

Appeal by the Social Democratic Party (Berlin, 15 June 1945)

Caption: On 15 June 1945, in Berlin, the Social Democratic Party (SPD), led by Otto Grotewohl in the Soviet zone, declares its willingness to cooperate with the German Communist Party (KPD). This attitude leads to a split with the Social Democratic Party in the Western occupied zones, led by Kurt Schumacher, who rejects any cooperation with the Communist leaders.

Source: TREUE, Wolfgang. Deutsche Parteiprogramme seit 1861. 4. éd. Zürich, Berlin, Frankfurt: Musterschmidt-Verlag - Göttingen, 1968. 506 S. (Quellensammlung zur Kulturgeschichte; Bd. 3). p. 174-177.

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Appeal by the Social Democratic Party (Berlin, 15 June 1945)

'Workers, farmers and citizens! Men and women! Youth of Germany! Nazi Fascism has vanished into an abyss of grim destruction! It has left the German people in dire and desperate straits, in unimaginable despair! People's sense of justice is paralysed! Skull-faced hunger and deprivation grin out at the nation from the ruins of devastated houses and blown-up factories. The victorious allied armies have extinguished Hitler's megalomania and stamped out forever the militaristic power lust of German imperialism.

The German nation is left to pay the price of Fascist deceit and betrayal! Dishonourable chancers and power-hungry politicians have disgraced and besmirched the name of the German people worldwide.

In silence and emotion, we lower our flags before Johannes Stelling, Rudolf Breitscheid, Julius Leber, Wilhelm Leuschner and the thousands of victims representing all parties, faiths and social strata of the German nation, devoured by the bloody jaws of fascism. But alas, all these sacrifices of health and blood, the inevitable fate of those forced to operate outside the law, were not enough to eliminate the hellish machinery of oppression.

The German people will not despair! Their will to live will be stronger than their suffering! They will gather their last remaining ounce of strength, because they want to live on, they will and they must live on!

The hard lesson of history for the German people is that through all their hardships, through all the hunger and misery, they must work indefatigably and show a steely resolve to earn the respect of all peaceful, freedom-loving nations.

Never again must the German people naïvely allow themselves to be led astray by an unprincipled political adventurer. The political road to a better future for the German people is clearly signposted: democracy in State and local authorities, socialism in the economy and society!

We are ready and resolved to work together on this with all persons and parties of like mind. We thus warmly welcome the rallying cry of the German Communist Party's Central Committee on 11 June 1945 which rightly says that the future rebuilding of Germany depends on how the situation develops in Germany now, and that the decisive interests of the German people currently require the creation of an anti-Fascist democratic regime and a republic based on parliamentary democracy, with all proper democratic rights and freedoms for the people.

At this hour of destiny, it falls once more to the German working class to act as standard bearer for the State – a new anti-Fascist and democratic republic! Any selfish party-political squabbling, of the kind which dominated the political theatre of the Weimar Republic, must be nipped firmly in the bud. In an anti-Fascist democratic republic, democratic freedoms can be accorded only to those who recognise them unreservedly. Democratic freedoms must be denied to those who seek to use them merely to despise and destroy democracy.

The most basic requirement for the new State to exist is that every last remnant of Fascist tyranny should be eliminated. Hearts and minds must also be cleansed of militarist thinking. Our youth, intellectually cut off from their roots by Fascism, must be educated to be free and critically thinking individuals again.

The new State must make reparation for the sins committed against the victims of Fascism; it must atone for the crimes committed by Fascist power lust against the nations of Europe. This State must first and foremost give the German people the economic and moral strength to perform this Herculean task.

The demands of the German Social Democratic Party are thus as follows:

1. Total and utter eradication of all traces of the Hitler regime from legislation, jurisprudence and administration. A State of fairness and justice, without blemish. Members of the National Socialist German Workers' Party and its associated groupings to be liable for losses and damage caused by the Nazi regime.

2. Food supplies to be secured. Provision of labour and cooperative endeavours in agriculture. Proportion of fats in the diet to be increased by imports of raw materials, feedingstuffs and livestock. Consumer cooperatives to be encouraged and new rules to be laid down for small-scale commerce.

3. Essential housing, clothing and heating needs of the broad mass of the populace to be met with the help of local authority self-government.

4. Rebuilding of the economy with the help of local authority self-government and the trade unions. Accelerated restoration of transport systems. Procurement of raw materials. Removal of all barriers to private-sector initiative, provided the public interest is safeguarded. Removal of Nazi over-organisation in the economy. Clear and simple restructuring of economic bodies administered on an honorary basis. Restructuring of the monetary system. Stabilisation of the currency. Local authority loans for industry, small crafts and trades and commerce. Revival of cashless payment transfers. Simplification of the tax system by rigorous combination of different types of tax. Greater consideration for social circumstances to be shown in tax assessment.

5. Promotion of popular culture. Young people to be educated in the democratic, socialist spirit. Encouragement for science and the arts.

6. Re-drafting of social legislation. Labour law to be based on ideas of freedom and democracy. Employees' councils to be made part of the economy. Trade unions and consumer cooperatives to have a voice in economic organisations. Social insurance to be expanded into a system of provision for the sick, for (new) mothers, invalids and accident victims, widows, orphans, the war-wounded and unemployed. All persons in work to be covered by social security.

7. Incentives for housing welfare and development, local authority supervision of housing. Rents and mortgages to be adjusted to the economic aftermath of war. Large properties to be divided up to provide land and property for urban dwellers willing to relocate. Relocation of medium- and small-scale industries to economically well-situated rural areas.

8. Banks, insurance companies and mineral resources to be nationalised. Mining and energy sectors to be nationalised. Large properties, viable industries and all war profits to be assessed for the purposes of reconstruction. Abolition of unearned incomes from land and property rentals. Tight restrictions on interest income from mobile capital. Obligation on entrepreneurs to manage, for the benefit of the German national economy, business operations entrusted to them by the national economy. Rights of inheritance to be limited to immediate relatives.

9. Adjustment to the law to reflect the concepts of an anti-Fascist democratic State. Protection of the State for individuals. Freedom of expression in speech, image and the written word, subject to the safeguarding of the interests of the State and respect for the individual citizen. Freedom of opinion and religious practice. Incitement to race hatred to be a crime punishable by law.

Hitler's guilt forces our hapless, tormented nation to endure unspeakable suffering and pass through a deep vale of sorrow! We want to help raise it up again, to restore it to the heights of human culture and dignity, in friendship with all nations of the world.

Above all we want to lead the struggle for new growth, founded on the organisational unity of the German working class! We see this as moral reparation for the political mistakes of the past, a way of passing down a unified apparatus of political struggle to the next generation. We must follow the flag of unity as a shining symbol in the political initiatives pursued by working people! We stretch out the hand of brotherhood to all those whose watchword is "fight Fascism, for the freedom of the people, for democracy and socialism!"

We thus urge you all, our friends and comrades in town and country, to make a start on the work of rebuilding, using your erstwhile commitment and fresh courage.

Onward! To work!