Chapter 2 German Unification: 1815-1871

Section 1

The Holy Roman Empire: 926-1806



Europe After the Napoleonic Wars Ended in 1815

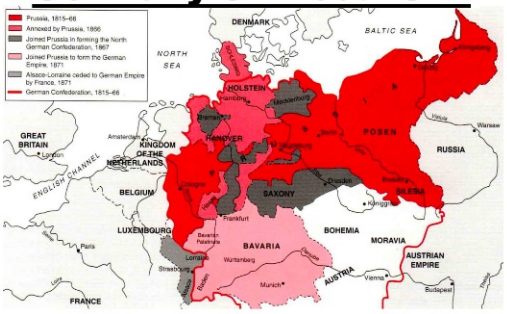


Otto von Bismarck

The North German Confederation in 1866



Germany Unified: 1871



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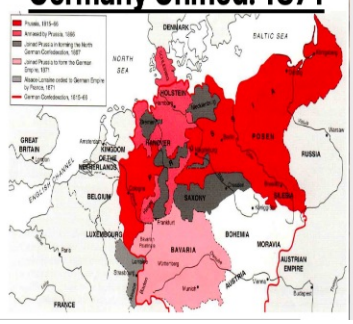


In Chapter 2 we will learn about:

1. The causes of the European revolutions of 1848-1849.
2. What happened during the 1848-1849 European revolutions and their consequences?
3. Why Bismarck was appointed Prime Minister of Prussia in 1862 and his goals in the period up to 1866.
4. How and why German unification was achieved by 1871.

The Causes of the European Revolutions of 1848-1849

Background



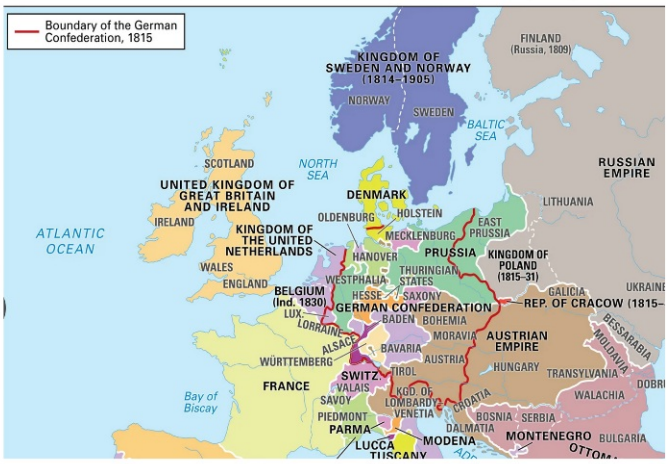
Before 1871, Germany was not one country like it is today. Instead, it was made up of more than 1,000 smaller German-speaking territories. These territories were part of a group called the **Holy Roman Empire**, which lasted from 962 to 1806. The Holy Roman Empire was led by Austria, and the emperor was supposed to rule from Rome. In reality, the empire was a loose collection of weak states in central Europe. People sometimes called it the **First Reich**, which means empire in German.

Austria was the most powerful country in the Holy Roman Empire and controlled most of the German-speaking lands, but it also owned some German territories outside the empire.

The Holy Empire: 962-1860



Austria



Background (cont.)

The German territories had trouble unifying as one country because people felt a strong loyalty to their own regions instead of to a united Germany. This feeling is called **regionalism**.

In 1806, Napoleon Bonaparte of France invaded and conquered the German territories during the **Napoleonic Wars**, which were a series of European battles from 1803 to 1815. Napoleon wanted to control all of Europe. After the Germans pushed the French out of their lands in the **Battle of Leipzig** in 1813, the Germans realized they needed to work together and form alliances with neighboring empires to become stronger and more independent.

Europe in 1812 During the Napoleonic Wars



Background (cont.)



When Napoleon was finally defeated in 1815, Austria took control of the German territories again. **Prussia**, however, remained out of Austria's control. Prussia was the largest German state and was mostly Protestant. Prussia controlled some German territories that had big cities and strong economies, while others Prussia controlled were small cities and mostly country areas. All these differences made it hard for the German states to unite, but they also set the stage for big changes and revolutions in Europe in 1848.

The Impact of the Napoleonic Wars (1803-1815)

During the time of the Napoleonic Wars, in 1806, Napoleon ended the Holy Roman Empire and created the **Confederation of the Rhine**. The Confederation of the Rhine was a loose group of German states under French control. But, ideas from the Enlightenment and the French Revolution began to spread across the German-speaking regions. The Enlightenment was a movement that encouraged people to think for themselves, value knowledge, and believe in equality and freedom. As these ideas reached the German states, people realized that working together could help them become stronger and more modern.

The Impact of the Napoleonic Wars: 1803-1815 (cont.)

As Napoleon and his French army controlled most German lands, the people living there started to think more about what made them unique. They developed a sense of **Volksgeist**, which means "Spirit of the People." This idea was about how each nation has its own special identity, based on things like a shared history, traditions, and a common language.

The Impact of the Napoleonic Wars: 1803-1815 (cont.)

The German-speaking territories noticed how their culture was different from other areas that were part of the former Holy Roman Empire. Seeing how easily Napoleon took over their lands made them want to unite and protect their own way of life. This led to the growth of nationalism after 1830. Nationalism is the belief that people who share the same language, culture, and history should be able to govern themselves. Nationalism also means that the borders between countries should be based on these common traits so that each group can have its own nation.

The Congress of Vienna: 1814-1815

The **Congress of Vienna** was a conference held in Austria from 1814-1815 to end the Napoleonic Wars. Leaders from four powerful countries, Austria, Prussia, Britain, and Russia, came together to figure out how to bring peace back to Europe. Their main goal was to restore kings and queens to their thrones because many had lost power during the wars.

The Congress of Vienna: 1814-1815 (cont.)

The most important person at the Congress was **Prince Klemens von Metternich**, who was Austria's Foreign Minister. He created a plan to help monarchs rule again, not just in Austria, but in other European countries too. Metternich didn't like new ideas about freedom and equality. He thought these ideas could cause problems, especially because the Austrian Empire had many different groups of people, which made it hard to keep everyone united.



The Congress of Vienna: 1814-1815 (cont.)

The countries at the Congress of Vienna mostly wanted to keep things traditional, which is called being **conservative**. Conservatives believe in keeping old ways, like having kings and queens, and letting trade and businesses run with little government control, a system called **laissez-faire economics**. But there were also people who wanted change, called **liberals**. Liberals believe that governments should give people more freedom and rights and let them make more choices about their lives and money.

The Congress of Vienna was important because it tried to balance these different ideas and keep Europe peaceful after decades of war.

The Metternich System: 1815-1848

The **Metternich System** was a plan created by Austria's Foreign Minister, Klemens von Metternich, to help keep Europe peaceful and under the control of kings and queens, called absolute monarchs. Metternich wanted Austria to stay powerful and in control of the German states so he made rules that were very strict. For example, he used press censorship, which means newspapers and books were checked and sometimes blocked so people couldn't read or write things that criticized the government. Metternich also had secret agents who spied on people who wanted to change the government, called political radicals. The agents would listen in on their conversations and read their messages. Metternich's system was tyrannical, authoritarian, and against nationalism.

The Metternich System: 1815-1848 (cont.)

In 1815, Metternich helped create the **German Confederation**, which was a group of 39 German-speaking states. These states were loosely connected, and each one could make some of its own decisions, but Austria was in charge overall. The German Confederation replaced the old Holy Roman Empire.

Metternich's system did help keep Europe peaceful for about 100 years, but it also made many people unhappy. People living under Austria's strict rules often felt frustrated because they didn't have much freedom and couldn't speak out against the government. This resentment would later lead to problems and changes in Europe.


39 STATES.
NO GERMANY.
The German Confederation (1815)
A loose union of 39 states.
Two powers dominated.
Who would lead Germany—and how?
Other German States
Austrian Empire
Kingdom of Prussia
North Sea
Baltic Sea
PRUSSIA
RUSSIAN EMPIRE
PRUSSIA
MILITARY POWER & AMBITION
FRANCE
AUSTRIAN EMPIRE
OTTOMAN EMPIRE
AUSTRIA
TRADITIONAL POWER & INFLUENCE
Italian States

Section 1 Questions

4. Define regionalism.

*5. Explain why it was difficult for the German speaking territories to unify before 1871. (include Austria and Napoleon; at least 1 reason because of each) "*Austrian opposition was the main obstacle to German unification in the period 1815-1850. How far do you agree with this view?*"

6. What happened in 1806 and why?

7. Explain why the Battle of Leipzig (1813) was significant. (at least 2 reasons)

8. What happened in 1815 and why?

*9. Explain how the Napoleonic Wars from 1803-1815 impacted Europe? (at least 2 reasons, then explain and connect) To what extent did Napoleon's conquests impact the German territories? and "*To what extent was the development of German nationalism in the period 1815-1850 caused by economic factors*?"

10. Explain the idea of Volksgeist and its importance in the German territories.

*11. Explain the start of German nationalism. (at least 2 reasons, then explain and connect) "Explain how the growth of nationalist ideas led to the Revolutions of 1848-1849?", "*How strong was German nationalism by 1850?*", "*The revolutions of 1848 in Germany were caused by the growth of liberal ideas. How far do you agree?*", "*How far were the revolutions in Germany in 1848-1849 caused by nationalism?*", "*Explain why the development of German nationalism was limited in the period before 1848.*", and "*Liberal ideas were influential in Germany by 1848. How far do you agree*?"

***12.** To what extent was the development of German nationalism in the period 1815-1850 brought about by cultural factors?* (argue for and against; 3 reasons total)

13. What happened from 1814-1815 and why?

***43.** To what extent did the Carlsbad Decrees limit the development of nationalism in Germany in the period from 1819 to 1848?* (argue for and against; 3 reasons total) "*Explain why the Carlsbad Decrees threatened the development of German nationalism."*

Section 1 Questions (cont.)

44. Explain the idea of a "large Germany" vs. a "small Germany" and how the different ideas impacted German unification.

***50.** Austrian opposition was the main obstacle to German unification in the period 1815-1850. How far do you agree with this view?* (argue for and against; 3 reasons total)

51. Why did the growth of nationalism occur in the German states in the 1840s? (at least 2 reasons) "Explain the reasons for the growth of nationalism in the German states in the 1840s."

The German Confederation 1815-1866

The German Confederation was created in 1815 mainly to help Austria stay powerful and keep control over the German states. The borders of the Confederation were similar to those of the old Holy Roman Empire.

Prussia was the largest state in the Confederation. It was the only state that could challenge Austria's control. Prussia was ruled at the time by conservative **King Wilhelm III**, who was supported by the **Junkers**. The Junkers were wealthy landowners who were very conservative and made up most of the officers in the Prussian army.

The German Confederation 1815-1866 (cont.)

Each state in the Confederation had its own government, called a **diet**. A diet is a legislative assembly. An assembly is a group of people who meet to make important decisions. Each state's diet was led by a representative from Austria, and Austria had the power to veto (say no to) any changes in the rules or constitution of the German state laws. In the Confederation, Austrian federal law took seniority over state law.

The German Confederation 1815-1866 (cont.)

However, the individual German state rulers continued to manage their own internal affairs, and the Confederation never developed a strong identity of its own or a unified country. This was because each state had a lot of power to make its own decisions, so they didn't work together as one. The Confederation also did not have its own **civil service** and there was no attempt to develop it as an economic area. Civil service is when a country has professional administrators who help the government of a country.

Austria could also always count on support from the southern German states. These states were closer to Austria, were mostly Catholic, and usually agreed with Austria.

How Effective was the Metternich System?: 1815-1848

The Metternich system did not work very well because more people were learning to read, so ideas about freedom and change spread quickly.

Many Germans remembered the time when Napoleon ruled parts of Germany. Even though Napoleon was a foreign leader, he brought some new ideas, like more rights and unity, which made people hope for a better future. These memories made Metternich's strict rules seem even less welcome.

How Effective was the Metternich System?: 1815-1848

Also, Germany was changing in ways Metternich could not control. Cities were growing and industrialization was starting. This made people's lives different and gave them new opportunities, so they wanted more say in their government.

Finally, Austria and Metternich became known for stopping German people from working together and having their own country. Because of this, many Germans started to look to Prussia for leadership.

The Influence of Liberal Ideas and the Creation of a Middle Class

Liberialism in the German States

Liberalism and nationalism spread after 1815, and from 1830 on there was an increase of unrest. Liberalism stressed the importance of opening careers to professional people based on their ability rather than inherited power and privilege. Middle-class liberals felt excluded from the upper levels of the social order, which were still dominated by privileged landowners. The middle class also included professionals like lawyers, professors, government officials, and doctors. Many of the middle class had a university education and literacy was high in Europe in the first half of the 1800s.

Liberialism in the German States (cont.)

In Prussia, the Junker class, which owned large agricultural estates in the eastern part of the country, controlled most of the higher positions in the army and civil service. Many members of the middle class wanted to gain access to the opportunities offered by these public service careers and this desire made liberal ideas attractive to them.

Liberialism in the German States (cont.)

Liberal thinkers wanted to change how the government worked. They did not want a king who had all the power, but they also did not want a government where everyone voted directly on every law. Instead, they wanted a system with a parliament, which is a group of people chosen to make laws, and a constitutional monarchy, where the king or queen had to follow rules written in a constitution.

These liberals believed in protecting people's rights, such as the right to speak freely and have fair trials.

Liberialism in the German States (cont.)

Liberal also supported laissez-faire economics and low or no taxes on importated imports, called **tariffs**. They thought that if people had more freedom, they would work hard to improve their lives, and this would help society get better.

Many middle-class liberals were leaders in their communities, and they were often well-educated. They helped spread these new ideas to other places.

Regionalism and the Growth of Nationalism in Germany

Regionalism in Germany

In Germany, many people felt more connected to their own local area than to the whole country. Each region had its own special traditions, foods, and ways of celebrating holidays, and people were proud of their culture. Because of this, most regions did not want a strong central government telling them what to do. Also, religion was different in different parts of Germany. The southern states were mostly Catholic while the northern states were mostly Protestant. This made the regions even more unique and sometimes led to disagreements about how things should be run.

The Growth of Nationalism in Germany After 1830

In the early 1800s, many people in Germany started to think about two important ideas: liberalism and nationalism. At first, only a small group of people in Germany supported these ideas. One group was called the **Burschenschaften**. These were student organizations that began after 1815.

The students in these groups wanted Germany to become one united country, and they also wanted more freedom and civil rights for everyone.



The Growth of Nationalism in Germany After 1830 (cont.)

Most people in Germany at that time were peasants who worked on farms. They were focused on surviving and taking care of their families, so they did not usually join these student groups or think much about nationalism or liberalism. Liberals and nationalists were also too few at the time to make a difference in society.

The Growth of Nationalism in Germany After 1830 (cont.)

After 1830, nationalism began to grow in Europe because of European revolutions. In France, Charles the X was replaced in July 1830 by King Louis Philippe. Charles had wanted to govern as an absolute ruler. Belgium declared independence from the Netherlands in 1831. Greece declared independence from the Ottoman Turkish Empire in 1832. Even though it was unsuccessful, Poland revolted against their Russian rulers. Italy also began to consider a unified country.



The Growth of Nationalism in Germany After 1830 (cont.)

These events encouraged liberals and democrats in Germany to try for change. Some small areas were granted constitutions. Other areas increased the freedom of the press which led to increased criticism of the government. A group called **Young Germany** was created, which called for a united Germany based on liberal principles. It consisted mainly of political writers and journalists who were opposed to the German states being controlled by princes. Those who wanted a unified Germany wanted it based on liberal principles and not violence, but they were still radical.

The Growth of Nationalism in Germany After 1830 (cont.)

In May 1832, nationalists organized the Hambach festival. 30,000 came together demanding national unity. Even the German leader wore the colors of German nationalism: black, red and gold. In April 1833, the Burschenschaften tried to cause an uprising in Frankfurt. The authorities stopped it and forced the Burschenschaften to go underground.

The Growth of Nationalism in Germany After 1830 (cont.)

In 1837, the new king of Hanover, Ernest Augustus, abolished Hanover's constitution. Seven college professors objected and lost their posts at the university of Gottingen. The "Gottingen Seven" as they were called included two famous brothers who promoted a sense of German culture by collecting traditional folk tales. The firing of the seven raised public and media awareness of the nationalist cause.

The Growth of Nationalism in Germany After 1830 (cont.)

Unfortunately, the Burschenschaften was powerless to achieve anything major. They lacked a clear plan to achieve their goals and relied too much on education to bring about unification. The individual princes, the leaders of the individuals German states, also began granting constitutions, helping them maintain power. But, the princes kept the right to veto proposals and could rely on the upper houses of the parliament, dominated by the aristocracy. They restricted the public opinion as much as possible, including indirect voting. This prevented Germans from voting directly for representatives. Instead, they voted for delegates who then chose the representatives.

The Conservative Reaction to the idea of German Unification

After the Napoleonic Wars, many people in Germany wanted more freedom and hoped their country could unite. However, some leaders, like Austria's Foreign Minister Metternich, were worried that these ideas would cause problems and make it harder for Austria to control their countries. In 1819, Metternich created strict rules called the **Carlsbad Decrees** to stop people from spreading ideas about freedom and nationalism.

The Conservative Reaction to the idea of German Unification (cont.)

The Carlsbad Decrees made it so that universities had special officials who watched what teachers taught. If a professor talked about new ideas that challenged the government, they could lose their job. Student groups that met without permission were shut down. Newspapers were also censored, which means the government checked what was written and could stop articles they didn't like. Metternich even set up secret agents to look for groups that wanted more freedom or wanted Germany to unite.

The Conservative Reaction to the idea of German Unification (cont.)

Some smaller German states didn't agree with these rules. They allowed people to write more freely in newspapers and let students have festivals to celebrate their love for Germany. Metternich didn't like this, so he convinced the rulers of these states to accept even stricter laws called the **Six Articles** in June 1832. These laws made it harder for elected groups to make decisions and limited the rights of elected assemblies of states that had constitutions. It also said that Austrian laws were more important than the laws of each German state.

The Conservative Reaction to the idea of German Unification (cont.)

The German Confederation's Federal Diet was to appoint a commission initially for six years to monitor events within the German states. There were limits on freedom of expression designed to maintain the stability of the confederation.

The Conservative Reaction to the idea of German Unification (cont.)

A month later, Metternich made even more rules, called the **Ten Articles**. These rules said again that Austrian law was the most important, and they even made it illegal for students to wear certain colors or scarves that showed they were part of student groups. The Ten Articles banned political meetings and festivals, unless they received government permission. Newspapers required government permission to include anything with political content. Police monitoring increased, passport rules were tightened, and each member state was required to offer military assistance to each other and notify the Federal Diet of the steps taken when rules were broken.

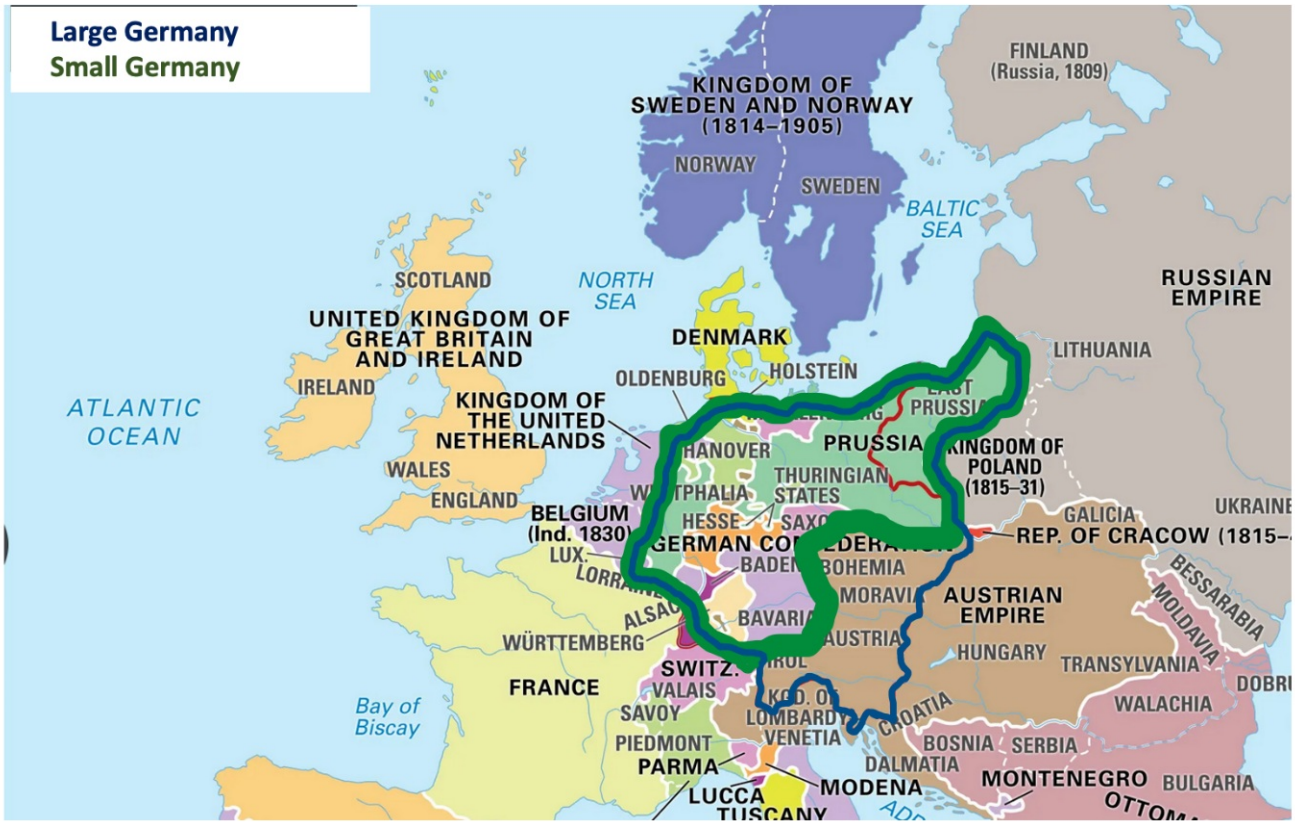
The Conservative Reaction to the idea of German Unification (cont.)

Because of all these strict rules, it was very hard for anyone to start a revolution or make big changes in the Germany states. Metternich's actions kept the confederation under tight Austrian control for many years and kept peace in Europe, but it built up resentment from the states under its strict rule.

An Important Weekness to German Unity: Its Borders

One of the biggest problems for German unity was that people could not agree on what the borders of Germany country should be. Some people wanted a "large Germany," which would include all the German-speaking areas, even those in Austria. This idea meant that Austria would be the most powerful part of a new unified Germany. Other people wanted a "small Germany," which would leave out the Austrian regions and be led by Prussia instead. These two groups argued because they had different ideas about which states should be included and who should be in charge. This disagreement made it very hard for Germany to become one united country.

“Large” Germany vs. “Small” Germany



King Wilhelm IV of Prussia: 1840-1861

In 1840, **Wilhelm IV** became the king of Prussia. When he first became king, Wilhelm IV sounded like a liberal. He made promises that sounded like he supported new ideas and changes, which is called being liberal. However, he preferred to keep things the same and was very conservative. Wilhelm IV was king during the 1848 revolutions, a time when many people across Europe protested and demanded more rights and freedoms from their governments.

King Wilhelm IV of Prussia: 1840-1861 (cont.)

Even though he talked about making changes, Wilhelm IV tried to keep his power and did not allow many of the reforms that people wanted. He did relax censorship and give greater powers to provincial diets or assemblies. A provincial diet is a local government inside a nation, like a county or state inside a country.

The Opportunities and Obstacles to German Economic Growth

The Prussian Customs Union: 1818

The German-speaking states were located in the middle of Europe, which helped them trade with other countries. They built many roads and railroads, making it easier to move goods and people. These states also made a lot of textiles, which is clothing. All of these things helped their economy.

However, about 70% of the people in these states worked in agriculture. This made it harder for them to develop other industries. There were also customs and tax barriers between the different German states, which means German states had to pay extra money to trade with other German states. This made trading more difficult because they had to compete with products from other countries.

The Prussian Customs Union: 1818 (cont.)

Eventually, Prussia decided to make changes when it created the Zollverein.

In 1818, the **Prussian Customs Union** abolished the kingdoms' 67 internal custom barriers and encouraged other German states to do the same. A customs union is a group of areas or states who agree to get rid of tariffs between themselves, and to charge the same tariffs on imports from other countries. Tariffs were created to protect Prussian industries from foreign competition by charging tariffs on imports. In 1828, Prussia and one of its larger neighbors, Hesse-Darmstadt, agreed to a custom treaty. Prussia was beginning its dominance over trade within German borders.

The Zollverein (1834-1871) and the Rise of Prussia

In 1834, Prussia improved its economy creating the **Zollverein**, a customs union of 18 German states that created a special trade agreement between them. The states agreed to trade with each other without charging extra taxes or customs fees. This made it easier for people and businesses to buy and sell goods across these states. The Zollverein also created tariffs, which are special taxes on products from foreign countries. This helped local businesses grow because it made foreign goods more expensive. Soon, seven more German states joined, and the Zollverein became the biggest free trade area in Europe at that time with 26 million people. As a result, trade between Prussia and the other German states increased and their economies became stronger.

The Zollverein (1834-1871) and the Rise of Prussia (cont.)

The Zollverein had a system for sharing money collected from taxes on goods coming from other countries. The money was divided among the member states based on their population and size. This helped all the states grow their industries and economies, because they could use the extra money to build factories, roads, and railways. A common currency was approved, and it was clear that economic expansion was the goal for all its members. The Zollverein also provided a way to isolate Austria economically by improving each of the German state's economies without helping Austria.

The Zollverein (1834-1871) and the Rise of Prussia (cont.)

Prussia became the strongest and most important state in the Zollverein. Because of this, Prussia started to lead the way toward uniting all the German states.

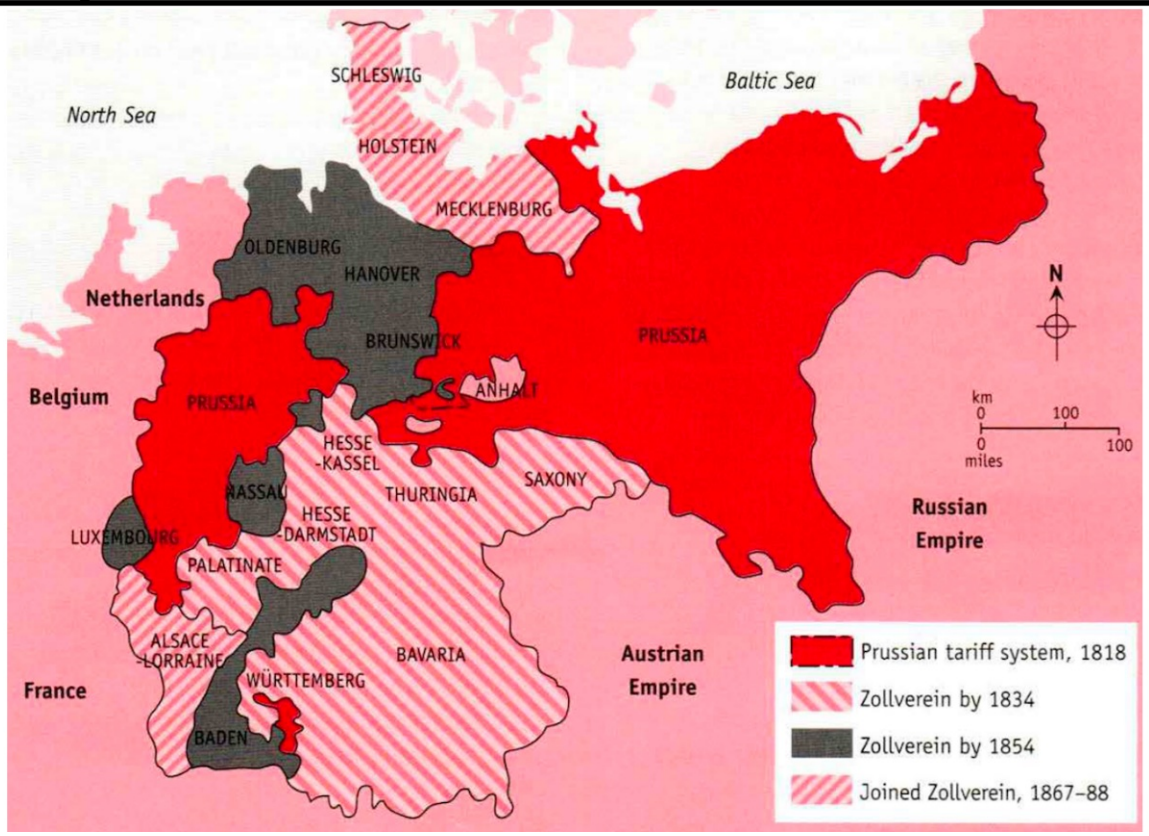
Free trade between the German states made everyone richer, especially Prussia. Prussia's factories, businesses, and transportation systems grew quickly. Cities got bigger, and more people became part of the middle class, which means they had better jobs and more money than before.

The Zollverein (1834-1871) and the Rise of Prussia (cont.)

Getting rid of customs and tax barriers also helped railways grow. Railroads connected the German states, making it easier for people and goods to travel. This helped the states feel more united.

Austria chose not to join the Zollverein. Instead, it focused on trading within its own empire, which meant it did not benefit from the same economic growth and unity as the other German states. Austria eventually lost its influence over the German states to Prussia.

The Expansion of the Zollverein from 1834 On



The Growth of Nationalism in the 1840s because of German Culture

Industry and the Zollverein brought about a sense of national identity by bringing together Germans from different states. A feeling of unity began to grow. A common culture also started to bring the German states. closer. The population in the German states was growing and they were high levels of literacy. Even literature and music was important. The song *Deutschland uber alles* became the Prussian national anthem in 1841 and the newspaper Die De Deutsche Zeitung in 1847 reflected nationalist and liberal feelings. Even travel guides encouraged people to visit certain locations in Germany, which helped the Germans to see themselves as a united people.

The Growth of Nationalism in the 1840s because of German Culture (cont.)

Tensions with France over the Rhine River in 1840 almost led to a French invasion of German territory. The patriotic poem *Die Wacht am Rhein* called for Germans to protect their land and became even more popular when it was set to music in 1854.

Another situation strengthened the national feeling. There was a dispute with the Danish king who ruled the provinces of Schleswig and Holstein. This was an area linking Prussia and Denmark and contained a large German population.

The Impact of Railroads on German Unity

Transportation was critical to Prussia and the idea of a unified Germany. Roads and steamboat services helped, but railroads were the only way to develop heavy manufacturing. At the start of the 1840s, Prussia had fewer than 372 miles of railways. Within 10 years it had almost 3,728 miles. It's growth attracted money and the development of coal and iron, which were necessary in industry. New city centers developed as areas experienced an industrial boom. With the heavy cost of construction, the Prussian state pushed ahead with building railroads, but they needed money to do it.

The Impact of Railroads on German Unity (cont.)

In April 1847, King Wilhelm IV called for the Prussian national assembly known as the United Diet to meet to get support for his plans. The United Diet was a combination of many of the diets from the German Confederation. The people in the United Diet said they wanted a constitution before they would help, but the king refused and ended the meeting. He said he would never let a written document come between God and his country.

Prussia benefited economically from the ability to move goods quickly and cheaply over long distances. It's railroads were a huge reason supporting German nation building as Berlin became the most important hub in the network.

The Impact of Railroads on German Unity (cont.)

In addition, the same railroads would later move soldiers and military supplies, a key factor in the German wars for unification.

The Frankfurt Parliament: 1848-1849

In October 1847, politicians who wanted more freedom asked for even bigger changes. They wanted all the German states to come together and form one united country instead of being separate. In March 1848, representatives from six German states met to create a group that would create a constitution for a new unified Germany. This was called the **Vorparlament**. This led to the creation of the **Frankfurt Parliament**, where each German state was supposed to hold elections to choose who would represent them in the legislative assembly.

The Frankfurt Parliament: 1848:1849 (cont.)

The Frankfurt Parliament gave great optimism for people who supported German unification, but their hopes were soon squashed. The first all-German parliament met from May 1848 to June 1849. The parliament was all male and most of its members were wealthy professionals.

The Frankfurt Parliament: 1848:1849 (cont.)

The parliament members were mostly liberal and politicians, but there were a small few that were radical and wanted a German republic. In June 1848, the parliament set up a temporary central power under a region, the liberal Austrian Archduke Johann. A region is an individual who is appointed to govern a country, usually for a limited amount of time. Johann would govern until a permanent constitution was in place.

The same month, demonstrations broke out in Berlin over workers' pay and conditions and middle class rights. At first Wilhelm IV of Prussia appeared to back the demonstrations.

The Frankfurt Parliament: 1848:1849 (cont.)

Wilhelm IV wore the colors of the nationalist movement and declared that Prussia would combine with the rest of Germany. He also allowed the election of an assembly whose purpose was to create a constitution for Prussia. However, in December 1848, he announced a more restrictive political settlement of his own. The new constitution of February 1850 established a two chamber Parliament but let the king keep the most important powers. He had the right to change the constitution at will and government administrators would be responsible directly to him.

The Economic and Social Causes of the German Revolutions of 1848-1849

During the 1840s, many people in Germany faced serious problems. There were several years of poor harvests, which meant that farmers could not grow enough food. 70% of the population still made a living from agriculture. Both country and city areas suffered from economic and social problems in the 1840s. Living standards fell and food prices increased. Potato blight, a disease which ruined the crop, added to the misery as potatoes were a main food for most German peasants.



The Economic and Social Causes of the German Revolutions of 1848-1849 (cont.)

All of the farming problems led to food shortages, so many families did not have enough to eat. Because there was less food, people had to spend more money just to buy basic things like bread. At the same time, there was an economic depression, which means that many people lost their jobs or earned very little money. The decade was known as the **hungry forties**. An increasing population and death rate made the situation worse.

The Economic and Social Causes of the German Revolutions of 1848-1849 (cont.)

Living conditions were tough for most people. Many families lived in crowded homes with high rents that were not very clean or safe. Those that could not find employment on farms moved to the cities. Workers in factories had to deal with long hours, low pay, and dangerous machines. Even children had to work in factories, which was harmful to their health. Overcrowding, poor sanitation, and disease made the situation worse.

The Economic and Social Causes of the German Revolutions of 1848-1849 (cont.)

Food riots often broke out. In April 1847, a riot broke out in Berlin, known as the "potato revolution." The riot's goal was to control the food supply. However, the riots helped the politicians who took part, causing a debate between radicals and conservatives about the government's role during bad times.

The riots of 1847 led to protests in early 1848. The poorest workers simply wanted their lives to improve while skilled workers formed their own workers committees. The workers called for **trade unions** (organizations which negotiate with the employers on behalf of the workers to improve their pay and conditions of work, like a minimum wage and safer working conditions).

The Economic and Social Causes of the German Revolutions of 1848-1849 (cont.)

Karl Marx and Friedrich Engles, authors of the 1848 revolutionary book *The Communist Manifesto*, said that the riots were a sign of the growth of a working class awareness and a revolt against being used by **capitalism** (an economic and political system in which individuals rather than the state owns businesses to make a profit).

The middle class wanted political and constitutional change. As more people learned to read and write, they started to think about how life could be better. They began to feel proud of being German and wanted their country to be united.

The Economic and Social Causes of the German Revolutions of 1848-1849 (cont.)

Skilled workers wanted stronger labor unions to help protect their rights and improve working conditions. Many people were unhappy with the government, especially with leaders like Metternich who did not allow much freedom, and King Wilhelm IV of Prussia, who did not support ideas like liberalism or nationalism.

Prussia became a powerful German state during this time, partly because of economic changes. The most important development was the Zollverein. This helped Prussia grow stronger and compete with Austria for leadership in a future united Germany.