

Austria, Prussia and
the Making of Germany
1806–1871

Second edition

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With that rejection the days of the Assembly were numbered. Austrian deputies had already left the parliament on instructions from Vienna. Soon members of the *kleindeutsch* group also were leaving, often obeying instructions from their states. Nevertheless, it was still possible to pressure some twenty-eight of the smaller and medium German states to affiliate to the Imperial Constitution. The radical rump remaining in the GNA moved the parliament to Stuttgart. Some of the deputies were involved in the wave of second revolutions which took place in the spring and early summer of 1849 in Saxony, Württemberg, the Rhineland province of Prussia, and Baden. These revolutions, fuelled mainly by a determination to preserve democratic gains, were ostensibly in defence of the Imperial Constitution of 1849, although they can be better understood in terms of local political traditions and socio-economic conditions. (See Siemann 1998, chap. 13 for a general treatment; Sperber 1991, part 3 for a regional one.)

With the failure of the GNA, initiatives on the national question shifted back to Austria and Prussia. The revolution had made plain how difficult was going to be any move from a confederal Germany dominated cooperatively by Austria and Prussia to a national state with clear boundaries, independence and a single effective government. It was now generally recognised that there was no prospect of achieving this by means of a popular movement. Even amongst those who wanted a national state, there were insuperable divisions between Catholics and Protestants, democrats and liberals, Austrians, Prussians and those from the 'third Germany', guildsmen and mobile businessmen, landowners and small peasants. It seemed impossible to devise any arrangement which was acceptable to both Austria and Prussia yet equally to dispense with cooperation from one or other of these states. Yet the revolution had also laid bare the weaknesses and inadequacies of pre-1848 arrangements and the sharply opposed positions of Austria and Prussia.

The national question had become a major issue in 1848 and would not disappear. It needed addressing urgently but with the failure of the revolutionary approach by early 1849 it was quite unclear how this was to be done. Very rapidly Austria, Prussia and the medium states came forward with new but opposed proposals. Yet in many ways, the ideas worked out in the course of the revolution would continue to inform approaches to the national question up to and beyond 1871. (A central argument in Hewitson 2010.)

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Counter-Revolution, Cooperation and Conflict, 1849–1858

INTRODUCTORY COMMENTS

For a brief moment in 1848–49 it had appeared that the construction of a German national state was possible by means of popular movements and a national parliament rather than state action and power, whether from Prussia, Austria or the medium states. However, the rapid recovery of old regimes, especially in Prussia and Austria, the divisions within the national parliament and its growing isolation from waning popular support meant that by early 1849 the initiative was returning to the princes.

Their priority was the restoration of order. This was a European-wide concern and brought international and domestic politics together, most obviously with Russian assistance to the Habsburgs in crushing revolution in Hungary. Insofar as nationalism was regarded as revolutionary, the restored monarchies were anti-national. Frederick William IV regarded the imperial crown offered by the German National Assembly as tainted by association with revolution (Barclay 1995, especially pp. 188–96) [Doc. 40, p. 153]. Francis Joseph and Schwarzenberg were determined to crush breakaway movements in Hungary and Italy and reimpose control from Vienna. (See Siemann 1998 and Sperber 1994 for counter-revolution in Germany and beyond respectively.)

The two states responded differently to the national issue in Germany. Austria opposed any moves towards a national state whereas Prussia was interested in such moves if it could control them [Docs 36 and 37, pp. 146, 148]. The different opportunities the two states perceived in the first phase of counter-revolution, from early 1849 until the end of 1850, brought them into sharp conflict of a kind not seen since the dispute over Saxony in 1814–15. As then, the conflict ended with an apparent Prussian defeat. For the next eight years the policy of cooperative domination was resumed within the restored *Bund*, mainly to clamp down on demands for political change. At the same time Prussia extended its influence over

non-Austrian Germany through the expansion and development of the *Zollverein*. However, this duality of political cooperation and economic competition did not just repeat the situation from before 1848, partly because of the impact of the revolution itself but also because of other significant changes in Europe, the 'third Germany', Austria and Prussia. These changes laid the foundation for the public re-emergence of the 'national question' after 1858 in a different context from that of 1848.

EUROPE

The policies of the major powers played an important part in bringing revolution to an end in the German lands as elsewhere. Britain and Russia supported Denmark in the Schleswig-Holstein affair which led to Prussia ending its war there, even if it did not formally renounce its claims until the end of 1850. Austria obtained military assistance from Russia against Hungarian insurgents. Revolution in Italy was crushed by a multi-national combination of Austrian, French, Papal and Neapolitan soldiers.

When Prussia pursued a forward policy in Germany in 1849–50, Russia saw this as continuation of revolution and backed Austrian opposition to it. For a brief period there was a revival of the conservative alliance between Prussia, Austria and Russia (1850–53). As during Metternich's time, the prime purpose of foreign policy appeared to be to restore and maintain domestic order. (See Mosse 1958 for a general diplomatic treatment for the period after 1848.)

This reactionary emphasis ended with the outbreak of the Crimean War. The war brought Britain into alliance with France and against its Napoleonic ally, Russia. This was the first war between major European powers since 1815 and signalled a new readiness to use war as an instrument of policy without worrying about possible domestic instability. The war was the first in Europe marked by new industrial conditions, for example the use of steam ships to bring men and material from western Europe to the Crimea (Goldfrank 1994).

The war placed Austria in a difficult position. It was beholden to Russia for assistance in 1849–50 in repressing revolution and confronting Prussia. Some policy-makers in Vienna considered it essential to maintain this conservative alliance. However, Austria was worried about Russia's drive against the Ottoman Empire, its claims to defend the interests of the Christian subjects of the Ottoman state, its appeals to Balkan nationalities, its search for access from the Black Sea to the Mediterranean and specifically its occupation in 1853 of the semi-autonomous Danubian principalities of the Ottoman Empire, Moldavia and Wallachia. When the Crimean War began in

1854 Austria initially took a neutral position though this was effectively anti-Russian with troop mobilisation on its borders, a mobilisation which led to a Russian evacuation of the principalities in August 1854. In December Austria entered the war on the side of Britain and France and in turn occupied the Danubian principalities. Prussia declared itself neutral. This policy deprived Austria of Russian support in later years and, through the high cost of mobilisation, deepened her financial problems. The outcome of the war did temporarily halt a forward Russian policy in the Balkans but the financial and military weakening of Austria and its subsequent diplomatic isolation took on major significance after 1858 (Okey 2000, chap. 6; Bridge 1990, chap. 3; Bled 1994, chap. 5).

GERMANY

Political repression after 1848 was more effective than before. State police forces communicated directly with one another about suspect individuals and organisations rather than going through ministerial and diplomatic channels. The restored *Bund*, under Austro-Prussian domination, intervened in internal state affairs over constitutional provisions and laws on freedom of association, assembly and expression. Although censorship did not play a major role, a whole battery of controls such as caution money and liability of printers and publishers to prosecution muzzled expressions of dissent (Siemann 1998 and 1995: 400–1).

However, while Austria was preoccupied with internal problems of restoring order in early 1849, Prussia played an active role in ending revolution elsewhere in Germany, for example in Baden. Counter-revolution took different forms in the two states. In both cases the work of constituent assemblies was set aside and the assemblies dissolved. However, Prussia imposed a constitution which, although modified in anti-democratic ways in 1850 and later, continued to operate until 1918. Austria, by contrast, imposed but immediately suspended a constitution (permanently, it transpired) and the regime returned to absolutist rule. Thus there was provision for participation in elections and parliamentary debate in Prussia, even if restricted in many ways, unlike in Austria. (For the perspective of the two rulers, see Barclay 1995, chap. 9; and Bled 1994, chap. 6.)

In the rest of Germany, the counter-revolution destroyed democratically elected parliaments and many of the freedoms the revolution had created. However, many parliamentarians had never been happy with democratic politics. Radical political figures were arrested and imprisoned, forced underground, driven into exile. The moderate liberals who remained were anxious to cooperate with restored regimes, whether on a constitutional

or neo-absolutist basis, especially if offered suitable economic or national policies.

From a liberal or democratic perspective Germany presented a bleak picture through most of the 1850s. There was no scope for open political debate and organisation. After the brief period of intense Austro-Prussian conflict in 1849–50, there was effective cooperation between Austria, Prussia and the medium states to enforce counter-revolution throughout the German lands.

However, there are other aspects to consider. The period of the 1850s was one of rapid economic growth, much of it in modern sectors such as coal, iron and steel manufacture and railway building. This was linked to liberal economic policies pursued by Prussia and Austria, for example the Prussian liberalisation of mining laws and joint-stock companies and the removal of tariff barriers between Austria and Hungary. Such liberalisation was in tension with official policies of clamping down on free communication. Economic growth was generally more rapid in the areas of the *Zollverein*, now covering most of non-Austrian Germany with the accession of Hannover in 1851, than it was in Austria. However, recent research has suggested that Austria was not as economically stagnant as was once commonly believed, and therefore one cannot easily draw a conclusion about any rapid falling away of Austrian strength compared to that of Prussia, especially in the period of the 1840s and 1850s. (For Prussia and the *Zollverein*, see Davis 1997; Hamerow 1969, part I: 11, 19, chap. 4; for Austria, see Good 1984; Huertas 1977, chap. 1, which revises upwards estimates of growth in this period; Komlos 1983; Pollard 1981: 222–9; Matis and Bochsinger 1973.)

AUSTRO-PRUSSIAN RELATIONS

Open conflict, 1849–1850

On the same day (28 April 1849) [Doc. 40, p. 153] that Frederick William IV formally refused the offer of the imperial crown, he initiated a forward policy in Germany developed by his minister, Joseph Maria von Radowitz, inviting the other German governments to a conference in Berlin to consider the way ahead on the national question. Some have seen in Radowitz anticipations of Bismarck with his concern for Prussia to confront Austria and to appeal to national opinion in doing so (Barclay 1995, chap. 8).

Internationally, Prussia could see no major obstacle to its pursuit of greater influence in non-Austrian Germany, provided this was on monarchical lines. Many other German princes owed their survival to Prussian support. Austria was still fighting revolution in its Italian and Hungarian territories.

Union policy: The Prussian policy initiated by Radowitz in early 1849 which aimed to bring other parts of non-Austrian Germany under Prussian influence, principally through agreements between medium states and Prussia but also with liberal support.

The policy was two-pronged. First, the other German kingdoms (Saxony, Hannover, Bavaria and Württemberg) were invited to form a 'League of Kingdoms' which would draw up a constitution to replace the old *Bund*. Bavaria and Württemberg declined to join but Saxony and Hannover did, though under duress and setting conditions on the completion of a move towards an effective union between Prussia and many of the smaller states.

Second, Prussia sought to secure liberal support. Elections were held to a parliament which met in early 1850 in Erfurt. Leading figures from the GNA which had offered the imperial crown to Frederick William were members of this parliament, which quickly accepted the constitution worked out by the three states. This constitution itself, minus many democratic features, borrowed heavily from the Imperial Constitution agreed by the GNA. Prussia appeared to be leading the way towards a north German state [Doc. 41, p. 154].

This policy was challenged by the medium states, led by Saxony and its chief minister Beust. He formed a 'four kingdoms' league' which envisaged a restored and reformed *Bund*, with a central executive, national representation and court, all of which would have provided it with more unitary and national features than the pre-1848 *Bund* [Doc. 42, p. 155]. Whether this was more than a riposte to Prussia's 'Union policy' is difficult to say. It was accepted by Austria tactically as one way of blocking Prussian policy.

The Austrian Finance Minister, Bruck, proposed yet another policy. The whole of the Habsburg Empire should join the *Zollverein*, creating a great central European zone of seventy million people. [Doc. 45, p. 157] comes from the following year but contains similar views to those of 1849. (See also Austensen 1980.) This went well beyond any 'national' framework. One could interpret this move as a riposte to the Prussian union policy rather than a seriously considered policy in its own right. One finds this view amongst those contemporaries and historians who argue that a much lower level of economic efficiency and performance in the Habsburg Empire (especially the eastern half) compared to the *Zollverein* region actually made such a policy economically impossible. Certainly the policy encountered vociferous opposition from economic interest groups in the Empire which argued that Austria could not withstand the competition to which it would be exposed both because of free trade with the economically superior *Zollverein* states and to the wider world through the low tariff policies of the *Zollverein*. However, more recently it has been argued that the Habsburg economy was in much better shape in the late 1840s and early 1850s than was previously realised and that the tariff measures of the early 1850s (1850 abolition of the internal tariff barrier between the Austrian and Hungarian halves of the empire; tariff revisions in 1852 and 1854; a trade treaty with the *Zollverein* in 1853) in effect achieved the economic results of a customs union, made little difference to the Habsburg economy and, therefore, also meant there

would be few economic obstacles to Habsburg membership of the *Zollverein* (Huertas 1977). This shifts the interpretation back to the politics of the matter: the significance for leadership in Germany of Austria entering or remaining outside the *Zollverein*. However, if one accepts this view one cannot see Prussia's insistence on low tariffs as an effective way of excluding Austria, at least in the 1850s. It may be that specific interest groups, such as the producers of cotton yarn and pig iron, did see a real danger through entry into the *Zollverein* and played a key role in blocking this policy. More important probably was that the medium-sized princes were not prepared to jeopardise the revenue-sharing arrangements of the *Zollverein* which had been agreed with Prussia, and therefore would always accept Prussian policies, even if politically they wished to see Austria join the *Zollverein*.

One can then discern three options being outlined: Prussian domination of a north and central German state, Austrian domination of a central European customs union and a reformed *Bund* with a greater role for the medium-sized states. These were mutually incompatible. Meanwhile, by the middle of 1850 Austria and Prussia had agreed to the establishment of a provisional *Bund* commission to consider ways of coordinating counter-revolutionary policy. However, until the other, new and conflicting policies were settled, it would not be possible just to return to the pre-1848 arrangements.

Matters came to a head in late 1850 in Hesse-Cassel. A liberal ministry had aligned the state with Prussia's Union policy. This was reversed when the Grand Duke dismissed the ministry, suspended the constitution and withdrew from the Union. His actions were disavowed by the *Landtag*, many civil servants and the army. Schwarzenberg declared that Austria would support the prince if he appealed to the *Bund*. The prince did just this on 15 October. Based on a military agreement of 12 October between Austria, Bavaria and Württemberg, Bavarian troops were to intervene in support of the prince, to be reinforced if necessary by Austria and Württemberg. Prussian troops entered the state to defend the 'constitutional' Union policy and shots were actually exchanged.

Schwarzenberg made it clear that Austria was prepared to go to war on the matter and had the backing of Russia. In Berlin opinion divided between Radowitz, who was prepared to risk war, and more conventional conservatives who were not but wished instead to conclude an agreement with Austria and clamp down on liberal and constitutional initiatives at home. Bismarck loudly championed this course [Doc. 44, p. 157], although at first, like many other Prussian conservatives, he had hated the idea of backing down. After various crises and ultimata the policy of retreat prevailed. In the Bohemian town of Olmütz, Prussia agreed to abandon its Union policy and withdraw its troops from Kurhessen [Doc. 43, p. 156]. It also abandoned its claims in Schleswig-Holstein. A conference was subsequently organised in

Landtag: An elected representative assembly within individual German states.

Dresden in early 1851 at which plans for a reformed *Bund* (whether based on the Beust or Bruck proposals) were abandoned, which one might take as a sign that these policies were not serious possibilities. The *Bund* was restored with the same territory, institutions and competences as before 1848. Prussia and Austria now concentrated on using the *Bund* as an instrument to enforce counter-revolution throughout the German lands. (On Olmütz from the Austrian perspective, see Austensen 1984 and Bled 1994, chap. 4; from the Prussian perspective, see Barclay 1995: 206–13; more generally, see Sheehan 1989: 710–15.)

There are different evaluations of the 'humiliation of Olmütz'. For some it was a decisive check on Prussian ambitions and meant that Prussia's drive for domination in Germany had to take a different form in the 1860s. For others, such as the Bavarian First Minister, von der Pfordten, what mattered was that Austria had not acted more decisively and had withdrawn its own plans for confederal reform as well as forcing Prussia to do the same. He declared: 'The fight for control of Germany has been settled and Austria has lost' (Bled 1994: 66). Perhaps a more reasonable conclusion is that the two powers had cancelled out each other's plans for a forward policy in Germany, leaving the conflict to be taken up again at a later time.

Uneasy cooperation, 1851–1858

The years between 1851 and 1858 are perhaps the least well researched for the whole century as historians skip forward from the revolutionary period to the opening up of politics again at the end of the decade. Both Austria and Prussia combined political repression with economic liberalism. Economic growth, increasing social mobility and migration from one state to another, the publishing of more popular magazines, expansion of the railway network, the formation of many new associations (though not overtly political and not allowed to affiliate on a state- or nation-wide basis) meant that many social and economic links formed which governments could not control. However, the very fact that governments were unable to do very much means that such activity is not reflected in governmental sources. We can only guess at how far such developments permitted and encouraged informal discussions of political matters (Nipperdey 1996, chap. 6; Sheehan 1989: 710–29).

Attempts by Austria to move closer to the *Zollverein* were blocked, though there are differences in interpretation of how far this can be explained economically rather than politically. Economic growth in Austria was quite rapid; indeed, some historians argue that certain regions, especially in the western half of the Empire, effectively entered upon a process of industrialisation from the late 1820s into the 1850s, and that in the period 1841–58 growth

rates in some sectors outstripped those of the rest of Germany (Huertas 1977; Komlos 1983).

Nevertheless, this lagged behind the *Zollverein* in key respects. For a start, the *Zollverein* began with a much higher per capita level of production, perhaps 30 per cent higher in the late 1850s. Key sectors, such as coal and iron production, expanded at about twice the rate in the *Zollverein* compared to Austria in the 1850s. Austria's share of European trade in 1860 was about one-third the level of that of the *Zollverein*.

Meanwhile Prussia expanded the *Zollverein*. Its success in getting Hannover to join in 1851 was of major importance as this had been the last sizeable German state other than Austria outside the union. Prussia had been prepared to make substantial concessions to achieve this goal and demonstrated its own increasing authority over the *Zollverein* by imposing these changes upon the other members (Henderson 1968; Böhme 1974; Hahn 1984). The effect was to lower further import tariffs and effectively to cover all of northern Germany and its major river and road routes to the Baltic and the North Sea. That made it possible for Prussia to contemplate moving to a purely north German union if the south German states would not go along with its policy. At the same time, economic growth and increasing customs revenue in the 1850s ensured an ever greater dependency of the other states on membership. Even when princes sought to oppose Prussia, the latter could mobilise business opinion in those states against their own governments. Austria, which tried to support the opposition of these states to the Hannoverian accession could, by contrast, bring very little effective pressure to bear. The other states came into line; Hannover was accepted; the *Zollverein* was renewed for a further twelve years in 1853 [Docs 45 and 46, pp. 157, 159]. Yet the matter was not closed. Austria and the *Zollverein* concluded a more liberal commercial treaty in 1853 and it was agreed that from 1860 negotiations on a possible future membership of Austria in the *Zollverein* should begin. However, as we shall see in the next chapter, by then the situation was very different.

While consolidating its position within the *Zollverein* Prussia did not challenge Austrian pre-eminence in the *Bund*. It did not actively support Austrian policy during the Crimean War but instead formed an 'offensive-defensive' alliance with Austria which was extended to the Confederation (Barclay 1995, chap. 10). However, this was on the basis of strict neutrality in relation to the warring powers, a policy which in turn constrained those in Austria who wanted to come out on the side of Britain and France. Bismarck, who was at this time the Prussian ambassador to the *Bund*, complained that the policy would enable Austria to pull Prussia in an anti-Russian direction (Feuchtwanger 2002, chap. 3; see also Lerman 2004: 40–42.) He urged instead that Prussia exploit Austria's difficulties in order to expand in

Germany. He continued to advocate this approach once the war was over [Doc. 47, p. 159].

Prussian conservatives in power in Berlin were, however, more worried about the threats from the new imperial regime under Louis Napoleon in France and the potential for instability if Austria and Prussia came into conflict openly with each other. Only dramatic changes in the situation in both Austria and Prussia were likely to alter the policies of these two states. These changes came in 1858–59.

6

From Cooperation to War, 1858–1866

EUROPE

By the early 1850s the European economy had largely recovered from the crisis of the mid-1840s and entered a period of rapid growth (Hobsbawm 1975; Millward and Saul, 1979). The aftermath of the Crimean War left France, Britain and Russia reluctant to pursue potentially destabilising policies in central Europe. By 1858, however, Louis Napoleon in France was interested in supporting liberal and national movements, starting with Italy, especially if France could make territorial gains or secure dependent allies. Such successes might compensate for failing popularity at home. International relations favoured such initiatives. Since the end of the Crimean War Louis Napoleon had moved closer towards Russia. Both had interests against Austria – France in Italy and Russia in the Balkans. Furthermore, Britain, although generally a supporter of Austria, was less concerned about preserving Austria's Italian sphere of influence than that in the Balkans. The Prime Minister in Piedmont, Cavour, was anxious to expand his state, making it the core of a kingdom of north Italy against Austria. He met with Louis Napoleon in 1858 and came to an agreement on common action against Austria. (For diplomacy from 1856 until 1859, especially Austro-French relations, see Hallberg 1973 and Coppa 1992.) The direct result was the war of 1859. Rapid and bloody defeat in northern Italy, coupled with threats of national opposition being fomented in its eastern territories, persuaded Austria to conclude a peace and to give up the rich province of Lombardy to France which passed it on to Piedmont.

French success here (the newly established Kingdom of Italy handed over Nice and Savoy to France) emboldened Louis Napoleon in other spheres. In the early 1860s he determinedly pursued a free trade policy which led to agreements with Britain, Belgium and Italy. He also negotiated such an agreement with Prussia which Prussia in turn imposed on the *Zollverein* with the full support of the French. These low tariff agreements arguably helped maintain the exclusion of Austria from the *Zollverein* when the matter came

up again for negotiation in the early 1860s. The inclusion of a 'most favoured nation' clause in many of these treaties resulted in the commercial liberalisation of much of Europe (Marsh 1999; Davis 1997). (This was a provision in a trade treaty between two states which automatically extended to each other any lower import tariffs negotiated subsequently with a third state.)

The opening up of gold fields in the USA and Australia underpinned credit and monetary expansion which helped real economic growth, while the closing down of some American markets and supplies due to the Civil War probably focused attention on developing markets within Europe. Large banking operations were involved internationally with investment schemes throughout western and central Europe, especially in the field of railway construction. The hope of many liberals was that commercial liberalisation and the internationalisation of economic activity would promote middle-class influence and reduce the possibilities of war between states. However, what the 1860s was to show was that such economic developments could combine with warfare to bring about dramatic changes in the political geography of Europe. (Generally on economic development, see Millward and Saul 1977 and 1979; on finance see Ferguson 2000.)

The war of 1859 had led by 1861 not merely to the formation of a north Italian kingdom but unexpectedly to the unification of most of the peninsula under the Piedmontese monarchy. Only the Papal States and Venetia remained outside. To German liberal nationalists this provided a compelling model of what could be achieved by determined state action, even if they were ambivalent about this success coming at the expense of Austria, a German power. The war also made clear the need for military innovation in a way that the Crimean War had not. Troops were moved by rail, new mass-produced weaponry played a key part in French success. Finally, the war led to crisis and change in Austria. This in turn altered the balance of power with Prussia. When Bismarck, already well known for his view that Prussia must act against Austria in order to provide an adequate sphere of influence for itself in Germany, was appointed Prussian Prime Minister in September 1862, it was clear that he would be working out how to exploit these changed conditions.

From this point the major diplomatic attention moves towards the policies of Austria and Prussia in relation to the German question. I will only consider the policies of the other European powers in terms of how these influenced Austro-Prussian relations.

GERMANY

Authoritarian rule and economic liberalism characterised politics in Germany through most of the 1850s (Blackbourn 1997, chap. 4; Brose 1997,

chap. 14; Sheehan 1989, chap. 12). There were, however, tensions between these two tendencies. Economic growth strengthened the position of middle-class interests which felt stifled by continuing political restrictions and divisions between many small states. More generally, such growth was accompanied by new associations, reading habits and better communications and transport which undermined authoritarian control. The German lands shared in the rapid economic growth after 1853 which was only briefly set back in 1857–58. For the first time the industrial labour force started to grow more rapidly than that in agriculture, the urban population in relation to the rural population. Investment in railway building exceeded one-quarter of all manufacturing investment by 1860. This was linked to the formation of larger banks which concentrated investment in industrial ventures. Certain urban regions were taking shape – in the Rhineland/Westphalia provinces of Prussia (most notably the Ruhr district), Saxony, parts of Silesia, Bohemia, as well as round large cities such as Berlin and Vienna (Hamerow 1972, part I; relevant chapters on demography, urbanisation and finance in Ogilvie and Overy (eds) 2003; and see Tables 8.2 and 8.5 at the end of Chapter 8).

With the relaxation of state supervision from 1858–59 such conditions helped sustain a sharp increase in the formation of all kinds of associations: professional and occupational, cultural and political. One of these was the *Nationalverein* (National Association), founded in 1859, which pursued the objective of a national state formed under Prussian auspices. It adopted the Imperial Constitution of 1849 as the basis of its programme of 1859 (see document 3 in Williamson 1998). The *Nationalverein* established a network of branches across the German states, although with higher levels of support in Protestant compared to Catholic areas. As an organisation of upper middle-class elites, the *Nationalverein* did not seek to become a mass organisation (its membership never exceeded 25,000), although it was able to draw upon the support of a variety of cultural and educational associations with lower middle-class and skilled working-class memberships (Hamerow 1969, chap. 8; Langewiesche 2000, chap. 3).

Some of the leaders of the *Nationalverein* had been active in 1848–49. From that experience they had concluded that one had to work with, not against, established political authority and that Austria was resolutely opposed to national unity. They were themselves uneasily divided between moderates who liked the restricted constitutional Prussian system and radicals who wanted to create a popular basis for the new nation state, albeit in a non-revolutionary manner. They were prepared to see the smaller and even medium states subordinated to a more powerful central authority, but at the same time they believed that Prussia must be considerably liberalised both in order to pursue a forward national policy and to be acceptable as the dominant element in a national state. These liberal nationalists believed that

economic growth, constitutional reform and the deepening of institutions such as the *Zollverein* would provide the basis for success.

The general support for peaceful and liberal progress towards national unity was vividly expressed in November 1859 with the celebrations of the centenary of the birth of Schiller, the great poet and dramatist. All over Germany there were processions, festivals and speeches, with Schiller presented as a man of the people, the embodiment of a vigorous German cultural identity [see Plate 6]. However, one should note that such celebrations were as popular in Vienna as they were in Berlin. There remained a tension between the increasingly *kleindeutsch* tendencies of the most politically organised national groups and a more widespread and diffuse sense of cultural nationality which extended to all of what was regarded as the German high-cultural zone.

The views of the *Nationalverein* stood in a complicated relationship to that of the smaller and medium German states. Where liberalism was a powerful force, as in Baden by the end of the 1850s, there was a willingness to consider surrendering much state sovereignty to the right kind of national authority. In other states, such as Bavaria, conservative as well as Catholic sentiments inclined the government against any moves towards Prussian, liberal and Protestant domination. The medium states were acutely aware of their great dependence upon Prussia through the *Zollverein* and tended to look to Austria to provide a balance to this within the *Bund*. There was support for more effective *Bund* action on such matters as currency reform and also for constitutional changes which would strengthen its authority, but always within a framework which would ensure autonomy for the medium states. However, the varying interests of the different states (e.g., the suspicion of the others against Bavarian assertion, the Protestant/Catholic tensions) made it difficult to unite around any distinct programme. The response to the *Nationalverein* was the *Reform Verein* which insisted on the continued membership of Austria in any national state but which is better understood as a negative reaction to the *Nationalverein* rather than as an organisation with a positive agenda of its own. (See Hope 1973 for the politics of the medium states; Rumpler (ed.) 1990 for their links to the *Bund*.)

What all these groups – states and political movements – had in common was a dislike of joint Austro-Prussian domination. Perhaps their main opportunity for influence was in exploiting situations where Austria and Prussia came into conflict with one another. However, both Austria and Prussia would in turn seek to use these German interests against each other. In this way domestic politics within the various German states was closely linked to differences on the conduct of foreign policy. Especially between 1861 and 1866 there was a complex alternation between different combinations of Austrian, Prussian and German alliances which only came to an end with the military defeat of Austria in the Seven Weeks' War. It is, above all, through

the prism of Austro-Prussian relations that the German question must be considered over these years.

DEVELOPMENTS WITHIN AUSTRIA AND PRUSSIA, 1858–1863

Austria

In certain respects Austria had a good decade until 1859. The Crimean War had created financial problems but the main result was the defeat of Russia and the temporary end of its expansionist aims in the Balkans. Policies of economic liberalisation had paid off with rapid economic growth, including some industrialisation. The confidence of the regime was expressed in an ambitious rebuilding programme in Vienna. Austria began to trade and engage in other transactions on a more intensive basis with other parts of Germany than before 1848 and that in turn strengthened the movement for a closer link to the *Zollverein*. (Generally, see Katzenstein 1976, chap. 4; Okey 2000, chap. 6.) However, already the crises of 1848–49 and the Crimean War had severely weakened public finances, leading to an unstable fluctuation between expansive and contractionary monetary policy, high levels of public debt and a stop-go military policy.

All this was compounded by the war of 1859. Austria had hoped for Prussian support and was bitterly disappointed that Prussia had only been prepared to grant this if allowed to dominate the German military arrangements, especially along the Rhine. This could look like an attempt to exploit the Italian problem to achieve greater control in Germany but it fitted with the fact that Prussia was more committed than Austria, by virtue of her territories in western Germany, to any military defence of German lands against France. The Austrian Foreign Secretary Buol-Schauenstein still assumed Prussian support which would in turn deter decisive French action in northern Italy but at the same time Austria refused to make the concessions Prussia demanded. One consequence was that the army was mobilised very late. This error was compounded by a weak and divided conduct of the war under the personal command of Francis Joseph. After some bloody setbacks, Austrian fears about internal unrest and maintaining its position in Germany against Prussia led to the decision to bring the war to a rapid conclusion (Rothenburg 1976, chap. 4; Bled 1994, chap. 5).

Defeat left the Austrian state in massive debt (Ferguson 2000, chaps 3 and 4; Huertas 1977, chap. 3). By 1865 this amounted to 1,670 million Thaler. By comparison, Prussian state debt then stood at 290 million Thaler. (Chapter 8 considers the implications of this comparison at greater length.)

Two things were crucial: to reduce state expenditure and rebuild political confidence. Both required an avoidance of risky policies which might lead to war or require extensive preparations for war.

First, reduced expenditure was most easily achieved by cutting back on the army. From 434,000 in 1850 it had fluctuated wildly with retrenchment after the Crimean War, then a sudden expansion shortly before the war of 1859, then a rapid reduction to 306,000 in 1860, leaving it at just 275,000 on the eve of war in 1866. The military budget had been slashed by half between 1860 and 1865. (See Chapter 8, Tables 8.7 and 8.8.) Austria sought to return to 'sound money' but this also contributed to a reduction in economic activity (Huertas 1977, chap. 3). Just as Prussia and the *Zollverein* were reaching very high levels of growth in the early 1860s, Austrian economic growth was faltering.

Second, rebuilding confidence meant moving back to constitutional government. In early 1860 the regime experimented with an aristocratic federalist arrangement, depending on the support of conservative Hungarians, Bohemians and Poles. However, this was anathema to the economically and culturally dominant German elite which had been central to the neo-absolutism of the 1850s and, although willing to move down the constitutional path, wished to do so within a liberal and centralist framework. In December 1860 Anton Schmerling, former Prime Minister of the German Provisional Authority in 1848 and a leading exponent of such constitutionalism, was appointed Chief Minister. In February 1861 he introduced a new constitution with a dominant role for central institutions. The problem was that this was opposed not only by Bohemian and Galician nobles but by the much more powerful Hungarian nobility, leading to the suspension of their Diet in August 1861. The Emperor only half-heartedly identified with Schmerling's policies and by the end of 1864 was inclining back towards the aristocratic federalist line. The constitution was suspended in 1865. The major domestic political weakness was conflict between the dominant German elite in the west and the Hungarian elite in the east, exacerbated by the continued growth of Slav nationalist pressures, especially amongst the Czechs of Bohemia. (See Okey 2000: 176–83 for constitutional issues 1859–64; Bled 1994, chap. 6 for the views of Francis Joseph.)

These domestic political weaknesses and conflicts throw light upon Austria's German policy. The German elite saw itself as part of Germany and was resolutely opposed to any weakening of Austria's position in Germany. Indeed, for Schmerling, a central role for Austria in Germany was essential to maintaining a central position for Austrian Germans in the Empire. Coming from economically the most advanced parts of the Empire and supporting liberalisation, elite Germans were interested in closer links with, if not membership of, the *Zollverein*. Tactically, they veered between a policy

of seeking to dominate Germany through agreement with Prussia against the interests of the medium states and liberal national opinion, and of appealing to precisely those interests against the threat of Prussian hegemony. Schmerling supported the more forceful reformist policy; Rechberg, who took over the conduct of foreign policy following Buol's resignation in 1859, preferred the dualist approach. (See the Who's who section for biographical sketches of these men.) That approach also tended to be associated with a less forceful, less centralist and less constitutional line within the Empire. The result was inconsistency in policy-making. (Doc. 48, p. 160 expresses the more negative line; Doc. 51, p. 164 the more positive line. See also Bridge 1990, chap. 3; Elrod 1984.)

Thus, in 1862–63 the Schmerling line led to the floating of ideas of reform of the *Bund*, culminating with a meeting of the German princes in August 1863 to agree such a plan [Doc. 51, p. 164]. This aroused *kleindeutsch* nationalist antagonism (expressed in a meeting of parliamentary deputies in the same month and also opposition within the princes' meeting from the Grand Duke of Baden). Only the refusal of the Prussian king to attend the meeting, something which Bismarck worked hard to achieve, undermined the scheme (Feuchtwanger 2002, chap. 5; Gall 1986: 230–2; Lerman 2004: 70–71, 94). However, in 1864, with the war against Denmark over Schleswig-Holstein, Rechberg steered Austria back towards cooperation with Prussia and the exclusion of the rest of Germany from policy-making. This policy reached its peak in August 1865 when the Convention of Gastein divided the occupied duchies, with Prussia taking control of Schleswig and Austria of Holstein [Doc. 57, p. 168]. This was bitterly condemned by both the medium states and the national movement which had wanted to see a new state established within the *Bund* under the rule of the Duke of Augustenberg. Yet the agreement also advanced Prussian leadership by including the former duchies in the *Zollverein* and giving Prussia the right to build a canal across Holstein. Austrian policy was unstable. Early 1866, with the threat of approaching war, saw Austria changing tack yet again, now taking up the cause of Augustenberg. Indeed, it was the decision of Austria to allow demonstrations in support of Augustenberg in Holstein which provided the pretext for the Prussian ultimatum which led to the war itself (Carr 1991, chap. 3).

There was also an economic reason for these contradictions. The German elite was at the forefront of industrial development in the Empire. Liberalisation of trade across the Empire (e.g., the removal of tariff barriers between Austria and Hungary in 1850) suited these German interests. Politically there was much to be said for closer links to the *Zollverein* as part of the policy of ensuring Austrian dominance in Germany. Economically, however, these German interests were well aware that they were inefficient

compared to *Zollverein* competitors, and this gap had grown wider since the end of the 1850s (Huertas 1977). Arguments against membership of the *Zollverein* with even lower tariffs following trade treaties with states such as France and Italy may not have much application to the early 1850s but they did matter more in the early 1860s. Aristocratic and bureaucratic elements within the German elite were perhaps prepared to pay the price of import penetration for the sake of political gains, but the best organised sections of the German business community were not. Before 1860 it might have been possible for the dynasty to override that opposition, especially as interests such as Hungarian land-owning magnates in turn were attracted to the prospect of cheaper manufactures, inward German investment and larger markets for their foodstuffs. However, the constitutionalist path was designed precisely to attract support from the Austrian German business community, in order to be able to raise loans, and that gave those business interests the political power to block such a policy. Just as these Germans politically favoured reform and integration in Germany but opposed *Zollverein* membership, Hungarian interests opposed closer political ties but were more positive about the economic links. Policy-making as a consequence fluctuated and probably made a determined pursuit of entry into the *Zollverein* impossible (Katzenstein 1976, chap. 4) [Doc. 55, p. 166].

These conflicting tendencies were reflected in an inconstancy in Austrian policy which makes it difficult to understand. A further complication is that Austria had to balance concerns about Germany with those about Italy and the Balkans. It suffered from the condition of major powers which Kennedy has termed 'imperial over-stretch' (Kennedy 1988) to a much greater degree than Prussia. Thus Austria had been involved in two major wars (Crimean and Italian wars) which weakened it militarily, economically and financially, while Prussia remained at peace with lower levels of state debt.

What complicated matters further was that the two policies of reforming centralism and stand-still dualism could be linked rather than opposed, with one serving as tactical leverage in support of the other. Thus support for national reform against Prussia might serve as a way of forcing Prussia back into a policy of cooperative domination. All these contradictory pressures meant that Austria had no clear and positive policy about how to assert itself in Germany, whether through territorial claims or constitutional reform, political subordination of Prussia or closer economic links with Prussia and the *Zollverein*. The one goal that did remain clear was the negative one of preventing Prussian domination. The clarity with which Schwarzenberg had acted between 1849 and 1853 had disappeared, not because his successors were less able but because the problems they confronted were more intractable. When war finally came in 1866 Austria embarked on it more as

an escape from the dilemmas of policy-making than as an instrument of a particular policy.

Prussia

In 1858 William became Regent in place of his brother. New elections to the *Landtag* produced liberal successes and William appointed moderate liberals to the government. The hopes of liberal nationalists that Prussia would now lead the way to a reformed and national Germany were raised by these events. This pointed to one vital difference between Prussia and Austria: Prussia had a constitution and an elected parliament which provided a basis for a liberal direction of policy before any major crisis; Austria only moved in such a direction as the result of such a crisis. (Apart from general studies such as Blackbourn 1997; Brose 1997; and Sheehan 1989, on the 'New Era' see Hamerow 1972, part I.)

The Prussian government had never slavishly followed Austria since 1850, although this was an impression that Bismarck cultivated in his reminiscences in order to highlight the difference his appointment made (Bismarck 1899; Feuchtwanger 2002; Gall 1986; Lerman 2004). During the Crimean War Prussia refused to go beyond an alliance with Austria based on strict neutrality. Since 1856 it had quietly allied itself with Russia rather than Austria on matters where there was conflict. Prussia's trade policy had determinedly kept Austria out of the *Zollverein* and had involved close links to France, a policy opposed by principled conservatives. (See Voth 2001; Böhme 1974; Hahn 1984 on customs union policy; Barclay 1995, chap. 10 has details on conservative criticisms.) Indeed, when Bismarck in 1864 suggested a weakening of this policy as part of his then dualist cooperation with Austria, ministers with financial and trade responsibilities, along with Rudolf Delbrück who shaped tariff policy, ensured Bismarck was overruled (Feuchtwanger 2002, chap. 6).

Prussian population growth was about twice that of Austria. Its booming economy began to pull ahead of that of Austria in the later 1850s and early 1860s. (Huertas 1977, chap. 1 revises earlier estimates of Austrian growth rates for the period 1841–58 upwards, but notes a slackening thereafter.) Add to that Prussia's limited international commitments compared to Austria, a much lower state debt and the impact of the army reforms by the mid-1860s, and one can conclude that there was a sharp tilting of the balance of power between the two states, although this was probably not fully or widely realised at the time. (See Chapter 8 below for further analysis.) Generally, however, the preference of the conservatives who shaped policy in these years was to follow an independent course from Austria but

to avoid direct conflict so far as possible and certainly not to provide any support to liberal nationalism. Thus the liberal hopes raised in 1858 by the turn-around in domestic political, social and economic change were doomed to disappointment in the foreign policy sphere.

This pragmatic conservative line continued in 1859, steering between principled conservatives who wanted Prussia to ally with Austria against France (seeing the war in anti-French rather than pro-Italian terms) and principled liberals who looked sympathetically upon the Italian liberal nationalist cause and wanted Prussia to take up such ideas. Then there was the eccentric position of Bismarck who urged the government to use Austria's difficulties to expand its own position in Germany, seeing this in dynastic and Prussian, rather than liberal and national terms. (Doc. 47, p. 159 outlines Bismarck's ideas more generally and a little earlier.) Some of these differences were reflected in the policy-making elite of the time [Doc. 49, p. 161]. Much to the dismay of Austria, and Francis Joseph in particular (Bled 1994, chap. 5), the Prussian government insisted that it could only provide assistance if put in charge of all non-Austrian *Bund* troops. This, along with Prussian mobilisation on the Rhine in case Louis Napoleon extended the scope of his actions, appeared to Austria as a bid for leadership in Germany. It was one reason Austria rapidly concluded a peace with France, while the mobilisation also made Louis Napoleon anxious to bring the war to an end (Hallberg 1973, chap. 9).

War and defeat had greatly weakened Austria and stimulated the national movement which looked to Prussia for leadership. However, it had also uncovered Prussian frailties. Partial mobilisation revealed many problems in the army, a matter of acute concern to William who worried about an increased threat from France. After all, the first Napoleon had started with military success in northern Italy and then turned his attention to the Rhinelands. Following a review William ordered a radical reform of the army, expanding its numbers, increasing the length of service from two to three years and marginalising the role of the territorial reserve army, the *Landwehr*. (Williamson 1998 deals with some of these matters. See also Bucholz 2001; Craig 1964; and Showalter 1986.) These reform plans offended the new liberal majority in the *Landtag*, not so much because of the additional expenditure that would be incurred (state finances were healthy and the liberals recognised the need for a strong army) but rather due to the increased length of service and diminished role for the *Landwehr*, coupled with the insistence of the king that he alone had complete power of command over the army. Liberals feared that, rather than being used to back up a forward policy within Germany, this army might become an instrument of the monarchy against parliament.

Two bills – one to reform the army and the other to pay for these reforms – were put before the *Landtag* in early 1860. William refused to accept that the parliament could alter anything in the army reorganisation bill though he could not deny the budgetary powers of the parliament. The *Landtag* made it clear it would only provisionally grant extra monies. This was a fateful decision because it meant that the army reforms could be set in hand, even if their cost had not been firmly approved. In an attempt to improve the situation William dissolved the parliament and called for new elections. The result, and this was repeated over the next couple of years, was the return of a larger and more determined liberal majority. The combination of liberalisation, a more mobile and organised society and crisis was generating political forces beyond the control of the regime. In early 1861 a new party, the Progressive Party, was formed which took the liberal lead. Subsequently, branches of the Progressive Party were formed in other states, pointing up the national implications of the conflict. (Anderson 1954 is a study of the constitutional crisis.)

One possible way out of the crisis was for the government to pursue the national policy liberal politicians demanded (see, for example, document 4 in Williamson 1998). It is no coincidence that in December 1861, just as there was a new round of elections, the Prussian government under the leadership of Manteuffel, floated a new version of the Union policy of 1849–50. It resembled the *Nationalverein* programme (document 3 in Williamson 1998) except that it did not make provision for any elected national assembly. In part this was a response to yet another initiative by the Saxon minister Beust for a federated Germany with an executive authority, court and national representation but also more influence for the medium states [Doc. 50, p. 162].

Neither domestically nor beyond Prussia did the policy initiative work. Austria and the medium states rejected the idea, just as they had done in 1850. The Progressive Party registered electoral victory. In the new *Landtag* it decided against voting any more provisional budgets for army reforms. William dissolved the *Landtag* yet again in March 1862 but elections in May returned an even more determined liberal majority. In the meantime, Austria – well into its constitutional policy under Schmerling – decided to take up the issue of national reform in conjunction with some of the other German states.

It was at this juncture that the decision to appoint Bismarck Minister-President was taken by the embattled William on the advice of his War Minister, the architect of the army reforms, Albrecht von Roon. As a book in this series (Williamson 1998) deals with Bismarck from 1862 until the end of his career, I will not spend much time on biographical detail but just note some key points. (See Gall 1986; Pflanze 1990; Feuchtwanger 2002; Lerman 2004 for English language studies of Bismarck.)

Bismarck had long advocated confrontation with Austria in order for Prussia to expand in Germany. In his memoirs late in life, he suggested that previous Prussian governments had subordinated themselves to Austria and only with his appointment was this policy reversed. This is at best a half-truth, tending to make policy appear as a function of personality and contributing to a one-sided ‘great men make history’ view. As we have seen, Prussia steered a confrontational course in foreign policy in 1849–50 and took an independent line from 1854, including a determinedly anti-Austrian line in key areas of trade policy and *Zollverein* membership. What it did not do, until December 1861, was revive the Union policy which had brought it into direct conflict with Austria in 1850. However, Bismarck had loudly condemned that policy and supported the Olmütz agreement that brought it to an end [Doc. 44, p. 157]. Indeed, his own appointment as ambassador to the restored *Bund* in 1851 arose directly out of that agreement and his support for it. It also had the effect of bringing into the diplomatic service a man who had failed to complete his probationary period as a civil servant, resigned from office, retreated to run his estates in Brandenburg, and had only come back into politics with the constitutional crisis of 1847, and then by taking a hard counter-revolutionary line in 1848–49.

Indeed, it was that reputation as a determined defender of royal prerogative during a crisis rather than his maverick opinions on Prussian foreign policy which accounts for Bismarck’s appointment in September 1862. His immediate objective was not to lead Prussia into Germany but to assert the royal will over the liberal majority in parliament, a majority which was the most important force agitating for such a forward national policy.

This domestic challenge was to be Bismarck’s major preoccupation for the first year or so after his appointment. Bismarck argued that the budget already granted to the government should continue to operate at a time when the executive and the upper house (*Herrenhaus*) of the legislature failed to agree with the lower house (*Landtag*), on the grounds that those drafting the constitution had never meant government to break down in the event of such a disagreement. This dubious ‘constitutional gap’ theory worked because the *Landtag* was not for its part prepared to pursue active sanctions against the government such as leading a tax boycott or some other kind of civil disobedience.

As for any national policy, Bismarck was at a loss. The revived Union policy of 1861 had been rejected by liberals, the medium states and Austria. He took a firm free trade line in 1862 to ensure agreement with France and the exclusion of Austria from the *Zollverein*. He continued with this policy up until the renewal of the *Zollverein* in 1865 (though as we have seen, he contemplated diluting the policy in 1864), making it clear that, if necessary, Prussia would leave the customs union and negotiate separate agreements

with non-German states. Faced with such a threat the other German states had no option but to fall into line [Doc. 55, p. 166].

Bismarck also strengthened the positive relationship with Russia. At the heart of this was the Polish question. When a new insurrection broke out in Russian Poland in 1863 Bismarck quickly and demonstratively signalled Prussian support for its repression. However, the main domestic effect was to alienate him even further from liberal nationalists who supported the restoration of a Polish state and saw Russia as the main obstacle to German unity and the liberal cause throughout Europe. His Polish policy also alienated France, traditionally a supporter of Polish national claims. It is difficult therefore to see how this would help Bismarck make any decisive policy change in the German question. The liberal opposition was not greatly impressed by Bismarck's famous 'blood and iron' speech when he declared that the way of solving the national question was not through parliamentary resolutions (the 1848 method) but through the use of power (see document 9, Williamson 1998). As Bismarck was not actually pursuing an aggressive policy in Germany which might require blood and iron, the phrase looked more like an oblique reference to the crisis in Prussia than a signal of a possible change in foreign policy. Yet the liberals never seriously believed that Bismarck was going to send soldiers into parliament and try to cow it into submission. Indeed, they could not see him remaining in office for very long given the weight of public and parliamentary opinion against him.

They were right to believe that Bismarck was not prepared to attempt a coup and return to non-parliamentary government. Bismarck was well aware that in the long run, without parliamentary support, above all without the support of the business and professional middle classes on which the liberal majority was based, his could be little more than a stop-gap administration. Such support was needed above all for the credit-worthiness of the state. For all his harsh rhetoric Bismarck had no intention of going down the path of *coup d'état* and a return to absolutism which some conservatives envisaged. He would try to bribe and intimidate deputies, buy up newspapers to express pro-governmental views, have discussions with radical labour leaders like Ferdinand Lassalle about the possibility of basing monarchical rule on popular consent, thereby under-cutting the liberal parliament elected on a weighted franchise. He also 'indiscreetly' insinuated to deputies that he really wished to govern with their support but that the king had to be persuaded and this would only happen if parliament would be a little more forthcoming on its side. All these measures and rhetorical tricks were intended to push liberals towards agreement with Bismarck, not to replace the present constitution. Furthermore, Bismarck was aware that his value to the king was precisely that he was overriding but not abolishing parliament. Once things had gone that far government could be handed over to bureaucrats and

soldiers. Bismarck was a creation of the constitutional politics he opposed and thereby also tied to that politics. (See Gall 1986; Feuchtwanger 2002; and Lerman 2004: 59–60 for detailed support for this interpretation of Bismarck.)

However, none of these tactical twists and bewildering array of half-promises and veiled threats proved successful in Bismarck's first year or so in office. Poised between parliament and the hardline conservatives at court, dependent almost entirely on the personal support of the ageing king, blustering about radical new policies but actually governing in a traditional authoritarian manner, it appeared to many that Bismarck was an interesting, unprincipled politician who would not be able to retain power for long. His successes were negative ones. He persuaded the king not to attend the princes' congress Austria had organised in 1863 as part of its bid to take the lead on national reform. In return, he had suggested that a reformed *Bund* should have some nationally elected assembly but one could hardly take such an idea seriously from a man ruling in defiance of the one such assembly that existed in Prussia. Indeed the *Nationalverein* rejected Bismarck's offer of a German parliament in April 1865 because they did not find it credible. In 1863 a shrewd contemporary might well have judged that Austria was making the running in German matters and that Prussia was paralysed by internal conflict. (See Docs 51–54, pp. 164–66 on these reform proposals in 1863.)

The Schleswig-Holstein affair changed everything.

THE STRUGGLE FOR SUPREMACY IN GERMANY, 1864–1866

The war against Denmark

We have already encountered Schleswig-Holstein and the ways in which it brought about conflict locally between Danish and German nationalism and war between the *Bund*, Prussia and Denmark in 1848–49. The matter had finally been subject to international regulation under the terms of the Treaty of London of 1852. Neither side was happy: Danish nationalists wanted to incorporate Schleswig directly into Denmark while German nationalists wanted to bind it to Holstein and form a new German state out of the two Duchies. (See Carr 1963 for the longer-term background; Carr 1991, chap. 2 and Steefel 1932 for the origins of the war of 1864.)

In 1848 direct action to alter the *status quo* had come from the German side and the major European powers, especially Britain and Russia, had taken the Danish side. One major difference in 1863, when the problem re-emerged,

was that now the initiative was taken by Denmark. Denmark had drawn up a charter in March 1863 which laid down that the successor to Frederick VII would succeed to rule over Schleswig as well as Denmark. Frederick died on 15 November 1863. His successor, Christian, claimed Schleswig and signed a constitution to that effect. This went against the 1852 treaty.

This enraged German nationalists who insisted instead that the two Duchies be formed into one state under the Duke of Augustenberg and that this state should become a member of the *Bund*. (The Duke's father had resigned his claim and had been compensated for that as part of the preparation for the 1852 treaty. The Duke now declared that he was no longer bound by that resignation, given the action of the Danish monarchy.) The *Bund* decided upon military intervention against Denmark and in November federal troops from Saxony and Hannover occupied Holstein. The differences from 1848 were that Denmark could not be presented this time as a victim, France was more active, Britain was less interventionist and Russia was concerned to maintain good relations with Prussia and Austria because of the Polish issue. The powers also became impatient when Denmark refused to negotiate any compromise on its new position. Denmark was under pressure from its own nationalist opinion and did not think that ultimately the major powers would abandon it (Carr 1991, chap. 2).

Thus when Austria and Prussia determined bilaterally upon an invasion of Schleswig in January 1864, insisting that they were doing so in defence of the Treaty of London and not to advance any German national cause, this was not opposed by the other powers. Bismarck had found a way of Prussia acting decisively on a matter dear to German nationalism but the manner of action – with Austria, independently of the *Bund* and avowedly to restore the 1852 arrangement – had the effect of uniting the medium states and nationalist opinion in condemnation of the policy. (Doc. 56, p. 167 puts Bismarck's dualist line clearly.)

The advantages for Austria were that this policy distanced Prussia from nationalist support, ensured that the Prussian government remained locked in conflict with the liberal majority in parliament and seemed to go a long way towards restoring the cooperative domination of the two states over German affairs which was always the Austrian default position. There was also the hope that such cooperation in north Germany might lead on to cooperation elsewhere, for example in undoing some of the results of the 1859 war. The disadvantages were that Austria undermined its own policy of bidding for liberal and national support in Germany and became entangled in an affair in distant northern Germany in which it had no direct interest and which it could not control.

Denmark was no military match for Austria and Prussia. (See Carr 1991, chap. 2 for the war generally; Bucholz 2001, chap. 4 for Prussia's role;

Rothenberg 1976, chap. 5 for Austria's role.) The war gave the Prussian Chief of Staff, von Moltke, an opportunity to test the efficacy of the army reforms. Many people in Prussia were simply proud as Prussians to see their army winning battles and taking control of new territory. The intransigence of Denmark and its unfounded faith in international intervention led to the loss of the two Duchies. Now the idea began to grow in Prussia, and certainly in Bismarck's mind, that the final outcome might be Prussian annexation of the two Duchies. He had already broached the subject at a Crown Council meeting as early as February 1864. For Bismarck this was vastly to be preferred to a return to pre-1864 arrangements or the formation of yet another small German state which, in Bismarck's view, simply added to the nonsense of all other such states.

At what point the matter could also be used to engineer a direct conflict with Austria over the relative position of the two states in Germany is less clear. Already by May 1865 the possibility of war had arisen. The Gastein Convention settled that crisis and made clear the impotence of the other German states or nationalist opinion [Doc. 57, p. 168].

Moltke strongly implied in his memoirs and correspondence that the war of 1866 was deliberately planned by the Prussian government. (Moltke 1925, 1: 34–5; and 3: 51; letter to his brother in May 1861 in Moltke 1956: 289–90. See also his memoranda of April 1866 in Förster 1992: 106–27.) Certainly Bismarck had long insisted that Germany must be divided into a Prussian and an Austrian sphere of influence and that the current arrangements for a shared hegemony over the *Bund* were not tenable [Doc. 47, p. 159]. There were many precedents for such a policy of regional expansion within a 'national' zone at Austrian expense. It was, after all, what Frederick the Great had achieved with the invasion and annexation of Silesia in 1740, what Prussia had aimed for over Saxony in 1814–15, what Radowitz had sought in 1849–50 and what Manteuffel had briefly outlined in 1861. Furthermore, there was nothing new about claiming that this policy was in the interests of Germany, not just Prussia. Frederick the Great had justified his policy in just this way and would in the later period of his reign invoke a 'patriotic' defence of the Holy Roman Empire. The big difference was that there was now a much more popular and powerful national movement which would insist that reality matched such rhetoric and that expansion could not simply be dynastic annexation.

This national movement was now articulated in numerous organisations and associations and supported by a range of newspapers and periodicals and dense networks of political writers and parliamentary parties and speakers. 1848–49 had crystallised the main issues and the need for conceptions of national unity to combine with practical political and economic programmes. By the early 1860s there was an intense anticipation of German

unity and, in the elite middle-class circles which dominated the public sphere, the 'national' had become almost a 'natural' category, even if a nation-state had never before existed and people remained unclear or even despairing of how it was to be realised (Breuilly and Speirs 2005; Hewitson 2010).

Still, whatever the precedents might be, no matter what the shifts in the balance of power between Austria and Prussia in the early 1860s, and however dominant might be elite public opinion favouring Prussian leadership in bringing about a national state, confronting Austria was a high-risk policy. Frederick had only succeeded in taking Silesia after two long wars involving all the major powers and had come within a hair's breadth of complete defeat and occupation. Prussia had backed down in 1814–15 and 1850 when faced with possible war against Austria and other states, especially as the prospect of clearcut and swift victory, indeed of victory at all, seemed remote. Was Bismarck taking the same kind of gamble in 1866 as Frederick had in 1740, a gamble which his more immediate predecessors had refused to take? Or was there some essential difference this time?

The road to Königgrätz

There were important differences from earlier conflicts between Austria and Prussia.

The first was the possibility of isolating such a war from broader international complications. Britain was reluctant to become involved in another European war, especially after the recent experience of Crimea. Earlier interventions (1740–48, 1756–63, continually between 1793 and 1815) had been aimed mainly against France, still seen as the major threat to a balance of power on the continent. Prussia had been its ally in 1756–63 and 1813–15. There was sympathy for Prussia as a Protestant culture, close links between the royal families (Victoria's daughter was married to William's son, Frederick), sympathy for the liberal and national cause and, above all, no strong sense that Prussia could become a threat to the general balance of power. The likely British response, therefore, was one of neutrality with a broad sympathy for Prussia.

Russia was close to Prussia because of Polish matters and in conflict with Austria since the Crimean War. Given that Prussian policy since 1864 had taken an anti-liberal line and was firmly in a dynastic tradition of state aggrandisement, this did not raise the fears that the Union policy of 1849–50 had created in Russia when she allied with Austria. In any case, Russian influence since defeat in the Crimean War was not nearly as great as it had been before 1848 or in the counter-revolutionary period from 1849 to 1854. (See Mosse 1958 for diplomatic background.)

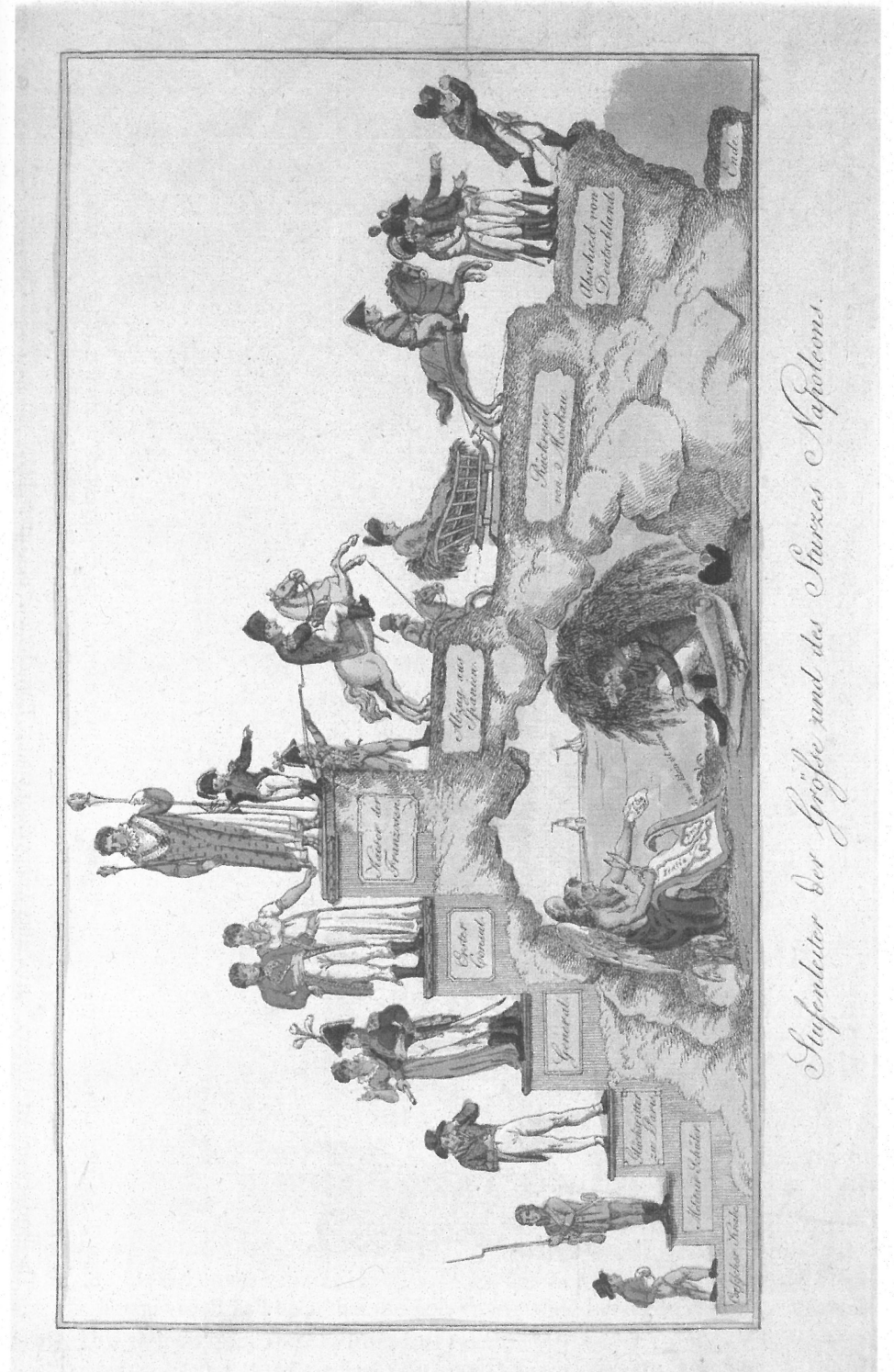


Plate 1 This cartoon depicts Napoleon's rise to and fall from power. Note that it is from 1814 so does not include the 100 days of 1815. Source: Deutsches Historisches Museum, Berlin

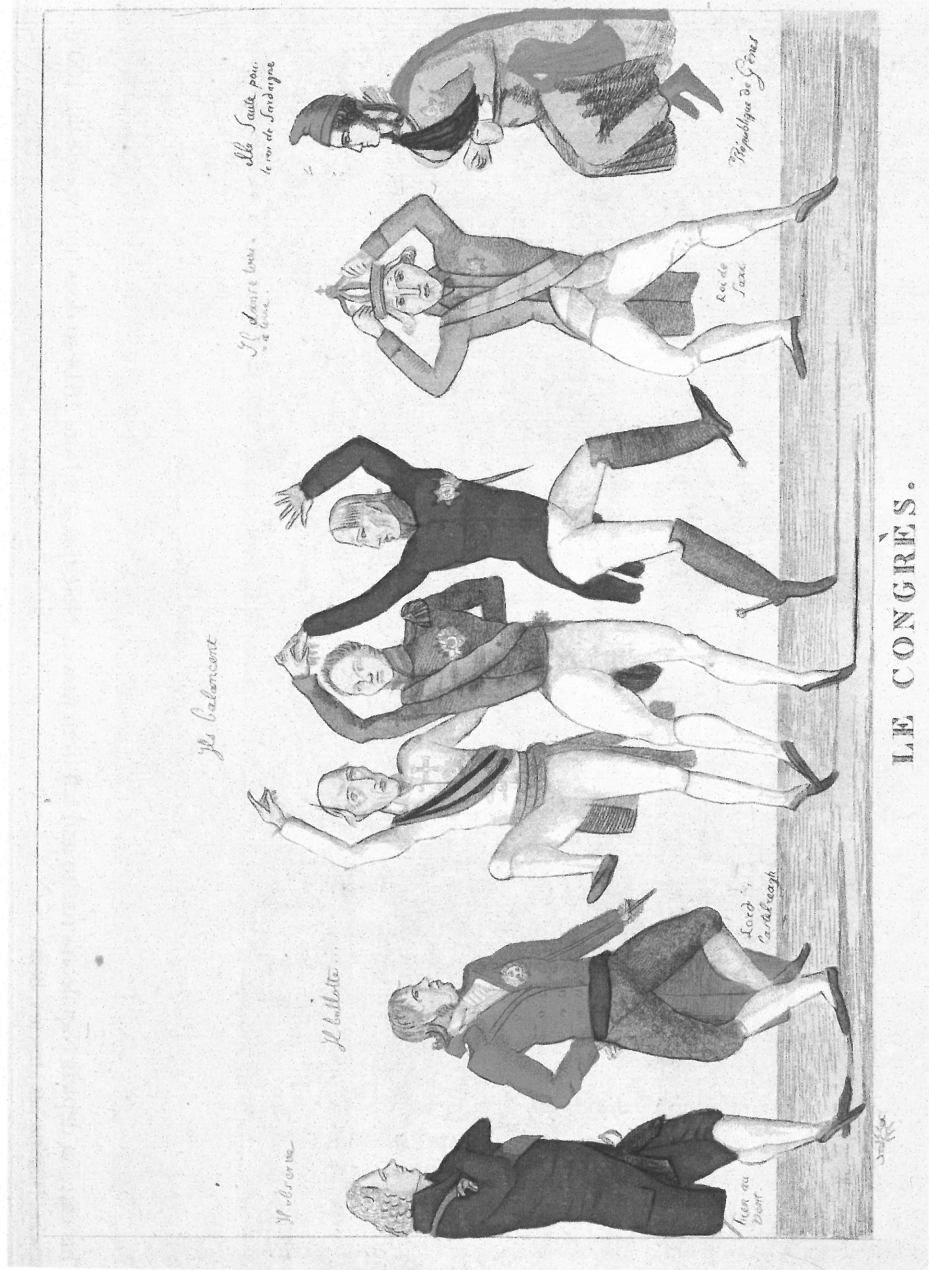


Plate 2 Satirical cartoon depicting the key protagonists in a dance at the Congress of Vienna in 1815 (engraving) by French School, (19th century) Musée de la Ville de Paris, Musée Carnavalet, Paris, France/ Giraudon/ The Bridgeman Art Library Nationality / copyright status: French / out of copyright.
Source: Bridgeman Art Library

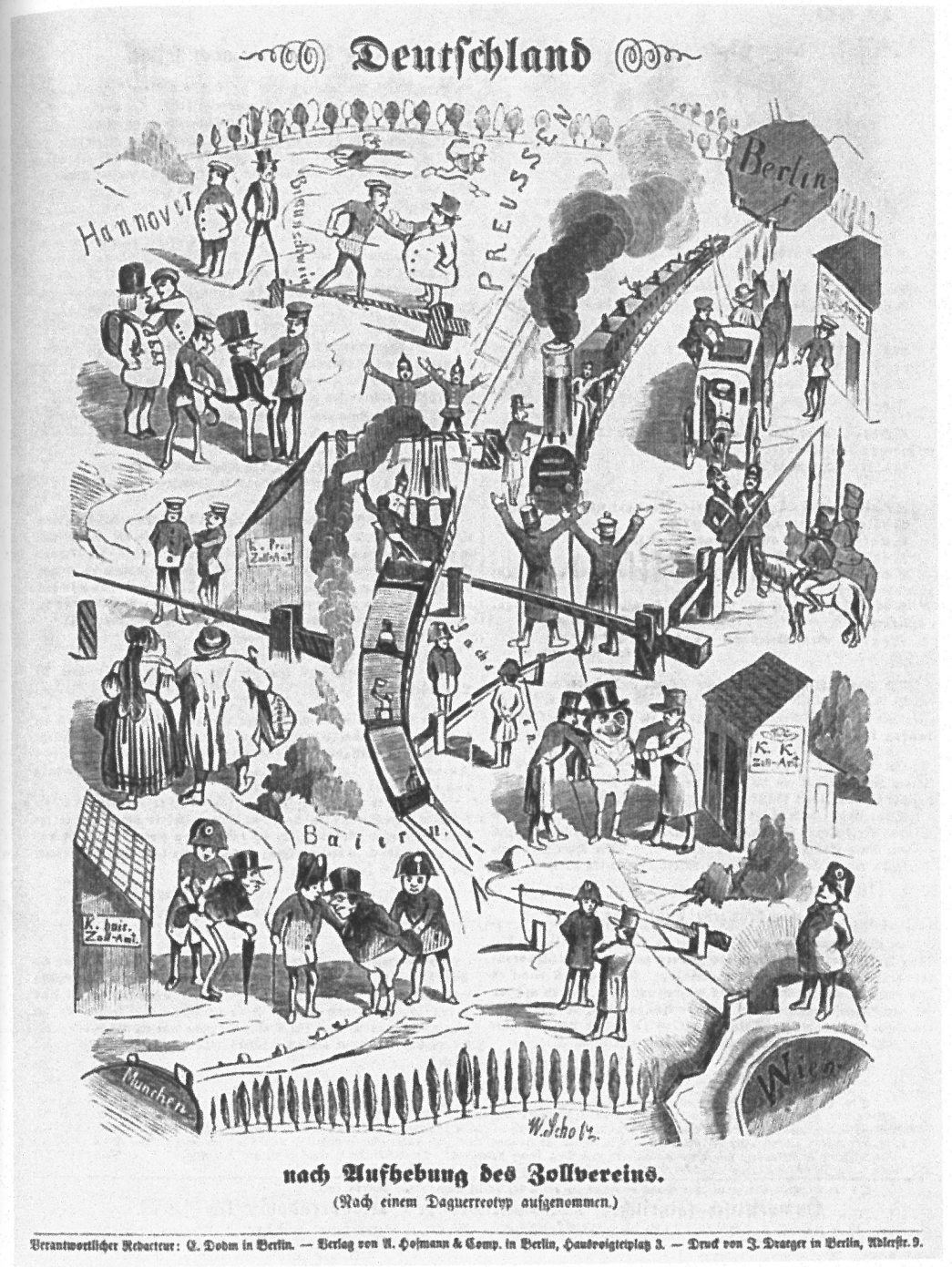


Plate 3 The liberal vision had been that the Zollverein would herald an era of free movement in Germany. This cartoon from 1852 satirises that vision.
Source: © Universitätsbibliothek Heidelberg; <http://digi.uni-heidelberg.de/diglit/kla1852/0196>

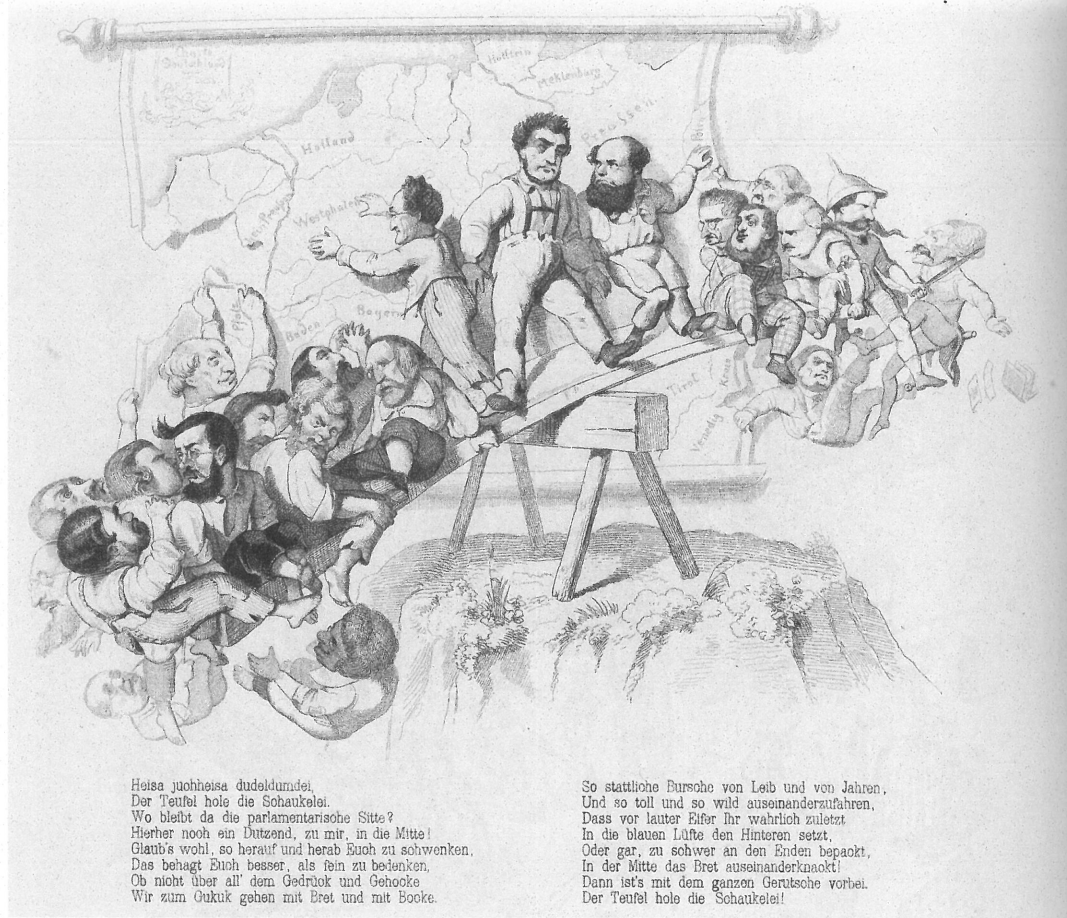


Plate 4 The Frankfurt Parliament on a seesaw. Left and right wing deputies quarrel while Heinrich von Gagern seeks to hold his balance in the centre.

Source: Germanisches Nationalmuseum, Nürnberg

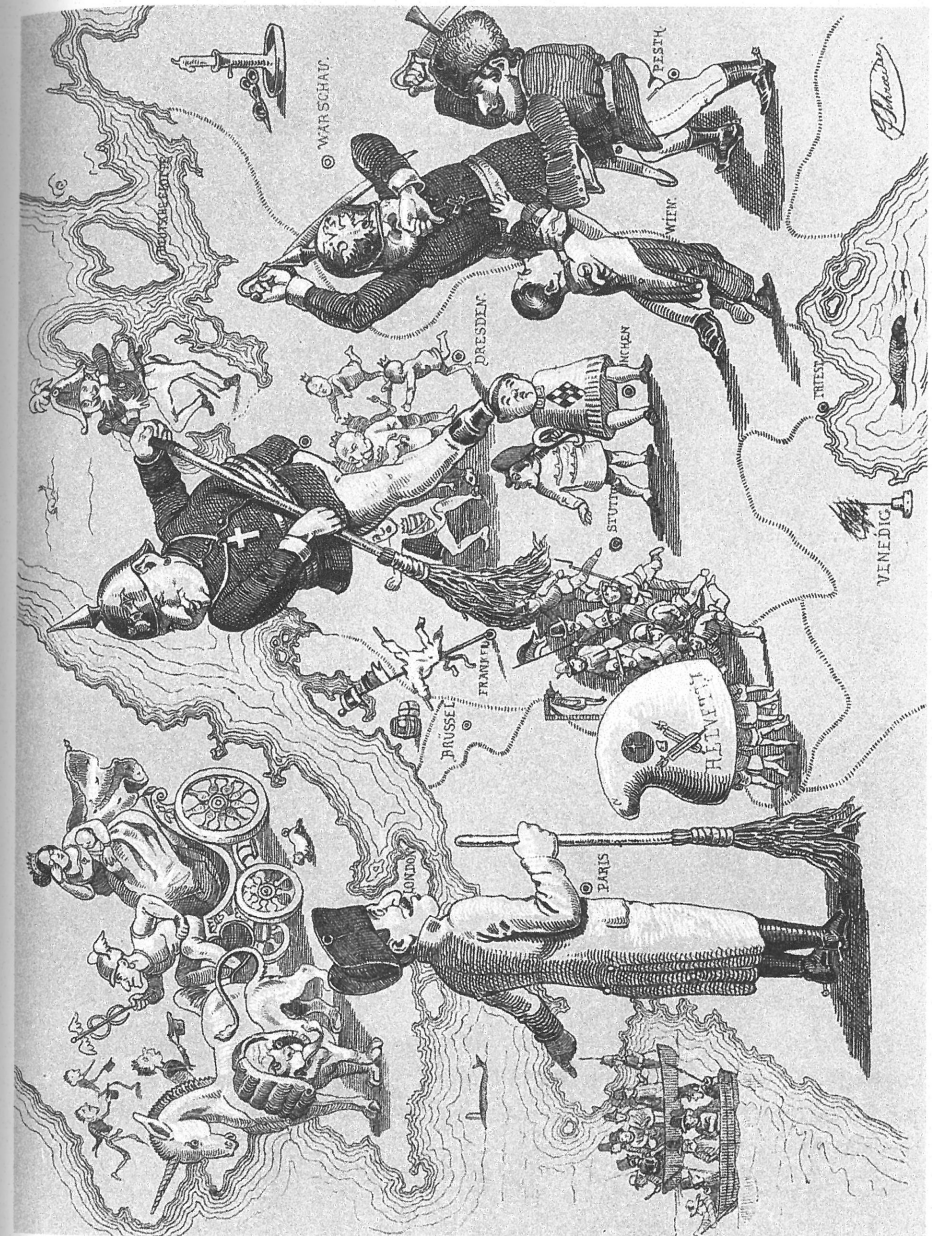
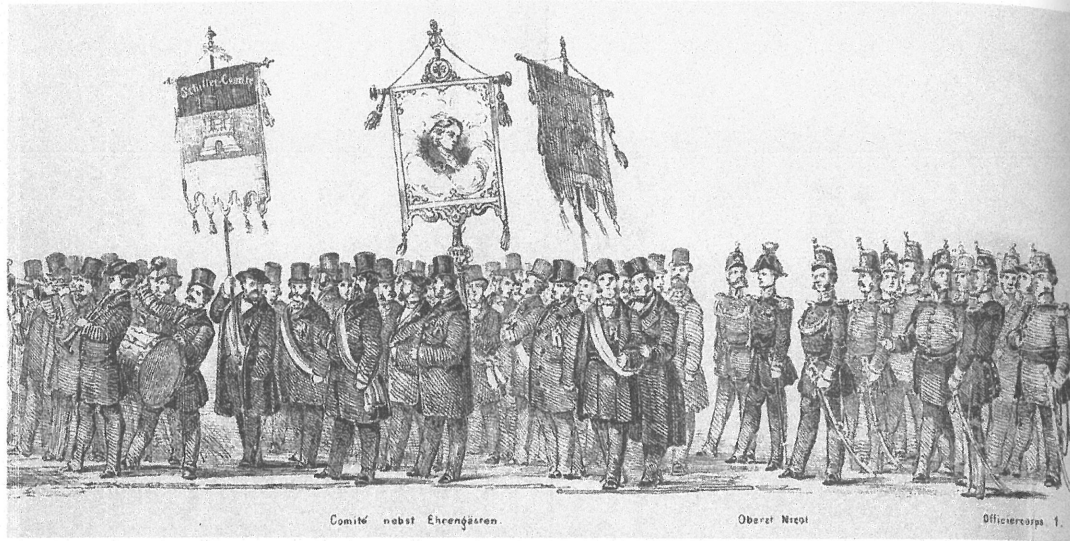


Plate 5 Louis Napoleon has virtually swept revolution from France. The Prussian king is still sweeping, especially in south-west Germany. The Austrians are still fighting the Hungarians.

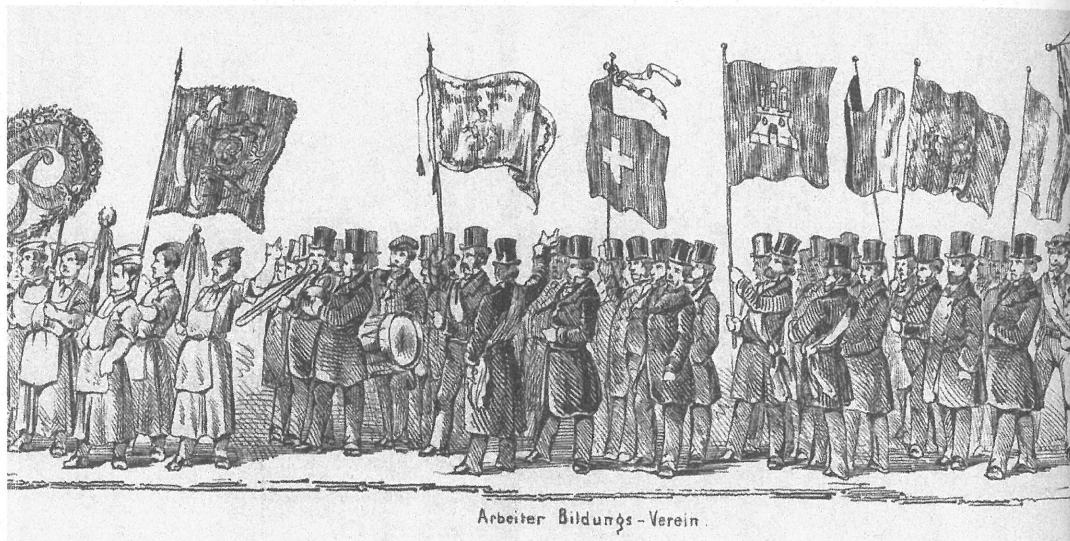
Source: akg-images Ltd



Comité nebst Ehrengästen

Oberer Nest

Officierscorps 1.



Arbeiter Bildungs-Verein

Plate 6 The centenary of Schiller's birth in November 1859 was the occasion for many demonstrations of national feeling. One of the largest took place in Hamburg, including a procession arranged by the various associations under whose banners the members marched.

Source: Deutsche Literaturarchiv Marbach



PEACE—AND NO PIECES!

BISMARCK. "PARDON, MON AMI; BUT WE REALLY CAN'T ALLOW YOU TO PICK UP ANYTHING HERE."
 NAP (the Chiffonnier). "PRAY, DON'T MENTION IT, M'SIEU! IT'S NOT OF THE SLIGHTEST CONSEQUENCE."

Plate 7 Punch cartoon in which Bismarck rejects French ambitions for territorial gains following the defeat of Austria.

Source: Punch Cartoon Library



GAUL TO THE NEW CÆSAR.

“DEFIANCE, EMPEROR, WHILE I HAVE STRENGTH TO HURL IT!”

Plate 8 Punch cartoon portraying victorious Prussia in 1870.

Source: Punch Cartoon Library

The biggest potential problem was France (Pottinger 1966). After his success in Italy in 1859–60, Louis Napoleon was interested in advances on the Rhine. However, rather than backing one or other of the German powers, for him the best policy was to wait and see how a conflict between Austria and Prussia developed, and then to exploit this to best advantage. This was the line he took when he and Bismarck met at Biarritz in October 1865; there was nothing more than vague allusions to possible territorial alterations to French advantage in the event of remaining neutral during an Austro-Prussia conflict. Louis Napoleon leaned towards Prussia in the sense that he had tended to an anti-Austrian policy since 1856, found the Habsburg dynasty repellent, wanted to complete his Italian policy with the detachment of Venetia from Habsburg control and recognised that it was Prussia that would take the initiative in bringing about a confrontation. (See Hallberg 1973 for the period to 1864; Pottinger 1966 thereafter.) Nevertheless, ambiguous neutrality was his principal policy and he took this line also in negotiations with Austria. His encouragement for the Prussian–Italian alliance of April 1866 further suggests that his main policy was to bring about conflict between Austria and Prussia and exploit the outcome. It may be that his secret treaty of 6 June 1866 with Austria signalled a turn away from that policy and a belated awareness of the danger of a rapid and decisive Prussian victory, although it could also be interpreted as just another way of ensuring conflict by strengthening Austrian resolve.

Certainly, then, for a short period at least, one could anticipate the non-involvement of the other three major powers. It needed little ability on Bismarck's part to secure this diplomatic situation. The next question was the prospect of winning such a localised war.

Between 1860 and 1865 the military balance of power between Austria and Prussia shifted rapidly in favour of Prussia. Whereas in 1860 army strengths on paper stood at about 300,000 and 200,000 respectively, in 1866 they stood at about 275,000 and 215,000. However, this Austrian numerical superiority was undone by the Prussian–Italian agreement of 1866, an agreement supported by Louis Napoleon. Both Prussia and Italy sought to manipulate the other state one in a conflict with Austria in order to make territorial gains. Equally, each was worried that the other, having used this leverage successfully, would abandon its ally. The agreement, formally commencing on 8 April 1866, was limited to just three months. Italy agreed to go to war against Austria if Prussia did, and both states agreed not to bring war to an end until each had made territorial gains. The ball was in Prussia's court but it needed to start the war soon. Italy's army had a paper strength of 230,000 although this was an unrealistic estimate and the Italian army performed woefully in 1866. However, it meant that Austria had to divide its army, sending 100,000 troops south. In theory, Austrian soldiers

were boosted by the entry of Saxony, Bavaria, Württemberg and Hannover into the war on its side. However, the failure of Austria to mobilise quickly and advance its armies into southern Germany meant that only 33,000 Saxons succeeded in joining up with Austrian troops in Bohemia, bringing the strength up to a little over 200,000. That failure of mobilisation, as we shall see, was no accident and anticipated by Prussia. The other German states – isolated from the Austrian-Saxon forces – were rapidly defeated by Prussia and hardly delayed the mobilisation and movement of Prussian soldiers into northern Bohemia. Numerically there was rough parity between the two sides in the German war zone in Bohemia. (See Buchholz 2001; Craig 1965; and Wawro 1996 for the 1866 war.)

When the war began many informed observers believed it would be prolonged, possibly indecisive and that Austria was more likely to emerge the winner. (On the public war aims of the two states, see [Docs 58 and 59, pp. 170, 171].) Austria had the advantage of a central position. Moltke opted for the high-risk policy of dividing his army into three to bring it over the mountains into Bohemia, providing the Austrian commander Benedek with the chance of concentrating his force on to one of these armies and then picking off the other two. In the event Benedek failed to do this, the Prussian armies were brought together on the eve of (indeed, even during) the decisive battle. Part of the reason for this was that Moltke fully exploited railway networks (far superior for his troops coming south to the Austrian border than for Austrian troops moving north from Vienna) and the division of his forces to move much more quickly than Benedek had expected. The telegraph also, at least in the initial stages of movement, enabled better coordination of widely dispersed forces. Nevertheless, this did not go like clockwork; there were many breakdowns in communication and bottlenecks in transport, and once in Bohemia route marching and mounted couriers took over.

Then, when troops closed on one another, the needle-gun used by Prussia (a breech-instead of a muzzle-loading rifle which could be fired more rapidly and from the prone rather than standing position) inflicted devastating casualties on Austrian troops who tried to close in for hand-to-hand combat. Broadly speaking, these elements – rapid movement of divided forces, concentration at the point of battle and superior infantry – were the key to Prussia's rapid success. At the same time military historians point to missed opportunities and mistakes by the Austrian command. The war had been a huge gamble; the Prussian leadership had not expected so dramatic a triumph.

However, it is not enough to point to such military factors. One also has to explain why they existed. Why did Prussia have the needle-gun and not Austria? Why did Prussia plan for war more effectively? Why was Prussia better able to use railways or the telegraph? To answer these and other such

questions we must go beyond battle narratives and that is the purpose of Chapter 8 below.

What also needs to be explained is why one lost battle, however calamitous, should lead so rapidly to the end of the war. The defeat of Sedan in 1870 did not bring the war with France to an end; why should Königgrätz do so in 1866? Austria had been successful in the Italian theatre. It could have transferred troops from the south (this operation was actually started), fallen back in defence of Vienna and raised more troops. France was now regretting its previous policy and shifting in favour of Austria. Russia was not happy about the imminent destruction of various German monarchies and the massive expansion of Prussian power. It would not have been unreasonable to anticipate the other major powers becoming concerned about Prussian success, bringing pressure to bear for a negotiated settlement and pushing back hoped-for Prussian gains (Mosse 1958, chap. 8; Carr 1991, chap. 3).

One reason Austria did not take this line was that it was concerned about its remaining territories. Bismarck in 1866, just like Louis Napoleon in 1859, had established contacts with Hungarian radicals linked to the 1848 leader Louis Kossuth, who wished to use Austria's weakness to revive the 1848 drive for independence, or at least much greater autonomy. Austria had, in the secret treaty of June with France, already agreed to concede Venetia to France, which intended in turn to pass it over to Italy. (Thus Italy was secure of Venetia whichever way the war turned out!) Also important is that Austria lacked positive war aims in Germany. It was not clear whether it aimed to deprive Prussia of territory, reorganise the *Bund*, destroy or join the *Zollverein* or whether it would simply have used victory to restore a confederal Germany in which Austria was pre-eminent and Prussia followed its lead. These fears and lack of a positive set of war aims help explain Austria's capitulation. Finally, public opinion even amongst Austrian Germans, the section of the population which was most committed to the German connection, was against continuing a war that could be debilitating. (See Katzenstein, chap. 4; Bled 1994, chap. 6. I consider this further in Chapter 8 below.)

Bismarck was equally concerned about the consequences of continued war. In his reminiscences he describes vividly the emotionally exhausting arguments with his king and military advisers who wanted to march to Vienna (though one always has to be aware of exaggeration which makes Bismarck's own role more central) (Bismarck 1899, chap. 20 'Nikolsburg'). Once those arguments were won, Bismarck made it clear that Austria would not be asked to surrender any territory in Germany but to give up its influence over other German states by allowing the *Bund* to be destroyed, as well as to pay an indemnity. He also hinted at territorial gains for France after the war. Consequently, there seemed to be no good reason for Austria

continuing with a war which would probably not improve on such a settlement and might easily lead to something much worse. (On Prussian peace policy, see Williamson 1998, document 17; for the peace agreement, see **Doc. 60**, p. 173.)

The consequences of Prussian victory

The biggest losers were the medium states in northern and central Germany (see Map 4). North of the River Main Bismarck followed the traditional policy of annexation, creating new Prussian provinces in Schleswig, Holstein, Nassau, the northern part of Hesse-Darmstadt and Hannover, while forcing the remaining states into a Prussian-dominated **North German Confederation**. The German states south of the Main, principally Bavaria, Baden and Württemberg, were deprived of Austrian protection, still dominated by Prussia through the *Zollverein* and now forced into secret military alliance with Prussia. Whether they could resist for very long a more complete incorporation into a Prussian-dominated Germany was a matter of debate (Carr 1991, chap. 4).

The national movement was plunged into disarray by the rapid course of events. Although some liberal nationalists by 1864–65 had begun to look more positively at Bismarck as providing a way towards national unity, most deplored the unconstitutional and military path he pursued. The outbreak of war between Austria and Prussia was greeted with dismay; this was a war between the two major German powers which would lead either to one of these powers dominating Germany or to a debilitating conflict which would weaken Germany and expose it to outside interference, especially from France. (Sheehan 1989: 899–912 calls this section of his book 'the German civil war', though Hewitson 2010 denies the term was widely used at the time; see also Williamson 1998, document 12.) Bismarck's sudden conversion to national reform, for example calling for a democratically elected German parliament, was not taken seriously.

Nothing, however, succeeds like success. Prussian victory changed the situation utterly. Furthermore, from his new position of strength Bismarck sought reconciliation with Prussian liberals and the national movement more generally. New elections to the Prussian *Landtag*, held on the day of Königgrätz (but before news of its outcome), had stimulated Prussian patriotism and led to victory for conservative candidates. Much to everyone's surprise, Bismarck did not use this opportunity to set a seal of approval upon his policy against the parliament, but instead placed before the *Landtag* an indemnity bill which was designed to return to normal constitutional rule [**Doc. 61**, p. 174]. The liberals split between those who considered that

North German Confederation: Created in 1867 and consisted of the newly enlarged Prussia and the other German states north of the river Main. Its principal institutions were a *Reichstag* elected by universal manhood suffrage and a *Bundesrat* made up of delegations from the member states.

it was better to work with Bismarck than against him, in the hope that such cooperation would impart a liberal and national character to Prussian success, and those who could not set aside four years of unconstitutional rule, harassment and Bismarck's refusal to undertake that in a future crisis such conduct could not be repeated. The pro-Bismarck faction formed the National Liberal party which in turn established branches in the new Prussian provinces and other German states. (See Langewiesche 2000 and Sheehan 1995 on the liberal parties.)

Bismarck sought to work with the National Liberals in his German policy too. He convened a democratically elected constituent assembly for the new North German Confederation and the National Liberals emerged as the largest party. The constitutional draft Bismarck put before this assembly and which was agreed with some significant changes (such as the introduction of a secret ballot and a limited accountability of the Chancellor to the elected lower house, the *Reichstag*) was hardly a model of liberal constitutionalism. Military expenditure was exempt from normal, annual budgetary control. Key powers remained with the individual states (especially Prussia). At the national level the upper house, the *Bundesrat*, which, like the old *Bund*, was made up of state envoys, was intended to be the institution in which legislation was drafted; the *Reichstag* was seen as a body which could just say yea or nay to laws laid before it. However, the national constitution provided the National Liberals with an instrument for liberalising reform which they would use to full effect over the next few years. Furthermore, liberal politicians from the annexed provinces joined with counterparts in 'old' Prussia to exploit Prussian constitutional provisions. In these ways Bismarck effected a partnership of sorts between the Prussian state and German liberal nationalists. (See Zucker 1975 for a study of Ludwig Bamberger, one such politician.)

The story of the North German Confederation and Bismarck's policy up to the Franco-Prussian War is dealt with by another book in this series (Williamson 1998) which in turn relates that story to Bismarck's career as the first German Chancellor up to 1890. Yet another book in the series (Mason 1997) looks at the domestic politics of Austria-Hungary after 1866, beginning with the new constitution of 1867 which conceded autonomy to Hungary. I will not go over ground traversed by these authors. The focus of this book is upon the conflict between Austria and Prussia for supremacy in Germany. With the benefit of hindsight we know that, in effect, that conflict was settled in 1866. However, contemporaries could not be so sure about this until after the defeat of France and the formation of the German Second Empire. The Austro-German alliance of 1879 finally made clear the Habsburg acceptance of Austria's exclusion from Germany and subordination to the more powerful Second Empire in a very different kind of cooperation. This last phase, from 1866 to 1871, needs brief consideration.

Reichstag: A parliament elected on the basis of universal manhood suffrage, originally established as part of the North German Confederation in 1867 and then extended to the remaining south German states under the constitution of the German Second Empire.

Bundesrat: One of the main institutions created by the North German Confederation and which continued after 1871 under the constitution of the German Second Empire. It was intended to be the institution which drafted national legislation.