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NATIONALISM IN GERMANY, 1848-1866

MARK H



Nationalism in Germany, 1848–1866

Revolutionary Nation

MARK HEWITSON



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To Anna and Camille

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Preface

This book, although now self-standing, started out as part of a much broader project on nationalism – especially liberal nationalism – in Germany between 1848 and the early 1930s. I am still working on the other parts, and the debts that I have incurred are correspondingly large and open-ended.

I wrote much of the volume on a year's sabbatical funded by UCL and the Arts and Humanities Research Council, as part of its Research Leave Scheme. I am very grateful to both for giving me the opportunity to write for an extended period, rather than for the usual snatched moments during vacations and term, and to concentrate on the minutiae of research instead of the minutiae of departmental and college administration. In a period when funding is increasingly 'applied' and 'collaborative', the AHRC scheme has continued to provide scholars in the Humanities with time to do what they should, in terms of research, be doing. I hope – but doubt – that the successor scheme will be as successful. I am also indebted, in a much more personal sense, to Matthew D'Auria, Jan Vermeiren and Daniel Laqua for providing teaching cover over the course of my sabbatical and for doing such an excellent job. My colleagues in the German Department and in European Social and Political Studies at UCL have picked up much of the rest of the work that this and other sabbaticals have occasioned, as well as putting up with sporadic moaning about lack of progress. Without such departmental backing (and lack of complaint), I am not sure that I could have completed this volume – certainly not within the decade.

The nature of the subject of the volume (the 1850s and 1860s) has necessarily made the research for it somewhat solitary at times. I am therefore all the more indebted to Rudolf Muhs and John

Breuilly, two of a small number of UK scholars who have continued to treat the period seriously, for taking an interest in the project: the former for reading the typescript in its entirety and giving such helpful advice; the latter for his engagement, as an editor and colleague, with all aspects of the book, providing detailed and challenging criticism (in the best sense) of its arguments and evidence. In different ways, both have served as models, at different times, during the difficult transition from the early twentieth to the mid-nineteenth century. In a wider sense, whether with reference to German history or nationalism in Europe, I have also benefited greatly from the comments and help of Tim Baycroft, Stefan Berger, Mary Fulbrook, Egbert Klautke, Eckard Michels, James Retallack, Bernhard Rieger, Jill Stephenson, and all of my Ph.D. students at UCL, especially – in this regard – those working on the national question – Jan, Matthew, and Mark Tilse. Finally, I am thankful for the very constructive suggestions of the anonymous referee and for those of the editorial staff at Palgrave who did not give up the project despite its changing shape.

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MH

London, 2010

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Introduction

The revolution of 1848–49 altered the history of politics and the nation in Germany. ‘The idea of unity became historical – that is the great result of 1848, which cannot be turned back by any means of violence or cunning,’ wrote the liberal publicist Ludwig August von Rochau in 1853: ‘By becoming historical, the idea of unity entered the same stage of development in which designs for internal reform in the individual states have existed for a long period of time.’¹ In *Grundsätze der Realpolitik* (1853), the former insurrectionary, who had fled life-long imprisonment in Frankfurt in 1833 and had only returned to Germany in 1848, purportedly helped to usher in a realistic age spanning the reaction of the 1850s and Bismarck’s wars of unification in the 1860s, after the ‘failure’ of the revolution. He was joined by Hermann Baumgarten, a neighbour in Heidelberg before 1861, whose ‘self-critique’ had supposedly exposed the fatal weaknesses of German liberalism in 1866, outmanoeuvred by the Prussian Minister-President. Even if it ‘had to fail’, wrote the journalist and academic, 1848 had been ‘the first attempt to solve the German question’.² The Reich constitution of 1849 was ‘a considerable advance’, albeit an unreliable one, ‘on our politicisation until that date’.³ ‘Its main merit consisted in ... casting the first bright light into the night of our political dreams and indicating the path which could lead us out of the labyrinth of German fragmentation,’ Baumgarten admitted, despite his intention of highlighting the naivety and inefficacy of his fellow liberals during and after the revolution.⁴ Like Rochau, the Karlsruhe academic was anxious to debunk liberal myths of the *Vormärz* and revolutionary periods, yet he, too, understood 1848–49 as estab-

lishing a long-lasting nexus of the nation, politics and, especially, liberalism.

This study examines such a nexus, in conjunction and conflict with other emerging political milieux and parties. It argues that many of the elements of the case for a *kleindeutsch* (small German) solution to the 'German question' had been decided by 1849, most notably through the discussion and enactment of the Reich constitution in March. These elements were defining features of political debate and activity over the next two decades. Contemporaries were right, of course, to doubt whether a constitutional, federal and democratic *Kleindeutschland* (small German state) was attainable in or after 1849. A powerful coalition of states and conservative political interests had blocked its realisation during the revolution itself and it had successfully resurrected a reactionary German Confederation, backed by most small and middling states and by the largest and most forceful German Great Power, the Habsburg monarchy. Despite such obvious obstacles, the revolutionary model of a German nation-state remained influential in the 1850s and, it is proposed, became decisive in the 1860s, as the principal alternatives to a small German state, which had already been partially discredited in 1848–49, proved not to be feasible. Since unification continued to be a political priority for many parties, especially those in the critical areas of the third Germany, the narrowing of the range of 'national' options available to ministers and policy-makers was highly significant, even for Austrian and Prussian statesmen, whose pursuit of their own state's interests forced them to take account of 'public opinion' and party preferences in Saxony, Bavaria, Hanover, Württemberg, Baden and other principalities. The effective preclusion of national alternatives to *Kleindeutschland* within some of the most prominent political debates of the previous 18 years helped to ease the very difficult transition towards a Prussian-dominated North German Confederation in 1867 and German Empire in 1871. The fact that so many features of the *Reichsverfassung* of 1849 seemed to have been retained made the new German states acceptable to most liberals and many democrats.

The transition towards *Kleindeutschland* was by no means inevitable. The forces – or balance of powers in a changing set of historical conditions – working against the formation of a small German state were considerable, dominating the 1850s and early 1860s. Recent historical accounts, correctly seeking to revise the persistent pro-Prussian orthodoxy of pre-war 'Borussian' historiography, have

emphasised the significance of such hindrances to the creation of a 'small German' polity. Historians like Heinrich Lutz and Helmut Rumpler have underlined the continuing predominance of the Habsburg monarchy in German affairs.⁵ From their point of view, the most pressing question concerns the timing of and reasons for the withdrawal of Austria from Germany. Lutz's answer, in contrast to those of the majority of authors who concentrate on the Austro-Prussian War (1866), points to the period after 1866, suggesting that Austrian policy-makers gave up their German ambitions more slowly than previously assumed, renouncing them definitively only in 1879 with the signature of the Dual Alliance.⁶ Other historians have focused on the Habsburg monarchy's main allies in the third Germany before 1871. Abigail Green, Manfred Hanisch, Andreas Neemann, Dieter Langewiesche, Lothar Gall and Michael John have demonstrated the extent to which the *Mittelstaaten* served as an alternative point of identification and loyalty after 1848.⁷ As a consequence, any solution to the German question had to pay attention to the wishes of governments in Munich, Dresden, Stuttgart, Karlsruhe and Hanover and to the affiliations of the German 'tribes'. It would also have to confront the German Confederation, which had become the principal diplomatic framework of the middling states and the main legal obstacle to unification according to the revolutionary small German model. How far could the Bund be reformed through the initiatives of the *Mittelstaaten* and of Austria in order to become a workable political structure for the German nation? This is the question posed by scholars such as Jürgen Müller, Jonas Flöter, Anselm Doering-Manteuffel and Jürgen Angelow, lending new credence to the Confederation as a political and legal framework for very disparate German states.⁸ A confederal solution appeared more attractive because of the unpopularity of a Prussian alternative, with widespread antipathy to the Hohenzollern monarchy, especially in the South German states. In this respect, perceived geographical, cultural and religious differences were exacerbated by internal divisions within Prussia itself.⁹ Amongst other things, recent research has revealed just how ambivalent Prussian conservatives and courtiers were towards *kleindeutsch* nationalism.¹⁰

The barriers to the realisation of the national settlement outlined in the Reich constitution of 1849 rested on existing powers, institutions and conditions – restored political elites, the borders of 1815, the Confederation, regional economies, the armies of the German Great Powers – which were the product of the 'reaction' rather than

the revolution. It is contended here, however, that more or less continuous debates about a German nation-state after 1848 had a decisive impact on such powers, institutions and conditions, not least because the 'public sphere', the press and 'public opinion', which were often referred to collectively as '*die Öffentlichkeit*', were heeded by governments in the aftermath of 1848, particularly in the third Germany. It is true that relatively little was – and is – known of the opinions, beliefs and assumptions of the majority of subjects, but it can be argued that what mattered most in the formulation and execution of policy was ministers' evaluation and understanding of 'opinion', as it was interpreted and shaped by journalists, academics, and politicians. For the public sphere was, at the same time, a rapidly evolving political forum, connected to emerging political parties, networks and milieux. Thus, 'opposition' groups, whose parliamentary activities were regularly reported in the press, existed in virtually all German states during the 1850s and 1860s, playing an important part in political debate, if only through their public protestations, and in sanctioning and blocking legislation and ministerial actions, most famously – if also unsuccessfully – during the Prussian constitutional crisis after 1862. Two years earlier, in Baden, liberals from the opposition had even entered government. This study examines the relationship between ministers and policy-makers, on the one hand, and politicians, journalists and other publicists, on the other. It proposes that, when statesmen addressed the German question, they did so partly – and increasingly – on terms established by liberals in the public sphere. Policy-makers kept returning to the national question because it constituted a priority of the dominant liberal parties, which figured in the domestic deliberations of the governments of the small and middling German states and, in part as a result, in the external calculations of the German Great Powers. Prussian ministers and diplomats, in particular, sought to court parties and opinion-makers in the third Germany in order to avoid the Austrian-engineered machinery of the Bund.

Such arguments about the linkages between nationalism and politics are necessarily framed in the wider context of debates, which have been central to the controversy about a German *Sonderweg*, concerning the putative failure of revolution in 1848, the weakness of liberalism, the circumscribed role of representative assemblies, and the formation of contradictory, authoritarian or sham-democratic systems of government in the individual states, the North