

THE EARLY POLITICAL PHILOSOPHY OF  
FÜRST OTTO VON BISMARCK  
FROM 1848-1852

by  
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The political philosophy of Bismarck is often imposed from his later career onto his earlier political activities without asking the question of whether or not the political pragmatism he clearly practiced later in his life was an evolution or whether it was always present even in his earliest political activities when he possessed the reputation of being an arch-conservative in Prussian domestic politics. This thesis seeks to understand his early political philosophy through his interaction with the Revolution of 1848, his role in the Reaction and his attitude and political actions towards Austria during his service in the Federal Diet until late 1852.

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## Introduction

Following the Revolution of 1848 the German status quo established under Metternich came to an end. Austria and Prussia instead of determining German politics in agreement from Berlin and Vienna began to assert their power political interests in German affairs through the German Confederation. The consequence of success for either Prussia or Austria of achieving greater power in a more tightly unified Germany was mediatization for the other. Prussia sought through a plan immediately following the Revolution of 1848 to corral the smaller and medium states into a unified Germany under a conservative constitution accepted by the rulers of these states. At Olmütz the Prussian government, facing the threat of a large scale European war and heeding the arch-conservative desire within its own government for national solidarity between conservative powers, was forced to sacrifice its union plan and its claims for German national unity and suffered a serious political defeat both in German and international affairs. At the same time Austria succeeded in reconvening the Federal Diet and sought to use its presidential power to try and enhance the institution into an executive body under Austrian tutelage. While it sought to expand the Federal Diet, Austria also attempted to break up or enter the Prussian *Zollverein* which had come to be an increasingly unifying force in Germany around Prussia. While both governments paid lip service to reestablishing the political conservative status quo of pre-1848 politics in the midst of this struggle, they in reality sought politically, economically and

through a strong appeal to the growing desire for German national unity in the Confederation to subjugate the other politically and take over sole leadership in German politics. It was a political struggle wherein the dominant motif was political pragmatism and not conservative solidarity.

A prominent figure in these developments was Otto von Bismarck. From his initial entry into politics as a bitter opponent of the Revolution to his appointment as the Prussian delegate to the Federal Diet with the mandate to pursue rapprochement with Austria, Bismarck was viewed as one of the more vocal and visible arch-conservatives in Prussian politics. Though he was to enter politics with this arch-conservative reputation, the path he was to take in German politics and his attitude towards Austrian and Prussian dualism which he exhibited even in the first three years of his political activity in Frankfurt show that he was willing to break with conservative ideals in order to pursue Prussian national interests even at the cost of conservative national solidarity. Bismarck was guided by the goal of assuring Prussia the unfettered right of pursuing its German interests. From his initial step into politics in 1848, Bismarck, claiming the need for Prussian parity with Austria but nonetheless willing to defend the Olmütz decision, began to develop into the statesman who would eventually unite Germany under Prussian domination while subjugating Austria to a secondary role. It is clear from the path he was to take that he could not be considered one of the great conservative preservers as he showed himself willing to break some of the most basic tenants of conservatism: the maintenance of conservative supranational solidarity and the complete rejection of any nationalistic or revolutionary tendencies. In hindsight it can easily be stated that while

Bismarck sought to preserve the power of the traditional order in Prussia, he was not motivated by the same divine right political assumptions of his arch-conservative colleagues, but rather by the practice of *Realpolitik*, which mandated that his political allegiance be first of all to pursuing the measured interests of the Prussian and secondly to any form of ideology or ideal whether conservative or liberal. The question which must be asked is whether or not Bismarck's practice of *Realpolitik*, which he is so commonly associated with in hindsight, was present in his early years as a politician. Did Bismarck metamorphous into the *Realpolitiker* who in 1866 ended Prussian and Austrian dualism on the battlefield or were the ideological underpinnings already present explicitly or implicitly during his initial political activity in Berlin and later Frankfurt? While it is very easy to read back into Bismarck the political philosophy which defines his political career, is it possible to see the fundamental assumptions of *Realpolitik* in Bismarck's initial political involvement from 1848 to the end of 1852? If these traits can be ascertained, how is it that Bismarck as a professed conservative *Junker* was able in his own mind to reconcile his pursuance of Prussian power needs even at the cost of supranational conservative solidarity and complete rejection of the revolutionary concept which his *Camarilla* colleagues believed to be the two highest priorities of politics?



### The Pre-history of 1848

The conflict in 1848 which catapulted Bismarck into political life found its source in the developing contradictions of the previous half century in the social, political and economic life of Germany. Following the wars of liberation and the liberal reforms of the vom Stein- Hardenberg governments in Prussia, the expectations of a developing *Mittelstand* for greater German unity were very high. With the establishment of the German Confederation at the Congress of Vienna, however, Metternich pursued a policy of repression concerning liberalism and revolution and sought the re-establishment and protection of legitimate patriarchal states in Germany.<sup>1</sup> The creation of the German Confederation, seeking the "maintenance of the external and internal security of Germany," had at its core the "independence and inviolability of the individual German states."<sup>2</sup> The Federal Diet, consisting of 39 German states and representatives of a few foreign states with ties to German princes, embodied the old tradition of state particularism.

Following 1815 the relationship between Austria and Prussia had been one of cooperation in eliminating the forces of revolution. Prussia however, through its significant role in the liberation of Germany and its Rhineland acquisition had gained more influence than previously in German affairs.<sup>3</sup> While Metternich saw the "preservation of Austria's influence over Germany as essential for the maintenance of the integrity and European

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<sup>1</sup>Eyck, Frank, *The Frankfurt Parliament: 1848-1849* (New York: Martin's Press, 1968) 8.

<sup>2</sup>Snyder, Louis L., *Documents of German History* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1958) 151-153.

<sup>3</sup>Eyck, *Frankfurt Parliament*, pp. 8.

position of the Habsburg Empire,"<sup>1</sup> he was also sensitive to Prussia's increasing influence and its claims to a position of parity in German affairs. He thus pursued a policy of cooperation within German affairs between Berlin and Vienna in which all important matters were first settled between the two capitals and then introduced in Frankfurt. In such a fashion the two powers were able to rule Germany jointly in conservative solidarity.

The triumph of the conservative order following the defeat of Napoleon was achieved at a time when the rise of industrialization began to create new social and economic elements which were making the ideals of this order obsolete. Both a cause and effect of industrialization was tremendous population growth between 1815 and 1871. Germany experienced a population growth of nearly 60% during this time. This growth was most pronounced in the territories where industrialization was progressing more quickly and Prussia, for example, experienced between 1815 and 1864 a population increase of 87%.<sup>2</sup> This growth was to especially increase the Prussian population and therefore also Prussia's economic and political influence.

One of the most significant consequence of the industrial revolution and the accompanying population growth was the rise of a new politically conscious *Mittelstand* or bourgeoisie which was comprised of merchants, shopkeepers, skilled artisans, industrialists and bankers as opposed to the enlightened *Bildungsbürgertum* of scholars and bureaucrats which had existed in the Prussian reform movement. The bourgeoisie sought free trade

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., 8.

<sup>2</sup>Hamerow, Theodore S., *The Social Foundations of German Unification 1858-1871: Ideas and Institutions* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press. 1969) 46.

and an end to the controlled economy of the past. They believed in the freedom of movement, repeal of usury laws, and sought common currency, weights and measures.<sup>1</sup> Though this new group only gradually developed a political consciousness, its desires for greater commercial unity in Germany at a very basic level worked against the conservative values of restoration and legitimist state particularism. The existence of the numerous trade frontiers resulting from the existing particularism in the German Confederation was contrary to such goals and aspirations. This group with time agitated for other liberal goals such as freedom of the press and stronger voice in the political affairs of the German states.

These new goals found expression even in the constitution of the Confederation in paragraph 19 which stipulated that the confederate states had the right to deliberate at the first meeting in Frankfurt of the Federal Diet concerning the regulation of commerce and navigation in Germany.<sup>2</sup> These demands were widespread in Germany at this time and had a broad base of support.<sup>3</sup> Friedrich List was one of many who agitated for the implementation of paragraph 19 in the Federal Constitution and in a petition by the Union of Merchants to the Federal Diet in April 1819 he stated that, "Only the remission of the internal customs, and the erection of a general tariff for the whole Confederation, can restore national trade and industry."<sup>4</sup> The Federal Diet, however, was concerned primarily in pursuing conservative restoration and issues of commerce were left in the tradition of

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<sup>1</sup>Hamerow, *Social Foundations*, 97

<sup>2</sup>Henderson, W. O., *The Zollverein* (London: Frank Cass and Company LTD, 1959) 25.

<sup>3</sup>*Ibid.*, 24.

<sup>4</sup>*Ibid.*, 26.

particularism to the individual states leaving the rising new *Mittelstand* frustrated in its aims.

With the failure of the Confederation machinery to bring about more economic unity in Germany, numerous states began forming smaller customs unions. Prussia most aggressively pursued this policy against some resistance by liberals in Germany who saw such actions as further dividing Germany. Prussia made its stand on concerning paragraph 19 clear. It was willing to conclude treaties with individual states, but "was unable to modify her customs system."<sup>1</sup> Prussia felt the differences in financial institutions and industrial interests were too great for the creation of German economic unity.<sup>2</sup> It began reforming its internal commercial and fiscal interests in 1818 with measures which pursued basic goals of replacing the confused mass of national, provincial, and local dues and import duties with a unified tariff which would be implemented at the exterior Prussian frontiers and creating tariffs low enough to make smuggling unprofitable.<sup>3</sup> In seeking to include smaller German states directly on its borders into the customs union, Prussia hoped not only to further prevent smuggling, but also to connect its two halves and improve its position militarily. During this time there were also attempts in both the South and the North to establish commercial unions. Neither of these attempts were successful. In the South, despite emerging concepts of creating a "third Germany" which would offset Prussia and Austria, divergent goals concerning tariff levels and the particularistic egos of

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<sup>1</sup>Price, Arnold H., *The Evolution the Zollverein: A study of the ideas and insitutions leading to German economic unification between 1815-1833* (Ann Arbur: University of Michigan Press, 1949) 125.

<sup>2</sup>Price, *Evolution Zollverein*, pp. 122-123

<sup>3</sup>Henderson, *Zollverein*, 37

the smaller states prevented a comprehensive union.<sup>1</sup> From this failure the two states of Bavaria and Württemberg formed a smaller union which in 1829 closed a commercial treaty with Prussia, a precursor to joining the *Zollverein* in 1833. The Middle German Customs Union was concerned primarily with protecting access to duty free British wares as it primarily consisted of agricultural states. It was more a defensive institution and each state maintained its own commercial policy.<sup>2</sup> Here also the inability to achieve unity led to the demise of such an attempt.

The single commercial union able to pursue a unified and consequent commercial policy was Prussia and throughout the 1820's it was able to expand its commercial ties to most of Germany. The *Zollverein* was formed in 1833 and became effective at the start of 1834. It consisted of 162,870 square miles with a population of 23.5 million people.<sup>3</sup> The most significant states not in it were Hannover, the Habsburg Empire, Frankfurt am Main and Baden. By 1847 this was down to only Hannover and naturally the Habsburg lands. Its affairs were managed by an annual General Congress at which unanimity was necessary for action. Prussia was to undertake all treaties with foreign powers on behalf of the *Zollverein*. Though the member states were to have a voice in *Zollverein* affairs, their dependence on it pushed them into a subservient role to Prussia and membership had been achieved, though with some compromises by Prussia in many cases, by accepting the Prussian system and policy. Even in the face of traditional political hostility, such as in the case of Hesse-Cassel, states began to see the necessity of joining.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., 57-63

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., 64-68

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., 93-94

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., 104, 112

The extensive development of railroads, roads, financial institutions and infrastructure needed for economic development as a whole began to pull individual states together around the Prussian dominated *Zollverein*.<sup>1</sup>

The political consequences of this were not lost on contemporaries at the time and one Prussian minister involved in the formation the *Zollverein* wrote in a memorandum in 1829 of the advantages a commercial treaty with Bavaria and Württemberg would afford Prussia in its relationship to Austria, which would be economically isolated, and France in case of incursion in the Rhine area.<sup>2</sup> Metternich wrote to the Habsburg Emperor in 1833 that, "Within the great Confederation, a smaller confederation is being formed ... under the direction of Prussia. ... Prussia ... will use the satisfaction of material interests to weaken the influence of Austria over the courts dedicated to her system, to sabotage their relations with Austria, to make them used to turning their eyes to Berlin."<sup>3</sup> Clearly a strong link was being recognized between state power and economic influence. The Prussian nationalist historian Treitschke describes in exaggerated but nonetheless revealing terms concerning the initial opening of the *Zollverein*: "Long strings of heavily laden freight wagons were waiting in front of the customs houses, surrounded by jubilating crowds."<sup>4</sup> He unabashedly ascribes to Prussia that it "marched unhesitantly towards the attainment of ... the permanent union, under Prussia's leadership, of all Germany, Austria excluded, by the

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<sup>1</sup>Pflanze, Otto, *Bismarck and the Development; The period of the Unification, 1815-1871* vol. 1 (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1990) 11-12.

<sup>2</sup>Henderson, *Zollverein*, 91-92

<sup>3</sup>Snyder, *Documents*, 168

<sup>4</sup>Treitschke, Heinrich von, *History of Germany in the Nineteenth Century* trans. Eden and Cedar Paul, ed. A Graig (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1975) 235-236.

indestructible bond of economic interests."<sup>1</sup> This mutual dependence made Germans recognize "that there could no longer be any separation from the great fatherland ... and in this indirect political influence lies the historical significance of the customs union."<sup>2</sup> He sees the extension of Prussian power through the *Zollverein* as the beginnings of overcoming particularism and fostering interdependency of the German states. Not all liberal forces however were in favor of such commercial unions and at the *Hambacher Fest* of 1832 it was claimed that the princes through competitive customs policies had further disunited Germany. Prussia was often a prime target of this criticism and was accused of using its economic magnetism as a means of extending its "arbitrary" political rule.<sup>3</sup> Regardless of the various standpoints concerning the Prussian *Zollverein*, the link was clear between overall German economic interests and German politics. That state which could bind the material interests of the other German states to itself would also gain in the realm of German political influence. In the political struggle for hegemony in German affairs which was to ensue in the final stages of the Revolution of 1848 this was to become one of the primary battle grounds as both Prussia and Austria sought to enhance their position in a way that would leave the other a secondary role in German affairs and a subsequent loss of power on the European stage. Immediately following the Revolution both states began to recognize and exploit the new forces in a swiftly changing political, economic and social environment in order to enhance their state

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., 235.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., 237.

<sup>3</sup>Price, *Evolution Zollverein*, 171-172.

influence and power in German affairs. It was in the midst of this struggle that Bismarck was to make his political debut.



## Bismarck's Early Political Perspective

### The Junker

Bismarck began his political career as a representative to the Prussian United Diet in the 1846-47 session and in the eyes of his contemporaries quickly showed himself to be of an arch-conservative ideology. He defined himself early in his political career as being *ständisch-liberal*, meaning he sided with aristocratic opposition to centralizing monarchical power and bureaucracy, while recognizing the need for a healthy strong monarchy. He saw the monarchy as a two edged sword which threatened to expand and subject the aristocracy but which also served as the bulwark of aristocratic privilege and position. Though he defined himself as *ständisch-liberal*, the events of 1848 impressed upon him the need for protecting the monarchy from encroachment by parliamentarism in order to protect the position of Junker in Prussian society from those elements which sought not only political but also social reform. Bismarck believed the power of the monarchy and the Prussian state should protect the class interests of the Junker and the traditional elements of Prussian society in a period of social, economic, and political change. These traditional institutions in turn served as the basis of power for the state and the monarchy.<sup>1</sup> Later in his life Bismarck stated that throughout his political career he was guided by the principles of a:

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<sup>1</sup>Planze, *Bismarck and Development*, 70.

Monarchische Gewalt, ... welche durch eine unabhaengige nach meiner Meinung staendische oder berufsgenossenschaftliche Landesvertretung soweit kontrolliert waere, dass Monarch oder Parlament den bestehenden gesetlichen Rechtszustand nicht einseitig .. aendern koennen.<sup>1</sup>

Bismarck believed fundamentally in preserving the traditional political relationship between state, aristocracy and the people. While he saw the potential of a parliament checking arbitrary power and as serving as a defensive institution against absolutism, he denied it any authority to force the king against his will in areas of budgetary, military, or affairs of foreign policy.<sup>2</sup> The movement of liberalism and concepts of representative government lacked any moral or practical justification in the mind of Bismarck which could give them the right to rule the Prussian state. Such power according to Bismarck existed only in the traditional order of things and he stated:

Preussen ist keineswegs durch Liberalismus und Freigeisterei gross geworden, sondern durch eine Reihe von kraeftigen, entschlossenen Regenten, welche die militaerischen und finanziellen Kreafte des Staates sorgfaelltig pfliegten und ... sie ... in eigener, selbststaendiger Hand zusammenhielten.<sup>3</sup>

Concepts such as liberty or representative institutions could be promoted until they hampered the interest of the Prussian state in attaining its goals and protecting its interest. The basis of Prussian strength in pursuing its interests had always been the monarchy and the traditional order of politics according to Bismarck.

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<sup>1</sup>Bismarck, Otto, Furst von, *Die gesammelten Werke*, compl. Dr. Herman von Ptersdorff, vol. XV (Berlin: Otto Stollberg and Co., Verlag für Politik u. Wirtschaft, 1924) 15-16.

<sup>2</sup>Bismarck, GW, I, 375-376.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., 375.

The landed and aristocratic interests accordingly provided the most dependable protection against bureaucratic absolutism as well as the *Freigeisterei* of liberalism. For Bismarck the "soil nourished the healthy instincts of patriotism and dynastic loyalty; the city bred the loathsome disease of treason and revolution."<sup>1</sup> The rural population, according to Bismarck, was not only the strength of monarchical and aristocratic survival, but also the backbone of the army and he wrote during the Revolution of 1848:

Wenn wir unserer Landwirtschafft nicht bestehen, dann geht mit dem Nahrstand auch dem Wehrstand zu Grabe. Der Bauer ist der Kern unseren Armee, der auch in Not und Drang aushaelt, denn er ist mit dem Lande verwachsen. ... Dem Staedter und Fabrikarbeiter fehlt diese Empfindung und Eigenschaft, denn mit Pflaster und Backstein kann man nicht verwachsen. Das land ist das Volk."<sup>2</sup>

For Bismarck, the backbone of Prussian society was monarchy, aristocracy, and army and the basis of this was the rural interests and not the cities and bourgeois liberalism. This *Stockpreussentum* as he was to often refer to it, was what he saw threatened by the Revolution of 1848. To the claims of liberals that they represented the whole German nation Bismarck replied skeptically, "dass sich in unserem Kammern das eigentliche preussische Volk mit seinem praktischen Leben und seinen Interessen doch nur duerftig vertreten findet."<sup>3</sup> Because he saw Prussia primarily as a land whose political institutions and power were based in the old order, his conceptions of state and politics were very conservative in that they sought to preserve that order in Prussia.

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<sup>1</sup>Planze, *Bismarck and Devopment*, 60

<sup>2</sup>Bismarck, *GW*, IX, 90.

<sup>3</sup>Bismarck, Otto, Furst von, *Bismarcks Reden*, compl. Helmut Kohl (Berlin: Deutsche Bibleothek, 1914) 302.

In a period of social and economic upheaval Bismarck opposed any compromise of Junker privilege and he quickly found his political niche with the ultra-conservatives who were represented by the *Camarilla* or Court party. This was primarily a group of landed aristocrats seeking to preserve the old feudalistic relationships in the country side and to protect their privilege in areas of political power in the face of rising demands for more representative government and social liberalization such as freedom for the press and the right of dissent with the government. Bismarck wrote to his wife in May 1847, "Es ist mir gelungen, einigen Einfluss auf eine grosse Anzahl der doch einige Abgeordnete der sogenannten Hof-Parthei und der sonstigen ultra-Conservativen von mehren Provinzen zu gewinnen."<sup>1</sup> This influence was to be the initial base of political support which would enable him to enter a further political career.

### **The Revolution of 1848, Social Issues**

In February of 1848 a revolution in France sparked uprising throughout Europe and by March even the conservative centers of Vienna and Berlin were forced to capitulate to the demands for reform in the political, social and economic arenas. On March 14 Friedrich William called the United Diet into session and capitulated to the revolutionary demands and declared the need for the constitutional reorganization of government and a program of internal reforms. The United Diet thus proceeded to call for

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<sup>1</sup>Bismarck, GW, XIV 89.

general, equal, but indirect elections for the Prussian National Assembly which was to be convened in May. While Bismarck made his disapproval of the king's capitulation clear, he also showed himself willing to accept the inevitable and stated to the Diet in response to its letter of appreciation to the King, "dass ... [ich] die Adresse, insoweit sie ein Programm der Zukunft ist, ohne weiteres acceptire, aus dem alleinigen Grund, weil ich mir nicht anders helfen kann."<sup>1</sup> He accepted the present situation with the belief that the present ministry was the only means of maintaining an orderly state in Prussia and that the past could not be brought back, but he criticized the king whom he partially blamed for the events of past few months as having himself thrown dirt on the coffin of the old order.<sup>2</sup> This resignation, however, was not to last long and though Bismarck was not elected to the Prussian National Assembly he played an active role in defending what he considered conservative rural interests throughout the revolution until the beginning of the reaction in December of the same year. In his final speech to the United Diet on April 10 Bismarck, in rejecting a proposal for funds to alleviate the economic distress resulting from the revolution, stated in no uncertain terms that he saw the Revolution as a conflict between rural and urban interests. For Bismarck the liberals possessed only the appearance of popular support and he stated that the peasants were deceived by certain elements of *Bildung und Intelligence* who seduced them by appealing to their immediate desires and promising to free them from feudal payments.<sup>3</sup> Bismarck ultimately believed, however, that the interests and the allegiance

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<sup>1</sup>Bismarck, *Reden*, I, 45f.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., 77-78

<sup>3</sup>Bismarck, *GW*, XV, 28.

of the peasantry lay with the conservative order. The liberals he believed would not be able to rule all Germans, but represented merely a small segment of German life, primarily the interests of urban bankers and industrialists. Taxation and allocation of state resources he stated must be done with objectivity and with an eye to the good of the whole state and he feared that those in power:

Die Zustaende unseres Vaterlandes mehr durch die Brille des Industrialismus auffast, als mit dem klaren Auge des Staatsmannes, der alle Interessen des Landes mit gleicher Unparteilichkeit ueberblickt; ich fuerchte deshalb, dass bei der neuen Belastung die Last vorzugsweise auf die Platte des Lands und auf die kleinen Staedte gewaelzt werden wird, und dass die Verwendung der aufgebrauchten Mittel ueberwiegend der Industrie und dem Geldverkehr der groesseren Staedte zu Gut kommen wird.<sup>1</sup>

Agrarian reforms such as the repeal of the tax exemption for the *Junker* and the nullification of many remaining manorial obligations of the peasantry by the new liberal cabinet and assembly directly attacked the material interests of the aristocracy and were an attempt according to conservatives to promote city interests over traditional landed interests. The conservatives believed that liberals sought to undermine their traditional hold on political power and the bureaucracy by undermining the aristocratic economic independence which had allowed them to provide the traditional leadership in the government and military. The dominance of the agricultural interests had to be protected against the bankers and industrialists because capitalism would undermine the form of society which had become rooted in the agrarian economy and “ was a threat to the class differences defining a man’s rights and obligations, since it preached a divisive individualism inconsistent with

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<sup>1</sup>Bismarck, *Reden*, I 54f.

the corporate ideal.”<sup>1</sup> Under such a system the leaders and population would not serve the overall interests of the community but would all become slaves to the tyranny of the “cash nexus.” Industrialists and bankers would not be able to “conceive of a political authority with higher ideals and powers than a business enterprise.”<sup>2</sup> The hierarchical social system dominated by landed nobility could not survive under the rule of industrial capitalism in a society dominated by the thinking of liberalism. From an ultra-conservative perspective the principle at stake in the revolution was more than merely preserving their power. Their whole political perspective was based upon divine right authority. For conservatives such as the Gerlach brothers of the *Camarilla* insisting on the traditional order was as much a matter of living in accordance with the will of God as protecting or justifying their own power political interests. One sees clearly the conviction with which the conservatives attacked the concepts of revolution and liberalism as the “Devil’s work.” These conservatives sought to curb the innovations of time and this traditionalism made it impossible for them to accept the demands of liberalism or deal viably with the hardships and real needs of the lower classes due to the social and economic upheaval of the early 19th century. Gerlach in considering the plight of much of the lower class and the demands of liberalism stated, “If people had faith like a grain of mustard seed, then soon there would no longer be any talk about all this stuff.”<sup>3</sup> Such conservatives saw both “revolution” and “Revolution.” They felt compelled to repress events such the French Revolution or the Revolution of 1848, but

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<sup>1</sup>Hamerow, *Social Foundations*, 207.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., 193.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., 20.

they saw the problem as a much broader development towards materialism and political and social liberalism which contradicted what they considered a divinely determined world order. In defending the Holy Alliance against the claim that it was an association of princes against the people, Leopold von Gerlach stated:

The princes declare that they derive their power from God, and that they want to rule in accordance with God's commandments. It was precisely this . . . which the revolutionaries did not like. There should no longer be any authority instituted by God. Men wanted to establish it by themselves, to control it by themselves, and rulers should become subjects. . . . You cannot and must not disavow the principle of the Holy Alliance. They are nothing other than that authority comes from God, and that the princes must accordingly govern as agents commissioned by God.<sup>1</sup>

While such thinking was dominant in Bismarck's social circle, he was to take a very different approach in facing the difficulties which his state and class faced at the time.

In response to this threat from the revolution Bismarck, among many other conservatives, saw the need to take practical steps in defending the interests of their class. Two ventures which he was particularly involved in were the founding of the *Kreuzzeitung*, or *Die neue preussische Zeitung*, and the establishment of the *Junker Parliament*. The purpose of this new conservative paper, which was to become a significant voice for the conservative political party, was stated as "opposing the paper constitutionalism of doctrinaire speculation with the historic constitutionalism of natural tradition," and the, "restoration of the corporate

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., 183f.



balance between crown and estates."<sup>1</sup> The *Junker Congress*, which met in Berlin in August of 1848, was a political gathering by conservative Aristocrats to put pressure on the king to resist further incursions on landed interests. In a letter to Friedrich William from the Junker Congress, Bismarck wrote that the reforms of the liberal cabinet were a "Confiscation des Vermoegens derjenigen Unterthanen, mit einer Willkuehr, wie nur Eroberer und Gewaltherrscher sie bisher uebten."<sup>2</sup> These "arbitrary measures" were the action of "einer anderen wohlhabenden Klasse" promoting "Privatforderungen" against the "Adelstand." He further harked back to the traditional relationship between king and aristocracy and the kings obligation to protect that.

While the congress was supposed to be a unified representation of conservative interests, it became clear that many conservatives did not adhere to the romantic conservatism which sought to turn back the clock on social and economic developments, but rather wanted to insure the survival of their privileges and interests as a group. They thus did not view themselves as being above the politics of interest and appealing to the political and material desires of the peasantry as opposed to insisting primarily on the moral imperative of divine right authority and the moral axioms of the feudal order rooted in a religious organization of society. The program of the congress and the new political activity of these conservatives made it clear that they were willing to court those groups with traditionalist sentiments such as artisans and peasants, which they saw as having divergent

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<sup>1</sup>Hamerow, Theodore S., *Restoration, Revolution, Reaction: Economics and poltiks in Germany, 1815-1871* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1969) 177f.

<sup>2</sup>Bismarck, GW, I, 1f.

material interest from the urban and industrial population.<sup>1</sup> These methods were to make clear the divergent ideological underpinnings between the old and new conservatives. New conservatives were willing to fight their cause in terms of interest and economics and not just ideals of legitimacy. While old school conservatives such as the Gerlach brothers found the Junker Parliament already too materially oriented, Bismarck saw the Congress as "eine Interessevertretung."<sup>2</sup> He pointed out:

Wir leben in der Zeit der materiaellen Interessen. . . . Es ist natuerlich, dass die Staedter dahin streben, der Steuererheber von der Fabrikindustrie, von dem staedtischen Hauswerth, von dem Rentier und Capitalisten so fern als moeglich zu halten und ihn lieber auf Acker und Wiesen und deren Producte anzuweisen.<sup>3</sup>

He wrote in a letter to Herman Wagner, "daher muessen wir schon so materiell sein unsere materiellen Interessen zu verteidigen."<sup>4</sup> Though the differences here in ideology between traditionalist and new conservatives were initially a question of degrees and not complete incompatibility, they were to be accentuated in the future ideological struggle which would ensue between Leopold Gerlach and Bismarck as a delegate to the Federal Diet in Frankfurt concerning Prussia's relationship to Austria as a conservative power. Bismarck was to stress the practical needs of the Prussian state and Gerlach would continue to insist on the moral imperatives of traditional supra-national conservative solidarity.

The reaction came almost as quickly as the Revolution, which by early 1849 had lost much of its impetus. The Frankfurt Parliament in the

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<sup>1</sup>Hamerow, *Restoration*, 179f.

<sup>2</sup>Marcks, Erich, *Bismarck und die Revolution 1848-1851*, (Berlin: Deutsche Verlag-Anstalt, 1939) 58f.

<sup>3</sup>Bismarck, *GW*, XV, 27-28.

<sup>4</sup>Bismarck, *GW*, XIV, 112

*Paulskirche* failed to secure itself a firm power base either in the mass population or by resolving the German national question. The liberals, who were able to ride to power in March 1848 to a large extent on the revolutionary threat posed by the lower classes of artisans, workers and peasants, had as their first goal the desire to create a responsible and moderate government.<sup>1</sup> The groups which had propelled them into power, however, were less interested in the political ramification of parliamentary government and constitutions as with improving their material lot which had experienced great upheaval due to industrialization.<sup>2</sup> This is clear in the numerous calls for guilds, the call for more protective tariffs, and the frequent destruction of machinery by those angered by loss of work and falling wages.<sup>3</sup> There was thus a strong divergence of interests between those who were elected to Frankfurt and those who had provided the threat of violence which had forced the various rulers into compromise.<sup>4</sup> The bourgeois liberals, "while exploiting the threat of mass upheavals to get their own programs of reform accepted, favored a limited revolution."<sup>5</sup> Once in power liberals were concerned with achieving order and quickly pacified peasants through agrarian reforms while at the same time trying to stabilize the economy. When such attempts failed they were willing to use troops to repress violent instability.<sup>6</sup> This desire for order, which was needed to create a new political

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<sup>1</sup>Hamerow, *Restoration*, 138.

<sup>2</sup>Sheehan, James J., *German Liberalism in the Nineteenth Century*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990) 63.

<sup>3</sup>Hammen, Oskar J., "Economic and Social Factors in the Prussian Rhineland in 1848," in *American Historical Review*, 104(1949), 827-830.

<sup>4</sup>Sheehan, *German Liberalism*, 52.

<sup>5</sup>Hammen, "Economic and Social Factors," 839.

<sup>6</sup>Hamerow, *Restoration*, 113f.

system, was accentuated by a general distrust of the masses as a reasonable political force. It was felt that the masses did not have the political enlightenment needed to sacrifice immediate material gain for long term political goals. One contemporary historian wrote of the masses, "It is so difficult to work with them, to teach and to guide them," and even less flattering, "Under the best of circumstance it is a cloud of dust filling the air and obscuring the view, until a gentle rain settles the whirling mass into the thick and sticky form which we commonly call mud."<sup>1</sup> With the Frankfurt Parliament 's failure concerning the national issue and its inability to bring the individual states into submission under the new constitution, it found itself isolated from the forces which had propelled it into power. Bismarck was to write in his later years that the revolution underestimated the power and resiliency of the German monarchies, especially those of Austria and Prussia, and that they overestimated the power of the barricade and the threat of violence which the masses posed.<sup>2</sup> Liberalism did lack a solid and broad base of support for its political aims.

### **The German Question and the Reaction**

The Revolution of 1848 was not merely a social revolution. A major force behind it was the desire in a large segment of the German population for a united German state. The nationalist ideal of all Germans existing in a single state, however, did not fit the particularistic realities of the past. The

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<sup>1</sup>Hamerow, *Social Foundations*, 163f

<sup>2</sup>Bismarck, Otto, Furst von, *Bismarck: The Man and Statesman*, 61ff

Frankfurt Parliament ultimately failed to find a solution for the difficulties which the tradition of German dualism between Prussia and Austria and small state particularism posed in creating a unified state. The first issue to be tackled in solving the national question was what to do with the Austrian non-German lands. The debate in Frankfurt concerning the composition of the new state began on October 19 and was the stumbling block which eventually left the parliamentary attempt at German unification in ruin. The first paragraph of the new constitution stated that all German states in the Confederation were to be included in the new state. Paragraph 2 and 3 of the new constitution, however, stipulated respectively that no part of the German Nation could be united into a unified state with non-German territories and that if this situation did exist that the non-German territories were to be governed on the basis of a personal union between crowns.<sup>1</sup> Those who supported such measure saw the "separation of German Austria from the rest of the Habsburg monarchy as a natural outcome of the development of the national principle."<sup>2</sup> This was a direct assault on the Austrian Empire. The disjointed history of Germany complicated the criterion as to what could be viewed as belonging to Germany despite the presence of non-German nationalities. Those in Frankfurt, for example, were not willing to give up Bohemia.<sup>3</sup> Adherence to this principle meant that Austria would either join the new German state and maintain its non-German lands separately or remain a part of the Habsburg monarchy. The two measures would have led to the weakening of the Habsburg Empire, a development which many did

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<sup>1</sup>Eyck, *Parliament*, 322.

<sup>2</sup>*Ibid.*, 326.

<sup>3</sup>*Ibid.*, 326.

not find in the interest of Germany or Europe.<sup>1</sup> The Frankfurt Parliament eventually proved unable to enforce these stipulations on individual states, specifically Austria and Prussia, at the cost of state sovereignty.

The issue was brought to a head by the conflict over the type of monarchical government the Frankfurt Parliament would establish in Germany. The two viable options proposed were referred to as the *Gross-* and *Kleindeutschland* proposals. The first option would have made Austria the preeminent power in the German state and the second Prussia. Here the differences which existed within Germany became quite clear, specifically between the Protestant North and the Catholic south. The *Kleindeutsch* plan promoted by the *Erbkaiserliche* party, which sought to establish the Prussian Hohenzollern line as a hereditary monarchy over the new Germany, would have effectively put Prussia in charge of Germany. It would have inevitably led to the mediatization of Austria and was unacceptable to any self-respecting Austrian.<sup>2</sup> The *Grossdeutsch* plan would have given the imperial crown to the Austrian Habsburg line allowing for a personal union with the non-German lands with the consequence that Prussia would have been mediatized. At the heart of the *Grossdeutsch* plan were the Austrian and Bavarian delegates who opposed domination of Germany by a northern power out of allegiance to both "their states and their religion."<sup>3</sup> The idea of a Protestant state possessing the imperial crown over traditionally Catholic states was unacceptable to these Catholic states. Delegates from Protestant states such as Hannover and Baden or free cities such as Hamburg, while

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., 327.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., 363.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., 366.

distrustful of Prussian domination, likewise distrusted the Catholic influence in politics.<sup>1</sup> Thus the question was influenced not only by political issues concerning the structure of the new state, but also by the basic cultural and religious differences within the empire.

The discussions in Frankfurt over these two proposals had become irrelevant by December 1848 as the reaction in Prussia and Austria had already begun to take hold and the old order of aristocracy and monarchy with the army began to reassert itself. On November 1, Friedrich William called a new conservative cabinet. The Prussian National Assembly upon giving a vote of no confidence concerning the new cabinet was adjourned and moved to the town of Brandenburg outside of Berlin. On November 12, the government declared a state of siege and Berlin was occupied by troops. As a last gasp effort a small number of delegates met in a Berlin cafe and denied the government the legitimate right to raise taxes and, without success, appealed to the Prussian citizens to not do so. In that same month a delegation from the Frankfurt Parliament sought to secure Prussia's adhesion to the constitution by offering the imperial crown. At this point Friedrich William IV made it clear that Prussia would not be able to choose for the other states whether or not they would enter the new state. Such a move according to Friedrich would pose too many political difficulties in Prussia's relations with Austria.<sup>2</sup> On December 5 he unilaterally decreed a new conservative constitution in Prussia which implemented many liberal features, but which insured the dominance of the moderate and conservative

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., 367.

<sup>2</sup>Eyck, *Parliament*, 336; Huber, Prof. Dr. Ernst Rudolph, *Dokumente zur deutschen Verfassungsgeschichte*, (Stuttgart: W. Kohlhammer Verlag, 1961) 334.

interests of Prussia. This was all a prelude to April 3, 1849 when Friedrich William IV gave a final rejection of the imperial crown. While recognizing the "voice of the people," could not answer it, "ohne das freie Einverstandenen der gekroenten Haeupter, der Fuersten und freien Staaten Deutschlands."<sup>1</sup> In the same statement he revealed what was to be the Prussian union plan, by which Friedrich William sought to achieve the acceptance of a revised Frankfurt constitution by the legitimate governments of the German states. This was the final nail in the Frankfurt Parliament's coffin. With this the moderate elements of the Parliament packed their bags and left the radical elements to pursue their own aims. Prussian military force put a final end to the radicalization of the revolution and uprisings throughout Germany, specifically in Baden, Saxony and numerous smaller states and conservative governments were reestablished.

### Prussian Union Plan

As a result of its role in crushing the revolution in Germany and Austria's continued struggle in Italy and Hungary a this time, Prussia had nearly a free hand in German affairs which it used in pursuing a plan of unification which was the brain child of the conservative Joseph Marie Radowitz. This union plan sought to gain the imperial crown for the *Hollenzollern* monarchy on the basis of a revised Frankfurt constitution with the only major difference being that it would come not from the hand of the

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<sup>1</sup>Huber, *Dokumente*, 329.



people but from that of the princes. This plan sought to create a parliament representing the individual conservative states which would then revise the Frankfurt constitution to fit its own conservative tastes. It would have consisted of two houses, one a general representative house, and the other a gathering of the represented legitimate governments. In such efforts Radowitz saw the possibility of creating a new "moralischen Boden" in the form of constitutionalism and popular national support under conservative auspices by which the Prussian king would be able to rule Germany.<sup>1</sup>

Bismarck later wrote unflatteringly of Radowitz and his political agenda:

Radowitz made a skillful keeper of the medieval wardrobe in which the King dressed up his fancies, and contributed thereby to make the King dawdle away the opportunity for practical intervention in the development of the present over historical questions of form, and reminiscences of the annals of the Empire.<sup>2</sup>

The Austrian monarchy would be offered a personal union with strong ties in areas of foreign policy and commercial interests. In the face of the forces threatening to destroy the Habsburg Empire, Schwarzenberg had in March shown his willingness to accept a Prussian expansion of power if it would in turn respect the unity of the Austrian Empire.<sup>3</sup> Later developments will show, however, that Austria was in no way willing to accept the loss of its preeminent position in German affairs and that it was merely buying time for itself to consolidate control in its own territories.

From the start the smaller German states were dependent on Prussia for their very existence in the face of the revolution and from the medium states who saw this as an opportunity for gobbling up smaller weaker

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<sup>1</sup>Meinecke, Friedrich, *Radowitz und die Deutsche Revolution*, (Berlin: E.S. Mittler, 1913) 532.

<sup>2</sup>Bismarck, *Man and Statesman*, 71.

<sup>3</sup>Meinecke, *Radowitz*, 243-244.

neighbors. Bavaria, for example, was interested in creating a hegemonial area for itself in the South separate from both Austria and Prussia and saw its weaker and smaller neighbors as possible areas of expansion.<sup>1</sup> The natural opponents of the plan were the medium states of Hannover, Saxony, Bavaria, Württemberg, Bavaria and Baden, who saw union with Prussia in the absence of Austrian-Prussian dualism as a threat to their sovereignty and the possibility of mediatization. The southern states, specifically Bavaria and Württemberg, were to offer the most resistance to such a plan while supporting their more traditional ties to Austria. Saxony was indebted to Prussia for squashing the revolutionary rebellion in Dresden. Hannover, because of its geographic position to Prussia, saw itself as having no other choice but to join. While Austria was in no position to offer direct resistance to the Prussian union plan, which still embodied the same basic power issues as did the Frankfurt attempts, it did nonetheless quietly support resistance behind the scenes.<sup>2</sup> By October Prussia had succeeded in forming the *Dreikönigsbund* of Saxony, Hannover and itself as well as securing the adhesion of Baden, but this success was to be short lived.

In November, Felix von Schwarzenberg was appointed to head up a new conservative Austrian government. Schwarzenberg was "ganz Oesterreicher" and there existed for him, absolutely in the spirit of *Realpolitik*, "ein oesterreiches Grossmachtinteresse mit ihm unscheidbar verbundene mitteleuropäische Notwendigkeiten, kein berechtigtes deutsches nationalstaatliches Wollen."<sup>3</sup> On October 31 Windischgrätz recaptured

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<sup>1</sup>Srbik, Heinrich Ritter von, *Deutsche Einheit*, Zweiter Band, (München: F. Bruckmann KG, 1935) 23f.

<sup>2</sup>Srbik, *Einheit*, II, 22, 24.

<sup>3</sup>Srbik, *Einheit*, I, 385.

Vienna only a day after the Hungarian rebels were defeated. With both Hungary and Italy defeated and forced back into the Austrian Empire by August 1849, Schwarzenberg began to pursue Austrian interests in Germany. This strengthened the resistance of the medium states, who were at best only unwilling participants in Prussia's union plans. Schwarzenberg, as an adherent of *Realpolitik*, was the absolute enemy of any concept of *Klein-* or *Grossdeutschland* plans if either meant the mediatization or division of the Austrian Empire. On November 27, in response to Frankfurt's attempt to see if Austria would accept the stipulations of the constitution in order to obtain the imperial crown, Schwarzenberg formulated his program of Kremsier before the Austrian *Reichstag* stating:

Oesterreichs Fortbestand in staatlicher Einheit ist ein deutsches, wie europaeisches Bedürfnis. ... Erst wenn das verjuengte Oesterreich und das verjuengte Deutschland zu neuen und festen Formen gelangt sind, wird es moeglich sein ihre gegenseitigen beziehungen staatlich zu bestimmen. bis dahin wird Oesterreich fortfahren, seine Bundespflicht treulich zu erfuellen.<sup>1</sup>

Here Schwarzenberg openly challenged Frankfurt's authority to carry out its national plans and also made clear that he would not accept any division of the Habsburg empire. In the spirit of *Realpolitik* Schwarzenberg sought to secure for a unified Austrian primacy in Central European affairs.<sup>2</sup> This he planned to achieve by imposing Austrian dominance both politically and economically in German affairs. The first goal would be achieved through the re-establishment of the Federal Diet with expanded executive power and influence in Confederate affairs under a unified Austrian empire and the second would be achieved by forcing the whole of Austria into the

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<sup>1</sup>Huber, *Dokumente*, 291

<sup>2</sup>Srbik, *Einheit*, I, 388ff.

Zollverein, creating an economic area from the North Sea to the Adriatic. The two goals went hand in hand in seeking to establish Schwarzenberg's dream of a German empire of 70 million under Austrian hegemony.<sup>1</sup>

### **Bismarck's Nationalism**

Bismarck did not support in any way the liberal efforts of the Frankfurt Parliament in unifying Germany. He clearly believed that at least Prussian and Austria had the right to exist as separate powers at a European level separate from any concept of a unified German nation. When faced with the question of Polish nationalism Bismarck as a conservative in the United Diet in 1848 clearly expressed a historical view of Germany which included all of the non-German lands which had fallen to German control or which had been conquered including Poland, Italy and Austria's non-German lands in Hungary and Bohemia.<sup>2</sup> Such a perspective was in contradiction with the liberal view of nationalism which stipulated that culture and language coincide with national borders and political institutions. Bismarck viewed the basis of German nationalism as being limited to that of the "spirit of 1813," which he described as hatred against foreign oppression and occupation and not the a desire for unity.<sup>3</sup> He thus perceived nationalistic sentiments as existing within the traditional order of particularism, specifically in the case of Austria and Prussia. The concepts of *Vaterland* and Prussia were for

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<sup>1</sup>Böhme, Helmut, *Deutschlands Weg zur Grossmacht*, (Köln: Verlag Kiepenheuer und Witsch, 1966) 19-20.

<sup>2</sup> Bismarck, *GW*, XIV, 106.

<sup>3</sup>Bismarck, *GW*, XIV, 89.

Bismarck synonymous.<sup>1</sup> His nationalism was for Prussia and not for Germany.<sup>2</sup> Given his views on nationalism it is possible to see Bismarck's "image of Germany" being determined by three factors: "A historical factor, a specifically Prussian factor and, and inseparably bound up with the first two, a power political factor."<sup>3</sup> Historically Germany was "das alte Reich." He did not question the right for any German state to conquer and possess non-German territories whether in Poland, Hungary, Italy or any other country and thus did not question Austria's claim to its non-German territories. The specifically Prussian factor was that Prussia, as part of the historical Germany, should deal with Austria and all other states first individually at a European level and secondly as a member of the Confederation. The final point was Bismarck's belief that Prussia as a European great power had the irrevocable right to pursue its own power interests. The final two points were to be the factors which would determine Bismarck's attitude towards Austria in the developing conflict during and after the revolution.

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<sup>1</sup>Pflanze, *Bismarck and Development*, 67

<sup>2</sup>Marcks, *Bismarck und die Revolution*, 42f.

<sup>3</sup>Gall, Lothar, *Bismarck: the White Revolutionary*, trans. J.A. Underwood, (Boston: Allen and Unwin, 1986) 60.

## The Humiliation of Olmütz

### Federal Diet or Union Plan

In a circular of April 1850 Schwarzenberg willed those states not in the Prussian union to meet in Frankfurt and on September 2 constituted the assembly as a complete Federal Diet. On October 5 Prussia set the election date for the Union Parliament which was to meet in Erfurt for January 15. Only 15 days later with Austria once again asserting itself politically both Hannover and Saxony withdrew. Schwarzenberg now began to tighten the noose around the union plan's neck and in November announced that the federal constitution of 1815 remained in effect and the basis of German domestic relations. Schwarzenberg sought to reassert the claims of the new Federal Diet but in a relationship where Austria clearly held the lead role in German affairs.

The political struggle between the Prussian union plan and Schwarzenberg's attempt to re-establish the Federal Diet was brought to a head when the reactionary Elector of Hesse-Cassel, locked in a bitter dispute against a majority in the Parliament and also a large section of his bureaucracy and army concerning constitutional reforms, turned to the Federal Diet in November for aid in protecting his legitimate claim to power. This request specifically recognized the Federal Diet in the legal form of 1815 in a way which favored Schwarzenberg's desire to reestablish its power in

German affairs.<sup>1</sup> The diet in Hesse-Cassel, however, sought the support of Prussia in the struggle and both powers saw the conflict as an opportunity to assert themselves in the German question, Prussia seeking to solve the problem through what was left of the Prussian union attempt and Schwarzenberg seeking to secure the final recognition of the Federal Diet in Germany.<sup>2</sup> In the *Bregenzer Punktation* of October 12 Austria, Württemberg, and Bavaria committed themselves to the continued support of the Federal Diet and to military support for the enforcement of its decisions in the Hesse-Cassel conflict. Such a move by the Confederation would have meant the occupation of the *Ettapenstrassen* which connected the east and west sides of Prussia. This was something which Prussia could not allow either from a political standpoint, because it would have meant the clear end of the Prussian Union Plan and a serious loss of political prestige, or strategically, as it would have made Prussia very vulnerable militarily. As both sides mobilized for a what seemed an inevitable conflict, Friedrich William IV requested the intercession of the Czar of Russia. While this may have temporarily prevented a war, it did not help the Prussian position as Czar Nicolas was adamantly opposed to the Radowitz plan and supported a return to the status quo of 1815 of conservative solidarity against revolution which had existed in the spirit of the Holy Alliance.<sup>3</sup> He thus favored Schwarzenberg's plans of reconstituting the Federal Diet as the basis of German politics.<sup>4</sup> While Friedrich William was willing to sacrifice the union

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<sup>1</sup>Gall, *Bismarck*, 75.

<sup>2</sup>Srbik, *Einheit*, II, 55-59.

<sup>3</sup>Mosse, W. E., *The European Powers and the German Question*, (Cambridge: University Press, 1958) 86.

<sup>4</sup>Srbik, *Einheit*, II, 66.

plan, he had difficulty in accepting such an insult to Prussian military honor and Prussia's position as a European great power. He was faced with the choice of losing credibility and prestige for the *Hollenzollern* crown or breaking conservative solidarity and risking a war which he might very well lose.<sup>1</sup> While publicly rejecting an ultimatum by Austria and the Federal Diet to allow the passage of federal troops on November 25, he sent Manteuffel as Minister President to speak directly with Schwarzenberg. There Manteuffel arranged the Olmütz Conference of November 29. Prussia there recognized the right of the Federal Diet to intervene in the Hesse-Cassel conflict and ended its blockade of the federal troops enroute to enforce the federal decision. The union plan was irrevocably lost. This progression of events led to the resignation of Radowitz and the summoning of the *Camarilla* conservative Otto von Manteuffel. He and his political backing were ideologically opposed to the *Brüderzwist* between conservative German powers and were willing to make significant concessions in Prussian power and prestige to pursue conservative solidarity.

The Olmütz conference of November 29 was the political opportunity to subjugate Prussia which Schwarzenberg had been pursuing. The military honor of Prussia was completely humiliated as Prussia was forced to be the first to demobilize in Hesse-Cassel and accept confederate authority even in an area most sensitive to Prussian security. At the same time it was forced to re-enter the German Confederation. As compensation for such concessions there was to be arranged a ministerial conference in Dresden of the German states concerning the conditions for Prussia's reentry into the Federal Diet

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<sup>1</sup>Meinecke, *Radowitz*, 508.



and the possibility for federal reform in granting the Prussian desire for parity. That these reforms would not be achieved was a mute question as Austria had already succeeded in establishing an alliance within the Federal Diet against Prussia. From January to May 1851 at Olmütz and the following conference in Dresden Prussia failed to receive the recognition that her military and economic strength warranted in German affairs.<sup>1</sup> The only compromise granted was the opportunity to further pursue such reforms in the Federal Diet. Though Olmütz was a serious political defeat, it was also not a complete victory for Schwarzenberg because he was forced to some degree of reconciliation by the conservative ideals of Russia and the Austrian Emperor. His dream of an empire of "70 Million" remained unfulfilled as these two monarchs sought the re-establishment of the status quo in the Federal Diet and German politics. Schwarzenberg was forced to moderate his objectives and as a concession for the sacrifice of the union plan, did not pursue the inclusion of a unified Habsburg empire in the Federal Diet.<sup>2</sup> In the end this opportunity did not afford Schwarzenberg the complete political victory over Prussia which he had hoped for. What was eventually achieved was a facade of the status quo of pre-revolution politics. It is often stated that Olmütz was merely a reprieve in the struggle over the "German question," which was to be finally settled in 1866.<sup>3</sup> While Prussia had lost a serious political battle, it had managed to avoid a complete defeat at the hands of the Austrians.

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<sup>1</sup>Srbik, *Einehit*, II, 86.

<sup>2</sup>*Ibid.*, 66ff.

<sup>3</sup>*Ibid.*, 90f.

### Zollverein Conflict

As the political struggle for either the dominance of the Prussian union plan or the Federal Diet began to climax, it was paralleled by the Austrian attempt to enter the *Zollverein*. The *Zollverein* was an ominous barrier between Schwarzenberg and his plans as it served as a unifying factor within the German Confederation around Berlin. It appealed to the material interests of the small and medium German states and could have potentially served as the basis of a *Kleindeutschland* which would have left Austria on the outside of Germany looking in.<sup>1</sup> Schwarzenberg, who was keenly aware of this, detailed in January in a memorandum that Austria would seek to pursue its unifying plans by also pursuing the material interests of Germany economically. It would, in addition to opposing Prussia's attempt to question the competence of the newly constituted Federal Diet, challenge Prussia's domination of the *Zollverein*. Karl Ludwig von Bruck, who became Schwarzenberg's advisor and Minister of Commerce in 1848, was the main driving figure behind the attempt to create the commercial area which would encompass an "empire of 70 million." His plan of an "empire of 70 million" would have extended Austrian dominance from the Baltic to the Adriatic and would have included all of Germany as well as Austria's non-German lands. Bruck began to feel out the attitude of the more protectionist oriented states in Southern Germany already during the Revolution. He skillfully used the pro-Austria press to promote his ideas of a German wide customs union. This created quite a reaction as such thinking was appealing to a large number

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., 92.

of Germans who saw this as a serious attempt at creating greater German unity through economic relations. An attempt to expand the *Zollverein* to include Austria or absorb it into a greater economic union was thus inseparably linked to an attempt by to win the influence of public opinion.<sup>1</sup> Bruck sought ideally to mold the economic regions of Germany into a single unit by achieving Austria's inclusion into the *Zollverein*, thus breaking Prussia's exclusive control in this area. Bruck first proposed his plan in October 1849, suggesting the expansion of the *Zollverein* into a large customs union which would have included the *Zollverein*, the *Steuerverein* and all of the Austrian Empire. He proposed 4 phases in which tariffs within the whole region would be brought closer together with the *Steuerverein* and the *Zollverein* gradually raising theirs while Austria lowered its own. Commerce, currency transactions and transportation in the trade area would also be facilitated.<sup>2</sup> While Austria was in the process of modernization and industrialization, the pace and success of such reforms were very moderate when compared to those in other German states which were experiencing tremendous economic growth, much of which was focused around the *Zollverein*.<sup>3</sup>

While Bruck was by nature not a *Realpolitiker*, Schwarzenberg sought to use such economic appeal in his efforts subjugate Prussia in Germany. In a memorandum of May 1850 Bruck, under Schwarzenberg's influence, further expounded on his goals. It became clear that the "revived Germanic

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<sup>1</sup>Lange, Wilhelm Friedrich, *Bismarck und die öffentliche Meinung Süddeutschland während der Zollvereinkrise 1850-1853*, (Giessen:Brühl'sche Universitäts Buch- und Steindruckerei, 1922) 10.

<sup>2</sup>Henderson, *Zollverein*, 202.

<sup>3</sup>*Ibid.*, 199-200.

Confederation and the proposed Austro-German customs union would be linked as closely as possible."<sup>1</sup> The two were thus seen as inseparable parts of the same plan in gaining for Austria absolute dominance in German affairs.

Delbrück, the Prussian Minister of Commerce, responded to the Bruck plan in November of 1849 and made it quit clear that while Prussia was open to reducing smuggling and cooperation in coinage, railways, postal arrangement, it rejected as impractical any proposal to set up an Austro-German customs union. The practical differences between the commercial areas were too great to overcome.<sup>2</sup> This struggle was to become more pressing as the existing *Zollverein* treaties were to become obsolete in 1852 and needed to be renewed. At the *Zollverein* conference in Hesse-Cassel the Bavarian delegation in collaboration with Austria broached the topic of the Austro-German trade union. It was decided that Prussia, Saxony and Bavaria would negotiate on the behalf of the *Zollverein* with Austria. The immediate consequences politically for both Austria and Prussia were immense. For Austria to allow the *Zollverein* to exist as it did was to insure Prussian dominance in German national economic questions for the foreseeable future.<sup>3</sup> Success of the Bruck plan would have meant mediatization for Prussia. Prussia responded by stalling for time on the issue and took the approach that an Austrian failure to achieve its goals would be a Prussian victory. In accepting the call to further conferences in late February 1850 it expressed "volle Zustimmung ... im Allgemeinen."<sup>4</sup> There, however, remained numerous open questions which would have to be resolved such a

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., 208.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., 206-207.

<sup>3</sup>Böhme, *Deutschlands Weg*, 28f.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., 24f.

the new composition and organization of the tariff commission, the setting of new tariff rates and the borders of the new tariff area. Such issues Prussia illusively relegated as being secondary to the overall goals, while in fact these were the nuts and bolts of achieving a new economic union. Prussia also sought to make any agreement dependent on the unanimous acceptance of all states involved which created enough opportunities to drag the conference on indefinitely. While Prussia needed to thwart Austria's power move, it also needed to avoid losing favor in public opinion for blocking progress towards greater German economic unity.<sup>1</sup> While bogging the attempted union down in the immense details of reconciling the many different interests and needs, Delbrück also had the task of keeping the conferences a purely commercially oriented discussions and avoiding any link to the overall political struggle. He was to insist that it was not a federal issue, but rather a series of separate commercial treaties between individual states. Extending the conferences over a period of time benefitted Prussia which had already tied the medium states' material interests to itself through the *Zollverein*.<sup>2</sup> Austria on the other hand exploited its favorable political position and played on the fears of the southern and medium states of Prussian hegemonial aims and often mentioned, "Süddeutschen mögen es nicht überhören, wie man in Berlin thut, als ob Deutschland bereits in Preussen aufgegangen wäre."<sup>3</sup> The Austrian cabinet recognized that:

Ein solcher Weg, die österreichischen Interessen zu fördern, wäre es, wenn man durch die Presse mit allem Eifer in den zwei Richtungen auf die öffentliche Meinung wirkenliesse, dass die preussische

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<sup>1</sup>Lange, *öffentliche Meinung*, 7-8.

<sup>2</sup>Boehme, *Deutschlands Weg*, 26.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., 26.

Bestrebungen in ihm wahren Lichte als nur auf den eigenen Vorteil berechnet, dargestellt, und andererseits die Gemeinnützigkeit der österreichischen Vorschläge und die ernstliche Absichte ihrer Durchführung nachgewiesen würden.<sup>1</sup>

While Austria had a great deal of support in the German press, especially in the south, Prussia in the initial stages of the conflict was left with only the Prussian press to make its case. Delbrück began to use the Prussian press to trumpet the cause of the *Zollverein* with the encouragement of Manteuffel. In addition to this a number of *schwarz-weiss* political economists and intellectuals began to assert that the national system of economy proposed by Friedrich List overlooked the intrinsic disparities in interest which existed between the regions of Germany based on varying nationality, religion, education, geographic situation, and political tradition.<sup>2</sup> Though Austria was in a very good position politically, it did not have the unreserved support of the small and medium states which sought to enhance their position by exploiting the rift between the two major German powers. These states were in reality beginning to fear the consequences for their own integrity if Austria became too dominant in German affairs.<sup>3</sup> This and the complete rejection on the part of Prussia of any expansion in Federal Diet authority led to a deadlock in Frankfurt. The greatest potential for Austrian aims in achieving its goals politically lay with the breaching of the *Zollverein*.

In an effort to end its isolation and counter Austria's pressure on the *Zollverein*. Prussia secretly pursued a free trade agreement with Hannover.

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<sup>1</sup>Lange, *öffentliche Meinung*, 11.

<sup>2</sup>*Ibid.*, 13ff.

<sup>3</sup>Boehme, *Deutschlands Weg*, 35f.

Prussia agreed to a tariff treaty in September 1851 which adhered to free trade principles and granted some beneficial terms for Hannover. It thus secured the adhesion of its natural "economic allies" as the regions smaller dependent states quickly joined. Prussia was able through this to secure its economic position in northern Germany.<sup>1</sup> It controlled access to the North Sea and the low tariffs precluded the entrance of Austria. Having secured this much, Prussia took a "take it or leave it" approach with the southern states concerning the re-establishment of the *Zollverein* and sent out a circular to *Zollverein* states renouncing the existing treaties and demanding for their renewal the acceptance of the modifications in the Hannover-Prussia treaty. The circular called for a conference to be held in the early part of 1852 in Berlin and left the remaining states with the choice of joining or getting the best deal they could with Austria.<sup>2</sup> At this conference Prussia reiterated its resistance to any plans of including Austria in to the *Zollverein* and played its strongest card in insisting that the tariff issue would have to be settled first, again insisting on the new tariff agreement with Hannover.<sup>3</sup> As a concession, however, it affirmed its willingness to establish a trade agreement with Austria as a favored trade partner. Prussia in dealing with the southern states in this manner made clear the dependence of these states economically on the *Zollverein*. Saxony, for example, was a state immensely dependent on the *Zollverein* and without it many saw Leipzig as being little more than a village in terms of economic significance.<sup>4</sup> Even the protectionist sentiments of many of the southern states were not enough to surmount the clear

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., 34ff.

<sup>2</sup>Henderson, *Zollverein*, 216.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., 219.

<sup>4</sup>Lange, *öffentliche Meinung*, 33.

dependency which they felt towards the *Zollverein*. Those in industry and trade flooded the courts of these states with petitions to maintain the *Zollverein*.<sup>1</sup> Manufacturers were dismayed that a source of commercial prosperity could be disbanded and governments which had been receiving a great deal of revenue from duties began to question the wisdom of breaking with Prussia.<sup>2</sup> Thus, while politically inclined to support Austria, the material interests of these states lay in economic union with Prussia. Bismarck, in expressing his opinion concerning the *Zollverein* conflict, believed that the Prussian government should not let on as if the *Zollverein* was so very important and that Prussia should let the medium states sweat it out a bit until they recognized their need for their neighbor to the north.<sup>3</sup> In suggesting such a path of action he saw clearly the issue of material interests and the material dependency of the medium states on Prussia.

Austria sought to come to terms with Prussia on commercial issues and get the best deal it could seeing that it could not hope to achieve its goal of breaking open the *Zollverein*. In December 1852 Prussia and Austria began negotiating a commercial treaty which was finalized in February 1853. It was to be a part of the coming *Zollverein* treaty between Prussia and the other states. Austria received special trade status as a separate country with commitments to facilitate transportation, currency circulation, and commerce with the German trade area. This status was to last for 12 years with reconsideration of an Austro-German trade agreement in 1860. With these obstacle out of the way Prussia was able to reestablish its economic union

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., 33ff.

<sup>2</sup>Henderson, *Zollverein*, 221.

<sup>3</sup>Poschinger, Dr. Ritter von, ed., *Pressen im Bundestag*, (Osnabrück: Otto Zeller, 1965) 58, 112.



under the new free trade agreement with all of the previous members and the addition of Hannover. Viewed in its long term consequences for the German national question it was a victory of perhaps more significance than that which Austria had achieved at Olmütz. Count Buol, the successor of Schwarzenberg after his sudden death in April 1852, summarized the situation well: Prussia could return to the Federal Diet where it could hope to assert its power and position even against a majority and it would be able to continue binding the medium and small states to itself through material interests. While an Austro-German trade agreement would have meant the mediatization of Prussia, the inability of Austria to achieve this left Prussia with the leverage which the material dependence of the small and medium states on the Zollverein created and this would be the needed counterbalance against Austria's political position in the Federal Diet.<sup>1</sup>

### **Bismarck's Conservative Compromise**

Bismarck during the reaction and subsequent political struggle gained the recognition as being a capable politician of arch-conservative ideology in both questions of foreign and domestic policy and his activities during the Revolution of 1848 in fighting for conservative interest had brought him into the political circle of the Gerlach brothers and the *Camarilla*. He was elected to the Lower House of the Prussian Diet in July 1849 under the new conservative constitution decreed in 1849. It was clear already, however, in

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<sup>1</sup>Boehme, *Deutschlands Weg*, 42.

1849 and 1850 that his speeches against the revolution, his opposition to the Radowitz plan and his defense of the Olmütz compromise had at their roots a very different motivation than that of his arch-conservative protégés.

On September 6, 1849 Bismarck delivered a speech which showed him capable of going beyond his reactionary firebrand reputation, and he gained the reputation of a politician "who knew how to marshal arguments ... in an attitude of sober realism ..., a man who thought in terms of alternatives and made room for different positions."<sup>1</sup> While criticizing the government's union plans and attacking its connection to the revolution, he meticulously appealed to sentiments of Prussian nationalism and pride in a way that sugar coated the criticism and made it palatable to king and government. He believed the union plan would give up certain elements of Prussian sovereignty in that the "ehrenvollsten und wichtigsten Rechte der presussischen Kammern wuerden auf das Reichsparlament uebergehen," and Prussia would in turn receive merely the executive "Reichsvorstandschaft." How would Prussian politicians justify this before Prussian voters?<sup>2</sup> Such unification plans, according to Bismarck, stemmed from the roots of the Frankfurt revolution and sought the mediatization of Prussia through its absorption into Germany. The imperial crown of Germany could only be made by melting down the Prussian crown first according to Bismarck.<sup>3</sup> Bismarck viewed the king's "romantic ideals" of German unity as being exploited and saw the union plan as merely a disguised form of what had been proposed only a year earlier. Radowitz had fallen under the spell of the

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<sup>1</sup>Gall, *Bismarck*, 72.

<sup>2</sup>Bismarck, *Reden*, I, 110.

<sup>3</sup>*Ibid.*, 81-93.

"Frankfurt swindle."<sup>1</sup> Unification of Germany, according to Bismarck, should be carried out in the glorious tradition of Friedrich the Great and not through the "Frankfurt hoax," which had its base of support in the exploitation of social issues. A true national policy:

Waere auf wenige, aber allerdings hervorragende Männer in engeren Kreisen beschränkt geblieben, wenn nicht dadurch der Boden unter unseren Fuessen erschüttert wurde.<sup>2</sup>

Friedrich the Great, according to Bismarck, would not have pursued national aims on any basis other than the desire to expand Prussian power and:

Es haette ihm freigestanden, mit demselben Recht, mite dem er Schlesien eroberte, nach Ablehnung der Frankfurter Kaiserkrone den Deutschen zu befehlen, welches ihre Verfassung sein sollte, auf die Gefahr hin, das Schwert in die Waagschalle zu werfen.<sup>3</sup>

He would have taken the role of leader in German affairs and would not have allowed the Austrian "Kaiser" to take it over through Russian influence. Bismarck again makes clear his bias concerning the basis of Prussian strength. Friedrich would not have ruled on the basis of a constitution and popular support. He would have turned to the:

Stockpreussentum, der die Revoltuion überdauert hatte, die preussische Armee, der preussische Schatz, die Früchte langjähriger intelligenter preussischer Verwaltung und die lebendige Wechselwirkung, die in Preussen zwischen König und Volk besteht.<sup>4</sup>

While Bismarck clearly attacked any change in the basic tradition of the Prussian political structure in a liberalizing direction, he clearly did not oppose the Prussian union plan out of a desire for rapprochement with

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<sup>1</sup>Schoeps, Hans Joachim, *Bismarck über Zeitgenossen, Zeitgenossen über Bismarck*, (Frankfurt/Main: Verlag Ullstein GmbH, 1972) 158-161.

<sup>2</sup>Bismarck, *Reden*, 111.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., 112.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., 113.

Austria based on the desire for conservative solidarity. While suppressing the Revolution, Prussia should have done so in a way which increased its power and prestige as a state. Bismarck's patriotism was *Schwarz-Weiss*. German unity in itself was not a goal of Bismarck's at this time and in Erfurt, at the union parliament in April 1850, Bismarck made it clear that he would rather not have German unity at all at the price of Prussian sovereignty or a loss of Prussian dominance in German affairs. He opposed any union plan which would subject the will of the *Hollenzollern* dynasty to the will of other state governments and attacked a system in which:

In dem Fürstenrath eine Million Badener so schwer wiegen, wie sechszehn Millionen Preussen, dass . . . vier Preussen noethig sind, um den Einfluss eines Badeners resp. Nassauers aufzuwiegen.<sup>1</sup>

The 16 million Prussians could not sacrifice any sovereignty in order to be molded into a state with 5 million other Germans in the union plan. For Bismarck the unconditional primacy of Prussian power interests was the undeniable driving force in his resistance to the Radowitz plan where:

Wir laufen dort die Gefahr, die erheblichsten Opfer an unserer Macht und namentlich an unserer Steuerkraft zu bringen, ohne etwas anders als eine Verminderung unseres Selbstständigkeit zu Gunsten der kleinen Staaten zu erreichen.<sup>2</sup>

In a letter to his wife in March 1848, Bismarck expressed the desire to see, "Alles beim Alten,"<sup>3</sup> but this statement is not merely to be understood as the romantic conservatism of Leopold Gerlach, which sought to turn back the clock on industrialization. It was based rather on a defense of Prussian interests. Bismarck saw Prussian state power and conservative traditional

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., 237.

<sup>2</sup>Bismarck, *GW*, XIV, 152.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., 126.

interests as being intrinsically tied together. The greatest danger of liberal reorganization was that it hurt specific Prussian power interests.<sup>1</sup> He thus believed that any expansion in Prussian power would have to be pursued on a conservative basis and not through concessions to liberal concepts of legitimacy.

With the repression of the Hungarian rebellion, Bismarck saw the end of any illusion that the German question would be solved by parliaments and speeches and stated the belief that they would be decided in the field of diplomacy and war. He noted that in 1849 "die ganzen deutsche Politik wohl bald eine andere Wendung geben wird."<sup>2</sup> Bismarck saw the basic goals of the union plan bringing Prussia into direct conflict with Austria. He was to state in hindsight at the end of his career concerning the errors of the Radowitz plan and the Erfurt Parliament:

The fundamental error of the Prussian policy of those days was that people fancied they could attain through publicist, parliamentary, or diplomatic hypocrisies results which could be had only by war or readiness for it, by fighting or by readiness to fight; in such shape that they seemed forced upon our virtuous moderation as a reward for the oratorical demonstrations of our 'German sentiments.' At a later day these were known as moral 'conquests;' it was the hope that others would do for us what we dared not do for ourselves.<sup>3</sup>

How he would react when this conflict came was determined more by his desire to protect Prussian power and prestige than by his adherence to conservative values. On November 22, Bismarck wrote in a letter to his wife that he had in a conversation with Leopold von Gerlach defended "die Nothwendigkeit des Krieges unter gewissen Umstaenden(d.h. zu grossen

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<sup>1</sup>Gall, *Bismarck*, 61

<sup>2</sup>Bismarck, *GW*, XIV, 135.

<sup>3</sup>Bismarck, *The man and the Statesman*, 84.

Oestereichischen Impertinenz)."<sup>1</sup> While Gerlach based his judgments solely on the legal precedent set by the conservative treaties of 1815, Bismarck could not accept the danger and insult of 100,000 Austrian and Bavarian troops resting between Prussia's two halves. Only two days later though, Bismarck made clear that a war at this juncture would be a "vollständiger Unsinn," which would have required the harnessing of Prussian national sentiments and create the need to slide considerably to the left politically, leaving that *Stockpreussentum* again at the will of the revolution. He also believed that such a war over the German question at this juncture would have left Prussia and all of Germany at the will of foreign powers such as Russia and France.<sup>2</sup>

It was in this "you have to pick your battles" spirit that Bismarck defended the Olmütz decision before the Lower House of the Prussian Diet on December 3, 1850. That Bismarck would be chosen by the conservatives to defend the tremendously disliked Olmütz treaty shows that he "was seen as the natural go-between for the different foreign policy positions within the conservative camp, as a man who knew how to bring out what those positions had in common and how to bring positions together."<sup>3</sup> This ability to work between forces, to find the necessary common ground on which a goal could be pursued, was also a quality which began to separate Bismarck from the conservative ideology of the *Camarilla*. Bismarck continued the theme that the cost of waging war with Austria at this time would have been alliance with the revolution and German nationalism and thus the weakening of Prussian power through the weakening of the traditional

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., 182.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., 182.

<sup>3</sup>Gall, *Bismarck*, 78.

order.<sup>1</sup> He, however, went in a direction which should have greatly disturbed his conservative colleagues when he defined in very clear terms what he believed to be the sole factor in determining the action of the state: not principle, but self interest. Bismarck answered the rhetorical question, "Warum fuehren grosse Staaten heutzutage Krieg?," emphatically with, "der staatliche Egoismus."<sup>2</sup> He very pragmatically pointed out the inopportune nature of a war in which it would be pitted against two major mainland European powers with a third greedily waiting on the German border for an opportunity to pursue its interests. Bismarck decried those who would fight a "Prinzipienkrieg" when what was at stake was the long term power and position of the Prussian state and the blood of Prussian soldiers.<sup>3</sup>

In his later years Bismarck in a moment of reflection while stating the fact that Prussia had not been ripe yet for the leadership of a united Germany, expressed the belief that Prussia had actually missed a golden opportunity to create greater unity around itself in German diplomacy when it chose the path of diplomacy and the Erfurt Parliament. Bismarck saw Prussia's chance of expansion in its stalwart conservative institutions and the reliability of its troops.<sup>4</sup> While Bismarck was more than glad to see the demise of the Prussian union plans, the results of Olmütz were also truly a threat to Prussian power and European interests. While he was willing to accept the immediate situation which Prussia faced at Olmütz, it is doubtful that he was ever willing to accept the overall political situation as a viable path. It was Bismarck's defense of the Olmütz decision and his support of the

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<sup>1</sup>Bismarck, *Reden*, I, 275.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., 264.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., 278.

<sup>4</sup>Bismarck, *Man and the Statesman*, 69f.

conservative compromise, however, which played a significant role in his assignment to the Federal Diet in 1852. It was in Frankfurt that it became absolutely clear that the political ethos of Bismarck and his Prussian nationalism created a vast gulf between himself and his Prussian colleagues.



## Bismarck in Frankfurt

### Federal Politics after Olmütz

Bismarck's selection to the Federal Diet in Frankfurt was made on the suggestion of Leopold von Gerlach. Gerlach's recommendation was not based on Bismarck's political experience, but rather on his proven support as a conservative ally.<sup>1</sup> Bismarck had won their trust by being an outspoken enemy of democratic or representative governments, had shown himself to be a staunch proponent of monarchical authority, had opposed the Prussian Union plan of Radowitz and had defended the highly unpopular Olmütz Treaty. He nonetheless, lacked the political experience which a delegate would normally have possessed. This was a point of worry for the government, most notably the king, and a point of ridicule for the press and Bismarck's political opponents wrote, "Herr von Bismarck-Schönhausen wäre auch dem Ruf gefolgt, eine Fregatte zu kommandieren oder eine Steinoperation durchzuführen."<sup>2</sup> Bismarck was himself aware of his inexperience and referred to himself to Gerlach late in 1851 as being Gerlach's "diplomatischer Saugling und gehorsamster Diener."<sup>3</sup> This attitude towards Gerlach shows clearly Bismarck's recognition of his novice status, but also his political dependency on the ultra-conservatives in his early political career.

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<sup>1</sup>Schoeps, *Zeitgenossen*, 141.

<sup>2</sup> Herre, Franz, *Bismarck: Der preussische Deutsche*, (Köln: Verlag Kiepenheuer und Witsch, 1991) 111.

<sup>3</sup>Bismarck, *GW*, XIV, 24.5

Conservatives saw in Bismarck someone who would strive to normalize relations and prevent further confrontation between Austria and Prussia in the framework of a joint alliance against revolution. They had recognized the basic fact that preserving the old order and pursuing a Prussian leadership of Germany were mutually exclusive goals. To pursue the Prussian union plan or any similar plan would have forced the need for concessions to the revolution. This thinking was a major impetus behind their acceptance of the humiliation of Olmütz.<sup>1</sup> To the arch-conservatives the act of unifying the German nation at the expense of legitimate dynasties was an iniquity. The collaboration between Austria and Prussia, in which the conservatives saw the basis of civic stability in Central Europe, was assumed. Such legitimists saw German dualism between Austria and Prussia as a bulwark against the threat of revolution and liberal government.<sup>2</sup> The arch-conservatives sought to reestablish the "legal" status quo from before the 1848 Revolution. The power struggle resulting from Prussia and Austria's respective attempts to achieve a dominant position in German affairs, however, made the cooperation of the past in forming a joint cohesive policy for Germany impossible.<sup>3</sup> The German Confederation of pre- and post-Revolution periods functioned in an intrinsically different manner. Metternich had until his fall in 1848 dealt with Prussia in a manner of utmost respect following a policy of: "Erst Verständigung zwischen Oesterreich und Preussen, dann Antrag beim Bundestag in Frankfurt."<sup>4</sup> Now instead of

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<sup>1</sup>Gall, *Bismarck*, 107

<sup>2</sup>Hamerow, *Social Foundations*, 189.

<sup>3</sup>Meyer, Arnold Oskar, *Bismarcks Kampf mit Österreich am Bundestag zu Frankfurt*, (Berlin:K. F. Koehler, 1927) 20.

<sup>4</sup>*Ibid.*, 19.

jointly deciding German affairs in the Prussian and Austrian cabinets, Austria and Prussia vied for the support of the small and medium states as they strove to gain the advantage in the Federal Diet.<sup>1</sup> This situation became increasingly charged and “je deutlicher die Fronten zwischen den beiden grossen Gegenspieler sich abzeichneten, je mehr der Bund zum Kampfplatz wurde.”<sup>2</sup> The existing political situation favored Austria in the Federal Diet. In light of the political struggle between Austria and Prussia the survival of the small and medium states had become increasingly precarious in Germany. The threat which the Prussian union plan had posed to the independence of these states made clear the risk which existed if either Austria or Prussia succeed in their desire for primacy in German affairs. The Federal Diet and German Confederation had been the traditional means by which the medium and smaller states had pursued their cause of independence. They therefore sought earnestly to protect it as an institution because it provided for the legal basis of their independence, even if in fact they still remained at the mercy and will of the two larger German powers. In the midst of the open breach between Austria and Prussia, the medium and small states were naturally drawn to Austria, which promoted the preservation of the Federal Diet and had been a traditional supporter of the conservative status quo preserving the integrity of the smaller states and their particularistic aims. It was believed in German politics that Prussia’s desire to expand could only be fulfilled at the cost of its weaker neighbors while Austria’s natural region of expansion was considered to be in the East.

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., 21.

<sup>2</sup>Fuchs Walther Peter, *Die deutschen Mittelstaaten und die Bundesreform*, (Berlin: Verlag Dr. Emil Ebering, 1934) 4.

Prussia's union plans had made these political relations exceedingly clear. The tendency to support Austria did not go so far as Vienna would have hoped, however. The smaller states were not willing to exchange Prussian domination for the same conditions under Austria, but sought ultimately to preserve and enhance their own independence. Thus, neither Austria nor Prussia could count totally on the support of these states in the Federal Diet.<sup>1</sup>

The issues taken up at Dresden: expansion of the Federal Diet's authority through the use of majority decisions on major federal decisions and the issue of Austrian and Prussian parity, had been left open to be further decided in Frankfurt. Following Olmütz the necessary policy for Prussia was to give up pursuing its German union plans and once again rule Germany in unity with Austria. This meant, however, that they expected concessions on the part of Austria in achieving an equal relationship in German affairs.<sup>2</sup> This was not forthcoming as it was Austria's undeniable goal to expand the apparatus of the Federal Diet to an executive institution under the Austrian presidential power at the cost of Prussian influence. In face of the existing political relations, the political environment which Bismarck was thrust into in Frankfurt was decidedly anti-Prussian. Whereas this diplomatic post prior to 1848 had been relatively minor with all major decisions being made in Berlin or Vienna, Austria's attempt to expand its own power through the Federal Diet and Prussia's opposition to any move in this direction coupled with the need to gain support from the medium and small states meant that the Frankfurt delegation had become a key diplomatic position.<sup>3</sup> The key

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<sup>1</sup>Fuchs, *Die deutsche Mittelstaaten*, 1-8.

<sup>2</sup>Meyer, *Kampf*, 35.

<sup>3</sup>Meyer, *Kampf*, 21ff.

aims of Austria: to lower the necessity of unanimity in the Federal Diet to majority vote on questions of significance, and to increase delegate independence, which would have increased the independence and prestige of the body itself, brought the Federal Diet diplomatic position into a new spotlight. The fact remains, however, that Bismarck functioned as a tool in Frankfurt with most important decisions of overall policy already made for him and not as a shaper of Prussian politics.<sup>1</sup> Bismarck, not willing to accept this fate, made up for the secondary nature of his position by writing profusely of his work and opinions to his political superiors and friends. It is from these writings in the form of official reports and letters to friends and family which one can gain insight into Bismarck and his political philosophy and how this determined his attitude towards Austria.

### **Bismarck's Political Hardening**

Concerning the goals of Austria, Bismarck noted that it sought, "[die] Beteiligung des Bundes als politischer Einheit im internationalen Verkehr," and that in an effort to achieve this they would attempt, "die Action Preussen nach aussen durch die des Bundes zu absorbiren und die Vertretung des letztern durch die Präsidialmacht mehr und mehr auszubilden."<sup>2</sup> If Austria were successful in its attempt to create "ein verlängertes Österreich" in the German Federal Diet, "so waren die Lebensadern Preussens als europäische

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<sup>1</sup>Gall, *Bismarck*, 103.

<sup>2</sup>Bismarck, *GW*, I, 155.

Grossmacht unterbunden."<sup>1</sup> Austria had left the issues of Dresden to be solved in Frankfurt and Bismarck was to write shortly after his arrival, "Österreich ist der Majorität zu sicher, um sich auf Verständigung mit Preussen einzulassen."<sup>2</sup> Through these attempts and the *Zollverein* conflict Austria sought to rein in Prussia's foreign influence and at the same time break the material hold which Prussia had developed over its smaller neighbors. While the question of nationalistic sentiments and popular support in Germany prevented Prussia from outright rejecting forever the idea of German economic unity or greater political solidarity through the Federal Diet as Austria conceived it, both Manteuffel and Bismarck knew that these possibilities were unacceptable in terms of Prussian power and prestige.<sup>3</sup>

Bismarck's basic political philosophy was clarified from 1851 to 1853. When he first arrived at Frankfurt his basic political assumptions were based on, "Prussian national interests conceived in terms of the unassailable legitimacy of monarchical rule and a commitment to the traditional order."<sup>4</sup> This was made clear by the position which he took on the Olmütz crisis and his activities during the revolution. Leopold von Gerlach and the conservatives who propelled Bismarck into office viewed his mandate in Frankfurt as promoting the throne against, "die rote Flut," and seeking to create "eine Stätte brüderlicher Zusammenwirkens der Konservativen Regierungen Preussens und Österreichs."<sup>5</sup> Bismarck in writing to Manteuffel, summarized his mandate in Frankfurt as being:

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<sup>1</sup>Meyer, *Kampf*, 66.

<sup>2</sup>Bismarck, *GW*, II, 311.

<sup>3</sup>Lange, *öffentliche Meinung*, 28.

<sup>4</sup>Gall, *Bismarck*, 92.

<sup>5</sup>Meyer, *Bismarcks Kampf*, 23.

Die Beziehungen beider Cabinette so freundlich als möglich zu gestalten, ohne in der Zollsache etwas nachzugeben, unnöthige Spannungen zu heben und die Bedeutung der Zollfrage und der Divergenz in derselben nicht mehr als nöthig wachsen und auf andre Fragen und auf die allgemeinen Beziehungen beider Mächte Einfluss gewinnen zu lassen."<sup>1</sup>

He was to exact from Austria full recognition of Prussia's equality of status in the Confederation while seeking to thwart Austria's main political attempts to expand the power of the Federal Diet and enter the *Zollverein*, all the while avoiding conflict if at all possible. The tension in pursuing such contradictory mandates put Bismarck in a situation where he was forced to choose between ultra-conservative values or Prussian state interests and this shed a great deal of light on his political assumptions. During the struggle over Olmütz he had already made clear that he viewed politics in terms of national interests and not bonds of sentiment or romantic views of conservative fraternity. He had been quit willing, given the right conditions, to fight Austria. In Frankfurt Bismarck's willingness to sacrifice solidarity with Austria to Prussian political goals earned him the reputation of being a bitter opponent of Austrian politics and called into question the nature of his conservatism. It was to eventually cost him the friendship of Leopold von Gerlach.

Bismarck's development as a politician in this atmosphere in Frankfurt and his attitude towards Austria can be most clearly seen in his attitude towards the routine business and politics of the Federal Diet and his personal relationship to the Austrian delegation. Prussia faced the initial problem of breaking the overwhelming majority against itself or achieving

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<sup>1</sup>Bismarck, *GW*, I, 207.

parity with Austria. Bismarck pointed out already in 1851 that "im Fall einer etwaigen Divergenz zwischen Oesterreich und Preussen ist die Majorität der Bundesversammlung bei der jetzigen Sachlage für Oesterreich gesichert," and further that Austria would use "die Majorität, in welcher es sich im Bundestage befindet, ohne Rücksicht auf die formellen Garantien der Minorität, ausbeuten."<sup>1</sup> Bismarck did not enter Frankfurt as an opponent to Austria, but his ideological underpinnings from the start turned him into such when faced with these goals and attitudes towards Prussia. It was at the start Bismarck's desire that the power struggle between Austria and Prussia be settled in a peaceful and cooperative manner and he wrote to Gerlach:

Es ist für jeden angenehmer, seinen Dienst in Frieden thun zu können, aber es ist nur das Wiener Cabinet selbst, welches dem Vertreter Preussens die unwillkommene Pflicht auferlegt, in fortwährend wachsender Opposition offen und verdeckten Übergriffen in der Bundespolitik entgegen zu treten. Ich war Gewiss kein principieller Gegner Österreichs, als ich herkam vor 4 Jahren, aber ich hätte jeden Tropfen Preussischen Blutes verläugnen müssen, wenn ich mir eine auch nur mässige Vorliebe für das Österreich, wie seine gegenwärtigen Machthaber es verstehen, hätte bewahren wollen.<sup>2</sup>

Bismarck stated to Gerlach later concerning his hardening towards Austria: "Ich war ziemlich gut Oestreichisch, als ich herkam," but this is quickly qualified, "und ich bin auch bereit, es wieder to sein, wenn wir von dort die Garantie für eine Politik erhalten, bei der auch wir bestehen können."<sup>3</sup> It is fair to say from these statements that he honestly sought to pursue his directive of rapprochement and that he did not enter Frankfurt as a determined opponent of Austria. This is further exemplified by his initial

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<sup>1</sup> GW, I, 113f.

<sup>2</sup>GW, II, 23; Poschinger, *Preussen im Bundestag*, 180.

<sup>3</sup>GW, XIV, 441.



attempt in Frankfurt to work out difficulties behind closed doors with Thun in order to maintain the appearance of unity despite the conflict which existed. Bismarck noted concerning the need for the appearance of unity in the Federal Diet:

Die Persönlichkeit des Grafen Thun, und die Notwendigkeit, am Budnestage den andern Gesandeten gegenüber den Eindruck der vollsten Übereinstimmung Preussens und Österreichs festzuhalten und zu verstärken, lassen mir es nicht ratsam erscheinen, dem Grafen Thun gegenüber eine politische Verstimmung über die Haltung Österreichs an den Tag zu legen. . . . Ich vermeide daher meinerseits dem Grafen Thun gegenüber geflissentlich jede Erörterung über Fragen, deren Entscheidung von uns beiden nicht abhängt, und deren Besprechung, ohne Vorteil für die Sache selbst, auf unser bisher sehr gute persönliches Eivernehmen rückwirken könnte.<sup>1</sup>

It was Bismarck's expectation that through close cooperation between himself and the Austrian delegate, a true front of conservative solidarity could be achieved, but he came to the conclusion from the unwillingness of Thun to participate in such a mutual relationship that "Graf Thun bemüht ist, die Präsidialbefugnisse, gestützt auf Besitz und factisches Übergreifen, ungebührlich zu erweitern."<sup>2</sup> Even on such small issues as the placement of federal troops for the protection of the Federal Diet, the Prussian and Austrian delegates were unable to reach an agreement behind closed doors which they could then present to the Federal Diet and Bismarck was left with the complaint that Thun pushed a decision through the Federal Diet which did not consider Prussian wishes.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., 97.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., 39f.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., 51.

All efforts of rapprochement could only end in futility considering the nature of the power struggle which existed between the two states and Bismarck's political assumptions. Bismarck believed that Thun, while hiding behind the guise of legitimacy and conservative rapprochement, did not pursue such an agenda in the spirit. Concerning the anti-Prussian sentiments of his Austrian colleagues, Bismarck wrote to Manteuffel:

Insoweit letzteres der Fall sein sollte, erlaube ich mir E. E. höherem Ermessen die Frage zu geneigter Erwägung ehrerbietigst zu unterstellen, ob es nicht gerade im Interesse der Befestigung und der Dauer des guten Einvernehmens zwischen beiden Mächten angemessen sein möchte, wenn E. E. die Geneigtheit hätten, dem Fürsten Schwarzenberg bei sich darbietender Gelegenheit die Bedingungen einer g e g e n s e i t i g e n Rücksichtnahme und Förderung der Interessen zu vergegenwärtigen, unter welchem allein ein in demselben Grade wie bisher bundesfreundliche Entgegkommen Preussens auf die Dauer durchführbar sein kann.<sup>1</sup>

Despite the existing political conditions in Frankfurt, Bismarck's mandate remained the same. This he deemed not possible if Austria were to hold to the need for conservative rapprochement only in the letter of the law while it pursued its own power political interests at the cost of Prussian sovereignty and independence. Concerning the state of federal politics and Prussia's resistance to Austrian aims, Bismarck wrote Manteuffel of a conversation with a Federal Diet delegate in which he expressed the opinion:

Nach der bestehenden Bundesverfassung die Stellung Preussens mir allerdings nicht in dem Grade gesichert und den natürlichen Machtverhältnissen meines Vaterlandes entsprechend erscheine, dass Preussen nicht Veranlassung hätte, jeden Schritt, der zu einer Stärkung der Bundesgewalt auf Kosten der territorialen Unabhängigkeit führen könne, sorgfältig zu prüfen; ausserdem sei die Haltung der Majorität des Bundestages . . . der preussischen Politik gegenüber von der Art, dass Preussen darin keine Aufforderung

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., 97.

erblicken könne, in die Hände dieser Majorität einen stärkeren wie den bisherigen Einfluss auf die Entschliessungen seiner Regierung zu legen.<sup>1</sup>

Because of these conditions, Bismarck from a very early period in Frankfurt began to show great skepticism about German politics in Frankfurt as a whole and towards his Austrian colleague Count von Thun and his government's politics in particular. He wrote to Manteuffel:

Meine Earwartungen von den Resultaten der Bundesverhandlungen waren nich hoch als ich herkam, aber sie haben sich seitdem vermindert. . . . Eine richtige würdigung der gemeinsamen Interessen der deutschen Regirungen und der dadurch bedingten Nothwendigkeit des Anschlusses an und der Unterordnung unter einander ist hier sowenig vorhanden, dass der Bundestag eher ein Bild des Bellum omnium contra omnes [ ] bei genauer Prüfung bietet, als das einer Verbindung zu anerkannt gemeinsamen Zwecken.<sup>2</sup>

He was appalled by the “wichtigthuender Kleinigkeitskramerei” and constant suspicion which permeated the Federal Diet member towards each other and in a further scathing critic of the political atmosphere in Frankfurt wrote, “Kein Mensch selbst der böswilligste Zweifler von Demokrat, glaubt es, was für Charlatanerie und Wichtigthürei un dieser Diplomatie steckt.”<sup>3</sup> He not only questioned the validity of the politics in Frankfurt, he questioned the overall claim that the Federal Diet represented conservative interests and values or law. He wrote very early on in his delegation concerning the Austrians and the Federal Diet:

Die idee die Entscheidung des Bundes anzurufen finde ich unwürdig. Die Oestreicher sind und bleiben falsche Spieler, und ich glaube nicht,

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<sup>1</sup>GW, I, 98.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., 17.

<sup>3</sup>GW, XIV, 213f.

das wir mit ihrem masslosen Ehrgeiz und mit ihren von jedem Rechtbegriff baren innen und äussern Politik jemals zu einem aufrichtigem Bund mit ihnen gelangen; sie reserviren sich stets das Löwentheil und führen die Einigkeit nur dann im Munde, wenn es ihre Zwecke oder die Vereitlung der unsrigen gilt; wenigstens so lange Schwarzenberg Minister ist, hoffe ich auf keine bessere Einsicht bei ihnen.<sup>1</sup>

It was clear to Bismarck at this time that "Oestreich misbraucht den Bund und nutzt ihn dadurch ab, er soll Mittel sein, unsern Einfluss in Deutschland zu neutralisiren."<sup>2</sup> This perception of Austria as a threat to Prussian interests doomed his attempts at rapprochement to failure and led him into a bitter conflict with Thun and with Thun's successors.

### Bismarck's Relationship to Thun

Bismarck's initial encounter with Graf von Thun and their mutual appraisals of one another, while very biased, show further Bismarck's growing skepticism and his increasing opposition to Austria. At a personal level Bismarck initially assessed Thun with the critical observation:

Er trägt in seniëm Äussern etwas von bursichikosem Wesen zur Schau, gemischt mit einem Anflug von Wiener Roue'. Die Sünden, die er in letzter Eigenschaft begehen mag, sucht er durch strenge Beobachtung der Vorschriften der katholischen Kirche in seinen oder doch in den Augen der Gräfin aufzuwiegen. Er spielt auf dem Club bis 4 Uhr morgens Hazard, . . . tanzt von 10 bis 5 Uhr ohne Pause und mit sichtlicher Leidenschaft, geniesst dabei reichlich kalten Champagner.

Beyond Bismarck's uncomplimentary personal opinion of Thun, however, was a definite awareness for the political capabilities of his opponent, though even

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., 231.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., 327.

these considerations could be summed up with the word sneaky, and Bismarck stated:

Unter dieser dieser äusserlichen Richtung . . . birgt Graf Thun, ich will nicht sagen eine hohe politische Thatkraft und geistige Begabung, aber doch einen ungewöhnlichen Grad von Schlaueit und Berechnung, die mit grosser Geistesgegewart aus der Maske harmloser Bonhomie hervortritt, sobald die Politik ins Spiel kommt. . . . Wie ich höre, ist Graf Thun, . . . gewissenhaft bemüht, das treuste Organ der der absichten des Fürsten Schwarzenberg zu sein.<sup>1</sup>

The most significant observation of Bismarck concerning Thun at this time was that Thun functioned merely as the voice of Schwarzenberg in Frankfurt and was in complete support of the Schwarzenberg policy of seeking to subjugate Prussia in German affairs.<sup>2</sup> He in so describing the Austrian delegation was making clear the sharp discrepancy between Schwarzenberg's politics of power and self interest and their alleged politics of conservative unity, law and principle. Bismarck soon began to characterize his observations of moral hypocrisy and two facedness which he saw in Thun as being specific to the Austrian diplomats and to their political aims as a whole.<sup>3</sup> He wrote concerning this Austrian double moral standard:

Die Oestterreicher sind intriguant unter der Maske burschikoser Bonhomie, verlegen, stehlen Acten (selbst die Rechtlisten unter ihnen), spielen, huren und suchen uns bei kleiner Formalien zu übertöpel'n.<sup>4</sup>

Bismarck's assessment of Austrian delegates and the moralizing undertones should not be taken too seriously. Such caricatures are especially prevalent in his letters to Gerlach who sought to make conservative German solidarity

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<sup>1</sup>GW, I, 3f; Meyer, *Bismarck's Kampf*, 38-40.

<sup>2</sup>GW, I, 250.

<sup>3</sup>Schoeps, *Zeitgenossen*, 48.

<sup>4</sup>GW, XIV, 217.

the basis of Prussian politics.<sup>1</sup> At the heart of Bismarck's personal opposition to Thun was Thun's commitment to Austrian primacy in German politics.<sup>2</sup> Bismarck, in a report to Manteuffel, makes record of a personal conversation with Thun wherein Thun expressed Schwarzenberg's belief:

Dass Deutschland mächtig und glücklich sein werde, wenn Preussen zum Verständniss seiner historischen Aufgabe gelange; diese bestehe nicht darin, dass es mit Östreich um den diesem gebührenden ersten Platz hadere, sondern dass es den übrigen deutschen Staaten Schutz und Garantie gegen etwaige Übergriffe Östreichs biete.<sup>3</sup>

Such a position in German affairs would have completely undone the legacy of Friedrich the Great in establishing Prussia as a major power in Germany and Europe as a whole. Such statements give a clear perspective of the issues which were at stake in the conflict which existed in Frankfurt.

Thun, likewise, had immediately mistrusted the Prussians in the Federal Diet and saw them as a threat to Austria's effort for primacy in Central Europe. Thun often criticized Bismarck for what he considered over sensitivity to affront and his lack of understanding for protocol. While this was likely in part true, the overall political nature of such a conflict rooted in the issue of Prussian and Austrian parity should not be overlooked in the personal dislike Thun had for Bismarck.<sup>4</sup> More significant is Thun's report to his superior in September 1851, in which he accused Bismarck of being concerned singularly with the interests of Prussia and having little faith in the work of the Federal Diet.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Gall, *Bismarck*, 105.

<sup>2</sup>Meyer, *Bismarcks Kampf*, 40.

<sup>3</sup>GW, I, 250.

<sup>4</sup>Meyer, *Bismarcks Kampf*, 59-61.

<sup>5</sup>Schoeps, *Zeitgenossen*, 49.

The personal struggle over etiquette and formalities was a consequence of the overall power struggle and "um die Parität geltend zu machen," Bismarck matched this informality or the affronts of his Austrian colleague.<sup>1</sup> He sought to challenge every formality and informality which even hinted of Austrian privilege. This led him into a "Kleinkrieg der Nadelstiche" with Thun concerning "ganz unwesentliche Dinge."<sup>2</sup> If Thun received Bismarck in a summer shirt, Bismarck would pull off his jacket. If Thun left Bismarck waiting for an appointment, Bismarck would walk out. If Thun took advantage of his smoking privilege in the Federal Diet, Bismarck would ask him for a light. This was clearly more than a personal conflict between the two individuals. It was a part of Bismarck's overall policy of opposition to any measures or privilege which increased or accentuated Austria's dominant position in the Federal Diet.

The personal struggle over protocol and etiquette between the two delegates reached into the political activities of the Federal Diet and the conflict played itself out in the larger realm of German politics. Despite Prussia being able to break its complete isolation following the Olmütz defeat by closing a free trade agreement with Hannover in late 1851, the struggle over the *Zollverein* was far from resolved. Prussia still felt itself to be much on the defensive and Thun himself believed that the saber rattling and opposition of Bismarck was merely a reaction to what he considered Austria's imminent success in breaching the *Zollverein*. Bismarck's antics as far as he was concerned were a last gasp effort to avoid inevitable subjugation of

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<sup>1</sup> Meyer, *Bismarcks Kampf*, 42.

<sup>2</sup>Schoeps, *Zeitgenossen*, 49.

Prussia in German affairs and thus also European affairs.<sup>1</sup> Thun saw clearly that Prussia put little faith in the Federal Diet and wrote to Schwarzenberg: "Die preussische Politik steht auf dem Standpunkt der negativen Handlungsweise," and further that Bismarck reflected this. It became clear to Thun concerning Bismarck, "Er geht von der Überzeugung aus, dass hier nichts zu machen sei."<sup>2</sup> In a classic conversation in November 1851 concerning the basic issues of equality in the Federal Diet and inclusion of Austria in the *Zollverein*, Bismarck and Thun clearly laid bare the issues which were at stake for both states. Thun referred to Prussia as an anomaly in German affairs achieved by the wild gambling of Friedrich the Great to which Bismarck replied that if Austria did not change its political course, Prussia would be forced to do so again.<sup>3</sup> According to Thun, Austria had always played the leadership role in German affairs and could only share this role with Prussia if the old particularistic differences were put aside and further stated that: "Solange das gegenseitige Verhältniss nicht frei von partikularistischer Eifersucht sei, könne das jetzige gute Einvernehmen nicht ein Frieden, sonder nur ein Waffenstillstand genannt werden."<sup>4</sup> Bismarck, replying that the Reformation and its political consequences were a fact which could not be changed, rejected fully the idea that Prussia could or would deny "[die] Erbschaft Friedrichs des Grossen." To do so would destroy Prussian prestige and deny it a rightful position as a European power, und "ehe [er] ... zu einer derartigen Politik zu Hause riethe, würde die Entscheidung durch

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<sup>1</sup>Meyer, *Bismarcks Kampf*, 71.

<sup>2</sup>Meyer, *Bismarcks Kampf*, 509.

<sup>3</sup>GW, I, 104f.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., 104.



den Degen vorhergehn müssen.“<sup>1</sup> Thun likened such political thinking to a man, “der einmal das Loos von 100,000 Thlr. gewonnen hat und nun seinem Haushalt auf die jährliche Wiederkehr dieses Ereignisses einrichte.”

Bismarck made it clear, “wenn diese Ansichten in Wien so klar wären wie bei ihm[Thun], so sähe ich keine allerdings voraus, dass Preussen nochmals in der bewussten Lotterie werde setzen müssen.”<sup>2</sup> It is clear from such comments that Bismarck had taken an aggressive stance to Austria and that rapprochement would not be achieved unless there was a significant change in power relations between the two states. His willingness to pursue rapprochement depended on the basic issue of achieving parity in German affairs and securing Prussia its rightful position as a European power which it had achieved under Friedrich the Great.<sup>3</sup> In response to Austria's continued attempt to either enter or break up the *Zollverein* and to increase the power of the Federal Diet, Bismarck threatened Prussian withdrawal from the German federation.<sup>4</sup> Thun records that Bismarck replied to Austria's continued effort to break Prussia:

So hielte die schwache Schale (der Bundesverfassung) es nicht aus und Preussen bliebe es nichts übrig als sich von allem zurückzuziehen und, wie der König stets sage, zu warten, bis der Zeitpunkt kommt, wo Deustchalnd fühlt, das es Preussen brauche.<sup>5</sup>

The willingness by the Prussian government to follow through with such a threat was evident in a similar threat by Manteuffel to Vienna and it was

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., 105.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., 105.

<sup>3</sup>Mombauer, Dr. Hans, *Bismarcks Realpolitik als Ausdruck seiner Weltanschauung*, (Berlin: Verlag Dr. Emil Ebering) 34.

<sup>4</sup>Meyer, *Bimsarcks Kampf*, 71ff.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid., 511.

taken seriously by the Austrian government.<sup>1</sup> Prussia was willing to go it on its own rather than be forced into a subservient position to Austria in Germany. Bismarck himself wrote:

Die directe Verständigung mit Oestreich halte ich auch für unmöglich. Die Bedingungen würden jedenfalls schlechter für uns sein, als die, welche wir sicher erreichen werden, wenn wir auf die vollständigste Isolirung ankommen.<sup>2</sup>

In all of this Bismarck made clear his unwillingness to hold the conservative line of politics concerning conservative supranational solidarity under such conditions. He was willing to pursue such a philosophy of conservative solidarity only when it served the interests of the Prussian state. That he served first the Prussian state is made very clear in his reply to Thun's irritation over Prussia's resistance in resolving the conflict over the Federal Fleet from 1848, "Meine Aufgabe ist, preussische Politik, ebenso wie es die Ihrige ist, österreichische zu treiben."<sup>3</sup> This service to the state entailed that nothing could be done out of good will rather:

Die Gränze, bis zu welcher sie uns entgegenkommen, wird vielmehr lediglich durch die Vortheile oder Nachteile Bedingt, welche es in unsrer Macht liegt ihnen versprechen oder anzudrohn. Diese wie ich glaubeunzweifelhafte disposition doer übrigen Staaten, einschliesslich Oesreichs, setzt uns in die Nothwendigkeit, jensietigen Wünschen aller nimals aus Gefälligkeit, sonder nur gegen äquivalente Concessionen zu entsprechen.<sup>4</sup>

It was the threat from the Wiener cabinet and the aggressive policy of Austria in the Federal Diet which forced Bismarck to take an opposing stance as the Prussian delegate. Bismarck, as a result of this hardening of fronts between

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., 72.

<sup>2</sup>GW, I, 238.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., 128.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., 17.

Prussia and Austria began to systematically undermine Austrian political aims in the Confederation. He blocked or slowed any measures which would have increased federal power in the decisions and affairs of the individual states and acted as a persistent gadfly and obstructionist to any action taken which would threaten Prussia's complete independence whether fiscally, in the arena of foreign policy, economically, or any other area relevant to Prussian state sovereignty.

### **Bismarck's Fight With the Federal Diet: Pressefehde**

One of Bismarck's first major successes in undermining Austria's position was to usurp the Austrian right to make press releases of Federal Diet affairs, a privilege which had allowed them to influence public opinion. For Bismarck, the Austrian use of the press to garner for itself German national opinion was a clear sign of Austria's ill will towards Prussia. That the Austrian delegation in Frankfurt took such initiative in controlling press releases of Federal Diet activities in addition to manipulating the pro-Austrian press as best it could was yet further proof, "wie sehr die Österrchische Regierung bemüht ist, der Bundeskanzlei den Character eines ausschliesslich Österreichischen Instituts zu geben."<sup>1</sup> The existing organ for such activities was a committee consisting of Austria and three other Federal states, Prussia not included. In the existing atmosphere in the Federal Diet this was clearly not in the interests of Prussia to allow such an organ to

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<sup>1</sup>Pochinger, *Preussen im Bundestag*, 146f.

publish with what was inevitably a pro-Austrian bias. *Die Pressefehde* was begun soon after Bismarck entered the Federal Diet when in December of 1851 he strongly challenge this Austrian privilege to make press releases of Federal Diet activities though the traditional Federal Diet organ and proceeded to publish in the Prussian press his own account of activities.<sup>1</sup> He saw this as a clear means of showing Prussian independence and asserting its parity. The conflict which had broiled to this point between Prussia and Austria behind closed doors spilled out onto the Federal Diet floor and eventually became a war of words which played itself out in brochures and newspapers.<sup>2</sup> Bismarck sought to prevent Austria from using its privilege to make what he viewed as its own biased press releases of Federal Diet activities in order to influence the smaller and medium states. He in a memorandum to Manteuffel made clear the need to influence public opinion in the service of Prussian national interests and wrote of the need to gain popular support:

[Ich] bin . . . schon seit einiger Zeit bemüht gewesen, die im Süden für die Erhaltung des Zollvereins überall vorhandenen Sympathien zu stärken und zur Äusserungen anzuregen, um auf diese Weise eine Agitation für den erwähnten Zweck aus dem Schosse der Bevölkerung selbst in Leben zu rufen.<sup>3</sup>

The nature of the conflict was beginning to go beyond the politics of the Federal Diet and was clearly being waged through newspapers and brochures throughout Germany as both sides saw the necessity of garnering popular opinion in Germany in order to achieve their political aims at the level of Federal and cabinet politics. Bismarck made clear his belief in the need to defend Prussian interests by portraying a more accurate picture of the political

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., 48, 67.

<sup>2</sup>Meyer, *Kampf*, 69-70.

<sup>3</sup>Poschinger, *Bundestag*, 140.

struggle in the press to counteract the pro-Austrian bias which existed in much of the southern German press and the courts of the Southern states and stated concerning this propaganda:

Hier werde ich nicht nachlassen . . . durch die Presse den wahren Thatbestand unter verschiedenen Formen und an verschiedenen Orten ohne alle Schonungen aufdecken lassen, von der Überzeugung geleitet, dass eine längere Rücksichtnahme nur von unserem Ziele weiter abführt.<sup>1</sup>

Bismarck often complained of the disadvantage which Prussia found itself at in terms of press influenced and expressed the wish for access to more widely distributed newspaper, especially in the southern regions.<sup>2</sup> In light of the attempt by Austria to expand its power through the Federal Diet and the large majority which it had behind it in this institution, Bismarck believed that it was necessary, "das Preussische Interesse in Süddeutschland auf das Entscheidenste zu vertreten und solche Agitationen zu paralyisiren, welche den wohlbegründeten Einfluss Preussens auf Süddeutschland aufzuheben trachten."<sup>3</sup> One of the primary means he saw of achieving this was through the press. That Prussia would breach such a privilege and offend Federal Diet etiquette left no doubt in the minds of most delegates that the Prussian stance towards the expansion of the power of the Federal Diet was one of opposition and Bismarck was to record: "Unsere Pressfehde wegen der Publikation . . . hat tiefen und schmerzlichen Eindruck gemacht und die Herren etwas zur Besinnung gebracht." After the shock caused by this breach of etiquette Bismarck suggested a *Waffenstillstand* to allow the reality of Federal power relations to sink in and to avoid hardening the Federal German states against

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<sup>1</sup>Poschinger, *Preussen im Bundestag*, 38.

<sup>2</sup>GW, I, 53f.

<sup>3</sup>Poschinger, *Preussen im Budnestag*, 140.

Prussia.<sup>1</sup> The Federal Diet and the conservative German states had to this point disdained the popular opinion in the political arena and that they would now begin to use popular sentiment to further their own power. Political needs in German politics was in Bismarck's mind proof of the fundamental conflict of interests which existed between the Prussia and Austria. As a Prussian statesman he was willing to use the power of the press to manipulate popular opinion even in the face of his conservative inclination against the press.

### Flottenfrage

Shortly after the beginning of the struggle over press releases Prussia came into conflict with the Federal Diet concerning the Federal Diet's financial responsibility for the German fleet created during the Revolution of 1848. In the face of the failed revolution there existed numerous questions concerning whether or not the fleet was Federal property or whether it should be divided up among the various states of the Confederation which sought to have a naval presence. The initial conflict arose when the Federal Diet sought to rewrite the payment schedule of the Federal fleet and its upkeep without recognizing the previous contribution of Prussia and without requiring states which had not contributed to carry part of the financial burden from the past. Prussia had paid more than any other state for the founding and upkeep of the fleet while Austrian and other smaller

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., 67.

states had contributed nothing and it protested the rewriting of a new receipt until the tardy payments had been made and Prussia's previous larger contributions were recognized. When the Federal Diet did not take this protest into account and rewrote the bill anyhow, Prussia claimed that this was beyond the authority of the Federal Diet. It could only ask for free will donations from the states of the Confederation and this was not enforceable by majority decision from the Federal Diet. Prussia in refusing to pay its contribution for the German fleet created during the Revolution of 1848 denied the Federal Diet any right to make decisions concerning Prussia's fiscal obligations to any federal projects. Prussia made clear shortly after the conflict began that it would in the face of certain compromises be willing to pay its part for the fleet upkeep, the most important of these compromises being the Federal denial of any right to make further fiscal demands on the individual states in the Confederation. By the end of the year, 1851, Bismarck saw these conditions as having been met and was willing to end the Prussian resistance and holdout on fleet payments, but the attitudes of the Prussian cabinet in Berlin were beginning to harden against Austria. Manteuffel, in order to assert Prussian independence and also to make clear the Federal Diet's need for Prussian involvement, further blocked Prussian payment of the dues. This refusal created a situation of immense tension in the Federal Diet. Rather than face federal insolvency over the fleet payments, Thun, using the future federal income as a guarantee, took out a loan from the Rothschild Bank to pay for the fleet upkeep, an act which Prussia clearly condemned as unconstitutional. Prussia proceeded to put a lean on the Bank of Rothschild making it responsible for any financial losses which would be suffered by

Prussia in the future if it were to make the loan to the Federal Diet.<sup>1</sup> For Bismarck the fate of the fleet was quite secondary to the issue of the Federal Diets claim have the authority to in any way determine the sovereign affairs of its members. He saw in this new struggle a chance to undermine the attempts of the Federal Diet to expand the authority of the Federal Diet and he wrote to Manteuffel: "Ich bestritt wiederholt die Berechtigung der Majorität, für andere Zwecke als organische Bundeseinrichtungen den Budnesmitgliedern Verpflichtungen zu Zahlungen aufzulegen."<sup>2</sup> Bismarck in the midst of this opportunity however, also saw the possibility of bringing the weight of public opinion in Germany against Prussia as the fleet was a symbol of German unity and power to many who sought greater unity between the German states. Bismarck was therefore inclined to meet the Prussian payments for the upkeep of the fleet.<sup>3</sup> The conflict over the fleet thus posed a double challenge to Bismarck as he sought to undermine Austria and the Federal Diet politically and to prevent any infringement on Prussian autonomy while at the same time not revealing any lack of zeal for German unity which would turn public opinion against Prussia. The true value of the fleet for both Austria and Prussia was not in the ships and Bismarck noted to Gerlach that if Prussia could resolve the conflict in a favorable manner "so erreichen wir im Wesentlichen dasselbe Resultat, welches wir bei den Verhandlungen mit Hanvoer beabsichtigten und welches . . . unsere Stellung in Deutschland ein erhaebliches Releif verleihin wird, denn die Flotte hat in den Vorstellungen der öffentlichen Meinung

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<sup>1</sup>GW, I, 146; GW, I, 126.

<sup>2</sup>Poschinger, *Budnestag*, 34.

<sup>3</sup>GW, I, 122.



und namentlich auch der meisten Deutschen Regirungen eine höhere Bedeutung als in der Wirklichkeit.“<sup>1</sup> The significance of the fleet in the struggle to expand the Federal Diet’s power and increase its influence over the various federal states was in reality considerable and it was necessary that Prussia not allow Austria to create a precedent from which it could then make further fiscal demand on federal states through the Federal Diet machinery. At the high point of this conflict Prussia threatened both from Berlin and through Bismarck in Frankfurt with Prussian succession from the Federal Diet if Austria did not end pursuing its efforts to enter the *Zollverein* and expand the Federal Diet. The conflict escalated to the point that Russia was once again called upon to mediate the dispute. This time the Russian Czar with a new cabinet was not predisposed to Schwarzenberg’s attempt to breach *Zollverein* and was not supportive of the Austrian foreign minister’s overall political scheme. By taking on the role of referee, unlike in 1850 when he applied pressure on Prussia to accede to Austrian and federal demands, The Czar lent Prussia the badly needed moral support with which it could win a compromise in its own favor from Austria.<sup>2</sup> In the end the federal fleet was a point of contention which could not be resolved and through the mediation of Russia the two powers came to an agreement disbanding the federal fleet. This was in fact a serious political defeat for Austria and Thun in the Federal Diet. During this time Prussia was in fact the object of a great deal of resentment for its role in the fleet’s demise, but in

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<sup>1</sup>GW, IV, 251.

<sup>2</sup>Meyer, *Bismarck’s Kampf*, 87ff.

the long run such a stalemate favored Prussia because the right of the Federal Diet to impose financial measures on an independent state was denied.<sup>1</sup>

### Censure Law

A most revealing point of contention between Austria and Prussia was the attempt by the Federal Diet to create a more stringent German wide censure law. It had been decided in the early phases of the reaction that “die revolutionäre Presse sei im Dienste der Männer des Umsturzes ein Mittel von so weitgreifenden und verderblicher Wirkung geworden, dass die Ruhe der Staaten und der Gesellschaft gegen diesen Feind nicht mehr durch das gewöhnliche Strafrecht ausreichend geschützt werden könne.”<sup>2</sup> Negotiations for a new federal censure law were begun in late 1851. The Latenbacher plan, so named after the Austrian negotiator, sought to implement the Prussian censure laws on a Federal level. Latenbacher sought to give the German Confederation a censure law for which Prussia had no possible objections, but which when applied at a federal level would stifle Prussia’s use of the press which it had used in the *Pressefehde* to criticize the Federal Diet. If the Prussian law were extended to all German states in the federation with a system of accountability between the states with stringent directives which would have made illegal criticisms of the Federal Diet and the individual states and monarchs, Austria would have won a significant victory in the

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., 75, 95f.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., 104f.

battle for public opinion.<sup>1</sup> Prussia had the means to completely stifle its press. It had left the press, however, just enough freedom to praise its own policy and used it as a propaganda tool against Austria and the Federal Diet. Austria hoped to stifle any “Angriffe auf den Bestand des Deutschen Bundes und auf das Ansehen und die Würde der obersten Bundesbehörde . . . , Schmähmungen, Entstellungen und Verspottung der Staatseinrichtungen, Gesetze, Regierungsform und Verwaltungsmassregeln.”<sup>2</sup> It was the clear objective of Thun to rein in the Prussian attacks in the press against Austrian policy and those states which supported it through such a law.<sup>3</sup> Giving the Federal Diet authority on a German wide level concerning the press was automatically opposed by Bismarck and he wrote Manteuffel in the early sittings:

Ich glaube voraussetzen zu dürfen, dass es ebensowenig in der Absicht der Allerhöchsten Regierung Seiner Majestät des Königs liegt, der Bundesversammlung den Erlass eines allgemeinen deutschen Bundes-Pressgesetzes, als ein grundsätzliches Eingreifen in jede, also auch die Preussische Pressgesetzgebung zu überlassen.<sup>4</sup>

According to the Prussian government, “der Bund habe nur das Recht, möglichst gleichförmige normative Bestimmung gegen den Misbrauch der Pressefreiheit aufzustellen, und auch das nur im Wege gemeinschaftlichen Uebereinkunft, d.h. durch Stimmeneinhelligkeit aller Bundesmitglieder.”<sup>5</sup> In response to the Latenbacher plan Prussia proposed its own plan and Bismarck wrote:

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., 106f.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., 111.

<sup>3</sup>Fischer-Fraundienst, Irene. *Bismarcks Pressepolitik*, (Münster(Westf.: Velag C. J. Fahle GmbH, 1963) 15.

<sup>4</sup>Poschinger, *Bundestag*, 13.

<sup>5</sup>Meyer, *Kampf*, 108.

In diesem Entwurf sind nur die jenigen allgemeinen Grundsätze aufgenommen, deren Anwendung auf die Pressgesetzgebung der einzelnen Bundesstaaten als unbedingt nothwendig erscheinen um die aus dem Missbrauch der Preefreiheit erwachsenden Gefahren sicher und nachhaltig abzuwehren.<sup>1</sup>

It became clear once again that at the root of this action lay the conflict concerning the extent of Federal Diet power, Prussia seeking a narrow interpretation and a weak Federal Diet and Austria seeking the opposite. Prussia sought to create a general criteria by which the press could be controlled in the German federation but denied the Federal Diet the right to pass any laws which could supersede the laws already established in the individual states.<sup>2</sup> The Federal Diet could create the standard by which the press could be repressed, but it was left at the will of the individual states concerning the enforcement of such measures. Even in defining these general principles however, Prussia and Austria had diverging views. Prussia was not willing to have its propaganda tool against the Federal Diet taken away. The general principles most opposed by Prussia were those concerned with choking off criticism of the Federal Diet or other states in the federation. Bismarck pointed out that in such a case an article written in one state which supported Prussia in the *Zollverein* conflict could be condemned in another and thus banned at a Federal level, something which would clearly not be in Prussian interests.<sup>3</sup> In lighter moments Bismarck wrote to his sister how in the case of a German wide ban concerning criticism of the Federal Diet, Heine's song:

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<sup>1</sup>Poschinger, *Bundestag*, 124.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., 124.

<sup>3</sup>Meyer, *Kampf*, 114.

Oh Bund, du Hund  
Du bist nicht gesund . . . ,

which Bismarck would have liked to make the "Nationalliede der Deutschen," would be forbidden.<sup>1</sup> Behind such thinking Bismarck sought to give the press enough room to function as a Prussian tool in the power struggle with Austria. In preventing such a censorship law Bismarck specifically protected the Prussian ability to continue the battle for public opinion which raged over issues such as the *Zollverein* and reforms in federal politics. It is clear here that Bismarck considered the press as a political tool and his driving motivation in this struggle was "die von realpolitischen Erwägungen geleiteten Zweckmässigkeit und staatlichen Notwendigkeit."<sup>2</sup>

In the conflict over the censorship law one can get a clear look at Bismarck's political priorities in Frankfurt. He supported the stringent press laws in principle and:

Die Absicht der neuen Bestimmung des Bundes, dem monarchischen Gedanken vor Angriffen der Presse zu schützen, entsprach durchaus der junkerlich-konservativen Gesinnung Bismarcks.<sup>3</sup>

In an incident wherein Herman Wagner made a press release in the *Kreuzzeitung* criticizing the Prussian government for possibly compromising on the *Zollverein* issue with Austria, Bismarck wrote to Manteuffel:

In mir steigert der ganze Vorfall die Bereitwilligkeit, zu strengern Massregeln gegen die Presse die Hand meinen hiesigen Collegen zu bieten. Die konservativste Zeitung, sobald sie Einfluss erlangt (und ohne solchen nützt sie nicht), wird ein zweiseitiges Schwert in den

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<sup>1</sup>GW, XIV, 336.

<sup>2</sup>Frauendienst, *Pressepolitik*, 14.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., 13.

Händen von Leuten, denen bei dem besten Willen und der größten Befähigung die Möglichkeit fehlt, sich in zusammenhängender Einsicht und auf der politischen Höhe der Fragen zu erhalten, welche sie besprechen; personelle Antipathien verdrängen die ruhige politische Erwägungen.<sup>1</sup>

There was in Bismarck no principle belief in the freedom of the press and he was in general repulsed by such concepts of democracy, constitutionalism, and public opinion. Bismarck's primary reason for blocking such a law "lag daran, dass ihm in diesem Augenblick eine Beschneidung der Pressefreiheit nicht im Sinne des besonderen preussischen Staatsinteresses, das er vor allem vertrat, zu liegen schien. . . . Es ging ihm nicht um die Sache der Presse, sondern von dem Erfolg seiner Diplomatie im Interesse seines Staates"<sup>2</sup> In the face of Prussian resistance and the inability to implement such a law through majority decision against Prussian will, the Federal Diet was forced to either accept a censure law which would accommodate Prussia's desires or have no law at all. What was left in the end was a measure which did not even begin to approach Austria's original goals to stop the attacks on the Federal Diet and put an end to Prussia's use of the press as a propaganda tool against Austrian goals in the power struggle which was still raging over the Zollverein and general federal reform.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>GW, I, 206.

<sup>2</sup>Frauendienst, *Pressepolitik*, 13f.

<sup>3</sup>Meyer, *Kampf*, 116.

### After Three Years

Bismarck, from his entrance into the Federal Diet until the Prussian victory over the censure law, was successful in thwarting all significant attempts by Thun and the Austrian government to expand the Federal Diet's authority or introduce the Zollverein conflict as an issue which could be settle by this institution's authority. While he accepted the position as Prussian delegate to the Federal Diet under the auspices of the arch-conservatives with the mandate to seek rapprochement, it is clear by the time Thun was removed from his post in 1853 following the defeat in the censure law conflict that Bismarck had come to decidedly oppose Austrian politics. In his judgment of the moral perfidy of his Austrian colleagues, his contentious and ever watchful attitude concerning offenses against Prussian power and dignity, his demand for Prussian equality in politics, etiquette and real political influence in the Federal Diet, one can see that Bismarck had moved away from his initial mandate of rapprochement with Austria and was now playing a clearly adversarial role. In expressing his wish to leave the post already in April 1851, Thun stated the opinion that he was not of the metal that his successor would need to be in order deal with Bismarck's constant pressure and expressed the belief:

So wird es durchaus nothwendig sein, dass der ... Vertreter Oesterreichs ein durch und durch geriebener, pfiffiger Mensch sei, der den preussischen Collegen das Fahrwasser abgewinnt, seine Pläne und Intriguen durchschaut und ihnen immer entgegenarbeitet.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., 35-37.

Thun's successors were not to experience any great success in dealing with Bismarck or in asserting the Austrian goals against the will of the Prussian government. Thun's successor, Graf Prokesch von Osten, wrote of Bismarck's efforts in the Federal Diet to stymie Austrian politics and his attempt to influence German popular opinion on the issue of national unity:

Mit unermüdlichem Eifer betrieb Bismarck die Lahmlegung und Herabwürdigung des Bundes; mit grossen Gewandheit und ausgiebiger Benützung der ihm zur Verfügung stehenden Presse wusste er die Schuld daran Österreich, das ihm im Wege stand, in die Schuhe zu schieben und Preussen als den Hort der Zeitgemässen Ideen hinzustellen.<sup>1</sup>

With both energy and skill Bismarck clearly pursued Prussian state interests even at the cost of his conservative Junker political sentiments and inclinations. He sacrificed supranational conservative solidarity to Prussian state interests and in the face of Austrian intransigence in accepting Prussia's demands for parity, became a bitter opponent of Count von Thun and his government.

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<sup>1</sup>Osten, Prokesch von, *Aus den Briefen des Grafen P. v. Osten*, (Wien, 1896) 472.



## Political Ethos

### Bismarck and Austria

During the three years in which Bismarck served in the Federal Diet he became a bitter enemy of Austria and his overall political perspective became much more clear. In the Olmütz crisis he showed himself willing to fight against Austria for Prussian power interests even in light of his arch-conservative reputation. In Frankfurt he further showed his willingness to sacrifice the belief of his backers in the solidarity of conservative powers in Europe for an adversarial stance to Austria. He was willing to pursue rapprochement, but such an approach was dependent on achieving for Prussia the position in German and international affairs which he believed his state warranted. He pursued conservative interests until they began to impinge on Prussian power interests. One sees in these initial years at Frankfurt a hardening in Bismarck's political ethos, which saw political action being based increasingly on the interests of the state.<sup>1</sup> He stated to Minister Manteuffel in December 1853 concerning the plea made by many for conservative German solidarity:

Diese Ueberzeugung [concerning the politics of interest] hat sich mir im Laufe der bundestäglichen Verhandlungen vielfach aufgedrängt, wo man, so oft wir unserer Hingebung für Deutschland gedenken, derartige Auserungen zwar benutzt, um uns beim Wort zu halten und Opfer von uns zu verlangen, den ersteren aber sichtlich keiner Glauben schenkt. Oesterreich, die deutschen Königreiche und

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<sup>1</sup>Pflanze, *Bismarck and Development*, 77.

Grossherzogtümer mit vielleicht 2 oder 3 Ausnahmen sind meiner Ueberzeugung nach jederzeit, wenn die Furcht vor überwiegender Gefahr sich nicht zurückhält, bereit, jede politische Verbindung einzugehen, die ihren partikerlistischen Zwecken förderlich sein kann.<sup>1</sup>

These states defined the value of German and conservative politics in terms of their own advantage and this had an increasingly negative effect on the way in which Bismarck led politics. In this atmosphere he came to despise the language of German nationalism or of conservative solidarity used in Frankfurt as merely promoting individual state interests and as a mask for interest politics. In this atmosphere, Bismarck began to make explicit his political philosophy which one can see implicitly in even his earliest political activity, when he viewed politics in terms of power and interests.

The conflict in Frankfurt was in Bismarck's eyes not just a conflict between ministries which could be resolved easily on paper. He saw the conflict as resulting from an intrinsic discrepancy of interest between the two powers as both sought to gain the control or support of the medium and small states in the German Confederation.<sup>2</sup> Bismarck viewed the conflict over the *Zollverein* which raged for most of his tenure in Frankfurt as an inevitable result of the power political desires of the two nations in saying:

Das Bestreben Oestreichs, die deutsche Handelsgesetzgebung aus dem Zollverein in den Bundestag zu verlegen, ist ebenso natürlich als das entgegengesetzte Preussens, seien Stellung im Zollverein nicht mit Oesreich zu theilen.<sup>3</sup>

To use the old western motif, Bismarck believed that, "there's only room for one of us in this town." In light of Austria's desire to impinge on what

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<sup>1</sup>GW, I, 401-402.

<sup>2</sup>Meyer, *Kampf*, 551, 558.

<sup>3</sup>GW, I, 70.

Bismarck referred to as Prussia's area of natural influence in Germany, Bismarck wrote: "Für beide ist kein Platz nach den Ansprüchen, die Oestreich macht, also können wir uns auf die Dauer nicht vertragen. Wir atmen einer dem andern die Luft vor dem Munde fort, einer muss weichen oder vom andern 'gewichen werden.'"<sup>1</sup> Under such conditions Bismarck was convinced that:

Oestreich unser Freund nich sein kann und will. . . . Es . . . kann für Oestereich nur eiene Frage der Zeit und der Opportunität sein, wann es den entscheidenden Versuch machen will, uns die sehene durchzuschneiden. . . . So lange es nicht über die Abgränzung seines und unseres Einflusses in Deutschland, vermöge einer geographisch oder politischen Demarcationslinie, sich difinitiv verständigt und die Verständigung in Vollzug gesetzt hat, müssen wir dem Kampf mit ihm entgegensehn, mit Diplomatie und Luge im Frieden.<sup>2</sup>

In all of this Bismarck was not opposed to working with Austria at a European level. He believed that a condominium in Central Europe between Austria and Prussia with both powers having the final say in their respective regions was a viable option.<sup>3</sup> Bismarck in opposing Austria had clearly defined prerequisites for dealing with the power struggle between Austria and Prussia. That the two could exist cooperatively within the same geopolitical region he doubted. He viewed the struggle over reforms in the Federation not as a German issue, but rather as a power struggle at a European level. Austria and Prussia needed to act as two powers at the European level. Relations between the two could only be decided between Vienna and Berlin and the two needed to determine the politics of the rest of the German states. This influence had to be practiced in separate spheres or else one or the other

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<sup>1</sup>GW,XIV, 334.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., 441.

<sup>3</sup>Gall, *Bisarmck*, 108, 116.

state would be forced to forgo prestige and power at the European level.<sup>1</sup> For Bismarck the realities of power determined political policy. Based upon this, Prussia and Austria had the natural right to precedence and priority in all decision making in the Federal makeup of Germany. Such thinking was a far cry from the considerations of his conservative backers who formed the *Camarilla* who were primarily concerned with preserving old feudalistic relationships.

### Bismarck's Break with Conservatism

One can begin to see in Bismarck's early Frankfurt days a division in the way he viewed domestic and foreign political policy. While conservatives such as Leopold von Gerlach were obsessed with fighting the specter of revolution on all fronts through the reenactment of a corporate society in domestic affairs and the creation of supranational-conservative solidarity against revolution, Bismarck approached foreign policy in face of the conflict between Austria and Prussia in terms of Prussian state power interests. He believed that the end goal of Prussian foreign policy was "to preserve and if possible extend its external power."<sup>2</sup> The liberals sought to mediatize Prussia and absorb it into and subject it to the German nation. The conservatives sought to pursue an ideology of conservative solidarity which Bismarck saw at the moment as being dangerous to the power interests of the Prussian state. From his arrival in Frankfurt until the end of 1852, Bismarck's

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., 107.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., 62

thinking began to clearly contradict that of the conservatives, but this was merely a consequence of his basic political assumptions which he had made clear even during the Revolution of 1848 and the Olmütz conflict as he stipulated that political action be guided by Prussian state interests. From Bismarck's writings one can see that: "Nach 1851 wandte er sich mit aller Entschiedenheit gegen die Aussenpolitik Fredrick Wilhelms IV, ... die auf der Kooperation der legitimen Dynastien Mittel- und Osteuropas gegen die Europäische Revolution bestand."<sup>1</sup> As Bismarck entered the political scene in Frankfurt: "

Waren die preussischen Konservativen in Überlegungen über eine Theorie des Ständestaates vertieft, während die Liberalen ebenso sehr mit der Theorie des Rechtsstaates beschäftigt waren. Was Bismarck interessierte, war aber nicht so sehr das Ideal als vielmehr die Wirklichkeit. Nüchtern-realistisches Auge gab es weder einen Ständestaat noch einen Rechtsstaat, sondern lediglich den Machtstaat.<sup>2</sup>

Bismarck looked to Frederick the Great for his model of German politics and rejected anything less than complete Prussian parity in German affairs.<sup>3</sup> Even in his support of the Olmütz decision during his speech of Dec. 3 1850 Bismarck ultimately defended the decision to avoid war not because of his desire for conservative solidarity but because he could see no clear state objective or interest for doing so. The only reason for a major European power to fight a war was if its material interests were at stake. The decision of the Prussian government, according to Bismarck, needed to serve the good of the whole community and not the goals of those who put ideology above the

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<sup>1</sup>Pflanze, Otto, "Bismarck Realpolitik," in Lothar Gall, *Das Bismarck Problem in der Geschichtsschreibung nach 1945*, (Köln: Kiepenheuer und Witsch, 1971) 220.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., 219.

<sup>3</sup>GW, I, 104f.

material needs of this community.<sup>1</sup> It is clear from this speech that the community which Bismarck was referring to was not the corporate society which the arch-conservatives sought or the unity of the conservative states. In Bismarck's mind the community as a whole was for him not just an ideal set of relations between estates and princes; it was in all circumstances identical with the Prussian state.<sup>2</sup> In this respect Bismarck was already deeply divorced from the traditionalist conservatives. He stated later in his political career: "Dem Auslande gegenüber kann man in der Vertretung Preussens nicht Parteimann in derselben scharfen Ausprägung, wie im Innern, bleiben."<sup>3</sup> Concerning his attitude towards the internal politics of other Federal states on their stance towards the revolution, Bismarck wrote in late 1851: "So entschiedene Abneigung ich dagegen habe, . . . so habe ich doch preussischen Egoismus genug, um im Bezug auf hanöverschen Recht nicht in demselben Grade gewissenhaft zu sein."<sup>4</sup> In foreign policy the interests of Prussia took precedent over conservatism.

While his view of foreign policy was not conservative, his perspective on domestic policy and the need to stamp out revolution remained quite firm.<sup>5</sup> He would not budge a single inch to the forces of revolution in his defense of what he considered *Stockpreussentum*: the aristocracy, the monarchy, and the army. On domestic policy "Bismarck tied power to law and legitimacy in a way that could be called conservative only in that it sought to preserve and promote the material and political interest of a

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<sup>1</sup>Bismarck, *Reden*, 261-278.

<sup>2</sup>Gall, *Bismarck*, 80f.

<sup>3</sup>GW, II, 323.

<sup>4</sup>GW, I, 70f.

<sup>5</sup>Bismarck, *Reden*, 410.

conservative segment of Prussian society."<sup>1</sup> Bismarck could see no other segment of Prussian society which could have served as the basis for a strong state. The purpose of all politics in Bismarck's mind then was to preserve the power of the state and his allegiance to conservative ideology, while not insignificant, was secondary to that goal. This was in the future to deeply divorce him from the ultra conservative to the point that in the end he was to lose even the friendship of his "mentor" Leopold von Gerlach.

### Bismarck's Realpolitik

The primary obligation of a politician was to serve the state according to Bismarck. Bonds of personal or political sentiment had to be subject to this aim. In his personal relationship to Thun Bismarck wrote:

Ich suchte den Grafen darüber zu beruhigen, dass das Verfahren, welches die preussische Regierung geglaubt habe einschlagen zu müssen, durchaus keine beziehung auf seine Person habe und dass die Differenz nicht zwischen uns persönlich, sondern zwischen den Kabinetten liege und auch dort keine willkürliche, sondern eine durch die historischen und politischen Verhältnisse gegebene sei."<sup>2</sup>

In a personal letter to Thun Bismarck wrote concerning the strained relationship between the two: "Meine Aufgabe ist,, Preussische Politik, ebenso wie es die Ihre ist, Oestreichische zu treiben." He further points out that the nature of the conflict finds itself in the historical realities which "weder wir beide noch unsere Cabinette vollständig beseitigen können."<sup>3</sup> A politician was

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<sup>1</sup>Gall, *Bismarck*, 54.

<sup>4</sup>*Ibid.*, 119f.

<sup>3</sup>*Ibid.*, 128.

according to such thinking obliged to pursue the interests of his state within the given historical and material framework which he faced. The critics of such politics in Bismarck's time condemned such practices as being *Schaukelpolitik* wherein a politician has no friends, rather only tools which one exchanged like a fork and knife between the courses of a meal.<sup>1</sup> Bismarck himself wrote sarcastically to his wife to be in his pre-political life: "An Grundsätze hält man nur fest, solange sie nicht auf die Probe gestellt werden; geschieht das, so wirft man sie fort wie der Bauer die Pantosseln und läuft, wie einem die Beine von Natur gewachsen sind."<sup>2</sup> As a hardened politician he was to write later in his career: "Ein Regierungsprogramm, das für alle Zeiten passt, kann es nicht geben weil die Zeiten sich verändern. Es gibt solche, in denen diktatorisch oder reaktionär regiert, und andere in denen liberal und progressiv verfahren werden muss."<sup>3</sup> The mode of power had to fit the needs and realities of the time. Bismarck in his early period as the Prussian delegate to Frankfurt became enemy of Austria, but he stressed the need to keep the door open to reconciliation, but only in light of achieving parity and separate spheres of influence in German affairs so that neither state would impinge on the other's power political needs. Bismarck's sentiments towards Austria were determined by the political needs of the time and would change with the environment.

Bismarck in his later life remarked in an interview: "Dem Professoren . . . in den Zeitungen tut es unendlich Leid, dass ich ihnen nicht ein Symbolum von Prinzipien geoffenbart habe, nach denen ich meine Politik

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<sup>1</sup>Frauendienst, *Presse Politik*, 14.

<sup>2</sup>GW, XIV, 78.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., 398.



eingerichtet habe."<sup>1</sup> Bismarck insisted that politics could never be defined in terms of any set of absolute values but stated that politics was the science of the possible.<sup>2</sup> This science he defined as an art for which a person had to have the feeling to choose in each fleeting moment of a situation that which was least harmful or most opportune.<sup>3</sup> The reason for this approach to politics was that, "in der Politik [gibt es] niemals volle Sicherheit und definitive Resultate, . . . alles [geht] stets berauf und bergab."<sup>4</sup> It is in this spirit that Bismarck stated concerning principle in politics:

Von einem Staatsman in erster Linie 'Konsequenz' zu verlangen, heist ihm die Freiheit nehmen, sich nach der wechselnden Bedürfnissen des Staates, dem veränderten Verhalten des Auslandes oder nach sonstigen wichtigen Gründen zu entscheiden. Er muss sich stets nach den jeweilig obwaltenden Umständen richten; er kann die vorliegenden Tatsachen und Zeitströmungen nicht meistern, sondern sie nur geschickt für seine Zwecke benutzen. Er muss jede günstige Gelegenheit wahrnehmen oder aufsuchen, um das durchzusetzen, was ihm für das vaterländische Interesse richtig und zweckmässig erscheint. Ob er dabei konsequent verfährt oder nicht, ist eine völlig gleichgültige Sache.<sup>5</sup>

There could be no instance where one could celebrate a complete victory, because any given victory would create new circumstances and thus new struggle. According to Bismarck, one could not even be certain of the consequences of political decision until much later after the fact thus leaving the political art in the realm of the uncertain and near incalculable.<sup>6</sup> Based upon this, one could not be certain that the principles which worked in the

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., 93.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., 93.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., 400.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., 399f.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid., 398.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid., 399.

present situation would work in the future. Immutable principles could not guide a politician, as these were an unreliable means of ascertaining the real material needs at hand. The one principle which Bismarck saw as relevant in all situations was the basic power needs of the state. Bismarck's most essential political tactic in achieving this was, "ständig Alternativen des politischen Handelns bereitzuhalten."<sup>1</sup> The uncertain, ever-changing, and unpredictable nature of politics led Bismarck to state that, "Man muss stets zwei Eisen im Feuer haben."<sup>2</sup> According to Bismarck a politician could not shape the forces of history, nor could he grasp them in their completeness. Added to this in his considerations was the unpredictable nature of his political opponents. The only political method which Bismarck deemed viable was to use those forces which were at hand to further one's own position. According to such thinking, the more options a politician had at his disposal, the better he would be able to choose the most beneficial path for his state. Bismarck consistently sought to maintain a political position in the fulcrum of events which left him with the possibility "in mindestens zwei, häufig aber mehr Richtungen vorzugehen. Dadurch, dass er in jeder Situation die Stellung bezog, die ihm die grösste Handlungsfreiheit erlabute, reduzierte er die Manövrierfähigkeit seiner Gegner und steigerte seine auf ein Maximum."<sup>3</sup> Already in 1853 such political thinking is clear in Bismarck's writings concerning the possibility of rapprochement with France. In suggesting that the Prussian government avoid unnecessary insult towards the French government Bismarck expressed the belief that political relations

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<sup>1</sup>Pflanze, *Realpolitik*, 235.

<sup>2</sup>GW, IX, 400.

<sup>3</sup>Pflanze, *Realpolitik*, 234.

to France should be used to insure the political freedom and independence from its eastern neighbors, specifically Austria. While he expressed a dislike for the possibility of alliance with France, he could not discount it as an option in pursuing the interests of the Prussian state.<sup>1</sup> According to such thinking, Prussia needed to lay aside the traditional bonds of sentiment it held for Austria as well as its dislike for France. Only in this way would it be able to have the political freedom to pursue its state interest and succeed in the struggle against Austria. The politician in Bismarck's mind was subject to the same laws of survival which all living creatures were subject to and late in his life he stated:

Ich würde keine Freunde haben, wenn ich nicht auch Feinde hätte. . . .  
Aus Kampf Besteht das Leben in der ganzen Natur, . . . Kampf ist  
überall, ohne Kampf kein Leben und wollen wir weiter leben, so  
müssen wir auch auf weitere Kämpfe gefasst sein.<sup>2</sup>

Politics also being a constant series of struggles necessitated accordingly that the politician's work would never be finished. It was such thinking which made *Realpolitik* the only viable mode of action in the long term.

Bismarck, very much influenced by Lutheran pietism, ultimately did find a justification for his politics of power which looked to a moral justification beyond the power itself. Power did not justify power. The frequent mistake is often made when looking at Bismarck's political thinking to consider his *Realpolitik* totally in terms of state power without considering the role which the state played in Bismarck's view of God's authorship in human history. A very important part of his total *Weltanschauung* was a firm conviction of a world determined by God where the state was a tool for

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<sup>1</sup>GW, I, 286.

<sup>2</sup>GW, XIII, 555.

maintaining order, but not necessarily in the same way as his ultra-conservative colleagues. For Bismarck the sinful nature of man necessitated the order and power of the state.<sup>1</sup> It was thus a moral mandate to protect the authority and integrity of ruling state power. Part of this world order was struggle and the friend-enemy relationship were natural and therefore a part of the overall plan of creation.<sup>2</sup> Bismarck believed that the state and the unceasing struggle over power was part of the divine economy. In this way he gave a moral basis for his politics of state interests which went beyond the mere justification of power. As a statesman he believed in a duality of Christian morality and political necessity where his obligation to serve the state had a higher priority than observing the moral codes such as don't lie.<sup>3</sup> The needs of the state necessitated according to Bismarck that a politician practice such esteemed traits as honesty and openness only to the same degree which his political opponent possessed them.<sup>4</sup> In spite of such pragmatism, Bismarck's writing overflow with references to *Treue, Pflicht*, and *Verantwortung vor Gott*. Even in his practice of *Realpolitik* Bismarck remained an immensely principled man. The highest moral calling or principle of a statesman was to lay aside all feelings of hate, personal preference or envy in pursuing state interests. Accordingly, not even the king stood above this necessity of politics. To not act in this way was in Bismarck's thinking an act of state infidelity.<sup>5</sup> Bismarck deplored the idealistic politics of Frederick Wilhelm IV wherein Wilhelm sought through the Prussian union

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<sup>1</sup>Mombauer, *Realpolitik*, 7f.

<sup>2</sup>Pflanze, "Realpolitik," 221.

<sup>3</sup>Pflanze, *Bismarck and Development*, 55.

<sup>4</sup>*Ibid.*, 389.

<sup>5</sup>Vossler, Otto, "Bismarck's Ethos," in *Historische Zeitschrift* 171, (1951), 18.

plan to expand Prussian power, but then was not willing to use all “bestehende Einflüsse” regardless of his personal sentiments to achieve this. The king shirked his moral obligation to pursue to the end with all available forces the expansion of Prussian power during this very opportune time and put the Prussian state at great risk by seeking the extension of Prussian power while being hindered by mere personal qualms.<sup>1</sup> That statesman who did not put aside personal sympathies and animosities in pursuing the needs of the state practiced in Bismarck’s mind a form of personal *Willkür* and ceased to practice politics.<sup>2</sup> Bismarck could work within this framework because he saw the existence of political realities as being the consequence of God’s will and as a Christian “he felt released from an unbearable and existentially intolerable responsibility for an unascertainable whole.” He as a statesman was merely a part of a historical whole which was impossible for man to comprehend and of which he could the more effectively be the instrument the more completely he accepted his own individual existence.” It was within this framework of thinking that calculable interests became the measuring stick by which all decisions should be made as the forces of history had to be accepted and worked with.<sup>3</sup> Bismarck wrote his mother in law: “Der Strom der Zeit läuft seinen Weg doch, wie er soll, und wenn ich meine Hand hineinstecke, so thue ich das, weil ich es für meine Pflicht halte, aber nicht, weil ich seine Richtung damit zu ändern meine.”<sup>4</sup> Bismarck felt himself to be at the will of immeasurable and unstoppable historical forces which he at the same time perceived as being intrinsically tied to the will of

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<sup>1</sup>GW, I, 435.

<sup>2</sup>Vossler, “Ethos,” 274.

<sup>3</sup>Gall, *Bismarck*, 92.

<sup>4</sup>GW, XIV, 249

God. Writing to his wife concerning his position to the Federal Diet and the difficulties which this would impose on his family, Bismarck stated: "Es ist doch nach göttlicher und menschlicher Ordnung nicht anders thunlich; ich habe die Sache nicht gemacht, ich habe keinen Wunsch, kein Wort dazu gethan, das is mir eine Beruhigung." The condition of the time were like "ein Rad, welches uns jetzt ergreift."<sup>1</sup> Time and events were simply too big for any given individual to stride against. He stated later to his wife concerning the acceptance of the position in Frankfurt: "Ich habe es nicht gesucht, der Herr hat es gewollt, muss ich annehmen, und ich kann mich dem nicht entziehen, obschon ich voraussehe, dass es ein unfruchtbares und dornenvolles Amt sein wird."<sup>2</sup> In further expressing his belief in his servitude to the forces of time and the conviction that he could not change these forces, Bismarck wrote to his wife, "Ich bin Gottes Soldat, und wo er mich hinschickt, da muss ich gehn, und ich glaube, dass er mich schickt und mein Leben zuschneidet, wie er es braucht. . . . Was Gott thut, das is wohlgethan, damit lass uns in die Sache hineingehn."<sup>3</sup> In the most difficult of times Bismarck wrote his wife from Frankfurt in a moment of vulnerability, "dass ich weinen musste, wie ich im Bett lag, und Gott recht innig bitten, dass er mir Kraft gebe, meine Pflicht zu thun."<sup>4</sup> He saw himself as a statesman being completely subordinated to his obligation as a servant of the state and a product and part of the stream of time. Such thinking was to go so far as to serve as a justification for what were the immoral acts necessary to be a good statesman and, "Die verfolgung der Staatsraison wird zum

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., 207.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., 206.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., 208.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., 209.

moralischen Pflicht des Staatsmannes."<sup>1</sup> This "moralischer Pflicht" led Bismarck to pursue the needs of the state within very clear boundaries. Power was not the supreme moral justification of any action and Bismarck wrote to Manteuffel concerning the pragmatism practiced in German and European politics: "Für einen Mensch, der nicht an Gott glaubt, die ihm in Wege göttlicher Offenbarung auferlegt sind, sehe ich nichts in der Welt was ihn abhatlen sollte . . . ausser der Furch vor Schaden an Person und Vermögen."<sup>2</sup> It can only be assumed from such a statement that there were limits as to how far Bismarck would go in pursuing power and that the extent to which a state could expand its power was limited. Bismarck belonged to the school of classical political thinking "which believed foreign and military policy must be dictated by the reasoned interest of the state and pursued within the limits of the balance of power system."<sup>3</sup> This was a moral restraint placed on the state as a whole because to do otherwise would not really serve the interests of the state. The individual statesman, however, who worked within this framework of thinking was subject to a clear moral dualism wherein he lived by two codes of conduct. As a statesman Bismarck felt released from the normal moral bonds he felt necessary to uphold in private life because these were subject to what he perceived as a higher moral cause of protecting and serving the state. It was thus that he was able to reconcile his conservative inclinations in Frankfurt and his insistence on a conservative order in Prussian domestic policy with his clear rejection of conservative politics in his dealing with Austria as an enemy to Prussian state interests.

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<sup>1</sup>Pflanze, "Bismarck Realpolitik," 220f.

<sup>2</sup>GW, I, 238.

<sup>3</sup>Pflanze, *Bismarck and Development*, 55.

### Conclusion

Bismarck later in his life was to very clearly formulate the fundamental assumption which guided him perhaps only implicitly in Frankfurt when he stated: "Auswärtige Fragen sind keine Rechts-, sondern Machtfragen. Sie lassen sich nicht durch juristische oder völkerrechtliche Theorie lösen. Soweit sie nicht mit dem Schwert entschieden werden müssen, tut man immer besser sich materiell zu verständigen."<sup>1</sup> It would be easy to conclude from such a statement that his political philosophy was based purely on pragmatism, that he was not bound by any moral obligations and that the power of the state under which he served was the highest obligation he answered to. It would be wrong, however, to count Bismarck with the ranks of Napoleon or Hitler who practiced an unrestrained hunger for power and were willing to take any measures to achieve their aims. For Bismarck the power of the state in the final analysis served the purpose of maintaining a divinely determined world order and it was with this assumption that Bismarck pursued the power interests of Prussia. This mandate placed him above the normal moral or ethical standards which were enforced outside of the realm of politics. Bismarck was even willing to trounce on what were for the arch-conservatives hallowed political relations and traditions. While he sought the preservation of the traditional order in Prussian domestic relations as that force which maintained the order and

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<sup>1</sup>GW, IX, 400.



authority of the state, the emphasis in his thinking was on that order and authority and not on the institutions themselves. In this manner he could justify the form of government and political philosophy based on the needs of the time. Innate to his belief in this order and authority were limitations. The practice of any form of *Willkür*, the act of placing one's own desires or fantasies above the immediate needs of the state, was for Bismarck the "unpardonable sin" in politics.

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