

Centre for Comparative and Public History
Department of History
Chinese University of Hong Kong
In-Service Teacher Training Course
The Making of the Modern World

Lecture 2:5: “National Unification: Europe’s Dominant Powers”

Source 10

Bismarck’s “Blood and Iron” Speech

There are members of the National Association [*Nationalverein*] – of this association that has achieved a reputation owing to the justness of its demands – highly esteemed members who have stated that all standing armies are superfluous. Yes, if only a public assembly had this view! Would not a government have to reject this?! – There was talk about the “sobriety” of the Prussian people. Yes, the great independence of the individual makes it difficult in Prussia to govern with the constitution (or to consolidate the constitution?); in France things are different, there this individual independence is lacking. A constitutional crisis would not be disgraceful, but honorable instead. – Furthermore, we are perhaps too “well-educated” to support a constitution; we are too critical; the ability to assess government measures and records of the public assembly is too common; in the country there are a lot of catiline [conspiratorial] characters who have a great interest in upheavals. This may sound paradoxical, but everything proves how hard constitutional life is in Prussia. – Furthermore, one is too sensitive about the government’s mistakes; as if it were enough to say “this and that [cabinet] minister made mistakes, as if one wasn’t adversely affected oneself. Public opinion changes, the press is not [the same as] public opinion; one knows how the press is written; members of parliament have a higher duty, to lead opinion, to stand above it. We are too hot-blooded, we have a preference for putting on armor that is too big for our small body; and now we’re actually supposed to utilize it. Germany is not looking to Prussia’s liberalism, but to its power; Bavaria, Württemberg, Baden may indulge liberalism, and for that reason no one will assign them Prussia’s role; Prussia has to coalesce and concentrate its power for the opportune moment, which has already been missed several times; Prussia’s borders

according to the Vienna Treaties [of 1814-15] are not favorable for a healthy, vital state; it is not by speeches and majority resolutions that the great questions of the time are decided – that was the big mistake of 1848 and 1849 – but by iron and blood.

Prince Otto von Bismarck, 30 September 1862

Context:

Otto von Bismarck, a Prussian aristocrat (a *Junker*) managed the unification of German states. Eschewing democracy and its plebiscites, Bismarck used a series of military conflicts with Denmark, Austria, and France to secure a united German aristocracy behind the King of Prussia. Later in life, Bismarck weaved a series of military alliances with other European states to protect German interests and devised the Congress of Berlin (1884-5) that established rules for Europe's conquest of Africa.

Source: http://germanhistorydocs.ghi-dc.org/sub_document.cfm?document_id=250

Questions:

1. Why did the Frankfurt Parliament of 1848 fail in its attempt to create a unified German state and compare its efforts to the tactics successfully employed by Otto von Bismarck?
2. How did autocrats such as Emperor Napoleon III of France and Tsar Alexander II of Russia use nationalism as a force in building their states?

Assignment:

Choose a European work of art - painting, music, or literature - from the third quarter of the nineteenth century and identify the characteristics that link it with the period in which it was created.

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