



German History in Documents and Images

Volume 5. Wilhelmine Germany and the First World War, 1890-1918
Appeal of the Westphalian Secessionists (1893)

The confessional division between Catholics and Protestants also translated into political action. In Wilhelmine Germany, elections allowed Catholics to contest the *Kulturkampf* ["cultural struggle"], in which Otto von Bismarck and his parliamentary allies openly attacked Catholic institutions and practices. This struggle led to the growth of a Catholic political party, the *Zentrum* [Center Party]. The Center Party sought support from agrarian constituents, who, in the early 1890s, suffered the economic strain of competition from foreign grain imports. Protective tariffs for agriculture were one of the ways in which parties catered to economic interests in the countryside.

To our fellow citizens!

The German Reichstag is dissolved; new elections will take place on June 15. For a long time now, a heavy pressure has weighed on domestic [*heimathlich*] agriculture, especially on the peasant estate [*Bauernstand*], but also on artisans and small tradesmen, with whom we feel a sense of solidarity, and through their circles courses a movement that has broken forth in the past few months with elemental force to set things right.

The trade treaties with their reduction of protective tariffs have damaged agriculture and been of little benefit to industry. The decline in prices, from which we suffer to the point of having been pushed below our own production costs, is exacerbated by the upholding of graduated tariffs for the importation of cheap grain from the East to the West, and it would become compulsory if there were also a trade treaty with Russia and customs reductions along its borders.

The dissolved Reichstag failed to give sufficient account to the legitimate wishes and interests of agriculture, which also extend to other areas; in particular, we Westphalian farmers lack a representation therein that is adequate in number and effectiveness. The upcoming new elections give us the duty and the right to demand redress and, as far as it is within our powers, to achieve it.

Until now, we have refrained from forming a separate party to achieve these goals, confident that our justified wishes and demands would find consideration within the existing parties, especially the Center Party. Therefore, at the meeting of the representatives [*Vertrauensmänner*] of the Center Party for Westphalia, held in Münster on May 24, we presented our complaints and wishes, and, in particular, demanded guarantees for an adequate representation for the predominantly agricultural electoral districts. To justify our demands, it is sufficient to point out that of the 9 Reichstag electoral districts of Westphalia that elected Center representatives [*Centrumsabgeordnete*], only 2 were represented by a farmer in the last Reichstag, and of the 4 Reichstag electoral districts of the Münsterland, in spite of an

overwhelmingly agricultural population, *none* was represented by a farmer in the last Reichstag, whereas 7 or 8 of the 9 electoral districts used to have a professional farmer as representative.

Our modest wishes to nominate farmers as representatives for an additional two electoral districts in the upcoming Reichstag elections, so that 4 of the 9 electoral districts would be represented by their kind, have now been rejected by the assembly of the representatives [*Vertrauensmänner*] of the Westphalian Center Party on May 24 when it moved onto the agenda.

This has given expression to the non-recognition of our justified wishes, the subordination of those concerns regarding the basic subsistence of Westphalian agriculture to a lopsided party position.

As Catholics, we stood and stand by the program of the Center Party on religio-political and Christian-social questions with continuing firmness and loyalty, and we also continue to follow the banner that *Mallinckrodt, Reichensperger, Windthorst, Schorlemer, Franckenstein, and Ballestrem* have planted and held high. As free German citizens, we want to be able to freely exercise our Catholic faith and demand the abolition of all laws that still impede this. But as Westphalian farmers, we also wish, like our ancestors, to remain in possession of our inherited farms, and we will not let our threatened property be taken from us without the fiercest struggle. We therefore demand that the delegates to whom we give our vote:

1. hold fast to the time-tested program of the Center in all religio-political and social questions;
2. advocate the protection of the productive estates – farmers, artisans, and small trade – by rejecting any reduction of tariffs on our products, closing our borders to the importation of livestock from disease-ridden countries, advocate limitations on stock market speculation with the most important foodstuffs, an international regulation of the currency issue, the introduction of the certificate of competence and obligatory guilds, restrictions on the peddling trade, and restrictions on military artisan jobs and prison work;
3. advocate the reduction of the oppressive military burden through the introduction of a two-year service period, exemptions for older militia men [*Landwehrmänner*] in case of war, and the imposition of a corresponding military tax on the wealthy who are exempt from active service;
4. guarantee the peace by maintaining an army that is sufficiently strong to defend our borders and protect our Fatherland. We therefore expect from our delegates that, as free men, in keeping with the time-tested principles of the Center Party, they do not commit themselves before the election to certain promises and do not allow themselves to be committed, but reserve for themselves the free decision of what they consider to be good and appropriate in the interest of the true welfare of the Fatherland.

This is our program!

We have accordingly nominated our candidates.

To landowners and farmers we direct the urgent appeal to support with the utmost resoluteness the candidates that have been nominated after careful reflection and with thorough consideration of the wishes of individual electoral districts. But we also direct the same appeal to artisans and the smaller tradesmen, with whom we feel joined by a common interest, willing

to support one of them with all our power, especially one of the candidates to be nominated by the artisans for the next Reichstag elections.

We enter into the campaign with the tried-and-true slogan: "For truth, freedom, and the law, and in the awareness that an economically strong and simultaneously religious estate of farmers and artisans is the strongest pillar for throne, altar, and Fatherland."

Therefore, *fellow Westphalian citizens from the city and the countryside!*, let us show that we Westphalians have the strength, the will, and the independence to stand up for our rights with the steadfastness and tenacity that God has given us Westphalians; let no one dissuade us, no matter *who he might be!* Let us all, man for man, go to the polls on 15 June and let us all boldly cast our vote for our candidates!

We will name these our candidates once the individual district electoral committees have made up their minds.

Source: "Aufruf der westfälischen Agrarier (Sezessionisten) 1893" [Appeal of the Westphalian Secessionists"], from Günther Mees, *Schorlemer-Alst und der Westfälische Bauernverein in der deutschen Innenpolitik, vornehmlich der Jahre 1890-1894* [*Schorlemer-Alst and the Westphalian Farmers' Association in German Domestic Politics, Particularly in the Years 1890-1914*], phil. Dissertation, University of Münster, 1956, Appendix, pp. 1-4.

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Translation: Thomas Dunlap