

## Political manifesto of the Social Democratic Party of Germany (Hanover, 11 May 1946)

**Caption:** On 11 May 1946, in Hanover, the German Social Democratic Party (SPD), led by Kurt Schumacher, publishes its political manifesto in which there is no mention of the merger that took place 20 days previously in the Soviet occupation zone between the SPD and the German Communist Party (KPD) to create the German Socialist Unity Party (SED), dominated by the Communists.

**Source:** TREUE, Wolfgang. Deutsche Parteiprogramme seit 1861. 4. éd. Zürich, Berlin, Frankfurt: Musterschmidt-Verlag - Göttingen, 1968. 506 S. (Quellensammlung zur Kulturgeschichte; Bd. 3). p. 182-188.

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## Political manifesto of the Social Democratic Party of Germany (SPD action programme) (Hanover, 11 May 1946)

'In the period between two world wars, the forces of high capitalism and reaction everywhere sought desperately to avoid the socialist consequences of democracy. In Germany, the economic and historical realities and the mood of the times made it possible for them to do so.

The advent of the "Third Reich" destroyed the political power of the working class, halting the progress of democracy and, in the absence of any democratic expression of political will and scrutiny, decisively sowing the seeds of disaster in Europe. Lack of response or action by the German bourgeoisie and that section of the labour movement which failed to recognise the value of democracy in the class struggle is responsible for the share of blame which rests on the German people.

The "Third Reich" suppressed by force any expression of class conflict on the home front and used the same methods to foment discord among the nations. Dictatorship led inexorably to war and thus to total military and political collapse and destruction of the foundations of economic, national and cultural life which had existed hitherto. The ruins left behind are an inadequate foundation on which to build a new Germany. In economic terms, the huge concentration of the once colossal machinery of production has given way to paralysis and breakdown. We now have a situation unable to sustain any class, any nation or any economic system.

The German nation is isolated in the world and suffering the consequences of the National Socialist war of conquest and the crimes perpetrated during that war against the peoples it oppressed.

In response to this, the Social Democratic Party believes it has a duty to rally all democratic forces in Germany under the banner of socialism. Not just the political balance of power, but also its economic basis, has to change. Only total reform will restore the German nation to economic and social health and secure peace and freedom.

### I.

Today's Germany can no longer sustain a profit-seeking economy built on private capital and pay out profits from exploitation, dividends on capital and ground rents. The system of property ownership still in place is no longer appropriate to the circumstances and needs of society. It is now the biggest obstacle to recovery and progress.

The large-scale means of production still in private hands and the potential social product of the German national economy must be used to serve the needs of all. The current situation, in which the overwhelming majority has lost everything whilst a minority has grown richer, must be corrected by an equitable reorganisation of society.

Social Democracy aims to create a socialist economy through planned control and structures designed to serve the public interest. The general interest must be paramount in deciding the scope, direction and distribution of production. If Germany is to become a part of the world trading system, and it must in order to survive, its means of production and the volume of consumer goods it produces must increase.

Socialisation of the means of production follows a variety of routes and takes a variety of forms. Socialism will not accept uniformity, illiberalism, a rigidly controlled barracks socialism. A socialist society must have the broadest possible range of economic activities and forms of production. Socialism wants as much economic self-management as possible, with workers and consumers having as much of a voice as possible.

### II.

Socialisation must start with mineral resources and the raw materials industries. All enterprises in mining, iron and steel production and working up to the level of semi-finished goods, most of the chemicals and

synthetic chemicals industries, large-scale businesses of any kind, any form of public supply and all sectors in manufacturing and processing which tend to be dominated by large-scale undertakings – all these must be brought into public ownership.

We need to encourage cooperative thinking, to solve collective business tasks in small-scale crafts and trades, commerce and agriculture, and to give as much support as possible to consumer cooperatives.

The whole of transport, the new system of money and credit supply and the insurance sector must be the subject of public-sector planning.

Radical agrarian and land reform is needed immediately, with the expropriation of assets held by large landowners. Large properties must be reassigned for agricultural, horticultural or residential use by individuals or, in part, for shared use by farmer cooperatives, without any fragmentation of the land which would jeopardise its economic viability. This is what is needed to ensure social justice in the countryside, find permanent homes for more people (a first solution to the refugee problem), stimulate production and broaden the agricultural base needed to feed the German people.

Within the economic order which Social Democracy seeks to establish, small and medium-sized businesses in agriculture, small-scale crafts and trades, industry and commerce will have an important part to play and will evolve within these boundaries.

German housing policy requires extremely tight public control. It must be funded nationally and not just by those local authorities which have had much of their housing stock destroyed. The provision of housing is one of our most pressing needs. At a time of housing shortage, what matters most is adequate shelter for all rather than continued comfort for a few.

The equalisation of burdens calls for fundamental and comprehensive financial and currency reform. People must have a minimum subsistence income, and mass consumption must be safeguarded. The equalisation of burdens between those who have assets and those who do not must be done in such a way as to create a social stratum free of both privilege and disadvantage.

The economic policy pursued by German Social Democracy seeks to give people economic freedom. So it sees socialism as the right programme for workers, office employees and civil servants, the professions and middle class, farmers and anyone who lives by the sweat of his own brow and not on the fruits of capitalist exploitation. Only when every form of exploitation is eliminated will people be able to exercise their rights fully and develop their personal strengths.

### III.

German Social Democracy believes that its political task is to anchor the radical social changes – which are inevitable and necessary – firmly in the political consciousness of the masses and so convert the majority of the populace to socialism.

The only path to this goal is through democracy which is strong and prepared to stand up for itself. There is only *one* democracy. There is no bourgeois or proletarian democracy, just as in today's Social Democracy there is no reformist or revolutionary socialism. Any kind of socialism is revolutionary, if it is progressive and reforming.

For all those who work, democracy is the best form of political struggle. For us Socialists it is both a moral and a political necessity. Social Democracy wants its adherents to support it of their own free will and out of conviction, with the freedom to criticise.

There is no socialism without democracy, without the freedom to reach one's own convictions and the right to criticise. But there is no socialism either without humanity and respect for human individuality.

Just as socialism is not possible without democracy, democracy under capitalism is constantly under threat. The special historical circumstances and the evolution of thinking in Germany mean that German democracy needs socialism. German democracy must be socialist, or counterrevolutionary forces will destroy it all over again.

German Social Democracy is characterised by an uncompromising commitment to freedom and socialism. Germany's Social Democrats are proud to have been the only party in Germany to speak out for democracy, peace and freedom, and they suffered very considerably as a result. Today too the SPD is the party of democracy and socialism in Germany.

German Social Democracy is categorically opposed to any return to totalitarian thinking and action. It will be true to this fundamental tenet in pursuing a policy of independence and autonomy *vis à vis* all forces inside and outside the country and in its relations with other political parties.

Social Democracy will not rest on the laurels of its historical legitimacy, amply assured by the glorious history of its freedom struggle. It will seek constantly to prove its worth as a leading force in German politics by working positively for the nation and its people and being honest, upright and competent in that endeavour.

#### IV.

As regards national policy and administration, Social Democracy wants to see a democracy built on co-determination and shared responsibility by all citizens. It wants a republic which is largely decentralised and self-governing.

The German republic of the future must be built on *Länder* which do not regard their own existence as their principal *raison d'être* but which see themselves simply as building blocks in a larger national order. The authority of the State must derive from the German people as a whole.

None of the present-day *Länder* or provinces must regard their continued existence and dimensions as guaranteed. History gives them no adequate legitimacy for this, faced with the imperatives of the present.

The administrative apparatus must be reformed from the bottom up, and local authorities at the lowest levels must have the highest level of competence possible. The people, represented by its parties, determines the tasks and objectives of the administration. Civil servants, employees and officials of public bodies must be supported by uniform statutory terms of service and their rights as citizens must be safeguarded.

All citizens must be eligible for public office under the law and in a manner consistent with their abilities and achievements, irrespective of their origin, religious faith or gender.

All citizens must be equal before the law. No one may be removed from the jurisdiction of his lawful judge. Extraordinary courts must not be allowed.

Freedom of religious faith and conscience for all! Separation of Church and State. This will give the churches and all communities with a particular philosophical creed the freedom to pursue their own particular duties and tasks. No one should be compelled to disclose his religious beliefs.

Art, science and their teaching must again be free, to help rebuild the spiritual and cultural life which has been destroyed. Work in this area will restore the world's respect for and trust in the German people.

General school education must be public. Schools must educate the young free of totalitarian and intolerant views, in a spirit of humanity, democracy, social responsibility and mutual understanding among the nations. Opportunities for education must be open to all Germans on the basis of their ability alone. They must be independent of creed, State and material wealth.

Freedom of expression and criticism must be mirrored in freedom of the press.

A uniform body of labour law must be enacted. Every citizen must be given the chance to work for a living. If it can be shown that there is no appropriate employment for him, he is entitled to assistance to enable him to live. Everyone must be given the same opportunity to choose his occupation and training. Everyone has the right and a duty to work for a living.

Freedom of association for the purpose of safeguarding and improving working and economic conditions must be guaranteed to every individual and to every occupation or profession. Employees' councils with far-reaching rights must be set up to represent the interests of workers in business and industry.

Responsibility for welfare and health rests with the State. For the preservation of health, the protection of mother and child, and provision against the economic consequences of old age and accidents, a uniform system of social insurance must be created in which those insured must make a proportionate contribution. Responsibility for youth provision and welfare must rest with the State. Victims of the war and the dictatorship are entitled to adequate assistance.

## V.

German Social Democracy acknowledges the duty to make reparation, to the extent that the German nation is economically able to do so. It favours punishment of the guilty and war criminals.

Social Democracy wants to see the new Germany included in the new international family of nations. Germany needs the economic, social and political support of the democratic world.

The new Germany is currently suffering not only from the legacy of the Third Reich but also from the fact that the occupying powers have no common policy towards Germany. German Social Democracy awaits the day when clarification of the problems in Germany and the world will allow the occupying powers to pursue a common policy towards Germany and end the policies of the zones of occupation.

The policies pursued under the National Socialist dictatorship, which led to a crippled economy, human slavery and mass extermination, can have no place in the democratic era.

Just as democracy is not secure unless human beings have economic freedom, equally it is impossible unless the nation is free. German Social Democracy wants Germany to remain as a national and economic whole. We must succeed in preserving Germany as a single entity in order to ensure that young people in particular learn to view freedom, democracy and socialism not as ideas born out of the collapse of the Third Reich, but as higher essentials to which they should in any case aspire. Only then will Social Democracy be able to defeat any new resurgence of nationalism.

Socialists in all countries seek to uphold the independence of their country, and so do the Social Democrats in Germany. But we know that the era of unrestricted sovereignty for individual nations is past. It is not parts of Germany which must be internationalised, but Europe as a whole.

German Social Democracy wants a United States of Europe, a democratic and socialist federation of European States. It wants a socialist Germany within a socialist Europe. Only in this way can Europe achieve solidarity with the nations of all continents.

Social Democracy stands shoulder to shoulder with the Socialists of all countries in the battle against every form of exploitation, imperialism and fascism, reaction and nationalistic hegemony. It is a major force in shaping history, which can secure peace and freedom for all nations.

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Socialism is no longer a distant dream. It is the business of the day. German Social Democracy calls for

immediate socialist action to tackle all the practical issues facing the State and economy.

German Social Democracy is aware of the enormity of its task. It wants nothing more than to be one party among other parties. It aspires, however, to stand out by virtue of the accuracy of its perceptions, the clarity of its policies and the efficacy of its actions. Its belief in the successful pursuit of its policies stems from a conviction that the class interest of the German workers now coincides with the needs of the German nation as a whole and the understanding and goodwill of all progressive and freedom-loving peoples throughout the world.'