Chapter 2 German Unification: 1815-1871

Section 2

The Holy Roman Empire: 926-1806



Europe After the Napoleonic Wars Ended in 1815

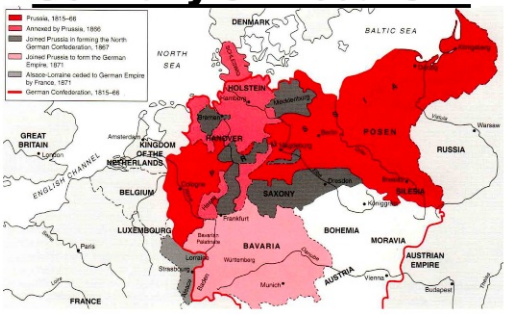


Otto von Bismarck

The North German Confederation in 1866



Germany Unified: 1871



The European Revolutions of 1848-1849

The Political Cause of the German Revolutions of 1848-1849- The French Revolution of 1848



In February 1848, people in France started a revolution because they were unhappy with their king, Louis Philippe. The revolution led to their king being removed from power. After this happened, ideas like liberalism and nationalism became more important to other countries in Europe. This event helped inspire other people to stand up for their rights and try to change their governments. The revolution in France was the immediate cause for uprisings in the German Confederation.

In Germany, people began to protest. They resented the nobles holding onto power and their control of the army and civil service, regardless of their qualifications. The people wanted social and political reforms.

The German States' Response to the French Revolution of 1848

In the 1840s, many people in Germany wanted changes to their government. Most of the leaders, called conservatives, did not want to listen to new ideas, so students and other liberals started asking for things like a constitution. When people in France started their own revolution, the news spread to Germany and made even more people interested in freedom and rights, especially in the southern German states.

The German States' Response to the French Revolution of 1848 (cont.)

In the southern German states, middle class Germans wanted political and constitutional change. People began to ask for things like voting rights, free speech, and freedom of the press, which means newspapers could write what they wanted, and trial by jury, which means a country's citizens help decide if someone is guilty in court.

Southern German states were more open to these new ideas and wanted a bill of rights and more power for the Frankfurt Parliament. Even in the northern German states, some changes happened without much fighting.

The German States' Response to the French Revolution of 1848 (cont.)

Some leaders in German states decided to give up their thrones or allowed new liberal policies, such as freedom of the press, the right to vote, and the ability to form clubs and political parties. These changes helped shape the future of Germany by giving people more say in their government.

Baden, Germany was the first German state to have unrest from the revolution in France. Peasants protested and attacked landowner's property. Middle class liberals met at the end of February 1848 to demand a bill of rights. Demands for liberal political change also spread to other German states.

The German States' Response to the French Revolution of 1848 (cont.)

Peasant farmers in German-speaking areas became very unhappy with the landowners and tax officials. Some peasants wanted to change the government to a republic, which means the people choose their leaders, or to **socialism**. Socialism is an economic system where important businesses and industries are owned by the workers or the government, instead of by private individuals.

The Reaction of Austria to the German Uprisings

Many German states wanted their parliaments to have more power. However, Austria was able to bring back the old German Confederation. This stopped new ideas like liberalism and nationalism from creating a new, united German nation.

Around the same time, the Austrian Empire was having problems. Their powerful leader, Klemens von Metternich, had to step down in March 1848 because people were protesting his strict rules. The Austrians were demanding universal male suffrage and a constitution granting civil and political rights to all citizens. Students were killed, and the working class population became involved. Metternich's downfall was a turning point for those who wanted Austrian rule over the confederation to end.

The Reaction of Austria to the German Uprisings (cont.)

This made the Austrian Empire weaker, and protests started happening in Berlin and other German-speaking areas. Many middle-class people joined these protests because they wanted their rights protected. The Prussian army could not control the crowds, and in the chaos, more than 200 Germans died.

These events were all part of the German revolutions of 1848-1849, when people tried to change their government to make it fairer and give more rights to everyone.

The Consequences of the European Revolutions of 1848-1849

Prussia's Response to the French Revolution of 1848

Prussia wanted to keep order, so they created a group called the Civil Guard. This group was made up of middle-class citizens who helped maintain peace and control in the country.

Prussia also set up a new assembly. The assembly's job was to write a new constitution. The goal was to give less power to the king and more power to the people, making the government fairer and more representative.

Prussia supported the idea of German nationalism. However, Prussia did not want to start a war with Austria.

Weaknesses of the European Revolutions of 1848-1849

During the revolution, not everyone in the German states agreed on what changes should happen, just like in the French Revolution.

Some people, called moderates, wanted to keep the government but make it better by adding a constitution, which is a set of rules for how a country is run.

Others, called radicals, wanted to completely change the government and start something new.



Weaknesses of the European Revolutions of 1848-1849 (cont.)

There were also differences between groups of liberals. Working class liberals wanted better living conditions. Middle class liberals, who usually had more money and education, cared more about having a say in government and making laws, but they didn't always agree with the working class about what was most important.

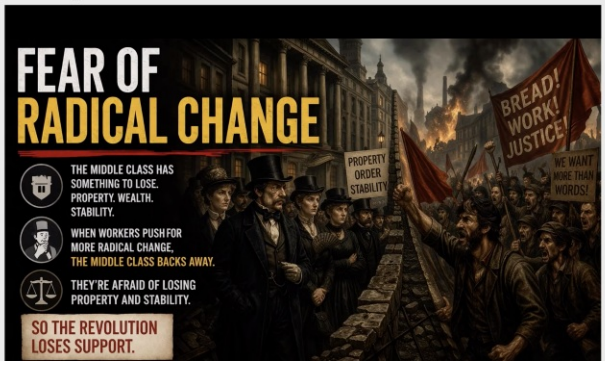


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The Impact of the German Revolutions of 1848-1849

The German revolutions were not violent. The fighting that erupted briefly in Prussia in March 1848 was not typical. This fighting was a combination of a decade of popular resentment later known as the "hungry forties." Economic depression and food shortages affected working class people across Europe. After March 1848 however, the political demands of the liberals became more noticeable.



The Impact of the German Revolutions of 1848-1849 (cont.)

By the end of 1848 Prussia was the strongest state in the German Confederation and the only rival of Austria. The experiences of 1848-1849 had demonstrated the weakness of liberal nationalism. Long established institutions were able to once again gain power and liberals and nationalists were overwhelmingly disappointed.



The Collapse of the Frankfurt Parliament

Why the Frankfurt Parliament Failed in 1849



During the time of the Frankfurt Parliament in Germany, there were many disagreements among the members. Liberals wanted changes that would give more rights to citizens, while radicals wanted a German republic and social change. Conservatives wanted to keep things mostly the same, like restricting the parliament's power over the individual states. They argued about things like how taxes should work and whether a unified Germany would be a “large” unified country with Austria or “small” unified country without her. Many members of parliament did not have much experience in politics, which made it hard for them to make decisions.

Why the Frankfurt Parliament Failed in 1849 (cont.)

The constitution they created mostly helped the **bourgeoisie**, which was made up of the middle class who own most of society's wealth and means of production. However, the working class, who made up more than 70% of the population, did not get much help from the new rules.

There were also problems because different regions of Germany had different beliefs. In the north, most people were Protestant and conservative, while in the south, people were Catholic and more liberal. This made it hard for everyone to agree since religion was very important.

Why the Frankfurt Parliament Failed in 1849 (cont.)

The middle class wanted to protect their property and make sure their rights were safe. Workers, on the other hand, wanted protection from tariffs and from cheap foreign imports that could hurt their jobs.

Another big problem was that the Frankfurt Parliament did not have the ability to enforce its decisions. It did not have an army of its own. The Prussian army remained under the authority of the king. Because of all these issues, the Parliament only lasted until June 1849.

Why the Frankfurt Parliament Failed in 1849 (cont.)

Even though the Frankfurt Parliament started meeting in May 1848, it took almost a year to finish a draft of the constitution, and then they proposed a Bill of Rights. This took so long that by 1850, people had lost interest in the revolution, and the idea of a united Germany was no longer the main thought of most Germans.

Why the Frankfurt Parliament Failed in 1849 (cont.)

In March 1849, a constitution was agreed upon. An emperor would govern with the support of the two houses of the Frankfurt Parliament. The Parliament offered the role of emperor of a united Germany to King Wilhelm IV of Prussia. Those who wanted a German republic which excluded Austria felt Wilhelm would lead a German national revolution. Prussia was also the only state with the military strength to resist Austria if she opposed. But Wilhelm refused. He felt the Frankfurt Parliament had no legal power to offer him the throne. He said he would only take the throne if he was offered it by the German princes. He also said that the offer was meaningless.

Why the Frankfurt Parliament Failed in 1849 (cont.)

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Finally, the Parliament offered the role of emperor of a united Germany to King Wilhelm IV of Prussia. He refused because he felt on the offer was meaningless because he felt above the right of Parliament to offer the title. This made the idea of a united Germany seem less important at the time.

The Scheleswig-Holstein Crisis of March 1848

In 1848, Denmark wanted to add the German territories of Schleswig and Holstein to its country. However, the people living in Schleswig and Holstein, along with the German Confederation, did not agree with Denmark's plan.



The Scheleswig-Holstein Crisis of March 1848 (cont.)

Schleswig and Holstein did not have their own army to defend themselves, and the German Confederation needed help from Prussia's army to protect these territories.

The Prussian army was controlled by King Wilhelm IV, but the Frankfurt Parliament gave permission for the Prussian army to fight against Denmark.

The Scheleswig-Holstein Crisis of March 1848 (cont.)

The Prussian army started moving toward Denmark, but then King Wilhelm IV decided to pull back his soldiers without asking Parliament. This showed that the Franckfurt Parliament had the power to give advice and make decisions, but it did not have real control over the army or the king. Parliament needed King Wilhelm IV's cooperation.

The Attitude of the German Princes

The German princes' authority had been weakened by the revolutionary events of spring 1848 and did not initially oppose the Frankfurt Parliament. But by the end of 1848, the princes were recovering their confidence and authority. The delay in working on a constitution was fatal to the parliament's chance of success. By the time parliament was ready to present its proposal, it's opponents regained their strength.

The Attitude of the German Princes (cont.)

By March 1849, the new Austrian emperor, France Joseph, was once more in control of his territories. None of the princes would support the creation of a German state in opposition to Austria. One by one states removed their delegates from Frankfurt. In June 1849, the remaining delegates were scattered by troops. The collapse of the Frankfurt Parliament marked the failure of middle-class liberalism to establish a united Germany.

King Wilhelm IV of Prussia (1840-1861)

King Wilhem IV of Prussia tried to get support from the liberal German states by wearing the colors red, black, and gold, which were important to people who wanted Germany to be united. He said that Prussia would join with Germany, but he did not have a real plan for how this would happen.

In 1848, he let a group of people called an assembly work on making a new constitution for Prussia. However, he later changed his mind and stopped the assembly from finishing their work.

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

Later, in 1850, King Wilhem IV did create a new constitution called the Erfurt Union. Even though this constitution existed, he still kept control over important things like taxes and laws, and he could change the constitution whenever he wanted.

Prussia's February 1850 Constitution

The new Prussian Constitution, called the **Erfurt Union**, was designed to make a strong central government for the German states. The **Landtag**, the Prussian Parliament, was set up with a two-house legislature. The first group was called the **House of Representatives**, or the lower house. The House of Representatives mostly supported conservative ideas and had a complicated voting system that gave more power to wealthy people. In fact, about one-third of the richest voters chose 85% of the members in this house. The second group was called the **House of Lords**, or the upper house, and its members were chosen by the king.

Prussia's February 1850 Constitution (cont.)

Most people in the Landtag were professionals like lawyers, nobles, professors, and teachers. Regular workers and middle-class people were not included, and this made them unhappy because they felt left out of important decisions.

Prussia's February 1850 Constitution (cont.)

The Landtag wanted to have more control over the German states than the old German Confederation's United Diet. They were not sure exactly what actions to take, but they did agree on 50 important rights for people. These rights included things like being treated equally under the law, having freedom of the press, and protection from being arrested without a warrant.

The Return of Austrian Power and the Humiliation of Olmütz

The Erfurt Union: March 1849-April 1850

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The Erfurt Union: March 1849-April 1850 (cont.)

In 1849-1850, Friedrich Wilham IV adopted a complicated pan for partial German unification. It involved a union and would be achieved through an agreement between the German princes. There would be a Prussian Union, or Reich, of the northern German states excluding Austria.

The union would have a strong central government, an elected parliament, and control of the army by Prussia. The union would be a special relationship between Prussia and Austria. They would be equal in power, with Austria no longer in charge of the new union.

The Erfurt Union: March 1849-April 1850 (cont.)

Both countries would have their own separate central government and parliament. Saxony and Hanover, which were two important German states, agreed to join the Erfurt Union. This group was led by Prussia. The idea was to create a united Germany under Prussian leadership, which some people called a Reich. However, other German states were worried that Prussia would become too powerful and control everyone else.

The Erfurt Union: March 1849-April 1850 (cont.)

Austria did not like Prussia's plan. Austria wanted to be the leader of a united Germany. So, Austria brought back an old group called the United Diet of the German Confederation, which was the group of German states that made decisions together. Because of Austria's actions, Saxony, Hanover, and another state called Baden, decided to leave the Erfurt Union.

After this, Austria claimed that it had complete authority over the German Confederation. This struggle between Prussia and Austria was important because it showed how difficult it was for Germany to become one country, and how different states competed for power.

The "Humiliation" of Olmütz: November 1850

In late 1850, Prussia was not strong enough to stand up to Austria, so it had to give up its plan for the Erfurt Union, which was an idea to unite German states.

The leaders met in November in a town called Olmütz, which was controlled by Austria, to officially end the union. Many German people were upset about this decision because they wanted a stronger, united Germany.

The "Humiliation" of Olmütz: November 1850 (cont.)

Some of the smaller German states did not like Austria's plan to lead a united Germany, so they went back to the old way of being part of the German Confederation May 1851. This showed that it was difficult for the German states to agree on how to unite and who should be in charge.

The Aftermath of Olmütz

Even though Austria was a powerful country in central Europe, Prussia started to become stronger because of its location and its growing factories and army. This helped Prussia compete with Austria and Prussia begin to lead the other German states. At the same time, Austria had to manage a huge empire with many different groups of people, which made things more difficult for them. Austria also lost Russia's support because Austria did not help Russia during the Crimean War, which happened from 1854 to 1856 in southern Europe. Prussia stayed out of this war so Russia remained friendly with Prussia. This made Prussia's position in Europe even stronger.

The Zollverein and Prussia's Economic Growth after 1849

The Zollverein and Prussia's Economic Growth after 1849

In the 1850s, Prussia started to grow quickly because it produced a lot of coal, iron, steel, and built many railways. By 1860, Prussia's economic growth had overtaken Austria's. Just in railroads alone, Prussia's railroads increased

	Percentage of labour force in manufacturing		Per capita Gross National Product (in 1960 US $)		Railways (km in operation)	
	1850	1870	1850	1870	1850	1870
Prussia	20	28 (1882)	308	426	5586	18876
Austria	14.8 (1857)	13.1 (1869)	283	305	1579	9589

by 46%. This growth was helped by the Zollverein, created in 1834. At the same time, Austria was having economic problems.

The Zollverein and Prussia's Economic Growth after 1849 (cont.)

Austria had to spend a lot of money to keep its large empire and army running, which made things even harder for them.

In 1862, Prussia made a trade agreement with France called the Franco-Prussian trade treaty. This helped Prussia's factories and businesses grow even more, especially in the western part of the country. By this time, Prussia was becoming one of the biggest economies in Europe.

The Zollverein and Prussia's Economic Growth after 1849 (cont.)

As Austria lost its power and could not control other countries as well as before, Prussia became the most important German state. This made Prussian leaders think about creating a larger, united Germany, but they still wanted to make sure Prussia's interests came first.

Otto von Manteuffel's Reforms

Otto von Manteuffel was the Prime Minister of Prussia from 1850 to 1856. He was a conservative leader. Manteuffel wanted to bring together the different German states and their people to make them stronger as a group. He believed that Prussia could grow and improve by helping its economy and society, but he did not want to make big changes to the government that some people, called radicals, were asking for. These radicals wanted more freedom and new laws, but Manteuffel thought it was better to focus on helping peasants and factory workers have better lives through social reforms, instead of changing the whole political system.

Otto von Manteuffel's Reforms (cont.)

To prevent poor members of society from supporting liberal ideas, Manteuffel undertook social reforms. His government provided low interest loans to peasants, provided financial assistance to peasants who were willing to move to less populated parts of the country, improved working conditions, and increased the pay for factory workers.

Austria's Economic Problems

In the 1850s, Austria's economy barely grew. Austria lacked direct access to the most rapidly growing trade routes in Germany. Towards the end of the 1850s, there was a recession. The cost of maintaining military forts throughout its territories added to Austria's problems. In addition, Austria was much less efficient than Prussia in sending money generated by its own economy to support its government. This ultimately led to the lack of financing of Austria's armed forces in the 1860s.

Austria's Economic Problems (cont.)

Increasingly, Austria lacked the economic and military might to force the German states to follow its rules. Resentment from the Humiliation of Olmütz only increased German efforts to separate from Austria. All that German citizens needed was the political leadership to do so. The Zollverein allowed Prussia to win the economic domination of Germany. It allowed many Germans to pursue their own state's interests, but also think of future German unification.

The Growth of Liberalism

As Prussia grew economically, it boosted the self-confidence of its middle class. Many began to look at the Prussian state to guarantee its future growth. Liberals realized that without the backing of a powerful state, liberal ideas would not succeed. In 1859, many business and professional people came together to form the **National Society**, or **Nationalverein**, an organization which placed its hopes in Prussia. This group wanted Prussia to unite all of Germany. They asked for elections across the country and wanted a strong government that could work with all the different German states.

The Growth of Liberalism (cont.)

Unlike earlier attempts in 1848, the Nationalverein in 1859 tried to find ways to compromise and bring everyone together.

After the 1848-1849 revolutions, Prussia's voting system mainly worked in the interest of the middle class who generally supported liberal or moderate conservative ideas.

Otto von Bismarck's Role up to 1859

Otto von Bismarck was little known in the 1850s. He was intelligent, cunning, and strong willed, but also emotional and short tempered. He was also a skilled manipulator, and arrogant. Bismarck believed in a monarchy with few constitutional restrictions, and he had little patience with parliament. He supported the monarchy and he did not like ideas such as liberalism or nationalism.

He came from a junker family. He had defended the monarchy against the liberals during the 1848-1849 revolutions.

Otto von Bismarck's Role up to 1859 (cont.)

But Bismarck first made a name for himself as a conservative member of the Prussian United Diet in 1851 where he openly smoked. He later became the Prussian ambassador to Russia and later France.

As the 1850s ended, the question of German unification remained unresolved. Prussia had the potential to challenge Austria for the leadership of Germany, but it's army needed modernizing. It also could not count on the support of many of the smaller German states. There was also concern that other conservative major European powers would prevent German power over Austria and a liberal country.