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German Social Democratic Party (SPD): Call to Rebuild the Party Organization (June 15, 1945)

On June 15, 1945, a few days after the KPD issued its founding manifesto, the Central Committee of the German Social Democratic Party (SPD) published an appeal to revive the SPD. The appeal advocated a parliamentary democracy in Germany, but when it came to the economy and society it demanded the introduction of socialism and extensive nationalization. Likewise, it demanded the “organizational unity of the German working class” in place of the two-party division that had assumed ever stronger form during the Weimar Republic. This demand was made even though the precise nature of this unity was controversial within the SPD, and despite the fact that many party members distrusted the Communists.

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Workers, farmers, and citizens! Men and women! German youth! Nazi fascism has fallen into a horrifying abyss of annihilation! It has left the German people in the deepest emotional agony, in inconceivable misery! All sense of justice has been paralyzed! Bare want and deprivation grin at the people from the ruins of destroyed homes and blown-up factories. The victorious Allied armies have extinguished Hitler’s megalomania and thereby obliterated the military rapacity of German imperialism for all time.

The German people must pay the price for this fascist imposture! Dishonorable gamblers and mad, power-hungry politicians have defiled and dishonored the name of the German people throughout the world.

Silent and filled with emotion, we lower our flags in honor of our [SPD colleagues] Johannes Stelling, Rudolf Breitscheid, Julius Leber, and Wilhelm Leuschner – and in honor of the thousands of victims from all German parties, faiths, and social strata who were devoured by bloodthirsty fascism. But, unfortunately, all these sacrifices of health, blood, and property – made while working underground – did not succeed in eliminating the satanic machinery of oppression.

The German people will not despair! Their will to live will prove stronger than their misfortune! They will rally with what is left of their strength, because they want to, they will, and they must go on living!

History is teaching the German people the hard lesson that their path of sacrifice will have to involve tireless work and iron resolve – despite hunger and deprivation – if they intend to earn the respect of peaceful, freedom-loving nations.

The German people must never again be abused as the trusting victims of unscrupulous political adventurers. The political path that will guide them to a brighter future is thus clearly delineated: democracy in state and local government, socialism in economy and society!

We are prepared and determined to work together with all likeminded individuals and parties. For this reason, we warmly welcome the call issued by the Central Committee of the German Communist Party on June 11, 1945. It rightly assumes that the reconstruction of Germany depends on the current terms and conditions for the country's development, and that, in the present situation, the decisive interests of the German people make it necessary to build an anti-fascist democratic regime and a parliamentary democratic republic with all democratic rights and liberties for the people.

At this decisive hour, it is once again the historical duty of the German working class to be the bearer of this conception of the state: of a new, anti-fascist democratic republic! All selfish party squabbling of the kind that filled the political battlefield of the Weimar Republic must be nipped in the bud. In an anti-fascist democratic republic, democratic liberties can be granted only to those who accept them unconditionally. They must be denied to those who wish to use them only to defame and destroy democracy.

The most basic requirement of this new state is the complete elimination of all remnants of fascist tyranny. Likewise, militarism must be banished from the hearts and minds of the people. Our youth, spiritually uprooted by fascism, must again be raised as free and discerning individuals.

The new state must make amends for the sins committed against the victims of fascism. It must make amends for the crimes that fascist rapacity committed against the nations of Europe. Above all, this state must give the German people the economic and moral strength necessary to accomplish this superhuman task.

This is why the Social Democratic Party of Germany calls for:

1. Complete elimination of all traces of the Hitler regime in legislation, jurisprudence, and state administration. An untarnished state based on justice and fairness. Public liability for members of the NSDAP and its organizations for the damage caused by the Nazi regime.
2. Securing of the food supply. The provision of labor and cooperative consolidation in agriculture. The import of commodities, feed, and livestock to increase fat supplies. The promotion of consumer cooperatives and the reorganization of the retail trade.

3. Fulfillment of the broad masses' basic need for housing, clothing, and heating with help from local self-government.

4. Reconstruction of the economy with participation from local self-government and unions. Accelerated restoration of the means of transportation. Procurement of raw materials. Elimination of all impediments to private-sector entrepreneurial initiative, provided that public interests are protected. Elimination of Nazi over-organization of the economy. Clear and simple rebuilding of economic associations managed by volunteers. Rebuilding of the monetary system. Stabilization of the currency. Communal loans for industry, the skilled trades, and commerce. Revival of non-cash payment transactions. Simplification of the tax system through the strictest consolidation of different types of taxes. Greater consideration for the taxpayer's social situation in the assessment of taxes.

5. Building up of a national culture. Education of the youth in a democratic, socialist spirit. Promotion of the arts and sciences.

6. Re-drafting of social legislation. Liberal and democratic shaping of labor law. Integration of works councils into the economy. Participation of unions and consumer cooperatives in the organization of the economy. Expansion of social security to provide for the sick, pregnant women and mothers, invalids and accident victims, widows, orphans, war invalids, and the unemployed. Inclusion of all working people in the social welfare system.

7. Promotion of housing provisioning and development, communal oversight of housing. Adjustment of rents and mortgages to the economic situation caused by the war. Division of large landholdings to create land for urban dwellers willing to relocate. Relocation of small and medium-sized industrial enterprises to rural districts with favorable economic conditions.

8. Nationalization of banks, insurance companies, and natural resources; nationalization of mines and the power industry. Seizure of large-scale landholdings, viable large-scale industry, and all war profits for the purposes of reconstruction. Elimination of unearned income from land and rental property. Tight restrictions on interest payments from mobile capital. Obligation on entrepreneurs to run the enterprises entrusted to them by the German national economy in a fiduciary way. Restriction of inheritance rights to immediate relatives.

9. Adjustment of the law to the anti-fascist democratic conception of the state. State protection for the individual. Freedom of expression in speech, image, and the written word, provided the interests of the state are protected and the individual citizen is respected. Freedom of opinion and religion. Incitement of racial hatred subject to criminal prosecution.

Because of Hitler's guilt, our poor, tormented people must pass through unspeakable misery and a deep vale of suffering! We want to help lead it back to the heights of a humane culture, to friendship with all the peoples of the world.

Above all, we want to wage the struggle to create a new society on the basis of the organizational unity of the German working class! We regard this as a form of moral restitution for the political mistakes of the past and as a way to give the younger generation a unified political organization. The banner of unity must be carried forward as a shining symbol in all political activity by working people! We offer our hand of brotherhood to all those who live by the slogan: "Fight fascism for the freedom of the people, for democracy and socialism!"

That is why we call upon all our friends and comrades in the city and the countryside to begin rebuilding the party organization right away, with old devotion and new courage! Onwards! To work!

Central Committee of the Social Democratic Party of Germany

From: Aufruf vom 15. Juni 1945 zum Neuaufbau der Organisation [Call to Rebuild the Party Organization, June 15, 1945]; reprinted in Ossip Kurt Flechtheim, *Die Parteien der Bundesrepublik Deutschland* [*The Parties of the Federal Republic of Germany*]. Hamburg, 1973, pp. 212-15.

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