

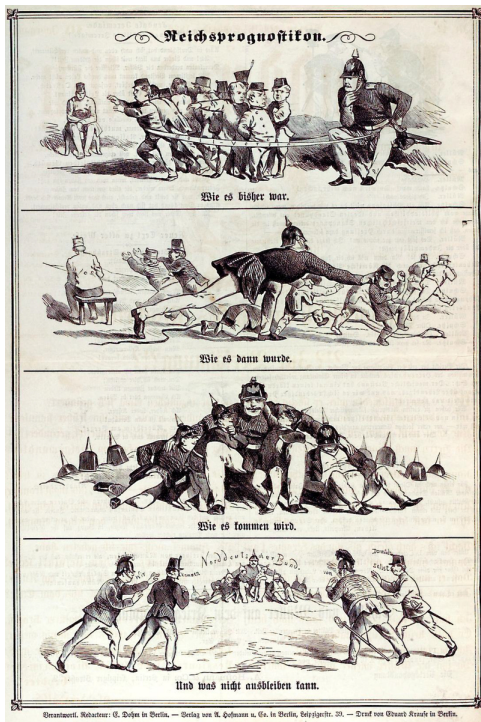
“The Future of the Empire Foretold” (September 9, 1866)

Abstract

This caricature by Wilhelm Scholz is divided into four horizontal panels. At the top, a Prussian (identified as such by the symbolic spiked helmet) uses a long ribbon marked “Customs Union” to restrain a crowd of rancorous children. The children represent the various states of the German Confederation (1815–1866), and some of them strain to reach the Habsburg soldier at the left. The caption reads: “How it was until now” [“Wie es bisher war”]. In the second panel, the children/states have freed themselves from Prussian control and are scurrying away in all directions. Two of them are rushing toward the Habsburg soldier, but he has turned his back on the group. We now read, “How it then became” [“Wie es dann wurde”]. — The allusion here is to the Austro-Prussian War of June–July 1866 and the elimination of Austria from any solution to “the German question” after its decisive defeat at the Battle of Königgrätz on July 3, 1866. In the third panel, we see the children/states getting cozy with the figure of Prussia; they now wear the same spiked helmet that he does and are embraced in return. The text reads, “How it will be” [“Wie es kommen wird”], suggesting the likelihood of new military and political alliances similar to those already formed in bilateral military agreements and in the North German Confederation in early 1867. In the fourth panel, this small group huddles together in the background, and Württemberg, Baden, Darmstadt, and Bavaria rush to join the happy family. Together, they say: “We come of our own accord” [“Wir kommen von selbst”]. The caption for this last section reads: “What cannot fail to happen” [“Was nicht ausbleiben kann”].

In this cartoon, Wilhelm Scholz aptly suggests that even a common cultural heritage and the binding influence of the Customs Union could not prevent fratricidal conflict in 1866. Scholz was also correct in seeing, as early as the second week of September 1866, the contours of Prussian hegemony in northern Germany. During most of the next four years, however, the historical “necessity” implied in the fourth panel failed to materialize. In fact, the southern German states, with the notable exception of Baden, found more reasons to resist unification under Prussian tutelage with each passing year, until a common war with France in 1870 provided the impetus to overcome such resistance. Historians today also resist Scholz’s suggestion that the specific form of German unity that came about in 1871 was inevitable—that it was merely a question of time. Instead, they emphasize that various federal and constitutional arrangements could have been pursued at any given point.

Source



Source: “Reichsprognostikon” [“The Future of the Empire Foretold”], *Kladderadatsch*, vol. 19, no. 41 (September 9, 1866), p. 164. Universitätsbibliothek Heidelberg, <https://doi.org/10.11588/digit.2248#0166>

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