

## WHAT OBSTACLES HINDERED GERMAN UNITY IN 1850 AND HOW DID BISMARCK OVERCOME THEM BEFORE 1871?

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At the beginning of the nineteenth century there was a move to greater German unity as a result of growing liberalism and a growing awareness of common nationality among the German people. There were, however, several problems preventing this. One of them was the excessive customs barriers that existed, and although this problem was relatively easily solved, its solution, the Zollverein indirectly caused two much greater problems: the question of Austrian inclusion in Germany and, concurrent to this, the exact territorial composition of Germany. These two closely interwoven problems (were) materialised in the "Grossdeutsch" and "Kleindeutsch" parties and it was these problems which Bismarck set out to resolve.

The creation of the Zollverein in 1834 was the first step towards German unity. It eliminated customs barriers (which caused economic growth to stagnate) and thus promoted National unity. Prussia, who was the driving force behind this scheme, became economically supreme in Germany as a result of it. And consequently Austria began losing her influence, as she did not become a member.

From 1851, when he was elected as the Prussian delegate to the Diet of the German Bund, Bismarck became acutely conscious of the problematic relationship between Austria and Prussia, and became strongly anti-Austrian. From then on he was first and foremost a Prussian nationalist who believed it was in Prussia's interest to dominate the whole of northern

Germany and to exclude Austria from German affairs (Thomson, *Europe since Napoleon*, p. 319).

In order to secure Prussian domination in Northern Germany, he went to war with Denmark in an Austro-Prussian alliance over the territories of Schleswig and Holstein. Beside the fact that these territories were strategically important to Prussia, it was also desirable for her to be in alliance with Austria "because any Prussian-Austrian settlement over so thorny a problem would leave ample room for picking a quarrel with Austria later whenever he chose." This then implies that although Prussia got Schleswig and Austria Holstein by the treaty of Gastein in 1865, Prussia had no intention of maintaining this 'status-quo'.

Bismarck's next move also proves this: After isolating Austria by treaties with Italy and France he, in June 1866, proposed that the German Bund should be abolished and a new constitution be drafted excluding Austria from German affairs. Austria saw this as a violation of the Treaty of Vienna and the Convention of Gastein and therefore declared war on Prussia. After only three weeks it resulted in defeat for Austria and her German allies. The treaty of Prague concluded the war.

The Austro-Prussian (Seven Weeks' War) war had two important consequences for Prussia: Austria was now excluded from German affairs and Prussia was finally in control of the north-German states with the gaining of Holstein as well.

It would, therefore, seem fair to assume that the gaining of Schleswig and Holstein, i.e. the securing of Prussian predominance in north-Germany and the exclusion of Austria from German affairs was one coherent plan in the mastermind of Bismarck. Bismarck's initial policy of "Kleindeutschland" had therefore been partly realised.

The only outstanding states now were the south-German ones, and Bismarck seemed determined to obtain these as well for before the Treaty of Prague had even been signed, Bismarck was already signing treaties with Bavaria and other south-German states that opened them to Prussian influence.

As a result of Prussia gaining more territory through the Seven Weeks' War, France felt threatened as the balance of power had now been upset and was against her. Franco-Prussian relations were also deteriorating as a result of Drouyn (the French foreign minister) making territorial demands to Prussia and as a result of France's failed attempt at buying Luxembourg. The break came over the Spanish throne question and Bismarck's editing of the Ems telegram, and on 15 July 1870 France went to war with Prussia. She was however, not well prepared and was crushed by Prussia. On 10 May 1871 the severe Treaty of Frankfurt was signed by which Prussia gained, among others, Alsace and Lorraine.

But Bismarck was advantaged by the French defeat in another way as well: the south-German states were overcome by such a surge of nationalism by the Prussian victory that

they joined the German Confederation. Germany was therefore now complete and complete in the way Bismarck wanted it to be, although he did not plan the joining of the south-German states after the war. He did not even plan the Franco-Prussian war; he was merely trying to prevent a possible Prussian embarrassment over the Ems telegram question by going to war with France. "He had neither planned the war nor even foreseen it. But he claimed it as his own once it became inevitable. He wished to present himself as the creator of Germany, not as the man who had been mastered by events." (Taylor, *Bismarck*, p. 121). But nonetheless in January 1871 the Prussian King was made the Emperor of Germany.

Bismarck therefore unified Germany by overcoming two problems that existed in 1850: the question of Austrian interference in German affairs and the exact territorial composition of Germany. While his plan to gain predominance in north-Germany and to exclude Austria from German affairs was planned, the unification of the south-German states into the German Confederation came about as a result of some quick improvisation and a good deal of luck.

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