

The Unification of Germany

Nationalism means pride and love for one's country. Nationalism can have both a positive and negative effect on nations. Feelings of nationalism helped the German and Italian states become independent nations. The 39 German states did not become a nation easily. One reason was that each state was ruled by individual princes. The princes did not want to lose their power, and because of that many princes did not want a united Germany.

Religion also made it hard to unite the German states. The people in northern Germany were Protestants and the people in the south were Catholic. There have been many wars that have occurred between the Catholics and the Protestants, and for this reason many they did not want a united Germany.

Otto von Bismarck led the unification of Germany. Bismarck was prime minister of the German state of Prussia. Bismarck ruled by a policy known as "blood and iron", blood meant war and iron meant absolute monarchy. Bismarck said that wars with other countries would unite the German people. He thought that wars give people a reason to work together, and these wars would spark a feeling of nationalism in Germany. Bismarck then strengthened the Prussian army and started three different wars.

Bismarck's wars started in 1864 when Prussia teamed with Austria to fight Denmark. Prussia and Austria were two German speaking nations in Europe. Prussia and Austria won the war. Two states from Denmark became part of Austria and Prussia. But each nation wanted to rule the two states from Denmark.

In 1865 after the successful war between Prussia and Denmark, the old conflict over the duchies of Schleswig and Holstein reappeared. According to the Convention of Gastein, Schleswig from then on was to be controlled by Prussia, and Holstein - by Austria. In the next half year, Bismarck tried negotiations with Austria about giving up the dominance in Germany. As before, Bismarck's main goal was to make Prussia dominant in Germany. His peaceful efforts to solve the problem failed. In the middle of 1866 the Prussian army entered Holstein, Austria sent its own troops to fight with the Prussians, and after seven weeks Austria was defeated. The two states from Denmark now belonged to Prussia. After this war the northern part of Germany was united. And in 1867 the North German Confederation was established.

1. Why did the original 39 states NOT want to unify?
2. How did religion affect the unification of Germany?
3. Who was Otto von Bismarck? What was his policy for unification?

Bismarck's wish to see Germany united would not have been totally satisfied without the southern states attached to it. Thus Bismarck set about trying to add the southern states to the Confederation. Bismarck supposed that a war with France could speed up the events. A great diplomat, Bismarck arranged that Russia and Austria stay away from the coming conflict.

Tensions had long been running high between Prussia and France following the Prussian victory in the Austro-Prussian War and its annexation of almost all Northern Germany. The humbling of Austria and Prussia's new territorial gains had shattered the European balance of power that had existed since the end of the Napoleonic Wars.

Napoleon III was afraid of how rapidly Prussian power was growing in Europe. This was one reason the war between France and Prussia was inevitable. The second reason was over the Spanish

throne. The Spanish throne had been vacant since the revolution of September 1868. The Spanish offered the throne to the German prince Leopold. Napoleon III feared that King Wilhelm in Prussia and a cousin ruling in Spain would put France into a two-front situation. Napoleon III was determined this time to stand up to the expansion of Prussian influence.

He successfully forced King Wilhelm to urge the prince's withdrawal from his Spanish candidacy. In a newspaper interview, Napoleon III announced that a renewal of Leopold's candidature would result in France going to war. The French ambassador in Prussia was then ordered to get Wilhelm I to guarantee that no member of his family would ever again be a candidate for the Spanish throne. His message to Berlin (the Ems Dispatch) reporting this event with the French ambassador reached the desk of Bismarck. Bismarck edited the telegram in such a way as to arouse French resentment, and then released it for publication. This newly changed document eventually forced France to declare war on July 19, 1870. The Franco-Prussian war had begun.

Bismarck decided that a war against France would unite all Germans. Nationalism brought the German people together in the war. Southern Germans helped Prussia fight against the French. In 1870, a united Germany went to war against France. The Germans soon defeated the French, and after that the southern part of Germany united with Prussia to form one German nation. Bismarck forced France to give two French states to Germany; the states were Alsace and Lorraine. Alsace and Lorraine were rich in natural resources like coal and iron, which were needed to support the growing Industrial Revolution. France was also forced to pay a lot of money to Germany after the war. After the three wars Germany was now known as the German Empire.

Bismarck was the creator of the German empire, and he became its first chancellor. When added to his Prussian positions the imperial chancellorship gave him almost complete control of foreign and domestic affairs. To maintain the peace necessary for the consolidation of the empire, he proposed to advance a strong military program, to gain the friendship of Austria, to preserve British friendship by avoiding naval or colonial rivalry, and to isolate France in diplomacy so that revenge would be impossible. Therefore, in 1872, he formed the Three Emperors' League (Germany, Austria-Hungary, and Russia) and also maintained friendly relations with Italy.

Bismarck created a new strong government within Prussia but it was not a democracy. Many liberals hoped a democracy would form but Bismarck did not support a democracy, instead King Wilhelm I of Prussia became the Kaiser, of emperor of all Germany.

After Wilhelm I died, his son Frederick III took the thrones of both Prussia and Germany. Frederick however only ruled for a few months before succumbing to throat cancer. The Bismarckian era closed with the death of Emperor Frederick III. A struggle for supremacy between Bismarck and William II developed immediately upon that emperor's accession in 1888 and ended with Bismarck's dismissal in 1890. Bismarck, created prince after the Franco-Prussian War, was now made duke (*Herzog*) of Lauenburg. He retired and spent the remainder of his life in oral and written criticism of the emperor and his ministers and in defense of his own policies.

1. How did Bismarck get France to go to war?
2. What did Germany gain in the war with France?
3. How did Bismarck intend to maintain peace for the empire?