be systematically promoted. We demand that the independent skilled trades – which face immense new challenges after the destruction of so many industrial companies – be protected and given the opportunity to expand.

A comprehensive rural and small-landholder settlement program must be pursued through the incorporation of large land holdings in order to give a large number of Germans access to both their own land and independent work. Economic security for self-employed farmers and the settlement of agricultural workers are indispensable components of any long-term reconstruction policy and require the strongest possible expansion of the system of agricultural cooperatives.

The principle of free association for all workers is consistent with the laws of Christian and democratic life in state and society. We therefore welcome the unified trade union movement of workers and employees, which aims to protect workers' economic and social rights. We recognize the strength that the workforce as a whole lends the nation.

We are conscious of the responsibility we have for the suffering and the weak, for the victims of war and of Hitler's reign of terror, and for all those entitled to benefits.

Charitable work must be able to develop unhindered. To mothers and working women, we say this: everything will be done to quickly relieve you of your increasingly difficult days of quiet heroism. In our relations with other nations, we want the same principles of freedom and justice to apply as in our personal lives and within our state. The loyal fulfillment of obligations arising from the lost war, as well as the greatest internal recovery effort, must pave the way for good-faith cooperation with other nations. In all this, we hope that the occupying powers will appreciate the infinite distress of the German people. We also hope for their expert assistance in reviving the German economy.

Deeply shaken, we stand before the fresh graves of our dead. We have not forgotten our soldiers who are still held as prisoners of war. Standing before the rubble of our houses, villages, and cities, we commemorate, in an act of human and Christian solidarity, the same sacrifice of the peoples around us. And we promise to expunge every last trace of the system that is to blame for this terrible sacrifice of blood and this unspeakable misery – and to do everything within our power to protect humankind from such a catastrophe in the future.

German men and women! We call upon you to put aside all divisiveness. Follow our call for a great party that wants to work together with the other parties in this new democracy in an effort to rebuild Germany.

We appeal to the young people who were especially hard hit by both the war and the subsequent collapse, and who have a special obligation to help shape the future.

We call upon the women and mothers whose sorely tried strength is essential to saving the nation.

We call upon all who profess allegiance with us and who share our determination to rebuild the country. Trusting fully in God, we aim to create a bright future for our children and grandchildren.

Berlin, June 26, 1945

Andreas Hermes, Heinrich F. Albert, Hans v. Arnim, Eduard Bernoth, Theodor Bohner, Emil Dovifat, Margarete Ehlert, Josef Ersing, Johann Eudenbach, Ferdinand Friedensburg, Willy Fuchs, Otto-Heinrich von der Gablentz, Wilhelm Happ, Peter Hensen, Artur Herzog, Ernst Hülse, Paulus van Husen, Jakob Kaiser, Heinrich Krone, Ernst Lemmer, Otto Lenz, Hans Lukaschek, Reinhard Moeller, Katharina Müller, Elfriede Nebgen, Otto Nuschke, Rudolf Pechel, Eberhard Plewe, Ferdinand Sauerbruch, Walter Schreiber, Martin Schwab, Hildegard Staehle, Theodor Steltzer, Heinrich Vockel, Graf Yorck v. Wartenburg

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