

German Unification Readings

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Johann Gottlieb Fichte: Address to the German Nation (1806)

"The first, original, and truly natural boundaries of states are beyond doubt their internal boundaries. Those who speak the same language are joined to each other by a multitude of invisible bonds by nature herself, long before any human art begins; they understand each other and have the power of continuing to make themselves understood more and more clearly; they belong together and are by nature one and an inseparable whole. Such a whole, if it wishes to absorb and mingle with itself any other people of different descent and language, cannot do so without itself becoming confused, in the beginning at any rate, and violently disturbing the even progress of its culture. From this internal boundary, which is drawn by the spiritual nature of man himself, the marking of the external boundary by dwelling place results as a consequence; and in the natural view of things it is not because men dwell between certain mountains and rivers that they are a people, but, on the contrary, men dwell together-and, if their luck has so arranged it, are protected by rivers and mountains-because they were a people already by a law of nature which is much higher.

Thus was the German nation placed-sufficiently united within itself by a common language and a common way of thinking, and sharply enough severed from the other peoples-in the middle of Europe, as a wall to divide races not akin

That things should remain thus did not suit the selfishness of foreign countries, whose calculations did not look more than one moment ahead. They found German bravery useful in waging their wars and German hands useful to snatch the booty from their rivals. A means had to be found to attain this end, and foreign cunning won an easy victory over German ingenuousness and lack of suspicion. It was foreign countries which first made use of the division of mind produced by religious disputes in Germany - Germany, which presented on a small scale the features of Christian Europe as a whole-foreign countries, I say, made use of these disputes to break up the close inner unity of Germany into separate and disconnected parts....

... They knew how to present each of these separate states that had thus arisen in the lap of the one nation-which had no enemy except those foreign countries themselves, and no concern except the common one of setting itself with united strength against their seductive craft a state must be perpetually on its guard. On the other hand, they knew how to make themselves appear to the German states as natural allies against the danger threatening them from their own countrymen-as allies with whom alone they would themselves stand or fall, and whose enterprises they must in turn support with all their might. It was only because of this artificial bond that all the disputes which might arise about any matter whatever in the Old World or the New became disputes of the German races in their relation to each other. Every war, no matter what its cause, had to be fought out on German soil and with German blood; every disturbance of the balance had to be adjusted in that nation to which the whole fountainhead of such relationships was unknown; and the German states, whose separate existence was in itself contrary to all nature and reason, were compelled, in order that they might count for something, to act as makeweights to the chief forces in the scale of the European equilibrium, whose movement they followed blindly and without any will of their own. Just as in many states abroad the citizens are designated as belonging to this or that foreign party, or voting for this or that foreign alliance, but no name is found for those who belong to the party of their own country, so it was with the Germans; for long enough they belonged only to some foreign party or other, and one seldom came across a man who supported the party of the Germans and was of the opinion that this country ought to make an alliance with itself.

Now, at last, let us be bold enough to look at the deceptive vision of a universal monarchy, which people are beginning to hold up for public veneration in place of that equilibrium which for some time has been growing more and more preposterous, and let us perceive how hateful and contrary to reason that vision is. Spiritual nature was able to present the essence of humanity in extremely diverse gradations in individuals and in individuality as a whole, in peoples. Only when each people, left to itself, develops and forms itself in accordance with its own peculiar quality, and only when in every people each individual develops himself in accordance with that common quality, as well as in accordance with his own peculiar quality-then, and then only, does the manifestation of divinity appear in its true mirror as it ought to be; and only a man who either entirely lacks the notion of the rule of law and divine order, or else is an obdurate enemy thereto, could take upon himself to want to interfere with that law, which is the highest law in the spiritual world! Only in the invisible qualities of nations, which are hidden from their own eyes-qualities as the means whereby these nations remain in touch with the source of original life-only therein is to be found the guarantee of their present and future worth, virtue, and merit. If these qualities are dulled by admixture and worn away by friction, the flatness that results will bring about a separation from spiritual nature, and this in its turn will cause all men to be fused together in their uniform and collective destruction."

Austro-Prussian War

Field Marshal Helmuth von Moltke (1866)

"The war of 1866 was entered on not because the existence of Prussia was threatened, nor was it caused by public opinion and the voice of the people; it was a struggle, long foreseen and calmly prepared for, recognized as a necessity by the Cabinet, not for territorial aggrandizement, for an extension of our domain, or for material advantage, but for an ideal end - the establishment of power. Not a foot of land was exacted from Austria, but she had to renounce all part in the hegemony of Germany....

Austria had exhausted her strength in conquests south of the Alps, and left the western German provinces unprotected, instead of following the road pointed out by the Danube. Its center of gravity lay out of Germany; Prussia's lay within it. Prussia felt itself called upon and strong enough to assume the leadership of the German races. "

Otto von Bismarck (1866)

"We had to avoid wounding Austria too severely; we had to avoid leaving behind in her any unnecessary bitterness of feeling or desire for revenge; we ought rather to reserve the possibility of becoming friends again with our adversary of the moment, and in any case to regard the Austrian state as a piece on the European chessboard. If Austria were severely injured, she would become the ally of France and of every other opponent of ours; she would even sacrifice her anti-Russian interests for the sake of revenge on Prussia....

The acquisition of provinces like Austria Silesia and portions of Bohemia could not strengthen the Prussian state; it would not lead to an amalgamation of German Austria with Prussia, and Vienna could not be governed from Berlin as a mere dependency....

Austria's conflict and rivalry with us was no more culpable than ours with her; our task was the establishment or foundation of German national unity under the leadership of the King of Prussia."