

ARPLAN

LEFT MEETS RIGHT, EAST MEETS WEST

The Electoral Programme of the Old Social-Democratic Party (1928)

The national-revolutionary programme of the Old Social-Democratic Party of Germany, drafted by **Ernst Niekisch and **August Winnig****

In the most recent article on this blog I presented an overview of the Old Social-Democratic Party of Germany (ASPD) by historian Benjamin Lapp, a party which began as a patriotic splinter-group of the Saxon Social-Democrats and which evolved, under the influence of intellectuals Ernst Niekisch and August Winnig, into a proletarian-nationalist organization with strong national-revolutionary impulses. As a complement to that article I have now also translated the political programme which the ASPD took to Germany's 1928 federal elections, the second of three separate programmes which the ASPD produced altogether in its history. The first of these three programmes, a statement of the ASPD's general principles which it disseminated on its founding in 1926, I have unfortunately not been able to acquire. My understanding is that it oriented the party relatively closely to the positions of the old Majority Social-Democrats and the Kriegssozialisten: right-leaning and patriotic, yet still "moderate" in its nationalism when compared to the NSDAP, DVFP, or DNVP. The second programme which the party produced is that translated below, and was drafted by Ernst Niekisch and August Winnig in early April 1928, two years after they had joined the Old Social-Democratic Party and become its guiding ideological lights. The new programme was intended to reflect the political direction which the ASPD had moved in since it had come under their influence, with its precepts more clearly spelling out the ASPD's proletarian-nationalist ethos and its own idiosyncratic perspective on socialism and the state, a perspective which unashamedly drew more from Lassalle and Rodbertus than it did from Marx and Bebel. More than that, the new programme was intended to be the springboard for greater things, prepared as part of the ASPD's operation to expand its branches outside of Saxony and to compete as a national party in the Reichstag elections in May. The ASPD's abysmal performance in these elections (it achieved only 0.21% of the vote) spelled an end to its foray into national-revolutionary politics. The Old Social-Democratic Party's radical-nationalist orientation, already very controversial among swathes of the party's membership (it had cost the ASPD the support of both the textile unions and the Reichsbanner), was abandoned, and Niekisch and Winnig subsequently left the party. As a consequence the ASPD's third programme appeared towards the end of 1928, being both an expansion and a revision of the second programme: it is structured similarly, and is longer, but significantly has had much of the more overtly nationalistic language excised, and is unmistakably closer to "conventional" Social-Democracy in both conviction and tone than the Niekisch-Winnig programme reproduced below.

The Old Social-Democratic Party of Germany 1928 Electoral Programme

Drafted by Ernst Niekisch and August Winnig

I.

Service to the Volk and to the State.

The Old Social-Democratic Party of Germany is a party of the productive population. It is rooted in the outlook that the productive Volk can only attain internal and external freedom, dignity, and vital historical significance through faithful service to the Volk and to the state.

The ASPD's attitude to the state consequently lies beyond all tactical considerations of expediency; it serves the state out of principle and conviction, and is ready to submit itself unconditionally to the imperative of state necessity. It is an expression of that momentous shift which is presently taking place within the German working-class, whose content is to lead from the state-negating position of the past to a standpoint of unconditional state-affirmation.

II.

The ASPD is a Socialist Party.

The health of the German national body [Volkskörpers] can only be maintained under the present state of affairs if the German economic- and social-order is structured according to the principle of the economic management of all limited available commodities. The free play of forces is tolerable in a richly endowed economy; where there is an abundance of goods and capital, unchecked competitive struggle does not constitute a danger. But where poverty prevails, there a regulative and preventative hand is required. This necessitates an interlinking of economy and society, which together make up the social content of the state; through them it becomes organizationally evident that the welfare of the collective is the paramount consideration pervading the whole. As the ASPD strives for an economic- and social-order which is systematically managed and structured for the good of the totality, it is a socialist party. Its socialist attitude is the complement to and the evidence for its state ethos; its stance is one of a highly-developed sense of social and national responsibility.

III.

Socialist Man is the Prerequisite for a Socialist Society.

Bourgeois society is the creation of Bourgeois Man. The bourgeois sense of values, which elevate individual material benefit into being the generally-accepted unit of value, have found their expression within it. The working-class seeks to express its own sense of values through socialism. Socialism is more than a new law for corporations, and more than a new economic order. Socialism

is a new mode of life, through which a new man seeks to come into being. Socialism is, above all, a new human attitude: one defined not by the pursuit of individual material benefit, but by a moral law.

In the deepest possible contrast to Bourgeois Man, the worker is driven to oppose the spirit of material self-interest with the alternative spirit of duty and responsibility to the community. The revolution of the 20th century, to which the Old Social-Democratic Party of Germany is committed, begins with the headstrong emergence of this spirit. This revolution is, above all, a revolution of the spirit. Within it rises the man who has been degraded by the reign of material benefit, and rising within it simultaneously is a youthful stratification against the degenerate and decaying rule of the old. The essence of this revolution is the spiritual renewal of all forms of existence. If bourgeois revolution preached a new human freedom, this revolution speaks of human duty.

Socialism's labor is the creation of Socialist Man – a new man, for whom subordination, work, and sacrifice for the community are the proud fulfillment of his life's purpose.

IV.

The ASPD is a Republican Party.

Never has it been more necessary than it is now that all social classes intuitively perceive the state as their own; only in this way can the state consolidate all the people's forces [Volkskräfte] and so prepare the ground for its resurgence. Consequently, any leadership must find its roots in the will of the people, must consider itself to be the embodiment of this will, and must represent itself constitutionally as the expression of this will. The degree to which this occurs determines whether a true, living democracy becomes a reality.

The way in which the German monarchy abdicated affirmed its historical obsolescence: it had lost faith in itself, and so resigned itself to its fate voluntarily. The outer form in which the state is now embodied as a state for all, as a "People's State", is the republic.

V.

The Historical Task of German Workerdom.

The collapse of 1918 created proletarian circumstances for the entire German Volk. The German Volk lost their independence, became tributaries, and were bled dry by foreign capitalists and imperialist powers. The historical task of German workerdom arises out of this context. The workers' will for social advancement and social liberation can only be fulfilled when Germany in turn regains its political and economic independence; in order to be successful, this drive for social advancement and social liberation must therefore be united with the national struggle for independence of the entire Volk.

VI.

The Importance of Psychological 1. Forces.

The ASPD feels strongly that Germany's means of enforcing its powers are limited; it sees how Germany is bound by its present plight. However, it recognizes the importance of psychological forces; in defiance of all the talk about "politics of the possible" and "adaptation to the circumstances of the time,"² the ASPD instead chooses to cultivate the powers of intellect and will, setting itself the task of surmounting the present conditions and, by being tenacious and consistently effective, also paving the way for the achievement of this task.

VII.

International Understanding.

The ASPD is for true understanding among nations. But international understanding presupposes that no Volk feel maltreated or violated in their necessities of existence; permanent reconciliation and peaceful concordance are only possible between peoples who are free in their decisions and who can negotiate with each others as equals. Germany's liberation establishes dangerous grounds for national hatred and enmity from the rest of the world.

VIII.

German Necessities of Life.

The German necessities of life, which must be satisfied before a peaceful understanding can exist between nations, are:

The annulment of the Treaty of Versailles and the elimination of the burdens imposed upon the German Volk by the imposed verdict of guilt;

Enforcement of the disarmament of all countries down to the same level of armaments as Germany;

Revision of the national borders imposed upon us;

Return of the former German colonies;

The unification of Austria with Germany.

IX.

Domestic Policy Objectives.

It is in accordance with the state ethos of the ASPD that it approves of all institutions and actions which are appropriate for promoting the state's position of power and prestige to the outside world, as well as its domestic stabilization. Accordingly, the party desires:

The cultivation of a powerful sense of feeling for the Reich³ which transcends energy-wasting

German particularism.

The training of the entire Volk in self-defence, and the maintenance of a trusting relationship between Volk and Reichswehr;

An administration and judicature sustained by the confidence of the Volk.

X.

Social Struggle.

The diversity of social situations among population groups inevitably leads to social tensions, antagonisms, and struggles. The form of such social disputes, however, must be defined by the awareness – binding upon all layers of the population – of belonging to the same state and the same Volk; consideration for the common good sets limits upon social struggles.

XI.

Social Policy Demands.

The basic social conception of the ASPD corresponds to a recognition that there is a responsibility to the Volk as a whole to ensure that every sector of the population is warranted a dignified existence. The ASPD affirms the struggle of the working-class for a fair distribution of the national product, for the structuring of working conditions in a fashion conducive to physical health, and for the effective fulfillment of the workers' entitlement to a share of all cultural assets. The ASPD views the trade-unions as indispensable self-aid organizations for the workforce.

The ASPD is convinced of the cultural and societal importance of the middle-class and demands protective measures in their favor.

The raising of tax revenue must be carried out under extensive consideration of the relevant social conditions.

The ASPD seeks to promote the vital interests of the farmer; it wants to help overcome the dichotomy between city and country in order to cultivate in workers and peasants the feeling of belonging to a community-of-fate.⁴ It aspires for the entire Volk to be fed from their own soil.

It is committed to the implementation of a vigorous settlement of the sparsely-populated territorial regions, particularly by rural laborers and by later-born peasants' sons.⁵ Wherever the necessary conditions are in any way at hand, the industrial worker should also be capable of acquiring his own home with his own plot of land.

Translator's Notes

1. "Psychological" – The actual word used here in the original German is "seelischer." A literal translation of seelisch would be "soulish", a word which doesn't exist in English – it implies something deep within someone's soul, a kind of amalgamation of the terms "mental", "emotional", "psychological." Probably the most accurate translation would be "psychic", but for most modern English-speakers this tends to be synonymous with the concept of ESP,

making it an unideal choice. I have used “psychological” as a compromise, but the authors’ actual meaning is a little deeper than this word implies.

2. “Politics of the possible” and “adaptation to the circumstances of the time” – Attitudes commonly reflected by the leadership of the Social-Democrats at the time, as well as by many bourgeois-liberal politicians. By 1928 the SPD had come to accept (although certainly not agree with) the conditions imposed upon Germany by the Versailles Treaty and the victorious Entente powers, with its approach being to adapt to these conditions, to work around them, and to try and ameliorate them where it could through legal means. The phrase “politics of the possible” was derived from Bismarck’s famous adage “Politik ist die Kunst des Möglichen” (“politics is the art of the possible”), and in the context of Germany’s situation under Versailles it appears in the speeches of Social-Democrats Friedrich Ebert and Philipp Scheidemann, among others.

3. “Sense of feeling for the Reich” – In German, “Reichsgefühls”, i.e. “Reich-feeling.” An alternative (and probably less clunky) translation would be “imperial sentiment” or “feeling of empire”, but that doesn’t quite translate the full context of what the authors mean by use of the term. The writers here are asserting that they want to inculcate in the German Volk a powerful sentiment towards the Reich as a concept and institution – a sense of “feeling” or “attachment” towards it – as a way of combating the divisions caused by the separate interests and self-identities of the individual states (“energy-wasting particularism”). In short – strengthening national German unity by strengthening German sentiment for the Reich as a whole. It should be kept in mind that “Reich” was not a specifically nationalist term. Germans of all persuasions used it even during the Weimar era to refer to their nation (“the Reich”), much as Americans might refer to their country as “the Union.”

4. “Community-of-fate” – In German, “Schicksalsgemeinschaft.” A Schicksalsgemeinschaft as a concept denotes a group of people whose communal ties are in large part derived from the fact that they share a common fate, that what benefits one inevitably benefits all the others – in other words, that they have a shared destiny.

5. “Rural laborers and later-born peasants’ sons” – Typically in Germany the inheritance of a peasant’s farm would pass to the first-born son. The second, third, fourth, etc. (i.e. “later-born”, “nachgeborene”) sons of peasants would often not get to experience land ownership, hence why so many ended up in the military; it was something of a cliché, although an accurate one, that many of Germany’s historical armies had been driven by “later-born” peasants. The proposal of providing the nachgeborene with alternative means through offering them land to settle in Germany’s underdeveloped East or in the colonies (if they could be reacquired) was not an uncommon one. Rural laborers fared similarly – they constituted a class who, through a combination of low pay (especially from some of the owners of the manorial ‘great estates’), difficult work, and little opportunity to acquire property, were regarded as a hard-done-by social stratum and were consequently courted fairly heavily by both nationalists and communists. Rural laborers made up a significant proportion of the NSDAP’s working-class support.

<https://arplan.org/2020/12/02/old-social-democratic-party-programme-aspd/#more-6151>

produced as pdf by *National Bolshevism UK*, 15th February 2021