

“Germany’s Unification” (1843)

Abstract

Published in the *Düsseldorfer Zeitung* (September 3 and 5, 1843), the article “Germany's Unification” criticizes the existing German Confederation. It calls for a unified German nation-state on economic grounds, particularly noting the need for a uniform industrial code and the elimination of trade barriers.

Source

However painful it is for us to look back at the vanished millennium and to feel the loss of those pieces torn away from Germany, and however much we long for reunification with them, a more heartfelt inner union is in any case of much greater importance to Germany as it is, and it is in this feeling that the voice of the times, as it raised against France only the negatives of the status quo, has elevated the unity of Germany as a positive emblem.

And wherein could this unity lie other than in heartfelt political unification? Everything else that one wants to use on behalf of Germany’s unification—communal monuments, uniform coins, measures, weights, and wagon gauges, even a general customs union—acts only as a means to an end or would follow naturally of its own accord from Germany’s political unity, should this first be achieved. The natural weakness of the current main focus as it conflicts with the national desire gives rise to these peculiar twitches and mistaken ideas; this *hysteron-proteron*^[1] of a good-natured popular politics and all the drivel about initiating German unity from behind ultimately discredit the cause itself or make it appear like a utopian dream, which it most certainly is not.

No, Germany’s unity is no utopian dream; it must be achieved just as surely as it is impossible, over the long run, to omit something felt to be necessary, and the idea itself will come all the closer to realization, the more unbearable it becomes to compare the condition in which one [actually] lives with that magnificent condition in which one could live, the quicker the age aims at unification on a massive scale, and the greater the accumulation of moments of domestic or external distress that rouse the sleepy German consciousness to action. But there is, above all, a transformation from the condition of an uncertain feeling to one of a clear recognition, of a firm perseverance along the path of right, but then also of resolute direction of all the means that present themselves toward the set goal.

This goal is a powerful, political main focus, whose form may be left completely open for the time being. But the natural weakness of the current unification focus resides in the way we have everywhere only a diplomatic, but not a political unification focus, a confederation [*Staatenbund*] instead of a federal state [*Bundesstaat*]. Thus we have, instead of a single Germany, thirty-eight German states [*Länder*], just as many governments, almost as many [princely] courts, so and so many assemblies of estates, thirty-eight different laws and administrations, legations, and consulates. What an enormous savings it would be if all this would be taken care of by a central government; what savings in money and ranks would result if Germany maintained a single army! But much worse than the current waste of expenditure is the way that, among thirty-eight different states, just as many special interests are at work disadvantaging and quashing daily commerce down to the last detail. No mail can be expedited, no postage facilitated, or else it requires conventions; no rail line can be proposed that won't be kept in its own state for as long as possible, and what help is it if the Federal Act grants the freedom to move from one German state into another if this other state sternly turns away the poor emigrant. And just as with one state against another, one municipality will close itself off from another, and thus we have gotten to the point with Germany’s residence laws where the old *glebae adscripto*^[2], which had been legislatively abolished as

shameful, is factually present again in a different form.

Let us take a look at the occupational trade laws! Here compulsory guild membership and restrictive monopolies on where to process and sell [*Bann- und Zunftzwang*], there complete freedom of trade, between the two a concessionary licensing system! The most skillful craftsman will be rejected from a guild simply because he has learned his trade under a different system, and the future journeyman, who is supposed to travel, is transferred somewhere because each German state distrustfully treats the inhabitants of the other thirty-seven states as foreigners. Otherwise it used to be said that “German hand goes through every land”; now major parties (France, Switzerland) are excluded because of the anxious concern of the divided Empire. I do not even wish to speak about the tribulations of trade—they have made themselves known with a powerful voice; yet it is a crying shame to see how, for lack of an appropriate political focus, the unification in the interest of the common good constantly has to do battle with the special interests of individual parts. But one does have to consider that an individual part can’t be easily torn out of the entire system, and every state may indeed consider how it manages its finances, but also (and especially) its tradesmen, so long as there is no organizing hand administering the whole. It is chiefly these special interests that—by pulling the ground out from under the aspiring force—promote pauperism, which is increasingly overrunning Germany’s districts [*Gaue*] with its whole sad retinue of immorality, and it is this disintegration of Germany that is preventing a remedy. Why do we not have any foreign colonies in which German traditions are maintained, institutions for emigrants, deportation for the incorrigibles? Even intellectual culture suffers from this extreme division. For the longest time there was an attempt to deny this and, instead, to maintain that the different [princely] courts, universities, and scientific institutions were just as many hearths from which education, disseminated among smaller circles, would become general. There is certainly much truth in this, and Germany has indeed, thank God, the best primary schools in the entire world. But the real reason for this resides much more in the entire German character than in political fragmentation. In a political unification, there would be no need for a single existing institution for art and science to fold, but certainly the petty jealousy that makes the children of a state prefer to attend their state’s university would have to cease; certainly, along with a great political focus, a great literary point of unification would develop, which would deprive German literature of its one-sidedness and provincial character; certainly, throughout the entire nation, an impetus would form that would lead German theoretical and impractical erudition out into practical life, which would give rise to a blossoming in art and science which we could now hardly imagine.

If one now thinks especially about the position that a united Germany would assume abroad, it seems impossible that anyone could be obstinate about the general advantages of unification, and one simply has to wonder why this unity has not come about a long time ago, that it was ever quashed.

This latter phenomenon is unfortunately clarified by the history of the German Empire; the inheritability of vassalages and the German corporative spirit were the original reasons, joined later by religious division, eagerly exploited by Germany’s enemies. But even all that corporative spirit is actually such a splendid spirit that it only requires the proper direction to accomplish the utmost, and even the inheritability of the great vassalages would not have led to the fragmentation of the Empire if statecraft and constitutional law at that time had been sufficiently taught to distinguish what is, and can be, an inalienable component of sovereignty, an office, property, or possession.

But if we ask why German unity did not come about a long time ago, we unfortunately keep coming back to the Congress of Vienna; to the jealousy of the foreign powers who are afraid of a united Germany, to the weak German statesmen and, of course, also to a mass of special interests who would rather aggrandize themselves on a small scale than subordinate themselves and assume their natural place in a larger whole.

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NOTES

[1] i.e., putting the cart before the horse—trans.

[2] Servile bondage to the land—trans.

Source: *Düsseldorfer Zeitung*, 3. and 5. September 1843, no. 244, 246; reprinted in *Rheinische Briefe und Akten zur Geschichte der politischen Bewegung 1830–1850*, compiled and edited by Joseph Hansen, vol. I, 1830–1845. Publikationen der Gesellschaft für rheinische Geschichtskunde XXXVI, vol. 1, 1919, pp. 589–92.

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